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From The Editor

The Special Swarnajayanti Grameen Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) projects were pilot projects awarded to NGOs, as part of the larger SGSY programme of the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD), Government of India. These projects had a different cost structure, had NGO participation and were taken up to showcase the lessons for adoption into mainstream projects. The Special SGSY Project was mounted in Jharkhand by PRADAN on the extensive social mobilization of women, achieved under various earlier projects that had been implemented there. A large number of women had been mobilized by PRADAN into SHGs in Jharkhand. Many SHGs were also linked to banks and several members had received cash credit facilities from a local bank, to supplement the credit needs of families. However, in spite of funds being available to the SHGs from their own sources or through supplementary credit from banks, it had become clear that 'credit' by itself did not impact the economic status of participating women. SHG women shared that they did not have remunerative options to invest the available funds. It became evident that significant investments were required to improve existing productive assets or create new, productive assets.

The project was launched to systematically make investments in improving productive assets and creating new productive assets, primarily around natural resources. Using a group-based approach, the project aimed at demonstrating the integrated development of natural resources and appropriate farming sub-systems along with unleashing opportunities in farm-allied sectors, financed through a combination of people's own labour, bank loans and government subventions as a strategy to remove mass poverty in the endemically poor Agro-Ecological Zone VII. The project was implemented in five districts of Jharkhand by PRADAN. The project also focused on the convergence of various government programmes, to help SHG members take up various livelihood activities.

PRADAN implemented the project in Godda, Lohardaga, Dumka, Khunti and Gumla, reaching out to 25,000 poor household families. The project focused on the large-scale capacity building of poor families, to facilitate the adoption of improved technologies and practices to attain rapid growth in farm and farm-allied sectors, and enabling these families to access mainstream markets to sustain economic gains. The intervention not only helped in developing an assets base and better livelihood options for the people but also instigated positive change, enabling women to negotiate with different stakeholders and power relations, and strive for a just and equal society. The engagement thus sought to tap the innate potential of the poor, especially women, building their capacity and developing a vibrant mechanism to bring about positive change in their life.

This Special Issue of *NewsReach* features a set of case studies from different project villages.

Collectives of Women: Paving the Way to Empowerment

PREM SHANKAR, SHAHNAWAZ ALAM AND MAINAK BISWAS

Adopting strategies to collectivize women in Khunti, under the umbrella of five SGSY projects, is helping counter the marginalization of women, who till now have been economically dependent on the menfolk, have lacked forums for voicing their concerns, have had very little awareness of their rights and have, therefore, been unable to take collective action.

On October 25, 2011, the administration of Khunti district, witnessed an unprecedented incident. Thousands of rural women gathered to raise their voice against two incidents of molestation in the area. The determination of these women was enough to set the administration in action. These ordinary women were members of an extraordinary institution, an institution of their own creation, the Torpa Mahila Sangh, one of the 15 women's Federations, promoted across five Special Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) project districts. The accused, who were at large since the lodging of the FIR with the police, were arrested within 24 hours of the demonstration. Such examples are testimony to the fact that women have been empowered because of the initiatives taken up with 57,000 rural women and their families, across five backward districts of Jharkhand.

Rural Jharkhand is characterized by a high incidence of poverty (estimated to be above 44 per cent), migration, gender inequality, underdeveloped agriculture and poor infrastructure. The state's performance on most of the development indices is alarming. There are 82 Integrated Action Plan (IAP) districts in the country and, of these, 17 (20 per cent) lie in Jharkhand, accounting for 70 per cent of the total districts in the state. Rural women bear the dual burden of having productive as well as reproductive roles. The plight of these women in Jharkhand can be better understood from the facts in Table 1.

Table 1: Women Per 1000 Men

Census Year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Sex Ratio	961	960	948	940	924	941	947

Source: Gender Composition-Census of India (censusindia.gov.in/2011)

Jharkhand has been witnessing a gradual decline in the sex ratio. Poor nutritional status, high incidence of anaemia, low institutional delivery along with other social factors such as the status of women in the family and society are a few of the important contributors to the skewed sex ratios. The economic dependency of women on men and the lack of avenues to raise their voice against oppression often aggravate women's subjugation.

