

# National Report

## Case Studies of CBOs

The Journey of Community-Based Organizations under PACS Support



# Acknowledgment

This study is an attempt to assess the journey of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) formed by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) under PACS programme. It seeks to capture the rich diversity of experiences in forming the CBOs, defining their purpose, developing their leadership, expanding their membership, strategizing the intervention processes and analyzing the outcomes. The study is based on 29 detailed case studies and 14 short profile case studies, which have been used as the basis for developing three knowledge products: a) Thematic Report of Basic Services b) Thematic Report of Livelihoods and Resources and c) National Report that synthesizes the journey of the CBOs. The national report presented here is the synthesis of all the case studies documented for this assignment.

More than 85 CSOs in 90 poorest-of-the-poor districts of seven states of India came together under PACS programme to ensure better access to basic services and promote livelihood security for poor and marginalized communities. This kind of programme gains relevance in a development environment of a country wherein economic disparities are on the rise, with little sign of the social stigmas afflicting certain caste groups, the disabled and women being weakened in a modernizing India. The central strategy of the PACS programme in the selected districts was to organize these dispossessed groups and empower them to demand access to their rights and entitlements.

Samarthan would like to thank the PACS national and state management teams for reposing their trust in the organization to undertake this study. We would also like to put on record our appreciation for their commitment towards the socially excluded groups and support and guidance provided by Anand Bolimera, Rajkumar Bidla, Swati and Rajpal of the national PACS team. We also sincerely thank the CSOs and PACS state teams, who were forthcoming and co-operative in organizing meetings with relevant stakeholders. The perspective, analysis and commitment of the organizational heads and programme leaders were extremely helpful in developing the case studies.

We are grateful to the CBOs, their leaders and members for passionate and candid interaction with the study team members, sharing their joys, successes, failures, hopes and aspirations. We are humbled by their struggles in a difficult and inimical socio-economic and political environment. We laud their achievements against such odds. It was enlightening and motivating to meet the CBO leaders - disabled people, unlettered Dalit women, tribal with profound wisdom. It strengthens our belief that empowering the SEG brings equality, equity and social justice at center stage, laying the ground for transforming the socio-political ethos of the country.

We thank the Study Advisory Group for providing their guidance and support in designing the study and providing one-to-one support whenever we approached them. Last but not the least, we thank the study team members - Amit Anand and Shrdha Kumar - and the research team that lent support in preparing the case studies and the thematic reports.

It is hoped that this report will inform many about the hitherto largely undocumented struggle of CBOs of the marginalized communities fighting and creating a space for their rights and entitlements.

Yogesh Kumar

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Case Study : CBO - Paigambarpur Panchayat Viklang Adhikar Sanghatan

CSO - Bihar Viklang Kalyan Parishad

Location : Muzaffarpur, Bihar

*Theme : PWD rights, MGNREGA*

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### 1. The context

The 2011 census places the disabled population in the state of Bihar at 1.9 million, which ranks it number two in the country, with around 3.2% of the total disabled population. Around 90% of the people with disability (PWD) live in rural areas, the category-wise break-up being visually handicapped 53%, locomotor disability 27%, speech and hearing 11% and mentally handicapped 9%.

Bihar is one of India's most underdeveloped states with a large proportion of scheduled castes (SC) who are economically and socially deprived. Disability among the poor, especially in rural areas, is high due to deficient nutrition, inadequate healthcare and the heavy physical work pregnant women do.

The disabled are vulnerable in society because their care-givers find it difficult to manage the cost of their physical care. They find it difficult to access social welfare benefits and subsidised healthcare because of poor service delivery and insensitive field officials. They cannot even access nested rights such as disability pension, scholarship, bus/railway pass for subsidised travel without a disability certificate. Social discrimination and poor rural infrastructure they have to travel long distances to access services - add to their agony.

### 2. BVKP and its association with CBOs

Bihar Viklang Kalyan Parishad (BVKP) is a civil society organisation (CSO) founded by a disabled person suffering from muscular atrophy who suffered deprivation and the insensitivity of government institutions due to his disability. Wheelchair bound Mohan Chaudhary, a doctorate in mathematics, set up the organisation in 1991 to work with disabled persons, particularly those with orthopaedic disability.



BVKP initially focused on the rights and entitlements of PWDs in Muzzafarpur district, identifying, rehabilitating and helping them to access their entitlements. The work later spread to many districts with the support of network organisations. The CSO organises the PWDs to campaign for their rights and builds their capacity to access targeted services. The PACS support helped the organisation expand its work to three districts covering 170 panchayats and 777 villages in seven blocks.

The BVKP promotes CBOs of disabled persons in these panchayats, the PWDs to fight for their rights at the panchayat, block and district levels with the support of its field facilitators. The Paigambarpur Panchayat Viklang Adhikar Sangathan (PPVAS) is one of the many CBOs promoted by the organisation.

### 3. History and genesis of the CBO

BVKP had a presence in the panchayat before it initiated the PACS project. The PACS support helped it intensify its work and set up the PPVAS in Sakra block, where Rakesh Ram, a disabled and mahadalit who has been associated with the CSO since 1995, is the PACS coordinator. A baseline survey was first conducted in 28 panchayats of the block where about 2,600 PWDs were identified. Meetings were organised to bring them together on a common platform, the survey providing data on the status of services and entitlements currently availed by them. Paigambarpur panchayat has 80 PWDs in five villages. All of them are members of the CBO, except those belonging to rich and influential families.

### 4. Organisation of the collective

The CBO has a seven-member executive committee with a president, secretary and treasurer. It meets every month, rotating the meeting between the villages in the panchayat, the agenda generally including access to disability certificates, provision of disability pensions, opportunities for income generation or work under the MGNREGS, and admission of

disabled children in schools.

The CBO is clear about its purpose and objectives. As Shambhoo ji, one of its members, puts it, “We have to fight to get our rights, so we need to be organised. As an organised group, we get dignity as equal citizens, with our fraternity empowering every member to address the feeling of isolation and helplessness.”

### 5. Leadership and its style

The CBO is a democratic body, its leadership selected for its ability to help members file applications, engage with the establishment, and take everyone along. Rakesh Ram is the block co-ordinator while Shailoo Khatun is one of the active women members.

### 6. Organisational culture and values

The organisational culture is based on the principles of compassion and support. Members cooperate to understand each other's disability and support one another through group action. The CBO does not look for sympathy but wants the disabled to be considered as people with unique strengths who can contribute to society. It has artistes who perform street plays on disability as well as a highly competent carpenter who works in many panchayats, among others.

### 7. The CBO's relationship with the CSO

The CBO has a close relationship with the CSO because the founder of the CSO is himself disabled. Most of the staff are either disabled or qualified to work with the disabled. So there is only a thin line between CBO and CSO members. The CSO helps the CBOs to network into a federation at the block level to address larger issues of access to services and medical board certification, which are done at the block level. It also engages with the district administration to influence processes and ease procedural bottlenecks that make it difficult for PWDs to realise their rights.

### 8. Important processes related to the CBO

Identifying the disabled in each panchayat: The



baseline survey was the CBO's first initiative, starting with house-to-house visits to contact PWD families and assess their socio-economic status. It revealed the difficulties PWDs face in accessing entitlements. An inventory of each village and panchayat was prepared and the PWDs were invited to attend the CBO meetings. The block co-ordinator got to know each and every disabled person by name and village.

**Disability certification by the medical panel:** The medical board certifies the percentage of disability of PWDs. Applicants for disability certificates are informed about the date of verification so they can reach the block office with the required documents. The CBO tries to make them feel more comfortable so they are confident to face the panel of doctors. At least one BVKP-trained staffer is present during these examinations to ensure the doctors do their job properly and no deserving PWD is denied a disability certificate.

**Engaging PWDs in the MGNREGS:** An innovative initiative is to engage the PWDs with the rights-based MGNREGS. Many of them get employment, the blind, deaf and dumb qualifying for manual labour, while persons with less orthopaedic disability are engaged as mates or helpers to provide water at work sites or manage the jhula ghar for the children of women workers. Many less labour intensive activities have also been

identified to widen the scope for employing PWDs, including planting and nurturing trees for five years.

**Making infrastructure PWD-friendly:** The CBO tries to ensure that existing services and public places are disability friendly. It took up primary schools as a priority public institution, demanding ramps be constructed, specially-qualified teachers be recruited and extra hours of teaching put in to help the PWDs academically. The CBO monitors such facilities in schools and engages with district-level authorities to improve the situation.

## 9. Key outcomes and impacts

**Extensive coverage of disability certification:** Certification of disability by the medical board is crucial because all rights and entitlements are nested in it. In Paigambarpur panchayat, almost every disabled person has received the certificate, some with 40% disability. The panchayat pradhan approached the Minister of Social Justice to organise disability medical camps at the panchayat and block levels. The block-level camp was held on January 27, 2015 and the panchayat-level camp the following day. It was the first panchayat-level camp to certify disability in Bihar's history, with 1,000 PWDs from the surrounding panchayats also turning up.

**PWDs employed under MGNREGS:** The panchayat has generated a significant number of workdays for PWDs, some completing 100 days of employment. Two PWDs worked as mates in the MGNREGS and PWDs were given the responsibility of planting, watering and maintaining trees along the village main road.

The panchayat also allotted a shop on its premises to a PWD, following a CBO-influenced resolution passed in the gram sabha. The shop is run by the PWD and his wife and is performing well. A second shop that is vacant will also be given to a PWD who is willing to run it.

**Access to benefits by the disabled:** The CBO helps eligible PWDs to get disability pensions, though its members feel the current pension of Rs400 pm





is inadequate. It also helps disabled children get admission in schools and gets their scholarships sanctioned. Another thrust area is to get aids such as crutches, wheelchairs, tricycles etc for PWDs under government schemes.

Disabled women mainstreamed in SHGs: Disabled women are encouraged to join the village SHGs to help their families meet small credit needs. For example, Shailoo Khatun took a Rs60,000 loan to support her husband's business. She feels proud to have contributed to the growth of his tyre repair shop on the main road near the village. She also works with the MGNREGS and her children go to school.

#### 10. Capacity building efforts by the CSO

The BVKP supports the CBO in building its collective strength. The initial team comprised volunteers who have been associated with the CSO for many years. They underwent a series of structured trainings to understand the provisions of the Disability Act and other supportive acts such as the NREGA, RTE and RTI. The CSO is also involved in the integrated participatory planning (IPP) and social audit of the MGNREGS in Bihar.

The CBO looks for hand-holding guidance to file applications and get disability certificates for the PWDs. The CSO has developed support mechanisms to help them. For example, it helped Shambu open a stationary shop at the block office from where he guides PWDs with information on schemes and helps them file applications, also accompanying them to visit block-level officials whenever required. Similarly, a street play team was developed to sensitise the public to the special needs of PWDs and be sympathetic towards them. The team also gives the PWD families details of schemes and provisions of the Disability Act to help them take advantage of targeted benefits.

The BVKP disseminates communication materials to sensitise the society as well provide PWDs with updates of schemes.

#### 11. Role of the CSO in the emergence of a strong CBO

The BVKP has networked the CBOs in 170 panchayats - including the PPVAS in a Viklang Adhikar Manch (VAM). The network has a block-level federation called the Sakra Viklang Sahyog Samiti that is being registered as a cooperative society with 28 members from each VAM, with one-third reservation for women in its executive committee. Each member has a Rs10 share in the cooperative which is expected to become fully operational once the formalities of the cooperative department are completed. The president and secretary are elected though leaders are usually chosen by consensus, based on their leadership qualities and their ability to mobilise villages and interact with block officials.

The cooperative has reached every PWD household with PACS support. It puts pressure on the government to ensure better services for PWDs, including wheelchair access to department offices and disability-friendly structures in all public places. The also works to change the mind-set of public officials, sensitising them to PWD needs so they respond positively to their demands. Similar sensitisation is done with banks where cash withdrawal counters are at an inaccessible height for many PWDs and they have to wait in long queues for



hours. In one instance, an SBI branch refused to open a PWD bank account. The federation put pressure on the bank manager, threatening to organise a chakka jam, forcing him to open the account. The fraternity's strength was also demonstrated to demand systemic procedural changes and facilities in the block and district offices.

The cooperative organised a voter-awareness campaign during the assembly elections to encourage PWDs to exercise their vote as responsible citizens. Some of them protested when they found the voting machines were fixed at a height that was not convenient for them, calling for a more disability friendly voting system.

The BVKP obtained a plot of land on lease on the periphery of the village to set up the infrastructure for a residential school for about 150 poor deaf and dumb children. The cooperative uses the school premises to conduct its meetings.

## 12. External opportunities and constraints

The external opportunities and threats are the following:

### Opportunities

- The digitisation of government schemes has streamlined information access and helped PWDs to seek benefits as well as hold officials to account. Many PWDs are graduates and computer literate, so they access information from the internet and also apply for services and benefits online.
- The provisions of the PWD Act 1995 favour positive discrimination for the disabled. Many PWDs are also SCs or STs, so they are entitled to better rights and entitlements.
- The newly-elected government in Bihar is considered to be pro-poor and pro SC/ST, minorities and OBCs. It is expected to be pro-PWD as well, operationalising the provisions for 3% reservation for PWDs.

### Threats

- Government officials and systems remain insensitive to PWD needs. Many government offices, including the collectorate, are on the first floor. Access to public utilities viz toilets in offices, schools and other public places is disabled unfriendly. The situation is unlikely to improve soon in rural areas.
- The government is shifting to electronic transfer of benefits under its support programmes. The disabled will have to open bank accounts and visit banks more frequently. The physical design of banks, access and priority are not disabled-friendly, making life more difficult for PWDs.
- PWDs are demanding livelihood opportunities to become economically independent. They know the MGNREGS is unable to provide them with sustained employment and many of them cannot do manual work. Unless there are more serious efforts to link the NRLM with their needs, employment options in rural areas will remain limited. PWD reservations for jobs also needs to be used more effectively to prevent further economic deprivation.

## 13. Sustainability of the CBO

The BVKP has framed rules and organised regular meetings to formalise the panchayat-level CBOs and build their collective strength. In many blocks, the co-ordinators are from the disabled community and reside in the block so they are likely to continue working for the CBO even if they receive inadequate or no financial support. Many of them are committed to carrying their mission forward.

The sudden demise of the BVKP's founder-leader in 2015 and the imminent closure of the PACS programme have serious implications for the pace and continuity of the CBO's work and advocacy of PWD issues. If the block-level cooperative becomes stronger and manages to get

resources from the government or other donors, there is a possibility of long-term sustenance of the CBOs and their federation.

#### 14. Future plans of the CBO

The future plans of the panchayat-level CBO and its block-level cooperative are entwined in the following manner:

- Sensitising and influencing the banking system will be a top priority to build disabled-friendly branches. Banks can also be a source of low-cost loans for PWDs to start businesses like shops and small enterprises that require less physical effort.
- Many government schemes do not have special or adequate provisions for PWDs. For example, the Indira Awas Yojana does not treat the disabled as a priority category, so they do not get the benefit of owning a

home. The Nirmal Bharat Mission does not consider additional incentives for PWD families so toilets cannot be constructed in their homes. PWDs find it difficult to obtain rations from the PDS shop because of the distance and also because the shopkeepers are not sensitive to giving them priority treatment. These are advocacy issues the cooperative will take up.

- PWDs need a special system of information dissemination and support to know about available job vacancies where they are eligible to apply. Shopkeepers do not keep the special forms required for these reserved posts. The cooperative will attempt to set up a special information centre to cater to PWD needs, and will promote their livelihood options through jobs and small enterprises.



Case Study : CBO - Prayas GrameenVikas Samiti

CSO - Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Kalyan Evam Vikas Sansthan  
(DBRAKEVS)

Location : Bhojpur, Bihar

*Theme : Livelihood, Legal Literacy, Education and Sanitation*

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### 1. The context

Dalits in Bihar confront many exclusion issues in accessing basic services related to education, health and nutrition. They also face social discrimination in development programmes. According to the 2011 census, dalits constitute 16% of the state's 104 million population. More than 90% live in rural areas and are landless, working as agricultural labour on the farms of rich, upper-caste landlords.

Dalit children face discrimination in school, with teachers directing them to do all the menial tasks like cleaning classrooms and toilets. They also face discrimination in the mid-day meal, their plates being kept separately. Also, if the cook is a dalit, the upper caste children don't eat the food, while upper caste cooks favour non-dalit children while serving food.

Teachers pay less attention to them in the classroom and their parents cannot protest, nor can they support them educationally at home. As a result, the drop-out rate of dalit children from schools is high. Their poor education puts them in the back seat of development, reinforcing their poverty and social discrimination.

The public health institutions also discriminate in their response to the health needs of dalits, the distance of hospitals making it even more difficult

to seek health services. Health workers like the ANM and ASHA find dalit women weak and impoverished and the health services neglect them, depriving them of drugs, vaccines and nutritional supplements for pregnant and lactating mothers. As a result, dalit women and their children suffer from anaemia and are prone to illness, affecting the well-being of their families, draining their strength and resources, and sinking them deeper into indebtedness.

Seasonal migration of dalit males is high because of limited employment opportunities in villages. They are also exploited by high-caste landowners who pay them low wages. They leave the women behind to work for the rich landlords at even lower wages when they migrate for employment. Medical and financial emergencies force them to borrow money at high interest rates from upper-caste money lenders, leaving them in a state of chronic indebtedness.

Bhojpur has fewer dalits around 15% of the district population than other districts like Gaya, where they account for up to 30% of the population. However, it is this district that saw the emergence of militant outfits such as the upper-caste Ranveer Sena and the opposing Marxist-Leninist (ML) groups, leading to violent confrontations over the issue of land rights.

## 2. DBRAKEVS and its association with CBOs

The Prayas Grameen Vikas Samiti has a network across 24 districts of Bihar. It partnered with the Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar Kalyan Evam Vikas Sansthan (DBRAKEVS) in Bhojpur for a PACS programme to mobilise marginalised communities in nine districts to fight for their basic rights. DBRAKEVS has been working with dalit communities in the field of land rights, livelihood, health and education to help them forge an identity in society and live with dignity. The lead partner conceived and established the Dalit Adhikar Manch (DAM) in 2005 with 13 civil society organisations (CSOs), including the DBRAKEVS to develop it into a state-level dalit-managed community-based organisation (CBO) across 28 districts.

## 3. History and genesis of the CBO

Prayas and DBRAKEVS mobilised the dalit community and organised them under the DAM banner with PACS support. They initiated an experiment in empowerment, called the Reflect Circle (RC), to educate and mobilise women in the project area. Based on Paulo Friere's pedagogy of the oppressed, the participating women analyse the reasons of their oppression and exploitation through a process of self-reflection. The conscientisation spurs them to organise

themselves to look for collective solutions that can transform their lives and their power equation in society.

Forty RCs were formed in 40 villages across several PACS target districts. Each RC has 40 women on average and a village-level facilitator organises fortnightly meetings that gradually lead to the women organising themselves into a CBO for collective action as they gain clarity of their objectives. The RC in Amrai Newada village of the Tedhara panchayat in Bhojpur district is one of the 40 RCs developed over the four years of the PACS intervention.

## 4. Organisation of the collective

The Amrai Newada RC has fixed a place for its meetings, putting up posters, charts and IEC material, where its members discuss the following eight subjects, with the facilitator providing background information and knowledge:

- Importance of education
- Domestic violence against women
- Female infanticide
- Child marriage
- Dowry practices
- Key government schemes
- Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) for maternal health and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBM) for health insurance, both under the NRHM.
- Dayanpratha the practice of torturing and killing women identified as witches.

The instructional programme begins with perspective building exercises to understand gender inequality in society and its impact on women, followed by sessions on the listed subjects. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods are used to reflect on issues, identify the core problems and develop a plan of action. Over the years, the RCs help women to build up a critical understanding of these issues and demonstrated actions to address the challenges.





## 5. Leadership and its style

Assessment of RC objectives and their attainment

The RC objectives to improve the quality of life and dignity of women include the following:

1. To promote the unity, participation and dignity of dalits.
2. To understand gender-based discrimination and take action for equality.
3. To empower women to fight gender and caste-based discrimination and violence.
4. To initiate positive actions for self and community development.

The RC women were asked to rate their performance against each objective. The self-ratings on a scale of 10, arrived at after considerable discussion, were as follows: Objectives 1, 2 and 3 - 10 (though there was some hesitation in grading objective 3 because many discriminatory practices have still to be addressed, though they demonstrate their understanding and concrete actions); objective 4 - 7 to 8 (but a lot still needs to be done to access entitlements and rights under various schemes);

Of the eight topics, the women said no action had been taken only on the issue of prevention of dowry. There was significant progress on all other issues. One woman narrated one initiative: "We run a small savings and credit group. One member asked for a loan of Rs700 for a family function. She told the group her daughter's marriage had been fixed and the groom's family was coming to finalise the date. The group objected to the marriage since the girl was only 15 years old. It advised the family that the legal age of marriage was 18 years and early marriage could affect the girl's health. The group pressure was strong. As a result, the marriage proposal was respectfully refused. The girl is studying in class 10 now and plans to continue her studies. The mother is also happy and aspires for an educated groom for her daughter when she completes her education and is of a marriageable age."

The RC group has built a collective leadership through this learning-cum-discussion process. A coordinator is elected in each meeting to manage the discussions and the processes to build the leadership abilities of the women. The RC

president, secretary and a treasurer have held their positions from the time the CBO was formed since the women never felt the need to change them

## 6. Organisational culture and values

The organisational culture is clearly pro-women and the RC understands that the life of dalit women will first have to improve at home, with the husband giving her equal status and respect. They know they need the support of men to address issues of oppression at the societal level. The RC also functions as a self-help group (SHG) and the collective savings are used to meet emergency credit needs of the members. It, however, does not function as a typical SHG, being influenced by the larger purpose of the group, which is for social and political transformation.

## 7. The CBO's relationship with the CSO

The CSO and RC partner to build the strength of the state-level DAM. The RC's effort is to develop the village-level leadership for the transformative and campaign-based agenda of a DAM-led mass movement supported by the CSO network. The CSO runs the field project and appoints and pays the staff. Its area coordinators and motivators support the RC leaders who feel they are still not ready to take the struggle to a higher level without CSO support.

## 8. Important processes related to the CBO

Regular meetings with a well-defined agenda: The RC was designed to get women together once a fortnight. Initially, the women were unsure of coming together as an RC because they did not believe change was possible. Their understanding of the causes of poverty and their oppression and their confidence to struggle to change their lives grew gradually. The structured meetings helped build their collective strength and ability to address issues of deprivation and unjust treatment of dalit communities.

Collective action as part of the DAM: The RC draws strength from the DAM to protest at the

village level and RC members participate in the DAM's district and state-level campaigns for the rights of Dalits. The DAM's village-level anchor coordinates with the RC.

**Better access and utilisation of services:** The women focus on accessing basic services so that the children get better education. They perceive education as the key to get jobs and change their social and economic condition. They also monitor the health services so that their children are healthy and women are safe during childbirth. They are keen to get health insurance cards under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) to get their medical expenses reimbursed.

## 9. Key outcomes and impacts

**Improved quality of mid-day meal and education:** The students complained to the RC women about the poor quality of worm-infested food served in the mid-day meal. The women met the teachers who initially resented being challenged by the dalits. But the women confidently quoted the RTE and MDM provisions and repeated complaints to the block-level official resulted in improved food quality. They also demanded the appointment of a dalit cook to counter upper-caste discrimination.

In addition, the women protested against the high teacher-child ratio in the school, which flouts RTE norms. They also pressurised school officials to stop charging Rs150 for transfer certificates (TC), which many students need because they migrate with their parents.

**High degree of empowerment:** The women understand the reasons for their underdevelopment and the oppressive practices they are subjected to. The impact of their knowledge is seen in the following incident. An RC office bearer demanded a loan for health reasons. They found she wanted to have an abortion because she already had two daughters and didn't want a third. The women counselled her family to revisit the decision in the interest of her health as well as to value the life of a girl. As a result, she gave life to a girl and is proud of her daughter.

There are other similar examples. A woman beaten up by her husband shared her agony in an RC meeting on domestic violence. The group spoke to the husband about the consequences of domestic violence. Several rounds of protest and counselling led to a change in the husband's behaviour. The women also realised that consumption of alcohol is a major drain on family financial resources and also causes family feuds. They convinced the men to give up drinking and today no male member of the RC families drinks. All their children - girls and boys - are in school and the boys also help their mothers in their daily chores like fetching water or cleaning the house.

**Ability to protest for macro issues:** Being a DAM component has exposed the women to protest campaigns at the district and state levels. For example, they joined with other groups to protest against the delay in constructing an overhead railway bridge that would shorten the travel time of workers from the village. They even staged a dharna, stopping a train by squatting on the tracks. They quote many other examples of their strength and ability to confront issues and demonstrate their collective power.

## 10. Capacity building efforts by the CSO

The 40 RC facilitators from different villages were identified after a rigorous selection process by experienced DAM workers. They underwent a four-day training to understand the DAM philosophy and the process of organising dalit and other marginalised women into an RC. A refresher training was organised after two years on new issues.

The project team - project manager, area coordinator and four mobilisers - regularly participate in RC meetings and support the facilitators in a participatory manner. The mobilisers work closely with the facilitators on emerging issues that demand negotiation or dialogue with the block or district administration.

## 11. Role of CSO in the emergence of CBO as a strong institution

The DBRAKEVS network has played a critical

role in organising the RCs and developing a strong dalit identity. The DAM's mission of demanding the legitimate rights of dalits to live with dignity and as equal citizens has guided and influenced the RC leadership. The community sees the DBRAKEVS and DAM and their leaders as co-travellers in the struggle against injustice and deprivation. The close association of the network members with grassroots volunteers is reflected in DAM's growth - from five to 28 districts since 2005. The DAM campaign for homestead land is a key demand of poor dalit families, which brings the RCs closer to the CSO and its network.

## 12. External opportunities and constraints

### Opportunities

- The supportive political environment created by the mahagatbandan parties forming the government in Bihar after the recent elections is an opportunity for the SCs/STs/OBCs and minorities to enter the mainstream of the development process and be treated with dignity by society. The feedback provided by women in rural areas during the election period about the harmful health and economic effects of alcohol consumption led to the ban on alcohol production and sale soon after the government was sworn into office.
- A major demand of dalit families is homestead land. The previous government had agreed to the DAM-advocated demand to provide 10 decimal of land per family as per the recommendations of the Bandhopadhyay commission. The new government is committed to provide the homestead land, though less than recommended by the commission. There is now a favourable environment for the RCs and the DAM to intensify their campaign for homestead land.
- PRI elections are due in Bihar in the coming year. This is an opportunity for RC leaders to get elected to the posts of panch and pradhan in the gram sabhas as well

as block-level posts. This will help shift the power balance in local government and bring the upper-caste power centres to the negotiating table. In Bihar, half the seats are reserved for women, so RC women have the opportunity to get elected, based on their leadership abilities and the unity of the RCs.

### Constraints

- The upper castes own most of the village land and the dalits work as agricultural labourers. Some dalit women have shown enterprise and taken land on lease to augment their family income. Deficit rainfall has affected them severely, leaving them indebted and unable to pay the lease rent. As one woman observes, "My family is restless and unable to sleep because the loan to be repaid is Rs25,000. The bad harvest has destroyed our dreams of food security. We have no way to repay the loan taken on high interest rate." There is no safety mechanism for women to get low-cost loans from the NRLM or to get work under the MGNREGS to supplement family income.
- The RC has a limited membership of 40 women, not many of whom are active because of seasonal migration for work. There are many more dalit families in the village who need to be motivated. RC facilitators are trying to build concentric circles of involvement to foster unity among dalits at the village level and usher in transformation in their lives.
- Many women do not have ration cards because their names are not in the below poverty line (BPL) list even though being dalit and landless automatically qualifies them as per government guidelines. Many also do not have health insurance cards or get old age pensions. There is need to engage more with service providers to help deserving dalit families get the due benefits they are presently denied.



### 13. Sustainability of the CBO

The RC is facilitated by local women who have been trained and informally supported by the CSO. The RC group has been formalised with designated office bearers who understand their roles and responsibilities. So it will continue to meet and function beyond the project life even though the convenor may not receive the nominal honorarium she got during the project period.. The collection of small savings and regular use of surplus as credit to members for emergency purposes creates a binding thread that adds to the sustainability of the group.

The RC women say the support of the motivators is still needed for their growth and raising issues at the block level and above. The long-standing presence of the DAM as a network and its close association with the RC is also a strong strategy for sustainability.

### 14. Future plans of the CBO

The RC articulates the following future plans:

- The group will try to address the issue of dowry on which no action has been taken till now, looking for meaningful solutions to intervene at a macro level, given that it is a society-level problem that cannot adequately be tackled at the village level. The women are also committed to ensure good education for their daughters so that they become earning members of the family.
- The women are seriously affected by the housing shortage. Hence they will support the DAM's campaign for allotting homestead land. Their children have married so the demand for housing has risen, their present homes being too small to accommodate expanding families. The lack of personal space also raises health and hygiene issues.

Case Study : CBO - Prayas GrameenVikas Samiti

CSO - Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Kalyan Evam Vikas Sansthan  
(DBRAKEVS)

Location : Bhojpur, Bihar

*Theme : Livelihood, Legal Literacy, Education and Sanitation*

Case Study : CBO - MusharVikasManch  
CSO - MuzzafarpurVikas Mandal

Location : Muzzafarpur, Bihar

*Theme : Discrimination, Atrocity, Land, Health, Education and MGNREGA*

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## 1. The context

Bihar has 23 scheduled castes (SC). The 2001 census shows around 93.3% of dalits in the state live in rural areas. Most are farm labourers and do not even own land for the homesteads. They are mired in poverty and need all-round improvement to raise their socio-economic status to gain a voice in society. But the social support system for dalits is fragile, limiting their access to most welfare services of the government. Thus, even though they are hardworking and self-respecting, they have no social standing in society.

The Musahars are considered the lowest of dalit communities, living on the margins of society. The census puts their population in the state at 21.1 lakh, of whom 96.3% are landless and 92.5% are farm labourers who depend on the mercies of upper-caste landowners, often living in bondage. While the census puts the literacy rate of dalits at 28.5%, the figure for Musahars is a mere 9.8%, the female literacy being abysmally lower at 2%. Their poor education, lack of technical skills and low social standing keep them almost totally outside the purview of special benefits targeted at the dalits, including jobs reserved for SCs by the government.

A survey conducted by the MusaharVikasManch shows that 75% of Musahar families earn less than Rs2,000 per month. Their socio-economic

exclusion manifests in hunger, ill health, illiteracy, indebtedness, and exploitation of women. Yet their sense of self-respect does not permit them to live on doles or charity but on their labour. They prefer to die rather than beg.

The CBO is a platform for Musahars to share their problems and raise their voice in a scenario where they are bereft of power. Along with its partner CSO, the MuzaffarpurVikas Mandal (MVM), it is helping them to make significant changes in their lives, even if they still struggle to deal with inadequate employment avenues and the atrocities and injustice they suffer.

Employment is a critical issue for landless farm labourers, so the MNREGS plays an important role in their lives. The MVM and the CBO see the scheme as an empowering tool for dalits, especially Musahars. If successfully implemented, it can address their basic needs, so strengthening the organisation is important to help them live with dignity. Their priority list includes demanding homestead land, job cards, old age pension, other compensatory benefits and proper implementation of the Annapurna and Antyodaya food security schemes.

## 2. The MVM and its association with the CBO

The MVM emerged out of the social movements



of the 1970s. Musahari block in Muzaffarpur district was engulfed in naxalite activism at the time. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Loknayak Jai Prakash Narayan (JP) camped in the block, bringing peace to the area. An analysis of the root causes of the prevailing volatile situation led to the formulation of a comprehensive area plan known as the Musahari Plan, which sought to address the growing socio-economic imbalances. The MVM was formed under JP's chairmanship to harness local initiatives and he remained its chairman until his death.

MVM was registered in 1972 and worked for the welfare of the local people, with a special focus on the most marginalised. It promoted gram sabha meetings in all the villages of Musahari block, making special efforts to include members of the excluded communities. It focused the attention of the people on developing their villages and including the marginalized in the process. Villagers got pattas for their farm and homestead land as a result of its thrust, among them many dalits.

Musahars and other dalit communities were the prime focus from the beginning. The MVM became the nodal agency of the Bihar government, its responsibilities including managing the industries department in the district, which it has been doing for the past 26 years. The Planning Commission seconded the MVM to select 23 villages in the district for its Whole Village Development Programme (WVDP) and manage the programme for five years. This initiative laid the foundation for the country's Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).

### 3. History and genesis of the CBO

The membership of the Musahar Vikas Manch was limited to 75 villages before the PACS project was initiated. The project scaled the coverage up to 248 villages, with the CBO

launching a special membership drive that was not limited to Musahars but included all dalits, especially women.

The Musahar Vikas Manch of Kalua panchayat in Salaiya block was formed by the CBO's facilitators Munni and Vasundhara, who understood the MVM's values and philosophy. They mobilised the community, discussing their caste-based social exclusion to overcome their fear. The local collective was networked with the other CBOs in a federal structure at the panchayat, block, district and state levels through its elected representatives.

The Musahar community meets regularly to formulate collective action plans to address issues of discrimination and improving the quality of life of Musahar families. Programmes like the MGNREGS are seen as an opportunity to work with dignity in their own village and earn a livelihood. The village-level CBO draws strength from the federation, its openness bringing other communities like the Paswans to swell its ranks to confront the feudal forces in the village and ensure access to the resources, services and benefits of government programmes.

### 4. Organisation of the collective

The CBO was organised at the village level to enrol every Musahar family as its members. Most members are women, although a large number of men also participate in the meetings. Each village elects its president and secretary and the CBO has well defined bye-laws, which were published in *Antodaya*, a quarterly magazine<sup>1</sup> brought out by the CSO.

The network of CBOs are spread across Bihar with adult men and women of the Musahar community as members. The network has village or ward-level units wherever 20 or more members are registered. Six representatives from villages in the panchayat form a panchayat-level committee while two members from each panchayat or ward in the block form a block or

<sup>1</sup>Antodaya Traimasiki, issue July- September, 2012, page 4-8.

town-level unit. The district-level unit has two representatives from each block while the apex state-level unit is formed by two representatives from each district. Half the seats in the committees at all levels are reserved for women. Each member pays a Rs2 membership fee.

The executive committee at each level has 7 to 11 members elected for a two-year term with a president, general secretary and treasurer, one of these posts - either president or secretary being reserved for women. The village/panchayat and ward-level committees meet once a month and district and state level committees meet twice a year. The quorum, decision-making process and roles of the office bearers are well defined. The bylaws also propose an advisory committee where people of different religions and castes who believe in the cause and are willing to support the network can be invited.

## 5. Leadership and its style

The leaders of the CBO are leaders of the Musahar community. Vasu Dev Sa, the previous district president, had set up the village units, identifying local leaders and networking the units with the block and district. The village/panchayat unit leaders elect the office bearers at the district and state level, the criteria for selection being literacy level, honesty, and mobility to interact with block/district officials. The state meeting of the CBO network was last held on November 7, 2015 to elect a new executive committee.

## 6. Organisational culture and values

The organisation is democratic in its functioning and clear about its purpose and objectives, defined by a senior leader as follows: "The Musahar community should attain equal social, economic and political status by attaining education, articulating its needs in public gatherings like the gram sabha and realising its rights." JP's 'whole village development' ideology and 'life with dignity' have percolated down to the CBO members. The CSO workers have ingrained positive values lifting the Musahars out of low

self-esteem and making them confident to collectively demand their rights with panchayats and government officials. It is said JP nominated Ram Phal Mahto as president of the CSO to send a positive message to the cadre that the dalit movement should be led by dalits. The same culture is followed by the current leaders of the organisation.

## 7. The CBO's relationship with the CSO

The CSO believes the CBO should be in the vanguard of the movement, its role being to offer support. The two organisations have an organic relationship to promote JP's vision of a just society. The CBO leaders are groomed by the CSO through regular trainings and interactions, with resource support from the PACS projects. The CSO also ensures state-level visibility of the CBO with the networks of other districts.

## 8. Important processes related to the CBO

**Building awareness about acts/schemes:** The understanding the Musahars develop about acts/schemes to improve the socio-economic condition of SC/ST families helps them to identify areas where interventions are possible to access the available benefits. The fraternity and strong group identity empowers them to act collectively against discrimination.

**Addressing livelihood/homestead issues:** Schemes like the MGNREGS generate employment/wages for the poor in the village itself, enabling them to live with dignity. Another issue the CBO is active in at the state-level is getting homestead land for Musahars because their hamlets are small and there is not enough land to build new homes for sons and daughters who marry and move out of the joint family.

**Improving the delivery of basic services:** Musahars face discrimination in accessing the services of anganwadis, schools (mid-day meals), health centres etc. The CSO builds collective pressure on the government to improve delivery, monitoring the quality of services, meeting block-level officials, and protesting against discriminatory practices.

Exposure visits to build capacity: The village leaders are taken on exposure visits to successful collectives to build their confidence. They also participate in state-level initiatives to ensure their local issues become state-level concerns, building their communication and negotiating skills.



Promoting inclusion: The CBO brings dalits other than Musahars into its fold to promote solidarity among all deprived groups and build their collective strength. The integration process is sometimes difficult, as in the case of the paswans, who have been kept out of the mahadalit category by the state government.

## 9. Key outcomes and impacts

Some of the key outcomes of the CBO's interventions include the following:

- The CBO of Kalua village filed a demand for work under the MGNREGS and participated in drafting the scheme's annual panchayat plan. This resulted in a Rs 8.84 lakh infrastructural project to construct a 1.5km-long canal to prevent flooding in the village during the monsoon. The project generated employment for Musahar and other dalit families. Bank accounts were opened for those who had MGNREGS cards but no bank accounts,

thus linking many families to the Jandhan Yojana.

- The CBO also monitors the services of the anganwadi and primary school, ensuring that dalit students get proper mid-day meals and improving the quality of their education.
- The group also put pressure to conduct a social audit of the MGNREGS, which led to a conflict with the panchayat pradhan. More than 50 women joined the protest in front of the block development office against delayed payments. They locked the office to build pressure on the block development officer to release more than three months' payment and address other discrepancies. The payment was released and new work was also started.
- The CBO got 10 of its members appointed as mates (work supervisors) in Salaiya block. Similarly, it got a Musahar woman engaged as a cook for the mid-day meal in Kalua village so that dalit children could get equal attention and care in the mid-day meal.

### Munni Devi - amasiha of musahar women

Munni Devi is a committed and long-time MVM worker. The CSO's PACS programme in 97 villages of three blocks in Muzaffarpur district is supervised by her. She has played a vital role in strengthening the Musahar CBOs in different villages.

Her organisational slogan is 'Ladenge to jeetenge' (We will win only if we fight). She shares information on government schemes and the provisions of different acts the dalits and marginalised. MGNREGS is one of the important programmes for musahar women to seek employment with dignity in their own village.

When Munni Devi saw that wage payments under the MGNREGS were being delayed, she called on the women MGNREGS workers of the CBOs to camp at the district collector's official premises with their chulhas and cooking vessels. The women gathered in large numbers with their children, cooking food and staying put till the



collector agreed to release the payments within a week and promised to open new work opportunities under the MGNREGS.

She was once threatened for exposing corruption in the MGNREGS. In one of the panchayats where she facilitated a social audit, the village mukhiya who was the panchayat president physically scuffled with her to stall the audit process. She filed an FIR with the police and fearlessly continued with the audit. The mukhiya had to return the amount he had embezzled from the MGNREGS funds following pressure from the district administration.

She once sheltered with a musahar family when it was raining heavily. She found the pulse that was being cooked to be of very poor quality. She protested to the PDS shopowner and later locked the store with the help of CBO members. It remained locked for 21 days until the administration looked into the matter and supplied better quality rations thereafter.

In another incident, a young musahar boy was killed by an influential upper caste person. The police did not take up the matter under the influence of the offender's family. Munni Devi visited several villages and mobilised musahar leaders to protest the child's death. 'Treat the dead child as your own child' was her message. A large number of dalit men and women gathered in the village where the child had died. They stayed a couple of days under trying circumstances- mosquitos, inadequate food and unsafe water- to protest against police inaction. An FIR was finally registered and the culprit was sent to jail.

Musahar women mention her name with pride because of her courage and because she is an inspiration for the villagers. There are many Munni Devis emerging in different villages.

## 10. Capacity building efforts of the CSO

The CSO provides hand-holding support to the CBOs with the help of experienced and trained workers. It has a block-level facilitator who visits the villages on a weekly schedule, attends the monthly meetings, and provides information on schemes. They are also available on phone to give information and provide guidance on procedures

for applying for benefits. They quickly reach the village in case of any emergency.

## 11. Role of the CSO in the emergence of the CBO as a strong institution

There CSO is clear about its role - supporting the cause of the Musahars and other dalits by building their organisation and capacity and linking them with state-level processes. Its efforts are directed to building a networked CBO at the district level to address issues at the macro level. But it also strengthens the village-level CBOs to address issues of discrimination in the villages. The struggles at the village level are quite intense, often leading to personal animosities. It strives to give positive energy to such conflicts by counselling the community as well as building pressure on the government to ensure justice and equity in programme implementation.

## 12. External opportunities and constraints

The following opportunities and constraints are visualised by the CSO and CBO:

### Opportunities

- The ruling government's leadership emerged from the JP movement, so there is a greater focus on addressing the poverty and social exclusion of dalits and backward classes. This has created the opportunity to select educated youth from the dalit and backward communities as Vikas Mitra in each village. This positive discrimination in favour of the dalits is likely to continue.
- The Musahar Vikas Manchis supported by a Dalit Action Network of CSOs so it has been able to build a strong identity in more than 17 districts, including Muzzafarpur. Many village-level issues, such as homestead land for dalits, are macro-level issues that the state-level fraternity is in a better position to address.

### Threats

- The CSO does not have multiple funding sources so there is the possibility that the



field-based support of its facilitators will decline. But, being a value-driven and low-cost organisation, it will definitely try to sustain its efforts.

- The organisational leaders who believed in Gandhian and JP values are getting older. New energy and resources are required to sustain the work of the organisation at the macro level and scale up its efforts.
- The central government thrust to reduce subsidies, leading to decreasing allocation and release of funds under the MGNREGS, will significantly affect the CBO's functioning. However, the poor implementation of the RTE act will generate several issues for campaigning and public interest litigation (PIL).

### 13. Sustainability of the CBO

The CBO is reasonably sustainable due to the formalisation of its structure at the block and district levels, and the clear rules and procedures laid down. With a large membership of about 12,000 Musahars and other dalits in the state-

level network, there is critical mass to engage with the administration. The Rs2 membership fee creates a fund for future expenditure. Most of the CSO staff are from the dalit or backward communities and the CBO leaders are also dalits/Musahars, so they have a personal stake and commitment to change the power equation with the upper castes and improve their economic status. So there is a strong natural desire to sustain the CBO and the mentoring support of the CSO.

### 14. Future plans of the CBO

The CBO of Kalua village plans to engage further with the MGNREGS. There is a leadership challenge within the current group, with the Musahar women wanting the paswan women to join the CBO. So a change is imperative, with a new president elected.

The CBO plans to intensify its struggle for homestead land for dalit families, promised by the current government in its election manifesto. Along with the state-level network, it will try to ensure this land is distributed to its members in an equitable manner.



Case Study : CBO - Lok Sangharsh Samiti  
CSO - Samagra Shikshan Evam Vikas Sanstha  
Location : West Champaran, Bihar

*Theme : Land and MGNREGA*

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### 1. The context

It was in Champaran that Gandhiji began the Indian leg of his journey almost a hundred years ago. Today, the district is divided into East and West Champaran. Launching his first satyagraha from here, Gandhiji brought the plight of indigo cultivators in the area into national focus highlighting the atrocities rich zamindars and the British committed on poor tenant farmers. In the 1950s, Acharya Vinoba Bhave carried out his bhoodan land reform movement in the area, campaigning with rich landlords to voluntarily donate land for redistribution among landless farmers. If the bhoodan movement focused on bringing about a change of heart and behaviour of rich landowners, the Jayaprakash Narayan movement for land reform in the 1970s organised dalits and other backward castes (OBCs), including women of these communities, to fight for their land rights, with dalit men and women giving leadership to the movement.

Drawing inspiration from the JP movement, a small group of youth set up the Samagra Shikshan Evam Vikas Sanstha (SSEVS) in Bettiah, West Champaran. Registered in 1990, the civil society organisation (CSO) sees itself as continuing Champaran's "political history of struggle".

The focus of SSEVS's work is land rights and the

rights of those displaced by the changing course of the Budhi Gandak or Sikrahanariver and its over 150 streams flowing from the Himalayas. This river has wreaked havoc in the region by inundating people's land and houses every time it changed course. The organisation works with the dalit community as well as scheduled tribes (ST), muslims and other backward communities. Dalits make up the bulk (almost 50,000) of the population displaced by the Sikrahanar or affected by the land ceiling law. Muslims make up 17% of the population of West Champaran according to the 2001 census, their numbers significantly larger in Siwan district where they make up around 27% of the population.

Under the land ceiling act, an individual or family can own up to 10 acres. Any land in excess of 10 acres is taken from the holder and redistributed to landless tenant farmers. The Bihar government acquired some excess land and distributed it among the landless in 2001. Unfortunately, several thousand dalits and muslims are denied access to the land granted to them even today.

Bihar passed the Zamindari Act in 1949 and the Land Reform Law in 1950. "But due to pressure from the land owners, the laws could not be implemented until September 9, 1970," writes Gandhian journalist Prabhat Kumar (<http://www.mkgandhi.org>). "This means the

excess land was kept by the zamindars for 20 years and during this period they transferred land on a large scale in fake names. They created religious trusts, orchards, etc and in most cases managed to keep the land in their own possession.”

The state government issued land entitlement documents to thousands of landless peasants following the land reforms. While a few got possession, most ran up against a network of powerful and corrupt zamindars. Today, hundreds of land-related cases are pending in the courts.

## 2. SSEVS and its association with LokSangharshSamiti

The SSEVS believes legal ownership of land is key to empowering landless farmers and ensuring food security. It helped form the Lok Sangharsh Samiti, a community-based organisation (CBO) that mobilises landless farmers to fight for their right to land and is active in 200 villages across seven blocks in Bihar. The SSEVS supports the samiti in building the capacity of the landless to sustain their struggle, its legal aid cell helping with land-related court cases.

The samiti also advocates the rights of people displaced by seasonal floods again mostly dalits and muslims living precariously near the riverbeds. Its agenda includes ensuring that government schemes like the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) and MGNREGS are implemented in a transparent and equitable manner.

SSEVS activists live in the villages themselves, working with local samiti leaders to develop long-term strategies to challenge the nexus of corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, police, and zamindars. The samiti also networks with the Jan Mukti Sangharsh Samiti, a platform for CBOs fighting for land rights, its members joining rallies and demonstrations organised by the network.

## 3. History and genesis of the CBO

The LokSangharshSamiti was formed in 2002 in

Pakariya village of Nautan block in West Champaran district. In its early phase, the CBO raised a fund of Rs38,000 to support the campaign of a candidate from the socially excluded community in the state elections. When its candidate lost, the samiti and the SSEVS concluded they would have to engage with the community over the long term to sustain its struggle for land rights and social inclusion.

By 2012, the samiti scaled up its operations to 46 gram panchayats (comprising 200 villages) across seven blocks, six located in West Champaran district and one in neighbouring Siwan district.

## 4. Organisation of the collective

The LokSangharshSamiti focuses on two issues: implementation of the MGNREGS and land rights, both campaigns seeking to ensure food security for its target communities. It is organisationally structured in a federated hierarchy of committees from the ward/majra to the district level, the numbers at each level being roughly as follows, depending on the number of wards and panchayats:

- Ward or majra level 30 to 35 members
- Panchayat level 18 members
- Block level 15 members
- District level 21 members (in West Champaran)

Each level has a coordinator, assistant coordinator and treasurer who represent the unit at the next level, meaning the ward office bearers represent it at the panchayat level and so on up to the district level.

## 5. Leadership and its style

As the SSEVS says, “Short-term service delivery programmes only create aspirations among the beneficiaries but never help in creating community leadership.” So the thrust is for a leadership rooted in the community that's committed to the organisation's long-term vision, the process encouraging leadership from the



bottom up. Take the case of Sohan Ram. He is today the assistant coordinator of West Champaran district and was earlier the coordinator of Bagaha 1 block. Ram is a fourth generation resident of Salaha village. "I was born here and now I work with my people for our land entitlements," he says. Ram's family has been residing in the dalit quarter for almost a hundred years, his forefathers tilling the land of Amriteshwar Singh, the local zamindar but getting very little in return all these years. They don't even have the title deeds to their homestead in their hamlet.

Ram leads the villagers in their struggle, organising sit-in demonstrations at the district magistrate's office, appearing in court in numerous legal cases for land rights and fronting the non-violent struggle against the zamindar.

The CBO's multi-pronged struggle has so far managed to get land pattas for 25 of the 72 applications filed by the residents of Salaha Bariarwagram panchayat. The big fight is against the powerful zamindar who exercises his right over 300 acres of land, although 167 landless families have already been granted one-acre plots out of this holding. But not one of these families has been able to lay foot on their land despite having the legal title deeds.

The samiti organised a *bhoomisatyagraha* on June 25, 2015 in the Gandhian tradition, with the land allottees and their leaders sowing paddy on 30 acres of the disputed land. On November 3, 2015, they came with sickles to harvest the paddy. They had harvested about 100 quintals when policemen reached the spot and forcibly removed

Policemen have erected a hut (left) and keep guard of the standing paddy and sugarcane crops (right)



them from the field. The charge was stealing the crop belonging to the zamindar. The court ordered a halt to harvesting in the entire 167-acre land parcel till the case was resolved. About 200 quintals of paddy remain unharvested.

While the community had sown 30 acres of paddy, the zamindar had sugarcane planted in the remaining acreage. The only satisfaction the community draws from all this is that the zamindar, too, cannot harvest the sugarcane crop following the court order. The money earned from selling the 100 quintals of paddy is being channelled into the legal battle, with 12 cases levelled against the farmers, including attempted murder. They are fighting the cases under the samiti banner, strictly abiding by court orders.

"Ours is a non-violent struggle," emphasises Ram. "We will never break the law or go against the court order."

For its part, the SSEVS is working in collaboration with the Bihar NavNirman Sena to strengthen the Panchayati Raj system, making people aware of the need to vote for those who can genuinely be their voice at the state and national level, its thrust being to create an environment for the emergence of strong local leaders.

## 6. Organisational culture and values

The LokSangharsh Samiti's organisational culture is democratic and strictly non-violent in the Gandhian tradition. The CBO and SSEVS believe in abiding by the law and following rules, taking their struggle to the district authorities and urging them to implement policies and government orders. The route is: written applications, community demands for fair implementation of government policies, especially in cases where they are fighting for 100 days of work under the MGNREGS and speedy payment as stipulated.

## 7. The CBOs relationship with the CSO

The LokSangharsh Samiti has an organic relationship with the SSEVS, enacting the CSO's vision on the ground, with the latter providing the

guidance and legal support for the battle against the combined might of the rich landowners, politicians and police. SSEVS functionaries are always present, lending tacit support in critical situations, like sowing paddy on the disputed land and harvesting the crop to exercise their ownership rights in defiance of the zamindar.

The organic linkage extends to the membership of the two organisations, making it difficult to distinguish the CSO from the CBO. For example, the role of the CSO preraks (campaign educators) is to inform the community about their entitlements flowing from government schemes MGNREGS, the public distribution system (PDS), the SC/ST Act, women's education and the RTI. But they are also dalits from the village who are with the samiti in its fight to access title deeds to their one-acre plots.

## 8. Important processes related to the CBO

**MGNREGS :** Employment under the MGNREGS is important for the sustenance of families. The scheme works well in some blocks, providing 100 days of employment and timely payments. Other blocks are engaged in a bitter struggle for work and release of delayed payments.

For example, in Dushad Patti village in Nautan block, 18 community members were not paid for work done two years ago. The samiti pursued the matter persistently with the authorities until the MGNREGS programme officer passed the order in January 2015 to pay the 18 workers the outstanding sum of Rs2,91,600. At that time, the labour rate was Rs162 per day; today, it is Rs177 per day. The struggle was led by the samiti coordinator Hiralal Paswan, the only member of the community who is educated while the others are barely literate.

In Dushad Patti and other villages where the samiti is active, farm labour is the mainstay, with rich landowners hiring villagers to work on their land for a paltry Rs30-40 for a day's work, that too only at the time of sowing and harvesting. So the MGNREGS wage rate of Rs 177 per day is a lifeline for the community, which is why the

scheme figures prominently in the CBO's agenda of demanding non-discriminatory employment under the programme and timely payment.

**Land entitlements :** The Lok Sangharsh Samiti fights the battle against powerful landlords to



The wall writing makes a demand for occupation of land granted by the government

claim the title deeds for its members both on the ground and in court. In addition, it also follows up a government promise to grant four decimals of homestead land for those affected by the Sikrahanariver's changing course. Its efforts led to 53 families in Nautan block receiving the homestead land but the struggle is still on in Chaubariya village of Bagaha 1 block.

**Education of out-of-school children:** Chaubariya has an education promotion centre to serve the poorest of poor children who remain out-of-school because of poverty. It has enrolled 30 adolescent girls who receive formal education and skill development, making it a unique opportunity for the girls to get back into the education stream.

## 9. Key outcomes and impacts

The samiti's efforts, backed by the SSEVS, have led to several successes in procuring land earmarked for the economically and socially excluded families. They have together supported many landless families in taking their court cases

forward:

- In the SiswaMangalpurMusahartola (Yogapatti block), 66 dalittitle deed holders were granted 33 acres of land for agricultural purposes.
- In Ratwalvillage (Bagaha 1 block), 250 families more than half of them muslim got one acre of land each.
- A bitter struggle is being fought at present in Badhgajwa village against a big landowner who controls over 5,000 acres. Several cases have been registered against him, but only 1,200 acres are being disputed since the rest of the land is owned by the zamindar's family in the name of a religious trust.
- In Chaubariya village, people did not know about the MGNREG Sbefore the samiti began working there three years ago.

A social audit of development work was conducted in Salha village of Bagaha block, the first experience of the villagers in demanding accountability. The audit covered the work done under the MGNREGS as well as other development schemes. It revealed that 24 toilets were reported built in the panchayat documents but did not exist on the ground. There was evidence of fake muster rolls and lower payments for MGNREGS work. The villagers protested against lack of transparency in the MGNREGS process, accusing the sarpanch and secretary of keeping the job cards with them and forcing the woman sarpanch to release pending legitimate wages amounting to Rs1.5 lakh. The gram sabha decided to repeat the audit process, realising its importance in monitoring village development expenditures.

#### 10. Capacity building efforts by the CSO

The SSEVS carries out capacity building exercises on a regular basis to empower the CBO. It mobilises local leadership, organises skill-development and awareness sessions on land issues and legal, and also runs a legal aid cell for

land-related court cases, which encourages the community to take their cases forward on their own, with support from the CSO as and when required.

##### One village tells a thousand stories

One village has been fighting for access to land for 10 years. Ninety families from the village received land entitlement documents from the government in 2002. They cultivated their land, but when the crop was ready for harvesting, the most influential zamindar family had their crop burnt. The zamindars lodged a case against the 90 families, claiming they were sharecroppers who had burnt the crop.

In 2007, the Patna High Court rejected the land documents presented by the families as evidence in their favour, instead ordering the district magistrate (DM) to settle the issue amicably. So far, after 22 settlement sittings, the DM participating in only four, the case is still pending.

Amar Das, a village leader, credits the SSEVS for supporting the 90 families. Around the time the crop-burning incident took place, a government programme had fortuitously brought the SSEVS to the area. The villagers saw their banner supporting the cause of landless farmers. They approached the organization, which organized a series of meetings and trainings, helping the farmers understand the legal nuances better.

According to Amar Das, the families now know how to take the issue forward both in the courts and on the ground.

Source : SSEVS documents

#### 11. The role of the CSO in the emergence of the CBO as a strong institution

The CSO encourages the LokSangharshSamiti to network with other groups fighting for the land entitlements of excluded communities. Villagers from Chaubariya said they even went to Patna, 200km away, to participate in a mega rally in March 2014 on behalf of the samiti. The rally was organised by the Jan MuktiSangharshVahini, an umbrella organisation of CBOs working on land entitlements.



## 12. External opportunities and constraints

The degree of exclusion of the communities is so sharp it is difficult to point out where the opportunities lie. One small window of opportunity is the government programme for women's education, which the CBO rightly focuses on, facilitating access to education of young girls in villages. It feels more and more women need to be educated empowered to join the community struggle for dignity and entitlement.

The constraints are many. Illiteracy and lack of job opportunities affect the everyday existence of the community while bigger barriers are posed by social inequity resulting from centuries of tradition. The biggest constraint is the big landowners' fear of losing cheap labour. They own large tracts of land and need labour during critical seasons so their game-plan is to keep costs low by paying subsistence wages. They find ready support from the upper castes spread across the services in the police, government and political power. This is exactly what the colonial masters did 100 years ago when Gandhiji came to the region to take up the struggle of indigo farmers.

## 13. Sustainability of the CBO

The CBO's potential to sustain itself is rooted in its leadership, which comes from within the community, not externally. The samiti does lean on the SSEVS for guidance and capacity building even today, but its organic relationship with the CSO is also a key element to sustain its efforts in

the long term. The samiti depends on the SSEVS for strength and support while the SSEVS needs the samiti to take forward its agenda of creating a more equitable society.

## 14. Future plans of the CBO

The future plan of the CBO is to focus more on ensuring that communities displaced by rivers are compensated according to government guidelines. It plans to substantially increase the number of applications filed by community members to regularise their ownership of homestead land.

In the immediate future in Bagaha 1 block, the organisation plans to go on a mass fast to draw attention to the government's inability to help the community gain access to the land that is theirs only on paper as of now.





Case Study : CBO - The Chhattisgarh Viklang Manch

CSO - Chaupal Gramin Vikas Prashikshan Evam Shodh  
Sansthan

Location : Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh

*Theme : MGNREGA, Nutrition*

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### 1. The context

Sarguja, Surajpur and Korba are among the predominantly tribal districts in the north-eastern part of the Chhattisgarh region that fall under the fifth schedule of the constitution. Adjoining Jharkhand to the north, the region is severely underdeveloped, with a high incidence of disability in its population, despite its abundant natural bounty, a characteristic of most tribal regions in the country. Chaupal, a civil society organisation (CSO) with a focus on the rights of tribal communities, felt the need to actively intervene on the disability front in these districts. As a first step, it sought to identify persons with disability (PWDs), seeking the help of existing support networks in the region to widen its search into remote tribal areas. Among them was the Right to Food campaign network of Action Aid, which facilitated its CSO partners to help Chaupal identify and mobilise PWDs in Sarguja and the adjoining districts, even extending financial support to the organisation.

Meetings of PWDs were organised across the region, the costs being jointly funded by Action Aid and Chaupal. Six to seven leaders were chosen from among the participating PWDs in each district for leadership roles. Some of them dropped out while others became active. Similarly, some districts became more active than others while some participated only on specific

issues. The most active districts in the network were Sarguja, Korba, Surajpur and Jaspur, possibly due to Chaupal's direct reach into this region.

### 2. Evolution of the Chhattisgarh Viklang Manch

The genesis, development and evolution of the Chhattisgarh Viklang Manch are closely intertwined with Chaupal's interactions with the community-based organisation (CBO) through its interventions in the affected districts. The CSO strategically supports the manch in many of its interventions, irrespective of the nature and scope of its core funding. For instance, it extends support to the CBO through its nutrition and MGNREGS-focused PACS interventions.

