



सत्यमेव जयते

Ministry of Rural Development
Government of India



From aspiration to
empowerment:
Impact of women's
collectives

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नरेन्द्र सिंह तोमर
NARENDRA SINGH TOMAR



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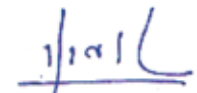
संदेश

मुझे यह जानकर प्रसन्नता हो रही है कि ग्रामीण विकास मंत्रालय प्रगतिशील भारत के 75वें वर्ष और इसके लोगों, संस्कृति तथा उपलब्धियों का समारोह मनाने के लिए भारत के प्रधान मंत्री द्वारा शुरू किए गए आजादी का अमृत महोत्सव के अंतर्गत "आकांक्षा से सशक्तीकरण तक: महिला समूहों का प्रभाव", शीर्षक से अध्ययनों का सार-संग्रह जारी कर रहा है।

दीनदयाल अंत्योदय योजना - राष्ट्रीय ग्रामीण आजीविका मिशन (डीएवाई-एनआरएलएम) आज ग्रामीण महिलाओं को उनकी आजीविकाओं को बढ़ावा देने, उनकी एजेंसी का विकास करने और अपना सशक्तीकरण करने, उनके सामने आ रहे सामाजिक-आर्थिक मुद्दों के समाधान के लिए सामूहिक रूप से कार्य करने तथा विभिन्न चुनौतियों पर विजय पाने के उद्देश्य से समुदाय की अन्य महिलाओं को एकजुट करने के लिए आवश्यक मंच उपलब्ध कराती है। ग्रामीण गरीबों को लाभान्वित करने की अपनी गहन प्रतिबद्धता के अंतर्गत, एनआरएलएम ने विशेष रूप से महिलाओं के सामने आने वाले अभावों को दूर करने के उद्देश्य से कार्य करने वाली सामाजिक कार्य समितियों नामक मंचों को संस्थागत रूप प्रदान किया है। थोड़े समय में ही, ये मंच सर्वाधिक उपेक्षितों तक पहुँचने के साधन सिद्ध हुए हैं और जमीनी स्तर की ऐसी संस्थाएं बन गई हैं, जिन तक गरीब महिलाएं आसानी से पहुँच सकती हैं, क्योंकि इनके सदस्य उन्हीं में से हैं।

इस सार-संग्रह में शामिल अध्ययन स्वयं महिलाओं के शब्दों में यह जानकारी देते हैं कि कैसे उन्होंने इन मंचों का प्रयोग अपने जीवन में मौजूद चुनौतियों पर विजय पाने के लिए किया। भारत की स्वतंत्रता के 75वें वर्ष में ये अध्ययन इस बदलाव को रेखांकित करते हैं कि कैसे कार्यक्रमों को गरीबों द्वारा उनकी गरीबी दूर करने के लिए स्वयं चलाया जा सकता है।

मैं इस संग्रह को जारी करने के लिए ग्रामीण विकास मंत्रालय और विशेषकर डीएवाई-एनआरएलएम के अधिकारियों की सराहना करता हूँ। मैं आशा करता हूँ कि अन्य राज्य और सार्वजनिक सेवाएं प्रदान करने वाले इन ग्रामीण महिलाओं द्वारा साझा किए गए अपने अधिकारों और पात्रताओं को प्राप्त करने के अनुभवों से प्रेरित होंगे। मुझे विश्वास है कि इस सार-संग्रह में प्रस्तुत इन कुछ सर्वोत्तम पद्धतियों और सामुदायिक संस्थाओं द्वारा निभाई गई भूमिका के उदाहरणों से कई अन्य लोग इसी प्रकार कार्य करने के लिए प्रेरित होंगे।


(नरेन्द्र सिंह तोमर)

साध्वी निरंजन ज्योति
SADHVI NIRANJAN JYOTI



ग्रामीण विकास राज्य मंत्री
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संदेश

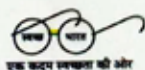
आज हमारा देश आजादी का अमृत महोत्सव के माध्यम से अपनी आजादी के 75 वें वर्ष का जश्न मना रहा है। इस उपलक्ष्य में, राष्ट्र के निर्माण में, भारत के ग्रामीण इलाकों की महिलाओं के योगदान को मान्यता दी जानी चाहिए। ये वे महिलाएं हैं जो खेतों में फसल उगाने और फसल काटने के लिए अथक परिश्रम करती हैं, मवेशियों की देखभाल करती हैं, बच्चों की परवरिश करती हैं, घर के सभी काम करती हैं, फिर भी अदृश्य रहती हैं। COVID महामारी के दौरान, हम देख रहे हैं कि उनका योगदान अमूल्य है, और कुछ मार्गदर्शन के साथ और अपनी सामूहिक शक्ति के आधार पर, महिलाएं महामारी से लड़ने के लिए उठ सकती हैं। पूरे ग्रामीण भारत में, पिछले एक साल में, हमने ऐसी कहानियाँ सुनी हैं कि कैसे महिलाओं ने सामुदायिक रसोई चलाई है, मास्क जैसी आवश्यक वस्तुओं को सिला है, और निडर होकर अपने घरों से बाहर कदम रखा है, ताकि सामाजिक दूरी पर महत्वपूर्ण संदेश फैलाया जा सके।

दीनदयाल अंत्योदय योजना - राष्ट्रीय ग्रामीण आजीविका मिशन एक ऐसा कार्यक्रम है जो ऐसी महिलाओं की क्षमता के निर्माण में निवेश करता है। यह मानता है कि महिलाओं की सामूहिक ताकत मिलकर उन्हें बाजारों और सार्वजनिक स्थानों पर शक्तिशाली अभिनेता बना सकती है। इसलिए यह गरीब ग्रामीण महिलाओं को स्वयं सहायता समूहों (एसएचजी) में संगठित करता है, जो मजबूत होने पर उत्पादक समूहों और उद्यमों में भी विभाजित हो जाते हैं। समय के साथ, इन स्वयं सहायता समूहों ने महिलाओं को आजीविका के स्रोतों तक पहुंच, बढ़ी हुई आय, औपचारिक ऋण तक बेहतर पहुंच, बेहतर शारीरिक गतिशीलता, लेकिन सबसे महत्वपूर्ण आत्मनिर्भरता और यह भावना दी है कि उनकी अपनी पहचान है।

एनआरएलएम का यह भी मानना है कि महिलाओं के पास बाल विवाह, बाल शोषण, घरेलू हिंसा, लड़कियों के स्कूल छोड़ने और संपत्ति और सामान्य संसाधनों पर महिलाओं के नियंत्रण जैसी जटिल सामाजिक मुद्दों से लड़ने की शक्ति है। यह संग्रह स्वयं सहायता समूहों की महिलाओं को ऐसा करने की क्षमता को मजबूत करने के प्रयासों को प्रस्तुत करता है। यह उन गांवों और समूहों में स्थापित सामाजिक कार्य समितियों का अनुसंधान प्रस्तुत करता है, जो महिलाओं द्वारा स्व-शासित हैं, और महिलाओं और उनके समुदायों के लिए महत्वपूर्ण सामाजिक समस्याओं को उठाती हैं। ये समितियां दर्शाती हैं कि महिलाएं आवाज उठा सकती हैं और अपनी चिंताओं के लिए लड़ सकती हैं, अगर उन्हें सही मंच दिया जाए। उन्हें केवल अपने आप में विश्वास और विपरीत परिस्थितियों से कभी हार न मानने की क्षमता की आवश्यकता है।

मुझे उम्मीद है कि इन सामाजिक कार्य समितियों और उनके सदस्यों के अनुभव, जो सबसे अधिक हाशिए की महिलाओं का प्रतिनिधित्व करते हैं, दूसरों को उनकी तरह सामूहिक कार्रवाई में शामिल होने के लिए प्रोत्साहित करेंगे। सामाजिक मुद्दों से जुड़ी चुनौतियों का सामना करने के लिए इन संस्थाओं का साहस सराहनीय है। मैं इस संग्रह को विकसित करने के लिए - जिसमें समानता और समानता के लिए महिलाओं के संघर्षों पर शक्तिशाली कथन शामिल हैं - मंत्रालय के अधिकारियों को धन्यवाद करती हूँ।

(साध्वी निरंजन ज्योति)



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Foreword

As we celebrate India's 75th year of independence next year, the Government of India's efforts have always been to invest in institutions of the poor. In this regard, the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) provides a remarkable opportunity. The programme currently reaches nearly 76 million households in rural areas, organising their women into around 7 million SHGs. It remains one of the largest social mobilisation programmes in the world.

Not only have these SHGs served as platforms for women to access formal credit and earn incomes by participating in smaller producer groups and enterprises, but they have also helped women tackle social issues that affect them, such as domestic violence and alcoholism, harmful practices such as child marriage and witch hunting, enabling education for girls, and promoting equality for women in all spheres, including participation in political institutions such as gram panchayats. During the ongoing COVID crisis, these SHGs have emerged as the heroes helping rural India fight the pandemic. They have been the backbone of India's rural COVID response making masks, sanitizers and PPE gears; setting up community kitchens; distributing essential commodities and articles; and raising awareness around the importance of personal hygiene and social distancing. They have also shown innovation by producing and supplying essentials such as masks and vegetables during the pandemic. As India gears up to vaccinate millions of households in rural areas, these SHGs remain a key component of our strategic thinking on encouraging households to come forward, and vaccinate.

As part of its efforts to keep gender issues front and centre in our framework, policy, structure and institutions, there has been an effort on the part of DAY-NRLM to design institutional spaces or platforms that women can easily access. This has led to the creation of Social Action Committees set up at the village or cluster federation level, with membership of the poorest women, who identify challenges faced by their households and communities and collectively frame and implement strategies that can help resolve them.

It is a privilege to release the compendium of best practices from various states on how different Village Organisation Social Action Committees (VO-SACs) have helped women collectively address gender issues and put into action principles of gender equality. I hope these serve as a reference and catalyst to others looking at how collective models of women's empowerment can be key to providing an answer to the most complex social challenges.

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PREFACE

The DAY-NRLM is a flagship scheme of the Government of India that provides a window of opportunity for building strong identities for women through women's collectives. Testimonies from the field reflect that these vibrant institutions of women are capable of financial planning and use of financial resources for livelihoods interventions both in the farm and in the non-farm sector. The presence of these SHGs in different SARAS melas underlines their capacity and capability of running, managing and sustaining rural enterprises.

As part of its effort to always keep women at the heart of all its initiatives, the NRLM has rolled out several programmes. Access to financial institutions and livelihoods is facilitated through Producer Groups and Producer Enterprises that provide rural women with opportunities to increase their income. The Model Cluster Level Federation (CLF) program invests in women's own, self-governed federations. Simultaneously, NRLM is building platforms such as Social Action Committees (SACs) at the village organization (VO) and cluster federation level, which can be accessed by women for their grievances and also resolving social issues that matter to their households and their communities. These SACs are now present across India, and take up issues set by the VO, CLF and SHGs around improving food and nutrition security, education, health, sanitation, and social inclusion and attempt to address these by interacting with public institutions at the panchayat and block levels. What is heartening to note is that these SACs are run by SHG members themselves, whose capacity is built through regular trainings imparted by NRLM officials.

This compendium presents powerful case studies from around the country on how NRLM is addressing gender inequality by strengthening women's institutions such as the SACs. They serve as an illustration to how investments in women's own platforms can be a first step to making them visible in development planning processes. I hope they facilitate cross-learning across states, and motivate states to scale up such institutions.

Alka

(ALKA UPADHYAYA)

NITA KEJREWAL
Joint Secretary



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Message

The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY NRLM) has adopted a focussed approach towards gender mainstreaming in its program architecture. This includes establishing institutional mechanisms like social action committees at the village organisation and cluster federation levels to serve as response mechanisms to various issues and concerns that women and girls face, and that continue to act as barriers for them in accessing their rights and entitlements to lead a decent living. The mandate of these institutions is to safeguard and promote principles of gender equality and women's empowerment in NRLM's programmatic functions. These institutional spaces have shown exemplary leadership in strengthening the gender responsiveness of the program at the grassroots level, especially at a time when the COVID crisis has heightened the need for such bottom up platforms that women can easily access to raise their concerns and grievances.

In this volume, you will read case studies from different corners of the country that echo good practices on mainstreaming gender, not only within NRLM but also in public services in a diverse set of geographies. These case studies provide excellent living examples to different stakeholders on how to instil core principles of gender equality in program implementation. The document is a first of its kind to collate practices from across the country on how NRLM's grassroots institutions are working on providing a better outreach to women, while fulfilling the aim of "leaving no one behind".

I appreciate the effort put in by the IB/CB vertical of NMMU, SRLMs and all the other stakeholders involved in preparing this document. I would also like to commend the efforts of the *Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy* (IWWAGE) for constantly rendering the technical expertise required to support the work being done by NRLM to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

(NITA KEJREWAL)

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADS	Area Development Societies
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
AWW	Anaganwadi Worker
BDO	Block Development Officer
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer
CLF	Cluster Level Federation
CMFCC	Community Managed Family Counselling Centre
CRP	Community Resource Person
CRP-CM	Community Resource Person - Community Mobiliser
CDS	Community Development Services
DLSA	District Legal Services Authority
DMMU	District Mission Management Unit
DWCD	Department for Women and Child Development
FCC	Family Counselling Centre
FIR	First Information Report
GFC	Gender Facilitation Centre
GPLF	Gram Panchayat Level Federation
GPP	Gender Point Person
GPU	Gram Panchayat Unit
JSLPS	Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society

KSRLPS	Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Promotion Society
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarentee Act
MMS	Mandala Mahila Samakhya
MSAC	Mandal Social Action Committee
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non- Governmental Organisation
NRLM	National Rural Livelihoods Mission
PDS	Public Distribution System
PLF	Panchayat Level Federation
SAC	Social Action Committee
SC	Scheduled Caste
SERP	Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty
SHG	Self Help Group
SRLM	State Rural Livelihood Mission
SSC	Sangha Service Center
SVEP	Start-up Village Entrepreneur Programme
TMMU	Tamil Nadu Mission Management Unit
VCDC	Village Council Development Committee
VLF	Village Level Federation
VLF EC	Village Level Federation Executive Committee
VO	Village Organisation
WLL	Women Land Literacy
ZS	Zilla Samakhya
ZSAC	Zilla Social Action Committee

#

● INTRODUCTION



In India, DAY-NRLM is the largest government programme working exclusively with rural women, yet there remains the need to move from 'working with women' to working with a 'gender equality and rights approach'. Rural women face numerous structural and institutional constraints in realising their right to livelihoods, resources, decent work and social protection. NRLM believes that gender mainstreaming should feature in its framework, systems, institutions and processes to achieve sustainable social, economic and political goals that have direct and indirect impact on the quality of life in a community. Gender mainstreaming can be adopted through a multiple-track strategy that combines both integrating gender in its operations, and a more targeted approach.

The gender integration approach focuses on shaping policies and programmes in all verticals of NRLM with a gender lens. For example, how can financial inclusion of women be promoted through promoting their individual ownership of bank accounts, or offering them customised financial products that address gender specific vulnerabilities? How can women's economic identity, independent to that of men, be strengthened? Can women's control over economic resources be advanced through promoting ownership of assets in their name or women led or women owned enterprises? Or by imparting them skills, market information and technical know-how? Can women's food security and nutrition levels, and those of their children be improved through promotion of nutrition sensitive agriculture and kitchen gardens?

The other approach is a more targeted one, wherein NRLM through differentiated strategies, focuses on the most vulnerable – elderly women, those with disabilities, marginalised women including those belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups, trans-genders, Devdasis, those with HIV, single/widowed/divorced women, survivors of violence, trafficked women and so on. The idea is to recognise the extreme vulnerabilities faced by these groups, and ensure targeted use of funds such as the Vulnerability Reduction Fund (VRF) to address their needs.

To facilitate gendered social action at the grassroots level and as part of its gender operational strategy, the NRLM has also established several institutional platforms at the village level, which self-help group members can approach in times of need. Prime among them, is the Social Action Committee (SAC), which is to be formed in each village, at the Village Organisation (VO) level, with 3 to 5 Self-Help Group (SHG) leaders as its members. This is supported by a Gender Forum (a more informal body with SHG members) which is to support and guide the SAC. Together, the Gender Forum and the VO-SAC are to prepare a Gender Action Plan to resolve critical gender issues in the village, that may range from, say, prevention of child marriage, to containing alcoholism, strategies to increase participation of women in the Gram Sabha, ownership of women over assets etc. The VO-SACs and Gender Forums are also to set aside some funding from the VRF, monitor progress on actions and report on them to the higher Cluster Level Federation which aggregates agendas for all Village Organisations under them.

The Social Action Committee in particular develops a social agenda and gender pledge based on the gender action plan; facilitates the Gender Pledge in every meeting of the VO; facilitates discussion on the social agenda and issues in all meetings of VO; and maintains records of discussions in the meetings, issues received and action taken at the VO level. Since 2018, more

than 21,000 VO-SACs have been formed across India, focusing on issues as diverse as enrolment and retention of children in schools; asset creation in the names of women; prevention of violence against women; access to rights and entitlements; and ensuring food and nutrition security with a gender lens. A majority of these VO-SACs (nearly 18,000) have been trained in how to address gender issues.

This volume contains inspiring stories of VO-SACs from across states, in how they handled incredibly complex issues and furthered the agenda of gender equality in their villages. They range from how a Social Action Committee helped increase women's access to rights and entitlements through engagement with public institutions; to how another increased women's access to property by encouraging land ownership in their name. One case study discusses how women's access to common property resources can be increased through collective efforts. Besides these efforts, other economic issues covered by VO-SACs include addressing wage disparities between men and women in the village through collective action; addressing issues of drudgery through collective action; the labour rights of migrants; and lately, COVID-related gender issues. Some VO-SACs have done commendable work on the rights of the girl child, by working on prevention of child marriage, increasing girls' retention in schools, and preventing child abuse. Case studies in this volume cover such cases as well.

Finally, the compendium documents cases where VO-SACs helped women fight adverse social norms, practices and behaviours that affect them. These include for instance tackling the scourge of alcoholism, the high incidence of domestic violence, and child abuse and human trafficking. In tribal dominated areas, where some women are labelled as witches, a case study discusses the vital role played by a VO-SAC in addressing the practice of witch hunting.

Broadly, the case studies highlight how VO-SACs have used multiple strategies including restorative justice, collective action, offering support to women (including psycho-social support) and sometimes even engaging with men to address issues that matter to women. They show how placing women's interests first and putting in place platforms which women can approach easily and speak to, can provide a prompt source of action, a first port of call to poor marginalised women in villages. For the state, these VO-SACs also act as the eyes and ears of the village, and a public acknowledgement of the distress that rural women have been facing for long¹.