The National Family Health Survey-II found that there is widespread acceptance among married women in Jharkhand that the beating of wives by husbands is justified in some circumstances. Almost two-fifths (38 per cent) of the married women accept at least one of the six reasons as justification for a husband beating his wife. Nearly 22 per cent of married women have experienced beating or physical mistreatment. Domestic violence against

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women is more pronounced in rural areas among the illiterate women and among women from households with a low standard of living (Source: NCW Report).

The economic dependence of a woman on a man, the unavailability of forums for women to voice their concerns and take collective action and the low awareness of rights are some of the important factors perpetuating the marginalization of women. Given this scenario, the five Special SGSY projects specifically targeted rural women, aiming for their socio-economic upliftment. The strategies adopted to collectivize women are now paying off.

Despite odds, women in the project villages are now successfully creating their own individual and collective identity, and a social and political space. This most vulnerable group—the rural women—have organized themselves into institutions of their own. Women's collectives

Table 2: Domestic Violence in Jharkhand

Age	% of Women Beaten	% of Women Beaten by Husband	% of Women Beaten by Relatives	% of Women Beaten by Others
15–19	13.5	11.8	2.8	3.7
20–29	21.4	19.7	2.5	1.9
30–39	26.6	25.2	2.4	2.0
40–49	17.6	16.6	1.0	2.7
After 5 years of marriage	13.6	11.5	2.1	1.4
Between 5–8 years of marriage	19.2	18.6	1.6	1.3
After 10 years of marriage	24.4	23.1	2.2	2.0

Source: Prabhat Khabar, October 2, 2002

such as Self Help Groups (SHGs), Clusters and Federations have brought about multi-dimensional changes in women and society. These women are now more confident, are taking a lead role in their family and village decision-making, are better aware of their rights and entitlements, have greater access to mainstream institutions, and have enhanced self-image and leadership skills.

AREA CONTEXT

Progress has been possible due to the concerted and continued engagement of the Ministry of Rural Development's (MoRD's) programmes for the promotion, nurturing and strengthening of women SHGs. The edifice of the Special SGSY programmes is built upon the large-scale social mobilization activities undertaken under the 'Community based Pro-poor Initiative' and 'Social Mobilization around Natural Resource Management for Poverty Alleviation'—both collaborative programmes of MoRD, Government of India, and UNDP. Although these two programmes created the necessary ground for the much-required social mobilization base, it was the Special SGSY project that provided the desired impetus to these women's institutions, by giving them a scale and integrating livelihoods with social mobilization. The Special SGSY programme has an outreach of 57,000 poor families, mobilized into 3,800 SHGs across 266 *panchayats* spread over 28 blocks of Khunti, Lohardaga, Gumla, Dumka and Godda districts. Considering the family as a unit of development, the Special SGSY project focussed on social as well as economic empowerment as a core model for development.

Despite odds, women in the project villages are now successfully creating their own individual and collective identity, and a social and political space. This most vulnerable group—the rural women—have organized themselves into institutions of their own. Women's collectives such as Self Help Groups (SHGs), Clusters and Federations have brought about multi-dimensional changes in women and society.

STATUS OF THE COMMUNITY

Before the intervention, life in the villages was bleak. With household food security limited to between three and nine months, seasonal distress migration was the second-most reliable income-generation option for small and marginalized farmers, first being agriculture. There was dire need of credit and, in the absence of any efficient credit delivery institutions, people entirely depended on the informal systems and invariably fell prey to the exploitative tactics of moneylenders. There was little awareness among

the community about multiple livelihood options. There was a lack of vision, thus limiting the scope for the optimal utilization of the natural and other livelihood capitals for the betterment of their life. Farmers were averse to taking risks of adopting new ways of livelihood. There was no common platform to facilitate joint and equal participation for men and women, in the village development process. There was lack of trust, confidence and co-ordination among the villagers, as also a lack of awareness, especially among women, about various government programmes and schemes. The awareness or demand for quality education, health and sanitation services in the community was perceptibly missing. Under the parasol of subsidy-oriented promotional schemes of SHGs, the core principles and objectives of promoting women's solidarity groups at the grass roots were being largely defeated. Further, the functioning of SHGs revolved around thrift and credit, and lacked the long-term perspective of taking up social and livelihood issues.