Once leaders in each district were identified, the CSO mobilised its field facilitators in its on-going programmes in the districts to identify more PWDs in the villages. Crucially during this period, the facilitators sought to orient the PWDs, focusing their discussions on societal attitudes towards the disabled and related issues, the aim being to change their attitude, self-image and mind-set about themselves. The process included taking the potential leaders identified at the district and block level on exposure visits to different areas in the region to widen their perspective and understanding.

This phase of identifying and orienting PWDs and potential leaders lasted for three to four years and was carried out at the district and block levels. Identification and enumeration at the village level is still an on-going process.

Chaupal's PACS interventions, the vehicle of its interactions with the manch, focused on the rights of tribal communities and their exclusion from society and governmental aid/development programmes. The CSO's values inevitably influenced the manch to adopt a rights-based approach in its work. So while the Action Aid support helped in identifying PWDs, making them aware of the social issues around disability, and strengthening the CBO's structure and organisation, the PACS focus on tribal rights emphasised access to disability pensions, employment in the MGNREGS, and disability-targeted benefits in other schemes.

The manch has an organisational structure at the district and block level so it takes a macro-level approach, seeking to influence the functioning of disability-centric schemes and benefits at the district level. It targets the medical board that certifies disability for qualifying for these schemes and benefits, the department of social justice, the employment guarantee scheme (EGS) etc at the district level, while it advocates larger issues, such as legal provisions for employment, at the state level. Its reach is extensive, being active in around 660 villages across Sarguja, Surajpur, Korba, Jaspur and some of the adjoining districts.

### 3. Organisation and norms of the CBO

Any PWD can become a member of the manch. The CBO has district and block units with convenors as well as clusters with a point person. The block-level team comprises five to seven persons. Many of the district, block and cluster-level leaders are economically independent, even if marginally, working in agriculture, minor economic activities such as owning a shop, or employed in jobs. They are assigned leadership roles on the strength of their articulation and willingness to shoulder responsibilities.

The CBO holds quarterly meetings at the district level, with the block and district convenors participating along with some cluster-level convenors. There is no structured mechanism to respond to PWDs seeking support in villages. In practice, it's easier for them to reach out to the cluster and block representatives, who serve as a link between the village and district. The district convenors focus on advocacy at the district level, supported by the block and cluster representatives.

The CBO's village-level base demonstrates its strength, when required, in negotiating a better deal with the administration. Village-level leaders provide support when large-scale mobilisation is needed or in specific cases requiring district-level support. Some of them have become impressively empowered to deal with the administration for themselves or other PWDs who seek their help. However, they do not play a significant role in the organisation, with the district leaders performing the key functions of the CBO.

Most PWDs find it difficult to take up responsibilities in the CBO, given their economic condition and extreme exclusion. Most are caught up in day-to-day survival activities for their families. Social support is low and mobility limited. So it is the district leaders who play a central role in the CBO's operations, with one or two key leaders being paid by Chaupal, which frees them from livelihood activities and compensates them for the time and effort they devote to the CBO.

The district leadership has grown out of an evolutionary process, with district convenors having spent many years with the CBO and undergoing a series of capacity-building trainings. There are two to three convenor-level leaders in each district who have the capability to deal with the district administration, ably supported by some block and cluster-level leaders.

Given the challenges of organising and mobilising PWDs, the CBO takes a more macro-

level approach in its work, focusing on improving access to PWD schemes and streamlining the delivery of key services by mounting pressure on the district administration.

Chaupal has formal as well as informal mechanisms for supporting the CBO. It identifies PWDs in its areas of intervention and engages with them through its field facilitators and programmes to link them to the manch. It currently underwrites most of the meeting costs and other expenses, with manch members only paying their own travel costs for specific celebratory events at the district level such as 'Disability day'. Chaupal also pays for the full-time employment of one of the manch's key PWD leaders and funds the quarterly meeting of the manch in Surajpur, Korba, Sarguja and other districts.

#### 4. Capacity building of the CBO

Chaupal undertook capacity-building of the CBO network leaders three to four years back. The focal issues during these orientations largely dealt with reducing social discrimination and mainstreaming the PWDs. Following the trainings, the PWDs took on leadership roles in the emerging CBO, conducting trainings/orientations of block-level and cluster leaders, the focus being on accessing PWD schemes and disability cards. In addition, occasional structured trainings are also conducted on government programmes targeting PWDs. The manch currently also undertakes annual one-day orientations of key members on schemes and other relevant issues.

Meetings are organised once every three months at the district, block and cluster levels. Solutions are sought for the issues discussed, which include discriminatory practices prevalent in society. Senior leaders also facilitate capacity building sessions for block and cluster-level leaders during these meetings. But capacity building is largely done through on-the-job learning while doing and regular interactions. CBO leaders have the freedom to expedite work on their own and this on-the-job experience gains them valuable

insights on how to deal with issues as well the administration.

Some of the key capacity building processes undertaken are summarized below:

**Identifying PWD leaders in the districts :** PWDs were invited as important campaign stakeholders to the district-level meetings organised by Action Aid's Right to Food and its network partners. Potential PWD leaders were identified to play a future role in the manch.

**CSO-supported capacity building :** These potential leaders were trained with the objective of building up their confidence and self-image as well as their understanding of the processes of social exclusion and discrimination.

**Forming and expanding the manch :** The leaders went about the task of building a base for the CBO at the village, cluster and block levels. The Chaupal programmes facilitated the identification of PWDs in villages and promoted their engagement with the manch. Gradually, the reach of the CBO extended over 660 villages across seven to eight districts. However, it is active only in those districts where Chaupal has a direct presence through its programmes. The other district units become active only when the need arises for mass mobilisation and pressure building.

**Adopting a macro-level approach :** CBO leaders play a key role in district-level operations, particularly in the disability certification process. The block and cluster members connect the PWDs with the district leaders. The CSO's field programmes continue to support the CBO in identifying and engaging with the PWDs, thereby strengthening it and enabling it to expand its reach to what is a relatively invisible target audience.

**Collective actions by the district units :** The district units join hands for collective action on issues that cut across district boundaries, engaging and mobilising even the not-so-active district units of the CBO. These issues include the appointment of PWDs to reserved seats and railway/travel passes for PWDs.



## 5. Key outcomes

**Struggle against discrimination of PWDs:** The CBO has been taking up issues of social discrimination of PWDs since its inception. It has built a network of leaders with a deep understanding of the processes of social exclusion and supports the PWDs in their continued struggle against injustice.

**Improving PWD certification :** The CBO interventions have sharpened the focus on the rights and entitlements of PWDs, empowering them and improving the functioning of the medical board and its delivery of PWD certification, particularly in districts such as Sarguja and Surajpur where it is relatively more active. The board in Sarguja has regularised its sittings to two days in the week and shifted its operations from the first floor of the district hospital to the ground floor on the initiative of the CBO. It is still a challenge to ensure fair practices by the board, but the CBO takes up and pursues all complaints that reach it.

**Improving the delivery of assistive aids/ equipment :** The CBO engages with the department of social justice that provides assistive aids to PWDs, connecting those who need these aids with the department and organising distribution camps where both the department and the PWDs participate.

**Facilitating access to the MGNREGS:** The CBO acts against social discrimination of PWDs and their unequal access to government schemes. In addition, it demands that PWDs are provided employment under the MGNREGS, engaging with the district administration to find appropriate employment avenues. One CBO member even performed the allotted work before district officials to demonstrate that most PWDs are capable of taking up work under the scheme.

The CBO filed an RTI (Right to Information) application in Baihayavan block of Surajpur district in 2013-14 to find out how many PWDs had received employment under the scheme. The administration claimed in its reply that 17 PWDs were provided employment.

**Improving employment opportunities :** The mandatory provision for 3% reservation for PWDs in government jobs under the PWD Act 1995 was not followed by Chhattisgarh Vyapam (which conducts recruitment tests for government departments) in an advertised examination for teachers in 2011. The CBO took up the issue, organising a meeting within 24 hours of the release of the advertisement. It mobilized 1,200 PWDs from different districts and organized a public agitation in Raipur, seeking a commitment from the chief minister to ensure compliance with the statutory reservation for PWDs. As a result, the conditions for recruitment were revised and reservation for the PWDs was ensured, with some CBO leaders getting jobs as teachers.

The CBO also presented a memorandum to the state government to fill up all vacant seats meant for PWDs. Acting on the memorandum, the government is now regularly updating PWD positions and making serious efforts to recruit PWDs.

The CBO also worked to reduce the Vyapam examination fees for PWDs, with the current charges being Rs300 against Rs500 for other applicants.

**Ensuring travel concessions :** Though mandated in the guidelines, the travel concessions for PWD card holders are not observed practices in buses of the state road corporation in Chhattisgarh. The CBO initiated a struggle to operationalise the concessions in Surajpur. It is expected they will come into effect soon. Similarly, subsidized travel passes for train journeys are also not given, though mandated in the policy framework. The CBO has petitioned the Bilaspur railway division to grant these travel concessions and it expects success soon.

**Facilitating a sensitive policy framework :** The CBO has filed a petition with the high court to appoint only PWDs in important positions in the Chhattisgarh Nishakt Jan Aayog.

**Confidence to engage with the administration :** PWDs have been significantly empowered in engaging with the district administration. The

Pooran Ram Choudhary is visually challenged and takes up small musical programmes to make ends meet. He joined the CBO in 2011 and has been an active member since. On several occasions, he has faced demands for bribes from district officials for scheme benefits such as transferring his disability pension or getting payment for his musical services in departmental kala jathas. Pooran constantly fights the demands of the departmental officials and has even complained to district collector on several occasions about such corrupt practices.

formation of CBOs and their collective struggle for entitlements at the block and district levels have brought about a shift in power relations between the PWDs and block/district officials and other public departments such as the medical board, hospitals and department for social justice.

**Sustainability and other challenges :** The CBO is reasonably well organized and independent today. But it is still financially dependent on

Chaupal even eight to ten years after its formation. The CSO continues to pay the salaries of some of its important leaders and supports many of its activities, such as reaching out and disseminating information to PWDs. It will be difficult for the CBO to function independently of Chaupal not just financially but operationally as well, considering that it still depends on the CSO's network to penetrate villages, given its infrastructure is limited to district and block offices. Also, the limited mobility of the PWDs poses an additional challenge to reaching out and involving them in CBO campaigns.

## 5 Future directions

The CBO intends to continue its struggle to improve practices for disability certification. It will also pursue its agenda to improve employment in seats reserved for PWDs and will continue working on rail and road travel concessions for PWDs.

Case Study : CBO - Dalit Sewa Sangathan - Taldevri

CSO - Kalp Samaj Sewa Sanstha

Location : Janjgir Champa, Chhattisgarh

*Theme : MGNREGA*

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### 1. The context

Taldevri is a small village in Chhattisgarh state dominated by the scheduled caste (SC) and other backward caste (OBC) communities. SCs account for 50% of its population of 4,500 residents in 495 households, OBCs for 48%, the remaining 2% being scheduled tribes (ST).

The village has 900 acres of agricultural land, well-constructed houses, a primary health centre (PHC), an anganwadi, primary and secondary schools, ponds and enough common areas. Most of its inhabitants are farmers, growing one crop, usually rice, annually, which is insufficient for their livelihood, so they work as labourers for the rest of the year.

The problem of social discrimination still exists in the village, with not every OBC being comfortable with the SCs. For example, the schools have more SC students than OBC students but the cook who prepares the mid-day meal is from the OBC/general category, since OBC students refuse to eat food prepared by an SC cook. Such discrimination extends to separate ponds for SCs and OBCs and beyond.

### 2. Kalp Samaj Sewa Sanstha and its association with the Dalit Sewa Sangathan

Kalp Samaj Sewa Sanstha was established in

1985 to work with marginalised communities in the field of livelihoods, reproductive health and child protection, educating and empowering the women to work for the development of the community to lift it out of poverty and live a life of dignity. It is active in two districts of Chhattisgarh - Jangir-Champa and Baloda Bazar- addressing the problem of social discrimination faced by the women self-help groups (WSHGs) of the SC community in accessing livelihoods, with a special focus on employment opportunities under the MGNREGS. Its first intervention was opening a school for dalit children, given the rampant poverty and illiteracy of the SC community in the two districts.

Kalp started to work on a PACS project in September 2011, conducting a baseline survey on the basis of which it decided to focus on empowering SC women in 151 villages of Baloda Bazar and Janjgir-Champa districts, out of which 24 CBOs are in Bhamnindhi block of Jangir-Champa district.

Among them is the Dalit Sewa Sangathan, launched by the SC women of Taldevri village in Bhamnindhi block with the support of the Kalp team. The close collaboration saw Kalp helping the sangathan in the registration process and in conducting trainings and organising campaigns.



### 3. History and genesis of the CBO

Prior to Kalp's PACS intervention in 2011, Taldevri had a sarpanch belonging to the Sahu samaj, an OBC community. The OBCs dominated the SCs and STs, the most oppressed being the women, who faced discrimination within their own families as well as socially. Kalp felt the best way to intervene was to work with the women of the village. But the women were not open to interacting with and didn't trust outside visitors. Appreciating the local dynamics, the Kalp team turned to Radha, one of the more vocal and enterprising women it had identified during the baseline survey, to forge an entry point into the village. She readily extended her support to organise the women, gradually bringing them together on the emotive issue of alcohol, which they saw as a core factor in raising social tensions and keeping them bound in poverty. Cutting across community boundaries, all the village women came together for the cause. This is how the Dalit Sewa Sangathan was born.

Post its liquor ban campaign, the sangathan took up other pan-community issues relevant to the entire village population, the focus being on accountability of the panchayat, employment under MNREGS and the general development of the village.

However, the anti-liquor struggle was the initial rallying point. Men brewed liquor at home and sold it to others. The culture of drinking led to squabbles in the evenings and ill-treatment of women and children. It created an environment of fear and violence, generating a general sense of discomfort in the village and breeding other vices such as gambling and betting that ate into a large part of the daily earnings of the men. Children were also getting influenced by these activities. So it isn't surprising that the issue of alcoholism formed the starting point of the CBO's journey.

The journey began with the desire to create a safe environment in the village for women, their daughters and sons and grew into a movement to improve the social and economic conditions of the people. It was not just about building an

organisation but about building a strong self, a fearless and enthusiastic group of middle-aged women undaunted by their drunken menfolk, the sarpanch or the police. Women who were earlier scared to make a stand against oppression in the village now have the courage to organize a meeting with the chief minister, the process of evolution making them more aware of their rights, their power to fight and the purpose of their struggle.

### 4. Organisation of the collective

Formed in 2011 by the village women with support from Kalp, Dalit Sewa Sangathan is presently in the process of registering itself under the societies registration act, having already got a seal prepared. Its initial core was the self-help groups (SHGs) of women from both the SC and OBC communities. They were apprehensive at first, but gradually began discussing and gaining clarity about the purpose and workings of a CBO, eventually deciding to set it up. There were 40 women in the founding group, the number growing to 101 but then falling to the present 55 members.

The reason for the slump in membership after the initial momentum was the controversy over the name of the CBO. The OBC members wanted the CBO to change its name from Dalit Sewa Sangathan to Barapathak Sewa Sangathan to show that membership was also open to OBC women. However, since the seal had already been made and all official work was being done under the original name, the older members didn't want the change so the dissenters dropped out.

### 5. Organisational culture and values

Despite the exodus of OBC women, the membership of the CBO is still open to all communities. It continues to maintain an open and informal culture, with some mutually agreed rules and regulations. The women know each other so they are unafraid to express their opinions, meeting as a group at least once a month, sometimes more frequently, springing to action whenever they feel an issue needs urgent attention and seeking solutions to ensure their

collective welfare. There is no binding obligation to donate money. However, whenever funds are needed, they contribute to a collective pool. There is transparency in everything they do, with meeting records and accounts open to review by one and all.

## 6. Leadership and its style

Radha was the consensus choice of the group for president and Gauri for vice president. They lead and represent the CBO in different forums. The members meet once every month or sometimes more often, depending on convenience and the requirement. A register is maintained to record details of all important meetings.

The first test of their leadership skills was in convincing women to organize themselves into a sangathan and take up their first collective struggle – the anti-liquor campaign. As we saw earlier, this initiative brought the SC and OBC communities together despite their social antipathy. That union set the foundation for the CBO's future operations – to address problems affecting all households in the village and look for solutions collectively.

In the case of the anti-liquor campaign, once the women realized that collective action was the only way to fight for the cause, the leaders strategically decided to go the legal way to deal with the issue because of the risks involved. They first approached the chief minister and the collector to legally ban liquor in the village. Nothing stopped them, not even the absence of outside funding. They collected funds from their members and took the movement forward, working night and day, even travelling by night to reach the chief minister's office early in the morning. It was this enthusiasm to bring about positive change in the village that didn't deter them from the path they had chosen.

Women who were earlier unaware about the structure and workings of a panchayat and did not have the courage to speak up and voice their opinions are today conducting elections from their tola. Five of them are presently members of

the panchayat samiti as village panch. They regularly attend the gram sabhas and encourage others to do so. They ensure the sarpanch is held accountable for work undertaken in the village and have even been successful in getting a sarpanch elected from their community. Today, they are respectable and active members of their community.

The economic condition of the village has improved. Many families now get at least 150 days of employment. This happened after they became aware of the MNREGS programmes targeting vulnerable groups and began to participate in preparing micro plans for these schemes. They also helped mobilise women at the district level to demand work under the scheme.

They have motivated women in other villages to set up their own CBOs. They have also set up a block-level federation as a common platform with a wider perspective to deal with issues affecting all the villages in the block and look for common solutions. Radha is the president of the block-level federation.

## 7. The CBO's relationship with the CSO

The CBO depends on the CSO for building its knowledge and strategies to address issues such as MGNREGS and other social and economic welfare programmes. The CBO, in turn, is part of the CSO's organisational strategy to build pressure at the district level on issues that cannot be resolved at the panchayat level. Many CBO members respond to Kalp's call to participate in dharnas at the block or district level to address various campaign issues.

## 8. Important functional processes of the CBO

The following are the key processes undertaken by the CBO and facilitate its work:

- Getting the women of the village together : It was a tedious task getting the women together initially. A local woman fronted the effort, convincing the others to join. The

women were briefed about the CBO and how to form it. It was a slow process that took months.

A series of meetings and discussions to identify issues for action zeroed in on liquor and the nuisance created by its consumption, which was affecting 95% of the village households. The struggle to ban liquor, funded out of their own meagre pockets, fired the imagination of the village women and the momentum swelled the CBO membership from the initial 40 women to 101 women from both the SC and ST communities.

They set up a 'nigrani samiti', with women venturing out at night to monitor where illicit liquor was being fermented and sold. They searched the houses of suspects, turning them over to the police if evidence was found and getting an enquiry conducted. They later even convinced the sarpanch to accompany them on their patrols. Their militancy attracted attention but also angered many in the village. However, they persisted undaunted.

Today, the village is liquor free. The first intervention by the sangathan, with the support of the government and police, proved to be a success.

- Awareness about entitlements : The CBO helped the villagers become more aware of their rights and entitlement, with its members actively participating in the gram sabha, questioning the sarpanch about development works and demanding accountability for expenditures. They participated in the Jan Adhikar rally organised by Kalp, which handed over 1,100 pending requests under MNREGS from the district to the Lokpal. Of these, 50 were from the village and around 30

families benefited by getting their dues cleared. The CBO also submitted a petition to the MNREGS officer demanding work at the block level for their village and succeeded in making all officials at the village and block level accountable for their work.

- Connecting the village to the block : The CBO currently has 55 members. Many had resigned over the name controversy<sup>1</sup> and the ban liquor movement also had a negative fallout on membership. This was because of pressure exerted by the men of the households who prohibited the women from venturing out at night. The CBO is now active at the block level and has formed an informal block federation where CBO members from different villages come together to discuss wider, block-level issues.

## 9. Key outcomes and impacts

The CBO has evolved into a self-empowered group (SEG) of fearless, action-oriented women who have succeeded in achieving the goals of their interventions, which include:

- Liquor free village: This was the first positive outcome of the CBOs actions. Today, the village is liquor free and time-to-time surprise checks are made to keep it that way.
- More than 150 days employment for 30 families: The CBO's petition to the MGNREGS saw 30 households getting 150 days employment in a year under the scheme, significantly improving their economic status. The group pressure also led to the appointment of the only female mate in the block. The women also participate as resource persons in training programmes and have indirectly motivated

<sup>1</sup>The OBC women wanted the organisation to change its name from "Dalit Sewa Sangathan" to "Barapathak Sewa Sangathan", so that people from OBC could be a part of this. But, since this name was already registered and seal was prepared, none of the old members wanted to change it

women from 10 villages to form the own CBOs.

- Representation at the panchayat: Five CBO members have been elected as village panch, leading to 90% improvement in women's participation in the gram sabha. This has helped put an end to questionable practices such as holding meetings without a quorum or only on paper, without holding the sarpanch accountable. The CBO leaders also mobilised the dalits to get a dalit sarpanch elected. Aware of the Panchayat Act and the sources of funding/resources of the panchayat they have helped make it more accountable for its development works. They are now seeking to intervene in the annual MGNREGS plan of the village panchayat.

## 10. Capacity building efforts of the CSO

Kalp organises trainings, campaigns and rallies on MNREGS, social security schemes, violence against women and the right to information from time to time. These capacity building efforts make the women more aware of government schemes and the way the village panchayat functions. Armed with this knowledge, they can demand accountability from the sarpanch and take action in cases of delays in the work undertaken. Another positive outcome is that some of them contested the panch elections and won, thus gaining a stronger voice in the gram sabha.

## 11. Role of the CSO in the emergence of the CBO as a strong institution

Kalp has a long presence in the district as an organisation supporting the cause of the poor and marginalised. The PACS programme provided the opportunity to scale up its work on the right to employment over a larger geographical area. The Talkhedi CBO is part of the block-level federation of CBOs that is being gradually formed by many CBOs coming together to intervene collectively and put pressure on the administration.

The CSO first provided handholding support to the women to enforce a liquor ban in their village.

Later, it provided information and support to demand work in their panchayat. Kalp's block co-ordinator and local team members belong to the block and many are dalits. So they understand the issues and communicate strongly in the local dialect. The women are also comfortable with the team, arguing issues, asking for information about rules and provisions and demanding support. Kalp orients its local staff through structured trainings and thematic communication material.

At the macro-level, Kalp organises the village CBOs for large scale events and campaigns to demonstrate the collective voice of the dalits and oppressed women at the block and district level and demand implementation of programmes like MGNREGS. Some examples of the campaigns undertaken include:

- A big rally of women from various CBOs organised in September 2013 under the 'demand for work' campaign. 1,100 applications from villages of the block were handed over to the MGNREGS lokpal. The district level ombudsman visited the villages to verify the genuineness of the demand and 1,000 labourers got jobs and payments as a result of the campaign.
- A district-level event was organised in January 2014, with women from five blocks participating. A memorandum highlighting issues affecting the MGNREGS and demanding work under the scheme was handed over to the district collector. The sarpanch and secretaries of the panchayats in these blocks were also invited for the discussions to establish better rapport and understanding among the CBOs and forge their collective strength.
- A district-level rally of more than 600 women was organised in September 2015 to draw attention to the growing number of rapes cases and atrocities on women and young girls in the district and highlight the issue of their safety and security. The women demanded a 'fast-track court' and



'single-stop centre' for the victims to reduce delays in registering cases.

These collective, macro-level efforts boost the morale of dalit women to intensify their struggle through their CBOs. The block and district-level are also an opportunity for the women to interact with officials in an open and transparent environment. As Sadhana, the MGNREGS project officer of the block, observes, "The women visit our office frequently with demands for work or releasing delayed payments. There is great comfort for them as I am a women and the current collector of the district is also a women."

The biggest challenge KALP faces is to sustain the CBO team and ensure its financial viability and working in the post-PACS scenario. Efforts are being made to link up the group with the NRLM to sustain its work.

#### Perfect coordination and joint leadership of Radha and Gauri

Hailing from a background where women are restricted to the four walls of their home, the CBO president Radha and vice president Gauri come across as two dynamic, confident and articulate women who are the 'wheels' driving the Dalit Sewa Sangathan. Their fearless attitude has helped lead the movement to another level, inspiring others to join in. Their goal is to bring about a change for the better in their village.

Radha could not study beyond the 10th standard because she was married at an early age. Fortunately, her husband supports her, enabling her to devote time to the CBO and its work. Well educated with a Masters in two subjects, he decided to return to the village to farm his land instead of working in a city. The favourable domestic situation has seen Radha going out of her home and village to strengthen the CBO and the interest of its women members. Her children go to school irrespective of gender.

Gauri is the second wife of her husband. She has four children, two of whom are from her husband's previous marriage. Her elder step-son works in the coalfields and often sends money and gifts home for her and other family members. Everyone at home is

proud of her as she has successfully built a position for herself in the community as a leader of the CBO.

The support of the men in the household is a prime reason why both Radha and Gauri are able to devote time for the SEG's activities. Both are financially well off compared to other women so they can also contribute money for the sangathan's work. Both stood for the village panch elections and won. Radha is also the only female mate of the MNREGS from the block. The two have fought to ensure there is enough work for people under the scheme. They are confident women who do not fear interacting with anyone.

They are fast learners who are quick to act. When they learnt that the sarpanch handles the expenditure account and is legally bound to share the details with the villagers, they asked him for an account at the very next gram sabha meeting, their courage taking him by surprise.

## 12. External opportunities and constraints

Some of the key opportunities and challenges affecting women's rights and dignity that both the CBO and Kalp face are discussed below:

### Opportunities

- The number of SCs and OBCs in Janjgir-Chapa district is large enough to constitute a distinct political identity, with the MLA and MP from the area being from the dalit community. The SCs thus have a collective strength that can influence the government and administration to improve the delivery of services.
- The ruling political party, which has been in power for more than 10 years, operates a popular Re1/kg rice subsidy programme for impoverished families. The highly subsidised ration enhances the bargaining power of dalits and tribals against poverty-driven exploitation by rich farmers. Also, the public distribution system (PDS) mandates only women SHGs, giving women's collectives the opportunity to engage with and benefit from the system.

## Threats

- The economic status and quality of life of both dalits and OBCs is similar. But the continuing social discrimination of dalits by the OBCs in matters like sharing food, participating in marriages and religious functions divides them, weakening the collective strength of the economically deprived class and diluting their efforts to fight for their rights.
- The patriarchal structure of village society is reflected in the high number of cases of rapes and atrocities against women and the inefficacy of the administration in dealing with the situation. This male domination constrains and limits the ability of women to unite and fight for their right to free movement and justice.
- Agriculture in the region being rain-fed and limited to a single crop, there is high migration for work post-harvest. Seasonal migrants lose their entitlements and their voice in the gram sabha to demand their rights during the migratory period.

## 13. Sustainability of the CBO

The CBO has demonstrated its strength to address issues of discrimination against dalits and has influenced service providers to improve employment opportunities for labourers. It has developed the capacity to negotiate with panchayat leaders and field functionaries, including the MGNREGS programme officer in the block. Its members meet informally, often on a daily basis, the literate among them documenting

important issues discussed. However, the group is still not mature enough or financially viable to sustain itself in the long run without external support, which the CSO has been providing till now. The strength of the block-level federation will determine the quality of its interventions and the support mechanism to sustain its future efforts.

## 14. Future plans of the CBO

The CBO has articulated some of its future plans, which are summarised below:

- The village lacks household toilets. The CBO would like to take up the drive to construct toilets under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. The demand of the dalit women is for dignity and for the safety of adolescent girls.
- The PHC does not function properly in the absence of a doctor. The group will build pressure on the concerned authorities to get a doctor and ensure the doctor attends the PHC regularly.
- Many persons eligible for old age pensions and widow pensions have not been getting the benefit because they have not got the necessary legal sanction. The group will build pressure so that these entitlements can be realised by deserving people in the village.
- The resources under the 14th Finance Commission have not been well utilised by the panchayat. The panch members of the CBO will try to ensure appropriate use of the resources.

Case Study : CBO - Hasdeo Arand Bachao Sangarsh Samiti

CSO - Janabhivyakthi

Location : Sarguja, Chhattisgarh

*Theme : FRA*

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### 1. The context

The feeble light of an earthen lamp in a nondescript temple in Salhi is the symbol of hope for the village community. This small tribal village in the midst of dense forests in Sargujadistrict of Chhattisgarh is faced with the threat of open coal mining that will take away the forests, fields, homes and livelihood of the tribals. The temple lies in the trajectory of a proposed railway track, to be laid to carry the coal from the adjoining auctioned coalmines. If the tracks are not laid, the mines cannot expand.

Coal is the engine of growth for the economy, running turbines to produce electricity to light up millions of homes across the country. Unfortunately, Salhi and the cluster of villages nearby have no electricity and know little of the progress the nation has made with coal and energy. They only know the forest have been their source of livelihood for generations, giving them minor forest produce for six months in the year, while they subsisted on rain-fed farming for the remaining six months.

Large coalfields were only a faint memory for most villagers until five-six years back when a clandestine survey was done in the area. Rumours of a 'company' starting coal mining became rife. The rumours turned to reality when company professionals began bargaining with

the villagers for their homes, farms and forests. The administration joined hands. The forests were fenced by the forest department and a trench was dug to stop the villagers entering the forests. Since the law prohibited forests with large trees to be auctioned, the first task of the company was to fell the trees and reduce the forest to shrub land so that it could be legally mined. The villagers were alarmed at seeing their forest fenced and intimidated by the company-bureaucrat nexus.

A total of 2,700 hectares of farm and forest land across 35 villages had been auctioned to Adani Mining, with Keta and Farsa villages being the first to be affected by their proposed line of operations. The company offered lucrative compensation, including new houses, well-paid jobs and many other facilities to villagers who supported its operations.

The dreams of homes and money were, however, short-lived. The compensation and rehabilitation were mere eyewash and a fraction of what was initially offered. Few got houses, fewer got jobs, but everybody lost their fields and forests. The houses developed cracks due to blasting and the jobs were menial and tortuous. Payments were irregular, much lower than promised and exploitation was rampant. Forests were cut and fenced to deny entry.



This trickery by government and company officials triggered the coming together of the 35 villages in the region and their collective struggle to protect their rights to livelihood.

It isn't that the village community doesn't understand the progress and prosperity that coal brings, which is critical to the nation. They are prepared to give up their homes and livelihood for this progress, even if with heavy hearts, but they are determined not to be cheated this time. Their first choice is to protect their right to their land and, if they fail, to demand 'rightful' compensation and rehabilitation.

## 2. Evolution of the Hasdeo Arand Bachao Sangharsh Samiti

The civil society organisation (CSO) Janabhivayakti had been working in the region since 2012, with the objective of protecting forests from mining and promoting the rights of tribals. It initially forayed into 4-5 villages but decided to extend its base when it found many tribals from adjoining villages attending its meetings. But it didn't have the resources to spread until 2013, when PACS began supporting its intervention. The PACS support enabled the CSO to venture into the Hasdeo Arand region covering 35-40 villages spread across Korba and Sarguja districts.

Janabhiyakti organised a jeep yatra, carrying audio-visual material on the Forest Rights Act (FRA), Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) and issues related to their implementation, making night halts in villages along the route. The yatra helped to mobilise the villagers, making them aware of the FRA provisions and how it could protect the forests against mining. The villagers formed a community-based organisation (CBO), naming it the Hasdeo Arand Bachao Samiti.

The CBO's objectives are to protect forests from mining, stop illegal mining, secure individual and forest rights to land traditionally possessed by villagers and secure suitable rehabilitation and compensation if they lost their homes, livelihood

and forests to mining. Drawing its name from the region and purpose, the CBO operates in 35 villages that fall under the fifth schedule of the constitution. Situated in dense forests of sal and other tree species, the tribals collect and sell sal seeds, mahua, chironji, harad and behrda for a living.

Realising it would not be easy to work against the power of the state and the muscle of the company, the villagers decided to first understand their own rights and keep a vigil on the company's activities. This collective resolve led them to collect evidence of their right over the land, secure individual and community forest rights, and fight for the compensation that is their due. Their tools were the FRA and PESA, and the hand-holding support and resources of Janabhivayakti.

### Forest Protection & Conservation Act

No state government or other authority shall permit, except with the prior approval of the central government, reserved forest or any forest land or any portion thereof to be assigned by way of lease or otherwise to any private person or to any authority, corporation, agency or any other organisation not owned, managed or controlled by the government.

## 3. Organisation norms and leadership of the CBO

The CBO is an informal federation constituted by village-level groups in the Hasdeo Arand region. It has five semi-formal convenors but the leadership is collective, drawn from the village groups. Though the federation represents a collective of 35 villages, the unit of intervention and advocacy is the gram sabhas of these villages.

The CBO membership is open to all the villagers, with understanding and sharing of objectives being the parameters for selection. The objectives

The gram sabha is the critical unit for verifying claims under the FRA. It also has constitutional powers under the PESA. Hence its membership is open at the village level.

are defined as protecting their homes, farms and forests and claiming their forest rights.

All members of the gram sabha are also members of the CBO, so it can also be seen as a collective of 35 gram sabhas. Since there is no membership fee and no mandatory preconditions, membership is flexible and can be classified as active members, casual members and 'suspicious members', irrespective of gender or social status. Suspicious members are seen as pro-company and are not trusted by the villagers, who keep a safe distance from them, believing they trade information with the company. However, their numbers are few.

The members aren't articulate or expressive, but have shared concerns, clear understanding of their purpose, and commitment to the cause. What keeps the group together is their realisation that acting collectively is critical for their survival, given the high odds against them. Many sarpanchs are active members and their engagement is critical since they influence gram sabha decisions - and may even manipulate them under negative influences.

There is no evident division of responsibility between the members and conveners. The federation meets once every month in one of its 35 villages, with tribals from other villages attending. They bear their own travel costs but collections are made when a specific need arises. Jan Abhiyakti bears the costs of the meetings, which build and promote the federation's collective strength.

The CBO members are also members of the Gondwana jati panchayat, though the relationship between the two is not explicit or clearly defined. They attend the tribal panchayat meetings, which are held once or twice a year, even though there's no articulated common vision or gain from common membership. The panchayat addresses social issues but the underlying perception is that the two organisations can work for common developmental goals.

#### 4. Capacity building interventions

Capacity building initiatives are a mix of formal

and informal trainings, exposure visits, participation in macro-level campaigns, and hand-holding support from the CSO. Jan abhiyakti facilitators live in the village, so the community can easily access and avail of their capabilities and skills.

**Structured trainings :** Trainings conducted in Ambikapur/Raipur are structured, while other trainings are mostly informal orientations, with the CSO providing knowledge and information to hone the organisational and communication skills of the chosen leaders. The centralised three-to-four day trainings organised by Jan Abhiyakti and PACS focus on different dimensions of the FRA and PESA, the use of GPS mapping in their work, preparing FRA applications, and other related issues. About eight to ten trainings have taken place till now, the participants including the sarpanchs and presidents of the forest rights committees (FRCs).

**Exposure visits :** These are among the most effective sensitisation/capacity building interventions, motivating the tribals and giving them inputs on how to manage commercial activities. Three visits have been organised, one to Raigarh district, another to Kutch and the third to Khokhroamma village. Raigarh was an example of forest land/villages acquired for industrial use where poor preparedness of the villagers resulted in poor rehabilitation. Interacting with the villagers who had lost their homes and livelihood was an eye-opener for the CBO leaders. The other two visits provided examples of effective management of forests and running a cooperative by the community.

**Workshops to share ideas/experiences :** Occasional workshops in Ambikapur, the district headquarters of Sarguja, intertwine the structured trainings. They focus on experience sharing and experiential learning. For instance, those who have filed claim applications and received pattas interact with those in the process of filing applications. Similarly, elected representatives of panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) and CBO committees share their initiatives in protecting forests from mining and countering

the hostility of government officials. The workshops raise awareness of the gravity of the issues and the need for stronger efforts to deal with the situation.

**Strengthening the gram sabhas :** Since the gram sabha is the constitutional authority for FRA and PESA, it is a critical unit of intervention in the fight against the nexus between corporate interests and the state. It has the authority to pass resolutions against leases granted to corporates and misdemeanours of the government, meeting once a month to play this crucial role. Hence, the

Devsay, the sarpanch of Madanpur, filed a complaint with the forest department against fencing the forest and constructing a CPT trench. The complaint said the fencing prohibits access to the forest, a right granted by the FRA, while the trench violates the PESA, since it was dug without the consent of the gram sabha. The department had to remove the fence and fill the trench to allow free movement of the villagers.

trainings focus on ways to strengthen the knowledge base and skills of the gram sabha to fulfil this role. Many sarpanchs have attended the trainings and become community resource persons to help individuals in filing their applications.

**Stalling public hearings :** Mandatory public hearings to hear and resolve the objections of the villagers have become an instrument of exploitation and forced land acquisition. Company personnel and government officials attend in strength, their hidden agenda being to reduce the meetings to mere eye-wash by sabotaging/hijacking them. The CBO federation decided to boycott his official muzzling of tribal voices and stall the fake hearings. Around seven hearings have been stalled, including the one at Harihar Bhumi.

**Networking with other groups :** The CBO depends on Janabhivvyakti to network but it also has ties with other organisations and panchayats with

similar concerns. It has built organic linkages with the Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan, a network promoted by the CSO that has a reach in five districts of the region. Many villagers who are not its members also attend its meetings.

## 5. Critical impact of the CBO

**Building a clear vision :** There is growing clarity in the community of its relationship with forests and land and its dependence on these sources of livelihood, something they took for granted earlier. The CSO/CBO have helped consolidate this understanding and build a clear vision to fight for tribal rights and protect/conservate the forests they have depended on for generations.

**Focus on FRA/CFR pattas :** The incursion of mining and its impact on access to forests and land have focused attention on gaining individual and community rights to forests and title deeds to land. Many applications have been filed through the FRCs, many of whose members are also in the CBO. They have engaged with the forest department to facilitate claim settlements.

The CBO also advocates at the district level. For example, when the forest department claimed that all CFR cases in Korba district had been settled, the CBO challenged the department and organised a rally in Korba, forcing it to re-open the cases. Seven claims were settled despite the department's non-compliant attitude and claim forms were distributed to mobilise more applications.

**Gram sabha mobilisation :** The PESA empowers gram sabhas in scheduled areas to control their resources and mandates the state to seek their consent before any land is acquired. The CBO has encouraged the villagers to attend the gram sabha meetings and use the PESA provisions to influence them to pass resolutions against the acquisition agenda and to monitor informers of the company. The CBO federation meetings have also helped create a large pool of FRA and PESA specialists.

**Unity and integration :** The collective struggle for a common cause has brought a sense of unity and

integration in the community.

**PESA: salient features to control mining**

The gram sabha or panchayats at the appropriate level shall be consulted before making the acquisition of land in the scheduled areas for development projects and before re-settling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the scheduled areas;

Every gram sabha shall be competent to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution;

Recommendations of the gram sabha or the panchayats at the appropriate level shall be made mandatory prior to grant of prospecting licence or mining lease for minor minerals in the scheduled areas.

## 6. Key processes in the CSO's functioning

The work and interventions of the CSO progressed in the following evolutionary stages:

**Formation of village CBOs :** The CSO intervention began with mobilising villagers to develop their understanding of the FRA/PESA and how they can use the provisions of these acts to protect the forests and land against illegal mining and also claim their rights to these resources. The mobilisation evoked popular support because the tribals feared losing their livelihood sources to illegal mining through the collusion of mining interests and the state.

**PACS support for the intervention :** Similar conditions prevailing across the Hasdeo Arand region prompted the CSO to expand its interventions over a wider geographical area. PACS support helped it to set up CBOs in 35 villages that were either affected by mining activities or had a large number of claimants for forest and land rights.

**Jeep yatra in 32 villages :** The CSO penetrated

deep into the region by organising a jeep yatra, mobilising the villagers during the night halts. Forty-five CBO members from 20 villages participated in the yatra, organising meetings to focus on the impact of mining and tribal rights to resources. The concerted thrust led to the formation of the Hasdeo Arand Bachao Sangarsh Samiti.

**Training and capacity building :** This was followed by training the cadre on critical issues with the objective of protecting their land and forests rights and securing suitable compensation and rehabilitation for villagers affected by mining.

**Opposing leases through the gram sabhas :** The administration has been pushing the mining lease agenda in the gram sabhas. But as the gram sabhas became stronger and more aware, seeing through the corporate-state nexus, they consistently rejected the grant of leases.

In 2014, 18 gram sabhas passed resolutions against allotting mining leases without their consent and without following procedural formalities. A delegation met senior central government ministers, parliamentarians, and select committee members, asking to allow for free and informed consent prior to auction/allotment of mines. The initiative received wide coverage in the regional and national media and was well received by policymakers and other stakeholders. The issue was taken up in parliament as well.

**Individual and community forest rights :** The CBO federation distributes application forms to claim individual and community forest rights during its mass mobilisation at Rs10 per form against Rs80 charged elsewhere. Its volunteers help applicants to fill the forms and its leaders and the panchayats help in registering the claims.

**Strengthening the CBO :** Filing claims requires processing and documentation, which is beyond the technical competence of most tribals. The CSO



trains CBO members and orients them on the various acts, their provisions and the procedures for filing claims so they can help the villagers. The capacity building also hones their organisational and communication skills and knowledge base so they can take up all planning and implementation functions to enable the CBO to become an independent, self-sustaining unit.

**External environment and sustainability :** The nexus between the state and mining corporates makes it more and more difficult to claim tribal land and forest rights. Land patta strengthens the claims of the tribals, but these vested interests have the political clout to achieve what they want through coercion and manipulation. This poses stronger challenges for the CBO in future. The CSO will have to plan its strategy carefully, given the challenge of funding and supporting the CBO once the PACS programme comes to an end.

The battle has not been easy. Many villages and tribals have succumbed to the lure and pressure

of the mining corporates and administration. Hence, growing their collective strength will become increasingly difficult. Many CBO leaders, in fact, are beginning to think they are fighting a losing battle against mining so they are cautiously focusing on the compensation and rehabilitation issue.

## 7. Future plans

The CSO/CBO will continue to help the tribal community to claim title deeds to land and individual and community forest rights. The struggle for just compensation and rehabilitation for those affected by mining will also continue. The thrust will be to build the collective capacity to fight legal battles and stall eviction. The CBO federation is also looking at setting up its own cooperative to collect and sell minor forest produce.

Case Study : CBO - Shiksha Vikas Manch

CSO - Shikhar Yuva Manch

Location : Bilaspsur, Chhattisgarh

*Theme : Education*

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## 1. The context

Samanta is a PACS-supported project to ensure non-discriminatory access to education for all that is managed by the civil society organisation (CSO) Yuva Shikhar Manch (YSM). Its operational network covers about 100 villages/97 panchayats in the Bilha, Patheri and Muger blocks of Bilaspur district in Chhattisgarh.

Bilaspuriya labourers are known to be hard working. They migrate in large numbers for employment, mostly in the construction sector. Bilaspur district has a population of around 20 lakh, 20% belonging to the scheduled tribes (STs) and scheduled castes (SCs), the majority of STs being Baigas and Gonds. The literacy rate of women tribals is a low 35%, mainly because of poverty and distress migration. Baiga children are more comfortable in their native dialect and find it difficult to study in Hindi.

YSM, which has prepared learning materials in the tribal dialect to support Baiga students, targets issues such as the high drop-out rate of STs and SCs, discrimination against dalit children in schools, and weak adherence to the RTE provisions.

## 2. Genesis of the Shiksha Vikas Manch

The community-based organisation (CBO)

Shiksha Vikas Manch (SVM) was formed in February 2012 in Majurpahari village of Bilha block in Bilaspur district. The village has 1,134 voters, the majority of its households being STs, with around 10-15% other backward castes (OBCs) and 4-5 SC families living on the fringe of the habitation.

YSM's village facilitators or shiksha doots identified potential leaders from the ST population during their initial baseline survey to collect data on education in the village. These natural leaders were oriented on the provisions of the RTE and need for collective action to ensure their implementation. They got together to form the SVM to address these educational challenges and to work on other development issues of the village.

The shiksha doots worked with the SVM to make the local people more aware of the importance of educating their children, especially girls, their focal emphasis being on quality education, retention of children in school, regular attendance, providing nutritional food through mid-day meals, and building toilets to improve sanitation. The parents realized the need to access the services promised under various governmental programmes to ensure quality education for their children.

The villagers, especially the women, first took up

the issue of alcoholism, which was eating into family incomes and affecting the education of children.

### 3. Organisation and norms of the CBO

The SVM's membership comprises young villagers, mostly in the 25-40 year age-group and many of them women, who were concerned about improving access to quality education in their village. The manch is informally organised, with no defined rules and regulations or norms of governance. The CSO conducted orientation trainings for its members on the provisions of the Right to Education (RTE) Act to enable them to monitor the implementation of these provisions in the village schools. Many of them joined the school management committee (SMC) set up under the RTE provisions.

### 4. Leadership style

The CBO has no defined leadership style or any single dominant leader. It has many progressive youth who question traditional tribal practices that affect the development of the community, including Netam, the village sarpanch. They respond collectively as and when a pertinent issue is raised. For example, the group pressurised the tribal panchayat to reduce wasteful expenditure on marriages and deaths in families. As a result, the panchayat ruled that only one close relative would perform the rituals and contributions from relatives would be in cash, not in kind (clothes etc). The ruling helped impoverished families meet the expenditure for such ceremonies.

### 5. Organisational mission, value and culture

The CBO's mission is not clearly articulated. Its primary concern is the education of the children and the development of the community. "It is our duty to convince parents to send their children to school regularly in proper uniform. We tell them we will stop their subsidised PDS ration if they don't let their children attend school. We also monitor the quality of the mid-day meal," says Jan Singh Jat, who is also an SMC member.

### 6. Organic relationship of the group with other CBOs

The CBO is closely linked with the village panchayat, the sarpanch being an active manch member. It also meets regularly with SVMs from other villages to collectively conduct capacity building workshops and organise block and district-level programmes. It is also linked to the national-level RTE campaign anchored by the YSM, which prepares an annual, state-level status report on implementation of the RTE that is shared among the constituent CBOs.

### 7. Capacity building interventions

The YSM provides hand-holding support to the manch. Its village level facilitators have been trained in community mobilisation by Pravah, a national level training organisation. They conduct capacity building trainings for the manch leaders and volunteers, which equips them to monitor the implementation of RTE provisions.

### 8. Important processes over the years

The key processes that have contributed to the achievements of the SVM in its four-year journey include the following:

**Monitoring of RTE provisions :** Along with the CSO, the manch monitors the implementation of the RTE provisions throughout the year. As a result, there has been a significant improvement of services in the school. Toilets have been built for girls and there is no discrimination of SC students by their peers as well as teachers.

**Quality improvement in schools :** SVM realised the need to strengthen secondary education in the village. The school faces a shortage of teachers, affecting the education of the children. The sarpanch identified a final year under-graduate Indra Kumar, appointing him a teacher on behalf of the panchayat. Kumar is not paid for this 'shiksha dan' but the panchayat underwrites some of his personal educational expenditure.

**Women's issues :** The community constructed a bathing platform for women at the village pond,



mobilising donations to cover the Rs1.15 lakh cost, with a village shopkeeper maintaining an account of the expenditure.

#### Bal panchayat - building leadership at an early age

*Ramauti Bai Netam is the sarpanch of Majoor Pahri village. Her husband was the sarpanch before her. She was associated with the SVM before she became sarpanch and took a leading role in evolving a bal panchayat in the village. When we met her, she was busy supervising a road being constructed with panchayat resources.*

Who can understand a child need better than a child? The SYM sought to create and support a child-based organization called the 'bal panchayat' in selected schools of the villages in the blocks of its PACS intervention to encourage students to participate in the effort to ensure quality education in their schools. These bal panchayats are, in turn, organised into a block-level federation.

Student members of the bal panchayat look after the attendance and retention of enrolled children as well as sanitation and hygiene in their school. They collectively decide to resolve issues hampering or threatening to hamper their education. If they fail to resolve an issue, they bring it to the notice of headmaster, teachers and, sometimes, SMC members as well.

Bal panchayat members are collectively selected by the students and are generally from Class 6, 7 and 8, ranging in age from 12 to 20 years, depending upon the situation and need. It meets once a month or when a need arises. It has a designated president, vice president and secretary. Attendance at its meetings is registered and the minutes are recorded. New members are elected every year.

**MNREGS employment :** The village got Rs42 lakh of work under the MGNREGS over the last two years. More than 350 workers are engaged by the panchayat, using MGNREGS and other funds, in

building cattle-sheds, land levelling, road laying and pond construction.

### 9. Role of the CSO in strengthening the CB

The SYM selected the CBO leaders from among the village youth, building their capacity and knowledge base. The CSO's field-level team regularly interacts with the CBO, providing information on the provisions of the RTE and other acts related to rights and entitlements, and helping it with the field monitoring.

### 10. External opportunities and constraints

Some of the key opportunities and challenges facing the CBO in its work to ensure the rights and protect the dignity of dalit women are as follows:

#### Opportunities

- The RTE Act has a constitutional mandate to demand access to education and the SMCs are mandated to monitor the functioning of schools and spend their resources for the schools' requirements. The CBO ensures community-based monitoring and the administration's response, with many of its youth leaders being SMC members.
- The government's emphasis on transparency and e-governance has given strength to the poor and SC/ST to use technology to bring accountability to the local administration. The CBO leaders use their smart phones to access information about various schemes and to apply for benefits online.

#### Threats

- Private players are entering education in a big way even in rural areas. The cost of education is going up even as the quality of education in government schools deteriorates. Monitoring of public schools, which cater to the poor and deprived communities, is weak and the administration is non-compliant. As a result, SC/ST children are offered lower quality education.

- Education programmes are affected by lower social spending. State funding of education is diminishing and if this trend continues, primary and secondary education will be significantly compromised.

## 11. Sustainability of the CBO

The CBO functions as an informal group and the block-level federation of SVMs is yet to evolve. Continued support and sustenance of its work by the CSO is doubtful. The shiksha doot can still provide some support on a voluntary basis since they live in the village, but there is no systemised support in the long term.

The tribal leaders of the village, who are also part of the CBO, are active in the tribal panchayat, which is tightly knit with defined rules and customs. They are trying to curb useless expenditure on social practices like marriages and deaths. They are also keen to educate children from the community to help them gain sustainable livelihoods in future and raise the quality of life of the community. However, the CSO's hand-holding support is still required to

ensure that children get their quality education, the administration reaches entitlements to the schools and the dalits are not left out.

## 12. Future plans

The CBO articulates the following future plans:

- Medical services are poor and unreachable in this remote hill village, with the nearest PHC located 15km away. The CBO will try to get a mini PHC in the village to improve access to health services.
- There is an acute shortage of teaching staff in the government secondary school. The CBO will pressurise the district administration to appoint more teachers immediately.
- There are two anganwadis in the village but more anganwadis are needed. The CBO will try to get one more anganwadi for the dalit and ST mohallas.
- The CBO leaders are exploring options for support and funding post the closure of the YSM's PACS project.

Case Study : CBO - Gram Suraksha Samiti Ramja

CSO - EKJUT

Location : Gumla, Jharkhand

*Theme : Health and Nutrition*

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## 1. The context

Gumla district is located in south-west Jharkhand at the junction of undivided Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. Following the bifurcation of states in 2000, it is now the meeting point of Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. The region, a melting pot of tribal cultures and practices, forms the divide between the southern Chotanagpur plateau and the eastern Deccan plateau and was once the largest traditional market of the Chotanagpur region.

The district is marked by undulating terrain with dense forest covering nearly a third of its geographical area. Despite adjoining Ranchi, the state capital, it has poor infrastructure, poor connectivity, subsistence agriculture and low human development indicators, with a high level of social and economic discrimination between its tribal and non-tribal population. As a result, it is a hotbed of left wing extremist activities, which are deeply entrenched.

Scheduled Tribes (STs) account for 70% of Gumla's population. The overall sex ratio of the district is 993, dropping to 955 in the 0-6 year age-group, while the literacy rate is about 67%, with female literacy at just above 55%. According to the Annual Health Survey (AHS) 2012-13, 49.6% of the married women are illiterate, their poor health awareness resulting in a high total fertility

rate (3.5), very low mean age at first conception (50.3% adolescent pregnancy), low registration of pregnancies for ante-natal and pre-natal care (ANC/PNC), poor adoption of family planning methods and low rate of institutional deliveries (45%). So infant and maternal mortality rates in the district are high, the average per 1,000 live births being 45 for infant mortality, 34 for neo-natal mortality, 70 for under-5 mortality and 244 for maternal mortality.

The civil society organisation (CSO) Ekjut decided to focus on building CBOs in the region to make people more aware of health and nutrition-related services and facilitate access to these services. Gram Suraksha Samiti Ramja is one of the several community-based organisations (CBOs) Ekjut has facilitated with PACS support in Ramja village of Raidih block in Gumla district. The village is about 35km from the block headquarters in Kopja gram panchayat, which is situated inside dense forests.

This is a region of intense, often violent, left-wing activity, which has stifled its development. As a result, the area is marked by poor road connectivity, lack of basic health and education, and poor overall awareness. Jhaliabandh hamlet is one of the village's 16 habitations, its 14 households belonging to the Birhor particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG).



## 2. Ekjut's strategy of working with CBOs

Ekjut works with community institutions on health and nutrition issues. It addresses inequities in accessing these services and making them more inclusive by monitoring their implementation and empowering the affected communities. Its primary focus is women's groups. It develops local strategies with village institutions to minimise health risks during pregnancy, delivery and the post-partum period, mobilising the community to collectively demand these services and make the service providers more accountable.

The CSO seeks to build independent collectives or revive defunct ones that are linked to mandated committees like the village health, sanitation and nutrition committees (VHSNC). These collectives work closely with front line workers of the health department and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to ensure inclusion and improve the quality of health and nutrition services.

Ekjut works in four blocks of Gumla district (Raidih, Basia, Kamdara and Chainpur) with PACS support. It sees women's self-help group (WSHG) as the most appropriate format for its interventions, empowering 195 women's groups in 195 revenue villages in these blocks and has revamped and capacitated 195 VHSNCs to support these self-help group (SHGs) in dealing with the health challenges they face in their villages<sup>1</sup>. Its four CSO partners have set up another 95 CBOs to work on health and nutrition.

The process of forming collectives begins with an economic activity, preferably thrift and savings, with the women meeting every week/month to pool their savings. Once they understand the

benefit of collective action for ensuring their livelihood, they look at other issues that affect their daily lives. The CSO introduces and discusses health issues at this point.

Ekjut uses the participatory learning and action (PLA) approach to change the attitudes and practices of women, analysing health and nutrition issues, transferring knowledge, and generating awareness of their right to a better life<sup>2</sup>. Their collective strength leads them to demanding services of high quality that are inclusive and non-discriminatory.

The learning cycle the CSO has adopted for the collectives is based on its field experience of working with village communities in Jharkhand and Odisha. The four-phase cycle includes all stakeholders the members of the collective, other villagers, frontline worker and local functionaries of line departments.

**Phase I : Identifying and prioritising difficulties :** The process of mobilising the community begins. Ekjut facilitators first introduce the aims and objectives of their organisation, the project goals and the reason why they are engaging with this particular community. The facilitators follow up this ice-breaking by initiating a discussion on health-related issues that concern the community, first evoking current health practices and belief systems. The biggest health challenges are then identified, the focus being on maternal and child health, the challenges being prioritised from the community perspective.

**Phase II: Planning strategies :** Next follows an analysis of the causality of these prioritised challenges and possible solutions to overcome them. The barriers preventing the adoption of each solution are identified and ways to

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<sup>1</sup> While Ekjut prefers working with women's groups, it supports village institutions that are willing to take up health and nutrition-related challenges. For example, it decided to support a gram suraksha samiti in Ramja village, which is distinct from the forest protection committees (FPCs) created by the forest department under its joint forest management initiative. FPCs have greater convening power than other smaller groups in the village.

<sup>2</sup> Ekjut conducts randomised control trials (RCTs) - called Ekjut trials - in select areas where it works with community institutions to improve birth outcomes and reduce post-partum maternal depression. There has been a significant decrease in neo-natal mortality (which is much higher than the national average in Jharkhand), maternal mortality and maternal depression.

overcome these barriers are explored. Strategies are worked out for all possible scenarios and prioritised. The community action plan is formulated on the basis of these prioritised strategies.

Phase III : Putting strategies into practice : Implementing the strategies is what happens in this phase. The community monitors and tracks the progress through collective reflection. The feedback and new learnings from the field experience feeds into reworking the strategies, with new elements added.

Phase IV : Assessing impacts : When the learning cycle nears completion, the strategies are revisited and their impact on the local community is assessed to see if the interventions have helped it address the health and nutrition challenges.

### 3. Genesis of the Gram Suraksha Samiti Ramja

Ramja village, situated in a remote corner of Gumla district, far from the district and block headquarters and close to the Chhattisgarh border, presents formidable last-mile delivery challenges. Low outreach and penetration of services across sectors and lack of accountability result in poor implementation while inhospitable terrain and the poor condition of roads make access to and from villages difficult. The threat of left-wing extremism impacts infrastructure development, delivery of services and effective local governance. Villagers live in constant fear of being branded government informers or sympathisers of one or other splinter group operating in the area.

The Gram Suraksha Samiti Ramja was born in this environment of fear and anxiety. In late 2011, prior to Ekjut's initiative, left-wing extremists had placed 15 families of the village on their watch-list, warning them of serious consequences. Fear and uncertainty reigned in the village. However, unlike other villages, the elders of Ramja decided to come together and do something about it. They formed a gram suraksha samiti to protect the village against external

threats and work for its development. The samiti passed a resolution to protect the families, declaring that no outsider could take action against a villager without consulting it.

### 4. Organisation of the collective

When Ekjut began working in the village to strengthen the VHSNC and support women's groups, it saw the gram suraksha samiti as the best village institution to work with because of its high credibility and its mandate to protect and develop the village. It felt the suraksha samiti could provide a platform where all the three SHGs it was supporting could come together to share and learn from each other. Two of the SHGs were functional while the third was dormant.

The Ekjut facilitators used games and role play to highlight the problems of the village, the key constraints it faced and what needed to be done to address the situation. Health issues emerged as the biggest priority. Infant and maternal mortality levels were high in the absence of a nearby health facility - not a single institutional delivery has taken place till now in the PVTG hamlet Jhaliabandh, with dais delivering babies at home and handling childbirth complications. Awareness about the causes of ill health was low because of the prevalence of myths and faith healing practices.

The group discussions also brought out the extent of social discrimination in the village. Two social groups lived in Ramja the Rouhtiyas belonging to the OBC community and the Birhors who are PVTGs. The Rouhtiyas are the dominant caste and practises untouchability seating the Birhors separately in village meetings, schools and anganwadis.

#### Leadership and its style

Ranpal Singh, a key functionary of the Dharm Raksha Upkendra, a temple trust, was unanimously chosen as the president of the gram suraksha samiti, with Sanmit Kujur as secretary and Vijay Baiga as treasurer. The three commanded respect as committed and credible leaders although they belonged to different social

groups.

The suraksha samiti, drafted its bye-laws under the guidance of Dharamjeet Singh, one of its most active members, deciding to hold elections annually to its executive committee comprising representatives from the tola samitis. Each of the 16 hamlets has a five-member tola samiti and is represented in the 16-member executive committee. The villagers also decided that all proposals from the hamlets or other village institutions would be routed through this kendriya samiti. It has progressive and literate members and is clear about resisting any unreasonable restrictions by the extremist groups.