¹Undurti, V. and L. Lingam. 2019. "Social Action Committees: Community Intervention to Reduce Gender-based Violence," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, October, 26(3):263-287



Ensuring access to rights, entitlements and livelihoods through collectives: A case study from Andhra Pradesh

The collective action always results in impactful outcomes which are long lasting. The SHG institutions nurture the social and institutional capital and enable the capabilities of the poor and vulnerable women to take their own choices in life. The SHG platform proved undoubtedly that it functions as an effective mechanism in helping women overcome gender-based constraints and experience empowerment. The case study presented below is evidence that collective action by the SHG Federation in the state of Andhra Pradesh has resulted in women's empowerment socially and economically.

LOCATION AND PROFILE

The Pileru Village Organisation (VO5) is located in Pileru mandal of Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh. The VO has 36 SHGs with 365 SHG members. Pileru is located on the National Highway and well connected with other regions of the district.

CONTEXT, PROCESS AND OUTPUTS

The Chittoor district is located in the drought-prone Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh bordering Karnataka and Tamil Nadu states. Being a backward region, the women are subjected to various kinds of gender discrimination at the household and societal levels due to lack of livelihoods options and patriarchal mindset prevailing in the society. The Pileru VO has identified and addressed various gender issues resulting in the empowerment of women.

Inclusion of Vulnerable Women: In the village, 37 vulnerable women were identified and included as members in the existing SHGs. Out of 37, eight of them were survivors of human trafficking and they were provided with a loan for undertaking livelihood activity of their choice.

Livelihoods to the survivor of trafficking: M. Indiramma, currently a member of SHG was sold at the age of 14 by her parents to the agent who promised to provide her some work. He did not provide any work, but sold her to the brothel in Pune. She silently suffered at the brothel for ten years and was able to get out of the clutches only when she became 24 years old. She returned to her village and decided to lead a life of her choice. She was included in the SHG and got a loan of Rs.50000 from the Gender Fund to set up a grocery shop.

Prevention of Child Marriage: The parents of a minor girl Bindupriya studying in 9th standard got her engaged after receiving an offer of Rs. 1,00,000/- from the bridegroom's family. The issue was brought to the notice of the VO SAC members. The VO SAC, CC and the women police approached the parents and counselled them to stop the marriage. After much persuasion, the team succeeded in convincing the parents to stop the marriage and got the written agreement signed by the parents that they will not get the girl married before 18 years. The girl continued her studies.

Entitlements and Skill Development: The VO has identified 13 women who are in need and eligible for skill development training in tailoring (9); beautician course (2); and preparation of household cleaning materials such as making phenyl, bleach and surf (2). Pension was mobilised for 2 HIV positive women and 15 widows. A loan amounting to Rs.3,00,000/- from Gender Fund was given to 15 widows for undertaking livelihood activities.

Covid Relief: Eight vulnerable women were given the opportunity to stitch 50000 masks during the COVID-19 lockdown last year which provided them with a livelihood. The poor and elderly members in the village were given bananas at Rs. 2 per kg and sweet lime fruits at Rs 10 per kg. Sanitizers brought from the government hospital were distributed in the village. The VO SAC also created awareness in the village on the precautions to be taken to protect from the virus.

STRATEGY

Selection of Gender Point Person (GPP) is done for each SHG who raises the gender issues in the SHG meetings. She also ensures that the Gender Pledge is taken up by all the SHG members and everyone feels committed to address the gender issues. The pledge is mainly focused on ensuring girl child education, preventing early marriage and domestic violence.

Awareness Creation: In the VO and SHG monthly meetings, awareness has been given on gender issues such as human trafficking, child marriages, impact due to alcoholism, domestic violence, child labour, school drop-outs etc.

Inclusion of Social agenda in the VO meeting is a strategy to ensure that the gender issues get discussed and addressed by the VO Social Action Committee (SAC).

Convergence with the Government Departments is yet another important strategy to address gender issues. The VO creates awareness to the SHG members and the communities on gender issues with the support of the departments of education, revenue, women and child welfare, ICDS, police, legal services authority, panchayats and other stakeholders. The convergence is also to mobilise government schemes, programmes and entitlements for the SHG members.

Capacity Building is a key strategy for all the SHG institutions at all levels. The members and the community resource persons are trained on gender issues and the instruments available.

Besides, SAC members attend the VO meeting and provide information on government schemes and entitlements, grants and loans from CIF, Gender Fund and financial opportunities available for undertaking livelihood activities.

Review Meetings: The SAC holds monthly reviews with the members of the VO to discuss gender agenda and come up with the plan and follow up mechanism.

Referrals: The VO provides referral services such as NGOs addressing gender issues and helpline numbers. The gender issues brought to the notice of the VO SAC members are taken up with the concerned authorities.

The Vigilance Committee is formed at the village level consisting of Sarpanch, Anganwadi Worker, Asha Worker, Women Police, School Headmaster, VO Leaders and the VO SAC members. The meetings take place once in every three months to discuss the issues of the vulnerable women and take necessary action.

SCALABILITY

The district team is planning to address gender issues through all the VOs and the strategies are being incorporated in the gender operational strategy for the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Awareness on protection for girls



Awareness on prevention of trafficking



The power of collective action: A case study from Arunachal Pradesh

In the North-East, the concept of land rights for women is alien. Primarily, there is no common land, that the administration if it so desires can allot it to women's collectives, or even to women, as has happened in other parts of the country under land distribution reforms for poor and landless women. All land is with private ownership and women have no right to either land or property as per the tribal customary practices/laws.

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the most recent SRLM in the NE region. However, PLFs were active and on their own addressing issues that were affecting their work. This intervention is one such effort. This case highlights how in such a background, the PLF organised itself to demand for land to build their PLF office, and their collective action yielded positive results.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND PROFILE OF THE VILLAGE ORGANISATION

The intervention occurred in the Parbuk village of Roing Block in Lower Debang Valley district. The Primary Level Federation (PLF) responsible for the intervention was Dapong. This PLF has 7 SHGs comprising 65 members. The village consists of the Adi tribe.

CONTEXT

As the PLF did not have an office of their own they were forced to have their meetings in the house of one of the members, who had kindly provided them a room in her house, to be temporarily used as the PLF office. Therefore, in every meeting held, this issue came up concerning the need for a separate space for the PLF office. This is what triggered the intervention.

Collective action holds the promise of long-term impacts. The NRLM institutions nurture the social and institutional capital and enable the capabilities of the poor and vulnerable women to make their own choices in life. The SHG platform proved undoubtedly that it functions as an effective mechanism for helping women overcome gender-based constraints and achieve empowerment. The case study presented below provides evidence on how the collective action through the SHG framework in the state of Arunachal Pradesh has resulted in women's empowerment socially and economically.

PROCESS

The EC members of the PLF approached the Gaon Buras (appointed by the Government to oversee village activities etc), Banggo Secretary (Traditional Institution), PRI Members and the village elders and discussed with them their need for the land in the village to construct their PLF Office. The PLF organised a meeting in the village in which the EC members explained to the villagers about the activities of the SHGs and hence the need for a PLF Office. Most of the villagers were ready to allot a plot of the village land through a proper process. Thereafter, there was continuous interaction with Gaon Buras, Banggo Secretary, PRI Members and the villagers and finally, it was agreed that a plot of land would be allotted to the PLF.

In a subsequent meeting with the PLF, it was confirmed to them by the relevant authorities and the village residents, regarding the decision to allot a plot of land. The site was selected where the PLF Office would be constructed. However, to the dismay of the PLF, it was found out that the land which had been allotted, was occupied by one of the influential villagers. He was using the land for his private cultivation. This influential person then approached the village elders and leaders to influence them to change their decision about allotting the land for the PLF Office. Unfortunately, he succeeded in getting the support of many villager residents, who were not convinced about giving land to a collective of women. Hence, these folks who were the supporters of the influential village person, tried to convince the village leaders to change their decision. Therefore, now the situation was in a dilemma.

Another meeting was held on the land issue and there were heated discussions, as some of the village people were not supporting the decision, so the decision was kept in abeyance. After the meeting, the EC members again went to the person who was occupying the land and explained and convinced him regarding why getting the land was important. Further, they also apprised him of how the objective of the PLF is to help the women to work for the development of their village. After continuous interaction and persuasion, the man finally seemed convinced and he agreed to vacate the land and have it allotted to the PLF for construction of the office. There was a final meeting held, in which the Banggo officially declared the allotment of the land to the PLF and an agreement was signed with the PLF. Now, that the PLF after its long-drawn struggle succeeded in getting the land for the PLF office, the next huge task in front of them was to arrange the resource for construction. The SHG members contributed through their daily wages Rs. 1,72,800 doing agricultural labour collectively for 12 days.

Apart from the above contribution, individual SHGs also made contributions of Rs. 3000, totally to an amount of Rs.27,000. In addition, the community cadres of the PLF contributed from Rs.1000, and CRPs Rs.3000 each from their honorarium. The PLF CIF loan interest totally to Rs.20,000 was contributed and another PLF Pone also contributed Rs. 12,800. The ZPM Shri Starson Saring contributed Rs.10,000 and a truck load of sand - gravel. The entire intervention process was initiated in 2017 and could be accomplished only by 2019.

CHALLENGES

A collective of women seeking land rights was new to the community and therefore, it required a lot of support mobilisation and convincing to be done, before people understood their purpose.

The PLF members had an arduous task to convince all the key stakeholders like the Gaon Burra, the Banggo Secretary, the PRI members and village elders to convince them of the need and importance of the land for the PLF office. Even after convincing, they faced the resistance from the person who had occupied the piece of land and was refusing to give it. Again, after much convincing and ensuring that the land was for the larger good of the village, that the person relented and agreed to vacate the land.

After the month-long struggle to get the land, the next hurdle was collection of funds. Thereafter, getting the plan approvals and other legal documents and the completion of the PLF office took two years.

OUTPUT

After the consistent collective efforts from all the SHG members and love and support of the community, the acceptance of the village authorities, the PLF got the land sanctioned. Thereafter, with the support of the DC, the ZPM, the PLF was able to complete the construction of their Office. The PLF office was inaugurated by the District Planning Officer Shri. Marto Dirchi on 25th November, 2019.

The PLF space is used for conducting adult literacy classes and many other trainings like, MCP, MKSP and PG for the SHG members.

In a state where women had no access to land and property, it was an example where the ownership of the land and office was made in the name of the PLF, which is a women's collective.

STRATEGY

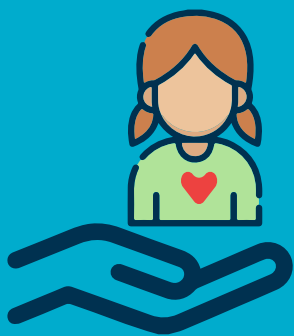
The strategy adopted in this intervention was advocacy with the village elders, the community, the local and traditional governing bodies. The PLF also initiated a fundraising drive through their collective action

SCALABILITY

This intervention can provide insights to other PLFs to explore the possibility of asset creation, not just limited to land or a building, but also access and control over resources such as ponds, fallow land and so on.

Dapong PLF Office at Roing with BMM





Collective action to address multi-faceted violence on women and girls: A case study from Assam

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 2016-2019, reveals that there has been increase in crime against women and girl children under three categories – domestic violence, kidnapping and molestation. The trend has been observed in data collated in the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) 2019-20. According to it over 30 percent of women in Assam reported spousal violence, up from 24.5 percent in NFHS-4 (2015-16), and 8 percent of young women reported sexual violence, up from 5.8 percent in NFHS-4.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

According to Action for North East Trust (ANT), a local NGO working on domestic violence for legal redress and counselling, only one in five crimes of domestic violence are reported to police in Chirang, a Bodoland Territorial Area District. Women in the region want their husbands to be counselled and for the marriages to be intact. Even if the woman goes to police, FIR is filed and charge sheet is made, they often prefer to retract their statement because they are intimidated either by spouse or family members. But the police generally do not pay much heed to the rural women, so often they end up calling the husband to the station, and counsel him. Filing FIR is a far-flung dream.

The traditional dispute resolution system is very strong in this region. Hence, such crimes are often not reported and rarely are the courts involved. In most instances of domestic violence, the spouses are invited to a meeting with the aim of mediation and reconciliation. Financial compensation is paid if the survivor has been injured, outside of the formal judicial system. Similar procedural method was adopted in this present case of VO SAC intervention.

CONTEXT

Gender integration is being implemented in ASRLM since 2018. Gender training was provided to the Social Action Committee (SAC) members of several blocks, Cluster Level Federations (VLF) and Jeevika Sakhis at Village Organisations (VO). This enabled them to initiate discussion and action on gender concerns in their respective areas. Trinayoni VO under the Borobozar Block of Chirang District also underwent similar training and has since been addressing gender issues. The VO was formed in 2018 covering 17 Self Help Groups with 186 members. It has been playing an active role in addressing the issues of domestic violence and child sexual abuse, besides other gender induced issues in the region. The intervention and actions have been rehabilitation of the survivors, counselling of the victims and their perpetrators and compensation to the survivors by their spouses, etc.

CASE

Pranovi (name changed to protect privacy), a resident of Chikajhora village (Bishnupur VDC) under the Borobazar lost her husband when her only daughter was just months old and remarried soon after. Initially the marriage was fine but over the years she has been a victim of domestic violence. She many times thought of meeting the women who were actively involved in dealing with women issues and child marriages in the village but kept quite as she was not sure of the implications. One day, not able to endure the ordeal of physical violence and abuse, she approached the Trinoyani VO of her village. The VO SAC met Pranovi's husband, tried to convince him to stop violence and conducted multiple meetings to build mutual understanding. Failed to bring any change in his behaviour, the SAC members along with the Response Committee² contacted ANT for support in dealing the issue. Respecting the informed decision of Pranovi the VO SAC approached the Gaon Bura (village headman). A meeting was arranged with the support of the Gaon Bura and the village elders to resolve the issue where Pranovi's husband was also called. After several rounds of discussion and mediation the couple could arrive at a written reconciliation.

Pranovi's joy did not last for long. One day she witnessed her husband molesting her 15 years old daughter. The girl revealed that her stepfather became violent and forced her to submit to his demands. Outraged Pranovi confronted her husband. He confessed, but threatened Pranovi that if she creates nuisance he would kill her and would marry her daughter.

Shattered Pranovi approached the VO and shared that her ordeal has escalated now taking a different turn. She shared what her daughter is undergoing, husband's response when she confronted, and sought support in dealing with the issue. She confessed that she is aware of the matter but did not speak about it earlier as the issue is very sensitive. Consoling her, the VO SAC tried filing FIR at local police station but the police refused due to lack of evidence in the case. SAC members tried to explain that it is a case of minor girl and mother herself is the witness but police did not take a heed of it. Later, the SAC along with the Response Committee complained on the Child Helpline, 1098. The ChildLine staff along with the police reached the village on the very next day. They have taken the girl into their custody and presented her to Child Welfare Committee (CWC). Presently, the girl is placed in the shelter home at the district headquarters. VO SAC members are monitoring the girl's wellbeing.

² Response Committee is a village level committee comprising of VO members, SAC members, Gaon Burha (Village Headman), VDC member, village elders and is supported by the ANT NGO. This committee helps in counselling the domestic violence survivors and redress the DV cases.

After the girl was sent to CWC, Pranovi's husband became very violent. SAC had to intervene to protect Pranovi and give shelter in one of the member's home for 3 days. They tried to file case on her husband but failed again with non-cooperation of the police. They placed her as domestic worker in Guwahati for which they had to face humiliation from Pranovi's husband. Later her husband connected with her, and brought her back home. Currently, the couple are living together. Back in the village Pranovi joined the SHG. She says with much gratitude **"ASRLM has completely changed my life. I feel secure with the aegis of the SHG members and the VO now"**.

CASE

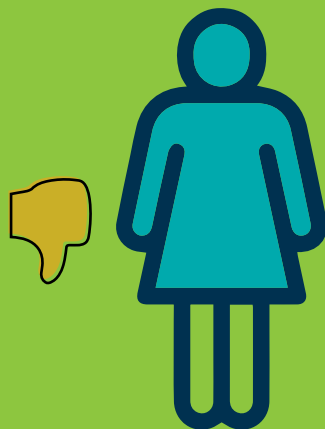
Pranovi's husband was rude to the VO SAC members in the beginning. They had to face resistance from him during the proceedings of the case. The community elders were not cooperative and not ready to intervene citing that it was their family matter. The traditional dispute resolution system was also against to the VO SAC's intervention. Involvement of ANT helped them to learn while dealing with the case. The VO had done awareness in the village through street plays and demonstrations on the issues of violence against women.

IMPACT

With the successful intervention in Pranovi's case the VO SAC became strong and confident of dealing cases of violence. They got visibility and recognition as a platform for dealing with social issues. Women started opening up about their issues and got support in dealing with their situation. Cases of domestic violence gradually came down in the village due to fear of shame in the society.

FUTURE PLAN

Considering the fact that vulnerability doesn't vanish at once and has chance of reoccurrence in other forms, Trinayoni VO draws a long-term plan for continuous handholding to Pranovi. This inspiring success story is being shared with other VOs to enable them take proactive role in addressing such issues. It is being taken as an example to discuss with other departments and administration to evolve a strategy for convergence and joint action. Formation of Gender Justice Forums and gender trainings for all levels is on the agenda of ASRLM now.



Addressing witch hunting and ending the ostracisation of women: A case study from Bihar

Several recent incidents and heinous crimes committed in the name of witch hunting have been reported in Bihar. This case highlights the plight of a victim of witch hunting in Bihar. The case study demonstrates ways to address the inherent biases that often SHG members themselves have towards issues.

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING AND PROFILE OF THE VILLAGE ORGANISATION

This case study is based in the Lalpari Sagar Village Organisation (VO) which was formed in 2011 in the Bochahan block of Muzaffarpur district in Bihar. A total of 25 SHGs participated in the efforts to address the practice of witch hunting.

CONTEXT

A follow-up gender sensitisation workshop was held at the cluster-level federation along with the community mobilisers and SHG members. All SHG members shared their experience of facing social discrimination that they confront very often. One of the CM didis shared her experience from the Komal SHG, under the Sagar VO. She stated that one of the women from the village was branded as a witch by the villagers. They blamed her for any mishap, or for people's illnesses or any other wrong that happened within the village. She was bothered by this mistreatment and the constant discrimination and ostracisation that she faced in the village. She was even blamed for the death of a grandchild of an SHG member in the village. The CM didi stated that because of this inherent bias within the village and even among SHG members, this problem cannot be resolved by just the VO, but needs the support of all SHG members across the CLF.

PROCESS

The members discussed solutions for addressing this challenge and everyone decided that there is an urgent need to organise a meeting at the VO level. In that meeting there were members from 7 VOs and community mobilisers. Thereafter a meeting was organised in the Komal SHG in which around 100 SHG members from 7 VOs participated. The SHG member who had lost her grandchild did not attend the meeting initially, but joined the meeting after several women went to her asking her to join. After setting the context of the meeting, The aggrieved woman stood up and stated that the villagers had branded her as a witch and have been harassing her. After stating the harassment she has faced, she sought redressal for her plight. The VO SAC members stated that ostracising a woman and branding her as a witch has long-term consequences that weaken her agency and the spirit of women. They also talked about the legal repercussions of branding women as witches and provided details about the laws that prevent this practice.