THE INTERVENTION

The Special SGSY project focused on tapping the innate potential of the rural poor, especially rural women, and building mechanisms for empowering them and putting them in the forefront. Development involves change, and change involves deconstructing and constructing complex relationships among various groups of society, which hold different attitudes, values and interests. Changes made within one group affect the other groups. Isolated attempts to involve various groups are not enough. Hence, there was need to tackle these complex tasks in a broader strategic framework.

Development involves change, and change involves deconstructing and constructing complex relationships among various groups of society, which hold different attitudes, values and interests. Changes made within one group affect the other groups. Isolated attempts to involve various groups are not enough. Hence, there was need to tackle these complex tasks in a broader strategic framework.

decades created an environment of faith and trust amongst the community. Further, past experience of professionals empathetically engaging with the community boosted their morale and propelled the accomplishment of outcomes.

The learning from past projects suggested the setting up of strong and vibrant community institutions of the poor to boost development. The project created a set of community institutions that catered to the specific needs of the community. These institutions, with specific roles and functions, contributed immensely to various aspects of

social and economic development.

Mobilizing a community and creating institutions were critical to developing ownership and equity among various interest groups. Addressing social issues such as liquor addiction, illiteracy, lack of harmony among the community, low level of women's participation in decision-making at all levels, and the issues of rights and entitlements and livelihoods—all require the presence of strong yet dynamic and vibrant mechanisms. Also, for the systematic and smooth delivery of a project mandate, it was critical to create for poor people their own institutions.

In the operational blocks, pockets with high incidences of poverty, backwardness, exclusion and dominance of vulnerable groups such as Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backward Castes (OBC) and minorities were identified for the implementation of the project.

PRADAN's legacy of working in the region and the neighbouring villages for a few

1. **SHGs** were formed in hamlets, with each group comprising around 12–16 rural poor women of similar socio-economic backgrounds. SHGs provide rural women a common platform to undertake thrift and credit activities and to meet their small consumption and production financial needs. SHGs also create mutual trust among members. Gradually, SHGs became a support group, in which members discussed and resolved family and village-level issues.
2. **Clusters**, as a higher-order institution of SHG members, take up social and livelihood issues of larger concern. Two members from each of 10–12 SHGs represent their respective agencies in the Clusters, normally of five to six villages at the *panchayat* level.
3. **Federations** are block-level institutions, with representatives from Clusters; they deal with convergence and other block-

level issues concerning the community.

4. **Tola Sabhas (Hamlet Associations)**, comprising adult men and women residents of a hamlet, are formed for participatory planning, quality implementation and transparent monitoring of project activities.
5. **Livelihood Co-operatives** are a collective of SHG members engaged in some specific stream of livelihoods such as poultry rearing, agro-horticulture and tasar. It usually deals with providing end-to-end solutions to livelihood challenges such as procurement, induction, nurturing, rearing and marketing of produce.

Emphasis is placed on social and monetary dimensions of the SHGs. During the promotion of a new SHG in a village, professionals also ensure the involvement of women members' husbands. It helps in getting the much-required social and family sanction in building the SHG and paves the way for the development of the village.

the involvement of women members' husbands. It helps in getting the much required social and family sanction in building the SHG and paves the way for the development of the village. It also builds understanding among men regarding SHGs and gender equity issues, and develops harmonious and symbiotic relationships in the community.

Exposure: The philosophy of 'seeing is believing' has worked wonders in motivating women members of the SHGs. The

members of new SHGs are taken to hamlets or villages that had vibrant SHGs. The touring team is invited to sit, forming an outer circle around the host SHGs and silently learn, through observation, the nuances of the meetings, the deliberations, the financial transactions, book-keeping and record-keeping, and the techniques and processes of conflict resolution. After the meeting, members from both the SHGs sit face to face and discuss the details of how SHGs function. The role of the facilitator is to observe the proceedings, uphold the focus of the discussion and act as a catalyst. During the exposure tour, the visiting team too is expected to share their learning and experiences with the host SHG members, thus creating a win-win situation for both.

FORMATION AND STRENGTHENING OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTIONS

Concept Seeding: The initial meetings between the PRADAN professionals and the community always focus on familiarization and rapport-building. Whereas, on the one hand, the community gets to learn about the promoting organization, its work and credentials, the organization also gains a deeper understanding of the social, economic, cultural and political situation of the community. In concept seeding meetings, discussions revolve around the life and lifestyles of the community and its problems. Efforts are made to draw up a common and fair understanding of the reasons for forming an SHG as well as its role and importance.