#### Organisational values and culture

The CBO wants the health and nutrition services and their delivery to be accountable and transparent, with even PVTG members becoming more demanding and questioning discrimination. But there is no malice towards the dominant groups. This is one of the positive outcomes of the villagers getting together in the gram suraksha collective. For example, some women recently leased a plot of land for vegetable cultivation, with members of all social groups, including PVTG women, participating. The SHG women also ensure the Birhors are included in all activities and avail benefits under all schemes implemented in Ramja. The shared values of the CBO have thus promoted harmony and singularity of purpose the result being improved health indicators and better village development.

### 5. Ekjut's linkages with the Gram Suraksha Samiti Ramja

Ekjut used the PLA approach to sensitize the villagers on healthcare basics. This led to more pregnancy and birth registrations, regular ante-natal check-ups and post-natal care, higher mean age at marriage, better off-take of ICDS services and improved maternal and child health outcomes. The CSO provided hand holding and mentoring support to the CBO despite the Maoist threats. It also sensitised PRI representatives and government officials to be more inclusive in implementing rights and entitlements to health,

nutrition and other benefits. The system is now more proactive than earlier in helping the CBOs and plugging gaps in service delivery. For example, bank accounts have been opened for beneficiaries of incentives under the IAY/ JSY/ RSBY etc.

Ekjut organised four jan samvads at the block level where its network of organisations took forward their dialogue with block officials of line departments to resolve problems requiring macro-level solutions. Coming together on this single platform boosted the confidence of the CBOs to air their grievances in accessing entitlements for health and nutrition, health insurance, employment, housing, pensions and education. Villagers began receiving many of these benefits after the samvads and a number of development schemes were also approved for Ramja and other project villages.

### 6. Capacity building efforts of the CSO

The four-phase capacity building strategy helped the CBO to prioritise the community health challenges, look for solutions, implement the solutions and then reflect on the interventions to refine them. The learning cycle comprises a 21-module training schedule (activity-based pictographic tools), with each phase ending in a joint reflection workshop of members of the CBO network, PRI leaders and government service providers. The workshops helped sensitise the officials to the journey so far and the challenges that need to be addressed.

The PLA trainings of the CBO and VHSNC are conducted simultaneously to permit sharing and reinforcement of learning between the two groups. The Ekjut staff provide feedback and track the observable changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP).

The animators and facilitators themselves undergo intensive preparatory training on different aspects of health and nutrition, conducting baseline surveys, video documentation, infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices, rights and entitlements, gender-based violence, management information systems (MIS) for project

management, and government schemes and acts such as the NREGA, ICDS, NRHM, NRLM, RSBY, FRA, PESA etc.

## 7. Important processes related to the CBO

Ekjut's timely intervention in Ramja strengthened the resolve of the villagers to collectively challenge the unreasonable demands of the left-wing extremists. It also got them to think about the holistic development of the village to better the quality of their lives. The important stages in this journey were as follows:

**Organisation of stakeholder groups :** Several CBOs in the village were nurtured to create small groups of like-minded individuals with like-minded concerns. Ekjut works closely with these small groups, tracking improvements in their awareness levels. It saw the SHGs as the appropriate forum, using savings as a springboard for other initiatives that helped change local perceptions about health and created an environment for accountability and better care-seeking.

**Creation of a strong, village-level platform :** The realisation that individual SHGs have limited ability to bring about community-level changes led to the linking of all village institutions. The gram suraksha samiti was the ideal platform for sharing learnings and practices and pushing village-level decisions, such as making it compulsory for all families to send their children to the school and anganwadi, and for women to attend the VHND, register their pregnancies and get mandatory ante-natal care.

**Interface with government officials:** The CBOs learned to engage with departmental officials to resolve their grievances and follow-up pending demands. The confidence to interact with officials proved useful in the jansamvad that addressed district-level solutions.

**Re-engineering village social dynamics:** The unity achieved under the gram suraksha samiti lessened social conflicts and divisions and the discrimination they bred. It showed the way for different community groups to work together for their mutual benefit and collective empower-

ment, mainstreaming the most marginalised (Birhors) and reducing discrimination.

## 8. Major outcomes and impacts

**Reduction in social tensions and discrimination:** An assessment of existing services showed that the Birhors did not have free access to AWC services, were denied work under the MNREGS, and did not participate in village meetings because they were not allowed to. The CBO convened a village-level meeting to which the Birhor community and NGO representatives were invited. The reasons for - and consequences of - discrimination were discussed. It was found that only Rouhtiyas were allotted MNREGS work. It was also seen that Birhors were often denied services. This discouraged them from sending their children to the AWC and school.

The suraksha samiti decided to end the discrimination. It called a meeting of all frontline workers (AWW/AWH/ASHA/ANM) who were warned to allow equal access to all without discrimination. The whole village backed the samiti's stand.

**Inclusive and holistic village development:** Since the ICDS centre nearest to Jhaliaband was located in a Rouhtiya hamlet, the Birhor families were initially sceptical about sending their children. The SHG, suraksha samiti and Ekjut led the effort to build their confidence and trust. Special attention was paid to women who were not allowed to attend VHND meetings and children who had been denied ICDS services in the past.

The CBOs pressurised the ANM to visit the village regularly, supervise and guide the work of the five sahiyas, organise VHND meetings, and ensure all health and nutrition services were available to everyone without discrimination. When she proved uncooperative, they raised the matter in the jan samvad with block administration in May 2013, after which her visits and services became regular.

**Greater demand for services of improved quality :** When the CBO took up development monitoring,



it pressed the demand to appoint a regular teacher in the primary school, a post that has remained vacant for the past six years. The lack of opportunities for secondary education for boys and girls in the village was also raised at the jan samwad, leading to several girls and boys being enrolled in the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyala (KGBV) and other government residential schools. Other issues raised in the samvads included pension entitlements and rural housing, with several eligible families getting houses under the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY).

The CBO members also found that special schemes meant for PVTGs exist only on paper, without reaching the community. For example, electrification of Jhaliabandh hamlet had been sanctioned several few years ago but the houses had no electricity!! This was brought to the notice of the BDO who adopted Ramja village and promised to reach all services and entitlements to the community.

Awareness of health and nutrition issues: Considering the high maternal and neo-natal mortality, the CBO focused on early and universal registration of pregnancies. Ramja soon achieved universal enrolment of expectant mothers at the AWC.

Shishir Kumar, the BDO of Raidih, has a special fondness for Ramja village. He adopted the village some time back and has promised to keep visiting it every year, even after he is transferred out of the district. Kumar says even though he has only recently come to know the village, the change he has seen in this short time is noticeable. This remote and backward village has now become a place where people are demanding quality services and want to benefit from government programmes. What particularly impresses him is the way the Birhor community has come forward to avail health services and get mainstreamed, and how the village united to make this happen.

The Birhor community also began demanding health services following the CBO's sustained awareness generating efforts. Counselling by the SHG and sahiyas led to the first institutional delivery from the Birhor hamlet, which occurred in the Community Health Centre Raidih in 2014.

But hospital facilities being distant, with no reliable mobility support, the women could not avail the benefits under the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) for institutional deliveries. With the support of Ekjut, the community demanded a mamta wahan<sup>3</sup>, which the block administration eventually designated for the village.

The social mobilisation by the Gram Suraksha Samiti ensured that all families began availing the services and entitlements. VHND meetings became regular with participation from all hamlets and social groups. As a result, the care-seeking behaviour of the villagers changed and the health outcomes improved, reflected in the fact that no maternal and infant deaths have occurred in the village for the past two years.

## 9. External opportunities and constraints

Opportunities : Regular engagement with block-level officials, particularly the BDO, has led to cordial relations between the CBO and the local administration, which makes services and schemes more accessible for villagers. Sixsuraksha samiti members were also recently elected as ward/gram sabha members (panch), giving the CBO more weight to pull in more government funding for developing the village.

Constraints : The strong unity among villagers and faster village development has made the CBO and the village an irritant for left-wing extremist groups. They have already started threatening the villagers to stop their strategy planning meetings. Hence, the fear of violence is a constant threat for the CBO.

## 10. Sustainability of the CBO

Ekjut has been preparing the CBOs for a post-

<sup>3</sup> Designated vehicles under the JSY to bring pregnant women to government health facilities for institutional delivery.

PACS existence over the past 4-5 months. The long-term strategy already underway is to link the CBOs/SHGs with the PRIs so they can sustain their work in unison. Some SHGs have been linked to the Pradan SHG federation to tap their support and become economically viable in the long-term as part of a larger group.

Health and nutrition will continue being on the CBO/SHG agenda even after it becomes part of larger federations. The CBO now has the capacity to prepare village health plans and support local developmental planning. The VHSNCs strengthened by Ekjut already have a mandate to work on health and nutrition and an effort is being made to mainstream them as a sub-committee of the gram panchayat. The suraksha samiti is also trying to organise lac cultivation and marketing as a livelihood option, given its abundant availability, but the process is still in a very formative stage.

## 11. Future plans

The Gram Suraksha Samiti feels it can carry on its work after the PCS project comes to a close. Ekjut

is thinking of withdrawing from the district so mentoring and support may not be available in future. Yet the CBO has no defined future plan although it intends to continue its village meetings, monitor the health services, ensure equitable access to and accountability of services and develop the village.

## 12. Internal strengths and weaknesses

**Strengths :** Thesuraksha samiti is represented by both men and women from all social groups and habitations of Ramja. Both men and women participate in its interventions and mobilisation for health and nutrition. Its wide support base and its successes ensure it will continue working on these thematic areas in future. Community pressure has impacted local governance and the impact is seen in villages across the district on physical infrastructure, service delivery, inclusive growth and economic development.

**Weaknesses :** Being a large village, convening the members of all the hamlets for village-level meetings remains a challenge.

Case Study : CBO - Gram Ekai Brahmna  
CSO - Naya Sawera Vikas Kendra (NSVK)  
Location : Chatra , Jharkhand  
*Theme : FRA and NREGA*

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## 1. The context

Brahmna village is located in Chatra district of Jharkhand, some 100km from Ranchi. Like Gumla, it is one of the backward districts of the state. Bordering Bihar's Gaya district to the north, it is surrounded by Palamau and Latehar districts, both of which are heavily affected by left-wing extremist activities. One of the few districts of Jharkhand with a predominantly Scheduled Caste (SC) population (35%), it is characterised by poor physical infrastructure and the sub-optimal quality of its public services.

The district has 12 development blocks and 154 gram panchayats, 62% literacy and low coverage of health and other services. Close to 60% of its geographical area is under heavy forest cover, with scattered settlements (population density 275/sq km) that depend heavily on forest resources for their livelihood. It is also an active mining area with several blocks being mined for coal and graphite. The population is largely rural and agriculture is mainly subsistence, with most cultivators being small and marginal farmers.

Chatra block, in which Brahmna village is located, has 16 gram panchayats and 184 revenue villages, with the Brahmna panchayat comprising 12 revenue villages. The village has a population of 1,250, more than 90% belonging to the Kumhar SC community. Seasonal migration

to adjoining districts for work is high, as are poverty levels (more than 50% BPL households) and dependence on forest resources.

The Gram Ekai Brahmna was formed with PACS support in 2012 by Naya Sawera Vikas Kendra (NSVK), a civil society organisation (CSO), as part of a network of community-based organisations (CBOs) organised to fight for the rights of socially excluded communities to land and livelihoods. The network is operative in 516 villages of five districts of Jharkhand, the focus being on improving access to the MGNREGS, making the programme socially accountable and recognising the customary rights of tribal communities to forest resources.

## 2. NSVK and its association with CBOs

NSVK is part of the Ekta Parishad network and, like the national body, has been mobilising socially excluded communities - poor, landless dalits and adivasis, especially women - since 2000, conducting advocacy campaigns for their rights over resources. It builds their awareness and empowers them by organising them into local and regional collectives and developing their self-governance capabilities.

NSVK and its CSO partner Samajik Chetna Tantra engage with communities on development issues. The process begins with identifying



communities in villages and mobilising them to address their problems collectively. The pre-requisites for selecting villages include the presence of large numbers of villagers from marginalised communities, their readiness to form a village-level collective, the presence of the Ekta Parishad, either directly or indirectly, in the region, and feedback from its village-level animators about the community-wise composition of the village and the issues it faces.

The organisation began work under the PACS programme in 2012, choosing around half the villages it was already working with for the new PACS intervention, the focus being on mobilising and empowering socio-economically marginalised communities to access their employment and forest rights under the NREGA and Forest Rights Act (FRA).

Its operational strategy is to create a village-level institution called the Gram Ekai, whose general body comprises all adults and gram sabha members of the village. It has a 12-15 member managing committee with representatives from all its constituent communities and the following sub-committees or morchas:

- Women's Self-Help Groups
- Farmers Rights Committee
- Land Rights Committee
- Livelihoods Committee
- Social Protection/Justice Committee
- Forest Rights Committee
- Health Committee
- Water Committee

Each sub-committee has at least six members who are directly affected/involved in its work and can link it to the overall development of the village. Wherever possible, they are headed by members or the sarpanch/mukhiya of the panchayat (or ward committees in urban areas) to create an organic linkage with panchayat raj institutions (PRIs), but no individual can head more than one committee. They meet regularly and put up their specific issues for consideration by the Gram Ekai.

The Ekta Parishad's animators, who are responsible for a cluster of villages, and its district coordinator facilitate the formation of these village collectives, drawing in villagers familiar with its work as members to promote the parishad's values and philosophy in the emerging collective.

The collectives are structured in three levels into a federation in the following manner: Each gram ekai has three representatives in a panchayat ekai, which, in turn, has three representatives in a block ekai, with each block having three representatives in the apex district ekai.

### 3. History and genesis of Gram Ekai Brahmna

Brahmna village is located in the middle of a forest. Its inhabitants have been tilling forest land for generations but have no legal ownership rights over the land so they face harassment by the forest department. They fear these rent-seeking forest guards who can stop them from collecting forest produce, summarily evict them from their farms, destroy their standing crops and even imprison them. The biggest targets of this harassment are the women.

Given the uncertain returns from agriculture and the failure of the MNREGS to guarantee employment, there is high seasonal migration of men looking for employment in Gaya and Patna. They prefer migrating to taking up employment under the MNREGS because they have either not been paid for past work, or got their payments after several months, or had money deducted from their payments without being informed about it. Many eligible villagers also do not have a job card, and those who do have to deal with middlemen in getting MNREGS work because they are not aware of their rights under the provisions of the MNREGA.

The discussions initiated in the village by the NSVK brought these issues to the fore, including their low awareness of their rights to forest produce and land under the FRA. They realised how their lives could change for the better if they

could acquire and exercise these rights and, emboldened by the work of the NSVK in supporting the struggle for these rights and privileges, they took steps to organise themselves into a village-level collective – the Gram EkaiBrahmna.

#### 4. Organisation of the collective

Once the progressive leaders of the village were brought together, the others followed. The next step was constituting the managing committee of the gram ekai and deciding the issues for which sub-committees could be formed. The focal concern was identifying access to employment/livelihood and use of forest resources, apart from poor delivery of basic services and the indifference of public functionaries in providing these services.

The NSVK created a cluster-level MNREGS assistance and resource centre to service the scheme-related needs of Brahmna and other villages and facilitate access to the programme. This involved assisting people in applying for job-cards, helping those with job cards to apply for wage employment, registering cases of non-payment or delayed payment of wages etc.

Once legal access to the scheme was actualised, a'kaam mango abhiyaan'was organised by the network of gram ekaisto demand employment under the MGNREGS. Collective pressure was put on the block and district administration to draw their attention to the needs of the cluster villages, with petitions being submitted to the respective panchayats/block. The campaign also pressurised the middlemen who were holding the job-cards of the villagers to return them to their rightful holders.

The link established with the administration helped in expediting the preparation of job-cards and sanction of schemes and payments. This developed trust in the schemes and their promise among the villagers. They also learned about the different aspects of the MNREGS, including how to apply to the panchayat for work and how to get their grievances redressed in case of delayed payments or non-payment. They were also

trained in preparing labour budgets for the village, measuring work and estimating wages, monitoring the work undertaken and conducting social audits of programme implementation.

The livelihoods sub-committee worked closely with the NSVK to facilitate the implementation of the MNREGS in the village. Under the leadership of Lakhan Ganju, the head of the sub-committee, nearly 250 villagers in Brahmna were able to get 100 days of employment in 2014-15. The approach road to the village was repaired, cement-concrete internal roads were laid, a pond constructed and soil and water conservation done to improve the availability of both potable and irrigation water. These infrastructural improvements impacted village connectivity, health and sanitation, as well as agricultural productivity. People from the vulnerable communities became more confident because of assured employment and those who migrated for work earlier now stayed back on their farms.

The gram ekai also conducted social audits of the MNREGS implementation, uncovering the mismanagement of the past. The fallout was that all work demands of the people were approved without delay and payments were made on time. The ekai also began helping the villagers access other entitlements such as widow and old-age pensions, school scholarships and social protection benefits like BPL cards and ration cards.

Once the MGNREGS process was streamlined, the ekai turned its attention to forest rights with the support of the NSVK. The villagers had been made aware of the FRA provisions for individual and community rights to forest resources in the early learning phase in 2013. But action to access and implement these provisions began in 2014, one immediate outcome being that they stopped living in fear of the forest functionaries.

The forest rights sub-committee has processed 90 claims for individual forest rights, including 30 claims that had been rejected earlier in 2013 without assigning reasons. Detailed mapping of all the claims was done to prevent rejection, the

villagers themselves helping to measure the land, a skill they had acquired during their training.

Apart from this, the villagers also filed a community claim for forest resources over 727.82 acres of forest land. The claim was returned thrice to the gram ekai's sub-committee<sup>1</sup> because it wasn't clearly formulated and because of differences in the actual and claimed forest area/resources. But the claim was assiduously followed-up by the sub-committee<sup>1</sup> headed by Muneshwar Singh Bhogta and community forest rights were finally granted to Brahmaby the chief minister at a state-level function in August 2015.

The community rights cover conservation, protection and regeneration of the standing forest and include a playground, cremation ground and approach road to the forest and pastures. Usufruct rights cover extraction of minor minerals from the forest, resources in forest water bodies, lac extraction, and collection of tendupatta, herbs, medicinal plants and fuel wood.

The NSVK and its CSO partner also formed a state-level Van Adhikaraur Ajivika Suraksha Manch to engage with the state and district administration to implement the MGNREGA and FRA in a just manner. This was part of a long-term strategy to ensure the village-level CBO continues to work collectively to access employment and forest land rights beyond the project period.

## 5. Leadership and its style

The gram ekai leadership has a wide base. Officially, Barban Ganju, a respected village elder, is its chairperson but he is not very vocal, unlike Bhogta who is more articulate. Also a respected village elder and seasoned leader, the latter is a former mukhiya who is familiar with how government systems function and how to engage with officials and elected leaders.

The other leaders of the morchas are younger and

enterprising villagers who are mobile and willing to spare time for the community. They include Ganju and Bijay Bhuiya who heads the farmers' group sub-committee.

The gram ekai takes collective decisions after discussing issues in the executive committee. In case of important decisions, it convenes the entire village. It sits every month with its morchasto plan for the coming month.

## 6. Organisational culture and values

A CBO that focuses on helping socially and economically excluded communities to access and avail their rights and, in the process, cements the people's link with their land, requires a high degree of commitment and energy. It needs to imbibe and internalise the values and philosophy of the Ekta Parishad. But the NSVK works in project mode in its interventions in the villages, with its village-level facilitators and even its more senior functionaries lacking the vision to infuse this value system that can carry forward the work it has initiated beyond the project period.

The structure and form are there. People have been mobilised and made more aware through trainings and mentoring. They are committed, hold meetings to analyse issues and take up these issues in block and district forums. The gram ekais are linked to each other through a federated structure from the panchayat to the district level to share understanding and take collective action. But their leadership still lacks the level of articulation and the resolve to take the struggle forward on its own without the NSVK's hand-holding support and resources.

## 7. CSOs relationship with the Gram EkaiBrahmna

The CSO has provided constant support and guidance to the gram ekai and its morchas through its local facilitators. They have oriented its leaders on the MGNREGA and FRA so they can monitor the implementation of their provisions. The leaders have also developed the capacity to

<sup>1</sup> This sub-committee also functions as the Forest Rights Committee (FRC) constituted in the village under the FRA.

manage the CBO on their own. But, as shared earlier, the organisation has not been able to deeply ingrain the parishad values in the CBO. For this to happen and for the leadership to develop to the level of the core parishad cadre, the association needs to continue beyond the PACS intervention.

NSVK has also sought to develop a working relationship between the ekai, its federated structure and the local and district administration to facilitate its work in the long run. For example, it organised a meeting in November 2013 with the district administration of Chatra where the ekai's representatives aired their grievances in accessing MGNREGS benefits. Similarly in May 2014, it organised a padyatra of gram ekais of Chatra and other districts to the chief minister's residence in Ranchi to highlight the delay in awarding forest rights to individuals.

The CSO has also made the villagers more aware of other social issues such as health and sanitation and entitlements like pensions. Many eligible villagers have been getting pensions as a result and nearly 300 households have been identified for construction of toilets under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

## 8. Capacity building efforts of the CSO

The CSO conducted a seven-day orientation of its staff before they embarked on mobilising villagers to form their CBOs. The training covered formation of CBOs and morchas, acts such as MGNREGA and FRA and their associated schemes, Bhamashah Swasthya BimaYojana (BSBY), conducting social audits, and village-level development planning.

Subsequently, it oriented the committee members of the CBOs on their roles and responsibilities and the schemes that could be leveraged for village development, then followed up by training community leaders. The trainings covered topics like conflict management, improved agricultural practices, gender-based violence, social discrimination, the SC/ST Atrocities Act, legal aid, the RTI as well as the provisions under the various acts and schemes.

Select members were also given hands-on training in work measurement, labour budgeting, land mapping, filing applications for employment and claims for FRA rights, filing petitions against discrimination and following up/representation up to the district and even state level.

## 9. Important processes related to the CBO

Organisation of the CBO around critical issues : Employment, insecurity about rights to forest land and problems in accessing forest resources are the critical issues affecting the daily life of the villagers. By selecting capable leaders, the villagers were able to address these needs, which became a rallying point for the villagers.

Decentralised/collective leadership of the gram ekai : Unlike other collectives, the gram ekai has no single dominant leader. Its collective leadership does not seem to have created any conflict or polarisation. Several leaders have emerged to champion the cause of village development, with the heads of the sub-committees becoming experts in the issues they deal with.

Creation of a federated structure: The gram ekais have created a federated structure at the panchayat, block and district levels to support and guide the village units and help them engage with district and state officials to resolve issues at the macro level.

Review of the status of land rights: The initial focus on individual forest rights revealed that 100 villagers were cultivating forest land. An analysis of land-use maps and other documents identified another 50 households. This comprehensive review helped the gram ekai's forest sub-committee to process the additional claims.

Gram ekai as a village development body : The gram ekai has a broad-based focus that covers health, livelihood, agriculture and other issues. It thus serves as a village development committee, guided by its sub-committees that focus on individual issues to benefit the village in the long run. Trained by the NVSK, its leaders prepare the



village development plans based on a collective process of prioritisation and envisioning.

## 10. Key outcomes and impacts

**Building confidence to engage with the government :** The villagers were earlier afraid of engaging with government functionaries, especially the forest bureaucracy, and lacked the confidence to demand accountability or assert their rights or claim their entitlements. Their collective involvement in accessing the MGNREGS and FRA provisions has given them the confidence to demand their rights and confront departmental officials.

**Rekindled bond with their land :** Before the gram ekai interventions, small and marginal farmers kept their land fallow and preferred to migrate for work during the rabi season because of lack of irrigation, constant threat of eviction by the forest department, and insecurity of tenure. They are now more confident that they will soon get land pattas, which will automatically end the threat of eviction. The MGNREGS work has also created irrigation facilities, allowing them to farm a second crop, which means they would no longer have to migrate seasonally for employment.

**Conserving and developing natural resources :** The community forest right best owed on the village has instilled a sense of responsibility in the gram ekaito conserve and develop forest resources to improve household incomes. The village mind-set has changed from harvesting and exploiting the forests to protecting and sustaining them.

**Smoother implementation of programmes :** Better awareness has led to smoother implementation of all development schemes and programmes including, apart from MGNREGS and FRA, schemes for social protection, sanitation and education. The gram ekaiensures that all programmes are effectively and transparently implemented in the village.

## 11. External opportunities and constraints

**Opportunities :** Awareness levels in the CBO

about rights and entitlements are fairly high and it has shown the capacity to deal independently with village-level issues, engaging with the local administration, and monitoring the implementation of government schemes/ programmes to develop the village. Some morcha leaders have contested the panchayat elections and exhibit a willingness to work, having, to some extent, imbibed the philosophy inculcated in them by the NSVK.

The granting of community rights over a large tract of 727 acres opens the possibility of supplementing and growing household incomes by properly managing and conserving the available forest resources. In addition, when the 150 registered claims for individual forest rights are recognised, 150 households will gain security of tenure/occupation.

**Constraints :** The individual forest rights of 90 claimants whose cases have been rejected are still at different levels of review and approval and will remain an irritant. While the CSO has assured all help to the villagers in getting their claims recognised, there is unease among the claimants as the project comes to an end. The resources available under the MGNREGS have been decreasing and there is renewed concern that villagers may again be forced to migrate for employment in the near future, which would threaten the existence of the gram ekai.

## 12. Sustainability of the CBO

The gram ekai has formulated a system for its executive committee and sub-committees to meet regularly. The morchas are also clear about their expected roles and responsibilities, which helps them to function and also plan for the future. Though NSVK intends to work in this area beyond the project period, it is difficult to predict how this would be possible in the absence of project support for its local staff.

The ekai has realised the benefits of collective action, having already reaped the benefits of its earlier efforts vis a vis MGNREGS employment, FRA rights and other social entitlements. The

villagers also understand the benefits of sustaining their ekai to improve their lives. This holds out the hope that they will act collectively to ensure the ekai builds strong bonds and is sustained in the long run. Its leaders are confident they will be able to carry forward the work done so far and continue working to develop their village.

### 13. Future plans

The CBO hasn't articulated its future plans clearly beyond continuing to work for the development of the village, filing claims for forest rights, applications for employment, and following up the cases. It has resolved not to leave any claim unrecognised. There is also some thinking on value-addition and processing of forest produce to improve incomes.

Case Study : CBO - Jamuna Swayam Sahayata Samuh

CSO - Shramajivi Mahila Samity

Location : Bokaro, Jharkhand

*Theme : Land rights, Livelihood and RSBY*

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### 1. The context

Jamuna Swayam Sahayata Samuh was formed in Karma village of Singhpur panchayat, which is in the Kasmar block of Bokaro district. Located 50km west of the steel city of Bokaro, Singhpur panchayat has a population of nearly 3,000 and is part of the Jharkhand tribal belt that falls in the Chotanagpur plateau- cultural hub of the major tribes of central and eastern India.

Kasmar is one of nine blocks in Bokaro district, comprising 15 gram panchayats and 68 revenue villages, its population being a mix of general, adivasi and dalit communities (25% SCs and STs). One of the most underdeveloped blocks of the district with a challenging topography, it is severely affected by left-wing extremism. As a result, physical infrastructure and development in most villages, including Singhpur, are limited.

The health and education indicators of the block are lower than the district average and the population depends on seasonal agriculture, livestock rearing (dairy and poultry) and employment in nearby industrial units for their livelihood. The forests, which cover around 30% of the geographical area of the district, also contribute to the livelihood of local communities.

The Jamuna self-help group (SHG) was one among five CBOs organised by the Shramajivi Mahila Samity (SMS) under the PACS

programme. These CBOs in Karma village are women's groups that focus on single women issues. The SMS has organised more than 700 CBOs/women's collectives and 63 block-level CBO federations across eight districts of Jharkhand between 2002 and 2005

### 2. SMS and its association with CBOs

The SMS works on single women (ekal nari) issues, specifically divorced or separated/deserted women as well as widows, spinsters and single mothers. These women are exploited and victimised, facing discrimination in different ways because of prevailing social systems and practices. They have no social support and are excluded from society, barring a few who had the backing of their families.

The helpless women lack confidence because of their low self-esteem. Being excluded from society, even treated as untouchables, they have to fend for themselves, sometimes with children to support, but are denied economic opportunities to become self-supporting and independent. They are physically exploited in workplaces, denied social protection benefits like pensions and get no support from their families, other women or their community.

One reason for the high number of single women in the region is the practice of 'sangha', an informal system of polygamy where males desert



their wives after a few years of marriage and live with another woman, even though they are not allowed to formally marry the second woman. The practice, widespread in the Mahto belt of the state, gives the region a positive sex ratio but mortality levels are high as is the number of separated/deserted, widowed or single women.

The SMS brought these women together in a collective so they could share their problems and support each other in the challenges and discrimination they face in everyday life. Its functionaries organised meetings and staged *nukkad natak*s to sensitise the villagers to the problems of single women and change their perception/attitude to these women. It built up their confidence to fight against discrimination, guiding them to demand their rights and seek redressal for their grievances.

By 2005, the SMS realised it could not mentor the large number of collectives individually so it began federating them into panchayat and block-level *Ekal Nari Sashaktikaran Sangathan*s (ENSS). The federations carried the struggle to the regional level, campaigning to end the *sangha* practice and to stop women being declared witches. It also took up the issue of property rights for single women because it was the root cause of their victimisation as witches.

Five years of campaigning until 2010 saw the *sangha* practice decline, with nearly 32,000 men being forced to take back their wives and children. Also targeted was the rampant alcoholism among men and the consequent harassment of women at home. The collectives mobilised the women against alcohol, destroying local breweries to send a strong message to the community.

The SMS' operational strategy was to first organise the women into a thrift and savings collective and then take up social challenges when they felt more confident and economically empowered. Married women were also admitted into the collective fold to create a wider constituency and support base. So while the focus remained on single women issues, it became a larger fight against gender discrimination and

issues like alcoholism that were affecting all the women in the village. Their independent livelihoods helped the women free themselves from economic dependence on male family members.

However, the CSO found it difficult to maintain its support to the ENSS network so many of the collectives became dormant between 2009 and 2012, though some did work intermittently. It saw the entry of PACS in 2012 as an opportunity to reinvigorate the network and make a fresh beginning. Its PACS project covered 27 blocks across eight districts of Jharkhand, bringing more single women into the ENSS fold to address their victimisation. The work in Bokaro district covered 44 revenue villages in nine gram panchayats covering six blocks, the target being to create at least 25 SHGs in each panchayat.

### 3. History and genesis of the CBO

The SMS began its PACS intervention in Karma village in 2012. Its baseline survey showed there were only seven single women in the village who were willing to form a self-help group, revealing the extent to which the social capital the CSO had invested in the panchayat since 2005 had been diluted due to lack of support. So married women were included into the collective fold and the *Jamuna Swayam Sahayata Samuh* was formed once the objectives of the SHG and its constitution were finalised.

The SMS adopted its time-tested approach to organising the collective : 1) promoting the savings habit among the women, then exploring income-generating activities to provide sustainable livelihoods and make them economically independent; 2) creating awareness about single women issues within the group and village; 3) collectively acting to fight discriminatory social customs and practices that were a barrier to gender equality.

In less than a year, the savings regime enabled the group to obtain a Rs. 50,000 bank loan, which it used as a revolving fund to take up economic activities. It also got a fair price shop (FPS) allotted in its name under the government's

public distribution system (PDS)<sup>1</sup>. The PDS shop operates in the residence of Samla Bala, the president of the collective, the profits being divided among the members who run it.

The SHG took a plot of land on lease from a farmer on which some of its members began collective farming of vegetables. They took a loan from the group to buy seeds and other inputs and grew potato, brinjal, mustard and other vegetables, generating a profit of Rs 5,000-6,000 in each crop cycle.

The same year, the women took another plot of land from the farmer to start a brick kiln. They manufactured 2.5 lakh bricks, selling some lots initially at a good price. But sales have been slow since then, given a slowdown in panchayat development work, so they are currently holding a large unsold stock. The hope the recent panchayat elections will lead to a renewal of local construction projects under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan/Indira Awaas Yojana, boosting brick sales.

One of the SHG's biggest achievements was protecting the village forest. By early 2014, the forest resources had been severely depleted due to huge demand from the seven hamlets of Karma village and the other adjoining villages. The villagers objected to this unsustainable exploitation but they were challenged by the villagers of Singhpur panchayat. Group president Samla Bala and some other members took the dispute to the forest department, meeting the department officials and getting a forest guard deputed to register a case against the Singhpur villagers.

The women also informed the forest department that it would patrol the forest to protect it from illegal exploitation, with 2-3 members doing the round every morning. Their enthusiasm prompted the department to reconstitute the village forest protection committee (FPC),

including seven SHG members and making Samla Bala the chairperson. A watch and ward committee was also set up with two members from each hamlet to patrol the forest.

The group pressurised the department to regenerate the degraded forest, resulting in large-scale plantation being done in the forest. The FPC then framed rules to ensure better management and regulate the use of forest resources - non-timber produce and timber/poles, fuelwood, fruits/seeds and tendu leaves - by each family in a given time-frame. It also decided to provide free fuelwood for the marriage of a girl from the village but would charge the market rate for a son's marriage.

In one subsequent incident, some residents of a nearby village were caught stealing wood from the forest but managed to escape the patrol. The women complained to the forest guard but he was afraid to catch the culprits. So the women of all seven hamlets, led by Samla Bala, accompanied him to take action against the wrong-doers.

This incident discouraged other villagers from entering the Karma forest, leading to better regulation and improvement of forest resources. The FPC also filed a claim under Samla Bala's initiative for community forest rights (CFR) over 50 hectares of the 400-hectare forest. The claim is being processed and the group has been able to garner support from the Uttar Chotanagpur Kendriya Van Prabandhan Sah-Suraksha Samiti to get its claim recognised.

Jagdish Mahto, chairperson of the Uttar Chotanagpur Kendriya Van Prabandhan Sah-Suraksha Samiti says, "It's a welcome initiative that women from Karma village have come forward to protect this forest and have done it so well. I hope more such women and their groups come forward to protect forests and create harmony between man and nature."

<sup>1</sup>There is confusion about the actual date the group was formed and when the PDS shop was allotted to it. A display board outside the shop states it has been running since August 2009, which means the group was formed before that date. The SMS reluctantly admits that though the SHG was formed in 2012, it had to show it was in existence for three years to qualify for the allotment.

#### 4. Organisation of the collective

Single women in Karma face the same problems as elsewhere. Some have been deserted by their husbands for other women, some have returned to their paternal home after being thrown out of the house after the husband's death, while some are still living with their in-laws, mostly working as domestic help with no decision-making role in the family.

The SMS functionaries, themselves single women who have faced similar discrimination and social stigma, encouraged them to come together as a group. But their number was too small to make the group viable, so married women interested in joining the collective were included. Eventually, 13 women got together to form the SHG, of whom seven were single- two separated/deserted and five widows and the remaining six were married. A mix of general and dalit women, seven belonged to the BPL category, while the others were equally vulnerable but did not have a BPL card.

The initial meetings discussed examples of the impact of collective action to build their confidence and drive a change in their perception. They included past ENSS campaigns against sangha, alcoholism and untouchability against widows, with which many of the women were familiar. They shared their experiences of harassment at every level - in seeking widow pensions, trying to get their children admitted to a school or seeking wage employment. Many widows were not getting their pensions despite petitioning the sarpanch and other government officials<sup>2</sup>. This experience sharing firmed up their resolve to work collectively to change the status of single women in society.

#### 5. Leadership and its style

The consensus choice for leading the group was Samla Bala, a widow who had been associated with the ENSS in the past. Mistreated by her in-

laws, she had returned to her parent's village and was living independently. The traits the CSO look for in potential leaders include a sound knowledge base, awareness of issues, honesty, the ability to manage finances transparently, and a willingness to spare time for the group. Samla Bala qualified on all counts, being the most articulate woman in the village, aware of government schemes and programmes, was always helpful and could engage with local departmental officials.

While the SMS oriented all potential leaders, Samla Bala was a level ahead, her initiative gaining the FPS bid, land lease for community farming, and revitalising the FPC. She organised

Moorti, a widow and member of a CBO in Manjura village, arranged the marriage of her daughter in 2010, spending much beyond her means to give a dowry - including a bicycle - to the groom. Not satisfied with the dowry, her son-in-law constantly harassed her daughter, asking for more dowry, sending her back to her mother after every argument.

In 2013, the daughter was again sent back, charged with not respecting her husband and answering back. When Moorti went to plead with him to take her daughter back, he refused, saying he could not guarantee her safety if she was forcibly sent back to his home. Scared, Moorti went to Samla Bala, who discussed the matter with the group and decided to make a police report.

Samla Bala led a large group of women to the local police station and lodged a complaint against the man on charges of harassment for more dowry. Assuring swift action, the police threatened the man about the consequences of the dowry suit and advised reconciliation. Sense prevailed and the man took Moorti's daughter back and they have been living together happily since 2013.

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When the women visited offices to enquire about their widow pension, they found that the post office clerk had withdrawn the pension of three widows through ghost accounts. They lodged a complaint against the clerk who was suspended and the women started receiving their pension.

the villagers to claim community forest rights once she came to know about the FRA and its rights/entitlements, and has ensured that widows get their pensions and other benefits. She is now a regional leader for all single women, with people from other blocks coming to lodge complaints or seek guidance whenever women-headed households or their daughters face exploitation/social discrimination. Samla Bala has

often expressed the wish to step down and give others the opportunity to take up the group leadership, but the group has refused.

The SHG takes collective decisions through a process of consultation and discussion. Also, there is no compulsion on members to participate in economic activities. For example, only some women took up collective farming, although the group provided all necessary support and credit to the venture.

### Organisational culture and values

The SHG has strong links with the ENSS network of CBOs, which has a membership of more than 25,000. State and district-level officials and panchayat leaders are aware of the network's collective strength and take ENSS advocacy seriously.

All CBO members are members of the panchayat ENSS, which selects three representatives for the block-level ENSS, which engages with block officials, advocating better implementation of schemes and priority targeting of single women and women-headed households for development works and grievance redressal. The district-level ENSS committee has four members from each block-level ENSS and does similar work with the district administration.

### 6. The CBO's relationship with the SMS

The CBO works independently, with guidance/mentoring from experienced ENSS functionaries. It has a close relationship with the ENSS, working with it to mobilise women on a macro scale to create pressure on the administration/local community. SMS staff are

more distant, both location-wise and interaction-wise, which is why the CBO women fall back on their own ENSS federation for support and guidance. Also, the SMS staff do not have the capacity to provide this kind of support, given their lack of knowledge of what exactly they do on the ground.

### 7. Capacity building efforts of the CSO

The CBO members go through structured leadership training programmes to develop their leadership skills, which include organising and conducting meetings and resolving conflicts. Informal trainings are also conducted on issues like legal aid, social audit, land rights, organising campaigns and protests, gender-based violence, untouchability, FRA provisions, SC/STs Atrocities Act, NREGA, RTI Act, etc.

Trainings on land rights and FRA are need-based and organised on demand, especially after the group became active in the FPC. The women needed to understand the FRA and its provisions and learn about managing forests in a sustainable manner. This knowledge helped them file the CFR claim and get the resolution passed in the gram sabha.

### 8. Important processes related to the CBO

Organisation around issues of concern : The CBO focused on single women issues to organise the women, even those who were married. Once a wide support base was created, it wove all other issues, such as gender discrimination, rights over resources and economic empowerment, around this core issue.

Focus on economic independence : Single women cannot challenge the prevailing mind-set and fight for their rights if they are not economically independent. Their success as entrepreneurs and wage earners demonstrated their ability to take their fight to wider socio-economic issues related to access to resources and putting an end to discriminatory practices.

ENSS support for escalating issues : The CBOs tapped the panchayat and block ENSS network to resolve issues requiring macro level solutions,



such as priority targeting of women-headed households for seeking scheme entitlements. They also sought the support of other networked women's bodies in the region, including the state-level Ekal Nari Sashaktikaran Sanghathan.

Working closely with front line workers : Rather than being in confrontation with front line workers in seeking scheme entitlements, the CBO chose to work in close cooperation with them. Thus panchayat functionaries helped them in accessing widow and old-age pensions, school scholarships and other benefits while forest officials worked with them to protect and conserve the forest and its resources.

## 9. Key outcomes and impacts

Strong bond among single women : The collective created a strong bond between single women in the village, the group backing them in times of harassment and violence. The sensitization of other women in the village to the vulnerabilities of single women broadened and strengthened this support base.

Economic empowerment of members : The economic activities brought livelihood security to the women, insulating them from poverty and distress. Their empowerment allowed them to take independent decisions, freeing them from male dominance. Their business experience and entrepreneurial skills made them confident to fight for their rights and defy social discrimination.

Rights over resources and conservation : Their confidence enabled the women to take up the responsibility of protecting their forest and managing its resources. They have become ambassadors of conservation, sensitising the entire village about sustainable management, and popularising symbolic practices like tying rakhis on trees during raksha bandhan. Having acquired CFR rights, they are also looking to exploit forest resources in sustainable ways and improve their earnings through value-added processing of forest produce.

Improved status of single women : The CBOs

advocacy has improved the status of single women in society. Where earlier they were despised, they are now respected. The social boycott of single women, especially widows, from social functions is on the decline and they are consulted in key decisions related to village development.

Improved development governance: The CBO's monitoring has improved access to benefits as well as delivery of services, especially in schemes for social justice/protection. With service providers now being aware of the power of single women, overall governance of schemes and village development has improved significantly.

## 10. Role of the CSO in the emergence of the CBO as a strong institution

The creation of strong local groups federated to the district level has empowered single women, giving them bargaining power to bring about macro level social changes. The federated structure allows action from the local to the district level, with the higher levels mentoring and guiding the local bodies.

This structure has taken root in the region, with five CBOs in a single village (Karma) and 20 across Singhpur panchayat that can be mobilised to provide critical mass to confront issues both at the local and macro levels. The single-minded purpose of the CBOs brings together like-minded individuals at all levels who share similar personal experiences. This bodes well for the future beyond the project cycle.

## 11. External opportunities and constraints

Opportunities : The village is well aware of the CBO's role in protecting the village forest and triggering social changes. Its forest regeneration initiative has allowed the villagers to get their daily needs of forest resources, which they couldn't in the past. The success of their economic ventures has also given them independence and confidence. They are now aware of the power of collective action.

The women have moved from the margins of the society to become active members of the gram

sabha who are consulted on all development issues. They also have the confidence to engage with elected representatives and local functionaries to negotiate and demand services.

Though none of the women contested the recent panchayat elections, they are confident they can work with whoever emerges as the winners. They now have a longer-term development perspective, which enables them to guide development planning in the village. Their interventions have improved individual entitlements/benefits, got more work approved under the MNREGS, ensured timely payments, and facilitated filing of individual and community claims of other forest dwelling communities (OTFDs) in the village.

**Constraints:** Left-wing extremism in the region hampers the development of physical infrastructure. The awareness levels of people are low and livelihood opportunities in the villages are limited, causing high migration to Bokaro and other industrial areas for employment. This could threaten the CBO if some of the women migrate for better income opportunities. Attention is being given to educate the younger generation, but literacy levels in the present group are low, which makes them depend on external stakeholders in dealing with complex bureaucratic issues like the recognition of FRA claims and getting development works approved from the block/district.

## 12. Sustainability of the CBO

The women are confident they can sustain the CBO and manage its work after the PACS project ends and the CSO support is no longer available. Some CBO members are now more informed than the CSO staff about how to deal with situations at the local level. Diversifying their income portfolio will put them on the path to self-sustenance,

which will keep their confidence high and enable them to continue helping single women in distress.

The strong bond styling the single women together in the SHG and ENSS network will keep them active and functioning as a collective in times to come, with their mutual understanding and coordination insulating them against future threats.

The SMS now wants to register the block-level ENSS as a society to keep it functioning independently. It also plans to link the SHGs/CBOs to skill development programmes in government schemes like the NRLM.

## 13. Future plans

The SHG wants to sustain its collective economic endeavours and strengthen its forest protection and conservation activities, while working around issues of single women. Having achieved economic independence of its women members and ensured their safety and dignity, it now wants to counsel other single women in the region and motivate them to become economically independent.

The group plans to seek the support of the forest department to regenerate more degraded areas in the forest through plantations to improve the forest quality to sustain wildlife. They have suggested planting palash and kusum trees so that the women can take up large-scale lac cultivation to supplement their income.

Case Study : CBO - Maa Buru Beshauli Mahila Samiti;  
CSO - Society for Human Assistance and Rural Empowerment (SHARE)  
Location : West Singhbhum, Jharkhand

*Theme : Health and Nutrition*

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## 1. The context

Maa Buru Beshauli Mahila Samiti is located in Delgapara village of Majhgaon block of West Singhbhum district in Jharkhand. The district has among the most adverse development indicators in the state and these indicators are further skewed in Majhgaon block<sup>1</sup>, which is over 65km from Chaibasa, the district headquarters. Located on the Chotanagpur plateau near the Jharkhand-Odisha border, the region is remote, has difficult topography, poor infrastructure and limited connectivity with the rest of the state. Consequently, the outreach and quality of basic services like health, nutrition and education is poor, resulting in high morbidity and low literacy levels. Over 80% of the population in the block are scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST), more than 50% being ST, mainly belonging to the Lohar, Santhal, Munda and Oraon communities. The area is also marked by low economic development, underproductive agriculture, limited alternate livelihood options and high dependence on forest resources for daily survival.

The Society for Human Assistance and Rural Empowerment (SHARE) works in the 10 gram

panchayats of Majhgaon block, where the ST population is over 80%, the rest including minorities and dalits. These panchayats are marked by high out-migration, discrimination in service delivery, unsafe and limited potable water, widespread discrimination against socially excluded communities, and high levels of superstition, which include strong faith in traditional healing practices (medicine men) and victimisation of women (for witchcraft).

SHARE has been working in the block for the past 12 years, mainly around issues of discrimination and exclusion of adivasi and minority communities, helping to form women's collectives and empowering gram sabhas for social and economic development. It focuses on providing livelihoods and basic food security to these excluded communities, creating collective local leadership to challenge social and gender discrimination, while working on the right to employment under the MGNREGS.

The Mahila Samiti is one of three CBOs SHARE has facilitated in Delgapara, a predominantly tribal village with a population of 950. It was formed in 2013, three years after SHARE helped set up the Maa Durga Mahila Samiti. Yet it has

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<sup>1</sup>Paschimi Singhbhum or West Singhbhum district has 18 blocks; it was carved out of Singhbhum district in 1990 after its division into East and West Singhbhum.



been able to achieve a fair measure of success in this limited period.

## 2. SHARE's strategy and association with CBOs

SHARE works with a community-focused approach, its strategy being to create collectives and bind them together with thrift and credit activities. This approach provides economic security to the communities it targets and ensures a common platform for their interwoven interests so they can look for collective solutions to their problems.

Most of the groups SHARE has promoted with PACS support have savings and credit activities to anchor their other initiatives. The organisation mostly works with adivasi and muslim communities, the focus being women, cultivators and farm labour. It has organised more than 200 special interest collectives in the villages of Majhgaon block that include MNREGS labour committees, village farmers and food security committees, village forest committees and women's self-help groups (WSHGs).

The entry point is mobilising the excluded community by interacting with the youth, women and community leaders in village-level meetings. These meetings help to identify groups of women or men who are interested in organising themselves together to pursue a specific objective. Defunct collectives that can be revived are also identified. Once these groups formalise their structure and select their leaders/members, they are encouraged to take up thrift and credit activities.

The groups meet regularly to understand the aspirations of their members, address underlying conflicts and orient themselves on development issues. Once the savings initiative stabilises, other development issues related to rights and entitlements, social exclusion and discrimination, community-led monitoring, access to public services etc are taken up, with the group collectively planning its strategy and looking for solutions.

SHARE's field organisers focus on building the capacity of group members on thematic issues - livelihood, health and nutrition and developing their leadership skills so they can take up leadership roles in the village. They also link these CBOs with government schemes and programmes.

## 3. Federating and networking CBOs

While facilitating basic economic activities through savings, SHARE seeks to weave individual CBOs into a network to strengthen their impact. The long-term objective is to create a large number of village-level groups in the region tied together by common interests and supporting each other by networking.

Thus, all the mahila samitis (WSHGs) and other CBOs such as the kisan samitis (farmers' groups) in a village are brought together on a common platform called the gram sangathan, where they share concerns and collectively address them, supporting one another in times of need/crisis. The sangathan, in turn, links up with other sangathans in the gram panchayat to form a panchayat CBO federation, leading up to a mandal CBO federation at the up-mandal (block) level.

Mutual sharing and support between groups builds collective strength. For example, the women in the mahila samitis are mostly illiterate so they seek help from the kisan samiti to maintain their accounts and record the minutes of meetings. The women don't have to look to an outside source for their daily functioning and this mutual support builds solidarity.

The PACS support has seen the formation of more than 150 CBOs in 10 gram panchayats and 56 revenue villages, including 76 WSHGs, 13 kisan samitis, 56 gram sangathans, 10 panchayat federations and a block federation. Their mandate is to address exclusion and discrimination in the delivery of basic services, the focus being on health and nutrition.

The block federation, also called the Sampoorna Up-mandal Federation on Health and Nutrition,

coordinates with block-level health functionaries -the block medical officer in charge(MOIC), officer in-charge of the malnourishment treatment centre (MTC), and other officials. It takes up advocacy of health and nutrition issues at the block and panchayat levels and also helps the kisansamiti in advocacy of agriculture and livelihood issues.

The panchayat federation monitors and supports the work of the CBOs and farmers' groups. Its membership is flexible, with the CBOs nominating 2-3 members to participate in federation meetings, depending on convenience and availability. The members elect the chairperson, secretary and treasurer of the executive body, usually by consensus. SHARE staff conducts leadership trainings for the office bearers so they can take up organisational responsibilities such as conducting meetings, resolving conflicts, facilitating access to rights and services, and developing group understanding of government programmes and the panchayati raj system.

The gram sangathan membership includes all CBO members but all villagers can participate in its meetings. The munda or traditional tribal leader is also the sangathan president because he commands the most respect in the community. All PRI (panchayati raj institution) representatives and local government functionaries are also invited to the sangathan meetings.

The sangathan is a platform to learn from each other and share information about what the constituent CBOs are doing. It helps them coordinate their activities and resolve divisive factional conflicts.

#### 4. History and genesis of the mahila samiti

The people of Majhgaon block were familiar with SHARE's work so they were happy when the CSO started the four-year PACS project in 2012. Mahila samiti member Urmila feels SHARE came to Delgapara village at an opportune time, when

farmers were in distress, out-migration was rising and most households were under financial stress. The women who attended the first meeting convened by SHARE's field organiser Vijoy demanded the formation of a self-help group.

They were already aware of the positive impact of a women's collective, the first SHARE-supported CBO in the village being the Maa Durga Mahila Samiti, which had accumulated savings and taken a bank loan to fund livelihood activities. The women wanted to join the group but it wasn't taking new members at the time because it wanted to first consolidate its work. So they decided to set up their own SHG, the Maa Buru Beshauli Mahila Samiti.

#### 5. Formation of the collective

Ten women led by Panmati Lohar set up the Maa Buru Beshauli Mahila Samiti, four more being added later by consensus to take its membership to the present 14 women. Eleven of them belong to vulnerable communities, mainly STs. They were familiar with the history of SHGs in the village, some flourishing while others broke up because of factionalism or lack of interest<sup>2</sup>. The successful Maa Durga Samiti was their role model, inspiring them to stick together, whatever be the circumstances. Helped by SHARE facilitators, the group began saving Rs.5 per week, the figure gradually rising to the current Rs. 20 per week.

Despite being illiterate, the women formulate strict rules with the help of the SHARE field organiser to ensure disciplined group functioning and commitment to the CBO. They included penalties for defaults in savings contributions and not attending meetings, with those who remained absent for long being given a warning, followed by cancellation of their membership.

It also worked out a system to prioritise the sanction of loans to members and non-members.

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<sup>2</sup> Delgapara village alone has eight SHGs of which three were established with SHARE support.

## 6. SHARE's linkages with the Mahila Samiti

The CSO facilitators conducted formal and informal trainings to sensitise women and make them aware of their rights and entitlements. They were also taught how to monitor government schemes implemented in the village. This helped create a demand-driven environment for services in Delgapara, markedly impacting the inequality and delivery.

The CSO facilitators who have been with the group since the beginning see the change as being transformational. Women who were too shy to talk are now confident opinion leaders. When the CSO organised a jansunwai (public hearing) at the block level last year, attended by district and block officials, bank officials and elected representatives, they confidently voiced their opinions and grievances in the large gathering.

The success achieved by the mahila samiti is built on the bonding with other WSHGs and kisansamiti in the village and their guidance and encouragement. The network of CBOs in the district created by the CSO strategically links mutually-supporting units to build critical mass to catalyse social change.

Laxmi Pingua is the woman sarpanch of Delgapara Panchayat who was elected on a seat unreserved for women in the December 2015 local elections in Jharkhand.

Talking about the success achieved by the mahila samiti, she says: "It is encouraging to see women now coming together, becoming more aware, and working for their own economic gain as well as the development of the entire community. They have become ambassadors for village development, especially in health and nutrition. Earlier, men used to discourage them from going out. All that has now changed. As the head of the panchayat, I will always encourage women to come to the gram sabha to learn about schemes and benefit from them."

The samiti experience shows that economic interests are as strong a binding force as social concerns. Livelihood activities empower the women who have woven their demand for inclusive and equitable health and nutrition services into their economic activities. So the ties that bind them together are strong and discourage them from leaving the group. So it's not surprising that no member has dropped out; on the contrary, the group keeps growing.

## 7. Capacity building efforts by the CSO

SHARE's capacity building approach is a combination of formal and informal trainings. The formal trainings focus on developing the organisational and leadership skills of the women while informal trainings are usually on-the-job orientations through discussions and problem sharing. The CSO's facilitators use pictographic learning materials for knowledge transfer and building awareness, the objective being to shape attitudes and influence practices.

SHARE uses the participatory learning and action (PLA) approach to generate discussion, fill knowledge gaps and encourage the women to analyse issues in their village context. Their local knowledge and understanding enriches their collective search for solutions to address their problems. The PLA approach is also used in community-led monitoring of schemes being implemented.

The content of both formal and informal trainings include organisational and leadership skills; rights and entitlements; exclusion and gender/social discrimination; engaging and negotiating with PRI, block and district officials; the SC & ST Atrocities Act, NREGA, FRA, PESA and RTI; and information and operational procedures of schemes/services related to health and nutrition.

## 8. Important processes related to the CBO

The Maa Buru Beshauli Mahila Samiti has achieved in less than three years what other successful WSHGs have taken several years to accomplish. When the women meet, they first attend to their savings work after which they

discuss health and nutrition problems that crop up daily. The energy of the women and their desire to transform their lives through their SHG has led to these achievements, some of which are summarised below:

**Economic empowerment leading to social change :** The CBO first focused on becoming economically stable, both collectively and individually. Economic empowerment established its credentials in the village, after which it took up social issues, intervening for the rights and entitlements of the villagers.

**Focus on health and nutrition :** Health indicators in Majhgaon are among the lowest in the district. Hence, equitable access to health and nutrition is a critical issue. The CBO focuses on making these services more inclusive and accountable, improving their quality, and helping people access them. It first tried to improve quality and delivery through dialogue with the service providers and front line workers. However, when things did not improve, it moved to get tardy/erring officials replaced by committed people who are willing to devote time to their work.

**Mutually supportive CBO network :** The village has several CBOs, with the mahila samiti drawing strength and support from them. Their shared concerns strengthen collective action and help create critical mass to initiate grassroots social change. One example is the almost total eradication of the widespread practice of 'witch-hunting'.

**Working with frontline workers :** The mahila samiti works closely with the AWWs, ANMs and ASHAs of the ICDS programme. It acts as a social watchdog to ensure equitable delivery of adequate and good quality health and nutrition services, mobilising the community to ensure access to these services.

## 9. Key outcomes and impacts

**Economic empowerment of the group :** Soon after the SHG was set up, the women realised they needed to quickly move from savings to the next

level economic activities. Six members took a Rs 4,000 loan from the SHG and, with the support of their male family members, went to Chaibasa and Tatanagar and bought in-demand vegetables - tomato, bitter gourd, etc in bulk. They sold them in the local market at a lower price than the private vegetable suppliers, still earning a good margin.

Encouraged by the profits the women made in the first round of sales, the group took this up as a regular activity, earning a weekly profit of Rs. 1,200-1,500. The business was expanded to include more vegetables - lady's finger, brinjal, chilly, potatoes and seasonal fruits/vegetables. The SHG members also applied for and received the licence to run a fair price shop (FPS) in the village under the government's public distribution system (PDS).

When the group savings reached nearly Rs. 37,000 the group took a kisan credit card (KCC) loan of Rs. 25,000 to encourage members to start their individual businesses. One member now sells bangles in village haats in the area, another has started a stationery shop in the village, one trades in rice, another runs a general store and yet another sells handia (traditionally brewed liquor).

So presently, the 14 members currently run two group-level economic activities- bulk vegetable purchasing/selling and running the FPS and also their independent individual businesses, thus firmly securing their economic future.

**Social changes catalysed by the CBO :** Once the group had stabilised the savings habit, it took up development issues, focusing on health and nutrition. A collective situational analysis revealed that health and nutrition services were either irregular or of inferior quality. Health facilities were far away and front line workers were not available when needed. Also, the poor faced discrimination in availing the services. Private health services being costly, they were essentially excluded from quality healthcare so they relied on traditional healing and rituals. As a result, children suffered from malnutrition,



maternal and infant mortality rates were high, and very few institutional deliveries took place in Delgapara village. The changes catalysed by the CBO included:

- Making services and service providers accountable : The first step the mahila samiti took was to improve the functioning of the anganwadi centre (AWC). It motivated women to take their infants and children to the AWC, creating pressure on the anganwadi worker (AWW) to open the centre on time and provide the stipulated services, which include pre-school education and nutritional support for children, infants and nursing mothers. It counselled mothers to take their acutely malnourished children to the malnutrition treatment centre (MTC) for treatment.

It then turned its attention to the delivery of health services by the sahiya (the social health activist - ASHA) and ANM (auxiliary nurse-midwife), which was poor, irregular, with no accountability and widespread discrimination against marginalised communities, even denial of services. The women encouraged the villagers to start using the health services.

When the sahiya refused to cooperate, they petitioned the gram sabha to have her replaced. With an active sahiya and AWW in place, services such as home visits, family counselling, health check-ups, routine immunisation and observation of village health and nutrition day (VHND) were regularised. One significant outcome is that all deliveries are now institutional under the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), except in emergencies when a trained birth attendant assists deliveries at home.

The next issue taken up was affordability of medical services, both public and private. The samite focused on extending the

coverage of the Rashtriya Swasth Bima Yojana (RSBY)<sup>3</sup> to cover healthcare costs. An RSBY mitra helps BPL families get the RSBY entitlement cards to access the stipulated entitlements. The samiti had the mitra, who was not performing his duties, replaced by its nominee, the husband of one of its members. The new mitra has expanded the RSBY coverage and helps patients register in both public and private hospitals (like Gayatri Seva Sadan in Chaibasa). He also coordinates with the sahiya for the JSY scheme.