However, the woman who lost her grandchild was unwilling to understand the grave consequences of this social evil. Upon hearing this, SHG members from the minority community stood up to state that had this woman been responsible for the death of your grandchild, then all children at the school where she cooks meals should also have died. They stated that she is being falsely accused and that there is no such thing as witches and that these are superstitions.

IMPACT

Upon further discussions and deliberations, those gathered at the meeting understood the impact of witch hunting and ending this social evil in their community. They stated that they will no longer bother the victim and wrongly brand her as a witch. She now visits other people's homes during festivals and other special occasions. She also stated that she is gradually understanding the consequences of social discrimination and discrimination against women and girls. Earlier she got two of her daughters married at an early age without allowing them to complete their high school education. Her perspective has now changed and she is letting her third daughter complete her education.

There are efforts underway to spread awareness about the evil practice of witch hunting across all village organisations and SHGs.





Collective action to end violence against women: A case study from Chhattisgarh

According to the NFHS-4 report, almost 37 percent of ever married women in Chhattisgarh have experienced spousal violence and show an increase of 7 percent from the previous report. Domestic violence by husbands is common. Increasing alcoholism among men and a concomitant increase in violence against women has emerged as a major issue in rural and urban Chhattisgarh (Status Study of Women in Chhattisgarh, NCW).

CONTEXT

Rajnandgaon is one of the populous districts in the State with more than 26 percent of the population being Scheduled Tribe. According to the Chhattisgarh Human Development Report (2005) the district is ranked 1 in education. However, in other human development indicators it is not doing so good, especially in health. Cases of Violence Against Women (VAW) in the district resonate with the state's status, major reasons being alcoholism among men. Women's groups have been in forefront in the anti-liquor agitations in many parts of the State. The SHG movement gave thrust to these efforts in addressing the issues of VAW.

PROCESS

Rajanandgaon block has been selected for gender intervention in CGSRLM. Samriddhi Village Organisation (VO) of Gathula village formed in 2015 has been one of the VOs in Anchal Cluster Level Federation (CLF) selected for the first phase gender intervention. The master trainers of the block were trained in 2018-19. They in turn trained the VO Social Action Committee (SAC) members and Gender Point Persons (GPPs – known as Samata Sakhis). After multiple training sessions, discussions around gender issues were triggered by the Samata Sakhis (GPPs) in the meetings of the Self-Help Groups.

During one of such meetings with Sharda Self Help Group (SHG), one of the members, Smt. Meena (Name changed) opened up and shared her suffering. She informed that her husband consumes liquor daily and under intoxication he not only abuses verbally but also beats her every day. He also threatens to throw her out of the house along with the children. Meena is 27 years old and has two kids, a 5 year old boy and a 3 year old girl.

The issue was discussed at length in the group. All the members decided to go to Meena's house and confront her husband. Initially Meena was hesitant but she gained confidence with the assurance of the group. All of them went to her house and had a dialogue with her husband, who agreed to stop drinking alcohol. He did abide by it for a few days. When he restarted abusing Meena again, the members tried to convince him not to resort to such things but he was reluctant to listen to them and started abusing the members of the group. At this juncture, they decided to take the matter further.

SAKHI MANCH (SAC)

The GPP of Sharda SHG put this issue in Sakhi Manch. The Sakhi Manch members felt that this is not just one woman's issue but many women in the village are facing similar problems but are hesitant to speak. Hence, they decided to take it up to the VO to get support for planning the action. They also felt that the whole incident needs to be recorded in the minutes book with the consent of Meena.

PROCESS

The members discussed solutions for addressing this challenge and everyone decided that there is an urgent need to organise a meeting at the VO level. In that meeting there were members from 7 VOs and community mobilisers. Thereafter, a meeting was organised in the Komal SHG in which around 100 SHG members from 7 VOs participated. The SHG member who had lost her grandchild did not attend the meeting initially, but joined the meeting after persuasion from other women. After setting the context of the meeting, the aggrieved woman stood up and stated that the villagers have branded her as a witch. After talking about the harassment, she has faced, she sought redressal for her plight. The VO SAC members stated that ostracising a woman and branding her as a witch has long-term consequences that weaken her agency and the spirit of women. They also talked about the legal repercussions of branding women as witches and provided details about the laws to prevent this practice.

However, the woman who lost her grandchild was unwilling to understand the grave consequences of this social evil. Upon hearing this, SHG members from the minority community stood up to state that had this woman been responsible for the death of your grandchild, then all children at the school where she cooks meals should also have died. They stated that she is being falsely accused and that there is no such thing as witches and that these are mere superstition.

VILLAGE ORGANISATION

In the subsequent VO meeting the GPP of the Sharda SHG presented Meena's case. It was discussed in detail with the SAC and EC members. They all decided to go to Meena's house and talk to her husband. Along with this, there was also a deliberation on identifying such incidents happening with other women and adolescent girls in the village, and building mechanisms to reach out to them. It was decided that the adolescent girls of the village should be trained on gender issues, so that they are aware of the gender-based violence and different laws and support system available to fight it.

ACTION ON THE CASE

The members of the VO went to Meena's house and tried to pursue the issue with her husband and the family members too. But he abused everyone and drove them away from there. Not losing the spirit, the determined members of the VO EC and SAC called for a meeting of the Village Health & Sanitation Committee (VHSC) with the support of the Mitandin. The case was discussed and all the members unanimously agreed to deal with Meena's husband. This time also the efforts failed. With these multiple persuasions Meena's husband got annoyed and started torturing Meena.

Vexed with his abusive behaviour Meena and the SAC members submitted a written complaint to the Gram Panchayat (GP). After careful listening to the case the GP advised Meena to file a case with the Police. Meena was not sure how things will turn with this step but decided to go ahead as the condition at home has been unbearable. All the members of Samriddhi VO, the Anganwadi Worker, Mithanin, Sarpanch and other members also stood by Meena.

After filing the FIR, Meena's husband was arrested following an investigation. Meena survived verbal and physical abuse but was not happy that the father of the two kids was not home. Within a few days Meena's husband came out on bail and started torturing her again. This time the SakhiManch (SAC) took it up with perseverance to bring attitudinal change in Meena's husband. They discussed with Meena and decided to have a village meeting. They all approached the GP. Convinced with the strategy the GP called a meeting of all the villagers. Meena's husband was summoned to attend the village meeting. The entire village was present there. After some arguments he was instructed by the village Patel and the elders to behave properly, not to resort to beating or abuse, to take care of his wife and children, failing which strict action would be taken against him. Realising his mistake and feeling ashamed, Meena's husband apologised and promised that he would not commit any mistake further.

It has been 5 months now since the village meeting happened. Meena's husband has stopped beating her. He is taking care of his wife, children and home well. Meena is happy for this change in her life. The VO and the SAC members are also keeping a vigil on this issue.

IMPACT

This success has brought visibility and recognition to the Sakhi Manch (SAC) and the VO as the forums for support and collective action on the issues of women's concern. This intervention helped in building trust and confidence in the CBOs. An enabling environment has been created for women to speak out their problems. The SakhiManch members and the EC of the VO started visiting the survivors periodically to show solidarity and provide them confidence. This also built a sense of collective strength among the members.

Social issues have been regularly discussed in SHGs, VO and SAC meetings as a key agenda. Reporting of and discussion on gender issues in the meetings of VO has started. Confidence is built among the members of the VO to deal with the cases of VAW. Awareness increased among the villagers on the social issues and the support systems. VO planned for legal literacy programmes to all the women and adolescent girls to build their capacities to handle such issues. Involving the GP, village elders, police, government institutions and villagers created an environment of cooperation between different institutions in the village while sending a message of warning to the perpetrators of action against them if they resort to violence.

CHALLENGES

- Meena's husband had become more irritable due to the persuasion of many times and many people, due to which Meena had to bear more torture, which was a challenge to her safety.
- Even after persuading so many people, her husband did not understand, so Meena was worried about the future of herself and her children.

FUTURE PLAN

The case is taken as a success story for discussion in other VOs of Rajnandgaon district to inspire the SHG members to identify cases of gender-based violence in general and alcohol induced violence in specific. All the CLF members have discussed and decided to take up domestic violence as one of the key agenda points and build the capacities of the VOs for future actions.





Bringing marginalised communities into the fold of inclusive development: A case study from Gujarat

Classified as a socially and economically backward class, the Devipujak community in Gujarat is an orthodox, nomadic community. Traditional, deeply entrenched rituals and practices have resulted in a slow process of growth and development within this community. Child marriage, myths and superstitions associated with family planning and lack of financial literacy within the community is a pervasive challenge. This case study highlights the comprehensive, multifaceted and broad-based intervention undertaken by the village organisation and the social action committee to address the root causes of these issues to improve the lives of girls, women as well as identify new livelihood opportunities to improve their socio-economic conditions.

GEOGRAPHY AND PROFILE OF THE VILLAGE ORGANISATION

This case study is based in the village of Paddhari, in Paddhari block, in the Rajkot district of Gujarat. The village organisation, Asha Gram Sakhi Sangh, has 5 Self-Help Groups under it with 50 SHG members. The block has a population of 64,234 as per the 2011 Census of India, of which 31,482 are women.

CONTEXT

This orthodox and nomadic Devipujak community is grappling with several issues that can potentially inhibit the empowerment of women and girls and affects their lives and aspirations. The prevalence of early child marriage remains a challenge, as well as superstitions related to family planning. The traditional money lending practices by the affluent class to the Devipujak community has affected the financial security of the households within these communities that are disadvantaged socio-economically.

PROCESSES AND STRATEGY

Ending the practice of child marriage: In 2017, the members of the Social Action Committee (SAC) formed by the village organisation (VO), found that seven child marriages were going to take place in Paddhari village. Members of the SAC persuaded the community members to stop this regressive social practice and shared information on the impact of child marriages on the growth and development of young children, particularly girls. However, despite these concerted efforts, the community members, including the women, were not persuaded to stop the seven child marriages. The committee members then approached the local leaders and priest to intervene and address the challenge of child marriage.

As an immediate step, the VO SAC was activated. The members provided information on the legal implications of child marriage and also approached local community leaders and religious leaders to intervene in this issue, given the influence that they have in shaping opinions and dispelling misinformation and myths. The VO SAC also provided an opportunity for an interface with public institutions where they provided information on the Child Marriage Prohibition Act. Several series of meetings were held with the women of the community at night to explain the consequences of early marriage on children, particularly the health and mental challenges that girl children go through.

Promoting family planning: According to the traditional customs in the Devipujak community, family planning as a concept does not exist. As per their traditional beliefs the family planning is already done by their goddess and every additional child is considered a gift from the goddess. This has resulted in families having seven to eight children.

These superstitions were identified and several meetings organised by VO SAC were used to raise awareness about family planning and the repercussions of having too many children. Camps were also organised to provide family planning information and services to households to ensure a healthy and prosperous life for them. Since 2016, the VO SAC members have taken the responsibility to educate the community members and raise awareness about the importance of family planning through camps, awareness building sessions and home visits. They also included the ASHA worker to provide information on the disadvantages and the socio-economic challenges that families may face if they do not address this challenge. Women from the Gram Sabha actively participated in these awareness sessions, where information on social security provisions were also shared with households.

Improving financial literacy and practices: Financial literacy and understanding of financial services for the poor remains a challenge in the Paddhari village. Around 65 Devipujak families live in Paddhari village, and are primarily engaged in self-employment opportunities such as vegetable vending, and tend to borrow money at 10-15 percent interest per day from informal money lenders to support their businesses. This practice of traditional money lending exploits marginalised individuals engaged in vulnerable occupations and self-employment with minimal incomes. They are ultimately stuck in an endless vicious cycle of poverty exacerbated by high interest rates.

In order to restrict the practice of informal money lending, since 2016 women of the villages have started building their institutions and have federated into VOs and cluster level federations (CLFs). Through their membership with these institutional platforms they were able to borrow the money at low interest rates through the VO at the NRLM interest levels. This has increased the participation of women in local businesses undertaken by their male household members. Additionally, these women have also raised the awareness and recognition of these institutions for the poor to provide formal credit and livelihood opportunities. Through the NRLM institutions, micro-credit and cash credit has been provided to these vegetable vendors by linking the SHG to the bank. Additionally, loans have also been provided at low interest rates through the community investment support fund.

Economically empowering women: Since 2016, in order to address the multidimensional poverty being experienced by the members of the Devipujak community, livelihood generation activities have been started by 22 members in the VO. While the women were making items that are traditionally given to brides at the time of their wedding (locally known as Kariyavar) since 2005, but after coming under the NRLM fold, women collectivised through SHGs and were able to get the financial assistance and that helped increase their production and they started making these kits. The amount received as part of the community investment support fund is being utilised towards this economic activity. The VO SAC has also identified women who were unemployed and have linked them to these economic activities.

OUTPUTS

Impact on child marriage: The seven child marriages that were being planned in 2017 were consequently stopped in the Paddhari village as a result of the strategic and multi-pronged approach adopted by the VO SAC.

Encouraging family planning: Around 53 Families are now readily taking proactive steps to curb the challenge of having too many children through family planning services and by spreading information within the community. Health-related complications of mothers have also been prevented through these efforts.

Financial inclusion among community members and economic empowerment of women: Around 22 women are now engaged in economic activities and engagement of the VO SAC has led to expansion of livelihood opportunities for unemployed women. Additionally, the practice of informal money lending at high interest rates has been addressed through support from the VO SAC and NRLM institutions and funding. Access to cash credit and micro-credit services has been ensured through linkages to the bank via the SHGs.

OUTCOMES

When it comes to ending the practice of child marriages, the VO SAC members acted as whistle-blowers to prevent many families from engaging in this illegal and harmful practice. The VO SAC members observed a broader impact on the community members after they understood the legal ramifications of child marriage. Health complications of the girl child have now been prevented, and children are also attending school.

In terms of financial security of the community members, the efforts undertaken to provide linkages to micro credit services and loans at low interest rates has improved the livelihoods of marginalised community members. The VO as an institution has been recognised for ensuring smooth financial linkages in the village. The livelihood generation activities undertaken by the SHGs has also led to additional household incomes that have been helpful in expenses related to education of their children, they are able to afford pakka houses and primary necessities required in a household.

PLANS FOR UPSCALING

The VO is now planning on creating awareness among the nomadic, backward caste families living in different villages of Paddhari block through awareness programmes with voluntary participation of religious leaders and local government officials. They are also aiming to end child marriages completely in the taluka. To address the challenge of overpopulation, the VO is planning work towards adoption of family planning in the villages of Paddhari taluka in collaboration with the health department and will ensure 100 per cent adoption of family planning. The SAC is also aiming to increase the participation of women in Gram Sabhas and expand their efforts towards women empowerment.



Reinvigorating the lives of domestic violence survivors: A case study from Jammu and Kashmir

Twelve per cent of ever-married women aged 18-49 in Jammu and Kashmir have experienced physical or sexual violence (NFHS-5 2019-20). This case study from Jammu and Kashmir describes the action taken by the village organisation (VO) Social Action Committee to improve the life of a domestic violence survivor by offering her legal support, financial assistance as well as ensuring that she is able to live a dignified life.

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING AND PROFILE OF THE VILLAGE ORGANISATION

This case study is based in the Bhatyar VO, in Bhatyari village in Jammu district. The VO has 14 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under it with 147 members.

CONTEXT

A survivor who was subjected to domestic violence from Bhatyari village was married off at the age of 19. The survivor was subjected to violence within a few months of her marriage. She was forcefully sent back to her parental home by her husband after a few months of their marriage. The survivor has two children; a boy and a girl. The domestic violence survivor and her children were subjected to physical and verbal torture by her husband repeatedly and they were traumatised by constant abuse and very often the survivor and children were thrown out of the house. Her husband's in-laws refused to accommodate her back in the family. Meanwhile the survivor lost her son in a road accident, which shattered her hopes of survival.

PROCESS

When she lost all hopes of pursuing a normal life she was approached by the Self-Help Group (SHG), and Members of Social Action Committee (SAC) committee of village Bhatyari, who went to their Panchayat ward member, Sarpanch, to take up the case. On SAC insistence, the village Sarpanch was convinced and summoned her husband, and questioned his reason for disowning his wife and children and shirking the responsibilities as a husband and father. The panchayat members tried to resolve the matter, however, the matter could not be settled.

The VO SAC filed a First Information Report (FIR) against her husband under the Domestic Violence Act at the nearest police station. The VO SAC ensured that the survivor be given the right to a separate share within the household as she lived in the same household. Later the VO SAC contributed their salaries to build a room for the domestic violence survivor at her parental village. The SHGs members, and the VO SAC also contributed towards the survivor's daughter's marriage.

CHALLENGE

Arranging the safe shelter for the survivor and her daughter was the biggest challenge, besides the marriage of her daughter was also an issue to which SHG members responded generously.

PROCESS

SHG members and VO SAC, attempted to counsel the survivor and the husband to settle their marriage dispute. When these efforts failed the SAC took a legal course of action to settle the matter in the court, by arranging an advocate to deal with the case. The village Sarpanch has also asked the VO SAC members to work with the PRI members to ensure awareness about domestic violence, dowry and other gender related issues.

OUTPUT

- A FIR has been lodged against the domestic violence survivor's husband and accordingly a case has been filed in the competent court. The case is currently pending in court.
- A small house was arranged for her for which the members of the SHG contributed.
- The community members also assisted in the marriage of the survivor's daughter.
- The survivor was encouraged to pick up alternative livelihood activities and has become financially stable after coming in contact with SHG.

STRATEGIES FOR UPSCALING EFFORTS

Awareness domestic violence has been done throughout the block. All the community members have been made aware about the domestic violence issues and the ways to overcome the situation. Two to three members from each VO have been trained on the gender related issues in that block.



Ending the practice of witch hunting: A case study from Jharkhand

Jharkhand has the highest number of witch hunting cases, a practice culminating from regressive and deeply entrenched beliefs and low literacy levels in the state. According to data published by the National Crime Records Bureau, since 2014, around 173 people have been killed in Jharkhand after being labelled as witches. While in 2017, 19 of the 73 people - 26 per cent - killed across India on suspicion of practising witchcraft were in Jharkhand. This case study highlights the plight of women being branded as witches, and how through collective action, the village organisation, SHG members and social action committee have tried to end this evil practice through local awareness building efforts, by supporting a life of dignity for the victims and extending coverage through social safety nets to improve their lives and livelihoods.