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TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The following training programmes were imparted to the community under the community mobilization process.

- ♦ **Awareness training:** To generate awareness regarding the concept, purpose, importance and governance of SHGs among members.

- ♦ **Membership training:** To bring about clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of individual members of the SHG and also the role that the SHGs play in women's empowerment, village development and relationship building among members.
- ♦ **Tola Sabha membership training:** To sensitize members of the *tola sabha* about their roles and responsibilities towards village development, and on gender issues and how they could collectively develop their village.
- ♦ **Leadership training:** To create a pool of community leaders, both men and women, who can lead the community in various aspects/dimensions.
- ♦ **Visioning exercise:** To assess the present state of being, identify the gap and take steps to meet the aspired state.
- ♦ **Sensitization of the elected representatives of a panchayat:** To organize *Panchayati Raj* Institution (PRI) training workshops and exposure tours on village development.
- ♦ **Training of community leaders:** To train representatives from SHGs, *anganwadi* workers, teachers, postmasters, opinion leaders and others to develop a sense of mutual trust and co-operation, and generate a collective understanding for social action tools.

Initial interventions with SHGs focused on providing poor households with an assured, affordable and accessible financial borrowing mechanism, in terms of providing them with small production and consumption loans, thus saving them from the clutches of moneylenders. This created the first taste of success and lured more and more women to

join the SHGs. Steadily, issues pertaining to women's subordination in their families and their subjugation in patriarchal society took the front seat.

In SHGs, women are central and not marginal to bringing about developmental changes in society. Women soon realized that economic independence is the first step towards gender empowerment.

Rules were framed to ensure financial discipline in groups, and issues such as regular meetings, regular savings, inter-loaning, timely repayment and proper maintenance of books became the non-negotiable norms of these groups. With abysmally low levels of rural female literacy rates in the state, which as per the Census 2001 was 38.87 per cent and still hovers around 49.75 per cent (as per 2011 Census data), managing a book of accounts for these SHGs was an arduous task. Literate persons from the group or outside were selected and groomed as accountants. Bank accounts were set up for the functional groups. In order to facilitate quick and appropriate decision-making processes about the functioning of SHGs, a dedicated software for SHG accounting—Mac Finance—was used. This further strengthened the Management Information System (MIS), and was operated by a Computer Munshi. A Computer Munshi is a person identified by the community and trained by PRADAN, to maintain the MIS system of an SHG. The Computer Munshi is paid by the community for his services.

Systemic efforts were made to nurture and groom each individual member of the SHGs. The members of the new groups were exposed to the functioning of other mature SHGs in the area. The mature groups with a higher credit intake capacity (approximately 41 per cent of them) were linked with Banks.

CLUSTERS

The selection of representatives from SHGs to Clusters is done with utmost care. Members, who are able to articulate their problems, empathize with the problems of fellow members, are vocal and can contribute actively to the discussions in Cluster-level meetings are the preferred nominees. Membership in a Cluster is rotated every year.

Acting as a conduit between an SHG and the apex-level institution—the block Federation, these Clusters play an extremely critical role in reinforcing and strengthening the functioning of federations. The functioning of individual SHGs too is monitored, and appropriate suggestions and support are provided by Clusters. A Cluster selects its office bearers for their day-to-day functioning. A Cluster also facilitates collective decisions and takes relevant action on issues of larger interest such as open grazing, alcoholism, gender-related violence and harassment, and rights and entitlements issues.

An eclectic mix of issues such as household-level livelihood planning, crop planning, the financial status of SHGs, issues of land and forest rights, job availability and wage payment under MGNREGA, allotment of houses under the Indira Awas Yojna (IAY), issuing of BPL cards, functioning of ICDS centres, availability of health services, running of Mid-day Meal schemes, organizing school programmes and the proper functioning of PRIs find place in the minutes book of Cluster meetings. Around 200 members help these women to increase their knowledge and improve their skills. All monthly Cluster meetings are conducted under the skilled guidance and supervision of PRADAN professionals.