- Improved community health and nutrition practices : The samiti's efforts have changed attitudes to healthcare in the village. Where earlier the first point of contact in case of illness was the local healer, villagers are now no longer apprehensive about visiting a doctor. Rituals are still performed, but patients now visit the PHC or district hospital on the advice of front line health workers, leading to a reduction in mortality/morbidity rates.
- Improving the social position of women : The collective strength of the women has helped improve their position in village society. Discrimination in ownership of property and other assets has declined. Earlier, the most convenient way to deny a woman property rights on the death of her father or husband was to declare her a witch and hound her out of the village. The samite put a stop to victimisation in this manner.

In another recent case, a girl from the village eloped with a boy from a powerful family in another village of the panchayat. When the girl became pregnant, the boy's family and local elected representatives put pressure on her family not to pursue the case. But the samiti lodged a police complaint against the boy, who is still

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<sup>3</sup> Under the Rashtriya Swasth Bima Yojana, the Government of India provides health insurance of Rs30,000 to families below the poverty line to meet hospitalisation expenses in any government or private medical facility.

absconding. The women have been able to get an undertaking from the boy's family that he will marry the girl as soon as he returns.

Today, the samiti is a strong pressure group in the village, attending gram sabha meetings, influencing its decisions and forging unity on development issues. For example, they wanted an approach road to one of their hamlets and got their demand included in the MGNREGS work budget. Also, when wage payments for constructing a nala were delayed, with the mukhiya indirectly demanding a bribe, they gheraoed the panchayat office and got the payment released.

Instances of social discrimination and untouchability are now rare. Some samiti members have also contested panchayat elections. As the women point out, "they sometimes get preference over men, as women of the village have now organised themselves into groups and emerged as a strong collective".

To summarise, the major outcomes of the PACS-supported intervention are the following:

- Economic empowerment triggering social transformation;
- Significant change in gender roles in the village;
- Greater awareness about health and nutrition issues leading to improved/accountable services and indicators;
- Creation of a strong collective as local ambassadors of safe health and nutrition;
- Building of a critical mass of progressive citizens (CBO network) in the village;
- Demand-driven service delivery environment across sectors/schemes- health, nutrition, MGNREGS, panchayat development;
- Elimination of discrimination in accessing

rights and entitlements.

## 10. Leadership and its style

A key factor in making all this possible is the leadership of samiti president Panmati Lohar and secretary Manisha Pingua. Though barely literate, Panmati is among the more vocal women who is aware of government schemes and how the government functions. She is also mobile, visiting adjoining villages and markets. Her personal drive and confidence helped in group formation and in engaging with government functionaries.

Similarly, Manisha, who is younger than Panmati, is equally aware of issues, can speak well and came to the village after marriage from a relatively developed area near a major urban centre.

Leadership trainings undertaken with PACS support have helped develop the leadership skills of the samiti members, enabling them to organise and conduct meetings, manage conflicts and negotiate with government officials.

## 11. External opportunities and constraints

**Opportunities :** Some samiti members are active in the village health, sanitation and nutrition committee (VHSNC), parent-teacher association (PTA) and mothers' groups. There is scope for greater participation at the village, panchayats and higher levels and for members to become frontline workers in flagship programmes.

There is also scope to further exploit employment and livelihood opportunities in programmes like the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NLRM) and MGNREGS.

More women are also sending their children to tribal hostels and girls to the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) for better education that can qualify them for jobs and improve their standard of living and quality of life.

**Constraints :** Inadequate regional economic development, poor infrastructure and underdeveloped markets limit development

opportunities while low awareness is a barrier to exploring available opportunities. This leads to out-migration of males and sometimes even families, threatening the unity of the samiti.

While the Majhgaon block is relatively unaffected by left-wing extremist activities, the presence of well-entrenched Maoist groups in the surrounding region is always a threat to development initiatives and the mobility of women.

## 12. Sustainability of the CBO

SHARE functionaries help the individual CBOs to develop their future plans as part of the CSO's withdrawal strategy. This includes assigning responsibilities for sustaining future planned work, creating accountability, and identifying critical areas where CSO support would still be needed. It also involves looking for ways in which the CBOs can complement each other and coordinate their work to minimise their dependence on external stakeholders.

Since SHARE will continue working in the area after the PACS project, it is open to offering support to the CBO as and when it needs strategic help which their CBO federation may not be able to provide.

## 13. Future plans

Today, the Maa Buru Beshauli Mahila Samiti is on a firm ground and can sustain itself with its income-generating activities. The members are aware of their collective strength and have a clear vision of where they would like to take their group in future so they are likely to stay together. The samiti office bearers are confident they can

manage and sustain the group in future, though they would like their association with SHARE to continue.

The group now wants to expand its portfolio of economic activities to include fisheries, vegetable farming and commodity trading. It also wants the panchayat to construct a community hall as a venue for its meetings and to hold community functions.

## 14. Internal strengths and weaknesses

**Strengths :** Economic success is a stronger binding force for the collective than external support. Economic empowerment has also helped raise the status of women. People listen to them and respect them, while their equation with males is more equal, with less dependence on males to play leadership roles. This will ensure the women stay together for their mutual interest and benefit.

Their knowledge and awareness of their rights and entitlements as well as their understanding of health and nutrition issues means they will continue to monitor development activities beyond the project period. The networked CBOs will also contribute to ensure sustainability.

**Weaknesses :** Many women in the group are illiterate, though this weakness is offset by their increased awareness and confidence levels. But there is still scope for them being manipulated in complex situations. This makes them depend more on outside stakeholders for book-keeping and understanding government documents. The group will need to include educated members to fill the literacy gap.

Case Study : CBO - Pahariya Peoples Organization (PPO), Paktodi;  
CSO - Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief  
(EFICOR)

Location : Sahibganj, Jharkhand

*Theme : MGNREGA and FRA*



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## 1. Background

Sahibganj district, set within the lush green region; with a predominantly tribal population is a part of Santhal Pargana division and forms the eastern most tip of the division. A large part of the district is hilly. The district is divided into two regions. The first region on the bank of the Ganges is fertile and richly cultivated. The hills and slopes are covered with forests, once dense but scanty now. The valleys have cultivable lands, yielding mostly paddy. The inhabitants of this region are generally Pahariyas, Mal Pahariyas and Santhals. The inhabitants on the hill top cultivate Barbatti and maize using rain water.

The second region consists of the uplands, undulation along ridges and depressions. The Ganges, Gumani and Bansloi rivers flow through this region. This area has plenty of fertile lands and is richly cultivated. The inhabitants of this region are mainly middle class people of different castes, Paharias and Santhals. Owing to large scale unscrupulous felling the region once known for its thick and extensive forests is now bereft of much of its jungle wealth. The Forest department has undertaken a forestation of these areas. The traditional cottage and village industries practiced by the Santhals and the Paharias constitute tasar rearing, village black-smithy, carpentry, handloom weaving, rope making, bidi

making, earthen ware making, stone ware making, etc. There is no large-scale industry available in the area mainly due to lack of infrastructure support. A number of small-scale industries have been set up in the district. Most of these are based on mining and related quarrying activities. The district has good network of roadways. The river Ganges provides water link also for such purposes.

Taljhari, a community development block is located 23 km from Sahibganj, the district headquarters. As per 2011 Census of India Taljhari CD Block had a total population of 76,330, all of which were rural. There were 51 % males and 49 % females among them Scheduled Castes 7% and Scheduled Tribes 60% and rest of them from general and other caste. As per 2011 census the total number of literates in Taljhari CD Block was 27 % and 73% are illiterate. Health service facility of this area is very poor. Though there is PHC but it's not functional. The community is depending on quacks. People have to visit Sahibganj district for any emergency cases.

The Pahariyas, as the name indicates, is a primitive hill tribe settled on hill tops in and around Rajmahal Hills of Santal Pargana Region in Jharkhand state. They are listed as one of the 8 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in

Jharkhand. Pahariyas live in difficult and rugged geographic terrain, and practice shifting cultivation, which is not sufficient to address the food need of families throughout the year. Their settlements are very scattered and live in small hamlets. With inadequate access to health, education and drinking water facilities the Pahariyas are compelled to live a substandard life. The Pahariyas are a primitive and most socially excluded group with hand to mouth existence. The poor governance mechanism and inequitable participation of the Pahariya tribe in the MGNREGA implementation at the local level has aggravated the livelihood insecurity of the Pahariya. Accountability and transparency is not maintained in the process of MGNREGA implementation as a result of which there are discrepancy in job card, job allocation and payment. The participation rate of the Pahariyas in MNREGA is very low due to poor awareness and access to its provisions.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief (EFICOR) is a Civil Society Organization (CSO) began its operation in 1967 when it provided relief to the drought hit state of Bihar. It was registered in 1980 under the Societies registration Act, 1960. Since then EFICOR has been working with the disadvantage and socially excluded communities in the poorest district of India. EFICOR serves the poor and marginalised irrespective of caste, creed, or religion in situations of poverty, injustice, and disaster. EFICOR in line with its vision and mission has been working among the poor and marginalized since 1967; however, the organization has focused more on people's empowerment and inclusive development approach since the late 90s and thus works towards issues of social exclusion particularly of tribes that live in socio-politico exclusion and economic deprivation. EFICOR has been working with the Pahariya communities in Jharkhand since 1992 with integrated development approach. Some of interventions carried out were Adult literacy, economic enhancement program for women through formation of SHGs, Agriculture development, land treatment and watershed management for farmers and initiating local governance process. EFICOR empowers the Pahariyas in 65 villages of Sahibganj district in Jharkhand through livelihood support and establishing linkage with the district administration to access tribal entitlements related to agriculture and horticulture programme. Under PACS program EFICOR has formed 219 PPOs, having 1980 membership among which 1486 male members and 494 female members.

management for farmers and initiating local governance process. In their work with PACS, EFICOR is working in 219 villages in the Sahibganj and Pakur districts of Jharkhand to improve the livelihood security and ensure land ownership for the Pahariya tribe by helping them to access their rights and entitlements under employment and forest rights schemes.

## 2. EFICOR and its Association with Community-Based Institutions

EFICOR is a national level Christian Organisation engaged in Disaster response, Development, Advocacy and training. It serves the poor and marginalised irrespective of caste, creed, or religion in situations of poverty, injustice, and disaster irrespective of caste, creed or religion. EFICOR also works towards influencing the faith based organisations in India to address issues of injustice and poverty. EFICOR has been working with the Pahariya communities in Jharkhand since 1992 with integrated development approach. Some of interventions carried out were Adult literacy, economic enhancement program for women through formation of SHGs, Agriculture development, land treatment and watershed management for farmers and initiating local governance process. EFICOR empowers the Pahariyas in 65 villages of Sahibganj district in Jharkhand through livelihood support and establishing linkage with the district administration to access tribal entitlements related to agriculture and horticulture programme. Under PACS program EFICOR has formed 219 PPOs, having 1980 membership among which 1486 male members and 494 female members.

## 3. History and Genesis of Pahariya Peoples Organization, Taljhari

The PACS programme has been implemented by Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief (EFICOR) with the network support of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti. The project concentrated its effort to improve the livelihood security for the Pahariya community by ensuring access to jobs opportunities through MGNREGA, access to

land ownership for household and agricultural purpose under FRA. The project was implemented in four blocks of Sahibganj and two blocks of Pakur districts of Jharkhand. These blocks are located in the hilly region and inhabited by mostly Pahariyas and other tribal groups. The geographical area of the project was spread in 32 Panchayats of both the district and covered 219 villages and has a total population of 52,875 comprising of around 10557 households. Improper functioning of the institutions of governance and depletion of forest and forest produce in and around Pahariya hamlets of the Rajmahal hills compounds the vulnerability of the Pahariyas. Moreover, the Pahariyas are near perpetual debt trap of the Dighus (local money lenders) who charge an exorbitant rate of interest ranging from 60-100% per annum. Approximately 1800 acres of cultivable belonging to the Pahariya are mortgaged.

Recognising the need to empower the Pahariyas in order to increase their participation at the local level administration, EFICOR started working with support of PACS mainly through organizing and strengthening CBO which is named as Pahariya Peoples Organizations at Paktodi village. The project focus on people centred advocacy initiatives to strengthen the governance aspects of the MGNREGA, thereby ensuring access to employment opportunities through MGNREGA and other entitlements meant for the Pahariyas.

#### 4. Organisation of the Collective

EFICOR formed Pahariya Peoples Organization with the objective to increase the access of the Pahariya tribe to non-discriminatory employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enhancing the purchasing power of the community. To create community assets in Pahariya villages through MGNREGA works to facilitate livelihood security. Beside this the project also ensures legal land ownership and lease/sale deeds under the Forest Rights Act (FRA). It also aims to improve the awareness of women on their

rights and entitlements and increasing their participation in decision-making processes at the local level. Paktodi village of Bakodi Gram Panchayat is situated in hill top under taljhari block. The village is constituted with Pahariya communities, who are lagging behind from government facilities. EFICOR staffs visited Paktodi village of Taljhari block, where small meetings took place with community. The particular CBO formed in the name of Pahariya Peoples Organization, with 13 (9 male and 4 female) members at Paktodi village. The group have selected their leaders, who are responsible to continue and facilitate the group process. They organized their monthly meeting on regular basis. The EFICOR personnel are closely attached with the group. Theme based trainings input provide for the capacity building of the members like MGNREGA its guidelines and process, RTI, FRA and Social Audit.

#### 5. Leadership and its Style

The leadership style of the CBO is very informal in nature. The leaders don't have any defined function to play. The group leaders Mr. Jewel Malto, group President 45 yrs and Secretary Mr. Lakhan Malto, 47 years lead the CBO and played a crucial role to shape up the collective process. Jewel Malta is one who completed his high school and very much aware about the developmental issues. They have the responsibilities to call up the meetings, whenever it requires. The members have chosen them on the basis of their leadership quality, knowledge, pro-activeness and the relation with government departments. They have good rapport with government departments and always tried to link services with CBOs and community. They regularly visit to the government offices and tried to link with government schemes for village development. The members have realised that in past they have very low accessibility of MNREGA or any other government schemes. The group do not have any written by-laws nor even any bank account. The members have now realized of these issues, but they want to emerge the group norms through process. The CBO is very fortunate to have these

two leaders who demonstrate their leadership at local church functionaries. The members have a strong faith on their leadership.

## 6. Organisational Culture and Values

Pahariya Peoples organization at Paktodi village is formed with a clear objective to help Pahariya people. The group members are from same community with equal socio economic background. There has a transparency in disseminating information related to developmental issues to the villagers through group members. It helps them to engage themselves and get employment from government running programs. By the effort of leaders, employment scheme came to Paktodi village as they have good rapport with government departments. Collective strength of the CBO has helped raised voice for demanding their rights on different schemes like; MGNREGA and RSBY registration etc. The CBO leaderships were able to put pressure on government to establish for long. The members who got employment, wish to move ahead to improve their agricultural production by seeking various government benefits. During this all the members were involved to take the issue at related department. This particular success shows energy and boost up the collective strength and dedication to work more. It was a motivating factor behind success of CBO. In the CBO, one of the major functions to collect information about updated government schemes from government departments and disseminate with members through meetings.

## 7. Pahariya People Organization Relationship with EFICOR

There is a regular engagement with the CSO and PPO. Forming community based collectives in their strategy of EFICOR where they believe collectives action can really bring changes in the life of poor like Paktodi village. Under this strategic consideration EFICOR has regularly organizing meeting with CBO where various developmental issues like MGNREGA, RTI, RTE, and Social Audit are discussed in details. The collective, Pahariya People Organization of

Paktodi village is formed with tribal people who are neglected and lagging behind from government running programs. EFICOR organized Pahariya community of Paktodi village and mobilized them to form collectives with an objective to raise their own voice.

## 8. Important Processes Related to the CBO

EFICOR intervention in Paktodi village with Pahariya tribal under PACS program has done a number of remarkable works. The CBO has achieved lots of achievements throughout its intervention;

- Pahariya People's Organisation, Paktodi Pahad of Bakudi Panchayat decided to build a school building in the village. It was felt that there is an immense need to establish a school where boys as well as girls can deliberately pursue their study and opt for higher study. Since there was no school in the village Paktodi. The small children used to go 2 km away for school. The members of Pahariya Peoples organization visited BDO to start and support in construction of primary school at Paktodi village. BDO was in favour to start primary school in the village but there was no money available, so the members contributed in form of labour as well as organised local material like sand and woods through their efforts. The school building constructed and appoints a teacher. The members monitoring and do follow up on regular basis. The members also monitoring for quality of food under mid-day meal program.
- Pahariya community is very limited since they live on hill top of Paktodi. The participation rate of the Pahariyas in MGNREGA is very low in terms of availability of job cards and access to wage employment under MGNREGA. Pahariya Peoples Organization initiative a campaign on job cards. The CBO of Paktodi village started a campaign on the issue of job card. The members of PPO have their job cards



but it was kept with middleman. They were not able to check the workdays or payment. In 2014, PPO driven a campaign on demanding to get back their labour cards from the local contractor/middleman at Block Development Office. After a long representation 30 members get back their job card in their hand. This initiative encourages local CBO to have more said on the issue of MGNREGA. Now any complaint related to MGNREGA is immediately conveyed to block office through the leadership of Pahariya People Organization and hence the role of middleman in MGNREGA implementation has been checked.

- Another important initiative which Pahariya Peoples Organization Paktodi taken is Child marriage. Among Pahariya child marriage is in practice. Normally the Pahariya girls married at the age of 13-14 years. The educational inputs provide by EFICOR to CBOs, they encourage taking up the issue in their village. There were about 4 cases where the CBO pursued the girl's parents to reconsider the marriage of their girl child in early ages. It was also realized the most of the women members of the CBO are now fully aware of the demerits of early child marriage age. However they encourage to the adolescent girls for higher study.
- The land related documentations, land papers etc are a major issue in most of the Pahariya villages. Most of the Pahariya's occupied forest land. They have always tensions and issues with local forest officers as their agricultural land is under forest areas. Most of the times they do not get proper land document papers from relevant departments. So after training and orientation from EFICOR Pahariya People Organization of Paktodi village has used RTI as a weapon to get necessary information about their lands and forest lands. The CBO leadership have helped

villagers to file a number of RTI petition to local forest departments to provide legal land document papers of forest land. RTI has regularly provided a very effective tool for resolving land related issues with Forest departments. Up till now about 4 acres of land has been cleared as agriculture land belonging to local Pahariya families which was under the ownership of forest department.

## 9. Key Outcomes and Impacts

Over the past years Pahariya People Organization process has resulted a number of achievements, some are as follows;

Emergence of Strong and operational Community Based Organisation :

Pahariya Peoples Organization shows their collective effort and bring a remarkable changes in the community. Through group effort primary school construction was successful and now their children have school at their doorstep instead of going 2 km far away. Beside this they also helped members to get back their job card in their hand. Such group efforts helped to emerge as strong CBO.

Emergence of Leadership in the community :

The leaders have shown the signs of strong leadership quality in group. The trained cadres facilitate meetings at the village level along with the PPO members.

These PPO and cadres form the crucial grass root leadership for village level development, and act as the crucial link between the village and the PRI level, between the village and the block level institutions. Pahariya People Organization, Paktodi leadership in the village has been very effective who are able take up issues that affect the village, issues related to MNREGA job cards, payments and other entitlements. They have successfully implemented various government schemes and have done effective monitoring of implementation.

Improved participation in local governance process:

Pahariya People Organization, Paktodi members ensure the participation in Gram Sabha and raised the issue. Prior to the Gram Sabha meetings they planned their meeting in Paktodi village and raised the issues in Gram Sabha.

Improved Access to MGNREGA:

The project has been able to bring positive change in the implementation of MGNREGA as one of the major issues. The members of Pahariya People Organization now have enhanced capacity on understanding the intricacies and bottlenecks in the implementation of MGNREGA. The understanding has helped in raising the issues related to MGNREGA before the government officials. The members are ensuring that all the beneficiaries should have their job card with them. They also keep watch on the quality of work. The PPO, Paktodi functions as a close link between the Panchayat level work and block level officials.

## 10. Capacity Building Efforts by the CSO

After the initial step of providing information that was easily accessible and understandable Kala Jatha and pamphlets in Pahariya language, the project provided a focused and detailed training to these PPOs and cadres to instigate in them the leadership skills and build their knowledge and skills on MGNREGA and other developmental issues. Various structured trainings were provided to the PPOs at different phases of the project. The trainings are provided on; MGNREGA guidelines and its implementation strategy, RTI Act, Forest Rights Act, Right to Education, Food Security bill at block level and district level. Besides this the CBO were provided with various exposure visits which helped them to interact with other communities, at different levels. PPOs got the opportunity to attend MGNREGA Majdoor Sammelan at Ranchi, CBO conclave, Pahariya Convention, district and block level interface and advocacy meetings. The MNREGA Majdoor Sammelan held in Ranchi was a key turning point

for many, as they got to meet other workers facing the same challenges, which created a feeling of solidarity among them. All these efforts helped the CBOs build their capacities and raised their voice for their rights and entitlements.

## 11. Role of CSO in the Emergence of CBO as a Strong Institution

In the overall formation and strengthening of CBO EICOR has performed the role of catalyst. Some of the important aspects of these roles are following;

- During their regular meeting CSO officials provided thematic input in each and every meeting. The role of EICOR in building capacity has been effective and enhancing their capacity and ability to visit government departments. The issues covered in meeting as MGNREGA guidelines, RTI process, RTE, Social audit, Forest rights. Such inputs help the CBO to know the issues closely and plan for action.
- EICOR staff visits government department along with CBO members and support behind the scene. This handholding support helps the members to build their confidence and also to know each department closely.
- Exposure visits helped members of PPO get the opportunity to interact with other communities. Number of exposure visits like MGNREGA Majdoor Sammelan at Ranchi, CBO conclave, Pahariya Convention, district and block level interface and advocacy meetings was conducted for cross learning purpose. The MNREGA Majdoor Sammelan gave a great learning, as they got to meet other workers facing the same challenges, which created a feeling of solidarity among them. These efforts from EICOR help the CBO to get a cross learning opportunity.

## 12. External Opportunities and Constraints

The CBO has emerged as a strong group in the community. Several opportunities and challenges are there. Some are as follows;

## Opportunities

- Pahariya People Organization is witnessed of various successful action like job security under MGNREGA, building schools, use of RTI to get authentic Land rights paper. Such activities help the CBOs to emerge as strong leaders in community.
- 2 members from the CBO were selected as Social Audit Volunteer at block level. As the members are quite capable on the issues like social audit, MGNREGA, RTI, for which they can be used as resource person for other groups.
- The group has a very strong bonding and the understanding of the group vision. They are committed.
- Good rapport with government departments helps them to pull more fund for village development.

## Challenges

- The Pahariyas have over the years confined mainly to the hills, are apprehensive in action with Non-Pahariyas communities. Other communities too look them with discrimination. Since most of the governance and administrative structures are controlled by Non- Pahariyas, it is very difficult for the Pahariyas to get equal opportunity in exercising their rights.
- The CBO do not have any fund management mechanism. Still all the expenses are borne by the leaders or shared by members, which is very informal in nature. This system is not very effective and can instigate conflicts among members.
- The group don't have any written by laws nor even any bank account.
- Illiteracy is one of the big challenges for the group and for its development.
- Youth from Paktodi village has not shown interest for youth leadership in the CBO is missing.

- Though the group membership is dual membership pattern but the women participation is very low. Women issues are not raised or discussed. The group is planning to form separate women group.
- The leadership is not on rotational basis. The group is depending on two leaders for future development it can be a problem. This dependency is a big challenge for Pahariya People Organization. Some Kind of rotation leadership has to be initiate.

## 13. Sustainability of the CBO

Pahariya People Organization of Paktodi has shown a remarkable change in their operation and functioning. The pressures created by PPO, brought a noticeable change in the MGNREGA implementation in the village, Construction of School building. However, the success in getting land titles under FRA is still not so effective. PPO engaged in the interface meetings and advocacy meetings. Thus, CSO has effectively tried to create a linkage between the PPOs and other development actor's viz. Government officials, media and local CSOs. These linkages would assist them in furthering their cause in future. The small steps of the Pahariyas in claiming their rights are increasingly making giant strides in eventually restoring their confidence and bestowing dignity to them.

Regular interaction with the government actors has created a positive impact in the mindset of government officials and many of them have become proactive in giving the Pahariyas their rights. However, at this juncture of the project it can be only said that so far the community has climbed the preliminary ladder towards a development process and their efforts are far from being sustainable. They have now linkages with government officials and other CSO during their exposure visits and local Church authority. They will be able to get the necessary support with these linkages. The CBO is quite confident to continue the work after withdrawing of the CSO. Though still there is need of hand holding support for the CSO. The group is came to a position of

action taking beside this they are also focusing on group fund creation and group norms formation. The need support from CSO for group strengthening process.

#### 14. Future Plans of The CBO

The CBO have some of the future plans which are mentioned as follows:

- Pahariya People Organization of Paktodi realized felt the need to form a separate women group, where women issues are discussed. Further the group can be linked with other external agencies like NABARD. This grant in the form of SHG can start some IGP programs.
- The CBO will work on fund creation for future development. For this they have initiate a process to open a bank account and decide a system to collect money from members.
- Pahariya People Organization is planning to initiate a massive drive to get the land documents and papers from forest departments, which is the major conflict. The land titles allotted to the tribal families have not been entered on the land records of the Patwari. There is a sense of insecurity that they may be displaced in future if proper document are not created. The PPO

will work to ensure that necessary amendments on the land records are undertaken so that their land title becomes full proof. They are planning to use RTI as main weapon for this.

- Pahariya People organization is planning to start membership drive to involve youth. They have realized the need for formalize basic norms for which the CBO will work. For this they have decided to initiate basic norms and by-laws based on which the CBO will work in future.

The larger visions of the EFICOR team working closely with PPOs are following :

- Motivate to develop a mechanism for developing a PPO fund. As it has been experienced by the CSO, that these community members often fall in the debt trap of money lenders, the PPO fund may help the community to meet out their financial needs.
- The Pahariya People Organization member will be linked with the various livelihood skill trainings of the government so to get the opportunity of income sources on the basis of their existing skills. Hence the CBO has planned to approach government departments to initiate few skills building training for Pahariya tribe youth.



Case Study : CBO - Jeevika Adikar Sangathan-Kotagarh  
CSO - Janasahajya

Location : Kandmal, Odisha

*Theme : MGNREGA, FRA, Land Rights, Women Issues, Village Development Issues etc.*

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## 1. The context

Scheduled Castes(SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute the bulk of the population of Kandamal district in Orissa. The Kondhs and Kutia Kondhs are the indigenous STs of the district, while the SCs include Pana, Dhoba, Dama, Ghasi and Lohalra. Most of the Panas are the upwardly mobile converted Christians among these marginalised groups.

The Kotagarh block of the district is dominated by the forest-dwelling Kondhs who traditionally earn their livelihood by collecting and selling forest produce and farming plots of forest land they have been tilling for generations. However, their subsistence farming is primitive and of low productivity, while diminishing forest cover has limited their earnings from selling NTFPs and fuel wood. So most of them work as farm labourers to supplement their income.

The FRA and MGNREGS, an important wage employment option, are of greater consequence for tribals since they do not usually migrate seasonally for employment like the SCs.

Jan Sahajya has been working in Odisha since 1989, mainly in Kalahandi district. It started operating in Kandamal district in 2000 when the 'Jal, Jungle and Jameen' movement was initiated by the land right movements after the super

cyclone in Odisha. It intertwined livelihood issues with its primary agenda, working specifically with the socially excluded SCs and STs in Kotagarh district. Land for landless being centre-stage of its interventions, the civil society organisation (CSO) facilitated 'homestead pattas' on revenue land for many marginalised families in the district.

The enactment of the FRA in 2007 and the MNREGA in 2008 gave a fresh impetus to its interventions, opening the door to claim rights to forest land traditionally in the possession of the community, either individually or collectively, and strengthening livelihood opportunities for families that could not subsist on agriculture alone.

Jan Sahajya joined the PACS programme to expand its mandated mission of fighting for land, FRA and MGNREGS rights across Kotagarh district. It is currently active in 122 villages of Kotagarh block, working with forest right committees (FRCs), self-help groups (SHGs) and other community-based organisations (CBOs) to mobilise village communities to form collectives. Having emerged out of the people's movement, its strategy is to build grassroots pressure through strong collectives to stake the claims of the marginalised communities.

Jan Sahajya formed a Jeevika Adhikar Manch in

all the villages it has intervened in, suffixing the name of the village to identify the individual manchs. The 122 village groups rally their collective strength for demonstrations, dharnas and specific project-based activities. Within these villages, it has also formed collectives of women SHGs to promote self-employment and livelihoods that can be seen as building blocks of the manch, which has wider socio-economic objectives. Forest rights being one of these critical objectives, it also works with FRCs to process claims for FRA land pattas in the gram sabhas.

So, essentially, Jan Sahajya works with the three types of collectives in a village - the Jeevika Adhikar Manch, FRCs and WSHGs that share the common vision of land and livelihood for marginalised communities. Operationally, its work is focused in the paras or hamlets of vulnerable Adivasi and harijan communities, which in the case of Kotagarh panchayat are hamlets 2, 4, 5 and 6. The Jeevika Adhikar Manch was set up in hamlet 6, though it has members from the other hamlets.

## 2. Evolutionary process of the Jeevika Adhikar Manch Kotagarh

The Maa Manekashwari Devi SHG, set up eight years ago under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) to prepare mid-day meals for the school, laid the foundation for the evolution of the Jeevika Adhikar Manch in Kotagarh panchayat. The group also engaged in savings and commercial activities, gaining recognition of the state government and receiving a revolving fund of Rs 10,000 under Mission Shakti to take up commercial activities.

Well respected in the village, the WSHG's current savings total Rs. 18,000. It secured two loans from the State Bank of India of Rs 60,000 each to start a goat rearing and poultry business. It repaid the loans and also took up fish farming, obtaining seed fish from the fisheries department and selling the cultivated fish at a profit.

It provided a small loan and technical know-how to another WSHG of left-out women striving to become small entrepreneurs, the Maa Thakurani

group, to take up fish production. The two WSHGs are the building blocks of the Jeevika Adhikar Manch Kotagarh.

Jan Sahajya began its community mobilisation under PACS with the Maa Manekashwari Devi SHG, motivating women to demand their rights and entitlements under MGNREGS and FRA as well as social security pensions. But the ambit of its work required frequent visits to the block and district headquarters to engage with programme officials to ensure access to rights and entitlements. So it decided to broaden the support base to include male members, which led to the formation of the Jeevika Adhikar Manch Kotagarh with its wider objectives.

## 3. Organisation, norms and leadership in the CBO

The mission of the Jeevika Adhikar Manch is to claim right and entitlements under the MGNREGS, FRA and other key programmes. The CBO has a semi-formal structure that includes members of village-level institutions and ad-hoc committees promoted by the line departments, such as the school management committee (SMC), village health committee (VHC), FRC etc. The two WSHGs provide leadership to the group.

Largely concentrated in one hamlet but with representation of other hamlets, the CBO has 2-3 members from each hamlet, particularly those having a higher concentration of SCs and STs, its total membership being 15. There is no specific criteria for women representation, but women are the most active members.

The president and secretary are chosen through a consultative process, the selection criteria including literacy level, articulation, organisational abilities, leadership qualities, willingness to share their learnings and guide the group, and confidence to engage with officials, withstand pressure from the powerful and represent the interests of the group. The current president is Sani Bai Patra, who is also a member of one of the WSHGs.

The CBO derives its strength from this intertwining of groups in the panchayat with a

common agenda. There is no formal institutional relationship but the grassroots groups come together to support local issues that require block or district-level solutions. Hence, the CBO's leadership style is flexible and collective, with a couple of members being active at different point of time depending on the agenda at hand. It meets every fortnight to discuss issues related to village development, MNREGS, FRA, etc, its most recent meeting focussing on identifying, listing and taking up cases for FRA pattas given to SCs, and demanding work under MNREGS during the near-drought situation prevailing in the state.

The CBO has no formal arrangement to financially support its activities, making collections whenever a need arises. For instance, past agitations at the block and district headquarters were self-financed by community collections, with Jan Sahajya bearing the cost of transportation. In fact, no village-level sangathan associated with Jan Sahajya has a committed fund or defined budget. The quantum of collection for any activity is decided in the general assembly of the CBO. However, the Kond caste panchayat makes collections for social events, such as marriage, if a family is unable to bear the cost. It also plays a complementary role with the CBO in dealing with social issues.

#### 4. Capacity building interventions

Formal trainings, informal orientation, interface meetings and exposure visits constitute the capacity building interventions. The structured trainings are of two kinds - trainings on group processes such as organisation/community development; and trainings on commercial skills such as goat rearing, poultry and fisheries. The structured trainings are mostly organised by PACS while unstructured orientations are undertaken by the implementing partner.

The PACS, supplemented with a CFR (community forest rights) top-up grant for the implementing partner, organised phased four-day trainings spaced at two-month intervals over a span of six months, which focused on preparing claims, claim procedures, claim-related documents and

other procedural issues.

Interface meetings were organised in each block, with around 50-60 community leaders interfacing with officials from the MGNREGS, PDS, forest department, etc. They served to solve pending grievances/operational problems, and disseminate information for effective and improved implementation of field programmes. While linking the community to the administration, they also built up the confidence of community leaders to negotiate with programme functionaries, their success in resolving issues reinforcing their motivation.

CBO members were also taken on exposure visits to the adjoining Kalahandi district to see the exemplary work done by CBOs in the region. For instance, a CBO in Punnigura constructed a road on its own after repeated requests to block officials failed. The road was a felt need of the villagers who had to travel 5-6km every day to fetch water. After it was constructed the block officials, impressed by the initiative, reimbursed the costs and wages under the MNREGS. The visits helped speed up MNREGS implementation in Kotagarh, with a CBO constructing three much-needed roads in the village. Similarly, another CBO was motivated by the work of a CBO in Kalahandi on settling individual claims to forest rights.

PACS organised a Lok Sangathan Utsav in 2013 to bring several hundred CBOs on common platform to share experiences and promote fraternity. The stories of struggle and successes motivated the participating CBOs, providing strategic direction to them, and telling them that they are alone in their adversity. The confidence boost and learnings also showed the way to interacting with officials and strategizing their claim interventions.

Unstructured capacity building consisted of informal orientations and rallies/public agitations used as a pressure-building instrument. These, too, provided the 'know-how' and platform to interface with government officials. The process and practice of resolving land rights



issues through rallies and agitations has been refined over several decades, with different stages of community empowerment and animation.

#### Important processes related to the CBO

Evolution of the SHG into a CBO : What started as a small SHG for fostering livelihoods transformed into a sangathan that includes the FRCs of all the villages in the panchayat to claim rights and entitlements under the MNREGS and FRA at the block level, with some members common to both groups.

Claiming MNREGS employment and FRA rights : Subsistence livelihoods drove the villagers to seek wage employment under the MNREGS to construct much-needed roads in the village to improve connectivity. Individual FRA pattas for 5-6 acres each for 41 families were also obtained out of 110 land patta claims registered (63 for ST families and 56 for SC families).

The CBO also helped in getting mango and broom grass planted in many of these plots, with land development being done in five pattas. With the state being less favourable in awarding pattas to SCs than to STs, it pushed the claims of SC families to prevent the escalation of a growing rift between the two communities on the issue.

The CBO took up the issue of delayed wages and streamlined the system, opening bank accounts for families in the State Bank branch.

Improved access to livelihood opportunities : All families given land pattas have been linked to government schemes under the CSO's convergence strategy. They have accessed MNREGS funds for plantation or land development or received training for poultry/fisheries/goat rearing etc. Seed grants in the form of chicks or seed fish have also been granted. The CBO is also intervening to improve irrigation facilities.

Micro-planning initiated by CBOs : The CSO promotes micro-planning with the active participation of all the CBOs. The plans focus on improving livelihoods through economic

activities (fish production, poultry etc), improved road connectivity, individual and community asset creation, and forest regeneration for sustained livelihoods (sal seed collection). They give vision and direction to the CBOs for future interventions. The micro-plans also focus on convergence, with backward and forward linkages with other departments to supplement flagship programmes.

Intervention on community forest rights : The village FRCs have been federated into a Van Adhikar Manch, with a president, secretary and members nominated by the FRCs of 17 panchayats. Some Jeevika Adhikar Manch and FRC members are also common but there is no formal linkage between the Van Adhikar Manch, the FRCs and the Jeevika Adhikar Manch. The relationship is more organic, with the CBOs extending informal support to each other.

The Jeevika Adhikar Manch supports the gram sabha to demarcate the forest and list its traditional usage to facilitate the resolution of CFR claims. The Jungle Adhikar Manch, whose expenses are borne by the gram sabha, negotiates claims independently without support from the CSO. The federation has settled 51 CFR claims in the last one-and-a-half years.

#### 5. Key outcomes and impacts

Greater awareness of MNREGS and FRA rights: Awareness of the MNREGS opened up wage employment opportunities and also led to the realisation that community infrastructure and individual land holdings could be improved. The villagers also realised that securing ownership rights of the forest land they had been farming for generations would put a stop to their eviction.

Once land pattas were secured, the CBO initiated land development work under the MNREGS. Nearly 50 families with five-acre plus plots were supported by the horticulture department to plant mango, cashew nut, broom, etc on their land. Land development and asset creation was also undertaken under the MNREGS.

Greater importance of FRA pattas : The

kondslacked knowledge of farm management and did not have the resources to develop their farms as viable productive sources. They could also not solely depend on their land for sustenance. Land development, construction of fish ponds, and other associated activities such as animal husbandry made their land more productive and increased its value. This also made them realise the importance of forests for augmenting their livelihoods, prompting them to stake IFR and CFR claims. They also formulated rules and mechanisms to regenerate forests and add value to forest produce.

**Mobilisation with FRA as a rallying point :** Realising the importance of FRA rights and land pattas, the CBOs organised demonstrations and agitations at the district level to secure these rights. The interventions made FRA claims a rallying point, helping the villagers to forge a distinct identity with an amplified voice. They began seeing themselves as right holders, not mere beneficiaries and the ripple effect spread across villages, with the number of claims rising significantly.

**Engagement with FRA committees :** The district-level interface organised by the Van Adhikar Manch brought together the sub-divisional administration and the block-level FRCs, the meeting helping to settle claims and foster understanding of operational issues. The FRCs registered 56 CFR claims, with CFR pattas being given in 51 cases, totalling 5,100 hectares of land for provisional use.

The block-level federation currently organises gram sabhas, undertakes measurements of land and negotiates claims with forest officials. Along with the Jeevika sangathans, it is active in the process of making many more claims.

**Accessing government schemes/entitlements :** The CBO members access several government schemes so they are fairly well aware of them and their provisions. This includes MNREGS and departmental schemes in horticulture, animal husbandry and fisheries. The CBO has also ensured universal access to the PDS for all eligible

families and filed applications for bore wells, drip irrigation etc in schemes targeted at tribals. The focus of this thrust is to make tribal lands more productive, farming more viable, and improve their livelihood through animal husbandry, fisheries and other activities. Most of the schemes accessed so far are for land improvement and agricultural development.

**Engaging with the local administration :** The Kondhs have been significantly empowered to engage with the state. The formation of the community institutions, their collective struggle for entitlements, their advocacy at the block and district level and the formation of Van Adhikar Manch have helped shift power relations between the collectives and the local administration. The numbers in demonstrations at the district and block level reveal their strength, making them confident when dealing with administrative issues and line departments.

Besides FRA and MNREGS rights, the CBO is also concerned about village-level delivery institutions such as the anganwadi and school, its interventions improving their functioning and the health and well-being of women and children.

**Enhanced livelihood opportunities :** The convergence of access of FRA pattas with MNREGS work and employment schemes has created new livelihood options for CBO members, in particular, and the village community, in general. Land development, irrigation facilities, and plantation are some of the critical convergences. Allied activities involving other line departments, such as horticulture, vegetable cultivation, fisheries, goat rearing, poultry, broom making etc have brought about a shift in the livelihood profile while increasing incomes. Improved availability of water, changes in cropping patterns to meet adverse climatic conditions and increased awareness and support from the department has improved agricultural productivity and reduced the mortality rate in new plantations.

The CBO network and interactions also facilitated transmission of knowledge, with

success stories converting more and more villagers to livelihood diversification.

Enhanced unity and integration among tribals : The collective activities, be it credit and saving, commercial initiatives, or agitating for FRA rights has brought a sense of unity and integration in the community for a common cause. Running the operations of the SHG and Jeevika Adhikar Manch has also helped in building skills in the members to manage a CBO on their own.

## 6. Role of the local CSO in strengthening the CBO

As mentioned earlier, the Maa Manikeshwari SHG was already operative in the village and was the foundation of CBO. It depended on Jan Sahajya as a knowledge provider in documentation and a facilitator in block and district-level negotiations. Its inputs strengthened the capacity of the CBO to deal and negotiate with the administration. Hence, the CBO can now visualise that it may not need the CSO for its operational needs.

The CBO also draws strength from being part of a Jan Sahajya, PACS and Ekta Parishad supported universe. A pro-people bureaucracy in the district has also contributed to rising the confidence of the community and motivated it, even if frequent changes of local officials has hampered the process.

Where the CBO needs support is in documentation for filing FRA claims, which is a tedious and technical matter requiring evidence

for 75 years. However, the emergence of the Van Adhikar Manch is projected to decrease this dependence as it gradually takes on these responsibilities. But another brewing challenge is the unsettled FRA claims of the SCs, with the administration being less forthcoming than in cases involving STs. The issue has the potential to create a rift within the village communities.

## 7. External environment and sustainability

Shrinking allocations for the MNREGS and increased commitment to industrial development are making it more difficult to claim FRA rights and impacting the process of entitlements. A sensitive district administration can significantly facilitate the progress of claims and entitlements if the policy framework and laws are positive. Fluctuating messages in the framework, which is what is currently happening, could impede the process.

In this fluctuating local and national environment, sustained progress will require a sharper focus and strategic interventions. The current challenge for the CSO is to find funding support, as PACS was its first and only major funding in Kotagharh district.

## 8. Future plans

The CBO is looking to improve infrastructure on their farms as well as in the village. It will also continue securing FRA pattas for eligible claimants, focusing on facilitating SC claims that have still not been settled by administration.

Case Study : CBO - JEEBAN Jeebika Sangthan  
CSO - AAINA

Location : Kandmal, Odisha

*Theme : MGNREGA & Education. Advocacy for different issues of  
PWDs, Women and CWDs*



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### 1. The context

There is nothing exceptional about 43 families from a remote village in Kandmal district of Odisha completing 100 days of employment under the MGNREGS, except that four of them are persons with disability who are members of a community-based organisation (CBO) called Jeeban Jeebika Sangh. This loosely-knit CBO was formed by current and potential MGNREGS job card holders to help them claim their right to employment under the scheme. It is promoted by AAINA, a civil society organisation (CSO) that began working in Kandmal district with PACS support, its core focus being disability, which forms the underlying theme of all its project interventions.

Kandmal district has witnessed a mushrooming of voluntary organisations over the past decade, many of them engaged in micro credit and chit funds, including some that have cheated the community and disappeared with its savings. Hence, trust in CSOs is low so AAINA wasn't exactly welcomed by the community, the history of delayed payments and denied wages under the MGNREGS also not helping its cause.

The first task the CSO took up was to build trust and win the confidence of the community. It began by forming a children's club, motivating children to go to school, initiating sports and

educational activities and integrating the various caste groups in the village. The club created space for the CSO in the village and it used this foothold to interact with the families of the children.

The CBO is located in Badamaha village of the Manekeshwari panchayat, which comes under Raikia block of Kandmal. The block has a predominantly scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) population, the SCs being relatively better off socially and economically, especially the Panavs who are christian converts with better access to education. The district has been riven by serious caste-based conflicts between the christians and other communities but Badamaha village has not witnessed such conflicts.

The club, open to children from all castes and communities, facilitated the community processes AAINA initiated in the village households. It first formed a self-help group (SHG) of five PWDs (persons with disability), simultaneously setting up the Jeeban Jeebika Sangathan. The two groups, complementing each other, created the critical mass and momentum for the CSO to take the process further.

Most families in Badamaha have small land holding of 2-3 acres so they supplement their income with manual labour, working on farms or on construction sites. Getting suitable wage

employment is their pressing need, but their poor experience with the MGNREGS has deterred them from working under the scheme.

## 2. Genesis and evolution of the CBO

The CBO Jeeban Jeebika Sangathan was formed under the PACS interventions with the objective of strengthening the implementation of the MGNREGS in the village, and had a very flexible base and membership, in the initial phase.

AAINA first conducted a baseline survey across a cluster of panchayats, which showed poor awareness of the MGNREGS. It organised meetings in these panchayats to inform and educate the villagers about the scheme, many of them interface meetings with the official implementers of the scheme at all levels. Similar meetings were held at the village level. These interactions served to build trust among the different stakeholders and made the community more confident in engaging with the administrative officials.

One critical outcome of the meetings was the resolution of the problem of delayed payments/non-payment of wages and ironing out of procedural processes at the local level, which rekindled the community's interest in the MGNREGS. The second impact was the realisation in the community that wage payments were delayed more by procedural problems rather than fraudulent practices as they believed earlier. The villagers also realised that wage issues could be sorted out by dialogue and active mediation.

Procedural improvements that streamlined the MGNREGS and spurred the formation of the CBO included making payments through the banking system, which reduced delays substantially. Another change was in the system of paying the mate. Earlier, the mates were paid the wages of skilled labour according to the number of days they worked. They hired their own workers and did not bother about productivity. Now their wages are linked to the amount of work done at the site so they are more careful about who they employ.

The result was that the community now looked forward to MGNREGS work and saw how useful a CBO could be to work on issues of common interest, such as opening bank accounts, getting ATM cards and, most importantly, regular employment and regular wages. The villagers said the block officials and panchayat secretary were now prompt in providing work and making payments, responding within 15 days to their demand for work.

The interface meetings also helped AAINA to sensitise the administration to PWD issues, especially finding suitable work for them, such as running the crèche, providing water or less strenuous earth work. The community also became more aware of the PWDs in the village and their special needs. The convergence of perceptions led to PWDs getting employment in the MGNREGS and finding suitable jobs for them.

## 3. Organisation norms and leadership

The Jeeban Jeebika Sangathan has a semi-formal organisational structure with flexible membership, the active members perceiving themselves as the group. Membership is open to the different caste groups and the PWD-SHG in the village, with women being among the most active, although there is no special criteria for their representation. Around 50% of the 42 households participate in the meetings. The president, secretary and treasurer are selected through a consultative process, the selection criteria including literacy level, articulation, leadership qualities, and confidence to engage with officials and represent the interests of the group. The president has the prime responsibility of taking up entitlement issues with the administration.

The CBO meets every month to discuss issues related to village development, the MGNREGS, sanitation, schools, anganwadi centre, bank problems etc. The meetings begin with stock taking of the previous month's resolutions and their implementation. The CBO also discusses social issues such as alcoholism, community rituals, preservation of community culture etc.

Emergency meetings are called when the need arises by ringing a large bell in the village.

There is no formal arrangement for financing the CBO's activities, the president looking after small everyday expenses and collections being made in the community if a special need arises. The CBO has now started a regular collection of Rs. 50 per month from members, though this group fund has not been utilised till now. AAINA contributes part of the transport and other expenditures but the CBO is aware that it will have to bear the expenses in future and feels confident to deal with the problem.

#### 4. Capacity building interventions

Structured trainings are mostly organised by AAINA, with its participating field functionaries and CBO members taking the responsibility of training other staff. AAINA also organises regular training for its district staff on issues linked to the MGNREGS and PWDs.

The capacity building interventions with CBO members include interface meetings, interaction and exposure to block officials, games and quizzes, etc. They begin with strengthening the group, using games to build awareness on issues such as leadership, conflict management, unity and integration of community, etc. Poverty analysis is also done through games to make them realise the reasons for poverty and the issues involved in addressing the problem.

Games are supplemented with trainings and informal orientations. AAINA has prepared innovative and informative materials that are distributed in the community. Quizzes are then held, based on the content provided, with small prizes such as soap, knife etc. given to the winners. This method helps in putting across and remembering important clauses of the MGNREGS. For example, everyone now knows they will get work 15 days after making a demand.

Interface meetings to build capacity were organised in panchayat clusters across the three blocks of Kandmal district where AAINA works.

The direct interaction with project and administrative officials helped build the confidence of CBO members and the growing mutual trust contributed to resolving outstanding issues. The CBO also gained a better appreciation of procedural issues through these interactions and no longer put lapses down to deliberate intent or fraudulence. It learned more about government programmes, which, in turn, influenced its organisation and work as it sought to promote community interests.

AAINA organises block-level rallies to mark specific days such as Independence Day, children's day etc, which energise the CBO and facilitate 'knowhow' about the block offices. It also provides hand holding support to help the CBO resolve issues with the administrative machinery, encouraging its members to negotiate on their own. It uses Rojgar Diwas, celebrated every month, as a rallying point to demand employment under the MGNREGS, raise issues and resolve grievances with the implementation machinery.

AAINA follows a well worked out strategy with PWDs, using its experience of working with them to empower them to access PWD-centric schemes. The PWD SHGs provide a platform for mutual sharing of experiences and accessing information on schemes and support structures for PWDs. The platform is also used sensitise the families of PWDs to their special needs. The process begins with an attitudinal change towards disability, making them realise that PWDs can work and contribute in their life and the life of their families. They are then informed about schemes such as disability pension, Mission Shakti, Khshamakhya mission (targeted schemes for SHGs and PWDs) etc. The attitudinal change helps empower the PWDs, with these interventions resulting in four PWDs accessing 100 days of employment under the MGNREGS. The 65 PWD SHGs AAINA has constituted form a bigger platform with the jeebika sangathan.

#### 5. Key processes

Formation of children clubs : AAINA's entry point

is the children's club, which opens the way to interact with families/households and resolve minor community conflicts. Children make friends easily, are open to inclusive education and help identify PWD children not attending school.

**Formation of PWD groups :** A five-member group of disabled persons is formed in the village for PWD-centric interventions. The group is also a subset of the jeebika sangathan.

**Linking PWDSHG to schemes:** The PWD-SHG constituted by the AAINA are facilitated to access schemes targeting SHGs. For instance, they have accessed Mission Shakti's Rs10,000 grant and used it for the needs of their members, the SHG in Danglu village dividing the money equally among its members to set up economic activities.

**Formation of the jeebika sangathan :** A labour union of all interested households in the village is formed. It is a loosely knit group, with flexible criteria for membership, entry and exit. Capacity building inputs are provided to its members.

**Interface meetings in panchayats :** Interface meetings are arranged with line department officials to resolve the pending payment grievance. This interaction strengthens the union and builds the confidence of its leaders to engage with the administrative machinery.

**Access to MGNREGS employment :** The demand for work under the MGNREGS is systematised, usually on Rojgar Diwas. A large number of households are provided work in the process. Most of this work is for road connectivity. Some of the work is provided in the adjoining village.

**CBO and micro-planning :** The IPPE approach the MGNREGS adopts sees the CBO participating in preparing the scheme's micro-plans for the village. The development areas identified include provision of drinking water, household toilets and village connectivity. The block administration peruses and approves the panchayat plan.

**Block-level federation :** A block level federation is initiated by the AAINA so that project activities can be sustained without active intervention of

the CSO. The federation is still in a primitive stage.

## 6. Key outcomes

The CBO has empowered the local community, sharpened the focus on rights and entitlements and ensured sustained village development.

**Awareness about the MGNREGS :** The intervention of AAINA and the formation of the CBO has resulted in increased awareness of the MGNREGS. The community knows its main clauses, its procedural details and possible lapses in wage-related issues. The villagers have claimed their right under the employment guarantee act in significant numbers over the last two years, helping to build village infrastructure such as roads.

Manikeswora gram panchayat	Budget
Year: 2013- 14	Rs19,05,000
Year: 2014- 15	Rs22,80,000

**Awareness about PWD entitlements and rights :** The CBO and PWDSHG have sensitised the community on the issue of PWDs, emphasising the fact the PWDs are not objects of charity nor can they be neglected. They have empowered PWDs to claim their rights and entitlements.

**Employment under the MGNREGS :** Awareness of the MGNREGS has led to a huge demand for employment under its schemes. The panchayat spending has increased substantially after the CBO became active in the village. Over 170 households worked under the MGNREGS in 2014-15, 84 families completing more than 50 days of work, another 46 families 80 days' work and 43 families 100 days. They built community assets and installed a piped water supply system in the village. They also got new job cards made for new households formed by division of families (marriage) and for those families that were left out due to some reason.

**Schematic funds for PWDs :** The sensitisation of the community to PWDs led to an uptake in PWD-centric schemes and increased



employment under the MGNREGS. Significantly four out of nine PWDs completed 100 days of employment in 2014-15 (see table). In case they are unable to work, employment is given to their family members.

Accessing schemes and entitlements : CBO members are aware of government schemes and make efforts to access them. Besides MGNREGS, they have accessed departmental schemes such as piped water supply, household toilets etc.

Ironically, many of them with small land holdings haven't taken up land development work under the individually targeted MGNREGS schemes. Also, despite taking up poultry and goats rearing, they haven't made any effort to access the goat and poultry shelter.

The CBO has ensured that all its members have bank accounts, something that was rare in the past. Around 84 also have ATM cards to withdraw money from local counters. The CBO

No	PWD's name	Age/Gender	Scheme availed	No of days worked
1	Sanuja Sahani	36/Male	ODP, IAY, Job card	100 days
2	Madav pradhan	42/Male	FRA, ODP, Job card	100 c
3	Sukanti Digal	37/Female	ODP	48 100 days
4	Jilu Pradhan	35/Male	ODP, Job card	100 days
5	Sudama Pradhan	28/Male	ODP, Arnapurna	72 days
6	Upesena Pradhan	32/Male	ODP, Job Card	45 100 days
7	Somaratha Pradhan	52/Male	ODP, Arnapurna	100 days
8	Jagan Digal	5/Male	ODP, Arnapurna	XXX
9	Anima Pradhan	14/ female	ODP, Arnapurna	xxx

has also been registered to enable it to access government funds.

## 7. Future plans and sustainability

The CBO is aware that AAINA will soon stop its interventions in Badamaha village but is prepared to carry on the functions independently. It has already begun its independent interventions such as engaging with banks etc. without external support. Similarly, negotiations at block office are conducted independently. The funds it has now started collecting will be used to meet its financial needs. The AAINA field facilitator is from the village, so he will be available if support is required in future.

Case Study : CBO - Jameen Adhikar Sangathan Khajuri Padar  
CSO - SPREAD

Location : Odisha

*Theme : MGNREGA & Land Right (FRA), Gender Mainstreaming*

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## 1. Context

Koraput is the southern-most district of Odisha which has abundance of natural resources. Till to October 1992, Koraput was one district and afterwards; it was divided into four districts namely Koraput, Rayagada, Malkangiri and Nawrangpur. The undivided Koraput district had the highest concentration of tribal population. The area inhabited by them was nearly 40 percent of the entire scheduled area of the Orissa. About 70 per cent of the total extent of the Koraput region was under forest as reported in Orissa District Gazetteers, Koraput by Shri N Senapati, 1966. The region has many rivers and perennial streams.

The Koraput region is rich in resources but the people are poor<sup>1</sup>. In comparison with the rest of Orissa particularly to the coastal non tribal region the undivided Koraput stands out as extremely poor by criteria of the literacy rate, number of villages electrified, per capita income and other indicators of people's development. There are also some positive indicators like sex ratio which is far better than the coastal plane region of the state.

## 2. History of land Alienation of the Tribals

The Tribals in the district have been facing displacement from ancient time when the administrative functionaries of the Kings pushed

them to go in the deeper part of the jungle to acquire cultivable land. Later, during the British period, steep tax rate on land further pushed them inside the deep forest areas to stay away from the sight of the colonial rulers.

In post-independence era around 1951, systematic measurement and land title formalisation process began. The tribals by that time had been pushed to the upper parts of the hill as the most fertile and irrigated land was captured by the non-tribal administrative staff or those who were closer to the British Raj. The process of measurement was tedious by using the 'chain method' particularly for the land on the hilly side. Therefore, the Government decided to use the method of 'plane-table'. The method was also not accurate for the undulating and gradient land. Therefore, with certain estimation land records were prepared. The tribals who had possessed the land for ages were not recorded as land owners. Most of the land above the gradient of 10 degrees was declared as the forest land for the ease of completion of land records. Since then, the struggle for land rights for the tribals began as the State claimed the land which was traditionally possessed by the tribals as the 'forest land'. With the stringent rules for the use and conversion of the forest land, the tribals were treated as the illegitimate occupants of the land.

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<sup>1</sup> "The issues of displacement, Rehabilitation & resettlement in Koraput region" unpublished article of Mr. Bidyut Mohanty, SPREAD, Koraput. Some of the historical facts and statistics has been taken from the paper.

### 3. History of Displacement Due to Development Projects

There are four major dam projects Machkud, Upper Kolab, Balimela and Indravati; and two major industries like Nalco and HAL in the district. In addition to these railway lines were drawn; one Kotavalsa-Kirondul line and second Koraput Rayagada line which has caused displacement and transfer of tribal land. As a result of this entire projects land in large scale was acquired. Though it brought benefits to certain sections of the society but the dark side of the story is, it brought miseries in the lives of the displaced oustees. The displaced persons are mostly STs and SCs. It is estimated that about 1.6 lakh acre land was submerged or taken away by these projects and more than 70 thousand persons got displaced.

The planned development process of the Sixties and Seventies established public sector units like NALCO and HAL which acquired large land areas and the tribals were displaced from their traditional possession of land. Later, laying of railway lines also displaced them. Currently, there are many private sector players operating in the district of Koraput for the business of minerals. Details of some of the industrial projects and land acquired is given in the table below :

No	Project/s	Year	Total land acquired (in acres)
1	HAL, Sunabeda	1966	804.56
2	NALCO Damanjodi	NA	7362.94
3	Nalco mines	NA	3952.00
4	Utkal alumina	NA	2420.00
5.	Naval Armament Deport	1975	917.07
6	Railway line Koraput	1963	4220.40
7	Railway line Raygada	1982	2763.20
8	Mixed farm Koraput	1964	2233.62
9	OUAT Koraput	1979	810.20
10	Dandakaranya, malkangiri	1958	123831.00
11	HINDALCO, Similiguda	2006	NA

The result of such development has serious implications on the livelihoods and peaceful existence of the tribals. There are occasions when the tribals moved to a particular area which was later declared as the catchment area of the dam or site for the industry/mining or marked for laying the railway line. This resulted in second time displace of the same tribal families over a span of two decades. The struggle to settle on the forest land was resisted by the forest guards and committed forest officials who imposed penalties on the tribals to be illegal occupants and destroyers of the forest.

### 4. Emergence of SPREAD to Support Tribals

The CSO-SPREAD was established in 1992-93 by a group of professionals, passed out from social science background who got exposure of plights of the tribals during their internship in Koraput. Mr Bidyut Mohanti and some of his friends decided to set up SPREAD to work with the tribals of Koraput. In 2005, the organisation started working in the Baipariguda block to form Self Help Groups ( SHGs) of the tribal women. Ramgiri Panchayat was selected to form the SHGs so that the women of the tribal families may address the issues of poverty, credit needs and livelihoods promotion. The SHG groups belonged to the tribal families that were affected by the displacement and alienation from the land as they were cultivating on the forest land. Therefore, the engagement with the women grew to become a movement on land rights where the men and women of the families joined Jameen Adhikar Sangathan. The village level units got federated at the village Panchayat level and later got organised at the block or cluster of Panchayats affected by the land rights. The Jammeen Adhikar Manch of Ratgiri Panchayat spreads in 10 more Panchayats to build a block level federation of the tribals affected by the displacement.