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

The case study is based in the Ganjhutoli-Kombakera village which is a part of Lachragarh Panchayat of Koleibira Block of Simdega District of Jharkhand. There are a total 341 families in the village. This is located in the south Chotanagpur division of the state. This is a scheduled area located about 50 km from the district headquarters and 20 km from the block headquarters. The primary occupation of the villagers here is agriculture, daily wage work in brick kilns and non-timber forest product collection. Almost every household has one or other person who has migrated to other states to sustain their livelihoods after the kharif season. In this area, girls also migrate for domestic work to metro cities of the country. The village is within the village organisation (VO), Kombakera Ajeevika Mahila Gram Sangathan. There are a total 16 SHGs under the VO having 172 members.

CONTEXT

On an average, every village in Jharkhand has at least 3 women who have been branded as witches and who live a life in fear and humiliation. Even the death of a goat or chicken is reason enough for the villagers to be convinced that the woman is practicing witchcraft and is responsible for the death of the goat or chicken. The slightest hint can trigger the mob into raping and lynching the woman in public. In Jharkhand's 32,000 villages, more than a lakh women have been branded as witches; and potentially, any woman can be branded so. So, it becomes a question of the right to dignity of not just these one lakh women, but every woman in the state.

On 19 September 2020, the Simdega village in Jharkhand was rocked by a heinous incident that created a furore in the entire state. A 50-year old woman had been branded as a witch, her head shaved and she was paraded half-naked in the village. She had been blamed for the death of her brother-in-law, who had been unwell for a long time, and was accused of practicing witchcraft and was branded as a witch. Close on the heels of this incident, on 30 September 2020, a similar incident occurred in another village in Jharkhand, where a woman was branded as a witch and assaulted. This time, it was because of the demise of the woman's husband, and she was being blamed by her husband's brother for allegedly practicing witchcraft. These cases tell the story of a deeper malaise in society, and the long practice of witch hunting, many leading to murders, in the villages of Jharkhand. These incidents not only received wide media coverage, but were also pivotal in turning the attention towards finding a more lasting solution and creating a complete mindset shift among the rural population of Jharkhand on the issue of witch-hunting.

PROCESS AND STRATEGY

Initially, awareness on this issue was created through collaboration with media houses to publish articles, and through rath yatras, banners and street plays performed by NGOs. Despite these efforts, the instances of the witch hunting incidents did not decline, which was an indication for the need for deeper engagement with the villagers. One of the informal institutional networks through which this evil can be combated is the SHGs under DAY-NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission), of which there are 7 crore members across India. If these women are formally engaged in fighting this social evil, then it is possible for the evil of witch hunting to be eradicated from the country.

With this change of strategy, the effort shifted towards engaging the SHG women and the beneficiaries of the villages, which was expected to bring about a change in attitude among them, their families and the community. Three hundred of these SHG women were trained in performing street plays as well as on the legal aspects of the issue of witch hunting, along with a day's field trip organised by the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS).

The time spent in each village was increased to two days for a deeper immersive experience. The idea was to engage everyone from men and women to school children. Slogan writing competitions were held in schools, and the best slogans were selected for rallies and wall writing in the villages. Street plays were performed by the SHG women in different spots in the village to ensure that everyone got to hear the message, and also to create an environment of dialogue and discussion. The performers also kept an eye on those who showed discomfort during the performance, as these women would mostly likely have been victims at some point of time.

Later, several audience members came up to the performers and confessed that they had been victims too. This was an opportunity to bring forth the names of those who suffered. The SHG members then documented their cases. Along with their stories, their entitlement data were also recorded – such as whether they had ration cards, job cards, pension, and other indicators like drinking water and toilet facility. This way, the team covered 15-20 villages in a span of 30 days.

At the end of the entire trip, a block level hearing was held, attended by all the important officials of the block, including religious leaders and the Pradhan. Every case would be read out with names withheld, but the names were later submitted to the panchayat both for ensuring accountability for their safety and for their entitlements to be resolved. This was later followed up by a district level hearing.

STRATEGY AND OUTCOMES

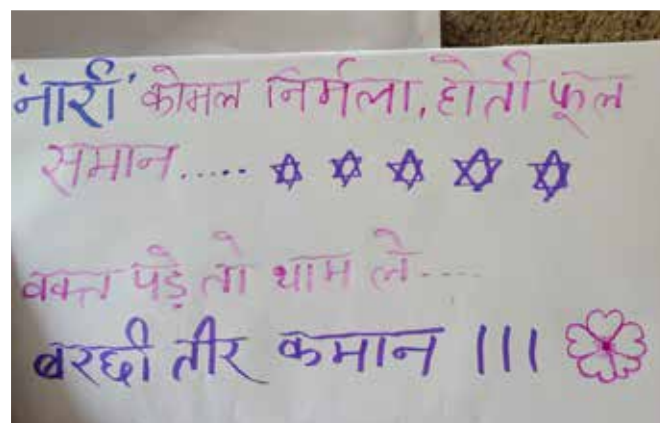
Through this initiative of JSLPS, 932 women who survived being branded as witches were identified. The 'badlav didis' of the SHGs, the block resource person, and the Social Action Committee of the village organisation continued to be in constant touch with the survivors to ensure their safety. A system of penalty was also established in the villages. Accordingly, if a person brands any woman a witch, he would first have to apologise in public. Doing so for a second time calls for both a public apology and a fine. If a person does so a third time, he is sent for training; and a fourth time attracts legal action.

The efforts of the SHGs have been successful in one of the recent cases in Kombakera village of Kolebira Block of Simdega district. Here, the SHGs not only showed support towards the survivors, but also helped the perpetrators in realising their mistake and apologise to the victim in public. Symbolically, as a token of acknowledgement, SHG women from 20 villages presented the victim with saris and shawls.

SHGs of GanjhuToli, Navatoli and Lackdagharh assembled to spread awareness on the social malpractices of witch hunting. 400 SHG women of 20 other neighbouring villages too assembled to spread this awareness. They also got the PRI members, as well as other community members to take an oath to ensure protection of the women of the village. They appealed to everyone to shun this superstition. Police Captain Dr. Shams Tabrez congratulated the women for their praiseworthy act. He said that their voice against social inequality will give further directions to tackle this social injustice. He said that they had put to action what the police department had been planning for a long time, and that the police department would honour the victim along with all the members of the women's SHG. The panchayat and other key opinion makers of the village gave the written commitment for the protection of not only Chintamani but of all the women from this evil practice. Unfortunately, even the SHG cadres had earlier been responsible for branding certain women as witches. But today, they have become the most effective instrument through which to fight this superstition.

REPLICABILITY

The felicitation of the survivor would now be one of the practices to be followed everywhere.



अयन बिसाई के पीछे महिला को महिला समूह ने दिया सम्मान गांव में रैली निकालकर चलाई जागरूकता अभियान

महिलाओं की ये पहल ऐसी कुरीतियों के खिलाफ एक नई दिशा तय करेगी: एसपी

समस्तदाता कोलेबिआ: प्रखंड के महिला आजीविका समूह ने छठम दिवसीय कि पीछे महिला को सही पहचान दिया सम्मान निर्दिष्ट हो 19 दिसंबर शुभ 7:00 बजे एक महिला के बहन बहन कर अपने नाम करते हुए पूरे गांव घूमना गये थे। इसी का निम्न आज आजीविका महिला प्रखंड समूह के द्वारा कोलेबिआ प्रखंड के लखरगढ़ पंचायत के कार्यकर्ता ग्राम में सही पहचान कर एवं स्टोल और 30000 महिला ग्रामीणों के बीच के कुछ लड़कों को कुछ काम करने का इन महिला समूह के द्वारा प्रकाश किया गया। साथ ही साथ महिला समूह के द्वारा नुकसान नोट कर जलकराज अभियान चलाया गया। इस अवसर पर कोलेबिआ संकुल सचिव के एवं कोलेबिआ राजीव देवी ने कहा महिलाओं के द्वारा महिलाओं का अपना घर निर्देश है। इस तरह का कार्य फायदा नहीं होने चाहिए। इस अवसर पर सचिवयम पीछे को उसके घर पर सचिवयम गांव हुए



और पुष्पाग्रह देकर सम्मानित किया। इस अवसर पर लखरगढ़ न्यायाधीश और कोलेबिआ कालक्टर की तीनों द्वारा उनके सम्मान में कहा हम आपके सम्मान कायम में नहीं लीटा सकते लेकिन यह छोटा सा प्रयास जलकराज आपके चले पर मुस्कान लड़ दे। इस अवसर पर अंतर्गत परिवार के लोग भी आए हुए थे वे अपनी मांगों स्वीकार करते हुए कहा इस तरह के कार्य नहीं होने चाहिए हमारे महिलाएं हुई हैं पीछे

पटना किमी के साथ ना हो इस अवसर पर लखरगढ़ पंचायत उप मुखिया, पंचायत उम शर्मा एवं गाई मेयर के अलावा पूरे प्रखंड संकुल सचिव की संलग्न 390

पुलिस कानून डॉ जयम लखन ने महिला समूह की सराहना करते हुए कहा कि ये बहुत बेहतरीन कार्य है। पुलिस जिस कार्य को खोजे भी आज महिलाओं ने कर दी। उन्होंने कहा कि महिलाओं की ये पहल ऐसी कुरीतियों के खिलाफ एक नई दिशा तय करेगी। समाज और पुलिस एक जुट हो जाते तो ऐसे कुरीतियों की कोई जगह समाज में नहीं बचेगी। उन्होंने कहा कि पुलिस इन महिलाओं के साथ साथ पीछे महिला को भी सम्मान देगी।





Ensuring property rights to women: A case study from Karnataka

INTRODUCTION

With a view to reduce rural poverty through establishment of Community Based Organisations consisting of women, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihood Mission is being implemented in Karnataka state through Sanjeevini- KSRLPS. Gadag is one of the districts under Sanjeevini.

Gadag district comprises 5 Talukas having over 337 villages and Sanjeevini is being implemented in all 5 Talukas with a bid to integrate gender activities among the CBOs in the district. Towards this all DMMU and TMMU staffs have been trained and it has had a cascading effect on the Gram Panchayat Level Federations (GPLFs) also. It resulted in action by the CBOs and successfully addressing different gender issues. Holealuru GPLF is one of those active and successful GPLFs.

CONTEXT

Traditionally women are seen as a liability at the maternal home and property of the marital home. This gender stereotype makes women's life miserable when it comes to their rights on property, more so, in case of the widows. Despite having legal rights generally married women are denied share in her ancestral property and widows from her husband's property.

In this context, the current case study reiterates the fact that women's collectives are capable of dealing with larger social issues like property rights of women and gives an account of action by Holealuru GPLF. Holealuru village is in Ron Taluka of Gadag district. Holealuru GPLF consisting of 63 SHGs with 675 members has been formed in June 2015. The key gender issues that were addressed by the GPLF include alcoholism, domestic violence, and early child marriages.

CASE

Two brothers who live in Holealuru village had ancestral properties. The properties have been divided among them and got their due share. However, while not overtly apparent there seemed to be an undercurrent of dispute between the brothers on the property. In September 2020, the younger brother passed away owing to an illness and his sudden demise left the family in disarray. Within hours of his death, the elder brother ordered the younger brother's wife - Hemavathi (name changed to protect anonymity) to leave the house asking her to shift to a shack close to the nearby river bed of Malaprabha. An argument broke out between them and Hemavathi refused to budge unless she was given a rightful share of her husband's property which would naturally be transferred to her. The brother refused to do so and asked her to leave the house immediately.

Hemavathi, who is part of Bismillah SHG for the past 2 years, immediately approached GPLF members of Holealuru Sanjeevini. She explained her situation to the members and sought their intervention and support. The GPLF members at once approached the elder brother. Even when the funeral rites were being performed the members asked him to give in writing on stamp paper to the effect that his brother's property would be duly transferred to Hemavathi. The brother told them that he would not part with the property as he was the lone property-owner after his brother's demise.

The agonised GPLF members then decided to sit around the body of Hemavathi's husband not allowing any further funeral proceedings until the brother gave it in writing that the demised person's property would be duly transferred to his widow - Hemavathi. It created a furore in the village. The members of the GPLF explained the case to the villagers and the elders gathered there. Most of the villagers supported GPLF's action.

Taking turns, members of the GPLF, along-with the local Gram Panchayat member and a few elderly people continued their silent protest throughout the day. Around 3 in the morning next day, the brother relented and gave in writing that the property of his brother would be transferred to the young widow in due time. During this process of redressal, Hemavathi's other immediate family members residing in the same village tried their best to persuade her not to cause any delay to the cremation and to finish the last rituals. But she got courage from the strength of the GPLF to continue her fight and decided to not to fall prey to the sentiments. It was only after receiving the promise in writing that the GPLF members allowed the funeral ceremonies to continue. Finally, Hemavathi was awarded her property rights with due respect.

IMPACT

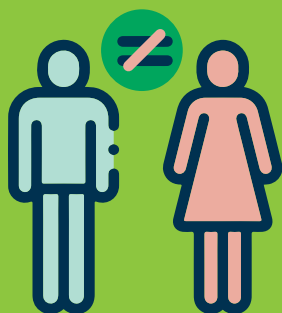
With this incident, Sanjeevini's SHG women have gained confidence in approaching the GPLF with their problems and issues. The villagers and neighbouring villagers of the taluk have now understood the importance of women collectives not only in terms of improving their livelihoods but also in regaining their social status and dignity. The convergence relations have become strong between the local bodies, government institutions and CBOs, and are working together in addressing the issues of gender-based violence. Discussion on gender issues has become a key agenda point in all their meetings.

CHALLENGES

GPLF members faced hostility and wrath from the kith and kin of the deceased. Challenging the traditions and facing the conservatives is an uphill task. Many times, they face humiliation from their own family members who are not different from the mainstream society. Holealuru GPLF members and Hemavathi also had to face all these. But they stood together and strategically involved the GP members and community elders in successfully dealing with the case.

FUTURE PLANS

The Holealuru GPLF plans to get further trained on women's rights, different legal provisions and support systems and in turn train all the SHGs members. This case is being shared as a success story among other GPLFs and CLFs in Ron Taluka.



A safe neighbourhood locality through women friendly panchayat: A case study from Kerala

A women friendly panchayat could evaluate ideas of local governance through a gender lens and identify spaces and opportunities for women to play an informed role both as duty bearers as well as rights holders. Gender inequality cuts across class, caste, religion, and geography. Patriarchal values are embedded in the social fabric and reflected in different institutions, including the family. It restricts women's mobility and life choices, including employment and reproduction. For good governance to prevail in the country, gender equality should be an important goal and policies/institutions must represent the diversity of interests of women and men and promote equal access to resources, rights, and voice.

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Vazhayoor Panchayat under Kondotty Block in Malappuram district which shares its boundaries with Kozhikode is a land of fertile soil with cultural traditions. Vazhayoor Panchayat has a population of 29319 including 14634 males and 14685 females as per 2011 census. Kudumbashree activities have been going on since its inception. There are 17 Area Development Societies (ADS) and 5159 Kudumbashree members in 296 neighbourhood groups. 840000 as RF, 380000 as VRF and Rs. 100000 as CIF. The Gender Resource Center and 85 vigilante group members are active in 17 vigilante groups. There are 17 CDS members and 119 ADS members.

CONTEXT

The activities of the Kudumbashree movement led to the empowerment of women which resulted in a qualitative change in the living conditions of households, and also in the social, economic and political empowerment of women in Vazhayoor Panchayat. Through gender status studies and vulnerability Mapping the team became aware of their issues in different sectors like access to rights and entitlements, education, skill development, health facilities

asset ownership. Gender mainstreaming process include engendering the institutional architecture as well as gender responsive implementation of the programs. Women's reservation and their presence and voices at the local self-government institutions is a milestone to achieve the mandate of women empowerment and gender equality.

Vigilant group is the community level social action team under Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission, Kudumbashree and Local Self Governments. The vigilant group is present in more than 14 districts of Kerala, and formed at ward level. A vigilant group consists of five to ten members who are from the same ward and they are volunteers including men and women. The group functions as a primary preventive mechanism and they refer the cases to community counsellors, Gender Resource Center (GRC) and Snehitha Gender help desk if further interventions are needed. It aims to:

- establish an action force for prevention of different atrocities and Gender based violence in ward level;
- identify the issues in the community and intervene;
- provide support services to distressed women, children and the needy;
- create a safe neighbourhood, locality and ensure freedom of movement and protect women and children from violence and atrocities;
- ensure child and women-friendly wards and community;
- encourage convergence activities to address gender inequalities with local self-government (LSG) and different institutions.

We have led the 'public spaces are ours too' campaigns in our Panchayath. Only boys and youngsters regularly played on public grounds and stadiums. A few of us went to the playground with the goal of women's health and owning public spaces, but initially could not move forward because of teasing from society and trouble from home. But we could overcome that and formed women sports teams. The Grama Panchayat has included a women's playground in the scheme.

- Prameela T.P

PROCESS

The analysis of Women Component Plan (WCP) of panchayat the vigilant group members and GRC submitted project proposals for Women Friendly Panchayat (2019-20) annual plan projects and prepared a plan of action. Women Friendly Panchayat project titled 'Koottukari' approved for Rs.15,97,420 under service sector and for Rs. 84,880 under infrastructure sector. 'Koottukari' was formed for creating women friendly and atrocities free spaces in the region. It also aims to convey the messages of gender equality, awareness of rights and privileges, legal awareness and gender sensitisation among the public.

With the fund allotted under WCP and Kudumbashree 'SNEHITHA' gender help desk, Gender Resource Centre and Vigilant group undertook several activities such as

- Break the shell (Gender awareness for different sections of community- Anganwadi Workers, Asha Workers, School Teachers, Club Youth Officers, Grama Panchayat Representatives, CDS Board, Kudumbashree Workers and Vigilant Group Members. The gender club formed in schools and provided a gender awareness classes;
- 'Street Debates'- Greta public awareness was created through street debates and plays on topics like "Is public space is only for men?", 'Democracy in Families';
- Kalikkalam (playground)-Provides public spaces for recreation, physical health, creating great players, motivation classes, badminton training, and football training.
- **Kanal' She Theatre** - Art is the best form of expressing the strengths and weaknesses of the society. Through the art form of theatre, plays were staged on gender barriers making public aware of the existing unequal power relations and its consequences. This also develops a taste for the younger generation about the surrounding and rationalise one's action;
- **'Penthoolika'(woman writers)**- Literary camp, collection of works and book review are conducted to nurture the literary taste of women;
- **She Library**- The library is set up in GRC's own building to create women's own space to read, discuss and know;
- **Gender Health Club**- Women's gymnasium is being built on top of the GRC building;
- 'Shangholi' (gender series) - The gender series was organised in koottukari group in seven days per month quarterly;
- **'Seeds of change'** (online gender club of children) and 'Sayanthanam' (online group of elderly people);
- **Capacity building training** for vigilant group members to enable them to lead activities in the respective areas. Topics covered were gender sensitisation, laws relating to women, the elderly and children, fire and safety, self-defence, palliative care, lifestyle disease, mental health, GBV and support service, Covid resistance and home care, disaster management, and alcohol use- social and health issues etc.