The sense of solidarity developed among women in the SHGs at the hamlet or the sub-village level is further propelled at Cluster-level Federations. This generates a significant level of confidence and builds high self-esteem among women and prepares them for even bigger challenges.

These facilitations further help build the capacity of Cluster members. The sense of solidarity developed among women in the SHGs at the hamlet or the sub-village level is further propelled at Cluster-level Federations. This generates a significant level of confidence and builds high self-esteem among women and prepares them for even bigger challenges. If needed, SHG members, who are not formal members of Clusters, may also participate in Cluster meetings.

Till 2013, the project has successfully federated 3,031 SHGs into 205 Clusters, with a total membership of around 44,000. The state witnessed *panchayat* elections in 2010, after a gap of 32 years. In order to build up synergistic co-ordination with the lowest tier of democracy, the project also promoted and placed these Clusters at the *panchayat* level.

BLOCK FEDERATIONS

The apex body of women's representation is the block-level Federation. It draws two or three members from each Cluster. It is promoted as an independent organization with the responsibility that the members will review the progress of the project. This body comprises women leaders, who ensure that need-based initiatives, connected to economic and social issues, are taken up.

Larger issues of social concern, mainstreaming and linkages with financial institutions are discussed and addressed on this platform. This apex body also takes up matters that require mobilization of members and opinion building from all over the block; it brings up the matter at appropriate forums and with the concerned

authorities. Federation members are more experienced and, hence, are able to focus on developing larger livelihood perspectives for the community. They act as resource persons and provide training to other SHGs, manage the functions of Community Service Providers (CSPs), who are persons from the community with domain-specific expertise in social mobilization or livelihoods or both.

Concerted capacity building initiatives and continuous direct and empathetic engagement with the community are keys to the creation of successful and vibrant community institutions. Capacity building programmes are organized for members as well as functionaries at all three tiers, on aspects such as membership training, leadership training, livelihood visioning exercises, livelihood micro-planning, SHG management, conflict resolution, roles and responsibilities of SHG functionaries and its associative tiers, and government programmes and schemes. In order to develop a long-term vision and perspective, regular intensive visioning exercises are undertaken for the leaders. The exposure of members to successfully functioning SHGs, Clusters and Federations within a block or in other parts of the state are organized. In total, approximately 36,500 members were trained in Khunti district.

Tola Sabha: The *tola sabha* is an institution that promotes decentralized inclusive planning in the villages. Through community mobilization, there has been a shift in focus from women-based development to family-based development (by actively engaging men members too). It comprises all adult members of a *tola* and constitutes a seven-to ten-member Project Execution Committee (PEC) comprising members from the SHG and beyond. Under the Special SGSY project, the *tola sabhas* took the entire responsibility of planning, executing and monitoring the progress of the project. Funds were routed to *tola sabhas* from the state rural development department.

Fund-flows through the community (*tola sabha*) became one of the major aspects of the community mobilization process and it set an example of zero leakage programmes (that which are being implemented without any bribery or corruption). The *tola sabha* empowered the community to undertake detailed patch-wise planning for Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM). *Tola sabhas* were able to effectively deliberate and resolve issues pertaining to gender violence, alcohol consumption/sale, education, sanitation, grazing of cattle, etc. One of the outcomes of community mobilization through

Jharia Mahila Sangh

Jharia Mahila Sangh, the block-level SHG Federation in Khunti district, in its monthly board meeting, discusses various issues of development related to the SHG members. It reviews the progress of SHGs and Clusters, and makes plans for strengthening these institutions and members further. Formed in 2011, the Federation today has around 1,100 members, spread across nearly 90 SHGs. There are around 25 community resource persons (CRPs) and 462 SHG leaders, who undertake visits to the Clusters, to ensure regular meetings, promote new SHGs, and provide training to them, with the help of PRADAN professionals, on aspects such as social mobilization and livelihoods. The Board members of the Jharia Mahila Sangh have resolved to spread the feeling of solidarity, gender equity and development through the SHGs.

the *tola sabha* has been and increased social harmony and a sense of community ownership. Aspirations for taking new initiatives existed and the community became confident about taking the risk with new interventions. Distressed seasonal migration has been considerably reduced.

Women have achieved a level of confidence that they never possessed before the SHGs were formed. Their self-perception has changed considerably. Women now participate actively in decision-making, both within and outside the household.