SPREAD has worked in different clusters of villages in different blocks of Koraput. Currently, there are 8 such Peoples Organisations (POs) which got formed around one or the other



displacement area. Most of the tribals joining the PO are affected by the land displacement due to construction of large dam or setting up of public sector units like HAL or mining companies.

## 5. Genesis of Jameen Adhikar Sangathan of Ratnagiri Panchayat

The women's SHGs which were formed by the support of THREAD in 2005 were animated to initially understand the reasons of poverty and domestic violence. There was a realisation that the alcohol consumption was one of critical factor in draining down hard earned income of the family by the men. Moreover, the drunken men were beating up the women resulting in family unrest and physical and mental harassment. The women also realised that the liquor brewing was done by the non tribals (known as Biharis, persons from the state of Bihar) and they promoted shops indifferent villages and hamlets. The chemical liquor was also competing with the traditional organic liquor prepared by the tribals. The collectives of the women, after many consultative meetings and strategy development, confronted the owner of the liquor mafia. The brewery was broken down and police station was gheraoed for appropriate action. The men were also counselled to stop taking non-traditional liquor. The movement was successful and women got motivated to organise their cluster level federation of Mahila Sangh.

In 2006, women used to discuss the harassment by the Forest Department functionaries who were by force planting trees on the agricultural land of the tribals. The protest by the tribal resulted in criminal offences by filing FIR and arresting the land owners or fixing monetary penalty. The forest department officials had formed a Van Suraksha Samiti (VSS) taking members from non-tribal upper caste cultivators who were the oppressors of the tribal land owners/families.

The women groups asked the men to join and form the Peoples Organisation<sup>2</sup> (PO) which was named as Jammen Adhikar Sangathan. The PO

initiated systematic struggle with the Forest Department to fight for the rights over their agricultural land on the forest land.

SPREAD staff were trained and oriented on the Forest Rights Act (FRA) which had provisions for the legal title of the tribals on the land cultivated by them. The PO members and the leaders were trained on the provisions of the FRA. The PO decided to form the Village Forest Committees by electing the members of the PO in the VFC so that eligible land owners can file applications and get positive recommendations from the VFC for final approval by the district level committee. The PO supported about 2000 tribals to file applications for individual land Patta under FRA. More than 1500 tribals have got land Patta and many of the Other Tribal Forest Dwellers (OTFD) could not get land title due to tedious procedure to prove procession of land over three generations.

## 6. Organisation and Norms of the CBO

The CBO or the PO of the village Panchayat Ramgiri got organised gradually. Initially, the SHG leaders took major role on organising the PO as the Mahila Sangathan meetings were the platform for discussions on the land issues. The organisational structure of the PO is a bottom-up as in each of the hamlet, there is a village level informal committee which is formed by all the affected families including the SC and OTFD. A President and a Secretary is nominated by the village group for facilitating the operations of the village Sangathan. The criteria of selection the President and the Secretary is based on the level of literacy, their ability to confidently speak with the Government officials and commitment to take the PO forward.

The President and Secretary of all the villages/hamlets elect their village Panchayat level leader. In Ramgiri Panchayat, there are about 25 hamlets/villages who elect their village Panchayat level President and Secretary. Similarly, the village Panchayat level PO of 10 village Panchayat in this cluster elect their

<sup>2</sup> SPREAD uses the term of Peoples Organization for the CBOs formed by the affected community members. Therefore, in the case study PO has been used instead of CBO.

cluster/block level President and Secretary.

The meetings are held on monthly basis at the village Panchayat level. The date of the meeting is normally fixed 1-2 days after the weekly Bazar day. The President or Secretary will communicate to the village or hamlet level leaders during the Hat/Bazar so that the message of the day, time and venue is communicated to all the members of the Panchayat level PO. The issues are identified based on the emerging challenges. The SPREAD team members facilitate the process, if required. There is an annual meeting which is termed as Organisation Development. The annual meeting is held to discuss larger issues that need collective attention of all the village level POs. It is facilitated to elect new leadership as well as nurture new entrants to evolve as potential leaders.

## 7. Leadership Style

The leadership style of the POs at the village and Panchayat level is informal in nature. There are no defined functions of the leaders. However, the President and Secretary of the POs take responsibility of facilitation of the processes, organising meeting and managing finances of the PO. The block and district level leaders gradually emerge after their demonstrated commitment and regularity in the meetings. Malti Naik of village Khajuri Padar of village Panchayat Ratnagiri has been President of her village level PO as well as for the village Panchayat over the last 15 years. She is quite dynamic and has been elected as Sarpanch of the village Panchayat, first time in 2002 and later in 2012.

## 8. Organisational Value and Culture

The POs have clear understanding of the oppression by the upper caste landlords as well as the Forest department. The purpose of the PO is primarily to safeguard interest of the poor tribals and OTFD to retain their land for dignity and survival. It is an impressive value that the PO also includes the SCs and other OBC families who are poor and displaced under the similar circumstances. Currently, Pattas have been issued

to the tribals only under FRA, however, their struggle is on to ensure land title of the OTFD also. There is a realisation that many OTFD are as poor as the tribals and they are equally affected by the displacement. However, the settlement of pattas for the tribals is creating low energy in the PO as tribals who got pattas wish to move ahead to improve their agricultural production by seeking various government benefits. The group is unable to address the issue in a value based system.

## 9. Organic Relationship of the Group with Other POs

There are 8 POs in the district which have been promoted by SPREAD. Each PO has a different cause of displacement of the tribals, however, the common thread is that they have been displaced due to large scale development projects of the Government. The POs meet together during the annual OD meet held inviting all leaders of the POs. This becomes an opportunity to exchange experiences, build solidarity and explore common issues for action and campaigning.

## 10. Capacity Building Interventions

Capacity building support of SPREAD to the PO leaders is primarily through the field level facilitators who are identified from the local communities. The design of the Organisational Development is participatory in nature where games and exercises are designed to nurture leadership of the existing Presidents and Secretaries as well as of the potential leaders who have recently joined the PO and will either establish new PO or take over responsibility in the existing one.

SPREAD has a team of experts on land issues who are cartographers to support the tribals in measuring the land and preparing their land records. The tribal leaders and members of the Village Forest Committee also get trained on land issues in the field as well as during the trainings organised.

## 11. Important Processes Related to Land Campaign Over the Years

The important processes that can be identified from the journey of the CBO of Ratnagiri Panchayat can be tracked from the period of 2005 when SPREAD initiated formation of SHGs in the Ratnagiri and neighbouring Panchyats. Some of the key processes identified are the following:

- Organising women through SHGs to build collective strength

It is observed that the process of organising the women of the Ratnagiri Panchayat was through the self help groups. It was realised that various issues of economic and social inequality can be addressed through the platform of SHG where women are oriented and their leadership is nurtured to address the internal issues of gender inequality within the family and later in the larger society. There were more than 56 SHGs got formed in the Panchayat and neighbouring areas. The women leadership was critical for building the campaign as they have been persistent with the Government officials and their Gherao created more embarrassment.

- Identification of local educated tribal youth as the field staff

Since the beginning of the programme, SPREAD identified local youth to facilitate the processes. The senior team of SPREAD trained the identified youth to support the community organisation process. There is a large grassroots team available in the intervened villages who have been working with the POs since its inception. They have become excellent trainers on the issues of land rights, displacement and strengthening Peoples' Organisations. Most of the facilitators are local and belong to the same community, therefore speak the local dialect and relate to the local environment, context and issues closely.

- Designing campaigns around the land rights and basic services

The processes of the POs have been supported around their demands to ensure basic

entitlements under various programmes like MGNREGS, PDS, RTE etc. In order to promote effective realisation of basic services, many of the PO leaders have been promoted to become Sarpanch or representatives of various committees. However, the larger campaign agenda has been around the issues of ensuring land entitlements under the FRA or other schemes. In order to keep the unity of the PO and larger federation alive and active, various livelihoods oriented needs are also addressed viz. tribals are promoted to plant cashew nut plants on their land. In some other POs, there has been a struggle over the community trees of cashews that can be harvested and produce can be sold after basic processing of the cashews to attain value addition.

- Federating village organisations upwards for collective strength

The collectives of the villages get federated at the village Panchayat level. There is an informal process of building collective at the village Panchayat level. The leaders of different villages/hamlets develop a collective strength by choosing President and Secretary for the Panchayat level institution. The collectives of women and land rights converge at the village Panchayat level to expand the membership and demonstrate stronger strength to the district administration and local power structure. The village Panchayat leaders federate at the cluster of Panchayat to form block level Peoples' Organisation.

## 12. Key Outcomes

The processes over the journey of ten years of the PO has resulted in significant achievements. Some of the achievement are the following:

- In 2007, the women's collective developed a campaign against the country liquor shop. The campaign resulted in closure of the brewery and also shops in different hamlets of village Panchayat Ratnagiri. The men were also counselled to abdicate external liquor. They were allowed to consume

organic alcohol prepared through traditional methods.

- In 2009, the women's organisation organised Darna in front of the Block level officials to improve the services of the PHC of Ratnagiri Panchayat. The protest was powerful as the women locked the PHC which resulted in the block and district officials to come down to the Dharna site and negotiate. It was promised in writing that the PHC doctor will be posted for regular duty within a week and hospital will function efficiently. The hospital was cleaned by the women to make it neat and functional as a gesture of support to the Health Department. The doctor got posted as promised who attends the PHC regularly, even now. As a result, the services of ANM and other functionaries have become regular. It serves more than 10 Panchayats of the Byapariguda block. As a consequence of regular monitoring of the services, many Anganwari centres of the cluster have also become regular and efficient.
- In 2009, the women's organisation decided to build a community hall in village Kajuri Padar of Ratnagiri Panchayat. It was felt that there is no meeting place for the Panchayat level Sangathan as well as cluster/block level Sangathan. The women requested SPREAD to support in construction of the community hall. SPREAD provided support of about 1.5 lakh for the purchase of material. The women and their male members contributed in form of labor as well as organised local material like sand through their efforts. The value of that would be about Rs 50,000. The community hall serves important function for organising meetings of the POs of the women as well as for the larger organisation around the land rights.
- The Jameen Adhikar Sangathan also initiated a campaign to get land titles under the Forest Rights Act. During 2006-2009, about 3000 applications were filed by the

facilitation of the PO. It resulted in 2000 tribal families getting 'Adhikar Patra' on the forest land that they were cultivating over a long period of time. The rejected cases have been of the OTVG who could not produce document of 75 years of possession or the officials did not support the non tribals in accessing their land rights.

### 13. Role of the Local NGO in Strengthening the CBO

THREAD has been instrumental in organising the women of the village Panchayat of Ratnagiri which resulted in formation of a larger CBO around the issues of land rights. The support of the organisation is seen in terms of providing information to the poor and displacement affected tribals on their rights. The presence and facilitation of the CSO resulted in confidence building for the women followed by men to organise and fight for their rights. The CSO worked on developing a team of local educated young boy and girls who can be the facilitators for the tribals as staff of SPREAD. The local level staff was trained on various issues of capacity building that can prepare them to organise the tribal women and men. Some of the structured training areas have been around the following:

- Understanding the concept of community organisation, management of self-help groups and livelihoods
- Knowledge on various programmes of the Government that are relevant for the provision of basic services viz. health, education, water and PDS etc.
- Skills for measurement of land using the official techniques so that the knowledge of Patwari and revenue department can be demystified and inaccurate land measurement of the Government can be questioned.
- Exchange visits and inter PO meetings to share experiences and learn from each other Annual Organisational development event as considered to be an important



opportunity to build leadership of the POs and developing agenda of action and support. The quarterly meetings of the POs at the Panchayat level are also utilised for capacity building of the PO leaders. THREAD has developed a training centre in Koraput town which is also utilised for conducting trainings.

#### 14. External opportunities and constraints

Gopal Nayak is a national level trainer on Forest Rights Act

Gopal Nayak, a resident of small hamlet of Khajuri Padar of Ratnagiri Panchayat, got associated with SPREAD since the beginning of their visit in the village in 2005. Initially, her mother was an active member of the self-help group. Her mother Malti Naik gradually demonstrated leadership abilities and became President of the Sangathan of Panchayat Ratnagiri. She encouraged Gopal to work with SPREAD due to her commitment with the mission of the organisation. He was not even 10th pass at that time, however, he was closely watching the oppression of the tribals by the Forest Department and the local power structure. Currently, Gopal is the block co-ordinator of SPREAD for managing all the programme of Baipaguda block.

He started working on the issues of land rights with the team of SPREAD. Initially, he got trained to understand the provisions of the forest rights in structured trainings as well as on the job support by the SPREAD team. He was instrumental in formation of Village Forest Committees in different villages getting most of the members of POs nominated by the Palli Sabha. He also helped the tribals in filling up forms for individual rights. Gopal learnt to measure the land, therefore actively helped during the verification process. This resulted in distribution of more than 2000 land titles under FRA.

Gopal is an active member of the Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) which is led by Mr Suresh Prabhu, an eminent activist on Forest Rights Act. Gopal attended several national level meetings of the CSD and presented on the findings of his work on FRA. The CDD works in more than 30 districts of Odisha with various activist groups. Gopal is well networked with the activists who invite him to conduct trainings on FRA. With his solid knowledge on FRA, he is a national level trainer on FRA.

Gopal also completed his graduation from Indira Gandhi Open University.

There are several challenges that the POs and SPREAD's work on land rights and tribal dignity is affected. Some of the key challenges are the following:

##### Opportunities

- The programmes like MGNREGS, FRA etc. have created possibilities of land title and entitlement of benefits to promote agriculture. There are more resources available in the tribal areas to improve the conditions of the tribals.
- Koraput is known for cashewnut production as well as for many other NTFP. It is a potential area to develop processing units which are run by the co-operatives of the tribals. There is organically grown Ragi and Paddy by the tribals which has a national and international market.
- Being a 5th Scheduled area, there are specific schemes and programmes for the benefits of the tribals. There are Tribal Sub Plan resources also available for the block/district.

##### Threats

- Koraput is also affected by the LWE activities. The PO members face threat from the police and security forces as being a member of the LWE groups. Land was one of the issue that the LWE also took with the Government, therefore the PO's campaign is seen as part of their ideology. On the other hand, the LWE groups feel that the POs are part of the State mechanism to implement the FRA which is not a real solution to the problem of land alienation of the tribals. A sense of mistrust from both the side, restrict growth and intensity of the campaign as well as membership of the POs.
- The tribal hostels of the tribal girls for primary and secondary education have earned a bad name due to many incidences of sexual exploitation of the tribal girls. Parents are not interested to send their girls for education in these centres. This will

hamper opportunity of the young and bright girls to get quality education.

- In Odisha, transaction of tribal land was restricted in 1952 with certain provisions of transfer of lands. The provisions were misused, therefore, Government of Odisha completely restricted transaction of tribal land in 2000. There is a growing pressure on the government to withdraw such a provision. There is a possibility that it may be withdrawn to promote land transfers to the industries.
- The Tribal Advisory Council is weak and the elected MLAs of different parties (in power or opposition) do not have power and strength to highlight the agenda of the tribal rights. They normally tow the party line which has limited sensitivity on the tribal issues and their empowerment.
- There is a greater exposure of the tribal youth to the city life due to increased communication system and their rampant migration for livelihoods. As a result, many traditional practises and positive values are disintegrating. It is found that marriages are being performed in Brahminical style inviting Pandits and spending on pomp and show. The traditional practise of marriage in a matriarchal tribal society is fading out where the girls used to spend couple of days in the groom's house to figure out her comfort and acceptance. Girls are subjected to sexual exposure by coercion during the period of stay resulting in growing vulnerability of the potential bridegrooms. The traditional practise is under question and more patriarchal practise are in vogue.

## 15. Sustainability of the PO

The sustainability of the PO is strong as the facilitators of the SPREAD were elected from the local community. They have been working with the POs out of commitment on the tribal rights issues as well as to improve the quality of basic services. There is a thinking and initiative taken

up by SPREAD to register the POs so that the POs can take grants as well as loans for their initiatives from the Government and other donors. The strategy of SPREAD to encourage the leaders to occupy spaces in the village Panchayat as well as other committees is also a step towards sustainability. The internal assessment of the project leaders and PO leaders is that the PO will be able to manage activities and sustain land campaign independently rating 8 marks over the scale of 10.

## 16. Future Plans

The PO representatives have some of the future plans which are articulated in the following manner :

- Applications under FRA of the OTFD i.e. Non tribals have not been accepted. The OP will fight to get their land rights so that the membership strength of the PO is not diluted.
- The land titles allotted to the tribal families have not been entered on the land records of the Patwari. There is a sense of insecurity that they may be displaced again if proper document are not created. The PO will work to ensure that necessary amendments on the land records is undertaken so that their land title become fool proof.
- There are applications filed for the community rights which have yet not been finalised by the Forest Department. The POs plan to take the campaign in this area also.

The larger vision of the SPREAD team working closely with the POs is the following :

- The POs need to grow further to manage their activities independently. A large number of members are illiterate, therefore, there is a need for regular support to know about the new provisions and Government schemes. Formal registration of the POs and mobilisation of resources is also being

considered so that dependence on SPREAD is reduced.

- There is a system of grain bank established in different villages in POs. There are more than 300 grain banks functional in different villages supported by SPREAD. It is

proposed that these are expanded as seed banks as women lend grains as seeds to the farmers in time of crisis. How the grain banks and organisation of women SHGs can be utilised for promoting livelihood activities for the tribal families.

Case Study : CBO - Dhanbanipati Labour Club CSO-Maa Tarini Community  
Action Group

CSO - THREAD

Location : Mayurbhanj, Odisha

*Theme : NREGA, FRA*



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### 1. The context

Mayurbhanj district is home to more than 50 tribes originating from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal. Located in the eastern corner of the Chotanagpur plateau, this melting pot of tribes, among the largest concentrations in the country, is remote, infrastructurally under-developed, and covered by forests. The region has a disproportionate share of communities living in poverty, with low levels of literacy and poor access to public services. This is reflected in the average annual employment under the MGNREGS, which is among the lowest in the country, indicating serious gaps in the delivery of services meant for the most vulnerable.

Living in an environment with abundant natural resources, these communities have traditionally had close links with nature, depending on forest resources<sup>1</sup> for their livelihood. However, the competing demands on natural resources over the years, especially forests, has increased biotic pressures, leading to a policy lock-in of these resources and policing by external players. This has weakened the link between the community and forests, making them more vulnerable and resource poor, and forcing them to look for

alternate livelihood options, including migration for employment within the state and even to adjoining states. Limited access to forest resources has also made agriculture a primary occupation and the main source of nutrition, food and income. So farmers from these communities now look to maximising their income from their land.

The major tribes in Bangripasi block, where the Dhanpabinapati Labour Union is located, include Santhalis, Mundas, Kolhas and Bhuiyas apart from several other smaller groups. The history of this community-based organisation (CBO) is rooted in the work of the civil society organisation (CSO) Team for Human Resource Education and Action for Development (THREAD) in Mayurbhanj and other districts of the state since 1995. In order to understand the CBO and its work, it is important to know how THREAD supports and forms linkages with the local community institutions it has created in the region.

### 2. THREAD and its association with CBOs

THREAD promotes village institutions in tribal areas of Odisha. For the past two decades, the

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<sup>1</sup> Nearly 39% of the geographical area of Mayurbhanj district is under forests, with more than 75% classified as dense to moderately dense forest cover. Of Odisha's 58,136sq km of forest area, nearly 31,786sq km or 55% is categorized as revenue forest, since it falls in revenue land that is controlled by the revenue department.

CSO has been working exclusively with socially excluded groups (SEGs) as its primary stakeholders on the issues of land rights, access to natural resources, social and gender discrimination, and eco-village development, opposing the destruction of natural resources through industrialisation and mining. It began its intervention by organising women's collectives and has largely used a gender lens to understand and address development challenges faced in the region.

- Federated women's collective Nari Samaj

THREAD started working with Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in 1995, identifying potential leaders in predominantly tribal districts in its sphere of operations across the state to create a cadre of women leaders who had experienced the cycle of exploitation, discrimination and denial of basic rights. The women underwent an intensive, two-month orientation and reflection during which they learned vocational and community mobilisation skills. These leaders then motivated and mobilised women in their village community to set up a village-level Nari Sanghand create local leadership to manage and lead local, village-level institutions.

The objective was to organise Nari Sanghs in villages across the region and federate these groups into a Nari Samaj at the block level. The CSO has created 54 Nari Samaj across 13 districts of the state, with a combined peak membership of over 200,000. The samajs serve as pressure groups to engage with the block and district administration as well as within the ST community, and to ensure a coordinated approach to the struggle for rights. The CSO's original target was to create a Nari Samaj in each of the state's 96 tribal block but paucity of resources and other factors limited the number to 54.

Since literacy and awareness was low at the time, THREAD seconded a block-level coordinator to each of the 54 Nari Samajs to help their leaders understand government policies and documents,

as well as assist them in petitioning the government for grievance redressal and accessing schemes and entitlements. The orientation process continued through in-field trainings based on peer learning and hands-on learning, interspersed with formal trainings by THREAD resource persons. The active Nari Samajs were registered as societies, their membership comprising representatives of the village-level sanghs.

An apex federation of the Nari Samajs was also created, called the Odisha Nari Samaj, to ensure uniformity in approach and strategy across the entire network and to advocate at the state level. This state vision is to "promote empowerment of poor/marginalized women, men and indigenous people by forming value-based organizations to catapult into a mass movement in Orissa for empowerment at all levels, in particular for ensuring human rights and for ensuring food security in line with the 'laws of nature'."

The long-term work strategy adopted by the CSO is to capacitate the women leaders to become opinion makers in their villages, especially among women, and get elected to leadership positions in the panchayati raj system to ensure livelihoods and better access to 'food security and food sovereignty'.

The objectives of the Nari Samaj federation are:

- To strengthen its constituent sanghs by mobilising local resources from the government so they can function independently;
- To prepare sangh members to contest panchayat elections so they have the power to facilitate access to government resources by the sanghs;
- To strengthen the functioning of the panchayat and gram sabha;
- To orient all Nari Samaj leaders and bring them into the Odisha Nari Samaj network to collectively address livelihood issues at a macro level;

- To facilitate access to government food security schemes and other welfare measures, to increase the quantum of these benefits, and to act as a watchdog to monitor schemes to ensure inclusive implementation and non-discriminatory provisioning of services;
- To strengthen sustainable, equitable and diversified use of livelihood options for people by organising seed and grain banks;
- To address all issues related to women atrocities, human rights violation, land alienation etc at the macro level through mass mobilisation.

Over the years, especially in the 12-year period from 1995 to 2007, THREAD used different strategies to strengthen and nurture the Nari Samaj and village-level sanghs. These ranged from nurturing fresh leadership in the block-level samaj, engaging in development challenges with regional or state-wide implications, encouraging and training women to contest panchayat elections at different tiers to empower the constituent sanghs, improving the ground-level implementation of schemes to facilitate access to land, water and forest resources, and linking women members to livelihood activities that create a strong bond between them.

Of the 54 Nari Samajs, 53 have been registered, representing more than 3,600 Nari Sanghs. These registered societies have tribal women as governing body members and are successfully steering a women-focused agenda through their work. Three representatives of the Nari Samaj are also on the governing body of THREAD, whose current chief functionary also emerged from the mass movement, thus integrating the CSO more closely with the CBOs. Nearly 80% of the CSO's field functionaries are tribal women associated with the sanghs in the past, some of them joining its advisory body.

The aim of the CSO is to see the Nari Samaj as an independent, self-sustaining entity, with its own resource-mobilisation mechanisms and regional focus. THREAD is also in the process of

registering some of the Nari Samajs under the FCRA, including four in the PACS-supported areas of Mayurbhanj district. In addition, it is looking into the possibility of providing seed grants and initial support for resource mobilisation to CBOs in future until they can function independently. The idea is for CBO members to eventually turn their livelihood activities, both collective and individual, into independent enterprises so they can partly use the resources earned for issue-based work. Currently, some members are being trained in block-brick production to secure their livelihoods.

#### Formation of MGNREGS labour unions- Shramik Sangh

Towards the middle of the last decade, the foremost agenda in the struggle of the tribal women to protect natural resources and secure their rights to access forests was opposition to rampant legal and illegal mining and setting up mineral-based industries in scheduled areas. These women were the first to face the consequences of these activities—land acquisition and displacement, land and water pollution, and prohibiting access to forest resources.

The samaj faced a backlash to their opposition in 2005-06, with members being jailed for opposing mining activities and subjected to atrocities—harassment, rape and murder—by industry-sponsored criminals. As a result, many of them got scared and their families discouraged them from continuing their activities, weakening the samaj between 2008-10, with 12-15 units breaking up due to internal differences and others confining their activity to the local level. The CSO, too, was not prepared for this severe backlash.

The collectives needed external inputs to infuse new energy to get on the path to revival post-2008. The understanding of the limitations of collective action led to a course correction, the focus shifting from opposing mining and industrialisation to ensuring the effective implementation of MGNREGS and FRA schemes

and facilitating access to their entitlements, for which there was latent demand in the sanghs since these schemes touched their lives and livelihoods. In addition, health and nutrition-related issues also figured in the action agenda.

The PACS intervention in 2011 came at an opportune time, giving a new direction to the work of the CBOs the sanghs and samaj and creating a new network focusing exclusively on the implementation of these two schemes. The CSO's PACS proposal covered four Nari Samaj networks in Mayurbhanj district<sup>2</sup>.

The CSO took up the formation of village-level MGNREGS labour clubs or shramik sanghs in hamlets to create a local pressure group for greater accountability/transparency and community-level monitoring of the implementation of the scheme. The 458 hamlet-level clubs with 2,000 active men and women members belonging to SEG groups were subsequently federated into 34 panchayat-level unions across four blocks.

The shramik sanghs have both men and women of the SC and ST communities and women from the general communities as members. Men in the general category are excluded, given THREAD's mandate to work with women and the vulnerable. The clubs work exclusively to improve the implementation of MGNREGS schemes in their village and negotiate with local elected representatives and government officials to maximise wage employment under the schemes.

All adult male and female villagers eligible for MGNREGS wage labour are members of the shramik sangh, which has an executive committee that meets once every month to take stock of the progress in the past month and lay down priorities and activities for the next month. The clubs federate into labour unions at the panchayat, block and district level, with the presidents and secretaries of the lower tier being the members of the higher tier.

The responsibilities of the clubs and unions

include monitoring the implementation of MGNREGS schemes in their area, supporting their members in getting MGNREGS job cards, filing RTI petitions for getting information on scheme-related work and funds, using the grievance redressal mechanism established under the act when needed, demanding jobs for the job seekers, participating in the MGNREGS planning (integrated participatory planning exercise-IPPE), creating pressure to conduct regular social audits, and mobilising members to participate in the audit process. They also work for effective implementation of the FRA - including submitting claims for forest rights and pushing the claims with the administration and local bodies (FRCs), and development of the land granted to claimants.

#### Panchayat-level community action groups

THREAD has created a community action group (CAG) at the panchayat level with the same membership base as the labour union but with a different mandate. The CAG focuses on the overall development of the villages in the panchayat to ensure effective implementation of all major flagship programmes in the panchayat. It has sub-committees to monitor specific aspects of the schemes and their implementation, taking up problem issues with PRI representatives and government official to bridge the gaps and also advocating the development programmes to be taken up. Issues that the lesser experienced labour union and CAG cannot resolve at their level are taken up with the Nari Samaj, which is an older, more experienced and stronger institution more adept at handling local/regional issues.

The three CBOs are not formally linked but the sangh and samaj are the backbone on which the other two institutions function. Also, the mixed membership of the community institutions (men and women) created post-2010 was based on the earlier experience that exclusively women's groups are more vulnerable, especially if they

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<sup>2</sup> a) Nari Unnati Samaj, Badamtalia, Block Bangiriposi, b) Nari Jayashree Samaj, Rengasahi, block GB Nagar, c) Nari Rashmi Samaj, Raliabindha, Block Bisoi, d) Nari Tejaswini Samaj, Nuadihi, Saraskana.



don't have strong family support in times of adversity.

### 3. History and genesis of the Dhanabanipata Shramik Sangh

The Dhanabanipata Shramik Sangh, created in 2011-12, is the MGNREGS labour club of Talabhadrasola village under the Syamsundarpur gram panchayat of Bangiriposi block in Mayurbhanj district. The village residents mostly belong to the Santhal, Khol, Bhuiyan, Munda and Gouda tribes, with some Khadia PVTGs (particularly vulnerable tribal group).

Talabhadrasola, a small village of 10-15 households, is one of 18 villages in the Syamsundarpur panchayat that are closely linked to the nearby revenue forest. One of its oldest village institutions is the traditional forest management committee constituted to protect the forest (by the customary arrangement of Thengapalli<sup>3</sup>) and conserve and regulate the use of forest resources. However, the traditional protection system was weakened by the enforcement of the National Forest Policy, which saw a new van suraksha samiti being constituted. This samiti never became as strong and active as the traditional system because the villagers showed little interest in it.

The government also designated forest areas to joint forest management (JFM) committees under the new policy, which increased the pressure on the village revenue forest because it was among the traditionally better-protected and managed forests in the region. It attracted a timber mafia comprising non-tribal communities in other villages of the panchayat whose brazen felling of trees left the forest extensively degraded by the late 1990s.

Some villagers of Talabhadrasola protested against this illegal felling but were threatened by the timber mafia of affluent villagers with better connections in the local bureaucracy. They implicated seven villagers in false cases and had

them jailed but none of the other villagers came forward to help them even though it was in their collective interest to stop the destruction of their forest. It took six months for their families to get them released, after running from pillar to post and mortgaging their assets to bribe officials.

### 4. Organisation of the collective

When THREAD began the task of setting up village collectives, the discussions it initiated centred on livelihood options based on their traditional dependence on forest resources, the depredation of non-tribals and the injustice meted out to them by the local administration. Those who had been jailed bemoaned the lack of community support while the rest admitted to being afraid because of their illiteracy and lack of awareness. The CSO pointed out that their illiterate forefathers had also protected the forest with fewer resources and numbers. Since their time, the village had more than doubled its population over the past two decades, the number of households increasing from 10-15 to the present 57. Also, the younger generation was far better educated. The villagers realised they had been taken advantage of and were vulnerable because they had failed to muster their collective strength.

They were now keen to organise themselves into a collective to look at their livelihood options and explore employment opportunities. They set up a shramik sangh to demand employment under the MGNREGS schemes, also reviving their customary practice of forest protection. The news of the collective and the resolve of the entire community to protect the forest spread to the adjoining villages, putting the brake on illegal felling, which has now stopped.

The FRA legislation also opened the door to claim ownership of the land they had been tilling for generations. Securing these individual land rights as well as the usufruct rights of the community to forest produce became the sangh's primary mandate, its work largely involving helping its

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<sup>2</sup> System of rotational watch and ward of the neighbouring forest by all households.

members file claim applications, pursuing these applications with the concerned officials and petitioning the administration to grant community forest rights.

The shramik sangh has a 22-member executive committee with a mix of village elders/traditional leaders and the younger generation to combine experience with energy. Its members were selected by the villagers based on criteria set by the CSO. More than 50% of its members are women. Most are from BPL families or vulnerable communities looking for employment under the MGNREGS.

## 5. Leadership and its style

When choosing the leadership for their collective, the villagers opted to be pragmatic. Hadibandhu Singh (32) and Rabindra Singh(30) were chosen president and secretary of the executive committee because they are educated, highly aware and pro-active in dealing with issues and officials. They have been shouldering the responsibility of engaging with government functionaries and outsiders, explaining the issues the villagers face.

The leadership is informal and collective, with decisions made by consensus and the president and secretary implementing them. The women play a strong role because of their dual membership of both the shramik sangh and the nari sangh. Within the collective, the traditional leaders and those who were jailed for protecting the community's collective interest in the village forest are held in high regard and listened to with respect. The president and the secretary represent the community in the panchayat level labour union and the CAG, sharing the village perspective in these larger bodies.

## 6. Organisational culture and values

The CBO is a homogenous group with common interests that draws its strength from the federated structure and its multiple institutions - the Nari Sangh, Nari Samaj, labour union and CAG. It understands that it cannot fulfil its mandate without the strength of the federation

behind it and all its decisions are consensual.

Subsistence farming and limited alternate livelihood options mean the villagers depend on wage labour in MGNREGS schemes to make ends meet. So the collective interest is to maximise the work and the number of workdays allotted to the village and ensure equity in distributing employment among the families. Similarly, since many farms come under revenue forests, most land holders need the support of the collective to secure their land rights.

Both these factors and the collective interest in developing the village binds them together. Having learnt from the past experience that they are vulnerable to external threats if they don't stand united, the collective is now more determined and strongly motivated.

## 7. The labour union's relationship with THREAD

The CSO supports a multiplicity of institutions so it interacts closely with the community. Its staff attends shramik sangh meetings and since some of them are former Nari Sangh members, the level of trust is high. Many senior THREAD functionaries are also tribals who have risen to leadership positions so they are a motivating force, inspiring others to work dedicatedly for the collective and grow with the organisation.

CSO staff a company shramik sangh workers for important engagements with senior officials, and the CSO ensures its partner institutions (like the Nari Samaj) are with the union in times of need - when pressure needs to be applied on the block/district administration. The CSO and Nari Samaj, in turn, mobilise the local community through the CBO when it needs the strength of numbers to draw attention of the media or administration to issue of regional importance.

In practice, the CBO interacts more closely with Nari Samaj functionaries who are located in the block than with senior CSO functionaries who are often not available because of their pan-state responsibilities and work.

## 8. Capacity building efforts by the CSO

THREAD's capacity building strategy is a mix of formal and informal training of leaders as well as members of the CBO. The informal trainings are for positional roles and responsibilities, engagement with PRIs and the local administration and village-level development issues.

The formal trainings happen both locally and at the CSO's training resource centres. They include workshops/courses on the NREGA, its operational guidelines, MGNREGSIPPE planning guidelines, demanding work under MGNREGS, conducting social audits, the FRA and its subsequent amendments, claiming individual and community forest rights, institutional structure for seeking and claiming rights, methods of verification of individual and community claims, the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the Right to Information Act, legal aid, domestic violence, and literacy.

The CSO uses simplified IEC material on the NREGA, FRA, NRHM and nutrition to generate awareness in the CBO. Some of the organisational staff have also been trained in using GPS devices to verify claims and upload them on Google. This helps individuals to file claim sand ensures the correct acreage and location of land awarded to the claimant during the verification process.

## 9. Important processes related to the CBO

The CSO tapped a deep community need in Talab hadrasola village to organise as a collective. Despite its homogeneity and small size, the community needed an external agency to bring it together. In the limited time the organisation has been in operation, it has created a strong pressure group within the gram panchayat and has several successes to its credit because of its collective functioning.

Some of the important processes in its evolution include :

Organising the CBO around community issues : Employment and forest rights were two pressing issues for the community at the time the CBO was formed. Hence, it took up the issue of securing tenurial rights for those cultivating land located in forests alongside its primary mandate to address issues linked to the implementation of the MGNREGS. It worked simultaneously on both fronts, making the MGNREGS implementation smooth and transparent and facilitating the claims of cultivators for rights on forest land.

Engagement with PRIs and local administration: The CBO's mandate involved regularly interacting with elected representatives of all PRI tiers and the local administration. Its leaders gradually developed the confidence to engage with these officials on development issues of the village as well as the panchayat. Their heightened awareness also enabled them to leverage government support to improve the delivery of services and schemes.

Support of federations for unresolved issues: The federated CBOs in the local network motivate and guide the shramik sangh to deliver on the expectations of the community, providing the required support structure in times of need. The closest links are with the Nari Samaj, which helps the CBO engage with block and district officials to resolve problems that needed action at a more macro level. The regular sharing between the groups and their interlinked membership also ensured that competing demands or conflicting interests could be resolved through consensus.

Value of young leadership and education : The CBO realised it needed pro-active leaders who are young, articulate and confident to coordinate the interests of individual stakeholders and follow-up follow up with the line departments. These leaders had to be literate with a basic education and also aware of the issues being raised and their context. It, therefore, opted for energy and education over the wisdom and experience of traditional community leaders.

Strong inclusion focus : Since its members mostly belonged to vulnerable communities (SC/ST/

PVTG), the majority being women, the CBO had to be inclusive in its functioning. For example, it had to ensure that all families were equitably treated in allocating employment under the MGNREGS and that the development of individual farm plots was included in the scheme's projects during the planning process.

During the 2013 Phailin cyclone, 14 houses of the Khodiya PVTG community were destroyed but the district administration offered just Rs300 and 25kg of rice as compensation. The labour collective and the CAG petitioned the district collector for fair compensation for the 14 families. The tehsildar felt the claims were false and locked them in a room. When the collector learnt they had come on behalf of other families and were not pushing personal claims, he assured all help and a resettlement package was provided to the families.

## 10. Key outcomes and impacts

**Cooperation and collective action :** Past experience had shown the villagers that they are vulnerable to external threats without a strong community collective to protect their interests and demand their legitimate rights to resources and entitlements. The growing strength of the CBO effectively put a stop to the pilfering of forest resources by the timber mafia of non-tribals from adjoining villages. It also led to the revival of the traditional community system of protecting the forest.

The collective's meetings attract wide participation and the animated discussions lead to consensus decisions, reflecting the cohesiveness of the group. An attempt was made to break this unity two years ago when a boy from the village was falsely accused of harassing a girl from an affluent neighbouring village. The CBO mobilised the village and its network to gherao the police station and demand the release of the boy, after which the case was withdrawn.

**Conserving and managing natural resources :** Realising the importance of nurturing and protecting their fast depleting natural resources, the villagers revived their traditional watch and

ward system to protect the forest from illegal exploitation. They also revisited their traditional forest management practices to redefine the rules for resource extraction and grazing of cattle and developed a system of penalties for non-compliance.

**Smoother implementation of programmes :** Earlier, wage labour opportunities under the MGNREGS were limited because of the limited number of projects it undertook. Pressure from the CBO led to an improvement in the average number of days of employment available under the scheme and to new projects being taken up in the village. Two CC roads, a gravel road, approach road to the village school, several cattlesheds and land development activities were approved and implemented in the village as a result of the CBO push.

Another issue the CBO addressed was delays in payment where its proactive intervention resulted in timely wage labour payments. It also intervened in the MGNREGS planning process, getting more need-based projects approved by the palli sabha and gram panchayat for inclusion in the panchayat development plan.

The CBO has secured individual forest rights for 23 families and has submitted eight claims for community forest rights, which are in the process of being verified by the revenue department.

**Improved access to public services :** The CBO has improved access to and delivery of public services some of its recent achievements including the construction of an anganwadi centre in the village; filing a grievance with the MGNREGS ombudsman, which resolved the issue of delayed wage labour payments; universal enrolment of all pregnant and nursing women in the AWC; access to entitlements and services for institutional delivery; enrolment of all eligible children aged under six years in the AWC; and regular access to nutritional food.

**Importance of education for leadership :** Illiteracy led to many villagers being implicated in false cases in the past. Realising the importance of education, they chose young and educated



leaders for the collective instead of their traditional leaders and also began sending their children to the anganwadi and school.

Fighting for the rights of others: Since the collective was working with socially excluded and marginalised groups, the villagers realised it was as important to fight for collective rights as well as the rights of others who had no voice as it was to fight for their own individual rights. This is what motivated them to come together in a collective, one significant outcome being securing a just resettlement package for PVTG families affected by the cyclone.

### 11. Role of the CSO in the emergence of the CBO as a strong institution

THREAD's strategy to build and nurture CBOs was to take up issues of community interest and motivate and educate traditional village institutions to transform their villages socially, culturally and economically. But it knew that individual, standalone community bodies have little chance of withstanding external threats on their own or surviving and sustaining themselves outside a project support framework.

So from the beginning, the CSO worked to build up the collective strength of these village-level bodies, federating them into a network at the panchayat, block and district levels. The village-level CBO looks for support and guidance from the other tiers of this cooperative structure, while the higher rungs depend on the CBOs to mobilise the villagers for resolving issues that require macro level solutions.

This mutually-beneficial structure has the potential to continue the work initiated by the PACS intervention, with minimal outside support.

### 12. External opportunities and constraints

Strengthens and opportunities : The strong community mobilisation and the collective realisation that the power to withstand external threats and demand legitimate rights comes from being a tightly knit unit backed by support structures. Having paid the penalty for being

divided and earned rewards for being together, the current generation is likely to remain bonded, the consensual decision-making and democratic leadership of its collective ensuring its survival. A homogenous group of the socially and economically excluded that is propelled by its women, the CBO will continue working to secure the interests of all vulnerable groups in the village and remove all forms of discrimination.

THREAD's guidance and mentoring over the past four years has given the CBO a better perspective of village development and the narrative in which schemes/programmes operate, something which it can apply fruitfully in future. The federated structure also provides it with a support environment to fall back on in times of need. In addition, the positive partnerships with line departments will help in implementing schemes and managing resources to strengthen livelihoods. A stronger CBO with knowledge of planning for development will also be able to pull in more development funds for the village, especially for developing skills, improving livelihood and supporting agriculture, all of which contribute to long-term development.

Weaknesses and constraints : Once project support is withdrawn, the CBO will face bottlenecks since it is still not fully technically and operationally equipped to deal with opportunity costs and resource management. Its members still depend on the CSO for documentation, budget preparation, book keeping and deal negotiation, which will limit its efficacy in implementing future strategies. Diminishing forest resources, subsistence agriculture, and limited livelihood options leave these landless or marginal farmers at risk while migration for employment threatens the existence of their collective. Policy barriers also prevent them from accessing forest resources to supplement their food, fuel and fodder needs that are amply available in the nearby Simmlipal National Park.

### 13. Sustainability of the CBO

THREAD has been developing a model based on community leadership to enable the CBO and its

federation to become independent entities. The framework embeds the community institutions with the Nari Samaj at the apex and the current strategy is to create a strong leadership at the apex because a lot will depend on how these partner CSOs perform after the project support is withdrawn.

The trainings and orientations, both formal and informal, have seen CBO leaders becoming well educated on current issues/challenges, and skilled in community mobilization and engaging with the government. They are confident, can function independently and have the potential to handle operations after THREAD support is withdrawn. They will continue looking collectively for solutions and if local solutions aren't available seek the support and guidance of their network, PRI representatives and the administration.

#### 14. Future plans of the CBO

- Creating a second line of leadership within the CBO and its related federations.
- Addressing the still-prevalent discrimination

by service providers in delivering services in the village.

- Completing the verification process for all pending CFR cases and gaining free access for the community to conserve and manage its forest resources.
- Addressing demarcation of forest and revenue land in the village to end all confusions and ensure better access to agricultural schemes for cultivators.
- Expediting MGNREGS IPPE planning to ensure more individual beneficiary-oriented schemes, and focusing on livelihood development of PVTGs, women-headed families and destitutes.
- Skill development of PVTGs in block-brick making (eco-friendly bricks) and establishing social enterprises to make the CBO financially independent and self-sustaining.
- Bridge the gap between PVTGs and other better-off tribal communities and address social discriminations and taboos.

Case Study : CBO - Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samooch

CSO - Emmanuel Health Association/Spandana Community  
Health & Development

Location : Chhapara, Seoni

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## 1. Background

Jogiwada village where the *Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samooh* is located is in the Chhapara block of Seoni district, in South Eastern corner of Madhya Pradesh. A predominantly tribal district, it borders the state of Maharashtra and has a high forest cover being home to the Pench Tiger National Park. The district has a Schedule Tribe population of 37.7 percent and a Scheduled Caste population of 9.5 percent. The sex ratio of the tribal population of the district is 1014 per thousand as per the 2011 census (957 among SC), though the child sex ratio among tribals suddenly drops to 977 per thousand (909 among SC), suggesting high levels of mortality. Literacy among the tribals is low at 62.7 percent as compared to the district and state average and even in comparison to the local SC population 76.2 percent (Census 2011).

The health and education infrastructure of the district is poor and scattered, with just 8 Community Health Centres, 30 Primary Health Centres and about 300 Sub-health Centres to cater to a population of 14 lakhs scattered over more than 8700 square kilometres and 8 community development blocks. The district has one of the lowest population density in the district. Many of these health facilities suffer from poor staffing, lack of infrastructure and trained

personnel and also lack of facilities to provide quality services. The district has 1584 revenue villages clustered into nearly 600 Gram Panchayats. Largely rural (90 percent), nearly 83 percent of the population is engaged in agriculture and supplements its livelihoods through collection and use of the neighbouring forest resources.

More than half the population lives below the poverty line (53.15 percent as per 2004-05 estimates). Located 70 kilometers from the district headquarter- Seoni and about 90 kilometers from the nearest city (Jabalpur), Lakhnadaon falls in northern Seoni, near the rich southern agricultural belt of Madhya Pradesh. The region is a stark contrast to this agricultural belt -with poor irrigation, small land holdings and high migration- with most men going to this belt (in adjoining districts) to work as seasonal agricultural labourers.

The *Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samooh* was formed by the Emmanuel Health Society, and its CSO network partner Spandan a Community Health and Development Project, in late 2012 with PACS support, and is among the 108 CBOs formed by the organisation in 4 blocks- Lakhnadaon, Chhappara, kurai and Ghansaur blocks of Seoni district on the issue of strengthening community accountability in the area of health and nutrition



and improving the quality of service delivery.

## 2. Emergence of Emmanuel Health Association and its Work on Community Health

The Emmanuel Hospital Association (EHA) was founded in 1970 by a group of Indian and international medical practitioners and community health experts to look for appropriate solutions for long term sustainability of about 13 Missionary Hospitals that had been operating with support from committed public health workers from the UK, USA and Australia. The reduction in programme support and the inability of workers from different countries to commit time for the community and hospitals spread over different locations of North India meant that these scattered Missionary hospitals needed an umbrella organisation to manage common operations, bring them under one roof and liaise with international organisations and donors. Over time the network grew to 20 Missionary Hospitals and 35 Community Health and Development Programmes (CHDPs) associated with those hospitals.

Thus since 1970 EHA has been functioning as a national Christian health and development organisation working with the poor and socially excluded communities mainly in the rural areas of North India. The thematic focus of EHA and its network hospitals and CHDPs has been on affordable community health and nutrition, HIV and livelihoods. The organisations community based work has been around preventive health, awareness generation on health, nutrition and sanitation related issues and their inter-linkage, capacity development of the local women and local functionaries on basic health, ante and post-natal care of women and promotion of health seeking behaviour among communities.

Over the years the organisation has also created community based health interventions that treat the community as a development partner- a shift from the charity based interventions, which EHA found was creating dependence within the community. The primary beneficiaries of EHA's

interventions are mainly people from the socially excluded groups including members of the scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and primitive tribes, People with Disabilities-PwD and People living with HIV/AIDS-PLWHA.

The CSO has been working through the Missionary Hospitals and CHDPs for providing clinical services and secondary health care in poverty stricken rural areas and also works to tackle the underlying causes of their vulnerability which is related to economic underdevelopment. Thus through promotion of SHGs and work on agricultural improvement and development the CHDPs also work on poverty alleviation and economic empowerment of the community.

The local CSO partner of EHA in Seoni district is the Lakhnadaon Christian Hospital and its affiliated Spandana CHDP. The Hospital was started in the early 1920s by missionaries belonging to the Free Church of Scotland. The population of Lakhnadaon and Chhapara, despite being close to Jabalpur city, was highly vulnerable at that time. A large number of people used to succumb to malaria, snake-bites and complicated pregnancies during those times, due to absence of proximate health facilities to respond to emergency health needs of the local community. The Christian Hospital, which at that time was the only major health care facility in the stretch between Nagpur (Maharashtra) and Jabalpur gradually evolved from a small health clinic in Chhapara block to a 30 bedded, fully staffed hospital in Lakhnadaon providing a range of secondary health services from general medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, dental care to basic ophthalmic services. The outreach of the hospital was limited and health needs of the region were immense- very few people were actually able to come to the hospital for treatment, despite the free treatment as the opportunity cost of coming all the way to Lakhnadaon was very high. In order to extend the outreach of health services the hospital also worked alongside Registered Medical Practitioners and Quacks to orient them on basic health treatment, right diagnosis/treatment and

appropriate referral. The hospital management however realised that this was a short term solution and they would need to go outside and work closely with the community in the villages.

As part of this thinking, Spandana CHDP was started as a development off-shoot of Lakhnadaon Christian Hospital in the year 2000 due to the combined efforts of De Verre Naasten (DVN) of Netherlands and Dr Sunil Gokavi, the present Executive Director of EHA. Spandana is one of the biggest CHDPs under the EHA network. It began working on health and integrated development of 15 villages of the district and presently works in 200 villages, though the organisation has chosen to limit its focussed work to 30 select villages of Lakhnadaon and Chhapara blocks, where it implements projects on watershed development, Reproductive and Child Health, Tuberculosis prevention, targeted interventions against HIV/AIDS and capacity building for ASHA cadres of National Health Mission.

With support from the PACS programme, EHA and its CSO partners, including Spandana CHDP, decided to extend its work to addressing discrimination and exclusion in the provision of health, nutrition, education, employment and other related basic services in the project area. The objective was to improve the health seeking behaviour of SEGs, specifically women, disabled, enable people to benefit from schemes/ entitlements and improve their participation in local governance. The strategy was to address the issue of denial of services and help communities to access those services/ entitlements equitably.

#### Genesis of *Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samooh*

*Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samooh* was one of the 108 CBOs formed by EHA under PACS support in Seoni district. As shared above, EHA had been working in the area for a long time and realised that for self-dependence and self-governance, communities not only need to demand services and entitlement which are due to them, but also learn the skills of negotiating with the government and fight the system through

available scheme-based provisions and general grievance redress mechanisms in case there was a continued denial of their rights.

The organisation (Spandana CHDP) had been working in the region for a long time and communities were aware of their work, including the villagers of Jogiwada village. When the organisation started discussing their issues with the communities- both men and women several issues related to service delivery and its quality emerged. To begin with the community identified a few women who were willing to organise themselves as a group. This was the beginning of the *Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samooh*. The women started as a regular savings group which also took upon itself the task of working for the village development and improving access to services for the community. Gradually, the group expanded and now has 11 women members. During this period the group has built a saving corpus of Rs 24,000 which is borrowed by members based on their needs- largely for meeting their consumption needs and have also worked for improving the delivery of services.

Within a year of its formation, since the dysfunctionality of the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) was repeatedly coming in the discussions, the women went collectively to meet the Anganwadi Worker (AWW) and ask her to regularly open the AWC and provide services to women and children. However, the functionaries continued her old ways. Complaints made to the Panchayat and the supervisor of the AWW also had no impact. During this time the organisation staff had been encouraging the CBO members and other villagers to work for the improvement of their own conditions by means of registering their grievances and had been creating awareness on the various grievance redress mechanisms available in the public system. However, this effort had so far not yielded much in terms of result.

With no other option left, the CSO functionaries encouraged the members to at least try grievance redressal system once as there was no harm. The chairperson of the group Sunita and the secretary

Gayatri went with the CSO staff to Chhapara block headquarter and visited an MP Online kiosk<sup>1</sup> and registered their complaint on one of the on-line grievance redressal mechanisms of the state government called Samadhan Online. Within a week of registering the complaint a team from the district headquarters visited the village and the AWC, met the community members and held discussions with the women's group. This was followed by a visit by a senior team from Bhopal which also held discussions. Some administrative actions were taken and there was an immediate change in the functioning of the AWC. Since then the centre has been running smoothly, regular services are provided and the AWW and her helper go to the different hamlets to take the children to the centre for pre-school education and for serving hot cooked supplementary nutrition.

The incident made the members, the villagers as well CBOs of other villages realise the power of these grievance mechanisms and their faith in the system increased. Since then there has been no stopping back and with support from CSO staff the CBOs of the district have filed/registered several complaints and achieved success in several cases.

Members of the *Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samooh* further used the established grievance redressal systems like the District Collectors *Jan Sunwai* (Public hearings), CM Helpline (a telephone based redressal system), use of provisions of Madhya Pradesh Public Services Guarantee Act as well as *Samadhan* Online for registering their complaints and getting them redressed. These have been for getting old-age and widow pensions for the eligible community members as well as for seeking disability pension for a girl of Jogiwada village.

### 3. Organisation of the Collective

The basis of the collective is the regular savings group that ensures that members meet every month to save as well as discuss relevant issues.

The CSO staff also attends these meetings and each meeting ends with a detailed discussion on different aspects of health and nutrition with the objective of improving awareness on health issues, educating members about the different schemes and entitlements that they can access for improving their well-being. The organisation of the group is quite informal and is headed by a President and also has two other office bearers- a secretary and a treasurer, who collectively manage the affairs of both the savings related work as well as other development/ grievance related work of the CBO.

The CBO is located in the Jogiwada *tola* which is at a distance from the main village and is largely inhabited by members of the Gond tribal community and some scheduled caste members. While most members belong to the scheduled tribes, it has included a few scheduled caste members, a few widows and a disabled woman in the group. The group also encourages other women of the village to participate in the discussions so that they can also become aware of the different scheme/ programme and entitlements that they can avail as well as the grievance redressal mechanisms that they can use independently or with support from the CBO members.

### 4. Leadership and its Style of Functioning

The leadership to *Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samoohis* provided by Sunita, who is a matriculate and is the President of the SHG and the CBO and also by Gayatri who is also educated (schooling till Grade 8th) and functions as the secretary to the group. Both the women are educated, vocal and enterprising and thus became the natural choice for the group when the selection of leaders for the group came up. They were willing to spare time for the community and the group and had the confidence to learn their expected roles and engage with the local and block level functionaries of different departments to get works done.

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<sup>1</sup> A state-wide PPP-based Community Information Kiosk/ Customer Service Centre offering IT related services to the residents.

The willingness of these women to be mobile and visit government offices/officials was also one of the reasons for their selection as group leaders. Despite the superior education of these women, as compared to other members, most of who are illiterate or semi-literate, the decision making in the group is collective- all members and their individual opinions are heard before a decision is taken on an issue by the group. The CBO leaders not only accompany women and other villagers to block level officials but also accompany the members for depositing or withdrawing money from their bank accounts in Chhapara. However, now the leaders are encouraging the other women members to visit the bank alone and independently manage their bank accounts.

## 5. Organisation Culture and Values

The values of *Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samoo* are in harmony with the larger organisational values of EHA and Spandana CHDP, and it strives to work for the rights, and improved health and nutrition status of the deprived, excluded sections of the community. With this objective, representation in the group has been provided to all those who face deprivation at multiple levels owing to their vulnerable position as girls/women, widows and disabled belonging to the socially marginalised SC/ST communities.

The gradual handholding and mentoring support provided to the group has led a group of women who were earlier shy to come out of their houses and come face to face with strangers to openly discuss and present their issues to outsiders.

There has been a gradual realisation among the CBO members that services and entitlements provided by government to the members of socially excluded communities are not a charity but their right, which needs to be realised not only for their own development but also for the long-term development of their children. And therefore it is important for them to question the quality of services provided to them and hold those people accountable who either are not providing the services or if those services lack in quality. A rights-based consciousness has

gradually been built within the CBO members and this has changed the way government programmes and schemes were viewed by the community members.

## 6. CSOs relation with Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samoo

The CSO members have been regularly facilitating the community and group level processes in the village. Regular sharing and discussions were also facilitated among different CBOs on issues that were regional in nature. Other CBOs formed in the revenue villages of Jogiwada panchayat-Jogiwada and Saleghad are also encouraged to meet regularly and discuss common problems and how they can be addressed through their joint efforts. On the health and nutrition related issues, the organisation has been providing support through its close working relations with the district and block level health department functionaries and also through the large network of ASHA workers that Spandana CHDP has been regularly training for the past few years.

Since working on the issue of public grievance redressal was also new for the staff of EHA/Spandana, the organisation invested a lot in the capacity development of its field staff, who had traditionally worked only on health and nutrition related issues. Staff was educated on different schemes, programmes, Acts and legislations that guaranteed different public services to the community. They are also intensively trained on which provisions and grievance redressal mechanisms would be operative in a given situation and how they were to be used by the community. Regular support was provided by the CSO staff to CBOs members for simplifying the different legal instruments and demystifying how they could access different redress mechanisms. The support and guidance provided by the staff continues till today, though informally, even though the active project support has come to an end in December 2015.

## 7. Capacity Building Efforts by the CSO

As shared earlier, intensive capacity building



input has been made by the organisation to create awareness on different schemes and programmes, rights and entitlements of different categories of beneficiaries and methods for availing those rights, including the options for registering their grievances in case they are unable to access those rights/entitlements.

To be able to transfer these capacities to the CBO members, the staff were first provided intensive Training of Trainers (ToT) on CBO formation, health and nutrition related schemes of the government, various rights available to communities and methods of accessing them, apart from training on different aspects of legal aid, gender based violence, ST/SC atrocities Act etc.

Equipped with these training inputs, the CSO staff, in turn, capacitated the CBO members and leaders on leadership skills and conflict resolution within groups, awareness on health, nutrition and education, monitoring the quality of services- including availability of

infrastructure and facilities for delivering those services at the PHC/SHC/AWC/Schools, formation of mandatory committees at the village- Village Health Nutrition and Sanitation Committees (VHSNC), responsibilities of local functionaries like ASHA, AWW, panchayat secretary and the PRI leaders. For better accessing services, CBO members were capacitated on making formal demands for various entitlements/rights, provisions to be used for registering grievances and the different mechanisms available for use by the community.

## 8. Important Processes Related to the CBO

- Organisation of the most vulnerable and socially excluded communities - The CBO formation process was able to get the most vulnerable and socially excluded communities within its fold- from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled tribes. This created a strong identity and a greater bonding among the CBO members and the issues more pertinent for the communities related to barriers to access services were strongly tackled by the CBO members.
- Representation to diverse vulnerabilities within the CBO - The CBO was able to look at the special needs of all the major categories of vulnerable groups by including them as members. Thus the entirely women's group also had widows, old- aged and disabled women from SC and ST community as members who suffered discrimination at several levels. As a result of the diverse representation, the CBO members were able to identify the vulnerabilities of different categories and work for improving their access to rights and entitlements. Thus, the CBO members not only carried on a struggle against the denial of rights and access to benefits like widow/old- age pension for all eligible women of the village but also adopted different mechanisms for seeking various benefits and pensions for the disabled women and children of the village.
- Increased awareness of members and

### Resource leverage of more than Rs 13 crores

Through their joint effort the CSO/CBOs have been able to direct large resources to the PACS project area through the use of public grievance mechanisms. The exercise to quantify these resources brought out that the government had spent more than Rs 13 crores (Rupees 130 million) in the project area in response to the grievances filed as a part of the PACS project.

These include works related to :

- MGNREGA - Cement Concrete roads of more than 5 kms, rural roads of more than 14.5 kms, receipt of delayed payment and beginning of new employment works,
- Health and Nutrition - Disability pensions (17), widow pensions (8), maternity benefit (10 women), incentive for institutional delivery (1), girl child incentive (4), RSBY (2), SHC repair (1), construction of new AWC (1), MDM improvement (8 schools), NRC benefit for severely malnourished children (18).
- Livelihoods - Sanction of dam (1), FRA individual forest right (18).

hands - on training of women-The CSO focussed on increasing awareness of the CBO members about health and nutrition related issues and also on the options available for addressing the denial of rights and entitlements. Dependence was not created on the CSO staff for filing of grievances, and members of the CBO were taken for all the grievance filing events so that the women could learn how they could submit the claims/ register grievances with minimal external support. A clear orientation was provided to CBO members about the fact that they were working for seeking what was rightfully due to them and not see it as a charity/favour to them.