Atrocities against women and children were identified and forwarded to the GRC or Snehitha for further steps. 27 cases were reported by vigilant group during the tenure of 2020-2021. Intervention of vigilant group at the of flood and pandemic is highly noted. During the floods, camps were organised in schools, mental support to the children and provided food through community kitchen. In the period of Covid, medicine, food for the needy and kits for the poor were brought to the wards by the vigilance group members and provided transportation for those who had difficulty in getting to the hospital.

OUTCOME

- Women were able to open up about issues and build women's self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of equality;
- Women friendly locality and Panchayat;
- System to address and build awareness on Gender based violence and child abuse;
- Allotment of WCP to address strategical needs of the women, children and distressed;
- Psychological support and protection to the lonely, the poor and the disabled;
- Creation of a drug free society;
- Gender Sensitivity Classes conducted for 35 Anganwadi Workers, 30 Asha Workers, 50 Youth Workers, 60 Teachers, 85 Vigilant Group Members, 10 Academic Committee Members, 17 Former Board Members, 500 Kudumbasree Workers, 120 College Students, 65 School Students, and 50 NSS volunteers;
- A special library for women has been set up.

"Women friendly place will be achieved like a land with oxygen to us."

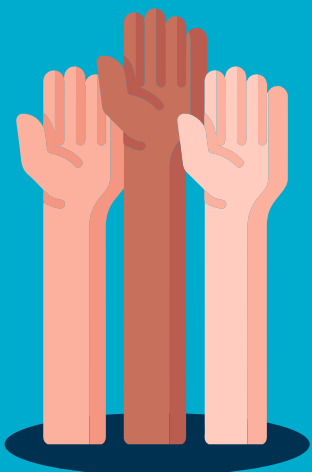
There is no doubt that the domestic violence cases and violence in working places and household has decreased as a result of the activities done in the panchayath on the basis of the women friendly idea. Also now we could understand that the women here are ready to fight for their life whatever the situation is...

- Saraswathy kakkove
CDS chairperson & vigilant group member

SUSTAINABILITY AND UPSCALING PLAN

Sustainability depends on convergence with Gram Panchayat, health department, education department, NSS volunteers and college students, sport council, district legal service authority, legal awareness and legal support. Steps are being taken to make Vazhayoor women friendly, to create gender awareness and to make all institutions and houses women friendly. Crime mapping and related activities are planning to identify different GBV and for the identification of unsafe places. Steps have been taken to disseminate messages on violence against women and children, complete family peace, gender equality and democracy. Messages will spread along with the assurance that the vigilance committee and vigilante groups are with you. All the vigilant groups were involved in working towards the goal in collaboration with GRC, Snehita, community-based organisation (CBO) and the Gram Panchayat.





Mainstreaming the marginalised: A case study from Maharashtra

Tamasha is a well-known folk art of Maharashtra, which has flourished since the 16th century. The Kolhati community of Maharashtra, is engaged in entertainment as an occupation and are known for their acrobats and have been a part of stabilised Tamasha theatres with focus on 'lavani' for many decades. Contemporarily, the folk art of Tamasha is challenged by new modes of entertainment and the 'traditional' texture of this art form is dying out. The Kolhati community, performing in Tamasha theatres, are far from cultural icons but are victims of poverty, exclusion and sexual exploitation. This case study reflects the initiative of the village organisation to mainstream the Kolhatai community and provide a decent living, ensuring a strong self-identity for this community, while also providing support through public service delivery.

GEOGRAPHY AND PROFILE OF THE VILLAGE ORGANISATION

This particular case takes place in the Solapur district of Maharashtra in the village of Parite. The village level organisation has 27 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under it which include 302 members.

CONTEXT

The 'Kolhati Community' is classified as a nomadic tribe by the Government of Maharashtra. Their traditional profession has been to run 'Tamasha Theatres and perform shows. These dance forms of the 'Lavania' have been part of Maharashtra's tradition for over three centuries and are currently known as 'Kala Kendra'. Earlier, women of Lavani Kalakar, at a young age would perform in Tamasha theatres and only after crossing a certain age, they became leaders of their own tamasha theatres. However, the condition of the women dancers who form a focal point of this art form is now abysmal. Although, previously, only the dombari and Kolhati community were in this profession but presently, many women in the community have become

a part of it. Caste, gender and labour relations of the society have forced women from these vulnerable communities to remain in extremely marginalised conditions, with very few choices for equal and upward mobility.

Today, Tamasha theatres have become a crucial source of livelihood for many women members of the Kolhati community. These theatres are present in a number of villages across Maharashtra, and women depend on it for their livelihoods. However, in the contemporary context, in rural settlements, caste-based professions like dancing have become sexualised in nature and therefore, keeps the women-artists and performers at the brink of prostitution and human trafficking. Although the structure seems complex it is indicative of caste-based exploitative occupations.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE KOLHATI COMMUNITY

The women from this community face multi-fold denial to various services individually as well as a community. The women do not have ration cards as they are continuously migrating. In order to preserve identity, security and to be in their comfort zone, they do not perform in near-by villages but move to Mumbai and Pune to perform in Tamasha theatre. They are deprived of education and are unable to find any livelihoods. As they are migrating constantly, they are not able to join SHGs. They face social ostracism and they are known by their mother's name. Their father's identity is not disclosed. Access to health care is missing and several are also infected by HIV.

The state can consider providing support services and social protection coverage for these women who are denied their individual entitlements and rights. At the same time efforts can be made to provide decent employment and livelihood opportunities.

PROCESS

The mission prioritises social inclusion of marginalised women, promotion of gender equality and equity with focus on gender sensitive interventions like, anti-human trafficking, sexual exploitation, child marriage etc., and mainstreaming groups towards achieving self-respect and dignity of life through gainful livelihood interventions. Through collective community led interventions and support from Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM), the community formed 15 Self-Help Groups (SHGs). At that time, the VO through its community efforts identified over 100 families from the Kolhati community and to their surprise, not even one member was a part of either any of the SHGs or the VO.

STRATEGIES

From a moral lens of inclusivity and not leaving anyone behind, the VO Social Action Committee (SAC), decided to reach out to the Kolhati community. Initially, there was visible resistance and no show of interest from the community to get involved in SHG led activities and interventions, for they believed that being a part of these groups would neither help nor support them socially or financially. Also, the profession they were pursuing had quite a satisfactory monetary incentive, but in true essence lacked dignity and respect. The women of Kolhati community were quite confident that community resource person (CRP) would not want to interact with them or want their community to come under their scope of intervention within the mission.

In addition to the above challenges, the SAC faced a number of other obstacles, one specific issue being, the availability of women community members to be able to interact with them, as their profession required them to travel continuously.

Through a number of successive joint visits, VO SAC members and CRP were able to orient, inform and communicate with the women members of Kolhati community about Mission' work, SHGs' activities, interventions, Dashasutri practices (includes improving health and nutrition of women as one of the ten focus areas), importance of a strong social capital, qualitative holistic individual and community development, benefits of accessing government schemes and stressed on the usefulness of enhancing their livelihoods and building strong safety nets.

They laid emphasis on how becoming a part of the SHG would empower them socio-economically and enable the Kolhati community women members to lead a respectable and dignified life. This created an overall positive impact on the members of the Kolhati community. Even though the women members seemed interested and there was this new spark of potential participation, however, the male members of the community discouraged them from coming forward and participating. To address this issue, the block team decided to intervene and organise a meeting with the male members of the Kolhati community. The discussions between the two were an effort to orient the male members on the importance of social inclusion of vulnerable community members, leading a quality life which is dignified and respectable and the usefulness of enhancing their livelihoods and building a strong social capital within the community. This seemed an important step because the Kolhati community members also knew that because of their profession, it becomes really difficult for their children to make a space for themselves in this world and be accepted socially. This was a vicious circle, filled with stigmatisation, exclusion and non-acceptance, and it would go on if not addressed through a proper channel.

OUTCOME

The meeting resulted in a positive outcome, as the members of the community were assured that their identification cards (Aadhar Cards) would not be misused, for they seemed hesitant to share any legal details for SHG related activities and interventions. They were also assured that the CRP will be organising regular meetings with them and brief them about the ongoing livelihood related programmes and schemes that they would benefit from. Hence, this changed their outlook about sending their women members to SHGs. Therefore, for the very first time and through the collective efforts of VO SAC members, CRP and due to internal motivation of the Kolhati community members, Parite village witnessed the formation of the very first SHG, in the Kolhati community. Inspired by a goddess, they named their SHG- 'Margai Mahila Swayam Sahayta Samuh'.

Through the RF and CIF support, the SHGs have opened beauty parlours and grocery stores. Women have also come in as CRPs and they are leading dignified lives. Four SHGs have been formed in the block and they have got RF. Through interventions, 50 per cent have got Aadhar cards. Currently, efforts are underway to provide ration cards. Two groups have been able to get bank linkages. The VOs have also received a vulnerability reduction fund (VRF). The VO and its SAC members are working hard and striving towards 100 per cent inclusion of Kolhati community members and jointly work towards improving and enhancing their access to a slew of schemes that they could benefit from, ranging from - pension scheme for their family members, voter ID cards, access to basic healthcare, etc.

PLANS FOR UPSCALING

These interventions focus on the MSRLM's plan for up-scaling by strengthening the gender forum, VO SACs, adolescent girls' groups and enhancing access to rights and entitlements of family members of Kolhati community to various government schemes and programmes and working towards their social, financial inclusion and holistic development.

Empowering the VO SAC to take up sensitive issues in various village or gram panchayat level forums, escalating these issues if necessary to higher platforms, i.e., Zilla Parsihad level, Women and Child Development Department and cultivating an environment that promotes higher decentralised governance mechanisms. These mechanisms and planned interventions would further increase the influence and participation vulnerable communities in village level meetings, empower them and as they would have a collective opinion in local or community related dispute resolution and discussions.





Ensuring food security: A case study from Manipur

The Covid-19 pandemic has devastated the country. The most affected have been the poor and vulnerable sections of the society. Thousands and hundreds of families have been pushed into poverty and facing food deprivation. Families were in dire need of food rations and the situation in Manipur was no different. But the efforts of grassroots women's institutions have endeavoured to make a difference. The case study illustrates this initiative.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND PROFILE OF THE VILLAGE ORGANISATION

The case is located in Imphal East district, block, Heinang and villages Laisharam Leikai and Khurai Kongpal. The VLF that took the initiative is Lamyambi which has 10 SHGs with a membership of 132 women.

CONTEXT

It was the period of the pandemic, due to which accessing the PDS was a major issue in villages. Even if the ration shops were open, hundreds of families were unable to get the rations, due to corruption and mismanagement. The VLF learnt that in the neighbouring villages, rice had been distributed to all households irrespective of having ration cards or not. But, in their village the rice had been distributed only to those households with ration cards. When the VLF questioned the distributor, he threatened them and asked them to complain to the local MLA.

PROCESS

The VLF then decided that this issue needs to be addressed as no one should go hungry in such challenging times. How could the PDS distributor deprive families of ration? As a start, the VLF decided to do a house-to-house visit, to find out how many households had received rations. Then armed with this information, they decided to visit the local MLA and apprise him of the situation. The MLA was not available but the VLF spoke to the MLA's father about the situation and he assured that there was adequate stock of rice for distribution and that families collecting the rations would require to show their Aadhar card.

The VLF EC called a meeting (during the lockdown) and they collected around 2500 Aadhar card copies from the villages within two days. This was not an isolated effort of just this VLF, but they joined hands with other VLFs from the neighbouring GPs of the same constituency. The Aadhar copies were to be submitted to the local MLA. So, while this was the initiative of the Lamyambi VLF but it was in cooperation with the other VLFs, thus 6 VLFs were involved in the collection of the Aadhar cards.

When the local PDS distributor learnt of this, he indirectly threatened one of the SAC members that he would take vengeance against the members who were ensuring rice distribution among the community. When the VLF members heard of this intimidation, it made them more determined that, there was no turning back on the efforts towards the food security of the community.

Another issue faced by the community was securing work during the lockdown. Most of the women are engaged in weaving. The village is located not very far from the main Imphal, not many families have agricultural land, except few with own kitchen garden. So, they work in the MGNREGA for cash. However, the MGNREGS work was being done during the lockdown and the PRI asked the community their option and to sign accordingly; for i) those willing to work and ii) those unwilling to work.

The SHGs decided to sign on to work. Previously the MGNREGS work would be allocated for only 2-3 days per household, and rest of the work would be contracted out, after securing the signatures of the women. Now that the SHG members have become more aware of their rights, through the training imparted in the VLF, they demanded more work days. They asserted this right to work with the concerned official in the GP, who was then compelled to provide them 10 days of work. This happened during the last year (20-21), therefore the women respondents failed to remember the exact number of days. As per information, MGNREGS work days for Manipur was 43.23 days in FY 2019-20 and 60.59 days in FY 20-21. Depending on the fund release (on instalments) and also as per availability of state share, average work days are allotted. So, it may be possible that the GP received work in total about 40 days but in parts. The VLF also demanded that one of their members be made a Mate and this too, was conceded to.

CHALLENGES

Threats and intimidation to the VLF and SAC members for assertion regarding ration distribution. Inadequate number of workdays provided under MGNREGS.

OUTPUT

As a result of the VLF's collective and collaborative effort, the PDS agent distributed ration to all the households.

Under the MGNREGS, due to the assertion of the VLF, the SHG members were given the task of cleaning the river bank, which provided them with a longer period of work, compared to earlier times.

An SHG member was selected as a Mate.

STRATEGY

The VLF and SAC adopted the following strategies: Generated awareness among the community about their right to food and mobilised them to collect the Aadhar cards; collected the required information regarding the ration distribution; advocacy to ensure ration for all households; and also advocated and demanded more days of work under MGNREGS.

SCALABILITY

Other VLFs with whom Lamyambi VLF collaborated are encouraged to demand that SHG members are made Mates. This will help more SHG members to get MGNREGS work in the 6 VLFs.

Awareness to all SHG/VLF members that all households should avail maximum allotted workdays under MGNREGS by generating awareness and putting up work demands to PRIs. Information dissemination on ration distribution system with a view to reduce misutilisation by concern stakeholders was also focused.





Women in governance: A case study from Meghalaya

Gender stereotypes hinders women's political representation and women's likelihood of putting themselves forward as candidates. Girls and women have a right to engage in civil society, vote in elections and make their voices heard in any process that will ultimately affect them, their families, and their communities. Investing in girls' and women's right to political participation is a necessary step to achieving local as well as global gender equality and democratic governance. The case study of Meghalaya unfurls the process of women participation at the Village Council.

GEOGRAPHY AND VO PROFILE

The intervention area is North Garo Hill, Resubelpara block, VCDC. The constant effort of Jarambong VO in the Damas village has enabled women to participate in the village Council.

The VO comprises of 215 members from 22 SHGs. 20 SHGs have received a revolving fund of Rs 300,000. 18 SHGs received a community investment fund of Rs 36,00,000. Vulnerability reduction fund of Rs. 1,00,000 has been received.

CONTEXT

The VOs of Jarambong have been addressing specifically on two issues—women's leadership in council and institutions and wage disparities in unorganised sectors. Therefore, the VOs have been actively addressing the issues of non-representation of women in village council and non-recognition of women in leadership capacities at religious institutions and other institutions.

STRATEGY

The VOs have been creating awareness to recognise their leadership capabilities and consider them as equal representatives at village councils and other religious places. The awareness also focused on discrimination in wages and demanded wage parity in all unorganised sectors such as—construction, forest work, domestic work, agriculture/farm labour, etc. in the region and in their community.

PROCESS

Jarambong VO has been addressing the issues of women leadership and gender wage parity. The cumulative effort of the VO members did not only limit within the village but also extended in the neighbouring villages. The processes include organising village level meetings connecting with village council and village head and church and other institutional leaders to deliberate on the importance and need for women participation and prioritise the differential needs of women.

The VO along with Village Employment Council, Sorder, Nokma, mother's union had meeting and several rounds of discussion on the issue of wage disparity based on gender with the Village General Meeting and demanded that equal wage to be paid for equal work and time without any discrimination. The demand of the VO for equal wages for equal work for all sectors has been accepted by the Council and male and female are paid equal wages in the unorganised sectors.

"Let's join together today to create a better future for women and girls with equal rights and dignity."

- Jarambong VO
social action sub-committee

OUTPUT

The VOs along with VEC, Sorder, Nokma, religious leader had several discussion on the issues of active participation of women in village and community governance. Also, the demand is to include women in the village council as a VEC office bearer and functionaries and allow women to participate in village council election processes. The efforts resulted five women from Jarambong VO to contest the VEC election 2020. As a result, two women got elected, Ms. Bethidia Momin from Rittimchi SHG. She is the first elected female VEC President in the village and Ms. Lovely Momin from New Chigisil SHG is the first Assistant Pastor in the village.

SCALABILITY

Jarambong VO will encourage women to represent village council meetings and contest council election to bring good governance in the community.





Schooling with dignity: A case study from Nagaland

Even though education institutions in rural Nagaland are equipped with adequate infrastructure and impart quality education, yet there are still many schools requiring upgradation and even lack basic amenities such as toilets with water facilities and waste disposal measures. The case in point is of a Government Middle school where there were no separate toilets for girls. This issue came up within the SHGs bringing to attention that the dignity and safety of girls was being compromised and therefore required necessary action. The case illustrates the challenges faced by girl children and the efforts of the institutional mechanisms; SHGs, VO SAC who raised the issue with the concerned authorities and had it resolved, so that the adolescent girls feel safe and can continue their education uninterrupted.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND PROFILE OF THE VILLAGE ORGANISATION

The case is located in Kohima district in Pfu-chama village of Jakhama Block. The Village Level Organisation (VLO) responsible for addressing the issue was Nourhe. There are 9 SHGs under the VO with a membership of 82 women.

CONTEXT

This village has a higher literacy rate compared to other neighbouring villages, yet the most vulnerable section of the community continue to be women and girls, who continue to face many challenges. Some key gender concerns prevailing in the village are: lack of separate toilets for boys and girls and the physically challenged, in the Government school; discrimination against girls to avail higher education; wage disparity and decision making. The issue of no separate toilet for girls in the school came up in the monthly gender meetings of the SHGs facilitated by the respective GPPs. It was prioritised to be flagged in the VO-SAC meeting for appropriate action.

PROCESS

The VLO, EC and SAC of Nourhe VLO have undergone gender training, as well as gender integration training that highlights how to take up interventions to address gender issues. The GPPs have also undergone training and are aware about getting gender related issues raised in their respective SHGs during the gender meetings. Therefore, it was during such meetings that the issue came up and the GPPs brought the issue to their Sakhi Manch (informal GPP collective) which also meets on monthly basis. The issue of the condition of the Government Middle School's infrastructure came up, which was not providing a conducive environment for the girls to pursue their education. It was discussed that, girls tended to dropout from the school as there were no separate toilets for girls.