PRODUCER COLLECTIVES

The SHGs and the associated tiers helped build solidarity-based women's institutions, mostly functional in the social and economic domain. However, dealing with products at scale and simultaneously meeting the requirements of a dynamic but imperfect market economy required an altogether different strategy. This daunting challenge has been met by linking these women with the already promoted producer-collectives of PRADAN. These collectives, in the form of producer companies, mutually benefiting trusted or co-operatives link individual small producers to large markets and ensure the sharing of substantial profit margins with individual growers and rearers. A total of 8,662 women under the project have been successfully linked to eight producer-collectives. These collectives have democratically elected governing body

members, responsible for managing and steering the collectives under the competent leadership of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO is a technically qualified and highly experienced professional, hired from the market, and has specialization in the product domain. Hence, a poultry co-operative will have a qualified veterinarian as its CEO whereas an agriculture expert will head

the agro-horticulture co-operative.

For field-level management, village producer associations have been formed to deal with the micro-level issues of products, processes and producers.

The collective makes concerted efforts to build the capacities of its members on various technical aspects of production, quality improvement, product standardization, waste minimization and risk reduction. Inter-state, as well as intra-state, exposure visits to already existing enterprises are organized for the new producers to understand the nuances of business better. This also helps in motivating producers and educates them on business-related information.

Godda Gramin Poultry Self Supporting Co-operative Society Ltd. has helped landless and marginal poor women, who had little earning options in villages, to earn a living. Started with 103 rearers in August 2010, the co-operative now has 121 highly motivated poultry rearers, with a full-time veterinarian as its CEO and an 11-member Governing Body. The co-operative maintains its own MIS system and has been able to mobilize working capital and capital asset loans to the tune of Rs 55 lakhs from NABARD. It produces 4.5–5.5 tonnes of birds per month and has an annual turnover of Rs 4–4.5 crore thus generating an annual profit of Rs 15,000–20,000 per rearer.

Table 3: Functions of Various Community Institutions Promoted under the Special SGSY

Institutions	Membership	Meeting Frequency	Level	Core Job
SHG	10 to 15 women members from homogeneous socio-economic backgrounds	Weekly	On a neighborhood concept in a hamlet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Undertakes thrift and credit ◆ Prepares household-level livelihood plans ◆ Undertakes wealth ranking and identifies vulnerable families ◆ Undertakes livelihood activities ◆ Takes up social issues ◆ Manages conflict in the village
Cluster	2 members from each SHG	Monthly	Mostly in a Cluster of 4–6 villages or at the <i>panchayat</i> level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provides supportive supervision to SHGs and discusses the quality of their functioning ◆ Acts on social issues of larger concern ◆ Motivates members by sharing best practices
Block-level Federation	2 members from each Cluster	Monthly	At block level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ensures overall quality promotion of the SHGs and scaling-up ◆ Develops long-term vision and perspective plan for the Federation ◆ Establishes convergence with government schemes ◆ Co-ordinates with CRPs ◆ Motivates members by sharing best practices

Institutions	Membership	Meeting Frequency	Level	Core Job
<i>Tola Sabha</i>	All adults members of a hamlet	Monthly	At hamlet level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Undertakes all project implementation activities ◆ Receives programme funds directly from the department and manages project finance ◆ Monitors project's physical and financial progress
Producer Collectives/ Cooperatives	Women producers as shareholders	Monthly	At block or district level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ensures forward and backward integration and provides end-to-end solutions in specific livelihood products such as poultry, agro-horticulture and tasar

IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONS ON INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS, FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Women have achieved a level of confidence that they never possessed before the SHGs were formed. Their self-perception has changed considerably. Women now participate actively in decision-making, both within and outside the household. They speak confidently about changes in their own lives, and their group's and the villagers' issues, and negotiate with senior government officials for development works in their villages.

These women's institutions have not only brought huge changes in the way the women view themselves but also how society perceives them. Their increased and effective role in the development process has earned them towering respect and dignity. The working of Federations has successfully broken the

hegemony of men and has forever changed the typical stereotype perception about women in society.