- Accessing established mechanisms for grievance redressal for improving access-The CBO members were encouraged to use all available grievance redressal mechanisms to counter the denial of rights and to access the rights and entitlement due to them. Thus the CBO members were familiarised with all the available public grievance redress mechanisms-telephone/mobile based, internet based, physical submission based, so that the community members could use whichever means they thought was the best for a given situation.

## 9. Key Outcomes and Impacts

- Realisation of the functionality and effectiveness of grievance redress systems-When the staff of Spandana started working with the CBO, they were not very optimistic about the use of established grievance redressal mechanisms for overcoming their barriers to accessing services. Regarding the non-functionality of the AWC centre they shared that they had tried their best to get it revived, complained to the Sarpanch several times but to no effect. However, in the first case where CBO members used Samadhan Online for registering their complaint regarding the Anganwadi services, they saw teams coming to the village and working on

seriously reviving it. This one case transformed the non-believers into becoming aggressive advocates for using the public grievance redressal services.

- Non-confrontationist approach to seeking/ demanding rights - Instead of developing a struggle and confronting the state for lack of services or their quality, the CBO members, based on the organisational strategy used a more cohesive approach, of using legal mechanisms within the system for fighting the denial of rights to them. This non-confrontationist approach made them willing partners of the district administration and avoided a direct struggle between the community and the service providers.
- Better implementation and management of programmes - Frequent use of the grievance mechanisms by the organisation for addressing their unmet needs meant that the local functionaries of other departments became alert that the system could also be used by the community on them and have also become sensitive to their needs. This not only increased the local accountability of public services in these villages but also improved the overall implementation and quality of different development programmes, including late payments under MGNREGA, poor functioning of the health sub-centre, access to benefits under Rashtriya Swasth Beema Yojana (RSBY), functioning of the Public Distribution System, etc.
- Reduced dependence on PRIs when they were not supportive - The community was not very optimistic about their situation when the CSO started working in the village. The hamlet (tola) in which the CBO members lived had a very low coverage of basic facilities as compared to the main village, where the Sarpanch and other influential members of the village lived. This had created a friction between the residents of the hamlet and the Sarpanch. The latter did not cooperate with the former

whenever they went to them for registering complaints or demanded some development work in their hamlet. The use of grievance redressal mechanisms helped the villagers discover an alternate approach to the development of their village in a situation where their own elected representatives were not cooperating. Thus for several facilities like pensions and scholarships, the CBO members directly accessed these mechanisms and the government to improve their situation. This created confidence among the CBO members and also alerted the Sarpanch on the need to be more responsive, as development in the village was no more dependent on his/ her whims.

- Improved Access to the administration - The villagers have now been directly engaging with the local as well as block/district level functionaries and officials of the government for drawing attention of the local administration to their problems. CBO members organise themselves as a group and regularly attend the District Collectors weekly Jan Sunwai (public hearing) to petition him regarding their complaints and also to follow up on the past complaints/ grievances submitted to the local administration.

## 10. External Opportunities and Constraints

Several opportunities have been created by the increased use of grievance redressal mechanisms by the community itself.

1. The community members have been directly accessing the systems for getting their grievances redressed. Since the confidence has been instilled and the inhibitions regarding directly approaching the district and block level officials have been removed, the villagers can now internally identify the problems and implementation bottlenecks on their own and get them resolved.
2. Due to greater awareness about schemes and their related rights and entitlements, the villagers will be able to continue questioning the services being delivered and get them improved for long term development.
3. As the CBO members have become more aware and knowledgeable about health and nutrition related issues of the village, they are now being made part of the Village Health, Nutrition and Sanitation Committees and other village based development committees.
4. The respectability of the CBO members in the village has increased and opportunities exists for them to fight the next panchayats elections.

### CONSTRAINTS

1. Some of the CBOs are still not ready to take up the work of filing grievances on their own, how to write applications, whom to address them or which office does it need to be taken to Such groups need further handholding to be able to function independently of the staff support.
2. Some CBOs are still apprehensive about going to government offices along without the CSO staff and will need to development confidence.
3. Since many of the grievance redressal mechanisms like Samadhan Online and use of Public Service Guarantee Act is based on an IT platform, members still cannot access these mechanisms effectively unless they get support from someone familiar with the system or the kiosk manager of the MP Online.
4. Staff of the CSO did all the eligibility checks and did background research regarding the legal entitlement of the individual before filing the grievance regarding denial of rights/entitlement. The CBO members may not be able to undertake such a thorough background check, which may lead to a

higher number of rejected complaints and a gradual disillusionment with the public grievance redressal mechanisms.

## 11. Sustainability of the CBO

The savings platform around which the CBOs have been formed will ensure that the economic interest of the members will bind them and ensure their continuity. The respect and attention that members have been receiving with villagers asking for their advice/help for addressing the issue of in-access as well as increased respect within the family means that there are reasons beyond economic which will help the members stick together.

Several CBOs have also been trying to register themselves as the *Gram Prasfutan Samiti*<sup>2</sup> for their Gram Panchayat. Since these CBOs already have the experience of handling these functions- social mobilisation, creating awareness on different schemes, encouraging villagers to access schemes- many CBOs are already in the process of getting themselves registered.

## 12. Future Plans

- The members of the *Adarsh Mahila Bachat Samooh* want to continue working on the issue of health and nutrition and grievance redressal in times to come.

- They still have a long list of things that they want to be done for their village and their hamlet, either through making demand to the Sarpanch or if it does not happen then take the grievance redressal route. These include getting old-aged pension for other villagers who are still left out, get drinking water supply for the hamlet that meet the needs of the members throughout the year and also secure reliable irrigation for their farms.
- They also want a Anganwadi sub-centre for their hamlet as the village AWC is far away and it is difficult for pregnant and nursing mothers to go there regularly.
- The nearest health sub-centre still needs a lot of improvement in terms of better facilities and services, which the CBO members will continue demanding.
- The members also like to continue discussing the health and nutrition related challenges of the village and encouraging their neighbours to adopt a health care seeking behaviour and access government schemes and programmes for the same.

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<sup>2</sup>This is a nodal CBO/NGO identified per panchayat by a quasi-government organisation to act as the Panchayat Development Committee to oversee the implementation of different schemes and programmes in a Panchayat. The committee receives a financial support of Rs 10,000 per annum to meet their expenses.



Case Study : CBO - Ekta Jan Sangathan

CSO - CASA

Location : Betul , M.P

*Theme : MGNREGS*

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## 1. Context

Betul is tribal dominated district in west of Madhya Pradesh. Ghoradogri block in Betul is predominantly dominated by Gonds and Korku tribe that speak Gondi and korki with a hint of Marathi. Agriculture is primary occupation of the community, however, most of the families have small landholding and scarce water. The constrained agriculture therefore, is unable to provide employment for provides livelihood for sevprovides employment only for CASA (Churches Auxiliary for Social Action) has been working in the block for a very long time focussing on livelihood intervention to alleviate poverty among tribal. Ghoradongri block falls in the fifth schedule area, and therefore follows PESA (Panchayat extension act in fifth schedule area) CASA being a missionary organisation, worked in 45 villages of the Ghoradongri block since 1986 with a relatively charitable approach focussed on improving livelihood. The organisation paid wages for individual or community work undertaken by the inhabitants that can increase livelihood potential for families. Year 2000 was milestone year in the interventions as CASA decided to shift its approach to 'rights based', with continued focus on livelihood and poverty alleviation.

As the approach shifted, CASA decided to

strengthen its community mobilisation and empowerment initiatives. Several small village organisation with various names, varied purposes were formed in the 45 villages intervened By CASA then. Many them were Self Help Groups, while many other Village development associations. There were groups at the level of a village, while there were also groups in neighbourhoods, below the village unit. However there was one thing common among the groups, that many of them were conscious on their rights and entitlements. Though many of these groups were promoted by CASA (Church's Auxiliary for Social Advancement), some already existed in the intervention area, and were at different level of empowerment, and were adopted by CASA. Though one or more village groups existed in the intervened villages, village development unit was a recognised primary building block for all the community engagement, irrespective of the other groups, that may co-exist. These village units were independent of each other and had very little relationship with other, thought they were all intervening on the similar issues.

Year 2006 was significant as it was the beginning of the National Rural Employment Guarantee act on one hand while CASA decided to unify these village level units to form a block federation called Ekta Jan Sangathan, with a concern of

reaching a larger number of families, and have an effective voice at the block. It was also felt necessary to give an identity to each of these village units, which were till then known by their different names. Simultaneously, a need for giving a collective identity to these scattered groups was also evident among the group members as well as in CASA.

A large campaign was initiated in the by CASA in the 45 intervened village ,to reach out to community on the need and advantages of collectivisation in a federation, that will have a common identity and purpose. Street plays, village meetings, and several small discussion were held, that led to formation of Ekta Jan Sangathan with common identity for all the all the villages and all the members. A common meeting was held after the campaign that was attended by 1250 persons, and resulted into a consensus of building a federation that will represent all the different village units.

Therefore each village unit for came to be called Ekta Sangathan, with the name of the village suffixed to identify the representing village. Similarly, a federation was formed at the district level, which was named Ekta Jan Sangathan that represented the collective identity of various village level units.

The onset of PACS with CASA in 2011-12, was a fresh thrust to the Ekta Jan Sangathan. CASA had taken up non- intervened 95 villages under the PACS program. The Ekta Jan Sangathan, foundation of which was laid in the in 2007-8, had taken its root among the community and a presence with the district administration by this time. The federation strengthened the interventions of CASA, while CASA strengthened the federation. The symbiotic relationship between the two, led to an obvious expansion of EKTA Jan Sangathan with PACS in the un-intervened villages. CASA expanded the base of the Ekta Jan Sangathan to support the mandate of PACS in the additional ninety five villages, taken up for PACS interventions. . Therefore new village units were formed and new members were added to the Ekta Jan Sangathan. Currently the Ekta Jan

Sangathan has a reach in more than 135 villages and has more than ten thousand members. The district level federation represents the village units in 135 intervened villages.

## 2. Organisation and Norms of the Federation

The 'Ekta Jan Sangathan' evolved with objectives of claiming right and entitlements under MGNREGS, and empowering village units and village communities to handle their own developmental challenges. Though the Ekta Jan Sangathan is a district level federation, each of the participating village units is independent and empowered to handle their own issue. Rather it is the village units that are the important constituents that influence the developmental issues of the community. The federation, gives stronger identity and recognisable presence in the district. The federation also provides a platform where the members get groomed and village leaders get information and nuanced understanding of the program. The grooming and the knowledge gained by the village leaders, facilitates improved functioning of the village units that handle village level issues of a wide range on their own. Most of the issues resolved by the federation, are by the independent interventions of the village units. It is not very evident on what is the exact nature of support by the federation to the village units. However, some of the unresolved issues are brought to the federation, and federation either gives direction or takes collective action on these issue.

## 3. Organisation and Structure of the Federation

The organisational structure of the CBO federation is formal. There is formal membership, and each member pays membership enrolment fees of Rs. 50, which was only Rs. 10 in the beginning, when they join the federation. They may also pay an annual membership charges, however, that is not abiding, as it may constrain the membership. There are nominated village leaders that represent the village unit in the federation.

There is a general body of the federation, constituted by all the members. There are also six convenors, of the federation that have specific responsibilities, such as 3 block convenor, one district convenor, one program convenor and one accounts convenor. The CBO federation derives strength and legitimacy from the more than 100 village units, which provides members, resources, issues and strength of numbers to the federation. There is a general body meeting held annually that has a mandated quorum of 80%.

The key responsibilities are shared by convenors of the federation. There are six convenors of the federation that take care of management, programs and accounts.. While the working committee, represented by convenors and one village leaders from each village. Therefore the working committee has 135 village leaders and six convenors. The meeting of the working committee is held quarterly or as and when required. The village unit also organises monthly meeting every month, which is the responsibility of the village leader. The village meetings help in identifying issues of the village and in organisation of collective action.

#### 4. Financial Management of the CBO Federation

There is elaborate arrangement for building resources of the federation. Besides the enrolment fees, many members pay annual maintenance fees. Besides the cash collection from these membership charges, there is an elaborate arrangement for collecting grains to support the resource mobilisation. Each village unit is responsible for collecting grains, may be different types from their villages. These grains are then sorted and as per their type or quality and then offered for sale. Members have a priority right to buy from this sale. The grain stocks are subsequently offered to general public for sale. The money collected is deposited with the federation. Currently the CBO federation has more than three lakh rupees (Rs. 300,000) as their saving. A month long collection drive is undertaken by the working committee members in the harvesting season.

Annual General Body of the federation also decided last year that all the visitors that come for exposure visit to federation will be charged a fees of Rs. 5000/-. The CBO mobilised Rs. 45000/- from this charges in the year 2014. The CBO has designed a unique method of mobilising custodians. An imminent personality from the district is mobilised as custodian for the federation, and his name is displayed on FLEX BANNER, in an annual general body meeting of the federation.

#### 5. Leadership

The village units have independent leaders, which provides a robust framework of several small collective leaders to the federation. Therefore, the leadership appears collective, though there are convenors in the federation. Further the village leaders often handle village issues independently of federation, though they derive information, confidence and ideas from the mutual exchange in federation.

The working committee constituted by village leaders and convenors provide collective leadership while convenors take specific responsibilities. The two convenors, one from the program and one from accounts/documentation is also paid currently by CASA at the rate of unskilled labour for the number of days worked by them.

#### 6. Structure and Interventions of Constituent Village Development Association, Example of Chordongri

Three Self-help groups were initiated as soon as the PACS intervention of the CASA started in the village Chordongri. The SHGs with membership of 15,18, and 22 women in each group. The SHG gave them financial confidence and availability of resources, at the time of contingencies. It was also the platform for collectivisation, empowerment and information dissemination. The knowledge on NREGS was also imparted in group meetings. Three groups united, and along with some other families formed the village development association (VDA) of the Chordongri village.



From the 145 households in the village, 100 are represented in village development association. Once the VDA is initiated, both male and females have the membership. Suman verkhede is the head of the village association of Chordongri. The

#### Initiatives of the VDA Chordongri

- Campaign for demanding work in NREGS, A large number of written applications were filed for demanding work. Around 45 families have got 100 days of employment while on average 40 to 50 days of work was provided to most of the families. Organised photocopies of application and took signature on it as mark of receipt of the application
- Women not only stated Gram Sabha, but also demanded that they be provided chairs for sitting, as Sarpanchs and secretary sit on chairs. A Gram Sabha lasts for more than five hours in the village
- Gram Sabha is organised as per the PESA, and not presided by the Sarpanch.
- The attendance of the women increased and exceeded the male attendance in Gram Sabha.
- Women ensured that selection for Indira Awas should be done in Gram Sabha and the list of beneficiaries should be displayed in Panchayat.
- When the wages were delayed for more than a month, they organised all the data and records from the Panchayat and reached the block office for payments. Their negotiation led to release of payment without any further delay.
- Demanded and ensured several individually targeted work under NREGS on their land like mud-bunding, land levelling, dug well, small farm ponds, poultry sheds etc.
- Raised and rectified the issue of poor management of mid-day meals in school, where children were forced to share plates. And menu was not followed. They insisted on distribution of sweets on Independence Day celebration.
- Raised issues of poor functioning of Anganwadi, such as irregular distribution of take home ration.
- Raised the issue of breach of commitment for marriage by a family even after keeping the girl in the house for more than month. They perused the case with the police and are following a legal action towards the family of the boy.
- Many women from the self-help group have started selling vegetables at the local haat despite a stiff resistance from the local shop keepers.

VDA has both male and female members and has elected representative for representation in district federation. The VDA leaders attend quarterly meetings of the federation, make collection for it, participate in its activities and intervene for the problems in their village.

The members of the village unit, that claimed to have never spoken in public and never raised their voice in Panchayat claim that they not only take the issues with Panchayat, but also liaison with block/district administration. Their confidence is complimented by their knowledge on program and practice on collecting details before taking an issue with administration.

The VDA mobilises resources for the CBO federation through membership fees and grain collection.

The members of CBO federation in the village participated in activities such as rallies at the district headquarters.

### 7. Activities of the CBO federation

Besides organisational management and working committee meeting, the federation takes out rallies at district headquarters on specific occasions. The rally has given them visibility and presence. They also took out a procession in support of 'Anna Aandolan'. Support to village units is their biggest responsibility. The federation also makes demands on specific issues from time to time. For instance, they made a demand on organisation of Gram Sabha in an specific manner.

#### Capacity building of the federation

Most of the capacity building has been on the job, while the leaders and working committee members also received some structured trainings. Many of the trainings were organised by CASA in their premises, while some trainings/workshops for village leaders organised by PACS in Bhopal were also very useful. The regular nurturing of leaders in working committee meetings and in the village by the village animators, too helped the leader grow in confidence and knowledge.

## 8. Key outcomes

The organisation of community into CBO federation have had bearing not only empowerment locally but also on but also on the sharpened focus on 'Rights and entitlements' and improved capacity to handle district administration.

- Greater Awareness about MGNREGS Related Rights and entitlements - The awareness on MGNREGS led to realisation that it is not only possible to demand and get wage employment in MGNREGS, but one can also seek improving the community infrastructure and individual land under NREGS. Most families in the tribal dominated Betul HAVE small pieces of cultivable land, and primitive practices of agriculture, Many families have had organised dug wells under the scheme. A large number of families have got wage employment in MGNREGS.

The village units have also taken up the issue of delayed wages in MGNREGS with district administration on several occasions. They have ensured release of payments by sheer pressure of federation. A payment of nine lakh was released by administration at the time of Diwali when CBO members held agitation in the collector's office.

- Strengthened Gram Sabha with a higher participation of women in Gram Sabha - Gram Sabha had little relevance for the community before they organised to form CBO federation. Currently, they mobilise gram Sabha, attend it actively and bring issues for discussion in Gram Sabha. The federation members have submitted a 22 point charter on the method of conducting Gram Sabha, of which seven points on date, time, seating arrangement, presence of Nodal officer etc. have been accepted by the district administration. Federation is trying to facilitate Gram Sabha as per the PESA mandate, and therefore that the decisions of the Gram Sabha is adhered to.
- Enhanced transparency in Accessing Government Development Schemes - Stronger Gram Sabha and open discussion on beneficiary selection has led to improved transparency of beneficiary targeting schemes such as social security pensions, Indira Awas Yojna etc. Awareness about government schemes and programmes is reasonably high among the CBO members as they make efforts to access them.
- Greater Confidence to Engage with Local Administration and district Bureaucracy - There has been a significant empowerment in the way in the way the CBO members in general and village leaders of the CBO federation now engage with the state and district administration. They have built pressure on administration on release of payments in MGNREGS. The formation of the community institutions, the organised collective struggle of several such CBOs for their entitlements, emergence of collective struggle at district has brought about shifted power relations between the community collectives and local administration. The numbers demonstrated at collective demonstration at district and block level, has brought confidence in community to deal with the administrative issues and line departments. Their rallies and demonstrations have even brought media attention to the CBO federation, that have them additional legitimacy and confidence.
- Improved social equation and confidence in women members to handle social issue - Many women that claimed that they had no confidence and no information, have now started intervening on the issues of Social justice. Many women used their confidence to engage in self-employment initiating small vegetable shops etc.
- Enhanced unity and integration among tribal - The collective activities, be it credit and saving, common commercial activities, or agitations for common rights, the evolution

has brought a sense of unity and integration among the community for common public cause. The running of SHG as has also helped in building skills in the members to run a CBO on their own.

Some of the Key Processes may be summarised as under :

- Expansion of a SHG and village level CBO into village units for claiming rights and entitlements

Small SHG and other CBOs in the village were collectivised to form a village unit called village Development association, that were called, Ekta Sangathan of the village later. Village development Association was formed in 135 villages.

- Collectivisation of village level CBOs in the Ekta Sangathan for the district

A mass campaign was organised in 45 villages to build demand for the large collective and organise the village CBOs into CBO federation at the district

- Expansion of CBO federation in 2011-12, after PACS

Expansion of CBO federation in 135 villages after the intervention of PACS. Fillip to the federation by enhanced numbers, reach, resources and experience.

- Intervention by the village units and CBO federation

The village units as well as district federation has been working to improve the

implementation of the MGNREGS in the intervened area. Several other societal issues are also handled in the process. The CBO members have also strengthened the Gram Subhas in their respective villages. There is formal linkage between village VDAs and CBO federation, and village units are critical for the existence of the CBO federation.

- Improving the resource base of the CBO federation systematically

The CBO federation has tried innovative and sustainable method of fund mobilisation Currently CBO federation is trying to meet its own expenses, though meeting venue, food and capacity support is still provided by CASA.

## 9. Moving Towards Independent Existence Sustainability and Future Plans

The resource mobilisation is contextualised for promoting independent functioning of the CBO with its own resources. The CBO federation is has two critical staff that are paid. Currently they are paid by CASA, however, CBO is planning to mobilise their salaries as well from their own resources. A good leadership cultivated in the CBO and a fair resource base may lead to their independent existence very soon.

Case Study : CBO - Village Health Action Ggroup- Amravati

CSO - Pradeepan, Betul

Location : Betul, M.P.

*Theme : HEALTH*



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## 1. Context

Amravati is small village on Maharashtra border in Prabhatpattam block of Betul district, situated close to Multai town. Owing to proximity to Maharashtra, there is visible shift in the culture, caste composition and occupational profile of the community in region. Though, Betul is a predominately tribal district, this region of the district has mixed population with large number of OBC and Scheduled caste families coexisting with relatively smaller population of tribals. While large land holdings are generally controlled by few upper caste families, most of the Scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and backward communities engage in labour for livelihood, though some of them do have small land holdings. Landholdings with these poor communities, if at all is too small to provide sustainable employment. Amravati village in Particular has Eight hundred and fifty two families (852) families, of which 746 families are OBC, from Mali samaj (engaged in gardening), and 50 families are from scheduled castes, five families of Muslims and scheduled tribes each and forty five from general caste category. Most of the community, but for the upper caste landlords, work as agriculture labour or petty labour in urban areas. While women choose to work within or near the village, the men also go to distant places on construction sites, or as petty labour. The agriculture wages in and around village gives

an employment for about 50 to sixty days to the community. In this background, health and nutritional facilities of the State is critically important to the community.

Swadhikar Manch focuses on human rights by strengthening the voices of socially excluded and marginalised communities. Swadhikar is working with its partner organisation, Pradeepan across 90 villages in three blocks of Betul. Pradeepan has had long presence in Betul on developmental issue, focussing women in particular. but primarily in Bhimpur block. The intervention of the PACS, with specific focus on Dalit and OBCs with Sawdikar, therefore necessitated a shift in the geographical area, to Prabhatpattan, Atener, and Multai, with relatively higher proportions of Dalit and OBC population. The mandate of the intervention is to increase non-discriminatory access of socially excluded communities, especially women and children, to healthcare services and to increase the accountability of the public health system through community action. Like most of the PACS intervention, it involves Building and establishing sustainable Community Based Organisations (CBOs) from socially excluded communities to influence public health systems for its improved uptake and improved quality.

## 2. Evolution of the Community group called- Village health action group-

## Amravati

Pradeepan has always worked with marginalised community and women for facilitating their struggle in claiming their rights and entitlements. It started its intervention in the village Amravati, a typical village of the block, by organising women of the marginalised community in a group. It was not easy, as poor maternal care and poor health service delivery is an acceptable norm, despite the fact that many women have lost their lives, just because a Janani express did not turn up pick up an expecting mother.

Gradual mobilisation and awareness building in the community, slowly started changing the mindset of the community, to demand their 'health rights and entitlements'. This change also came with the awareness of the responsibilities that they also have towards their own health. For instance, following immunisation, or getting food from Anganwadi for lactating mothers, or getting pre-natal check-ups. Change in awareness and mobilisation, gradually led to organisation of women in groups for demanding health rights and entitlements. These groups are called 'village health action groups'. The process of mobilisation, awareness building and organisation in groups took about a year. Village health action groups have been initiated in all the intervened villages in the districts. Some ninety such groups exist in the district, each called by the name village health action group, with the name of the village suffixed to the main name.

### 3. Organisation and norms of the groups

The groups were formed with a clear mandate of influencing the practices and quality of health service delivery, along with demonstration of a responsible health seeking behaviour. Regularisation of health service delivery and ensuring accountability of health service workers was a methodology for the intervention. The group has a president, a woman from the OBC (other backward class) community, a secretary and members. President and secretary have been chosen by the members of the group on the basis of their leadership abilities, articulation and functional literacy to address minimum group

related requirement.

The group members are mostly from the scheduled castes and landless or marginal farmers. The group is strategically promoted to integrate health service providers such as ASHA and Anganwadi workers from the village. Therefore three ASHA workers and Anganwadi workers are also members of the group. The idea is to collectively explore the problems and solutions and be open to ideas and suggestions of each other. It has also included members from the Village health and sanitation committees promoted by the line department.

The group does not make any financial collection on regular basis, however makes collection to meet expenditures, if required. The members are predominantly women, but there are men also in the group. Despite having the mixed membership, the 'gender dimension' in the group is strong and there is obvious inclination on women health and other women related issues in the functioning of the group.

### 4. Capacity building intervention

Most of the capacity building is constituted by informal orientation. Orientation focussed on change in mind-set to recognise discrimination in service delivery. There were also orientations on components of service delivery and the entitlements from the particular programs.

Structured trainings were also provided to the group representatives through Swadhikar Manch. One of the component in Swadhikar interventions was capacity building of the CSOs and CBOs in the network. Swadhikar Manch organised structured trainings focussing 'health and discrimination' issues. There were several structured orientation in classroom settings by the Swadhikar Manch for the CSO facilitators, while some of these trainings also focussed the CBO members. Some trainings were organised on the related issues by Pradeepan in Betul. However, learning by doing was one of the most effective way of methodology. The group members, intervened on issues, which in turn raised their confidence and understanding. The handholding support from the field facilitators

complimented the capacity gaps initially, however replaced by group members after few such interventions. The group intervenes on local issues, of their immediate concern. The CSO does facilitate in identification of issues and in strategizing of intervention. The local leadership in the group and the collective group strength provides direction and sustainability.

PACS, too has taken capacity building of the CSO, and CBOs. Lok Utsav, a congregation of CBOs, organised by PACS was very motivating for the group members.

## 5. Critical impact of the CBO

Change in mind set and building a vision towards discriminatory access of health services

There has been an apparent clarity in the community on discrimination in health related service delivery. For instance, it was evident that women from poor and marginalised were made to wait for a long time by the ANMs for immunisation, while all the upper caste women come late and get the SERVICES. Since many of the Dalit women are also daily wage labourer, they would have to loose the wage to get these services, by always giving up their turn to a upper caste/strata. Consequently, they either gave up or waited day long to get the basic services. Similarly the ASHA workers were selected from the upper caste community and they did not service the lower caste community. Anganwadi too displayed subtle discrimination by not engaging with the adolescent girls from marginalised section. The ANM, the ASHA worker, and Anganwadi workeres did not visit the hamlets occupied by the Dalit and other marginalised communities. Practice was common that the timing of the ANM did not adhere the schedule and, only few powerful elites could get the information on ANM visits. The rest of the community either missed their service or waited day long to get the services. The organisation of community in group changed their mind set towards this subtle caste/ class based discretion. They started raising their voice against the discrimination.

Improved access of service from health service

delivery institution

The regular meetings and organisation strengthened their demand from service delivery institution to improve their services. For instance an Anganwadi being run in a rented accommodation, did not have space for proper storage of all the utensils and Anganwadi stuff. In absence of a proper Anganwadi building, many children did not come to the centres. The CBO demanded an Anganwadi centre and even managed to get one. Similarly, the services of ANM were regularised and she was disciplined to visit as per an pre decided schedule. Regularisation of Janani Express, a specialised medical van for carrying the expecting mothers for delivery was also one of the group's achievement. Owing to distance, the Janani express either did not reach or charged some extra money. There have been some unfortunate instance of death during delivery. The pressure building on health administration ensured timely service of Janani express in the Panchayat.

The CBO continuously discussed the importance of health issues and health service delivery. While engaging with the department, the CBO demanded and ensured regular services of the doctor at the PHC from the department.

Improved negotiations with other critical stakeholders influencing health and hygiene

Besides engaging with the service providers, the community envisioned the direct relationship of hygiene and sanitation with health. They have tried to access household toilets and improved sanitary practices in the village. A local weekly market situated within the village left a lot of garbage and filth every week in the village. The CBO dialogued with the shop owners to organise the cleaning of the market. The CBO has facilitated an improved vision and practice with respect to health and hygiene.

The organisation of CBO has also influenced the functioning of the PANCHAYT AND Gram Sabha. A stronger Gram Sabha has influenced and improved governance of the village Panchayat. The implementation of NREGS has improved in the village. Women members of the

CBO are unable to go far off to get employment, therefore dependent on NREGS. The women made application for demanding work in NREGS. Currently each member has got 50 to 55 days of employment in NREGS. Few members have also completed 100 days of employment. They also pressurised the administration for timely release of wages.

#### Influencing the social practices in the village

The CBO has taken up the issues of alcoholism, domestic violence and other gender based inequalities in the village. They mobilised a large community to organise a protest against a State's liquor shop. Some 150 women sat on agitation for three days, braving rains and other hardships. The community could withstand the pressure of the administration and lure of the shopkeeper to pay higher rental for the shop. The community insisted that they the landlord should get the premise vacated. However, the shop was shifted to a nearby house.

The CBO also initiated a campaign for alcohol free village in March 2014. The use of alcohol has reduced substantially since then in the village.

The ripple effect of the CSO is visible in nearby villages such as Devgaon and Bagholikhurd, where the community has started raising their voice to access their rights and entitlements.

Some of the Key Processes may be summarised as under :

#### Formation of village CBOs

The CSO Pradeepan promoted Village Health Action Group in all the intervened villages. This CBO was also mobilised and promoted by Pradeepan after a nearly a year long education and organisation of community. The CBO represented most marginalised, mainly landless families.

#### Training and capacity building of the CBO

Both formal structured and informal orientations were organised for the CBO by Pradeep, independently or from the support of Sawadhikar Manch. Training focussed on health issues and

health rights. There were also inputs on their own responsibility towards their own health, or perceive and address discrimination in delivery of health services.

CBO making claims on rights and entitlements with respect to health and other schemes

The organisation and capacity building of CBO led to their raised awareness on the rights and responsibilities towards their own health.

### 6. External environment and sustainability

The CBO, though is able to identify and address some of the issues on its own, it is yet dependent on CSO to provide guidance and support. The external environment with respect to health is relatively stable. However, changing mechanism of sharing of departmental budgets between state and centre may lead to either shrinking, or uncertainty in the fund flow in schematic budgets. The uncertainty in fund flow, will make their struggle even tougher and success more difficult. The groups will, therefore need some support and motivation to withstand this fluctuating environment. There are chances that some of these groups will withstand the pressures and uncertainty, while some other may collapse. This particular CBO, village health action group OF Amaravati village visualises itself to be prepared to continue its existence and struggle.

### 7. Future Plans

One of the incomplete and important agenda for the CBO is removal of liquor shop from the bus stand adjacent to the village. They will raise the issue with the district administration when the time for the renewal of licence comes. Similarly, a sanitation drive will be undertaken, where nearly 50% of the households without toilets will also persuaded to construct toilets. They also have to build pressure on block administration to release the motivation money for the Sanitation friends that promoted the toilets. They have not got their due from the administration even after a year.

Some more sanitation related work such as construction of drains etc. will be taken up by the CBO in the near future.





Case Study : CBO - Vijay Nari Sangh Kukuwar  
CSO - Tarun Chetna  
Location : Pratapgarh, U.P.

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## 1. Background

Uttar Pradesh (UP) state in India is known as a traditional society where gender and castes based discriminations are deeply rooted. The economic prosperity in the state varies across the geographies. Eastern part of the state is known as a least economically developed part compared to central and western parts of the state. However, the social structure of the state does not follow the economic variations and it continues to be traditional and discriminatory throughout the state with regional cultural variations. The basic nature of the societal relations sets the agenda of the formation of community based organization in the state. It gains even further importance as the CBOs have been established in eastern parts that have not been doing well in economic development. Vijay Nari Sangh is one among such Community Based Organizations that exists in Kukuwar village of Pratapgarh District in Uttar Pradesh.

Kukuwar also carries the status of the Gram Panchayat. Vari Khurd, another revenue village, is also part of Kukuwar Gram Panchayat. Kukuwar is located about 55 km towards east from Pratapgarh district headquarters. The block headquarters (Patti) is about 6 km from the village. The village is demographically dominated by upper caste population. The upper

castes constitute about 57 per cent of the total population. Scheduled Castes (SCs), Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and Muslims constitute about 17, 17 and 7 per cent of the village population respectively.

Pratapgarh district falls under a climatic zone called as 'Upper Gangetic Plain Region'. The major soil types are deep loamy, partial sodic and slightly silty. About 98 per cent of the total irrigated area is irrigated through bore wells and/or tube wells. Major crops include: rice, wheat, maize, pearl millet, lentil, potato. The human development indicators of the district present a moderate picture. The sex ratio in the district is 998 female per 1000 male. The average literacy rate, according to census 2011, in the district is 70.9 percent. The female literacy rate is 58.45 percent and male literacy rate is 81.88 percent. The literacy rate among SCs and STs is 60.6 and 42.5 percent respectively. The work participation rate in the district is 33.2 percent, which varies substantially between males (43.9) and females (22.6). This mainly includes cultivators (28.7) and agricultural labourers (36.2).

Name of Village : Kukuwar				
Name of Block : Patti				
Total Household : 265				
Total Population : 1648				
Male 783 & Female 865				
SC	HH	Population	Male	Female
SC	48	278	138	140
Gen	152	912	453	459
Muslim	18	180	92	88
OBC	47	278	138	136
Total	265	1648	821	823

## 2. CSO (Name) and its Association with Community-Based Institutions

Tarun Chetna is a known civil society organization and has been working since 1993 in more than 70 Panchayats/villages in three districts of Eastern UP: Pratapgarh, Jaunpur and Allahabad. The organization focuses on various developmental issues including Panchayati Raj Institutions and local governance, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, reproductive child health, human rights, etc. The organization has focused its operations especially on lower and marginalized castes and groups. This includes women, SCs, Muslims and OBCs. These communities are economically weak and associated with irregular or unsure means of living.

Tarun Chetna's work in Pratapgarh district is focused on women from socially excluded communities with a special focus to 'single woman'. Tarun Chetna defines single woman as a woman who, by choice or due to any other reasons such as widow or divorce, lives single and is facing social, caste or gender based discrimination. Tarun Chetna has also been pioneer in establishing Sathi Forum, an etwork of 12 grass-root level organisations of Pratapgarh district established in 2004. The network is mainly involved in the issues that are at the core of Tarun Chetna's agenda. This network helps Tarun Chetna in using collaborative strengths in order to unfold community actions as well as to advocate with the administration.

A major strategy of Tarun Chetna in fighting for human rights is to use collective strength of citizens to ensure their basic rights and justice. This has led the organization to form community based collectives and to strengthen them to the point that they are able to demand their rights and entitlements for themselves and participate in local governance processes. Tarun Chetna facilitates capacity building of such collectives, spread awareness and ensures their access to relevant information. Tarun Chetna also provides support and guidance to CBOs in carrying out advocacy work. The idea behind this initiative is that once community based organization obtains required capacities, develop leadership skills and have access to relevant information about local governance processes, they would not need Tarun Chetna's help and would continue on their own.

## 3. History and Genesis of the CBO

Vijay Nari Sangh was established in Sept, 2012 by Tarun Chetna in Kukuwar and Bari Khurd villages of Pratapgarh district. Both the villages are part of Kukuwar Gram Panchayat. The genesis of the CBO in these two villages is directly influenced by the social fabric of the village where the social relations are driven by discriminatory caste equations and cultural practices. People from lower castes are the names/titles that carry derogatory meanings. For example, people from SC communities are called as Chamarguddi and Muslims are called Katua. The implications of discriminatory social and cultural practices can clearly be observed on local governance processes including the distribution of social welfare and social security benefits. There were several instances when Gram Panchayat and government functionaries had denied SC and Muslim women the benefits under NREGS, PDS, maternity benefits under Janai Suraksha Yojna, and Anganwadi services.

Tarun Chetna selected this village to form community based collectives with an objective of making women unite and fight for their rights and entitlement. Prior to the selection of this village, a baseline (household) survey was done

by the organization. Based on the survey findings, Kukuwar village was selected among other villages. Tarun Chetna had deployed a Community Mobilizer to encourage women from lower castes and minorities to form a community group. Many consultations were also held with the male members of the village to address their concerns and objections. Tarun Chetna also sought help from local religious leaders in order to convince women and male members of their family for this initiative. Connecting with male members and religious leaders worked very well and they supported forming of a community group of women in the village.

#### 4. Organisation of the Collective

Tarun Chetna has adopted a strategy of forming community collectives of women at the village of hamlet level. Each group has 10-15 women members. The members of these groups should be from excluded communities such as SCs, Muslims, disabled, single women, extreme backward caste etc. These groups are federated at the Panchayat level. Following this strategy, Tarun Chetna formed Nari Vijay Sangh in Kukuwar. Currently, there are 88 women members in this group. Most of the members of the group belong to SCs. Rest of the members are either Muslims or OBCs. The group does not levy any membership fee from new members. However, group members bear the cost associated with the functioning of the group, such as stationary, etc.

The organizational structure of the group is very simple. The group has only two officer bearers: President and Secretary. These two office bearers are also appointed in smaller groups at the village or hamlet level. Rest remain as members of the general body. The group organizes its meeting on 27th day of every month at a pre-decided place in the village. The group also does not have a complex process of subscribing the membership of the group. Any interested women can attend monthly meetings and can become part of the group.

The group also has constituted a Vigilance

Committee. The members of this committee monitor the implementation of schemes and distribution of social security and welfare benefits. Members of the committee divide their work according to their convenience and interest. For example, Ms. Bindu, a member of the Vigilance Committee, monitors the implementation of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS); Ms. Jagannathi looks after NREGS; and Seema Dhuriya takes care of education. In addition to this, members of the group are also members of School Management Committee (SMC), so that they can have a close eye on quality of education. Ms Nirmala and Ms Seema are members of SMC. Currently three CBO women are the members of the monitoring committee of ICDS. Vijay Nari Sangh has also constituted a Block Advocacy Group. This group consists of two women members from each hamlet/village level committee. The group takes the relevant issues and problems to block level government departments and officials. The group members file the complaints and follow it up further until the appropriate solutions are ensured.

#### 5. Leadership and its Style

The leadership in the group functions in a democratic way. No elections are held to elect/select President and Secretary posts. Group members select candidates for these posts based on consensus. The members use social capital to decide over the leadership issues. The women's group has also brought decentralization in its processes. The group members have been given responsibility and freedom to work on specific issues without any approval from the President and/or Secretary. The work has been divided among the members according to their skills and interests and the members discharge their responsibilities without any interference.

As part of another important strategy, group is trying to capture local governance space. The group is encouraging its members to contest Panchayat elections, so that they have their own members in the Panchayat and they can get



things done that are crucial for them and the society. Dhanau Devi, a member of Vijay Nari Sangh, is also a member of Panchayat. Jagannathi, another group member, has also been elected as a member of Panchayat. The group intends to encourage more women members to contest future Panchayat elections. Group members shared their desire that they would also like to contest for the post of Sarpanch in future.

In terms of monitoring and supervision of the implementation of social security and welfare schemes, the group has adopted the same strategy as it does in the case of Panchayat. Group members are entering into all such public and citizen's bodies and the committees (such as SMCs and Anganwadi level Monitoring and Support Committee) where citizens have a role to play. Inclusion of group members in such bodies provides them an opportunity to monitor the functioning of these bodies as well as schemes and programs. This enables women to fight with discrimination and corrupt practices.

## 6. Organisational Culture and Values

As discussed in the previous section, democratic functioning and delegation of power are main values of the group. The group has not adopted formal organizational processes to operate its activities. The operation of the group is completely based on mutual trust and social capital. The contribution of the group members into public causes is entirely voluntary and the group never impose any responsibility on any group members. In fact, while discharging their duties that they have adopted willingly, many group members end up spending own resources as the group does not own any resources or assets. For example, members of the Block Advocacy Group have to travel to block and district offices more frequently. Group members bear food and travel expenses themselves. This is coupled with the time that they spent on discharging these responsibilities. Many times women members spend entire day in advocacy and travelling, which they could have used for earning money by selling their labour or working in own fields. The

members of Vijay Nari Sangh defy the main premise of the concept of rational choice where members of any collective action come together for their individual interests, not for the group.

## 7. CBO's Relationship with CSO

Tarun Chetna identified the possibilities as well as synergies required to organize a women collective in Kukuwar village. Since Tarun Chetna is working on cross cutting issues including implementation of entitlements based development schemes and programs, local governance, rights of social and economically discriminated social groups, etc. Tarun Chetna is working as a mentor and facilitator to guide the group in taking their movement forward. The Vijay Nari Sangh's relationship with Tarun Chetna, however, is not professional, but is very informal, humane and deep-rooted. This comes out clearly when field functionaries of Tarun Chetna show their commitment to work and guide women in the group even after the project cycle is over and Tarun Chetna has officially ended the project.

## 8. Important Processes Related to the CBO

The collective has adopted following processes to achieve its objectives:

- i. Organizing women from lower castes and class and minorities:

This is the primary and first process of organizing a CBO. Vijay Nari Sangh with 88 women members spreads across two villages (Kukuwar and Bari Khurd) which are divided into four hamlets. In each hamlet the number of women group members remains between 15 and 25. The membership is open for any woman from lower castes, minorities, widows and disabled. The group is looking forward to increase its membership strength by attracting more women.

- ii. Monitoring and supervision of rights and entitlement based schemes and programmes through becoming part of formal citizens' bodies:

Another important process of the group is

consistent engagement with the monitoring and advocacy of entitlement based schemes and programmes. Group members use the spaces provided for the citizens in the governance of such schemes and programmes and work for the smooth and justly delivery of the entitlements. Currently, women are actively monitoring education, Mid-Day Meal, MGNREGS, ICDS, PDS, etc.

### iii. Engaging with Stakeholders through advocacy:

At one level women are able to bring changes at the village level through their participation monitoring mechanism of schemes and programmes. Many times, desired changes are brought by mobilizing stakeholders at the block and district levels. These stakeholders involve Panchayat members, government officials and politicians. The group members adopt various ways to influence these stakeholders. These ways include consultation, filing formal complaints before appropriate authorities, negotiations, precessions, etc.

### iv. Pressure Group at the village level:

Vijay Nari Sangh is also emerging as a pressure group because of the large membership group. In a democratic framework, a large citizens' group carries an electoral appeal. Vijay Nari Sangh has been able to exercise this appeal in order to influence Gram Panchayat functionaries as well as other stakeholders.

### v. Awareness Building

The group, with the help of Tarun Chetna, also spreads awareness among member and non-member women. The means of spreading awareness are trainings, meetings and discussions. Informal meetings and discussions that take place mutually or in a small group also serves the purpose.

## 9. Key Outcomes and Impacts

Followings are few key impacts/achievements of Vijay Nari Sangh:

- The group members, in 2013, collectively

supported a woman who was suffering from a serious health problem and she didn't have enough money to fund her expenses. She was required to go through a surgery. The group members collected INR 10000 for her help. They helped women in finding an appropriate hospital and deposited the money.

- The CBO members directly demand for job card and jobs under MGNREGS. They fought for equal wages. They demanded work as well as equal wages from Sarpanch and Rozgar Sahayak. The members took their fight to the Block office using formal channels of grievance redressal. Now, women are getting equal wages for their work in MGNREGS.
- Women also fought against male domination and domestic violence. One woman member's husband was a regular consumer of the liquor. He used to beat her almost every day. She shared her ordeal with other members of the group. One evening, CBO members came together and reached her home and gave her husband a warning to leave drinking and avoid beating his wife. After one week, once again he drunk and come to beat her. She called the members of CBO. Members beaten her husband and took her to the local Police Station and lodged a complained against her husband. Her husband ran away from home for few days. After his return, he left consuming liquor and never beat his wife.
- Local PDS shop owner did not use to provide regular ration to women from lower castes. He used to distribute the ration only one day in the month. He also used to give less amount of ration by using incorrect ways of weighing. CBO members questioned his ways of weighing the ration. Women lodged a complaint against the shop owner and followed it up further. After the complaint, he refused to provide ration to women. Women, in turn, asked him to give them in writing that he will not

provide them ration. An enquiry was set up by the district administration against the shop owner. Now all CBO women receive timely and right amount of ration. Now shop owner distributes ration three days in a month.

- Anganwadi worker used to give nutritious food to only upper castes children. Children from lower castes were either denied the food or less food was given. Bindu, a member of Vijay Nari Sangh, used to send her three children to Anganwadi center. Her children supposed to get three parcels of food (one parcel per child). However, her children used to get one and half parcels (half parcel per child). Bindu, along with other group members, complained to District program Officer of ICDS. An investigation was carried out and now her children get entitled food similar to upper castes children. Because of the complaint filed by the group member, district administration has provided a toll free number to lodge the complaint. The number has been painted on the walls in the village. Now, it has become very easy for everyone in the village to lodge the complaint, in case of irregularities, using toll free numbers.
- The CBO members who are part of SMC and the Block Advocacy group fought for opening the bank accounts of the children in order to receive scholarships. The Bank Manager, despite written certification by the Principal of the school, was not opening the accounts. The CBO members asked Sarpanch to provide his support in this regard. The CBO members locked in the manager and other functionaries inside the bank and asked that they will not released until bank accounts of the children are opened. The Bank Manager immediately facilitated the opening of all bank accounts.
- Vijay Nari Sangh no longer uses Tarun Chetna's name when they interact with Block and district level officials or gets

engaged with any advocacy work. Administration is now well aware about Vijay Nari Sangh. Now communications are furnished on the name of Vijay Nari Sangh.

- Women's mobility has increased. The group members have been travelling very frequently to Lucknow (Capital) and Pratapgarh (district headquarters) for meeting officials and advocating for their rights. Their visits to Block office in Patti have now become day to day affair.

## 10. Capacity Building Efforts by the CSO

Tarun Chetna has made efforts to build the capacities of the group members. The CSO has provided two trainings. First training was related to leadership building among women who are assuming leadership positions in the group. Second training was provided on gender issues and advocacy. The second training aimed at sensitizing women on gender discriminatory practices and also providing them technical and tactical knowledge about carrying out advocacy at the different levels of administration. Tarun Chetna also launched awareness campaign in order to make women aware about their rights and entitlements and the discrimination that they face in everyday life. The campaign also aimed at encouraging women to fight for their rights.

## 11. Role of CSO in the Emergence of CBO as a Strong Institution

CSO's role in the building of CBO is indispensable. Illiterate women from lower castes who have been facing caste and gender discrimination inside and outside the house for ages could have never been able to fight out with powerful and resourceful upper castes people and might government administration. One of the crucial supports that CSO provided is about forming a women's group by bringing these women together. Bringing women from lower castes and minorities, widows and disabled is itself a herculean task.

The CSO organized leadership building trainings

for women members. CSO also provides regular support on advocacy fronts by providing relevant information about the schemes and programmes, Acts and Laws, appropriate administrative setup to advocate with, etc. The CSO, wherever needed, also provides guidance to the members of the CBOs in terms of fighting their battle forward. Any changes in the legal environment is interpreted and made available to the CBO by the CSO.

CSO also provides help in writing applications as most of the group members are illiterate. CSO also provides support in translating the documents in readable format for the members of the group. The support provided by the CSO in spreading awareness through IEC activities and wall painting has been very effective to make women aware about the various aspects of their life. The handholding support that Tarun Chetna provided to Vijay Nari Sangh has been crucial for the women's collective to establish its own identity as well as sustain themselves.

## 12. Opportunities and Constraints

### Opportunities:

- Vijay Nari Sangh through its collective efforts can fight effectively for the social and cultural discriminations. The collective strength of the group has an enormous value and strength in the democratic setup of the society as well as in the decentralized system of governance.
- The group members can use their strength in contesting Panchayat elections and get directly into the system where fundamental changes are required to be brought in order to ensure justly delivery of rights and entitlements. Currently, few member of the group are the members of the Panchayat. The group has potential to increase this number.
- Looking at the previous successes of Vijay Nari Sangh regarding ensuring entitlements of women in MGNREGS, women group can engage actively with the preparation of labour budget, issuance of

job cards and social audits at the Gram Sabha meetings.

- Women group can take the task ahead by spreading the membership base in both the villages as well as making women aware about their rights and entitlements.

### Constraints & Threats (internal and external):

- CBO has not formulated its by-laws or rules and regulation to operate the group. Women are able to lead the group using their goodwill and rapport. This might not continue in future and the organization may need certain protocols and regulations to operate the administration of the group.
- Current leadership of the group is based on the consensus of the group. In case, there are disagreements in the group over leadership, the group has not chalked out any procedure (say elections) to fill the leadership positions. This can have serious implications on the unity of the group.
- The group members use their own resources while discharging their group's responsibilities. This is because group does not have any source of income. It is important to note that the members of the group are from poor and marginalized families, therefore bearing own expenses to discharge group's duties may not be a longer term solution.
- About 95% group members are illiterate. Since they are required to deal with the administration at Block and District levels, file complaints, do advocacy, women members must have adequate literacy to deal with these activities.
- The above point (illiteracy) also has bearing on access to appropriate information and interpretation of the same. The regulatory environment is changing very fast. Since the group is involved in advocacy, the group members must have access to relevant information and abilities to understand and interpret the changes.



### 13. Sustainability of the CBO

Tarun Chetna is set to leave Vijay Nari Sangh on its own after the PACS intervention is over. The group's sustainability is largely dependent on its future strategies to deal with the constraints and threats discussed in the previous section. However, the group is confident about operating by its own. The group is planning to include literate young girls and new bride as members of the group, so that the group does not have deal with the male counterparts in the matters related to reading and writing.

Women members are now well aware about the source of information as they visit more frequently to Block and District offices. Therefore, members are confident about their access to relevant information. The volunteers from Tarun Chetna commit to extend their support to the group even after the PACS intervention is over. They have been doing this with other groups that they had formed under different interventions in the past. This support can be in the form of providing relevant information, support on advocacy, etc.

### 14. Future Plans of the CBO

Following are the plans that the group intends to engage with in near future:


- Continue fight for rights and entitlements of women and poor sections of the society.
- Inclusion of CBO members in citizen's bodies such as Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee, School Management Committee, MNREGA Vigilance Committee, Anganwadi Monitoring & Evaluation Committee, etc.
- Expand membership base by attracting literate young girls and brides.
- Encourage CBO members to contest Panchayat elections.

#### A case of the rise of a woman leader Jagannathi

Jagannathi is an illiterate woman and belongs to Scheduled Caste. Her family is landless and dependent on daily agriculture labour work for their subsistence. Her husband was regular consumer of alcohol. She didn't have enough money to take care of her children's education. She requested Sarpanch to provide her some work under MGNREGS but she was never taken seriously and was not offered any work. While facing these ordeals, she got associated with Vijay Nari Sangh. She participated in group's activity and got elected as the President of the group. She was illiterate but also learnt writing her name, so that she can put her signature wherever needed. She took help from Tarun Chetna volunteers in understanding MGNREGS's rules and norms. She also understood the importance of muster role and social audit.

Jagannathi consulted with other group members who were facing similar problems and were not able to get work under MGNREGS. She got together with other women and asked for work. This time Sarpanch couldn't deny as they approached him collectively. Sarpanch gave her and other women a very tough work which needed huge labour. Sarpanch did this purposefully so that women would not be able to complete the work. Jagannathi along with other women took the challenge and completed that work. Sarpanch didn't keep record of this work and did not give any acknowledgement of the work. Women pressurised him to record this work on muster role. He didn't. Women, under the leadership of Jagannathi, approached Block Development Officer (BDO) with a formal complaint. BDO ordered to provide receipt of the work done by women. In this process Jagannathi and other CBO members were threatened by the husband of the Sarpanch. She was asked not to show activism, and if she does so, she will be given work. Jagannathi didn't respond to these threats.

At the time of payment, many women couldn't get it as their work was not recorded on muster role. Jagannathi again collected these women together and reached Block office with a formal complaint against concerned people. Following this, to manipulate Jagannathi, Sarpanch put money in Jagannathi's account showing fake work done by Jagannathi and asked her take half of the money and return half to Sarpanch. Jagannathi refused to do this and continued fighting against the irregularities in MGNREGS. Now, CBO members keep eyes on the functioning of MGNREGS in the village and ensure that no one is denied for work and no fraud transactions are done by Sarpanch and concerned officials.



Case Study : CBO - Laghu Seemant Krishak Morcha Samogar  
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## 1. The context

Uttar Pradesh is a predominantly agricultural state, 82% of its cultivators being small and marginal farmers with holdings of 1-3 acres. In spite of such inequality in land distribution, these cultivators contribute the bulk of agricultural production in the state. Women mostly work as labour on their family farms or other holdings, constituting 38% of the total agricultural workforce.

The civil society organisation (CSO) Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG) works in eastern UP, which has a feudal and caste-dominated socio-economic background, with its resources, especially land, controlled by the rural elite. Scheduled castes (SC), muslims and women have been largely side-lined in mainstream development because they lack control over land resources. The green revolution, which depends on high inputs, technology and big land holdings, has further marginalized the small farmers and landless, especially the women who work as cultivators or labourers.

In spite of being productive on the farm, women have no voice at home or in their community, being exploited by their 'masters'. They are never seen as equal to men, whether in the wages they

are paid or in decision-making. The prevailing socio-cultural and paternalistic traditions have institutionalised this discrimination. These women cultivator-labourers control only 6% of agricultural resources and fewer than 1% participate in skill development, yet they contribute almost 70% of agricultural production, along with their reproductive responsibilities<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. GEAG and its association with the CBOs

Almost 97% of the people in north-eastern UP still depend on agri-based livelihoods. GEAG began focusing on vulnerable small and marginal farmers from early 1991, prioritizing sustainable livelihoods and moving towards participatory management of natural resources to ensure ecologically sensitive development. Most of these farmers belong to SC, backward and muslim communities.

The CSO promoted a community-based organisation (CBO) in 2000 - the Laghu Seemant Krishak Morcha (LSKM) - as the voice of small and marginal farmers in UP. It registered the union after holding consultative meetings with this farmer group across the region. Today, the CBO has more than 1,50,000 members in the state working on the agenda of sustainable, small holder farming.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a research study conducted by GEAG quoted in the project proposal submitted to PACS.

### 3. History and genesis of the CBO

The green revolution in India saw the commercialisation of agriculture, which brought in private players to mechanize largescale farming in the face of rising input costs. The Laghu Seemant Krishak Morcha was visualised as a union that would preserve the identity of small and marginal farmers, safeguard their control over their resources and ensure the irequity in the agricultural market. It emerged out of a process of regional consultations with farmers, activists and civil society organizations, establishing village-level units across the state in 2000.

The PACS intervention came more than a decade later, covering 60 villages in Sant Kabir Nagar, Maharaj Ganj and Kushi Nagar districts in its ambit. The village-level units formed under this initiative had a minimum membership of 100 small and marginal farmers, the unit in Samogar village of Mehadwal block being formed in 2012.

### 4. Organisation of the community

The LSKM unit in Samogar village is organised around two self-help groups (SHGs) of women farmers and those willing to start on-farm and off-farm activities. Most of the women are either dalit or muslim, with a few poor upper caste women also being members of the SHGs.

The community-based organisation's (CBO) membership comprises a) small and marginal farmers, b) landless farmers and women farmers and c) agricultural workers who also cultivate land on a crop-sharing basis, with each member paying a Rs2 membership fee. The village units are federated at the block and district level, electing their representatives to these bodies, followed by election or nomination to the regional and state convening body.

There are more than 5,000 units under the LSKM banner spread across the state's nine agro-climatic zones, which are the nodal zones for identifying issues and action points linked to agriculture. The LSKM's key advocacy issues

include influencing the minimum support price, getting revenue land pattas for its members, ending mal-practises in land consolidation, and putting a brake on the entry of multi-national companies in agriculture.

### 5. Leadership and its style

The village-level LSKM unit and the SHGs are led by women although it is the male marginal farmers who deal with the external world or engage with block and district officials. The women are articulate and confident about practising scientific, organic agriculture, being clear about the harmful impact of chemical-based agriculture on land productivity and the long-term value of sustainable agriculture. The group hedges risk collectively and uses its collective strength to support poor farmers taking land on lease.

### 6. Organisational culture and values

The CBO's organisational culture is democratic and supportive. Its members firmly believe their collective gives them the strength to retain control over their natural resources and make them productive to sustain their families without having to migrate. Their unity also allows them to challenge the unfair demands of upper caste farmers who exploit share croppers and farm labourers. They understand the value of organic, low-cost farming and a diversified cropping pattern to maximise yields. They also believe in promoting indigenous crops and cropping systems based on local seeds and local wisdom and they support the growth of local markets and entrepreneurs.

### 7. The CBO's relationship with the CSO

The CSO's core objective is to promote sustainable agriculture for small farmers and address the issue of climate change, hence it has an organic relationship with the CBO. Its strategy is to promote the growth of the LSKM through people-centred advocacy of small and marginal farmer issues.



## 8. Important processes related to the CBO

**Organising women into SHGs :** The women farmers have been organised into SHGs to address their credit needs for agriculture and other allied activities. The SHG is also a platform to forge solidarity among women cultivators, a profession that is traditionally the preserve of men, allowing them to collectively discuss agricultural issues and learn modern farming practises.

**Educating small farmers through mobile FFS :** The PACS programme established 20 mobile farmer field schools (FFS) in its operational area that visit villages to provide scientific agricultural know-how, particularly to women farmers, on sustainable agricultural practices for the rabi, kharif and jayad seasons. The FFS educators/trainers use large, visually effective posters/flex to communicate with a largely illiterate target audience.

**Promoting indigenous knowledge :** GEAG believes local practices with improved seed are climate resilient and local communities can effectively manage their farming with local wisdom. It orients the women in its CBOs to understand and adopt scientific agricultural methods to raise the productivity of farming using local seeds and organic manure. It's the path to making their farms self-sustaining and profitable, with the mobile FFS demonstrating simple ways to achieve this goal.

**Establishing village resource centres :** Every five villages group into a village cluster, which is the apex institution to reach out to the farmers and coordinate project activities. These village resource centres (VRCs) converge relevant government programmes and coordinate between the villages and outside agencies such as line departments and programme officials - MGNREGS, horticulture, agriculture, animal husbandry, etc- to promote schemes and reach resources to deserving farmers in a transparent and efficient manner.

**Linking farmers with government programmes :** The CSO facilitates land development of

individual holdings under the MGNREGS and links the CBOs with Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and co-operative societies (for seeds and other inputs) to promote the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices that strengthen the collectives. The emphasis is on developing a flood and climate-resilient agricultural system that has a demonstrative effect on the government and other farmers.

**Creating critical mass to influence policy change :** The CSO believes the problems of small and marginal farmers are structural in nature and require a policy change at the state and national levels. It sees building village-level collectives in a federated structure and demonstrating workable examples of sustainable agriculture as the means to achieving critical mass to demand policy change. It uses the campaign and protest mode as a key strategy to achieve this objective.

## 9. Key outcomes and impacts

- The Durga Mahila Self-Help Group has 16 members, most of whom cultivate their own holdings or take land on lease. Their average saving is Rs. 2,000 and many of them have taken agricultural loans such as Dukhna (Rs. 10,000), Subhagi (Rs. 3,500) and Shurmila (Rs. 5,000). Some have also taken loans to open a shop or buy a goat to supplement their family income.
- The GEAG identified dhaincha as an organic method to fix soil nitrogen, with significant success. The crop is sown before the monsoon and ploughed back into the field, the wooden poles used to support the plants later serving as firewood or fencing to protect their land from foraging animals. The spread of dhaincha cultivation during the project period has raised land productivity, improved yields of wheat, potatoes, onions, garlic etc and enhanced family income. The sale of dhaincha seeds, for which demand is now high, provides additional income. Fruit trees being provided under various horticulture schemes will also help cushion agricultural risk in future.