The GPP brought this issue to the notice of the VLO- SAC and an action-plan was developed to identify the reasons for girls not pursuing their education. It was decided that the SAC members would visit the school to monitor the facilities available for the students. It was during one of these monitoring visits, the SAC members observed that there were only common toilets for use. The members also found that there was no separate toilets for the girls in the school vicinity. In addition, they noticed that there was insufficient clean water and there were no dustbins in the toilets. Due to this, students, especially the girls were facing a lot of difficulty and a number of students were getting sick and school attendance was dropping. The VLO members also found out that due to lack of privacy the girl students were hesitant to go to school especially during the time of their monthly periods. The VLO quickly realised that this was a very serious issue and required to be brought to the attention of the school administration. The VLO further realised that the issue of not having a separate toilet was much more than just denial of privacy to girl students, as this could also lead to serious consequences of abuse of the girl students in unforeseen circumstances in the future, thus making them more vulnerable to sexual abuse and result in physical and psychological harm thus jeopardising their future.

VLO-SAC decided it was important for them to engage with the school administration and the Village Education Committee to raise the issue of the toilets for girls. The interaction with the school administration and the VEC was productive as the school administration took the VLO-SAC's

Comments from those impacted by the segregation of toilets for boys and girls:

Neivotono, a Class VII student of G.M.S Pfuchama says. "Earlier before segregation of toilets, I preferred to go to the jungle as I was uneasy sharing toilets with boys. Now I am more comfortable and relieved as the toilet is specifically for girls."

"I am happy that boys and girls have separate toilets" says Meguleto, a Class VIII male student of G.M.S Pfuchama."

"Earlier I was hesitant to send my daughter to school during her menstruation days, but now that there is a separate toilet, I am at ease for her," says Khrieleno, a parent of a girl student."

Khrielie, an Asst. Teacher at G.M.S Pfuchama shared, "The segregation of toilets for boys and girls is necessary because of the biological difference between boys and girls. Also this will encourage the girls to attend school even during their menstrual cycle and also prevent the risk of possible sexual harassment of girl students."

concern seriously. The school administration appreciated them for raising the issue and assured them that necessary action would be taken up regarding the sanitation issue. This intervention of the VLO came to the notice of the Block Education Department and a meeting was called with the school administration to pursue the demand made by the VLO. The entire process took 6 months-8th Nov 2018 to 5th April 2019.

OUTPUT

Subsequently the school administration invited the VLO-SAC members to show them the toilets that were newly constructed. In the interaction with the school administration the VLO members had not just demanded for separate toilets for girls but also for students who are physically challenged. It was indeed great joy and satisfaction for the VLO-SAC members when they saw the separate toilets for girls and toilets for the physically challenged students. The toilets were provided with proper water connection and dustbins.

Post the intervention when VLO visited the school as part of their monitoring process, the Headmaster informed them that though there was a tank provided for drinking water, it had developed leakage and hence there is water scarcity. Water for the toilets is also another issue due to the scarcity. The VLO -SAC took up the matter with the BDO and handed him a letter to address the water scarcity issue in the school. The BDO acted upon their request and a water tanks as well as 4 additional toilets (2 for boys and 2 for girls) have been sanctioned for construction in the 21-22 budget. Further, the BDO informed that the contract for the construction will be awarded to the Nourhe VLO, under the MGNREGS. The VLO is awaiting the official sanction for this. Once the letter comes, the budget will be transferred to the VLO. Initially 40% for purchase of construction material and 60% towards labour, which will benefit the SHG members who offer their labour in the construction.

As water supply is a concern in the village, the BDO has agreed to provide one direct connection from the main water source to the school, so that there is sufficient water.

The VLO as a gesture of their support to the school, donated mugs, buckets and dustbins. Since the doors of the earlier segregated toilets had worn out, the VLO got them painted as well.

The Nourhe VLO encouraged with the success of their intervention continues to work hard for the rights of women in the village. The VLO's initiative continues to inspire and encourage other women in the community to speak up on gender-related issues. The VLO continues to advocate for women and girls' rights through different social activities and supports the community especially the most vulnerable section to help them live a life free from discrimination and with dignity.

STRATEGY

For this intervention, the VLO adopted the following strategies:

- Monitoring visits to the school;
- Engagement with school administration and VEC (Village Education Committee);
- Sensitization of teachers and students on the importance of segregation of toilets;
- Sensitization of SHG members to be vigilant and gather information from their children on issues affecting students, so that it can be addressed by the VLO.

INTERFACE WITH PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

- Convergence with Student's Union at the village;
- Convergence with BDO or Block Administration.

SCALABILITY

The thrust for upscaling was to ensure 100 percent toilet segregation in all the government schools in that block as this is a major issue. Also this will become a model for the rest of the State to follow and inspiration for the community to accelerate gender work. There is a consensus to form adolescent girls groups and raised a query that staff would need special training to address adolescent girls issues, so this aspect could be taken forward.

COMMENTS FROM THOSE IMPACTED BY THE SEGREGATION OF TOILETS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Neivotono, a Class VII student of G.M.S Pfuchama says. “ Earlier before segregation of toilets, I preferred to go to the jungle as I was uneasy sharing toilets with boys .Now I am more comfortable and relieved as the toilet is specifically for girls.”

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Prevention of child marriage: A case study from Odisha

Child marriage is a serious violation of child rights and continues to be a pressing concern in the protection of children's dignity. Child marriages have negative impact on physical growth, health, emotional and mental development and education opportunities. Patriarchy, class and caste influence the norms and expectations around the role of women and girls in the communities. In the rural hinterlands of the country, girls are perceived as an economic burden as a result early marriage transfers the economic responsibility to the male partner or the new family. As per NFHS 4, Odisha is a mid-performer State among all the Indian States with 21.3 percent of women aged-20-24 years married by 18 years while Deogarh district of Odisha is on higher side with 23.4 percent. The case study reflects the attempt made by the VO to prevent child marriage in the Balanda Gram Panchayat of Barakote Block.

GEOGRAPHY AND VO PROFILE

The incident took place in the Gram Panchayat named Balanda of the Barakote Block of Deograh district. Godabhanga VO/CLF comprises of 14 SHGs with 154 members. The members belong to the schedule class (SC) community. In the past years, the VOs have been actively involved in promotion of nutri-garden disbursement of loans, Vulnerability Reduction Fund, Community Investment Fund, spreading gender awareness etc.

CONTEXT

17 years old Sita fell in love with a guy who is above 21 years and her distant relative. Sita has just completed her matriculation. Her family members are engaged as daily wage laborer work earning 25-30,000 per annum. Both the families decided to marry them within a month due to continuous social pressure & blame. They happen to be close relatives of the Community Resource Person - Community Mobilisation (CRP-CM) of the CLF. But due to the relationship CRP-CM could not inform anybody about the matter. Later, CRP-CM informed about the marriage before 20 days of event. However, the CRP-CM requested to stop the marriage without disclosing her name.

STRATEGY

- Linkage with the public institutions through AWW, CDPO and CHILDLINE. Childline is the help line number developed by the Government to address child related issues;
- Family counselling to stop the marriage objective is to make the family aware of the demerits of early marriage;
- Follow up.

PROCESS

The Gender Facilitation Centre (GFC) counsellor suggested the Master Book Keeper (MBK) together with Anaganwadi Worker (AWW) of the village should speak to Sita, otherwise the GFC counsellor can counsel her individually. Then on the next day CRP-CM contacted the GFC Counselor & informed that she has managed to collect the AWW number but need guidance about the way to counsel the girl and the family.

CRP-CM suggested the AWW to meet Sita's family & counselled to stop the illegal marriage. Following to which, AWW discussed the matter with Sita's family. The family agreed to stop the marriage for a year & after completion of 18 years of Sita, the family again decided for her marriage. On the day, when marriage rituals were performed, the AWW informed the matter to CDPO & on the same day the marriage was stopped with the help of CDPO, CHILDLINE & police.

"We aim and work diligently towards making our village child marriage free."

The process primarily included individual counselling engaging Sita and her mother. Counselling sessions happened four times, wherein the disadvantages of the early marriages were explained and the consequences on health, physical development and chances of being victim of violence were also explained. The acceptance was not easy by the family but with time and constant counselling the family was able to understand the negative impact that could bring in the life of Sita with the decision of getting her married early.

OUTPUT

The child marriage was prevented in the said GP and Block. Presently, Sita is staying with her family and helping her mother in domestic work. However, both will get married after some years. The Vo was able to stop another child marriage in the area and the accused is in jail presently.

SCALABILITY

CRP-CMs are involved in intensively spreading awareness regarding prevention of child marriage. The women are being encouraged to approach the VO, Gender Facilitation Centre (Prerana Kendra) and reach out for immediate help as soon as any such case comes up. AWW and ASHA also involved in creating awareness and the topic is also discussed in the gender forum meeting regularly.



Journey towards gender equality: A case study from Puducherry

Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the violence at the domestic and societal levels. Social stereotyping, denial of higher education and discrimination against girl children, declining sex ratio, denial of socio-economic opportunities to women are the other forms of manifestations. The self-help movement in the country has been the most powerful instrument in altering the social construct of gender in the society. The case study presented here is an exemplary evidence for breaking the stereotypes and how women have taken control of their lives and experiencing the dignity of life with the enabling support of Thonadamanatham Panchayat Level Federation (PLF) in Villianur Block, Puducherry.

LOCATION AND PROFILE

The Thondamanatham is located in Thondamanatham Gram Panchayat of Villianur Block, Puducherry district in the Union Territory of Puducherry. The PLF was registered in 2015 under the Society Act. It has 59 SHGs with 716 members. It is located 6 km from Taluk headquarters and 15 kms from the district headquarters. There are 1241 households with a population of 4,482 (male 2283 & female 2199). Out of this, 1679 belong to Schedule Caste and 2803 belong to Other Backward Classes.

CONTEXT

Many SHG members were not having access to basic entitlements such as Aadhar Card, Ration Card, Marriage Registration Certificates, Old Age and Widow Pensions, Voter ID and Health Cards due to lack of awareness on the procedures to apply for the entitlements.

Girls were dropped out of the primary education and not provided opportunities to pursue higher education due to gender discrimination and poverty.

Widow remarriage is still not acceptable in the society. They are ostracized by the society, denied of their rights and subjected to economic and sexual exploitation.

Women do not own properties even though they are legally eligible. They are treated as subordinates whereas men are treated as heir and head of the families. Women also do not have access to common property resources in the villages which are vested with men only.

Men's addiction to alcoholism is one of the major reasons for the women to face domestic violence, work burden and drudgery.

PROCESS

The gender issues are taken up for discussions in the monthly meetings of the Thondamanatham PLF and SAC is assigned with the task of planning and taking lead in addressing the gender issues with the support of SHG leaders, PSRLM officials, Department of women and child welfare, Commune Panchayats, Parents-teachers Associations, Police and other stakeholders.

ACCESS TO ENTITLEMENTS

SAC members assigned the task to the SHG leaders to collect the list and fill up the details of the women not having the basic entitlements. After receiving the list of requirements, the SAC members divided the responsibilities among themselves as given below.

- Collection of application from the departments of Women and Child Development, Social Welfare, Health and Family Welfare, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Commune Panchayats, Election department and Common Service Centre by SAC members;
- Filling up the application with details and enclosures by the respective SHG leaders;
- Submission of application to the departments by the SAC members;
- Follow up with the departments by the SAC members with the help of PSRLM officials.

Output

The following entitlements were received in a month

#	Name of the Entitlements	Number
1	Ration Cards	35
2	Adhaar Cards	650
3	Marriage Certificates	10
4	Voter IDs	150
5	Health Cards	300
6	Widow pension card	52
7	Differently Abled pension card	6
8	MGNREGA(JOB CARDS)	456
9	No. of Individual Free Toilet under SBM	150

RETENTION OF GIRL CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

SAC facilitated the process of identifying the drop out girls from the SHG leaders in the monthly meeting of the PLF. SAC along with the Parents-Teachers Association sensitized the parents on the importance of girls education especially higher education. The patriarchal mindset of the parents were addressed through sensitization programmes and the economic problems of the families were addressed by giving an internal loan on a priority basis for educational purpose and arranging bank loan for higher education. SAC has also given preference to single women for undertaking livelihood activities to enable them to send their children to school. The list of children sent to school and higher education is given below:

Output

	Course name	Pursuing education		Completed education		Total
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
1	Doctor	4	2	1	1	8
2	Engineering	8	12	7	10	37
3	Police	-	-	10	8	18
4	Teacher	-	-	7	10	17
5	Nurses	10	12	8	10	40
6	Others	-	-	62	45	107
	Total	22	26	95	84	227

WIDOW REMARRIAGE

The Thondamanatham PLF has been conducting regular awareness to the communities on gender issues focusing on single women, widows, girls' education, violence against women, and women's empowerment with the support of the Women Commission under DWCD. When the PLF came to know that three young women from the SHG families became widows, it has arranged counseling to the young women and their families through SAC members. The consistent efforts and sensitization resulted in three young widows agreeing for remarriage.

- In Vizhuthukkal, SHG member Anjalatchi's daughter Lakshmi is 20 years old and became a widow by a tragic accident within a year of marriage. The awareness and the counselling given to the family resulted in Lakshmi getting remarried. She is now leading a happy life with her husband and two children. She was given a loan to become self-employed.
- Poorani is the President of Bharathiyar SHG. She was widowed in an unfortunate accident leaving her stranded with a girl child. Now she is remarried and has another child. She continues as a President and works tirelessly with a self-employed tailoring unit.
- Kantha is a member in Navadurka SHG. At the age of 32 years, her husband died due to lung cancer. She was remarried and given a loan for goat rearing activity.

Output

Three young women have come out of the extreme form of discrimination meted out to them. They are now economically independent, confident and leading a happy life. They have brought silent revolution in changing the mindset of the families and societies.

ACCESS TO PROPERTIES

Asset Creation: The Thondamanatham PLF has always focused on creating assets in the name of women and access to common property resources. The SAC facilitated loans for 9 SHG women with bank loan, CIF loan, and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Scheme for the purpose of creating assets in their names. About 18 SHG members got property in their name and these women now have recognition, dignity and better decision making power in the family.

Access to Common Property Resources: In Thondamanatham Panchyat, Temple lands were normally given to men for lease. SAC has intervened, created awareness on the event of tenders in the PLF meetings and motivated the SHGs to participate in the tender process. As a result, during the financial year 2020-21, with the help of a CIF loan, 4 SHG members have taken the agricultural land for lease and one woman has taken a pond for Fish rearing.

The list of women having assets and having access to common property resources is below:

Output

#	SHG Member	Name of SHG	Property	Purchase value Rs.	Present value Rs.
1	Chandra	Indragandhi	Agri land	630000	800000
2	Abirami	Indragandhi	House	430000	1000000
3	Raji	Tajmahal	Agri Land	120000	500000
4	Revathy	Poonthendral	Agri Land	500000	700000
5	Nithiya	Nellikani	Plot	450000	700000
6	Dhanalakshmi	Manjal	House	100000	300000
7	Ramani	Manjal	House	180000	400000
8	Thamizhselvi	Indragandhi	House	50000	250000
9	Thenmozhi	Manjal	House	25000	150000
10	Malaru	Manjal	House	25000	350000
11	Dharanishwari	Semmozhi	Plot	280000	500000
12	Aruna	Veerathamizhachi	Plot	150000	200000
13	Rajakumari	Manimegalai	Agriland	100000	1500000
14	Geetha	Nellikani	House	450000	700000
15	Thilagam	Navadurga	House	500000	800000
16	Anchalachi	Kanaraja	House	450000	1000000
17	Sundari	Bharatham	Agriland	3000	5000
18	Thayar	Magarantham	Agriland	500000	200000
#	SHG member	SHG Name	Activity	Lease Rs	Income Rs
1	Sundari	Bharathiyar	Agriculture	10000	5000
2	Sublakshmi	Vizhudugal	Vegetable	3000	5000
3	Valli	Jansirani	Paddy	3000	5000
4	Velvizh	Elanthilir	Fish-rearing	120000	40000

STRATEGY

Awareness Creation to the SHG women and the communities on the importance of girls' education, prevention of domestic violence, sexual abuse, asset creation for women and access to resources and entitlements, and safety measures during covid 19 pandemic

Capacity Building programs were organized on gender intervention, social Inclusion and social Development, farm and non-farm livelihoods, and financial literacy to the SHG women

Financial Inclusion: SAC has provided the SHG members with Revolving Fund, Community Investment Fund, Vulnerable Reduction Fund, Bank Loans and Schemes. Their saving and internal loans were also used for economic and consumption needs. The SHG women were safeguarded from private money lenders and institutions who normally charge a very high rate of interest for the short term loan provided. The SHGs have robust relationship and in good terms with the banks due to prompt repayment through EMI.

Convergence: Convergence is ensured with all the line departments and for availing various schemes and programmes by SHG women.

SCALABILITY

- Thondamanatham PLF SAC is planning to ensure that all the girl children of SHG members are sent for higher education;
- Encourage 25 percent of SHGs to undertake farm and non-farm economic activities so that women become economically independent;
- Ensure that the women and their families have access to their basic entitlements
- Gender sensitization through organizing bi-monthly meetings to all the SHGs leaders and its members to prevent all forms of violence against women;
- Creation of gender forum at PLF level, by identifying Gender Point Person from each SHGs in the villages of Thondamanatham Panchayat;
- All the SHGs/Cadres & other members who are above 45 years are motivated to take COVID Vaccination to ensure better health;
- Formation of Adolescent Girls group in the Panchayat;
- The PLF is visited by other PLFs so as to replicate the strategies in other Panchayats.

Access to common property resources

The SHG member in her newly constructed House with help of SRLM fund, along with the support of SBM & PMAY (Housing loan).





Collectivisation efforts paving the way for inclusive development: A case study from Rajasthan

The case studies discussed below provide an overview of the range of challenges encountered by the community in the Baamnikhera village. From fighting for the right to education for girl children, to the economic strain posed by traditional practices after the death of family members. From the lack of proper local infrastructure, to the use of SHG funds to support households, as well as enhancing the rights and entitlements of SHG members - all these challenges were overcome through the collective bargaining power and consolidated efforts undertaken by the VO social action committee (SAC) members over the past six years.

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND AND PROFILE OF VILLAGE ORGANISATION

These cases are from the district of Alwar in Rajasthan, in a village called Baamnikhera. The village level organisation is called Deepak which manages 8 Self Help Groups (SHGs) comprising 85 members. There are 120 households with a population of 543 (with 280 males and around 243 females).

CASE STUDIES: PROCESSES AND IMPACTS

A. Retention of girl children in schools and promoting higher education

The members of the VO SAC facilitated the process to identify children who have a higher probability of dropping out of school or who have already dropped out, especially girls. They mapped details of children drop outs and counselled their parents on the importance of education in today's world. After many follow ups they succeeded in convincing the parents to send their children to school for higher education. The SAC members were able to convince three families to allow their girls to do a nursing course. Now they are working in Jaipur and Faridabad, giving financial support to their families. This has also motivated other families in the village to support their children's education. Now the girls of Baamnikhera village have acquired various skills through training, making them economically independent.