- Women have learnt to prepare organic manure from cow dung and organic pesticide from cow urine and other natural ingredients. Their small farms now serve as demonstration sites for organic agricultural production, the practices adopted showing the way to optimally using small holdings. Three crops are harvested annually, with the multi-cropping system using labour optimally and maintaining land productivity.

**Shayada demonstrated organic farming in a flood-prone area**

Shayada Khatoon's farm used to be inundated by flash floods. The land was also unproductive, its quality deteriorating from years of mono-cropping and heavy use of chemical inputs. Frustrated, her family stopped farming the one-acre plot because nothing would grow. It lay uncultivated for many years.

Shayada is now an active women farmer. Building on her association with the GEAG, she learned mixed vegetable farming practices and how to prepare bio-manure and bio-pesticides, transforming her farm into a profitable enterprise.

"The soil had deteriorated. We started applying organic manure to bring it back to life" says Shayada. Today, with the help of her father-in-law, she grows more than 30 varieties of vegetables, her persistence and hard work earning her a profit of Rs50,000 between 2012 to 2014.

*Source : Inclusive Resilience; Stories of Small Marginal Women Farmers, published by GEAG, 2015*

- The women were initially reluctant to work under the MGNREGS because their payments had been delayed earlier. When they decided to take up work, they found the pradhan was uncooperative, not responding to their repeated demands for work. They filed a complaint through the toll-free number provided by the UP government, which led to the assistant programme officer visiting the village to meet them. They are now hopeful of quick action from the administration.

## 10. Capacity building efforts of the CSO

The GEAG's support has been critical in empowering the women as cultivators. Regular visit of the FFS help them learn new agricultural methods and address their farm problems. This scientific knowledge of agricultural practices and organic farming with local inputs such as seeds and manure has helped make their farming sustainable and productive, with many big farmers also learning from their experiences.

In addition, the GEAG organised visits to the kisan melas in Lucknow and Faizabad and to the Narendra Dev Agriculture University. The women farmers also attended the Jan Utsav organised by PACS in Lucknow. These exposure visits helped them learn from others, making them more confident and articulate in the process.

## 11. Role of the CSO in the emergence of the CBO as a strong institution

The CSO's support is critical because government schemes and programme officials seldom reach poor and marginalised farmers. The women needed support to build their confidence and gain scientific knowledge about sustainable farming practices to make their small holdings productive and earn them a livelihood. The large number of SHGs set up help them meet their small credit needs. The LSKM units formed in the PACS villages and their federated structure also provide a strong advocacy platform to look for macro level solutions to local issues.

## 12. External opportunities and constraints

The external opportunities visualised by the CBO and GEAG are the following :

- Climate change is now a global problem and local solutions are being explored by working with rural communities. The favourable environment for climate-resilient agriculture and the macro-level work of the GEAG are helping to create grass roots demonstrations and evidence to influence national policies. Dr. Shiraz A.

Wajih, founder of the GEAG, already represents the group in global and national-level policy-making committees.

- The current political economy, growing farmer suicides, persisting drought conditions in many regions of the state such as Bundelkhand, and rising farming input costs have shifted the focus to developing models of sustainable agriculture for small and marginal farmers. The models developed by the GEAG and the CBOs can be a training and learning ground for the government and other CSOs.
- The sustainable development goals recently declared at the UN summit and adopted by India will open up opportunities for resource mobilisation to sustain the effort of the GEAG and the campaigns and activities of the farmers' union.

The threats visualised are the following :

- Neoliberal market forces are influencing and pressurising governments to open up the agricultural sector to multinationals. The trend of international companies expanding their commercial farming base in rural India is growing, negatively affecting the GEAG/LSKM movement to promote sustainable agriculture for small and marginal farmers.
- The current government focus is on promoting the manufacturing and service sectors at the expense of agriculture, which is seen to have exhausted its potential, affecting budget outlays for the sector. Programmes like the MGNREGS have taken a back seat to other high publicity schemes such as developing smart cities.
- Sustainable agriculture needs to be converged with other social sector

programmes like school education, health and ICDS, social security pensions etc. Without a holistic approach, women will not be sufficiently empowered to raise their voice and occupy positions such as pradhan and panch in panchayat raj institutions (PRIs).

### 13. Sustainability of the CBO

The village units promoted by the PACS programme and federated under the LSKM make for a strong and sustainable structure. The LSKM is a macro-level union of small and marginal farmers that's been operational over the last 15 years, so the village units will continue being supported by its activities. The GEAG, too, will continue to support the groups, given its multiple programme base in the PACS programme districts. The CBOs need hand-holding for a few more years to become completely self-reliant and independent in voicing their demands for their right and entitlements.


### 14. Future plans of the CBO

The CBO plans to expand its membership base by reaching out to more small and marginal farmers. It will also make better use of budgeted MGNREGS funds by initiating land development of small holdings.

GEAG prepared a document 'Inclusive resilience- the way forward' based on the experience of the PACS programme<sup>2</sup>, which focuses attention on several action areas for policy change or improving agricultural practices and management. The need is to adopt practices that are resilient to climate change and have a direct bearing for small and marginal farmers. The LSKM will engage with the government to integrate climate-resilient agricultural planning in its policies to protect the interests of this farm segment.

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<sup>2</sup> Inclusive Resilience- The Way Forward, GEAG, and PACS, undated.



Case Study : CBO - Mahila Sangathan Chitrasenpur  
CSO - Gramya Sansthan  
Location : Varanasi, UP



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Location : Varanasi, UP

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## 1. The context

Varanasi is one of the oldest districts of eastern UP where caste and religion influence access to resources and basic services. Women are subjected to oppression and deprivation, particularly Muslims and scheduled castes (SC). The Mahila Sangathan was set up to engage with the service delivery institutions to demand rights and entitlement as well as put an end to caste and religion-based discrimination at the village and panchayat levels.

The district is populated by SCs and Muslims, the SC families working as farm labour or migrating to Mumbai for better wages while the Muslim men mostly work as artisans weaving the internationally famous Banarasi silk saris and dress material. The artisans get abysmally low wages for their superfine skills, toiling many days to produce the seven-footsari. The struggle to survive and live peacefully with the dominant castes has impacted the health and education of the new generation of these exploited communities.

Chitrasenpur village in Sewapuri block, about 35km from Varanasi, the district headquarters, is a gram panchayat with a population of about 5,000 that includes about 500 SCs and 300 muslims. The SC habitation is situated in a corner of the prosperous village whose land-owners

cultivate vegetables and commercial crops that earn them high profits in Varanasi city. The women and men working in their fields earn a fourth of the minimum wage fixed for MGNREGS work.

Men from the village migrate to Mumbai, Delhi, Surat, Ahmedabad, Ludhiana etc in large numbers, looking for long-term, skilled or semi-skilled jobs. Many also commute daily to Varanasi for work. The women stay at home to take care of the family and work as farm labour for rich landowners or get employment in government programmes like the MGNREGS.

## 2. Genesis of the Gramya Sansthan

Gramya Sansthan has been working in the undivided Varanasi district for many years. Its founder Bindu Singh worked as a district co-ordinator of Mahila Samakhya, a programme to empower rural women and improve their socio-economic conditions, returning to the area after almost a decade in September 2011 to implement Gramya's PACS-supported project. The civil society organisation's (CSO) intervention in Sewapuri block drew on the experience of working with women in another block, beginning with a baseline study to identify potential women leaders. The baseline interactions also helped identify villages where intensive mobilisation needed to be taken up, Chitrasenpur being one of them.

### 3. Genesis of the Mahila Manch - Chitrasenpur

The Mahila Manch of Chitrasenpur was formed in 2013 by women of the harijantola who had become aware of the rights of MGNREGS workers, the Right to Information (RTI) Act and other constitutional provisions benefiting SCs during meetings and trainings organised by Gramya. They realised that the root of their deprivation lay in the exploitative practises of the local, politically-powerful feudal forces and their influence over the development administration and its local functionaries. The women found the village pradhan and government officials were deliberately depriving them of their entitlements by withholding information about schemes targeted at SCs.

The women first filed a demand with the panchayat for work for those registered under the MGNREGS, asking the panchayat secretary for a receipt of their application. Realising the women were aware of MGNREGS procedures, he tried to dissuade them from exercising their legal right, with the Pradhan even threatening them, saying, “You will pay the penalty for demanding work.”

The women then approached the block office, registering their work demand through the government helpline. The panchayat finally capitulated but gave them MGNREGS work at a site about 5km from the village. That didn't deter them. They made a collective decision to take up the work to demonstrate the power of their protest and their willingness to work. The pradhan had no choice but to delegate the secretary and rozgarsahayak to the site every day to take the muster roll until the work was completed. “This was one way for us to equalise the power relationship and realise our rights and entitlement,” recalls manch member Shobha.

The initial struggles helped build a strong team of committed members and office bearers, their number growing from 15 in 2011 to 24 by 2013. The common concerns of the women and the sharing of responsibility helped develop a high level of trust and mutual support in the collective.

### 4. Organisation and norms of the CBO

The Mahila Manch is informally organised, with a designated president, vice president and secretary. It meets once a month, maintains an attendance register, and a matriculate member documents the proceedings. The president usually visits the block and other offices to engage with officials, accompanied by a team of 4-5 women. If a gherao is organised to pressurise the insensitive and tardy administration, the women confront the official collectively. Poverty is the limiting factor in covering the travel costs of mobilising large numbers of women at the block or district level.

The CBO is transparent in its functioning, with most members being aware of the issues involved in their struggles, the developments taking place, and the successes/failures. They even know how much each of them earns under the MGNREGS. Their strong sense of collective ownership rallies them to protect any women who is threatened or intimidated by the feudal forces. In one instance, an official came at night to threaten a woman with dire consequences if she sought information under the RTI. The woman protested against his call at odd hours and his 'dire consequences' threat, their collective sense giving them confidence.

### 5. Leadership style

The CBO leadership is democratic and the women participate in meetings with high motivation and a sense of responsibility, each one being given the chance to air their views. Collective leadership ensures that no single individual or clique dominates and the group doesn't become over-dependent on one or two members. The manch has a strong support structure in the youth group formed by Gramya, which takes care of preparing and filing RTI and other applications and writing the proceedings of meetings.

### 6. Organisational mission, value and culture

The organisational mission is to enable the

women to live in peace and dignity even in upper-caste dominated villages. The women understand that their exploitation is rooted in their ignorance of their rights and entitlements, which keeps them in poverty despite the constitutional provisions and targeted schemes for poor and socially excluded groups. Their sense of equality gives them a better understanding of the causes of domestic violence and the avenues to combat it. Their collective struggle is to receive a non-discriminatory and efficient response from the service providers and an equitable share in development programmes.

The CBO shares and practises the values of an empowered community, including the power of shared knowledge and the strength of collective pressure to realise rights and entitlements. The group strives to widen its information base by learning about new acts and their provisions so it can demand the entitled rights.

## 7. Organic relationship of the group with other CBOs

The Mahila Manchis linked to the CBOs promoted by Gramya in other villages under the PACS programme. These CBOs meet a couple of times in a year to exchange experiences and share concerns.

## 8. Capacity building interventions

Gramya helps to develop the confidence of the dalit women and their trust in their collective. Its cluster-level facilitators provide information about various acts and schemes, among them the MGNREGS and its wage employment options. The MGNREGS details that help the women demand work and deal with the resistance of the panchayat and local administration include work demand, work measurement, wage payment etc. The women have demonstrated the courage to file demand applications and work at distant sites, the daily support of the Gramya team being critical for realising their goals.

Gramyahas helped indeveloping the organisational structure and norms of the CBO. It arranges exposure visits to other mature CBOs to

develop the women's confidence as a collective. Its facilitators also accompany them on visits to block level offices so they can learn how to interact confidently with officials.

## 9. Important processes over the years

Confidence building of women : The women were initially oriented on gender discrimination and its impact on their life and in accessing and controlling resources and opportunities. They were taught to ride bicycles and now cycle to the block offices, while adolescent girls cycle to school. This has changed the stereotyped image of women, particularly in dalit communities. As Gunjasays, "I learnt cycling because the project demanded visits to different villages. I was shy initially to face the men on the road but I gained confidence and now cycle about 20km daily."

Developing support groups : Gramya promoted a support group of adolescent boys and girls studying in nearby schools and colleges whose mothers are manch members. Some are in graduate courses while one is studying engineering in a government institution. They help the manch in writing the proceedings of meetings and filing applications. The upper castes and administration now know that the women have literate and educated support. The children also gain confidence to collectively withstand oppressive forces, protect girl children from untoward incidents, and make their way in life.

Occupying positions in SMCs and other institutions : The manch understands how important it is to occupy positions in decision-making bodies to improve the quality of services. Many women are members of the school management committee (SMC), monitoring schools from a dalit and minority perspective. They protested against dalit students being made to clean the toilets, demanding that all students share the responsibility or the school hires a new safai karmi because the present incumbent is from a rich dalit family who never performs his duties because of his close connections with the sarpanch. The women also monitor the quality of

teaching in schools and ensure that teachers are not habitually absent.

**Monitoring to improve services:** The manch uses its empowering knowledge of entitlements under the RTI, MGNREGS, RTE etc. to hold government officials to account, registering complaints about access to services, particularly the MGNREGS, on the toll-free number notified by the UP government. They petition the block and district administration to ensure smooth delivery of services and build pressure on panchayat officials who are insensitive to the needs of dalit women.

## 10. Key outcomes

The CBO journey over the past four years has seen many achievements, some of which are listed below :

- The first step the manch took was generating awareness of the MGNREGS and its provisions. The demand for work under the scheme began with the women submitting a written application to the gram panchayat and asking for a receipt from the secretary. The demand was simultaneously registered online to bypass the intimidation of the pradhan who threatened them with penalties if they did not take up the work allotted at a distant site. The women pressurised the secretary and rojgar sahayak to take the daily muster roll at the site.
- They learned how to measure the work and questioned the underestimation of their labour. UP government rules specify a separate wage calculation for female workers based on a time and motion study, which gives them more than males for the same amount of physical labour. The secretary was unwilling to pay the differentiated rate so they protested against the lower payments. They filed an RTI application, asking for details of the work completed in the panchayat and the list of labourers in 2014-15. They also asked

whether “there is no work closer to their village where the women could be engaged”. They used the RTI information to work out their strategy.

- The manch also motivated musahar dalit families to admit their children to the primary school through its SMC members. The objective of this inclusive initiative was to mainstream this extremely excluded community, which lived in the same hamlet as other dalit women, in the development process. The manch also monitored the anganwadi centres, PHC and PDS services to improve their quality and ensure access to their entitlements.

## 11. Role of the local NGO in strengthening the CBO

Gramyawas was instrumental in identifying the village women leaders when the project began. The initial thrust was to help them understand the value of organising a Mahila Mandal to fight oppression and discrimination against women, particularly dalits. The exposure visit to Chandausi block, where Gramya has been working over a long period, provided critical understanding of the power of a collective and the norms to govern a CBO.

Its field-level workers conducted several PACS trainings on constitutional guarantees and the rights they conferred through programmes and acts such as the NREGA, RTI and RTE. PACS also organised state-level conventions to build solidarity and confidence in the CBOs.

## 12. External opportunities and constraints

The CBO and Gramya face many challenges but also see many opportunities in working with dalit women in their struggle for their rights and dignity.

**Opportunities :**

- The political environment in UP recognises dalits and muslims as focal constituencies for upliftment. So the protests of dalit women collectives against the development



Manju is a democratic leader of the Mahila Manch. Manju is an illiterate dalit woman who was elected president of the Mahila Manch. She is bold and confidently engages with government officials, sarpanch and service providers for gaining the rights of dalit women in her village.

Manju was initially apprehensive to organise the women against the powerful feudal forces in her village. Most dalit families work as labourers on the farms of rich, upper caste landowners or farm the land on a crop-sharing basis.

She felt empowered by the Gramya trainings on various acts such as the NREGA, RTI, RTE, the SC/ST atrocity act and domestic violence, gaining a deep understanding of the rights of excluded communities and the power of collectives to protest and demand justice.

With the support of Gramya, she organised the women of her hamlet to form the Mahila Manch. The knowledge she gained helped her to train other groups as well as engage with service providers at the village and block levels, focusing on their duties and responsibilities.

Her confrontation with the panchayat pradhan and secretary has opened the door to wider employment of women under the MGNREGS and distribution of other benefits. The PRI representatives, annoyed with her, are making all efforts to victimise her. For example, her name is high on the list of households entitled to a subsidy for a house, but they have found ways to defer her claim.

Manju remains unperturbed and is committed to continue her fight for justice and transparent functioning of the panchayat. The pradhan has even approached her to work out a compromise, holding out the carrot of benefits for her family.

Manju is the strength of the manch, with the dalit women standing with her and gaining confidence from her qualities as a leader who stands with them even in crisis and doesn't succumb to the lures of the establishment.

administration are heard and responded to. The law and order agencies also support their cause, with political priorities restraining upper caste harassment and exploitation of dalits.

- Development programmes like the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) promote self-help groups and target reproductive health issues. They provide opportunities for dalit women, adolescent girls and their CBOs to work together and reap the programme benefits as an organised group.
- The benefits of reservation in government professional colleges for SC students and jobs for educated dalit youth have not been fully availed due to lack of information and collective action to monitor the selection process. The CBOs have the strength to influence the recruitment process of anganwadi workers, health workers and other block-level positions.

#### Threats:

- Gramya does not have multiple funding sources to sustain its investment in the CBOs in a post-PACS scenario. The CBOs still require hand holding support to sustain their collectives, although they are confident of continuing their struggle at the local level independently. But they need support to engage with the block and district administration.
- Any change in political leadership that does not keep the dalits and OBCs at the centre of their political agenda will reduce the effectiveness of the CBOs in their fight against feudal forces and a compliant administration.
- The cluster and block-level federation of the CBOs is at a nascent stage, getting formalised in recent months. There is a possibility that this collective strength as a network may not mature if Gramya facilitation and support are reduced.

### 13. Sustainability of the PO

The Mahila Manch feels it can continue its fight even in absence of Gramya's support. The associated collective group of adolescent girls

and boys who are students of class VIII to class XII are a great support to access information, write applications etc. However, the lack of internet access hampers the use of mobile apps to access government web-sites and schemes.

The CBO's collective leadership has demonstrated its ability to stand up to external opposition from vested interest groups. The leaders are aware that if the CBO becomes weak or its members are less vocal and united, there is every possibility that the powerful feudal forces will reassert their power, reverting the service delivery system to its earlier discriminatory, iniquitous, opaque and unaccountable character.

#### 14. Future plans

The Mahila Manchh as articulated the areas for continuing collective action in future :

- The PHC needs to be more efficient, pro-poor and pro-dalit for equitable services. Medicines should be made available to the poor and dalits to reduce the cost of treatment.
- The women working under the MGNREGS are still not able to get differentiated wages specified by the UP MGNREGS rules. The

administration has still not accepted their demand to abide by the rules.

- The hand pumps for drinking water are poorly maintained and water stagnates around the platform. What is needed is safe drinking water and a safe environment.
- The adolescent boys and girls would like to re-occupy a public space illegally captured by the upper caste so that the dalit children can get a playground.
- The educated girls of the dalit community would like to get jobs using the provision of reservations. There is a need for clear information on the provisions and CSO support is desirable so that corrupt and non-transparent processes can be minimised.

The biggest challenge facing Gramya is to sustain its team and support the efforts of the CBOs to function independently in the post-PACS period. The Gramya leadership is trying to mobilise resources from different donors and CSR groups.

Case Study : CBO - Jan Adhikar Nagrik Sangh, Cholapur Block  
CSO - Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra

Location : Varanasi, U.P.

*Theme : Health, Education, nutrition, livelihood, social inclusion  
and Women Empowerment*

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## 1. Context

Cholapur, a densely populated block of the Banaras district is situated only thirty kilometres from the district headquarters. Yet the feudal social structure is often combined with poor penetration and misappropriation of the government schemes and programs. The feudal structure of Banaras, is dominated by Rajput and Brahmins, popularly called 'Bau Sab', that not only control large land holdings and resources, but also have control on most of the government resources at local level, such as Panchayat, PDS shops, Anganwadi centres etc. Despite a substantial caste representation of scheduled castes (30%) and Muslim (22%), these castes have been economically and socially backward in an otherwise fertile region of river Ganga. Most scheduled castes have small land holdings and work as agriculture labour on the fields of Rajput, Thakurs and Brahmins, while the Muslims are predominantly weavers of Banarasi Sarees. It is in this backdrop, Jan Adhikar Manch OPERATES. What is called as Jan Adhikar Manch, may be best understood as a group of socially conscious common citizens that have emerged as active leaders in their respective Panchayats and villages over a period of time. Significantly these common citizens belong to scheduled caste and Muslims communities and are popularly called 'Nagrik Netas', the leader among the citizens.

Jan Adhikar Manch which is now a federation of these 'Nagrik Netas or citizen leaders' has evolved slowly over a period of time from several small community based Organisations (CBO) formed in twenty odd Panchayat in Cholapur block of the Banaras district. These small CBOs that formed the base for Jan Adhikar Manch, ranged from Kishori Balika Samooch (group of adolescent girls) Youth group, women group and women SHGs. These citizen leaders emerged as leaders in these groups and were handpicked by Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra for further grooming and nurturing.

Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra, a voluntary organisation, works in Uttar Pradesh and has been working in three blocks of Banaras with the support from PACS. It started its interventions in Banaras with smaller intervention of a guardianship program, called Vidya Sagar of Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, where identification of scheduled caste girl child for higher studies was undertaken. The program brought them in contact with several parents that have promoted the education of their daughters despite several odds. Identification of the citizen leaders started at the time to seek their support in mobilizing the community for education. However the identification was neither obvious nor formal. The Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra that had experimented with the concept of citizen leaders



in past, was quick to capitalise on their experience as soon as they started interventions in BANARAS. While they formed different type of CBOs, particularly SHGs, they sharpened their focus on identifying potential leader that can provide leadership in their group as well as to other community members and Panchayat. Identification was relatively easy in Panchayats that was already intervened with Rajiv Gandhi Foundation Grant, as there was an established association, however it required effort, and sharp focus in other Panchayats. The identification strategy was simple, 'to keep an eye on individuals who have the confidence of group members, who takes the responsibility for resolving issues for others, who is able to withstand the pressure of power structures' and one who can articulate the issues, or simply who were more active such as they would take down the phone numbers, remember schemes, attend meetings etc. Basic education was seen as an added advantage but not a determining criteria.

## 2. Evolution of 'Jan Adhikar Nagrik Manch'

SSK started their intervention in PACS, by mobilising the marginalised community that is the Harijans and ADIVASI'S in different group of women SHGs, youths and adolescent girls. These groups while serving the purpose of community organisation in the respective villages and Panchayats, also served as platform for identifying leader as potential Nagrik Neeta or citizen leader'. The CBO was used as the platform for community mobilisation and empowerment, besides identification of potential citizen leader. The active members, those who took initiative and had the potential to lead the group were not difficult to identify. The field facilitators confirm that one of the skill required for their job was to have the 'eyes' that can identify the potential leaders. While the CBO was nursed partly by the citizen leader and partly by the field facilitator, the citizen leaders was systematically nurtured by SSK for their future role and responsibility. SSK being the organisation specialising in Participatory training methodology, the capacity building was systematic using several

participatory methodologies. The citizen leaders from different Panchayats were brought together on a common platform called-Jan Adhikar Nagrik Manch-Cholapur. This was a block level federation of the citizen's leaders from Cholapur block, with objectives of supporting each other, and drawing from collective strength of the their groups. Mostly it is represented by one citizen leader for each Panchayat but in certain cases it also has more than one citizen leader of a Panchayat.

Most citizen leaders besides being members of the village level CBO, are also members of other village level committees such as School Management committee or Anganwadi committee etc.,

A village information centre, run by SSK was an added support, as the community that came to collect information or read newspaper in the information centre could also interact with the citizen leaders/ CBO members, as information centres were managed by the CBO members. Therefore community members, CBO members and citizen leaders were connected informally also at the village level. Most CBOs that these leaders represented had monthly meetings also, for formal sharing of the issues.

Santosh, a member of the Garima Samooch self-help Group in the Panchayat Cholapur quoted that when her daughter was stalked by a teenager boy of the Panchayat, she brought it to the notice of Pavitri, president of her group and also the identified citizen leader. Pavitri then took up the matter with the concerned teenager. Similarly the irregularities in the Anganwadi center were brought to her notice by the Anganwadi Sahaiyaka of the village. Pavitri took the matter and ensured improvement in the system. She draws strength from the group as she is backed and supported by them, while the community draws from her strength. Therefore there is symbiotic relationship between the community, group members and Citizen Leaders. Often, the number of CBOs in a village exceed one, with the presence of more than one SHG, adolescent girls group and youth groups. Some

group of weavers were also initiated by the weaver community in the intervened villages are also represented in the block federation. Higher the number of groups in a village, greater is the support base of the citizen leader. Like Pavitri, most of the citizen leader are leaders in their Panchayat and VILLAGE LEVEL cbo. Most citizen leaders are women but there are men too, however, all of them belong to scheduled castes or Muslim community. Both gender and caste has not influenced the practices in the block level federation the 'Jan Adhikar Nagrik Manch'. They sit together, have collective meetings and share responsibilities. Both men and women members are equally vocal, confident and equally versed on the issue.

SSK has undertaken systematic capacity building of the citizen leader, starting from training them to give their introduction or organising relevant phone numbers for them, or building their confidence in mock drills. The citizen leaders that had basic grooming and confidence building interventions were then federated at block level. The block level federation has over 33 members and representation of 22 Panchayats. Once the citizen leaders were identified and established in the Panchayat, the process of federating them had begun. The federation came into being about one and half years back. Mahmood Alam, a weaver from Bhavinipur Village is the President of the federation, while Pavitri from Cholapur Panchayat is secretary. Mammood Alam represents Waris Bunkar Samoooh, while Pavitri represents Garima self Help Group from their respective villages.

The formation of federation was followed by regular monthly meeting of the federation. The meeting is usually scheduled on 28th of every month. The monthly meetings are used for sharing the experience, extending support and platform for demonstrating unity and solidarity. Sometimes, some they also discuss the issues that need support of the other leaders or that need resolution collectively at block level. The federation is having regular meetings for the last one and half years, sometimes, completely

independent of the SSK. Currently the interventions of the federation is largely the collective intervention of its members, with a gradual movement towards the issues that need block level interventions. The majority of the issues handled by them are also local in nature such as PDS shop of their village, School, Anganwadi, roads, social infrastructure etc. However, occasionally the issues have been larger, and not typically local. Such as streamlining of loan disbursement for weavers from the 'Handloom and Textiles Department'.

### 3. Organisation and Norms of the Federation

The organizational structure of the federation is semiformal, with representation of village level CBOs. Many of its members are also the members of School management committee or other ad-hock committees of the village, functioning with line departments. The Jan Adhikar Nagrik Sangha comprises of 33 citizen leaders from 22 Gram panchayats of Cholapur block. Though there is no specific criteria for women representation or caste representation, many of the members are women as they are the presidents of respective SHGs. The secretary of the federation is also a women. Members are either Muslims or Scheduled castes. The President, Secretary and treasurer of the federation are elected through a consultative process and currently belong to different Panchayats.

They have monthly meetings which are normally attended by all its members. The meetings are usually conducted at Cholapur Panchayat Bhavan, as it is close to block headquarters and is convenient to reach, though some of the members travel eight to 10 kilometers to attend the meeting. However, it is within five kilometers for most of its members. The member of the federation collect Rs. 25/- per month. The money is used to meet the expenses such as documentation, phone Fax, communication etc. of which the treasure of the federation maintains a record. Despite having president and secretary,

#### Nagrik Neta Pavitri, cholapur Panchayat

Identified by SSK during the guardianship program, while motivating education of girl child in the community. Today she has stories of hundreds of small issues has been addressed by her for improved rights and entitlements in her village. She streamlined Anganwadi, to ensure proper distribution of supplementary nutrition, she fought for shifting of a PDS shop allocated for Dalit Hamlet to the Dalit hamlet. Earlier it was operating from an upper caste hamlet, She ensured the transfer of shop to the Dalit shop holder, She participates in SMC meetings and is president of it. She ensured that Dalit children are not forced to clean the toilets and the 'Safai Karmchari takes care of the toilet cleaning. She also ensured that toilet is available for school children. She supervised mid-day meals along with other parents and raised voice against the discrimination of Dalit Children during serving Mid-Day MEALS. Fought with the Panchayat for hand-pump and other infrastructure in the Dalit hamlet, while she also fought with health functionaries to give full grant money in Janani Surakhsha scheme. Once she waged the war against the CHMO, when she got to know that even common medicines are not available in the hospital, or community is overcharged.

Pavitri also did the advocacy & mobilization work for the implementation of the MGNREGA in her villages. As a reward of that she became a mate in the village officially designated to mobilize community.

the members usually have shared responsibilities. The office bearers are selected on the basis of their articulation and leadership qualities.

The federation derives its strength from the fact that it is inter-twined- with the village level CBOs that demonstrate solidarity with the citizen leaders if there is a need. The leadership style of the CBO is flexible and collective in nature although there are couple of persons who remain active on different issues and agendas. Such as some members are more active the issues of weavers, while others will be more active on PDS, some others that are also the members of SMC are

active on school sanitation etc. Therefore, different types of issues are addressed by different members. However, there is no classification of roles in context of issues. The concern of the individual member on the issues usually determines the extent of his/her engagement on the issue.

The federation has monthly meetings and discusses issues related to challenges in their own village, their experiences on issues, success and challenges faced by them and support, they need of each other in addressing a particular issue. For instance, treasure of the federation, once challenging a bank officials who had swindled money from 'Samajvadi Pension' bank account of a pension beneficiary, sought support of other members as bank officials wanted him to give a legal notice, and was not returning money.

One of the prime objective of the federation is claiming the entitlements and rights offered as State's programs and schemes. They also work for ending caste based discrimination in delivery of services and prevalent social practices. The members also address some common social issues in their respective villages such as addressing alcoholism, eve teasing, and discrimination in distribution of Mid Day meals. The objective of the federation is more or less like that of its members.

The caste Panchayat for both 'Harijans' & Muslims is active in the region, and members of the federation are also part of the caste Panchayats. There are Muslim committees in village, promoted by Molivis/Madarsa's. The discussion in the Muslim committees are centered on social issues of Muslims including child marriage, diseases, education of the girl child etc. Many of the scheduled caste members are also member of Bahujan Samajvadi Party', a party symbolizing the issues of Dalits, These party workers are called 'BBF sipahi'. They constitute, local cadre of the party, and participate in party rallies. They pay an annual membership fees of Rs. 50 annually. However, members contests that there is not apparent gain in being the members of the party.

#### 4. Capacity Building interventions

Capacity building, being a strong hold of SSK, a methodical capacity building interventions is visible in the interventions of the SSK. The capacity building comprised of informal orientation, exposure visits, simulations, mock drills, exposure visits and some formal structured orientations

Informal yet structured orientation to the members of the federation on relevant topics. Some of the issues on which formal training was provided to the members were Role of School Management Committee, Right to Information, Social Security Pension, structure of the Administrative Machinery, Administrative structure of some of the critical departments, some of the critical schemes and flagship programs Important phone numbers and name of the concerned officials was also shared with the federation members. Certain issues are transferred repeatedly during all capacity building of SSK and are engrained in minds of members. These range from introduction to careful compilation of information. The federation member are told to introduce themselves fearlessly, speak confidently, and always ask for response in writing when they feel that the reaction or response of the government official is not appropriate, collect phone numbers of all the relevant officials, always keep an eye on which departments handle particular program/scheme and most importantly make requests/complaints to concerned official in writing and insist on getting a receipt. It is noticeable that all the federation member's recite their name, the Panchayats name and CBO'S name quite confidently when they introduce themselves. Almost each one has used These basic tenets of training as a strategy, as several federation members had several stories to tell around these fundamental methods of engaging with the government, as to how they asked a particular official to make response in writing, or how they kept on insisting to get a receipt for their complaint application. These strategies are repeatedly mentioned by SSK and used by the

##### Victory for weavers

Mahmood Alam is president of Jan Adhikar Nagrik Sangthan. He belongs to the families of weavers, and has also initiated WARIS bunker SAMOOH IN HIS Panchayat. He got to know that there is scheme where weavers are granted loans to buy silk threads, and replace parts of the weaving machine. A solar powered lantern is also provided to the weavers under the same scheme. The scheme is run by Ministry of Handloom and textiles. However, banks did not disburse any loan nor were there any beneficiary of the scheme in the entire Cholapur Block. Mahmmood tried to access the scheme and loan from the bank. Changing part of his machine meant higher profits, lesser effort, while they would be able to buy silk threads on their own, which meant reasonable jump in the profit margin. When his effort to access the scheme failed, Mahmmood made an RTI application on one hand and organized the weavers on the other. They met block officials and bank managers. Thaey got the support of SSK for organising a meeting with department in Lucknow. Public agitation and Dharnas were organized at block and district level.

Mahmood and his fellow weavers took the responsibility of agitations and negotiations. Finally the loan of Rs. 25000 each was approved for 501 weavers in the district.

This has only being one of his success, as he also fought a fierce battle for defamation of his village as a separate Panchayat. His village dominated by Muslim weavers was neglected by the Bhavanipur Panchayat dominated by Rajput and Brahmins. His village met the criteria for a separate Panchayat but this was not coming through, due to political reasons. He again fought his case. He applied at eight different places for the fresh demarcation of his village, and made an RTI application for the same. When all the effort at the district level went in vain, he obtained the fax number of concerned department in Lucknow, from a net Café. He faxed application in Lucknow, and followed it up on the phone. Finally his efforts bore fruits, His is the only Panchayat that was demarcated from among the eight cases that were sent for approval. Having their own Panchayat has resulted into a having their own PDS shop and infrastructure development

federation members. Some formal orientation of the Sangh is also undertaken, on specific issues such as accounts and book keeping in SHG or role



and responsibilities of School Management Committees etc. These orientations are usually one day only and are conducted locally by SSK's local team.

To build the confidence and give an 'actual feel' of handling of administrative machinery, a mock drill is conducted. SSK teams play the role of officials while federation members play themselves. They learn in the process on preparation of documents and evidences, handling of the administrative machinery or how to talk confidently etc. The mock drill helped in reducing the hesitation that the villagers had when they interact with government officials.

Exposure visit to nearby SITAPUR Block where SSK has an old federation of active citizen leaders, gave this federation, the insight into several nuanced issue.

Lok-Utsav in Lucknow, organized by PACS, also built confidence of the federation members. As the natural leaders were nurtured, it is not surprising that most members have telephone directory of all the relevant phone numbers, sometimes they ask SSK staff to get them a particular number or get the procedural details of a scheme. Some members have been able to use internet café to access relevant details for accessing scheme/making complaints. Normally SSK plays the role of facilitator, and federation members take the lead.

Some of the capacity building has been on the job. While resolving issues, they gained confidence, knowledge and insights. The federation members are usually not accompanied by SSK when they go to meet the officials. SSK only shows them the path, helps them in preparing the argument /documents etc. The independent meetings have helped the members to grow tremendously. Further, organization of public agitation and Dharna, improved their organization and management skills besides, honing their leadership qualities.

PACS organised Lok Sagathan Utsav in 2013 to bring several hundred of CBOs on one platform for sharing of experience and promote fraternity.

The stories of struggle and successes in this congregation not only provided confidence to these several hundred CBOs, but also provided strategic direction to them. They also felt that they are not alone in this process of struggle and adversity, but many more are with them.

Some of the Key Processes may be summarized as under :

- Formation of village level CBOs

A large number of village level CBOs were formed as a strategy for community mobilisation and a platform for identification of CBOs. These village level CBOs ranged from women SHG, adolescent girls group, youth groups, weaver CBOs etc. The village animators strategically try to identify the potential leaders in these groups that can be trained to become a citizen leader. Citizen leader is almost used as title, as well as an adjective for 'citizen leaders'.

- Identification of potential Citizen Leaders in village CBOs

The first initiative and a deliberate intervention is to identify the natural leaders with commitment, social vision, and potential for further nurturing. Articulation, leadership, trust, willingness to give time were some of the critical qualities in the citizen leaders.

- Organizing the Citizen Leaders in a block level federation

The citizen leaders identified at the initial stages of the initiative were then organized to form the Jan Adhikaar Naagrik Sangh. The formation of the Jan Adhikaar Naagrik Sangh helped in the systemizing and structuring the Citizen Leaders. A total of 33 Citizen Leaders became its members and the Head, Secretary and Treasurer of the Sangh were elected amongst them.

- Building the Capacities of the Citizen Leaders and the federation

After the formation of Jan Adhikaar Naagrik Sangh, attempts were made to raise awareness and build capacities of the leaders through structured and unstructured orientations, mock

drills, role plays, and exposure visits. They were also extended handholding support and critical information on schemes and block administrative machinery. SSK also facilitated group processes in a manner that strengthened the federation.

- **Collective Review of Unresolved Issues**

The issues that cannot be resolved by the concerned Citizen Leaders are reviewed in the monthly meetings of the Jan Adhikaar Naagrik Sangh. The Citizen Leaders also share the issues that are resolved, leading to mutual learning and sharing.

- **Collective actions if required**

Collective actions are planned, for instance collective visit to district office, or collective agitation at the office of corrupt officials, as per the need and decisions of the monthly meetings.

## 5. Key outcomes

The organization of community into CBOs and subsequently into a federation, have had bearing not only on empowerment and improved delivery government programs locally but also sustained and sharpened focus on 'Rights and entitlements' for many programs that influenced block and district level service delivery such as loans and schemes for weavers. Further, there is evident ripple effect of the interventions in the same village on other issues, in adjoining villages on same as well as other issues and occasionally on an entire community and entire district. For instance fight for improvement in PDS shops automatically improved the delivery of NREGS in the village, while improvement in service delivery in one village of Cholapur Panchayat improved the service delivery in other villages of the same Panchayat and other Panchayats also.

- **Significant improvement in delivery of village level institutions and scheme**

There has been a visible improvement in the village level institutions of the respective Panchayats of the citizen leaders.

Some of the key areas of improvement that are

visible across all the intervened 30 Panchayats may be listed as following-

- 'Improved timing and attendance' of school teachers' as a result of strengthened SMC in the leadership of the citizen leaders.
- Better quality mid-day meals in the schools across all the Panchayats.
- Improved Sanitation and use of toilets by children in schools for nearly all the schools in all the intervened Panchayats.
- Better distribution of supplementary nutrition in Anganwadi centers in all the Panchayats particularly in their Dalit and Muslim Hamlets.
- Improved road infrastructure in the hamlets occupied by the marginalized.
- A significantly improved functioning of PDS shops including reallocation of many PDS shops to Dalit and Muslim hamlets.
- Allocation and control of PDS shops by Dalit and MUSLIM COMMUNITY, which was marked contrast to the existing practice, where control of PDS shops was totally in the hand of upper caste and powerful.
- A significant increase in employment provided in NREGS. Which has improved the bargaining power of the community as agriculture labour.
- Improved distribution of medicine and improvement of facilities in the health centers.
- Changed practice of not paying full money to beneficiaries in Janani Suraksha Yojna. Several instances where beneficiaries demanded full payment and got it, Otherwise full payments are rarely made in the entire district.
- Effective implementation of scheme targeting weavers in Banaras district

Cholapur Block has significant number of weavers occupied in weaving the famous

'Banarasi Sarees of the region'. There are several schemes and subsidized loans targeting weavers to replace the spools and other parts of the weaving machine, procure a solar lantern to continue weaving during evenings etc. The ministry of textiles run schemes and centers for procuring silk threads, so that weaver's dependence on middlemen is reduced. However, there is no uptake of these schemes. Not a single weaver had been given loan to improve his weaving machine, similarly, the weavers were heavily dependent on middlemen to get them silk threads and therefore forced to sell their ready Sarees to the middlemen only. The allocation in the scheme in the district as well subsidized loan targeted towards weavers was not spent at all in Banaras district. The initiative of the Waris Bunkar Samooh, the support Jan Adhikar Manch and guidance from SSK led to effective implementation of the scheme in the district. The vague awareness of the village level CBO and federation members on scheme targeting weavers, led to evolution of 'Waris bunker samooh' and a sustained effort of this weaver group TO RIGHTS AND ENTILEMENTS OF THE WEAVERS. They made efforts to know the scheme properly, as they been trained by SSK and applied for the scheme. They had to fight a long battle with the support of federation members. SSK facilitated a meeting of the members with departmental officials in the Lucknow. The success of their struggle was that FIVE HUNDREAD AND FIFTY APPLICATION FOR LOAN OF Rs. 25,000 each was passed. The weavers were also linked to the scheme and got solar light and silk threads at a subsidized rate. A silk thread center has also been set up in their village. Many weavers now engage in direct procurement of silk threads and direct selling of their Sarees. The reduced dependence on middlemen have increased their profit margins considerably. Significantly all the weavers are returning their loan installments.

- Effective use of 'Right to information (RTI)

The CBO members from Village as well as from the citizen leader federation use RTI frequently to

access information and seek reddresal. Information on schemes or fund utilization or procedural lapse have been frequently sought by the federation members. They know the procedural issue with respect to RTI and have used the instrument to build pressure and access rights and entitlements.

- Greater Confidence to Engage with Local Administration

There has been a significant empowerment in the way in the community particularly the Dalits are engaging with the local powerful lords and district administration. The formation of the community institutions, the organized collective struggle of several such CBOs for their entitlements, emergence of collective struggle at block and district level, has brought about shifted power relations between the community collectives and local administration. The small success at Panchayat and block level gave them confidence to deal with the administrative issues and line departments.

Besides village level delivery institutions such as Anganwadi, school etc. They do confirm that NREGS, PDS have improved besides improving basic infrastructure in Dalit Hamlets.

- Strong Community Mobilization

The citizen leaders have a cadre at the village level to support them. This cadre includes members of the Kishori Samuh (Adolescent Girls Group), School Management Committees (SMC) and Women Self Help Groups, youth groups, weavers group etc. There is symbiotic relationship between these village level institutions and federation of citizen leaders. This symbiotic relations has led to speedier and greater transfer of confidence, information and empowerment. A large number of community members are mobilized in the process and extensive connective linkages forged by the community leaders. When the community cadre works in tandem with the Citizen Leaders, the capacities of the cadre are also developed.

- Awareness on the importance of education

All the citizen leaders realize the importance of education and want to ensure good quality education for their children. Many of them take the support of the educated youths of the village to undertake writing work for them.

- Rallying for political power

Despite the constraint of a feudal social fabric and a weak financial base, many members of the citizen leader federation are contesting the Panchayat election this year. Some of them are contesting at the village Panchayat level, while some are contesting at district level. Some know that they will lose elections, but they are contesting to demonstrate their empowerment besides a chance to win election.

## 6. Sustainability and future Plan

The members of the federation have reasonable organization to carry on the activities of the federation and have a vision for their respective villages. To draw strength from each other and collective actions, they have exchanged phone numbers. They converse on the issues and exchange support from each other. They have expanded their area of intervention and are working on issues besides government schemes, such as issues of girl education, hygiene and

nutrition. Or sanitation and household toilets, or undertaking total sanitation in the villages etc. Though, largely they become independent of the SSK, they still feel the need of SSKs support. They have requested SSK for continued support and direction for two more years, to be completely independent of SSK.

The various factors such as political power in state and local Panchayats will influence the CBO, particularly if some of the federation members WIN Panchayat elections. CBO members have a latent advantage of being in a member of the BSP, though direct benefit has come through. Change of power in state is likely to influence the working of the CBO.

The future plans of the CBO is clearly to improve the education, basic infrastructure and improved access of schematic entitlements. They are clear and keen to continue their organization with or without SSK and feel that their own awareness, alone can change the outcomes of their interventions. They therefore want to learn and understand more about basic services and entitlements. They also feel that the political victory of some of their colleagues will strengthen their organization.



Case Study : CBO - Rapti Vistapit Punarvas Manch, District Shrawasti  
CSO - Panchsheel Development Trust  
Location : Shrawasti , Uttar Pradesh

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## 1. Background

The Rapti Vistapit Punarvas Manch<sup>1</sup> emerged as a community based organisation (CBO) in response to years of ravage and destruction caused by the river Rapti in Shrawasti and neighbouring districts in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Rapti enters into India through the District of Shrawasti, bringing with it all the fury of a mountain river when it first touches the plains.

Regular floods in general and unprecedented floods in pockets are common to the eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh, with the Rapti River Basin being one of the worst affected areas. Every year devastating floods inundate several hectares of cropland, maroons or wash away whole villages effecting lives and livelihoods. Flooding occurs due to heavy rainfall and breaching of natural and man-made embankments. Besides, the Rapti, that flows down from the mountains in Nepal, carries large quantities of silt that has raised the bed of the river above the surrounding land and settlements leading to heavy flooding and frequent changing of the course of the river. Thus, not only is the location of the villages with reference to the river constantly shifting, but large deposits of silt make cultivation next to

impossible. In the process identification and demarcation of land becomes fuzzy and disputes over claims ensue.

While the State government is responsible for taking up flood mitigation measures, the Central government supports the states with emergency and relief funds. The State in turn uses both structural and non structural instruments for interventions. Although the interventions and state support have become relatively more organised after the passing of the Disaster Management Act in 2005, much of this continues to be in the form of relief and rehabilitation, with less emphasis on long term prevention, mitigation and protection of lives and livelihoods. As a result, over the years several civil society organisations have been working around developing community based models of relief and rehabilitation, including developing mitigation models to secure lives and livelihoods. The Panchsheel Development Trust is one such civil society organisation (CSO) that has been working to bring about policy level changes in flood mitigation and rehabilitation efforts and in the process has organised and empowered communities to become aware and protect their livelihoods rights.

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<sup>1</sup> A separate forum- the Ghagra Vistapit Punarvas Manch- has also been formed as a rights based platform for those affected by the floods in the River Ghagra.

<sup>2</sup> It also works on improving livelihoods, agriculture, water and sanitation, education and health with support from other funding sources and accessing government programmes.

## 2. The Panchsheel Development Trust (PDT)

The Panchsheel Development Trust (PDT) was established in 2003 as a civil society organisation working with communities affected by floods and consequent erosions by rivers in the districts of Baharaich and Shrawasti in Uttar Pradesh. Initially PDT had been engaged in relief work carried out by various national and international NGOs and the state government. However, it soon realised that long term and deep-rooted measures were required to bring about relief and rehabilitation in the long run. PDT observed that while the state and other agencies had developed guidelines and strategies for immediate relief and rehabilitation, there was no consistent policy for the sustained development of perennially flood affected areas and the protection of those who were victims of land erosion. In order to move towards this direction PDT began to work more closely with the displaced communities with support under the PACS programme.

Thus, since 2011, PDT's focus within the framework of PACS has been on organising communities, building their capacities to collectively influence and work with the Panchayats and developing and promoting village, block and district level rehabilitation plans. It has been working in a total of 90 villages in the districts of Baharaich and Shrawasti; has supported the formation of separate community based organisation for men, women and children and federated them at the village, block and district levels; supported households living below the poverty line, especially those from the socially excluded communities, to acquire job cards under MGNREGA, acquire land ownership certificates, enrol their children in schools, and access the RSBY health insurance scheme and other related benefits.

At the same time PDT is actively networking with like-minded organisations for advocating with the government at the state level to develop a concrete and inclusive policy framework and enact necessary regulations for addressing issues

related to displacements due to river erosions. In fact PDT has been vigorously fighting for the inclusion of this type of displacement into the National Relief and Rehabilitation Policy (2007) which currently only caters to development related displacements and land acquisitions. More specifically, PDT has firstly, been pushing for clear a definition of displaced families and categorising them into groups according to the nature and level of loss and secondly for sustainable support to those who have been displaced so that they do not go into a chronic deprivation and poverty spiral. The CBOs formed under PACS are part of this larger agenda.

## 3. Genesis And Organisation Of The Rapti Vistapit Punarwas Manch (Rvpm)

The Rapti Vistapit Punarwas Manch, came into existence in 2012 and is the federation of 60 Gram Punarwas and Vikas Samiti (GPVS).

Loss of land and difficulties in claiming compensation on the loss was the primary problem in this area. Loss of land itself was of two kinds- complete loss due to a change in course of the river, or loss of its productivity due to excessive silting and depositing of debris. Further, with a change in the profile and contour of the region, the ownership of 'safe' or salvaged land became an issue of conflict and vested interest with the more powerful in the community laying claims to the land. And what was more frustrating to the land owners was the need to pay taxes on land that did not exist. The eroding of this livelihood foundation pushed the communities even further down the poverty ladders and made them incapable of accessing other basic services. PDT hence, facilitated the communities to organise themselves into a three tier community level collective in the following manner:

- There are 4 groups in each village. The three primary groups are separate collectives of men, women and children from the village. The first of these is the Self Help Groups or SHGs formed by women from the village. The SHGs meet regularly, save a mutually

agreed amount on a monthly basis, open bank accounts and enter into credit and loan functions within the group and with the bank and keep records of meetings and all transactions, like every other SHG. The second collective is the men's group which functions as a farmers club. It meets once a month and exchanges information on new techniques in agriculture-especially in the context of a flood prone area- and about government programmes and benefits. In fact it plays the role of a support group for the farmers in the area. And the third, and relatively unique group, is that of the children in the village. Each committee consists of 10 girls and 5 boys in the age group of 10- 14 from each village and have their representation in the Gram Punarwas evam Vikas Samiti (GPVS )as well as the RVPM. The basic purpose of the children's committee is to ensure their right to health, education overall development and safety and security. They are supported by the teachers from the local government schools. Like the other committees the children's committee too meet regular and discuss their issues.

- The Gram Punarwas and Vikas Samiti (GPVS), is set up at the village level and consists of representatives from all households who constitute the General Body. There is no membership fee and 15 members from the General Body are selected to form the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee has equal representation of men, women and even children (2 boys and 3 girls). The Committee may also include 5 invited members as advisors. These could be people with relevant knowledge and skills like the ANM, Gram Pradhan, School Teacher ASHA, etc. 3 representatives from each of the GPVS have come together to form the District level Rapti Vistapit Punarwas Manch (RVPM). There is also an intermediary block level committee.
- Finally, there is the River Basin level Rapti

Vistapit Punarwas Manch. Three representative-preferably one from each of farmer's club the SHG and the children's club- will be a representative in the RVMP and one of the three will be in the executive committee. The RVMP meets once every 3 months or more frequently if necessary. The goal of the Rapti Vistapit Punarwas Samiti is to ensure that the central government puts into place a National Policy on the rehabilitation of river displaced people and guarantees their right to life and livelihoods.

#### 4. Leadership, Organisational Culture and Values

While men participate in large numbers in the meetings of the RVMP, a few dominate, while others are primarily listeners. Similarly women and children too are not too vocal in the larger meetings although their participation in numbers is evident. However, meetings are held regularly and minutes maintained.

#### 5. Relationship of RVPM With PDT

RVPM's has been supported by PDT from its conception to its present day, primarily within the framework of the PACS programme. In these four years over 60 GPVS have been formed and are represented in the Block and District level committees. PDT's inputs have been in the form of mobilising communities and forming collectives, helping each collective to develop group norms and empowering them through information and trainings. Funding support is minimal and limited to covering expenses of travel, meetings and stationary. However, what is most critical is the constant handholding support provided by the staff and volunteers of PDT to facilitate RVPM to connect with the appropriate officials, follow the correct procedures for various forms of redressals and intervention related to land rights and ownership certificates, and accessing benefits from various schemes and programmes. What RVPM values most is the flow of information from PDT and the regular capacity building inputs provided.



## 6. Important Processes and Key Outcomes

PDT began bringing immediate relief and rehabilitation to the flood effected communities in the region. Subsequently, it realised that this was not enough and the effected households needs some long term solutions and these would not materialise in the absence of a concrete national policy and the recognition of the flood displaced people in the same manner as those displaced in the process of development and land acquisition. This goal informed PDT's strategy and focus on a community based process. Empowering through knowledge and information was the principal and Right to Information the key instrument used to facilitate the communities to access their rights.

Gram Panchayat Veerpur Lohiya in Block Jamunaha in Shrawasti illustrates how RVPM works. Veerpur Lohiya has been badly effected by the Rapti river and has forced the community to live along the road on the Bund .The village does not have adequate safe water facilities, sanitation or drainage; and only a part of the village has access to brick roads, the rest of them having been washed away in the floods. In terms of social infrastructure, although it has anganwadis and schools within the village these are ill equipped and inadequately staffed. The village consists of five hamlets with a total of around 350 households and is dominated by backward class communities.

River Rapti enters India through Jamunaha block and consequently all the settlements here along the river take the full blunt of its fury. Since 2002 the destruction caused by the river in this block and Veerpur Lohiya has been immense with large part of the land being eroded.

In 2014 when PDT began its intervention under the PACS programme in the district it gave priority to all those villages that had been badly affected by the floods. The process started with formation of collectives at the village and district level and sharing information through frequent and several group meetings. PDT together with the community groups undertook a detailed

study of the situation in the area and an analysis of possible solutions. The problems and possible solutions were then shared with the District level committee which then took the responsibility of sorting out the issues.

The issue of demarcation and issuance of ownership certificates on land that was salvaged from the floods was an area of concern. There were constant fights between the community members on ownership issues. The village level committee took the issue to the District level RVPM which in turn decided to seek help from the Tehsildar and the concerned officials of the Revenue Department. Thus the first round of meetings of all the community members in the presence of the Tehsildar, officials of the Revenue Department was held wherein detailed discussions and debates were held on the reclaimed land. The GVPS and the RVPM actively participated in the meetings and finally came to an understanding as a result around 75 households could identify and lay claim to their land and start cultivating it. Further, because of the mobilisation by the village and district level committees internal roads were constructed in the village under MGNREGA. The RVPM undertook similar processes and interventions in other effected villages.

Interestingly, RTI is used extensively to know the status and type of land and the RVPM believes that this was one of its biggest learnings. About 10-12 RTI had been filed at the time of the study and included cases related to land encroachment, non release of funds for approved schemes, demand for construction of drains to channel flood water effecting around 1000 acres of land across several GPs, compensation on land taken over for construction of Bunds. One of the members of RVPM is well versed in the process of RTI and is responsible for all applications. Before 2011 the communities were totally dependent on government intervention; however now they are aware of their status and rights and do not hesitate to question the authorities.

RVPM claims that although they have a long way to go, achievements so far have been relatively

encouraging in terms of land recovered and handed over to the rightful owner, provision of some basic facilities and services and access to schemes. The most major gain is that the community now has a voice and process to be heard by the authorities.

## 7. Sustainability of RVPM

The sustainability of RVPM is dependent on its ability and capacity to continue to fight for its rights for long term rehabilitation. A major step appears to be the issuance of a national policy and commensurate legislation. It would also perhaps require networking with similarly effected settlements and communities not only across the district but across all states and settlements effected by devastating foods and

land erosion. RVMP will sustain as long as it is able to involve more and more people and bring benefits to its members.

## 8. Future Plans of RVPM

PDT has informed RVPM about phasing out support from March 2016 and as a first step has handed over responsibilities of the livelihoods center to the Block level committee. PDT proposes to work with the Federation as a local partners in future projects. Meanwhile, RVPM's agenda is three fold- to support its members in laying claim to their land or getting compensation for the same, ensuring basic infrastructure and services in the effected settlements and striving to ensure the establishment of a policy statement that addresses the issues of those displaced by floods.

Case Study : CBO - BONDHU

CSO - CINI

Location : Murshidabad, West Bengal

*Theme : Health, Nutrition and Education*

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## 1. Background

The district of Murshidabad in West Bengal comprises of two distinct regions separated by the Bhagirathi River. To the west lies the “Rarh”, a high, undulating continuation of the Chota Nagpur plateau. The eastern portion, the “Bagri”, is a fertile, low-lying alluvial tract, part of the Ganges Delta. The district is drained by the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers and their tributaries. Bhagirathi is a branch of the Ganges, and flows southwards from Farakka barrage where it originates from the Ganges. The district has an international border with Bangladesh covering a distance of 125.35 km of which 42.35 km is on land and the remaining is riverine running along 11 blocks of the district. Murshidabad has 254 Gram Panchayats, 27 blocks, 5 Sub-divisions and 7 Municipalities.

According to the 2011 census<sup>1</sup> Murshidabad district has a population of 7,102,430. The district has a population density of 1,334 inhabitants per square kilometre. Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 21.09%. Murshidabad has a sex ratio of 958 females for every 1000 males (952 in 2001), and a literacy rate of 66.59% in 2011 compared to 54.35% in 2001. The child sex ratio (0-6 years) was 968 in 2011 compared to 972 in 2001. Male literacy in 2011 was 69.95

compared to 60.71 in 2001, while female literacy in 2011 was 63.09 compared to 47.63 in 2001. The child (0-6 years) population as a proportion of the total population was 14.27 in 2011 compared to 17.80% in 2001. The girl child (0-6 years) population was 14.34% compared to 17.99 in 2001. About 66.27% of the population is Muslim compared to 33.21% as Hindus.

The population is predominantly rural, making up about 80.28% of the total population. According to the 1991 census the Scheduled Caste population was about 13.4% while the population of Scheduled Tribes was 1.3%. A closer look at the socio-economic conditions of the district shows that the mean age of marriage for girls is 18.1 with 54.8% of girls getting married before 18 years of age. The mean age at first pregnancy is 18.1 years of age<sup>1</sup>, which suggests early marriage is followed closely by early childbirth. Murshidabad specifically has high rates of illiteracy (33%) that increases in case of women (37%).

A predominantly patriarchal society coupled with low levels of literacy and inadequate development infrastructure; reflect on the poor development indicators of the district. According to the HDR, 2004, the district ranks 14th out of nineteen districts in West Bengal.

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<sup>1</sup> "Murshidabad District : Census 2011 data". Census Organization of India. 2011.



West Bengal with a historical legacy of empowerment of the marginalised offers a complex context for exploring issues of biases and discrimination. The withdrawal of upper castes from agriculture, land reforms and other factors have reduced caste fault lines which are more apparent in some other states of India. Muslims as the largest minority group also do not appear to be pushed into the margins in the development discourse; however SECs in West Bengal and in the district of Murshidabad are not completely immune to the 'Intersecting inequalities' of caste, class and power. Socially ascribed stereotypes including those associated with gender lingers and local developmental deficits compound the problem leading to experiences of discrimination and exclusion. The 'haves' and 'have nots' in West Bengal and also in Murshidabad, do not necessarily follow the straight line delineations of caste, tribe, gender or religion and although implications of these identities exist and exclusions along these lines are real, these factors combine intricately with other factors such as unequal development and unequal opportunity to create situations leading to the experience of exclusion and discrimination. Low levels of literacy and lack of awareness also create opportunities for discrimination and exclusion.

Murshidabad was traditionally known for its silk, however cheaper factory spun silk from China has diminished the market share of Murshidabad silk, the bulk of the population is involved in agriculture related activities. A large “beedi” industry engages significant numbers of women and children who roll “beedis” at home. Employment is largely in the unorganized sector and family incomes are dependent on the participation of women and children in labour and in wage earnings.

The Community-Based Organisation (CBO) “Bondhu” is located in the Mukundabag Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad-Jiaganj block. The Mukundabag Gram Panchayat comprises mostly SC families both Hindus and Muslims, most of who are engaged in agriculture related activities.