B. Improving the provision and access to community resources and infrastructure

Earlier Baamnikhera's cremation land had no boundary which resulted in a clear view of the process of cremation to all the villagers. Upon realising the sensitivity of this, the issue was raised by the SAC committee in the meeting which was unanimously supported by all members. It was decided in the meeting to drop an application to the village sarpanch for construction of boundary walls. When no response came from the Sarpanch's side, the VO SAC along with other SHG members gave their representations to the Block Development Officer (BDO) and Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM). Finally, collective efforts bore positive fruits and the task was completed timely.

"Helping hand for skill building and availing rights on a principle of growing together."

"Reducing orthodoxy bringing ethnicity."

"Let's fight against customary practices, join hands to aware community."

Also, there were kutcha roads in the village affecting road connectivity for the villagers. The issue was raised by the SAC committee in a meeting and was unanimously supported by all members. It was decided in the meeting to drop an application to the Sarpanch for construction of pucca roads. When no response came from the Sarpanch's side, VO SAC along with other SHG members gave their representations to the BDO and SDM. Thereafter, representation was made before the District Collector as the amenities were not provided. In the end, approval for construction of roads was sanctioned and in a short span of time, Baamnikhera will now be connected to nearby villages via road.

C. Combating the practice of Mrityu Bhoj

Amongst many evil customs practiced in Baamnikhera, Mrityubhoj (an act of feeding priests, family, villagers, relatives and the poor after death of a person) was a financial burden which could never be got ridden off as the villagers were not financially equipped. On one hand the loss of a family member was grave enough to shatter the family, on the other hand this custom chained them into a debt trap forever. Keladevi, VO SAC member raised her voice against this issue in the VO meeting. A meeting was convened with all the villagers where the SAC committee convinced them to shed off this practice as it is illegal and banned by law. After a lot of discourse, the villagers pledged to not take part in such practices and customs.

D. Easing the financial burden of disadvantaged families

A fire accident took place one night at Bhagwati Devi's house. The house along with all the belongings were burnt and this misfortune made them homeless and destitute. The VO SAC members immediately came into action and a meeting was convened to provide support to the family. In the meeting everyone agreed to provide help and assistance through the Vulnerability Reduction Fund and Rs.30,000/- was granted to the needy family. SHG members also joined hands and contributed for buying household necessities like utensils, ration, clothes etc.

E. Enhancing access to entitlements

During the monthly meetings held by the VOs, SAC members came to know from SHG members that many SHG members do not have access to basic entitlements such as Aadhaar Card, Ration Card, Pension Card (persons with disabilities, Elderly, and widows), Voter ID and Health Cards. VO SAC identified the SHG members who did not have access to these entitlements and were given a form to fill the details. After receiving the list of requirements, the SAC members divided the responsibilities such as who is going to which department for collection of application, submission of application and follow up with the respective authorities. Then SAC members went to the Department of Women and Child Development, Department of Social Welfare,

ICDS, Panchayats, Election Department, and Department of Health and Family Welfare. They shared the relevant application forms with the concerned SHG leaders and requested them to fill the applications and provide the necessary documents. The applications were submitted to the concerned departments and follow up was done with the help of block and district level officers. Some of the cards were received within a week and the remaining in a month.

The VO SAC members received applications for the following entitlements

Sr. No	Benefits	No. of beneficiaries
1	Pradhanmantri Awas Yojna (PMMY)	4
2	Toilet construction	10
3	Job card (MGNREGA)	150
4	Ujjwala Gas Yojna	30
5	Ration card	5
6	Teen shade shelter	10
7	Palanhaar scheme	2
8	Old age pension	15
9	Shramik card (labor card)	22
10	Sukanya Samradhi Yojna	15
11	PDS benefits	129
12	Ration kits for vulnerable ensured during Covid-19 pandemic	15
13	Road construction	2
14	Boundary wall of the symmetry area	4
15	Water tanker	1
16	Cash benefit of Rs. 5000 (COVID-19, pandemic help)	1
17	Cash benefits (Compensation) against pandemic mortalities	1
18	Ensured work for 100 days under MGNREGA	100
19	Awareness against Covid-19, pandemic	100
20	Vaccination against Covid-19	180

PLAN FOR UPSCALING

- The VO SAC has planned to boost and motivate the girl child to attain vocational training and pursue higher education;
- The gender pledge has been made mandatory in all monthly meetings. Further 25 per cent of SHGs are encouraged to undertake economic activities under farm and non-farm verticals;
- The VO SAC will also undertake gender sensitisation by organising monthly gender related meetings for all SHG members;
- Creation of gender forums at panchayat and block level, by identifying Gender Point Person from each SHG in the village.





Justice to Chandra Kala by Yangthang federation: A case study from Sikkim

In India, polygamy is unlawful. It has been declared as an offence under the Indian Penal Code, 1860. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 declares a marriage solemnized when the current spouse is living to be void and punishable as per IPC. But in practice, it happens in the country and the state of Sikkim is no exception. The evidence available indicates that the impact of polygamy on women is manifold and they suffer from anxieties, mental health issues, low self esteem and depression. They need a safety network and support to face the situation and lead a life of her choice. The SHG institutions have provided not only the self confidence but also ensured justice to women suffering from polygamous marriages. This case study is one such example of how the SHG Federation has ensured justice to a woman.

LOCATION AND PROFILE

The Yangthang Federation VO is located in Yangthang GPU of Gyalshing Block, West Sikkim. The Federation has 48 SHGs with 460 SHG members. Toyang ward is one of the wards out of 8 wards under the Yangthang GP. The Toyang village lies in the south belt from Gyalshing Bazar which is around 7 km away from Bazar. The village consists of 80 households and 7 SHGs covering 67 households.

CONTEXT

Chandra Kala Biswakarma belongs to a Scheduled Caste and lives in the Toyang Ward, under the Yangthang GPU of Gyalshing Block in West Sikkim. She is a member of the Sangam SHG and a resident of Toyang Village. She got married in the year 2005 at Toyang village and has two children, a boy and a girl. Her husband was unemployed. In September 2016, he went to North Sikkim in search of a job and became a driver for JCB. In a few months, he got married to another woman and stopped visiting his family in West Sikkim. He stopped sending money for his children and the family needs. Chandra Kala was not able to meet the requirements

of the family and the needs of the two children staying in the private hostel and studying 4th standard and UKG respectively. There was no one coming to her rescue. Chandra Kala's financial condition became worse. She is landless and does not have any assets in her name. She has taken land for lease and cultivated vegetables and other crops which provided some income to meet the family needs. With the meagre income from the land, she was not able to pay the fees of her children. She was under tremendous stress financially and mentally. Chandra Kala felt lonely and depressed since no one came forward to help her.

PROCESS

In this context, Chandra Kala shared her problems with her SHG members. The SHG leaders took the matter to the SAC of Yangthang Federation. The SAC members in consultation with the Ward Panchayat called her husband to the village and discussed it with him. It was evident that he wanted to get back to North Sikkim and not interested in staying with Chandra Kala. After a few rounds of discussions, the SAC and the Ward Panchayat made him sign the agreement that he shall bear all the educational expenses of the children besides giving Rs.1500 per month to Chandra Kala towards meeting her needs.

OUTPUT

Chandra Kala was relieved of the financial burden and mental stress to a great extent. Her children continued their studies without any hindrance. She took a livelihood loan of Rs.20,000 from the SHG for rearing 2 piglets and 2 goats. She was able to get income from the small ruminants and repaid the loan without defaulting. Again in February 2018, she took another loan amounting Rs 20000 for the same purpose. She is now rearing 3 pigs and 8 goats. She also goes for MGNREGA work. Her children are in the school hostel and now studying in 9th standard and 5th standard respectively. She feels confident and inspires other women due to her hard work and ability to withstand pressures in life. She always acknowledges the support extended by her SHG and the Federation. She always extends her moral support and motivates the women who face struggles in their life due to gender discrimination.

STRATEGY

Awareness Creation: The SHG members, SAC members and the Federation Office Bearers were given awareness on gender issues by the Sikkim SRLM team.

Financial Inclusion: The Federation supported the woman facing gender discrimination with livelihood loans at the right time to regain their economic strength.

Handholding support: The SHG and the Federation with the support of SRLM team provided adequate guidance and handholding support to the women who have taken loans for livelihood activities.

SCALABILITY

Sikkim SRLM is committed to replicate the processes by the Federation; as a first step, it wants to sensitize the mission staff and the SHG members and leaders on gender issues. The state is keen to adopt an institutional mechanism in addressing gender issues through specific interventions and through various verticals.



Women's safety ensured: A case study from Tamil Nadu

Safety of women in India is a major issue. The crime rates against women in the country have only risen to a great extent. Sextortion is a form of sexual exploitation that employs a non-physical form of coercion, for instance threatening to release sexual images or any related material, to extort sexual favours or money. The worst part of sextortion is that the victim, usually a woman, is riddled with guilt and shame, afraid of reaching out for help for fear of being judged and humiliated. Much of the perpetrator's power to contain the victim lies in her being silent. The case study presented here is exemplary evidence that the SHG Federations are the best safety networks for women in need of security and moral support.

LOCATION AND PROFILE

The Veeravanur Panchayat Level Federation (PLF) is located in Bogalur Block of Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu. The PLF has 20 SHGs with 269 SHG members. The district is drought prone and the families migrate in search of livelihood.

CONTEXT

Kala (Name Changed) aged 30 is a married woman residing at Veeravanur village of Ramnathapuram District. She was working in a private organization at Paramakudi. One day she was returning to her house in the evening. On the way she met one of her fellow mates and was talking to him. A gang of six kidnapped both of them and has taken away the money and ATM card. The gang photographed and video graphed both of them and threatened not to inform anyone. The gang continuously blackmailed her for money in order to return the photos. She was afraid and hesitant to disclose the incident with the family members. She felt ashamed and guilty. The group repeatedly tortured, threatened and demanded sexual pleasure.

PROCESS

Unable to bear the torture, Kala shared her problems with the SHG members in the SHG monthly meeting. She gained courage to share due to awareness given on gender issues to the SHG members. The SHG has taken the issue to the PLF. The PLF SAC after discussing with Kala, decided to give a Police complaint for further action. The FIR was filed and the police took immediate action. The gang was arrested and the photos and videos were retrieved from them. The police booked the case against them and all the six were jailed. The police realized that the gang had been involved in blackmailing and threatening the women for a long time and the arrest of the six member gang created big news in the district.

OUTPUT

Kala was able to come out of her guilt and gained self confidence due to the vibrant SAC and SHG members who provided a safety network. Kala is currently out of the mental and physical torture and leading a peaceful life.

STRATEGY

Awareness to SHG women and PLF SAC committee members made them understand the pain of the woman who was subjected to threatening and blackmailing.

Capacity Building to PLF SAC and OB members gave the confidence to approach the police and file an FIR in support of a woman.

Rapport Building: The Federation has established a good rapport with the stakeholders including the police, which is evident from the police taking an immediate action.

SCALABILITY

The TNSRLM is keen to ensure that the women's safety and security are utmost important and the SHG institutions need to focus on the same. It also wants to create awareness among the SHG women and the communities on the importance of the strategic gender need – i.e., women's safety and security.

Paper clipping on the arrest of six-member gang



Awareness of SHG women





Community women managed alternate redressal mechanism: A case study from Telangana

Over the years Telangana has shown an increase in crimes against women. Compounding this is the abysmally low presence of women in institutions crucial to address these crimes – judiciary, police and legislative bodies. The crimes against women in families far exceeds other forms of violence ('Telangana Social Development Report – 2018: Gender, Access and Well Being' by CSD Southern Chapter).

The latest report of NCRB reveals that in 2019 the crime rate has risen by 14.76 percent from 2018. According to this report 46.43 percent of the total criminal cases were of domestic violence which was the highest among all the Southern States. Many times, early and forced marriages are leading to instances of domestic violence. To make things worse about 7 percent of cases under the crime against women category are pending investigation from 2019. In this background the current case study emphasises the need for an effective alternate redressal system that is gender sensitive and women friendly with sensitised women in lead.

CONTEXT

Born in a very poor family of Gopanpalli (V), Zahirabad Mandal, Medak (old) district of Telangana State, Arunamma (name changed to ensure privacy of the person) had to give up her studies to get married at the age of 11. She was very much interested in studies but had to stop with 6th class and start her family life. As a child bride she faced many problems. She has been a teenage mother of three children. Her husband had no regular job leading to financial problems. As the family was growing she had to struggle to manage the family as her husband goes to labour work only now and then.

At the age of 27, Arunamma joined Bhulaxmi SHG and started saving Rs. 30 per month. As the family has no sustainable income she decided to take support of the group to maintain the family. Initially she took loan from the SHG and started vegetable shop. Later, she started

floor mill and water plant along with her husband. She was keen to educate her two sons and daughter. Witnessing the struggle their mother has been going through, the children also studied well. The elder son and daughter got married and the younger son is pursuing his higher studies in USA now. She says “my sangha is my life. It taught me how to rise to the occasion and deal with challenges. Collectiveness and Solidarity are the strength behind my growth...”.

She joined the SHG in 1999 and since then she has been active in the SHG and became SHG leader. With her passion and commitment towards women's empowerment she was elected as the President of the Ramnagar Village Organisation of her village Chinna Hyderabad, consisting of 58 SHGs having 610 members, and subsequently as the President of Mandala Mahila Samakhya (MMS) in 2002. The bitter experiences she faced as a child bride and later, made her to push the agenda of stopping child marriages and issues of violence against women in their institutions at different levels. She was instrumental in their MMS taking up mass campaigns to create awareness on these issues.

Taking cue from her own experiences she volunteered to be part of the Social Action Committee to work on Gender issues when the process was initiated in the year 2006. She started handling cases at VO level and gradually escalated up to the district level Family Counselling Centre initiated by Zila Samakhya. She received training on gender concepts. She was trained by DLSA and Lok Adalat on women's rights, entitlements, Acts, maintenance of FCC and counselling techniques. She attended to nearly 2,000 cases and could resolve almost all the cases. Today, her entire family looks up to her for any major decisions. She submits in a humble voice that *“My Sangha is my mentor... many people call me advocate and judge... I feel proud that I am part of FCC giving hope for life to many survivors of violence!”* Arunamma's story resonates the famous quote of the women's movement – *personal is political*.

THE COMMUNITY MANAGED FAMILY COUNSELLING CENTRE (CMFCC)

From the inception Gender has been one of the core components of SERP. It helped women to monitor their social empowerment processes, increasing their capacities in decision making at different levels. It facilitated the CBOs to evolve their agenda for action around zero tolerance of violence, put a check on trafficking of rural girls and extend support to single, vulnerable, distressed women in the villages. This agenda of SHGs and higher institutions enabled Social Action Committees to deal successfully with cases of violence on girls and women at different levels, viz., VO, MMS and ZS.

Giving impetus to the efforts of SAC at Zilla Samakhya level the Family Counselling Centre has come into existence in erstwhile Medak (present Sangareddy) district in 2006. This is seen as a forum for an alternate dispute resolution system in the society where women approaching the formal redressal system is still a taboo. This centre could break multiple deep-rooted stereotypes and taboos, viz., women cannot sit in the redressal forums, women are not capable of dealing with disputes, women are forbidden from arbitrations, bad women go to police station / court, women complaining against husband and seeking justice are don't fit to be good wives, women's forums cannot be effective justice systems, etc.

STRUCTURE

This District level Community Managed Family Counselling Centre is run by the Zilla Social Action Committee comprised of one member each from the Mandal Social Action Committees (MSAC). There are 25 MSACs under the ZSAC in the district covering 688 VOs; 18,769 SHGs with

2,00,496 members. From this pool of members, a 10 members committee, called counsellors, forms as the FCC. Priority is given to those who already faced and dealt with violence in their lives. Arunamma was unanimously selected for FCC. This committee is strengthened further with specific training on counselling, case documentation, understanding on women's laws, dealing cases with gender perspective, etc. The ZS hired a woman call centre operator who is also responsible to maintain the case registers, books, resolutions and other documents. She is paid from the ZS own funds.

FCC FUNCTIONING

The FCC functions from the ZS office. The centre remains open every day but cases are dealt on all Mondays. ZS has a call centre with a dedicated phone number which is popularised across the district. Survivors call on this number, received by the operator and presented to the FCC. Cases are also referred to by the SAC of MMS. Three members from the counsellors group sit in the FCC every Monday on rotation to deal with the cases. Survivor/respondent appear for the case as per the intimation by the call centre. Counsellors make field visits as required and MMS/VO SACs extend support in case enquiry. The counsellors are paid Rs. 250- 500 for every resolved case. SERP provided the budget to ZS for the purpose. Initially one advocate was appointed by ZS for legal support but in due course she was dropped as the counsellors gained expertise.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The FCC received 6,329 cases and could resolve about 70 percent of it. More than 50 percent cases received were of family disputes and the remaining were of dowry harassment, alcohol induced violence, sexual abuse, child labour and a small number of child marriages. FCC could help the women survivors to receive compensation from the ex-party worth Rs.2.44 crores in the form of cash, gold, land and house in their name. The needy survivors were provided with loans on priority basis for their economical sustainability. Most of the survivors had become self-reliant. Not limited to resolving cases the FCC provided care and support to the abandoned and physically challenged persons through ZS.

In the process of dealing with the cases the FCC worked in convergence with the departments of police, revenue, health, DWCD; DLSA, Lok Adalat, Local Court, Child Welfare Committee, banks, etc. The PRIs and local bodies were also to be roped in while dealing with critical cases in the field. FCC also created awareness on issues of human trafficking, girls' education, reproductive health, etc. This enabled them to gain trust, recognition and visibility. The FCC has become popular among the rural communities.

The success of this centre has attracted attention of various government, non-government, corporate and international agencies, thereby making it a learning platform to many. Some key visitors at FCC include the World Bank Team from Indonesia, Dr. Reddy's Foundation, CEO EGMM, Jeevika team from Bihar, District Collector of Sambalpur – Odisha, Telangana State Legal Services Authority, Madhya Pradesh SRLM team, Kolkata Municipal Commissioner, ICRW team and team from NMM-NRLM, etc.

CHALLENGES

All this has not been achieved overnight nor was an easy path for the FCC counsellors. The counsellors had to face threats from perpetrators' families and caste leaders, political pressures, local leaders and opposition from conservatives. In some cases, they had to face ostracism from the community leaders. But the strong and determined FCC members with the support of SACs

at VO, MMS levels could deal with all the situations. Sometimes when the culprit resorted to abusive behaviour they had to face discouragement from their own family members. However, all these hurdles could be surpassed with the cooperation and proactive partnership of their institutions at various levels. The district mission staff stood by them in all rough situations and extended support from time to time. The counsellors' passion and commitment to the cause had multiplied with the support and appreciation from different sections.