Land holding is small and fragmented and families have to rely on as many sources of income they can get hold of, these include seasonal wage employment of men and women in neighbouring towns and districts of the state. Children often have to contribute to the household income and the brick kilns of Murshidabad employ a large number of children. Unlike other parts of the district which supplies the raw material and finished goods for a number of industries in the unorganized sector, people in the Mukundabag GP, have no such options and have to depend on their income from agriculture or migrate. The capacity of the Gram Panchayat is low and public services are inadequate and most Government welfare schemes have patchy implementation. Child marriages are common and the apparently unproductive role of women is characterised by high levels of domestic violence that the community is confronted with.

## 2. CSO and its Association with Community-Based Institutions.

Child In Need Institute (CINI) began its work in 1974 from two child health clinics for children in Kolkata in West Bengal, India. Since then, it has grown into a national non-government organisation (NGO) reaching approximately five million marginalised poor across the country. This journey has been driven by CINI's commitments to working with deprived children and their communities. Today, CINI is recognised as one of the pioneers in the field of community health. It has also been building its expertise in education and protection sectors as well. The organisation has sought to increasingly build in rights based and gender sensitive approaches in all its work. CINI's mission focuses on '*Sustainable development in health, nutrition, education and protection of child, adolescent and woman in need*'.

The organisation is involved in direct interventions with communities, providing institutional services, capacity building, documentation and research, networking and policy advocacy. It has received various national and international awards.

CINI emerged from a passionate interest in attempting to understand and combat child malnutrition among deprived communities, the initial experiences itself sowed the need for comprehensive, community based interventions. Over 35 years, CINI has grown organically by listening and responding to communities. This direct engagement has also helped CINI in remaining relevant.

The Key thematic areas of intervention by CINI are:

- Protection and education of vulnerable children and women through provision of grassroots level services and building their capacities to demand services from the Government agencies and public service provision where no or limited services are available
- Health care, nutrition and treatment of women and their malnourished children through linkages with the government and emergency service provisions for rural poor
- Reproductive and sexual health clinics for HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment
- Promotion and protection of the young people's [10-24 years] reproductive and sexual health Rights

CINI has been striving for social inclusion, gender empowerment and poverty elimination efforts with the government and communities that it serves. It addresses social exclusion from the perspectives of inequality, access and discrimination, which are largely the concomitant factors of social behaviors and structural systems. It addresses issues of discrimination and structural barriers of Muslim girls and women in education and economic rights, violence against children and women due cultural and social practices and discrimination of tribal's and scheduled castes in public health and nutrition care services in West Bengal and Jharkhand states.

CINI's interventions involve socially excluded communities, organized into children and

women groups representing in different forums. They-

- Act as peers and motivate community towards utilising services
- Generate awareness amongst SEC on rights and entitlements
- Plan, implement and monitor programmes and advocate through civil society networks

CINI has been working with the socially excluded groups in the district of Murshidabad for almost a decade and has implemented several projects such as the Community Health Care Management Initiative [with Panchayat & Rural Development, Government of West Bengal], 'Participatory communication for availing NRHM entitlements and services' [CHIN project], education and protection [with Save the Children Bal Raksha Bharat partnership].

The PACS project was an opportunity for CINI to continue its work with PRIs and SHGs who had partnered with CINI through its various projects including the Civil Society Support Programme, funded by DFID.

Through the PACS supported project "Stronger Voices of the Marginalised for Inclusive Development", CINI proposed to strengthen capacities of the socially excluded communities [SEC] in decision making and enable them to access quality education, health and nutrition [E,H&N] services contributing to achieving MDGs 2, 4 and 5.

The project sought to enhance negotiation and leadership skills of socially excluded communities to demand and access their legitimate citizen's rights of education, health and nutrition, to sensitise service providers [SPs] and Panchayats delivering non-discriminatory services, to strengthen institutions between the local self -government [LSG], service providers and socially excluded communities to improve service delivery system and to document and disseminate the learning for policy advocacy.

The project proposed the CWFC (Child and

Woman Friendly Community) approach. This approach targets three key players namely, Local Self Government i.e. PRIs, Service providers in health, nutrition and education, and the socially excluded community for improved demand of public welfare services designed for socially excluded communities and quality services with accountability, accessibility, availability and adaptability.

The CINI- PACS project has sought to bring SECs centre stage as owners of their development process while also investing in the capacities of civil society organizations particularly NGOs and CBOs for facilitating this change. The project strategised to train and empower, a total of 350 existing women's Self-Help Groups (across three districts) to collaborate with the Panchayat and the social service functionaries, to mobilize the community in setting in motion a people-centred movement in favour of achieving key human development goals.

The Self Help Group “Bondhu” is one such CBO, that CINI identified in the month of January, 2012 in the Mukundabag Gram Panchayat of the Murshidabad Jiaganj block, while implementing the PACS supported project in the district of Murshidabad.

### 3. History and Genesis of the CBO

The women of “Bablamona para” in the Madhushudan Bali Gram Sansad of Mukundabag Gram Panchayat, like their counterparts in most of rural West Bengal in the late 2000's, were a deprived lot. Mostly illiterate and early mothers, they spent their time and energy in supporting the many needs of the family. Apart from raising children, women had the responsibility to take care of all domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, fetching drinking water, collecting firewood etc. They were additionally required to tend to cattle and other livestock and contribute labour in the family's agricultural pursuits. Almost all women depended on their husbands for cash and often found that when required, the men simply refused or had no cash as they had either drunk it away or used it for

other purposes. Emergencies in the family often drove these women and their families to money lenders who charged exorbitantly. Being home bound these women suffered their economic deprivation in isolation.

With the launch of the Government of India's “Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana” or the SGSY, this condition began to change as women were encouraged to form small groups called Self Help Groups and engage in savings and thrift. The group savings and inter lending activities empowered these women significantly and allowed the groups to raise their voices against social issues which included domestic violence and other atrocities against women and children.

In early 2010, 14 women from Bablamona para, used the opportunity of the SGSY programme to register themselves as a SHG, called “BONDHU”. The group received training on how to manage their savings and inter lending activities and started to function as a relatively good SHG. The group members met regularly and over time the performance of the group was noticed by the office of the Gram Panchayat, who referred the SHG as a good group, when CINI came to Mukundabag Gram Panchayat in 2012, to implement the PACS project.

Since joining the implementation of the PACs project, the group has grown in stature and the members of the group are known and respected for their work to improve the lives of the 312 Scheduled Caste households in Madhushudan Bali Gram Sansad of Mukundabag Gram Panchayat. From their voiceless existence in isolation, these women have broken all stereotypes and find it easy today to meet the officials of the Gram Panchayat and the Block and district administration. Two members of the group confronted a state level minister at a state level conclave over issues regarding implementation of Government schemes in their district.

### 4. Organisation of the Collective

The group is registered as a SHG under the SGSY programme and has 14 members in the group.

Geeta Roy is the president of the group, while Anjali Roy and Sibaniroy are the treasurers, the other members of the group are Manju Roy, Maya Roy, Prabhati Roy, Anita Roy, Protima Roy, Lakhi Prasad Roy, Tara Rani Roy, Rumpa Roy, Nagari Roy, Arati Roy and Sumitra Roy. The members currently meet once every month.

## 5. Leadership and its Style.

The group structure is a democratic structure where all members have a say in the management and operation of the group and its activities. Geeta Roy, the President of the group is a soft spoken middle aged lady who commands a lot of respect both within and outside the group. All 14 members belong to the same community and have a strong bond among themselves and their identity as a group that does valuable work for their community.

Largely the leadership in the group is informal and collective. The President usually goes with whatever emerges through consensus among the group members. Her role is largely limited to putting down facts, adding her own knowledge about the issue on the matter and later working towards the implementation of the decision that has been taken collectively by the group.

## 6. Organisational Culture and Values

The group believes in the rights of women and children and the position of women as a change maker both within and outside the house. They strongly believe that their unity gives them the strength to tackle any issue, whether in regards to their entitlements or with regards to social ills such as domestic violence and the drinking habit of male members of the community.

The group members are a tightly knit ensemble and profess a value for honesty and co-existence. An example of their value system can be found in the group's intervention on the functioning of an Anganwadi Centre in their village. The group noticed that several Hindu mothers were not sending their children to the centre, purportedly because the Anganwadi helper was a Muslim woman. The group members met the Hindu

mothers and convinced them to send their children to the centre regularly. Muslim and Hindu children now share the same food in the Anganwadi centre.

The group currently meets once every month and all meetings are duly recorded. A drop- box has been put up by the group in a Sarva Shiksha Kendra (SSK), where members and non-members can slip in written complaints or issues that need the group's attention / intervention.

## 7. CBO's Relationship with CSO

The SHG called "BONDHU", was identified by CINI in 2012, during the implementation of the PACS project in the Mukundabag Gram Panchayat in the district of Murshidabad. Prior to its association with CINI, the group was primarily involved in savings and inter-lending between members. Within a few months of the group's operation, the members of the group began to earn the respect of the men in their families, the men saw women practicing saving instead of spending and also that the groups provided the opportunity to its members to take a cheap loan if required. Initial scepticism from the males who felt that women did not have any business outside the house and that meetings were a waste of time, soon changed in the families of the members of the group. This tacit support from their husbands, spurred the women to meet and talk more often. Through formal and informal meetings the members began to talk about their lives and their families. Issues of alcoholism and domestic violence spilled out from most members. They decided that they would take a stand and began protesting the drunken habits of their husbands. Group showdowns reduced instances of domestic violence and men took their drinking underground. It was around this time that CINI and the PACS project happened. CINI provided the group a direction and focus.

CINI has a long experience of working with women and children in groups and CINI found BONDHU to be very receptive. In the CWFC approach adopted in the PACS project, CINI played the role of a facilitator in the



implementation processes by providing technical inputs and capacity building support based on expertise gained over three decades of working with different communities in various set-ups. The organization facilitated the process whereby the key stakeholder's especially marginalised communities are actively engaged in decision making and implementation processes thereby ensuring a more protected and safe environment for themselves.

The association with CINI and the PACS project offered BONDHU the opportunity to channelize their energy and enthusiasm. The project focussed on health & nutrition, education and legal education, issues which the group recognised as key determinants in the communities desire to attain a better development status. The project gave BONDHU the platform from which the group could mobilise the conscience of their community to collectively address the issues of exclusion and inequality experienced by the community.

The group developed a fantastic working relationship with the Block Coordinator of CINI and this association helped the group to evolve from a collection of women to a group that voiced the issues and concerns of socially excluded communities and groups. By the end of the association in 2015, the group had achieved most of the objectives of the project and issues such as early marriage and domestic violence which were rampant earlier were all but unheard of. Schools and Anganwadi centres opened regularly and children's participation in early development and education was high, women were aware of the health and sexual health entitlements and availed institutional health care support, the drinking water and sanitation status has improved and life has become more bearable for the community compared to what it was five years back.

Following the closure of the PACS project, the association between BONDHU and CINI has reduced, however the erstwhile Block coordinator of CINI who lives close by, still continues his association although not as frequently as during

the project period.

## 8. Important Processes Related to the CBO

The intervention by CINI in Mukundabag GP was able to tap the strong but latent need of the community to be lead by strong pressure groups such as BONDHU. Amongst other SHGs, BONDHU has been able to establish itself as a very strong pressure group within the Mukundabag Gram Panchayat and has several other successes to its credit.

Some of these important processes include :

- CBO took up issues which are very close to the community

BONDHU, took up the issues relating to health, nutrition and education of the community and these coincidently were the felt needs of the community specially mothers and children. By highlighting how the community could improve their health, nutrition and education status, BONDHU received the trust of the community which in turn facilitated community participation. The participation favoured the achievement of results and by the end of the project period, the community was completely aware of their health, nutrition and educations rights and entitlements, and the corresponding service providers were providing non-discriminatory services.

- Regular engagement with the elected representatives and local administration.

It took the members of the group a while to interact with the elected representatives of their Gram Panchayat, however over time and with the support of CINI, these members became confident to engage with their elected representatives as well as officials from the block administration.

The group used the confidence to engage with elected representatives and officials to suggest improvements in the implementation of the rural sanitation programme. They also suggested how the drinking water situation could be improved by providing hand pumps in strategic locations.

These suggestions were appreciated by the office of the Gram Panchayat and in turn by the community.

- Support of CINI and other CBOs.

The CINI PACS project supported other CBOs in the project area and this not only provided the CBO the motivation to deliver more effectively on the mandate and expectations of their community, it also provided them a support structure to seek help and guidance from whenever they were confronted with an issue that they could not handle in their limited capacity. The project created opportunities where the CBOs and their members could meet frequently; these meetings generated familiarity and camaraderie. BONDHU was able to use the camaraderie of the informal association of various CBOs to tackle issues relating to child marriage and rising alcoholism. BONDHU led other CBOs to demand a total ban on the sale of liquor and even got the police to close down local breweries and retail outlets.

- Able leadership of the CBO.

Geeta Roy is the President of BONDHU, a stately lady in her forties, her calm demeanour and patient gaze belies the energy she carries within herself when it comes to work. The community particularly women and children usually listen to what elderly women in the house and community advise. Their experience is accepted and appreciated. Young women and girls are also most likely to live and learn from the experience of elder women. Geeta Roy and her team were appreciated for their experience and exuberance and this greatly facilitated community acceptance as well as the respect and recognition of the elected representatives and officials from the Gram Panchayat and Block development office.

- Strong inclusion focus of the CBO.

Since all the members of the CBO are women from a vulnerable community, there is an inclusive approach in the functioning of the CBO. This approach is reflected in their work to ensure that

all families get equitable access to development services. A case in point is the CBOs involvement in the rural sanitation programme. The list of beneficiaries under the sanitation programme was found to exclude certain families based on class and other exclusionary parameters. BONDHU convinced the Gram Panchayat to amend the list of their village and include all those without latrines in their homesteads to be eligible to receive the benefits under the national rural sanitation programme.

## 9. Key Outcomes and Impacts.

Some of the key outcomes and impacts are highlighted as follows:

- Women taking ownership of their development issues :

The PACS project supplemented the role of SHGs in the project area. SHGs which were principally engaged in savings and thrift found in the project a platform to express and work on their desire to improve the status of women and the community at large. With increased awareness and knowledge, the women gained in confidence and took ownership of the development issues confronting the community. The concerted effort of women to claim their rights and entitlements led to the achievements made by the community in terms of health, nutrition and education. The commitment and participation of women has led to reduced instances of child marriage and female drop-outs from school.

- Better implementation of development schemes :

The CBO received participatory planning skills from the CSO. A series of participatory tools were used by the CBO to map the existing resources of the community including identifying those who were the most vulnerable. The resource and vulnerability map was used by the CBO to present to the office of the Gram Panchayat, a plan to improve the drinking water status of the village along with infrastructure such as roads and other utilities. Families that had most difficulty in securing their drinking water were identified and

Water points installed in these locations before other locations identified by the elected representatives.

Increased health and hygiene awareness also prompted the CBO to take up the issue of sanitation with the office of the Gram Panchayat. The CBO mobilised communities to agree to pay the mandatory contribution required to obtain a latrine from the rural sanitation programme. The CBO has been successful to increase demand for sanitation and the coverage of latrines has risen substantially during the last two years.

Increased awareness and mobilization by the CBO has resulted in almost all families in their village, registering themselves with the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), from a situation where most were unaware of the scheme and its benefits and thus only a few had health insurance coverage. The CBO ran a local information centre called RSBY Sahayata Kendra providing referral services to RSBY affiliated hospitals and nursing homes.

- Importance of education.

Women and men in the community have realized the importance of educating their children and particularly the girl child. They have realized that their illiteracy is what prevents them from accessing their rights and entitlements as well as opportunities. Involvement of children and rigorous monitoring by members of the CBO to ensure that all children are in school have lead to increased emphasis on education and parents are more inclined to send their children to school and ensure their continued participation in education compared to earlier when very few children continued their education participation after middle school.

- CBOs as pressure groups :

The CBO was able to realize that it could not only create pressure with their service providers to receive their rights, it could advocate for the rights of other socially excluded groups through coalitions with other CBOs. The informal coalition of CBOs seeking rights and justice for

socially excluded groups provides the impetus for real change to take place. The voices of the excluded and vulnerable now have a chance to be heard as there are others who are willing to take up issues on their behalf.

## 10. Capacity Building Efforts by the CSO

CINI has been working for the poor and marginalised community for more than three decades and has the insight that the key to long - term change to address the issues of poverty and inequality is to build community partnerships that are child and woman centred and friendly, not just in terms of services but also where children and women are the main stakeholders and are empowered through knowing their rights and entitlements to participate in every aspect of the social development process. This is particularly important for disadvantaged population who have often been denied voices in the development processes and the resultant benefits.

These experiences and learning are the foundations on which the Child and Woman Friendly Community [CWFC] approach promoted by CINI is built on. This framework initiates and facilitates an innovative lateral thinking and integrated approach that works in synergy at critical periods in the life cycle of children, adolescents and women. Significant issues such as education, health, nutrition, gender, social, political and economic inclusion, and cultural practices are the foundation on which such an integrated programme is being built upon.

The basic objective is to enhance the knowledge and skills of SECs so that they can prioritize and work on their own issues and concerns in EHN in a more informed manner and more significantly, from a rights-based gender sensitive perspective. This will entail sensitization meetings, workshops, training and various other formal and non-formal interactions. Most activities undertaken by the project were therefore capacity development in nature. Some of the key highlights of the capacity building initiatives undertaken by

CINI are :

**Sensitisation events :** The CSO began the project implementation with sensitisation events directed at the sensitisation of Community based Organisations, Local Self Government and Service Providers on the rights and entitlements in the domains of education, health and nutrition of children and women, inclusion of socially excluded groups in decision making processes and the various schemes and services that could be availed by socially excluded groups.

**Formal Trainings :** In order to sensitize and orient socially excluded families to demand their rights and entitlements, CINI provided identified SHGs with training on Health, Nutrition and Education of children and women issues and the related rights and entitlements related to mother and child health, nutrition and education and on the process of prioritisation, planning, implementation and monitoring. Service providers in health, nutrition, education and PRI functionaries were involved in the training as resource persons. In the first year of intervention, this training was undertaken in two phases with two trainings in each phase. Refresher trainings were also conducted for the SHGs. These trainings provided the trainees with the skills and knowledge to undertake participatory need assessment using appreciative enquiry methods, analyse data gathered from need assessment and to set goals and objectives and to undertake participatory planning and monitoring.

Capacity building programmes were organised by trained SHGs for socially excluded communities on their rights and entitlements/ rights of health, education and nutrition. These trainings were helpful in minimising the gaps that exist between professional trainers and the indigenous community like language/ communication. Socially excluded communities got the SHGs as peers in their movement and a pool of trained human resources in Health, Nutrition and Education was created. Service Providers and resource persons for the themes provided training supports to the SHGs. Following the completion of training of the SHGs,

each SHG was required to organize subsequent training for 20 SE families. Two (2) trainings were held at each Gram Sansadin the first year of intervention.

**Representation of Socially Excluded communities in different forums and institutions :** Women self help group members as well as other excluded members were supported to become a member of any village level committees. Committees like the "Village health and nutrition committee, Village education committee and 'Gram Unnayan Samity'. Members received training and mentoring support on how to participate in the bi-annual 'Gram Sabha' in their villages and to prepare and present actionable plans. Members received training and mentoring support from CINI to participate in the last Saturday Meeting in Gram Panchayats, to present the need of the community before service providers and local decision maker's. Members were also supported to participate at higher levels like block and district level forums and institutions.

**Monthly meetings of the Gram Sansad level Steering Committees :** CINI facilitated the bi-monthly meetings of the Gram Sansad Steering Committees. This committee is responsible for implementation and monitoring scheduled activities to ensure fair system of delivery under national the National Rural Health Mission, Public Distribution System, Integrated Child Development Services, Sarva Sikhsha Mission and other government programmes.

*Capacity building of Children's groups and Children's Parliaments on the rights of health, nutrition and education, and planning exercises.* CINI also supported the formation of Children's associations such as children's group, children's club and Children's Parliament. Children's groups and children's clubs mostly focus on their rights to play. Representative children from these groups from each Gram Sansad are organised into Children's Parliaments. Every Gram Panchayat has a Children's Parliament. These groups received training and mentoring support to assist them to negotiate with their respective Gram Panchayats on their needs, rights and



entitlements.

### 11. Role of CSO in the Emergence of CBO as a Strong Institution

As mentioned earlier, BONDHU was a regular SHG engaged in savings and inter-lending till they were recommended as a good group by the office of the Gram Panchayat of Mukundabag to CINI in late 2011/ early 2012. The association with CINI and the PACS project has significantly impacted on BONDHU as an institution. In addition to fulfilling its obligation to its members to conduct savings and inter lending, the association provided BONDHU with the knowledge; skills, confidence and opportunity to not only voice the needs of the members it provided the opportunity to organize the voice of the socially excluded community as a whole and to make the voice heard. The increased capacity of the organization to mobilise communities to articulate their needs and to secure non-discriminatory services augers well for the CBO as well as for the community and relevant stakeholders. A strong CBO is an asset to any development planner and BONDHU is well placed to bring equity and equality to the SECs of Mukundabag Gram Panchayat.

### 12. External Opportunities and Constraints

District administrators are concerned that effective development schemes and policies are often mired in implementation problems and programme outcomes are increasingly difficult to achieve. A number of factors are responsible for this situation but principal among them is the lack of knowledge and awareness among the intended beneficiaries of these schemes and policies. By bringing intended beneficiaries and service providers on the same platform, implementation issues are reduced if not completely obliterated. Almost all government schemes and policies target community led or community centred implementation, however by their very nature and context, SECs are defined by lack of social cohesion and institutional capacity. CBOs such as SHGs, clubs etc. have the demonstrated potential to bring SECs together

and to capacitate them to demand and secure their rights and entitlements. The coalition of SE CBOs provides both hope and opportunity to realize the intended benefits of the national flagship programmes in particular the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). Both of these programmes give communities and community greater voices and roles in planning, implementation and monitoring. Currently, SHGs and CBOs have some implementation role such as in the Mid-day meal component of the SSM, sanitary mart component of the National Rural Sanitation Programme etc. The policy guidelines of the MGNREGS and NRLM provide SHGs and CBOs with a greater role and opportunity to participate not just in implementation but also in planning and monitoring. These provide opportunities for all SHGs and CBOs who wish to participate and lead their own development process as well as for their communities of origin. How and whether these CBOs are able to realize their potential and secure their participation in the development schemes is difficult to predict. It will depend on the leadership and vision of district and block level administrators and perhaps the support services of a CSO.

The biggest challenge to the involvement of communities in the development process is their demand to be involved in the planning process. Planning traditionally has always been a top-down affair with elected representatives and officials making all the decisions about who gets what and when, what gets built and by whom etc. Elected representatives and officials are reluctant to release their perverse control of this domain and are either upfront about their reluctance or pay lip service to community demands. But as is the case, unless communities themselves get involved in planning, implementing and monitoring their development, nothing much that is sustainable can be achieved. CSOs and CBOs will have to work together and continue to lobby and advocate for the rightful involvement of people particularly the SECs in planning, implementation and monitoring of government

schemes intended for them.

### 13. Sustainability of the CBO

The CBO is primarily an SHG that promotes savings and inter-lending. Loans are taken mostly to meet consumption expenses, to meet exigencies and in some cases to rent / lease land for agriculture. Social work requires commitments of time and travel which further require cash expenditures. In the absence of any income, family members are often forced to dissuade their women members from pursuing non- income generating activities. The members of BONDHU are in a situation where would like to continue to work for the larger community causes, however they are also confronted by issues of cash requirements, time away from family etc. Most members said that they would like to either engage in group or individual activities that could give them some earnings and some of the members had even partially completed a “tailoring” training provided by the block, but nothing eventually came out of these trainings. Members of BONDHU also expressed that while they found their work very satisfying and would do everything in their power to continue to work for the community, they would also like to contribute to their family income and not be seen as a liability.

Thus unless the members of the CBO find some way to earn, either through a group or individual activity, it is unlikely that the CBO would be able to function to their potential.

The office of the Gram Panchayat was conscious of this fact and were exploring ways how linkages with the NRLM could be made or with the unorganized sector dominated by household activities such as “beedi rolling”, “zari work”, “muri making” etc.

### 14. Future Plans of The CBO

The CBO intends to continue working as they had been doing during the PACs project, however their focus would be on ensuring that the drinking water situation in their village improves. Accessing drinking water particularly in the dry months is a serious issue as the ground water table drops significantly during the dry months owing to excessive use of ground water to irrigate and water their winter crops. The Gram Panchayat has a proposal to provide piped water to all residents and the CBO would like to see that the scheme is implemented at the earliest. The group would also like to focus on sanitation and ensure that all households have sanitary toilets at the earliest possible.

Activities such as monitoring children's participation in education, registration of pregnant women, institutional delivery and proper functioning of health and nutrition centres, referrals to RSBY affiliated centres will continue as would be continued vigils and education regarding the girl child and her rights to life and development.

Case Study : CBO - Rokaiya Common Interest Group  
CSO - Nari O Shishu Kalyan Kendra (NOSKK)  
Location : Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal

*Theme : Health, Education, MGNREGA*

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### 1. Context

Human development situations in Uttar Dinajpur are, strongly influenced by demographic attributes, including high population growth, high rural dispersal of the population and high rates of migration. The district comprises two subdivisions: Raiganj and Islampur. Islampur subdivision consists of Islampur and Dalkhola municipalities and five community development blocks: Chopra, Goalpokhar I, Goalpokhar II, Islampur and Karandighi.

Islampur, a City in Islampur Block in Uttar Dinajpur District of the state of West Bengal, It belongs to Jalpaiguri Division. It is located 82 KMS towards North from the District head quarters Raiganj also is a Block head quarter. The case study conducts at Goalpokhar I, at Dhantola GP. As per 2011 Census of India Goalpokhar I Block had a total population of 326120 in rural among which 52% are males and 48% are females. Scheduled Castes 14% and Scheduled Tribes 4% and 80% are from Minority Community and rest of them from General Caste. The educational conditions of both Muslim and non-Muslim households the level of illiteracy among Muslim households is very low. Who are deemed literate, the percentage of below primary educated male is 21.72% and female 20.77% and the percentage steadily dwindles as one goes higher up till the

secondary level (Male 3.43% and Female 1.95%). The situation is not appreciably better for non-Muslim households, where literacy level is almost similar, and secondary school going 18 % for male is 6.25 and female, 2.61. Very few among them who could continue to the highest possible level of graduation those who stayed onto the higher secondary level also continued till graduation and at that point the disparity across Muslim and non-Muslim households almost vanishes as does the gender gap across religions.

Agriculture is the major source of livelihood for both the communities, either as cultivator or as landless agricultural laborers. However, across communities there is very little female participation in work although there is a sizable share in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities who do not classify as either in full time or casual jobs or purely engaged in household maintenance. Given the fact that major source of occupation is agriculture it only reflects disguised unemployment in agriculture leading to effectively low productivity. The share of long term migrant workers is quite sizable and major proportion from both Muslims and non-Muslims go to towns of other states for work. People are more dependent on government health centres or hospitals for accessing health facilities. However, both the communities also go to the quacks. Generally, sub-PHCs are available



within respective panchayats. The consequence of this inaccessibility is strongly reflected in the high average incidence of childbirth at home (88.16% of Muslim households and 70.21% of non-Muslim households) with the aid of trained and largely untrained midwives. Most of the public hospitals are not located in close proximities, and hardly any is located in the neighborhood of the village or even within the Panchayat. There is hardly any ambulance available for pregnant women to take them to hospitals; people mainly depend upon rented cars.

NOSKK was established in 1979. It was initiated by a group of young women professionals, who were convinced that a sustainable livelihood for the poor and marginalized women is one of the keys for women's empowerment. The devastating flood of 1978 and its traumatic aftermath triggered these young women to organize themselves and initiate the Nari O Sishu Kalyan Kendra. It was formed in order to immediately respond to the flood victims and with a larger dream of overcoming the economic poverty through livelihood options. NOSKK is a voluntary organization, working primarily with women, adolescent girls and children. The motto of this organization is to build up peaceful society. NOSKK is registered under the Societies Registration act of West Bengal. With a aim to reduce the gap in the well being status of the socially excluded groups with the rest of the population, The aspiration of Nari-O-Sishu Kalyan Kendra is for a self-reliant society, based on human values like cooperation, participation, justice, respect and love. It would be a society where people will participate in a decentralized political process, where the economy will be based on localized production and consumption, the environment will be free from pollution and exploitation, and where the people will survive with their own indigenous socio-cultural identity. The envisioned society will be free from the forces of patriarchy and will be more peaceful and harmonious.

## 2. NOSKK and its Association with Community-Based Institutions

The Nari-O-Sishu Kalyan Kendra strives to

unfold the downtrodden, marginalized people and to make them self-reliant with particular emphasis on the socio-economic, political and culturally vulnerable groups, like women and children towards attaining the envisioned sustainable society. NOSKK has a wide-ranging experience in rights based approach of promoting livelihoods within the rural poor, through; Formation of community institution for the excluded groups. Political, social and economic awareness, Promoting participation in local governance, Meaningful partnership between the Civil Society and the Government for ensuring accountability. NOSKK has been working to promote women from marginalized community. The organization has worked on women empowerment to promote livelihood and to build up right based collectives. Since its beginning the CSO was an association of women's collective largely promote right based approach to address developmental challenges faced by the community. Under PACS program the organized works in Uttar Dinajpur district and formed several CBOs. NOSKK works as a catalyst with the support of PACS to address the vulnerable status of socially excluded group like Muslim women and focuses on capacity building of the beneficiaries, that they can entitled to opportunity without any discrimination within the framework of government policies. The women Common Interest Group (CIGs) has been formed which includes 3144 no of CIG having 38374 members, is responsible for generating awareness about the discriminations facing by women from the minority and socially excluded community.

## 3. History and Genesis of Rokaiya Common Interest Group

The Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Program works with socially excluded groups in India to help them claim their rights and entitlements and aims to reduce the gap in well being status between socially excluded people and the rest of the population. Under the theme of PACKS, NOSKK has taken their initiative to raise the situation of socially excluded group, mainly Muslims and women who are in a constant

deprived situation for ages. This is a five year programme (2011 to 2015). It focuses on the areas of Livelihood (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), Health (Janani Suraksha Yojna & Rastriya Suraksha Bima Yojna), Education (Drop out & Mid Day Meal). As a part of program strategy community level CBO formed and strengthened to take up the issues of women forward. So that these CBOs can able to recognize, unite, and mobilize other women from Muslim, SC community to raise their own voices. The project ensures that the excluded communities are participants in their own development and are involved in the decision making processes. One of the major steps towards the fulfillment of the objective is the formation of a strong Community Based Organization which will lead the whole process.

Rokaiya Community Interest Group formed at Dhantala of Goalpokhr GP of Islampur block. Dhantala is Muslim dominated village. The village Dhantala constituted with a population of 5796 among which 79% are from Muslim community and 21% are from SC community, rest of them are from General Caste. The major livelihood sources are Agriculture and income from Migration.

The CSO started its intervention in Dhantala GP under PACS program. Rokaiya CIG is a group of adolescent girls from Muslim community formed under this program. The demand of such collective is high in the community. Muslim women are lagging behind from the benefit of basic services. The CBO formed with due focus on right based activities. The CBO witnessed various successful achievements. Presently the CSO is planning to federate at block level, members will raise their issue at village level and the federate will be operate at block level.

#### 4. Organisation of the Collective

NOSKK formed CBO to create a collective and to create a platform where women from marginalized community can raise their voice for their rights and entitlements. It is very rare in Muslim women who unite and demand for their

rights. Muslim woman's started coming out and sit together and plan and participate in village development plan.

The group is formed with 10 adolescent girls. The group is formed with an objective of collective action against all forms of women oppressions, empowerment through self initiate. The president and secretary of the CBO are elected by the members. 2-3 meetings are organized in every month. The president is mainly responsible for conducting meetings and led the group activities. The NOSKK workforces are very attached with the CBO and provide all the necessary support to them. NOSKK staffs are also participating in their regular meeting. Theme based training on various issues like RSBY, Micro Planning, RTI, MNREGA ACT are provided to the members.

#### 5. Leadership and its Style

Women from Muslim community realised that they are far away from development. They have realized that they are not getting the benefit of government running programs and fear of engaging with government functionaries. They have their own Job cards under MNREGA schemes but they didn't get 100 days job.

Ms. Ruksar Begam, 28 years and Bilkis Khatun, 21 years chosen as the president and Secretary of Rokaiya Common Interest Group. The executive members of the group had chosen them because of their education, pro-activeness, knowledge and outgoing personalities. Both of them visited government functionaries and also participated in lots of capacity building programs. They have the quality to share and explain the issues of Muslim women in their village to any external persons. They fight for 100 days of work for women. By their leadership their group has been recognized at block level and now women raise their voice to get jobs.

Since the formation of the group the leadership has not been changed. The members shared that they have a belief on their leadership and they want to continue their present leaders. The leadership style is very informal in nature.

Though they have leaders there is no a written bylaw or group structure. It shows that it is focused on taking up issues and the internal structuring is still not taking into consideration. The president and Secretary played a crucial role to shape up the collective process. They have the responsibilities to call up the meetings and lead the group process. The group have very committed and energetic members, they hoped to get recognition at district level and start some IGP programs for income. Group secretary has been chosen as block level Social Audit volunteer under MNREGA schemes.

## 6. Organisational Culture and Values

The group has formed with a very clear vision to help minority women. Specially engaged women form minority communities with MNREGA programs and also implementation of government running program, so that reach out to the program can increase. The group members are from same community with equal socio economic background. The CIG have a very clear mission to help minority community for their basic rights and entitlements. Every month 2 meetings are organize by the members and need based emergency meetings also been organized. The group have a very strong bond with each other and have faith on their group leadership. After achieved success from MNREGA they came to know the power of collective effort. Among the members a common practice is follow to share information or learning with each others.

## 7. Rokaiya CIG Relationship with NOSKK

There is a regular engagement with CSO and CBO. As a part of organization strategy at community level women from marginalized communities collectives are formed with a focus on right based approach. The collectives are formed with only women from Muslim community, who have the same issues. The CSO make capable the CBO to mobilize other women from same community and to raise the community voice for their rights and entitlements. The CSO has formed a block level federation to give a larger vision of the CBO.

## 8. Important Processes Related to the CBO

The interventions of NOSKK in Islampur block has bring changes among Muslim women of the village. The group has achieved a lot of success throughout their journey.

Some of the process as follows;

- Value of Women Empowerment

After formation of the CBO, the community came to know that the nature of work of the CBO is to support women to get work under MNREGA. If the CBO don't have a strong proactive leaders who can take up the challenges and run the group function smoothly it will lack its group stability.

- Establish network with External Agencies

The action which is running by the CBO is right based. Regular contact with PRI members and other external agencies is maintained. They are closely worked with PRI members on MNREGA, mid day meal, RSBY and other government running programs.

- Monitoring of Quality Food and Education system

The CBO checked the quality of food provided under Mid Day meal program. Before their intervention the schools provided only Khichdi in daily menu and the quality is very low. After discussed the issues at group meeting, collectively they visited government schools to check the quality. There they quarries about the menu to School teachers and gave pressure to them to follow the government menu. They pressurised the schools to provide menu based food with 3 days egg and increase the quality of the food. They are keeping follow up of the schools and ensure the quality of food.

- Mobilize for Institutional Delivery and Linkage with Health Scheme

The CBO mobilized women from Muslim community for institutional delivery. Before their intervention women have myth that institutional delivery is not good for child birth and mother health. They belief that it will reduce the child

birth ratio, the CBO here play a crucial role here. They mobilized community women and act as change maker in community to change their perception and to get safe and proper delivery process at institutional level. Gradually the community adopt practice and now they follow the same.

- Stop the Social ill practice

In Muslim community there is high in practice of Child Marriage and school dropout. CBO have intervened to stop Child marriage and promote girls for higher education. Successfully they reduce the practice and promote adolescent for education.

## 9. Key Outcomes and Impacts

Over the 5 years of the CBO process has resulted in momentous achievements. Some achievements are as follows;

- MGNREGS, it is a process that enables Government to assess and demonstrate it's social, economic and environmental benefits and limitations of the various stakeholders directly or indirectly related to the relevant schemes. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) which helps the poor families in rural areas to access work opportunity without any discrimination and ensure the rights of fair wages. In 2014 the collective organized a campaign, in which 300 women from Muslim community demanded for work under MNREGA scheme. Before NOSKK though the members have their Job cards but it was kept with ward members. When women from Muslim community went to demand for 100 days work it was big challenge for them. Community was against of that because of religion barrier. But the CBO fights for that and finally they got work. The income help them a lot to meet out their daily needs like education, health issues, agriculture etc. Having learnt the collective strength to raise voice for demanding work and any other issues like mid day meal

menu, RSBY registration etc collective is now much more committed and strongly motivated. The CBO monitoring for quality food under Mid Day Meal program. It was shared that the schools provided very low quality food and repeat the same food every day. The members quarry the responsible authority for this. After their intervention the food quality improved and the menu also changed.

- Muslim women have come out from their house and take the role of community change agent. CBO has started organizing open village level meetings and raised the women issues in forum. Throught this meeting they discussed about village development plan giving priority of women issues and submit their agenda at Panchayats. They demanded women friendly hospitals with all facilities with all basic facilities and availability of women doctors; they also have demanded for 24 hours Ambulance services at Goalpokhar-1 block. After their effort the area has got the Ambulance services.
- The CBO works to stop child marriage in their community. Early marriage among Muslim community is in practice. After PACs and NOSKK intervention in Islampur block, child marriage is reduced. The member fights for this and they are witness to stop such practices in their community.
- They promote institutional delivery and mobilize women for that. They demand for Mobile ambulance facility at their village. As the area lacking the proper health care services.
- Some members from CBO selected as Social Audit volunteers. They got the chance to do monitoring of MNREGA implementation works.

## 10. Capacity Building Efforts By The Cso

Capacity building for group strengthening is in project strategy. Under PACS program various



capacity building programs organized for office bearers and group members. NOSKK has organized training on RTI, MNREGA, ICDS- schemes, JSY, RSBY Mitra, leadership development etc. Besides theme based training the group has participated in exposure visit to get a handholding experience on group strengthening process. At very beginning the training was organized on office bearer's roles and responsibilities, PRI structure, village development plan etc.

Training was organized at village level as well as district level run by CSO including workshops/seminars, campaign on demanding work under MNREGA, Right to Information. To create awareness among members and other non group members various IEC materials developed.

### 11. Role Of CSO in the Emergence of CBO as a Strong Institution

The CSO, Nari O Shishu Kalyan Kendra formed the group with the name of Rokaiya Common Interest Group under PACs program. The group is totally right based group. They have an understanding the power of unity to achieve any goal. The CSO provided some theme based training for group strengthening and knowledge information sharing on government running schemes, RTI, Social audit on NREGA, RTE, RSBY Mitra and Domestic violence. Beside this some exposure also conducted at district level on government department activities. They have the exposure to block office to raise their voice.

NOSKK worked to strengthen the CBO and create opportunities to for growing. The CSO workforces giving technical inputs at their regular meeting and also providing to support for any documentations or to establish network with external agencies.

### 12. External Opportunities and Constraints

Several opportunities and challenges are there. Some of the key achievements are as follows;

#### Opportunities

- The group members are very energetic and

committed for the group. The group leaders are proactive and want to take the group forward. They are capable and informative with the process of MNREGA implementation.

- The members are capable with the issue of RTI, MNREGA, and PDS etc for which they can be use as resource person for other CBOs.
- The CBO conduct its regular meeting. The members are quite confident and good recognition in community. Community people visits group and ask for help if they need.

#### Threats/Limitations

- The CBO presently working as pressure group in community and help other women from community to get 100 days work guarantee under MNREGA schemes. Such successful efforts, give pressure to PRI members. PRI members sometimes go against of them and threaten them to stop such CBOs.
- Still now the group work as pressure group, they don't have any savings in group. They bear all the expense if required to advocate on any issues, this cannot be run longer. Continuous information flow is required to make the group proactive.
- The group is not well adept to handle or run the group independently. Lots of information like RTI application process, PDS, PRI structure information is lacking in the CBO.
- The CBO don't have any written norms and regulation, this can be emerge by continuous group process. There is need to document the norms, to give a formal structure.

### 13. Sustainability of the CBO

The project ensures that the excluded communities are participants in their own

development and are included in the decision making processes. One of the major steps towards the fulfillment of the objective is the formation of a strong community organization which will lead the whole process. In Islampur block the CSO (NOSKK) has formed CBOs under PACs program. After withdrawal of the Project, sustaining of the CBOs will be difficult. After forming of the CBOs and provided continuous handholding support the CBO is come into action taking position. A block level federation is also been formed but it is in under process to complete its legalities. The leaders and the members still needed lots of handholding support. Muslim women take longer time to come out and to works as community leaders or change agents. Now the group came to a stage, where they are ready to take some action for community. Here they need more support for future.

#### 14. Future Plans of the CBO

- Completion of federation registration process, which is still in under process.
- Explore and start IGA activities and link the group with government running program.
- The group is planning to start savings to meet out their day to day needs and with the collective money wants to start group activity.
- The group is in a stage to taking some action; still they need handholding support from CSO. In this stage they want to have more training and knowledge on government running program implementation.
- Formation of block level federation of CBOs. Creating second line leadership opportunities.

Case Study : CBO - Balia Adiwasi Swanirbhar Dal

CSO - Shripur Mahila O Khadi Unnayan Samity (SMOKUS)

Location : Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal

*Theme : MGNREGA , Health and Nutrition*

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## 1. Background

The District Uttar Dinajpur came into existence on 1st April, 1992 after the bifurcation of erstwhile West Dinajpur District. Human development situations in Uttar Dinajpur are, therefore, strongly influenced by demographic attributes, including high population growth, high rural dispersal of the population and high rates of migration. The districts of Uttar Dinajpur as Muslim minority district with 47.36% Muslim population and religion. The district comprises two subdivisions: Raiganj and Islampur. Raiganj is the district headquarters, is far off from Kolkata, the state capital and is not well connected by road and railways. In fact until very recently there was no rail services, it is only since 10 years that district has got connected through railways via Malda. It is via roadways that the district is connected with the rest of West Bengal or other parts of the country. Raiganj (Community development block) consists of with 14 Gram Panchayats and two census towns: Nachhratpur Katabari and Kasba. As per 2011 Census of India Raiganj Block had a total population of 414143 in rural among which 51% are males and 49% are females, 39% Scheduled Castes and 7% Scheduled Tribes and 50% are from Minority Community and rest of them from General and other Caste.

Balia village is comes under Bindol Gram

Panchayat. The major population of the village is constituted with minority community. Near about 96% of the population comes from SC, ST and Muslim community. They are lagging behind from government schemes.

Balia, a small village located at Bindol Gram Panchyat of Raiganj Block in Uttar Dinajpur District. The village has 705 households that cater 3156 population in total, (65.74%), ST (5.54%) and Muslim (21.31%) belong to 'Socially Excluded Groups' i.e., SEG Population (SC, ST, Muslim, PWD and Women of Others). The village has a considerable proportion of tribes (Santhals) along with Muslims and SC population. The educational status of the GP is average. There are 17 primary schools in GP, 2 Madhyamik Shiksha Kendra, 8 Shishu Shiksha Kendra, 1 Madarsa and 1 higher Secondary School. The literacy level of the GP is only 61%. The crop pattern of the area is paddy, jute, mustard, wheat and vegetables. Lots of rice mills are in this area. Industrial presence is almost negligible in North Dinajpur district. Some industries are found in South Dinajpur district. Land holding pattern among tribal is very low. Those who have land but the size is very low. The income from migration is not enough to run the family expense. So, when male person migrated to other places women are working at local level as wage labour. Subsistence agriculture and limited livelihood options show



that the high dependency of the village is on wage labour (MGNREGA) or migration income. The income from MGNREGA helps them to meet out the expense of child education, daily need and others.

Though the village is very close to district head quarters but still it's not enjoying good health facility. People are more dependent on government health centers or hospitals for accessing health facilities. But due to ignorance of government on health facilities the 24 hrs availability of doctor is very poor, lack of female doctor and Ambulance facility. People are visit quacks to get health services. Most of the public hospitals are not located in close proximity, and hardly any one is located in the neighborhood of the village or even within the Panchayat.

The Shripur Mahila-O-Khadi Unnayan Samity (SMOKUS) established as a women's organization in 1990. Its management body comprises of all female members and the program team had a balance of both women and man. SMOKUS got the registration from the Society Registration Act in 1994. Since inception, its focus has been on women empowerment and child protection. In 1994, Mother and Child health program activities started in few villages, spread across in three Gram Panchayats of two blocks in the Uttar Dinajpur district. Since 2003, the work focus has been children and women's right based. Prevention and protest against women trafficking, child labor, women & child domestic violence and abuse was taken in an organized way in several areas. Also, awareness programs on NREGA started, with a focus on eligibility to get work for women. With these ideal setups, SMOKUS has taken up the task of demolishing any political or socio-economic obstacle posed by individuals, groups, or ideological machineries that finds itself in the way to the achievement of all round development to the underprivileged communities they represent. Under PACS program the CSO is working with 421 CBOs among which 40 CBOs are formed in Bindol GP.

## 2. SMOKUS and its Association with Community-Based Institutions

SMOKUS envisions a society of developing humanity, sustainable economic prosperity and strengthened governance, where there is mutual respect among individuals regardless of age, gender or sexual orientation, economic status, religion, political affiliation, ethnic and cultural background, and educational attainment. A society should be where there is no marginalization and exploitation of women and children and where women can freely come out in the society by their endeavor and indigenous knowledge to achieve all round development. SMOKUS is working with a vision a dynamic civil society influencing policies and actions at all levels to safeguard the global environment and promote sustainable development. It's in their mission to build up a cadre of socially conscious youth in the field of community development through capacity building, mainstreaming and strengthen civil society partnership by enhancing participation, contributing to policy formulation and stimulating action. SMOKUS is committed to work for marginalized section of the community. CBO formation is in its work strategy so that the community can fight for their own rights and entitlements, who can overcome the social barriers and able to identify livelihood opportunities. Since the initial work of the organization was focused on women collective formation to promote collective action. The CBO Balia Adiwasi Swanirbhar Dal formed under the guidance of SMOKUS. The CSO provide all support to nurture the CBO and make it a strong CBO.

## 3. History and Genesis of the CBO

Balia village comes under Bindol Gram Panchayat of Raiganj block of Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal. The residents of the village are mostly from backward classes SC (65.74%), ST (5.54%) and Muslim (21.31%). The illiterate Tribal women of Balia Village of Bindol GP used to earn their bread working as day-labours in the agricultural sector. They came to

know about the usefulness of Group Formation from the PACS Workforce of SMOKUS. SMOKUS has its presents in that area previously and it was seen that these members were participated their orientation meetings, interface meetings and campaigns. Later these members expressed to form a separate group which will bring changes in their life and they can be benefited from the group. SMOKUS contacted individually to get a background, earning pattern, education etc of these members. The information made them interested as they found a better way of living while working as a group. Consequently, facilitated by the SMOKUS they came together in a common forum and decided to form an SHG with 13 members.

Over the period of the time the CBO emerged slowly. The main livelihood sources of the community are depending on agriculture and migration income. The land holding pattern by each family is also very low, so for better income male person migrated to another cities and state for bread earning. Women stays at home and they work as agriculture labor in village or use the tradition of share cropping. The purpose of the CBO formation was micro saving, better life opportunities and to create safe migration awareness. Being a member from ST community they feel themselves aloof from developmental agendas. The program brought them opportunities to get 100 days work guarantee under MNREGA and access to basic services. SMOKUS has experienced in its each activities/programs that collective formation is a quick action taking process for any issues and make the target group self motivated. During CBO formations they have acquired experience to demand for work and access to basic services and also intervene to reduce social stigma like witchcraft, child marriage etc. The basic criterion of the group formation was common social cultural and economic background. Balia Adiwasi Swanirbhar Samity is going to be part of block level federation with the name of PRATAYA.

Before PACs intervention the members had their

job card but they didn't get any job and the card was kept with PRI members. After joining with SMOKUS they fight for that and get back their Card and got 100 days works under MNREGA. The income help them to meet out education expense, agriculture purpose etc. This success help them to fight for another issues too like mid day meal quality check, migration awareness program, stop child marriages, regularity of Aganwadi Services etc.

#### 4. Organisation of the Collective

A strong need or demand for works under MNREGA arose from the community. The member's demands to get 100 days work under MNREGA. The development activities of SMOKUS are spread over 17 GPs (100 Villages) in 3 blocks of Uttar Dinajpur district, as Raiganj block (6 GPs), Kaliagunj block (5GPs) and Itahar block (5 GPs). The PACs program spread out in 100 villages of Raiganj block. The purpose to form such CBO is to reduction of the socio-economic gap between socially excluded communities, particularly the Santhal tribal community and the general population through non discriminatory access to livelihood, health and nutrition by bringing into a sustainable, participatory and inclusive process.

The group formed with 13 women from Santhal community with common interest and need. The President and Secretary of the group elected by the members, the leaders are responsible to call the meetings and will communicate with outsiders. They have monthly meetings which are normally attended by all its members. The meeting usually is conducted at common place of village as per convenience of the members. The monthly savings of members in the group is Rs.50/-. The money is used to rotate loan among members for education, agriculture need, need for migration expense and very little for enterprise purpose. The CBO maintain their records, to document their daily minutes or saving and loan register they depend on CSO or any other literate person from village. Though the group have their president and secretary but the

members shared the group responsibilities among them. The issues are identified based on emerging challenges. Sometimes, SMOKUS team facilitate the process if there is any requirement. The office bearers are selected on the basis of their proactiveness and leadership qualities.

## 5. Leadership and its Style

The community comprehend that before SMOKUS they were not able to get benefit of government running program. After forming the group when it come to chose a group leader they given priority on basic parameters as outgoing personalities, knowledgeable, able to present outsiders and confident members.

The group leader has been chosen by members. Since forming of the group the leadership has not been changed. They belief on their leadership and they want to continue their present leaders. The membership size of the group is 13. It was very interesting to find that the group has not any formal structure, not any formal bylaws. It shows that it is focus is on taking up issues and the internal structuring is not still taking into consideration. The group leader Ms. Suddi Maddi and Fulmoni Hembrom is quite capable to run or to lead the group. The executive members of the CBO have chosen them on the basis of their knowledge and activeness. They have visited and get the exposure of various government departments. Since the group formed, leadership is not rotated. The members have strong belief on their present leaders. The leadership nature is informal type. As the group has no any written bylaws they want to take some more times for emerge the group norms by group process itself.

## 6. Organisational Culture and Values

The group has good unity with each others. To take any decision they always focus on group participation. The group interest is largely common and the decision making process is democratic in nature. The Santhals of Balia village is very much depending on MNREGA and income from migration. Land holding pattern among them is very low, some of them also doing

share cropping. Male person of the family migrated to other places and women are responsible to look after the families at source end. To meet out the daily needs or expense women works in MGNREGA.

The CBO constituting with homogeneous in nature, the need and interest of the CBO is common in nature. The CBO have clear understanding about the group purpose and interest. The purpose of the CBO is primarily to support tribal poor women for livelihood security and secure rights and entitlements. They also support SC and OBC who are in need. The CBO organized their monthly meeting twice, one day is specially for saving purpose and another is to discuss on social issues and to prepare developmental plans. In their monthly meetings all members present and share their issues. They have very close bonding with each other.

## 7. CBO's Relationship with CSO

One of the core strategies of the CSO is forming collective for collective action. Since 25 years SMOKUS is experienced that by forming collectives bring necessary development changes in community. The community understand the power of collective action. CSO is proving necessary support in terms of group formation, capacity building support, information dissemination on RTI, Social Audit and RTI. CBO members are dependent on CSO for its future strengthening.

## 8. Important Processes Related to the CBO

SMOKUS intervention for tribal community at Balia village under PACS program has done a notable works. The CBO has achieved lots achievements throughout its intervention;

- a. For ensuring the livelihood rights in MGNREGA, Balia Adiwasi Swanirbhar Dal, on 2014 leads a "Fortnight"-long MGNREGA Campaign, on the day of World Woman's Day in Bindol GP. The members started demanding for jobs from the Panchayat and started filling up Format 4 (a) on regular basis. During this campaign

the SHG members motivated the community women and mobilized them to raise their voices to access livelihood under MGNREGA. As a result, 419 community women filled in Format 4 (a) to apply for a job in MGNREGA.

- b. The SHG took active part during IPPE I and led the Planning Process Exercise. The members of the CBO actively participated in the process, which help the CBO more confident. It has been acknowledged and appreciated by the Dist Authority later on.
- c. Balia Adiwasi Swanirbhar Dal emerged as a strong CBO in their village. Various developmental schemes like MGNREGA, RTI, and RSBY etc discussed in meetings. The members are oriented on thematic issues which helps them for their capacity building. The member's works as resource pool for SMOKUS. They disseminate the information related with safe migration and help migrants to get registered at village level records and also get migrant help card.
- d. Apart from the MGNREGA, the SHG Members individually started piggery in a small scale but they are planning for a large scale group venture in near future.
- e. In addition, the members have started cultivating Kitchen Gardens and planning for a large scale gardening by hiring a piece of land in a group-based approach. Share crops are started to start IGP activities among group. The group savings is taking as loan to continue such activities.
- f. Regular contact with PRI members and other external agencies is maintained by the CBO. Such contact helps the members to bring developmental schemes for their village development.

## 9. Key Outcomes and Impacts

Before SMOKUS intervention through PACS program, none of the members can even sign respective initials. The PACS workforce taught

them and provided them with the basic knowledge of literacy; as a result they started signing instead of thumb impression. The formation of SHG had been followed up by the Orientation/Strengthening/Capacity Building of CBOs on a clan of issues. As soon as they got aware on the Livelihood and Health-Nutrition Rights, they felt the urge to access the services. They came to know about the social exclusion and started identifying the discrimination. Equipped by the information the group gradually became proactive and has shown the following outcomes during the phase:

- The SHG has been monitoring the nearby Free Primary School, Madhyamik Shiksha Kendra and Anganwadi Centre for last couple of years to measure quality of the services. For Schools, the SHG monitors the quality and quantity of the Mid Day Meals and shares the status with School Management and PRI. Before their intervention or monitoring it was found that the food quality is very low and the menu is repeated daily. The schools are not following the menu decided by government departments. After raised the issue in group, the members decided to monitor schools and take action on it. They visited the schools and checked the quality, which was not satisfied. They discussed the matter with PRI and SMC and did continuous follow up with SMC and PRI, food quality has been improved and teachers also get accountable for this. The CBO regularly visited schools for to ensure the quality.
- The SHG has been playing a crucial role in re-admitting the school drop-outs in age appropriate classes. This indeed has played a role in decreasing numbers of drop-outs in the community of the area, especially in the Tribal Sections.
- The SHG is acting as one of the pioneer CBOs that show stubborn resistance against the curse of "Witch Hunting". They share the example; a Non CBO member came to the group for help as the



community harassed her for Witch Hunting. She was beaten and threatens from family and community. The CBO member contact local PRI Member and somehow managed to rescue the victim and her children from the hand of the fuming pack of cruel people. The victim who was senseless with a severe injury in head has been admitted to the hospital while the children have been kept in safe custody. The CBO spontaneously informed the Raiganj Police Station and after that FIR has been lodged. Police has immediately arrested all the accused and produced them to the Court for proper punishment. The CBO and the Police jointly took the victim and her children to their home and rehabilitated them with the help of the Panchayat. An interface meeting has been organised in the village by the Balia Adibasi CBO in collaboration with PRI-Police-Social Welfare Dept-Block Administration and with the technical support of SMOKUS with an aim to aware the community on the curses of witch hunting helping them form a community safety net to protect women and children from any superstition-myth led abuse and exploitation. Afterwards, this effort of the CBO has been showcased and shared in different CBO-Forum by the District Officials as an instance of successful CBO Movement.

- Bindol Adiwasi CBO has been regularly disseminating awareness among the community against early marriage, trafficking, migration and domestic violence.
- Members now started to work as resource person for other CBOs on group strengthening issues, which they have experienced in their group process.

## 10. Capacity Building Efforts by the CSO

Capacity building support provided to CBO leaders on various issues under PACS program. Training on MGNREGA was facilitated to learn

how to raise voices. A guideline and process of availing benefit, Prevention of early marriage and child rights, health & hygiene and malnutrition, awareness generation about health and hygiene, child nutrition, RTI and leadership development, RSBY guideline and process of availing benefit, community Participation And Importance, MGNREGA act & scheme, Social Audit and steps to be followed during the entire process & RTI.

SMOKUS has team of experts on SHG who impart training on bank linkage process, group dynamic, Micro level planning for Income generation program, financial management, Child rights and Domestic violence. They also get exposure of IGP program.

## 11. Role of CSO in the Emergence of CBO as a Strong Institution

CBO formation is in the strategy of SMOKUS, it is belief collective power can bring changes for development. The support form CSO is providing information to the tribal community on MGNREGA implementation, Social audit, Child rights, Nutritional value, RTI help the CBO to prepare themselves. The presence of SMOKUS workforce makes the CBO confident. The CSO help to organize at community level right based collective. Some theme based trainings were provided to the CBO.

- Basic concepts of CBO/SHG formation and its operation.
- Share information through meetings on PDS, ICDS, RSBY, ill effect of child marriage, witchcraft.
- Exposure visit on IGP activities to learn the process.

## 12. External Opportunities and Constraints

There are several challenges as well as opportunities for the CBO and SMOKUS to work for future. Some are as follows;

### Opportunities

- Strong mobilization process helps the CSO and the CBO to build a strong collective to

advocate on village level issues.

- Members are running individual IGA activities; later on in future they want to take the activity at group level. They have handholding experience on this (pig rearing).
- Since 3 years the CSO provided continues support/orientation/trainings to build capacities of CBO

#### Threats

- Facilitation and coordination is in the nature of work CBO, which are biggest challenges or threats of the CBO in smooth functioning after withdrawn of the project. Ongoing information flow is needed to keep interest of the group process. If the information flow will stop from CSO then the CBO activities will slow down.
- The CBO is still not adapt to keep record, documentation and accounts management. They are very much dependent on CSO workforce. Illiteracy is the main barrier to overcome such challenges.
- The group is running without any written bylaws. There is lack of clear and articulated vision of the CBO.
- Rotate leadership for group strengthening is needed; otherwise the leadership quality will not be developed.

### 12. Sustainability of the CBO

There is plan of SMOKUS to registered the CBO and provide some technical and financial support at very basic level. After lots of effort for group strengthening the group is in a stage of action. But

still they need support from CSO. The CSO give confidence to leaders to take up issues and take action on that. A formal and periodic meeting are all in process. The members are aware that the support from the CSO is come to an end. They have planned to meet as per their meetings and want to start any IGP program at their village. They feel this will help them to run their CBO for long time and draw interest of members. SMOKUS has formed a federation at block level with the name of PRATAYA.

### 13. Future Plans of the CBO

The future plan of SMOKUS team to provide possible support as following;

- The CBO need more capacity building support to manage their activities independently. Beside this there is a strong need of regular support on new government schemes and its process. Though the CBO having their bank account but the CBO is not registered this is under process.
- SMOKUS is planning to support the group after withdraw of the project to start IGP program.

The CBO members have some future plans which was expressed as following

- Start IGP program collectively as Pig rearing. Presently members are individually running the business but for future they want to open a collective farm and start business.
- They also want to start collective farming; the income will help them for education, health needs or to meet out of their day to day needs.



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