FUTURE PLAN

The FCC intervention has been replicated in a few more districts. It is under expansion to the remaining districts. Given the need to simplify the process of documentation and case registration the call centre is now planned to be operated using web mode and is to be launched in 16 districts shortly. Corpus funds are being created for sustainability of the intervention. Every member of all the SHGs contribute Rs. 24 per annum towards the gender fund which would be used for all the interventions of FCCs.





Overcoming domestic violence: A case study from Tripura

The latest NFHS-5 (2019-20) shows that domestic violence continues to be a challenge in India. Around 31 per cent of ever married women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence. This situation is no different in Tripura, where 27.9 per cent married women have experienced spousal violence (NFHS-4 2015-16). This case study highlights the plight of a domestic violence survivor who broke her silence and sought support from the institutional mechanisms of the programme, the SHG and the VO SAC to proactively address her situation and end the cycle of violence.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND PROFILE OF THE VILLAGE ORGANISATION

This case is based in the Dhalai district, Dumburnagar Block of Tripura, in Durgapur village. The Bhagwati Grameen Sangathan village organisation (VO) responsible for addressing the issue was Bhagwati-G.P. Gandachara. Socio-economically Dumburnagar is a remote tribal block from the most backward District of the state, Dhalai. There are 21 SHGs under the VO, which include around 173 members.

CONTEXT

Debalina Das (name changed), a survivor of domestic violence, is a mother of two children. She became a member of the Alpana SHG in 2016. Since 2015 she has been facing domestic violence, both mental and physical, from her husband. Her husband, an alcoholic, often used to lock her inside the house and beat her. Debalina, even approached the local political leaders to find a permanent solution to this issue, but her prayers were all in vain, and the violent behaviour continued.

PROCESS

The survivor and her sister-in-law were members of the same SHG. As Debolina was initially hesitant to share her story, her sister-in-law informed the SHG about the violence being inflicted

on Debolina. This then encouraged Debolina to speak out and she detailed how he beat her everyday as he was addicted to alcohol and weed. As the GPP in the SHG had still not been selected, the President of the SHG who represents in the VO, immediately informed their Bhagwati Grameen Sangathan (VO), about this issue and it was flagged to the Social Action Committee (SAC) for action. The SAC members went to the survivor's house to discuss these issues and counselled the husband.

Her husband was furious that the issue was raised in the VO. When the SAC members tried to discuss the issue, he hurled abuses at them and asked them to leave. The SAC members tried to engage her husband several times, but he refused to interact with them. The SAC members even tried to threaten him with legal action and that an F.I.R. at the police station will be filed. However, on the behest of the survivor, no legal action was taken, as she was afraid that the situation would get aggravated. The members counselled the survivor that she must inform them, if her husband abuses her again.

Finally, with no other options left, the Bhagavati VO called for a meeting and decided to help the survivor. After repeated visits, gradually Debalina's husband started interacting with the SAC team and opened up about his financial difficulties, because of which he was under stress and miserable. He sold homemade sweets, taking them around on his cycle to shops in the nearby market. However, due to the acrimonious relationship between him and his wife, he had to make the sweets himself and was not very successful in doing so, thus resulting in his business suffering which added to his frustration leading to violence in the family.

The VO members shared the problem in the SHG, who after discussing it decided to offer a financial assistance of Rs.20,000 from the SHG, on the condition that he would quit consuming alcohol and stop abusing his wife and children. The husband agreed. The entire intervention period spanned across 6 month, with initiation of the intervention in 2019/20.

Debolina says, " Earlier,I felt so powerless and broken. It was the support and comfort received from the SAC didis that kept me strong to resist the DV I had been subjected to. It is because the didis were determined in their pursuit, despite the threats and abuses from my husband, that I am leading a happy and peaceful life with my family today, otherwise, I am not sure what state I would have been in? My daughter's life would have got ruined, as her education was discontinued and I was both mentally and physically a wreck.". Now I feel strong and in control of the situation as my husband has changed completely. He cares for me and the children and together we are managing our business successfully."

CHALLENGES

Debolina was in constant fear of her husband, as he was livid with the matter taken up at the VO level, as for him it was a matter of self-respect. The issue was private and therefore should remain within the confines of the home and not get into the public domain, the typical patriarchal norms in force.

Debolina's husband was abusive and disrespectful to the VO-SAC members. He was intimidating them to lay off the issue, as they continued their pursuit in counselling him.

Therefore, the intervention was no easy cake walk. The determination of the VO-SAC and their constant support and reassurance to Debolina to stand up against domestic violence did bear fruitful results.

OUTPUT

Now both Debalina and her husband make the sweets, which he sells. Meanwhile the VO members continue to keep a watch and interact with the husband as and when they cross paths, to get a sense that things are fine.

With the amount that was loaned, Debalina and her husband restarted their small business of selling sweets and it is faring well. Within two months, the husband gave Debalina Rs.10,000 to repay part of the loan amount. Smt. Debalina Das is very grateful to the VO members and is now able to pay for her daughter's school tuition, which was not possible earlier. Debalina is grateful for the timely intervention of the VO members, which has given her a new lease of life.

The intervention instilled in Debolina courage to take control of her life and speak out against violence.

For the VO-SAC, the experience strengthened their resolve that through their collective action, issues can be successfully tackled. It strengthened their agency as catalysts of change.

STRATEGY

As the EC and SAC members of the The VO had initiated strategies across the SHGs which enabled members to speak out about domestic violence. The strategies were; to create awareness on issues of gender discrimination and gender-based violence such as domestic violence; to create an environment to build solidarity among the SHG members; to motivate members to be vigilant about domestic violence around them; counselling; and legal and financial intervention if required.

SCALABILITY

To create awareness, the SAC held many meetings where domestic violence was discussed. The result of the interventions was that the husband, after counselling has stopped the violence, as the financial support that was provided to the survivor, helped them rebuild their family business. It was the failure of the business that led to her husband's substance abuse and violence in the family.

Such situations may be prevalent with other SHG members too and the possibility of ensuring financial inclusion to ameliorate the economic condition could be a viable option, provided it ensures thorough follow-up by the SAC such as; domestic violence has stopped; the woman is in equal control of the resource generated through the financial assistance; and that there is joint responsibility for repayment. This also helps in building the woman's self-esteem and her worth, both in the private and public domain.

The VO will conduct awareness sessions for all its members regarding domestic violence. The SAC plans to upscale this programme and initiative through the creation of a peer group of counsellors who can help women survivors of violence; to create an environment of safe space in the SHGs, so that women are comfortable to share their experiences of violence; and lastly, to be a model for other VOs on addressing domestic violence issues.

CONCLUSION

As the economic situation improved, a harmonious and peaceful environment prevailed in the home. The loan was through Debalina, and it was a family business, therefore, she now has equal control in managing the business and the resources generated through it. In addition, the husband realised that the repayment is their joint responsibility which is being done successfully.

P.S. Name changed to maintain confidentiality of the DV survivor.







Ending child marriages: A case study from Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh is home to the largest population of child brides, with 3.6 crores (UNICEF India). This case study captures the efforts undertaken by the social action committee and SHG members to spread awareness and end the practice of child marriage in Uttar Pradesh's Triveni Village in Banda district.

GEOGRAPHY AND VO PROFILE

With a village population of 2,896, women constitute 46.3 per cent of the population in the village. There are currently 17 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with 182 members under the village organisation, Saksham Prerna Gram Sangathan.

CONTEXT

Gender inequality is a lived experience. A girl is more likely to be denied her rights like education and forced to marry at an early age. According to Malti there are many young girls below the age of 18 years who are married at an early age to reduce the financial burden of the families, as their families feel that their financial burden reduces. However, these families do not realise that there are numerous health risks that girls face including early pregnancies, fewer spaced pregnancies and anaemia. Additionally, the young girls are also exposed to gender-based violence like physical abuse, including domestic violence, marital rapes, resulting in physical and mental health deterioration. It is natural that married girls are then expected to conceive, regardless of any concern about her reproductive age and maturity.

PROCESS

Malti, a resident of Triveni village and a member of Saksham Prerna Gram Sangathan, has been actively working to spread awareness about child marriage and its impact. After undergoing training on gender, focusing on concepts, social norms and gender barriers in day to day life and different verticals of NRLM coupled with ways to address through institutional mechanism, Malti started training the VO members on preventing the practice of child marriage. She held several meetings with the local community members and the village Pradhan to identify such cases and end the practices through individual counselling or group/family counselling. Several of these child marriages were cancelled, and community members encouraged their relatives to follow suit.

STRATEGY

In the context of this chronic social issue, Malti started regularly spreading awareness regarding dowry and underscores the value of educating the girl child and encouraging them to have their own career. The process will deepen the identity of the individual girl child and enable them to make decisions both at personal and professional level.

Initially she prepared an implementation plan with all the members of VO in which she planned various meetings, rallies and campaigns. Following which, she discussed the issues with other members of VO SAC and started the trainings on child marriage and dowry.

IMPACT

Through the joint efforts and local advocacy and awareness-building undertaken by all the members of VO SAC, 12 families cancelled the child marriages. These families further realised the importance of educating girls and started sending their children to school. Malti, along with other members of VO SAC participate in every meeting held by the VO and jointly address all the issues against child marriage and dowry.

SCALABILITY

They plan to continue with their work of spreading awareness regarding child marriage and other gender related issues in other SHGs. The main strategy for future will be to:

1. Improve gender sensitisation for all, including cadres, community and staff so that the issues related to gender can be handled appropriately;
2. Implementation of action plan for the FY 2021-22;
3. In the first phase the gender intervention will be in five districts i.e. Bahraich, Banda, Lakhimpur Kheri, Basti and Gorakhpur. It will be expanded in other districts in the next phase.





Empowering women on land governance: A case study from West Bengal

In West Bengal 17³ per cent of women and 34 per cent of men own land alone or jointly as per NFHS-5. Access to and control over productive and economic resources by women results in greater economic agency of women. Limited presence of women in the public spaces supplemented by unpaid work burden and patriarchal social norms, all have contributed to a pervasive inequality in land access, control and importantly ownership of land. As a result, women lack knowledge on land governance system and associated process which restricts their economic opportunities. The case study from Coochbehar district, reflects the efforts to enhance capacity of SHG women by training organised by Sangha Samabay (at the Panchayat level) for creating awareness and establishing institutional architecture for facilitating rural land recordings by leveraging existing web-based government managed platform. Another tangible benefit in the process would be land ownership increasing in the name of women through inheritance.

GEOGRAPHY AND VO PROFILE

Located in north-eastern part of West Bengal, Cooch Behar district. There are 48,247 SHGs in the district consisting 521,833 women. There are 12 blocks in the district and Dinhata-I is one of them which is located on the southeastern side of the district and sharing its border with Bangladesh. Total geographical area of this block is 248.54 sq.km which host 281,890 population (Census 2011).

³http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5Report_WB.shtml

Baro Atiabari-I Sangha Samabay was formed in the year 2005 and in 2012 they purchased 5 decimals land for construction of current Sangha Bhaban with support from Cooch Behar DRDC. The Sangha office is situated at the outskirts of Dinhata sub district town. There are total 369 SHGs under the umbrella of Baro Atiyabari-1 Sangha Samabay comprising 4020 women SHG members. This Sangha actively promotes economic activities to be taken up by the women members and helps the groups to do some business through Start- up Village Entrepreneur Programme (SVEP) in addition to their ongoing livelihood activities under SRLM programme. Major livelihood activities promoted by Sangha Samabay include supply of school uniform for non-aided schools, arranging refreshments during government trainings, etc.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in this panchayat, there is a perceived lack of interest exists among the community to access the government offered services for updating records, attributed to various reasons. A recent study in West Bengal revealed that more than 46 per cent of land records are undated and more than 83 per cent of the households visited, felt that community involvement (SHGs, more specifically) and support in accessing services would greatly improve the situation quickly.

CONTEXT

Located in north-eastern part of West Bengal, Cooch Behar district. There are 48,247 SHGs in the district consisting 521833 women. There are 12 blocks in the district and Dinhata-I is one of them which is located on the southeastern side of the district and sharing its border with Bangladesh. Total geographical area of this block is 248.54 sq.km which host 281890 population (Census 2011).

Baro Atiabari-I Sangha Samabay was formed in the year 2005 and in 2012 they purchased 5 decimals land for construction of current Sangha Bhaban with support from Cooch Behar DRDC. The Sangha office is situated at the outskirts of Dinhata sub district town. There are total 369 SHGs under the umbrella of Baro Atiyabari-1 Sangha Samabay comprising 4020 women SHG members. This Sangha actively promotes economic activities to be taken up by

PROCESS

To address the gap in awareness and for capacity building among rural women on land issues, the West Bengal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (WBSRLM) –Anandadhara initiated an innovative approach in 2016. With more than 800,000 registered SHGs under this multi-layered, federated structure, WBSRLM collaborated with Landesa, an international non-profit organisation for promotion of Women Land Literacy (WLL) in the state for “Poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment through secure right to land for women”. This WLL training has covered so far more than one million SHG women from 22 districts of the state and has positioned these women to claim entitlements, seek services related to land records and its updation from the government offered online services platform.

To access Government online services, one needs to have a computer with internet connection or to apply offline one should be educated for filling up the requisite applications. But most of the SHG families do not have internet-connected computers or many of them lack computer literacy. However, these services can easily be provided by trained members of the Sangha Samabay as it is considered to be women’s own institutions at the gram panchayat level. The Sangha Samabay plays an instrumental role in bringing women in SHG folds, helping them develop their entrepreneurial capacity, start-up income generating activities thus promoting economic empowerment.

Baro Atiyabari-1 Sangha Samabay in Dinhata-1 block of Cooch Behar district was covered under WLL programme in 2019 and the BOD members started to think what efforts could be taken by the Sanghabeyond training for enabling the SHG women access land related services. The BOD showed their interest in setting up a counselling center and requested DMMU, Cooch Behar for necessary suggestions and approval in September 2020.

With prior approval from district, the Sangha organised training on land record updation and accessing online services, which was jointly facilitated by Landesa and local land revenue office. The Sangha identified 10 BOD members having minimum school leaving qualification and computer background –all were Block Level Trainers (BLTs) of WLL for attending training organised in November 2020.

Post training, an institutional architecture was set up called Sangha Service Center (SSC) with requisite infrastructure in place on December 23, 2020 where women could visit and seek guidance on land issues, the intending persons could initiate application online or offline for mutation of transacted or inherited land. The trained Sangha service providers would help the aspirants to complete the paperwork and submit it to the block level land office on their own, and thus reducing the time, harassment and the transaction cost of the members. Following a couple of further handholding support providing sessions, the counselling center has started full-fledged functioning since January 2021.

OUTPUT

Gender disaggregated data on land ownership is still not available from Land & Land Reforms Department in the state. At the fall of 2019, the Government has issued guideline for taking initiative for mentioning “gender’ against each land record, the work is on-going and the gender disaggregated data will be available for each Sangha in coming days.

West Bengal is also one of the pioneer states to have placed the textual and spatial data for each land record in the website (www.banglarbhumii.gov.in) for the citizen to access information on status of record online.

The pandemic induced restrictions offered several challenges for the service center to function to its potential. Till March 2021, 21 women have applied for land record updation and three women have obtained updated land records in hands so far. As the applicants require thorough guidance for properly submitting their application, the completion of land record updation takes time. Apart from seeking services for land record updation, 27 women applied for other services like plot information, certified copy of land records, etc. and are benefitted by the services received. It has not only saved their time and money but also helped them bypass unnecessary harassment from middlemen. With updated records, the farmers are in a position to access benefits offered by schemes introduced by Government of West Bengal to support agricultural activities as also accessing institutional credit and crop insurance benefits.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALABILITY

The Sangha is considering and at present discussing with District Mission Management Unit (DMMU) on the option of charging a minimum fee for the offered services for making the Sangha Service Centers economically sustainable. Presently, this service is still limited to the SHG women within the jurisdiction of the Sangha. The Sangha BOD has also decided that trained members would educate and promote awareness among the rural women whenever they are

visiting village level SHGs for any other purpose. In addition, the Sangha has approached the Block Land and Land Reforms Officer for providing mentoring support for this approach to be popular and sustainable. Services rendered through Sangha Service Center have brought transparency, reduced exploitation and fraud transaction and an enabling environment for women to claim their inheritance rights.

Inspired by this example, several other Sanghas from Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri districts are exploring the possibility of opening such centers, in consultation with the respective DMMUs. Considering the fact that there are more than 3000 Sanghas in the state of West Bengal and that WLL training is fast reaching out to all blocks, this Sangha led initiative has the potential worth scaling up. The land recordation issues are there in all Panchayats in the state and if there is a local level solution available, it is expected to be well-received and utilised by the community.



CONCLUSION

The Livelihoods Mission is built on the belief that nurturing and sustaining institutions of poor women is central to addressing poverty. DAY NRLM departs from the economic (income) understanding of poverty to recognising multi-dimensional poverty, acknowledging the vulnerabilities of women with the intersection of caste, class, ethnicity and religion. A key gender integration approach of the program is establishing of institutional mechanisms to address gender issues at the grass root level. The existing institutional structures at the village level like the village organisation/village level federations, cluster level federations, social action committees, the gender point person collectives and the gender forum offer a unique opportunity to address women's identity, access and control over economic and productive resources, technical knowledge, dignity and bodily integrity. These institutions serve as an effective fundamental structure for establishing a demand-supply relationship with other public offices/spaces like the Gram Panchayat/Village Council (specific to tribal areas), Gram Sabha, Anganwadi Centers, Banks, public health centers, public distribution system, schools etc.

With a renewed focus towards a demand driven strategy for poverty alleviation and gender responsive implementation of NRLM, the differential needs of women are continuously been discussed at these institutional platforms and integrated in the development planning process to achieve the objective of increased agency of women. The case studies in this volume reflect the able leadership of women from the different corners of the country, to challenge varied social issues ranging from child marriage to domestic violence, asset ownership, governance and financial inclusion and offer solutions that can help women and girls to lead a decent and dignified life. They serve as live testimonies of the journey women have travelled over time. Using the lens of women's rights, these case studies show how a focus on developing and strengthening the collective identities of women by increasing their consciousness, understanding of the political economy and their position in the development process, can improve women's interface with the community and governance machinery. It can serve as a bottom up method to catalyse public cooperation for provision of public goods for a decent living.

In its journey of mobilising women and promoting their collective action, NRLM has taken the path of forming, nurturing and sustaining women's 'own institutions' which can deepen both their individual identity and collective strength so that they are empowered to carve out their own destiny. NRLM strengthens these institutions by constantly investing in their capacity through training and awareness building. These case studies show how grassroots institutions of the poor can help nurture their social capital, support in curating financial products and services, and create the prospect for convergence between public institutions and institutional mechanisms to engender the development planning and implementation process with the aim of "leaving no one behind".