The empowerment of the members of women's Federations is reflected in the way they have shrugged off their image of being just beneficiaries of the programme to becoming important stakeholders in the implementation of the programme. Now women have formed their own PECs and are confidently handling lakhs of rupees, creating soil and water harvesting structures, undertaking large-scale plantations, constructing vermi-composts, installing lift irrigations, which until a few years ago were under the dominance of men. Enhanced participation in the decision-making process, within the family and in the *gram sabha*, has placed these rural women in a new league altogether.

The SHG members of Sundermore village in Godda district take active part in their *gram sabha* meeting. During one such meeting, the SHG members demanded a reinforced cement concrete (RCC) road and a proper drainage system for the welfare of the village. When the work was sanctioned to the *panchayat*, the SHG members came forward to execute the work but were opposed by the men. The people in the village had no confidence in the ability of these illiterate women. The issue was referred back to the *gram sabha*, where members from all the three SHGs in the village fought their case. The work was finally bagged by the SHGs and it was executed through the PEC, formed under the *tola sabha*. Such tests and trials have further motivated these women, who now diligently review the implementation of government programmes such as the ICDS and the Public Distribution System (PDS) work.

FUTURE PLANS

The primary objective of developing these institutions is to make them sustainable institutions of the poor. At the village level, SHGs strengthen *gram sabhas* by ensuring more participation by women. To achieve this, it is imperative that each and every household is brought within the ambit of the SHG movement. At the *panchayat* level, Clusters will play a stronger role by working

in association with PRI representatives, so that flagship programmes such as the MNREGA are implemented in their truest sense. Awareness building around various government schemes, both for the villagers and PRI representatives can gradually take shape as an important responsibility for members of the Clusters. Eventually, women's Federations can be expected to take up issues of social, economic and political importance for advocacy.

Agriculture Production Cluster: Breaking the Market Hegemony in Gumla

NRUSINGH CHARAN SUTAR AND DEBANJAN GHATAK

Recognizing the potential that agriculture has in changing the lives of small landholders, the initiatives to develop an Agriculture Production Cluster, under the Special SGSY project, led to collectivization at all levels, helping asset creation and credit linkage; as a result, some marginal farmers are now emerging as big farmers

The unprecedented returns from vegetable cultivation for the farmers of Gumla district, one of the Naxal-affected districts of Jharkhand, have rejuvenated them. Vegetable growing and selling had never been so lucrative. The fear of low returns had always haunted the farmers, keeping them away from vegetable cultivation. The perishable nature of the commodity, the urgent credit requirement, the legacy of indebtedness, the absence of proper storage facilities, the poor road network, the inadequate market information, the low volume of produce and the poor negotiation skills had always frightened the vegetable growers in the area. The vegetable business had been limited to the big and the affluent or the so-called 'progressive' farmers only.

Government agencies have, over the years, tried to create favourable conditions for agricultural producers; however, due to market imperfections, the intended benefits have not reached the farmers. Ironically, it is the farmers who have had to bear the brunt of inefficient agricultural input supply and market sales mechanisms.

PRADAN took up the ambitious task of ensuring better price returns to the farmers for their crops, especially vegetables. Building on the edifice of the Social Mobilization, and Soil and Water Conservation activities promoted in the area in the past, namely, the three consecutive projects of the UNDP and the MoRD, the latest being the MoRD's Special SGSY programme (January 2009 to June 2013), PRADAN seeded the concept of promoting and developing Agriculture Production Clusters (APCs) in the district.

An APC is an innovative concept, propelling the agriculture productivity of a particular geography with the ultimate objective of increasing the profit margin of the primary producers. Areas with similar agriculture practices and cropping patterns are identified for the purpose. Usually, three to four crops are selected and promoted as major crops for that particular area. Based on the production patterns and the market study of the farmers in a hamlet, 25 to 30 farmers are mobilized into an informal collective. A comprehensive survey, capturing all the details of individual land holding, soil type, irrigation facilities, water availability, seasonal cropping pattern, consumption requirements, marketable surplus, etc., is sketched out. Largely, hamlets with the presence of robust SHGs are selected for the interventions. Local and adjoining town markets are assessed for marketing opportunities.

In the initial stages, the focus is on attaining production efficiency. Under the catalytic supervision of PRADAN, farmers are assisted to do a cause-and-effect analysis of issues pertaining to crop failure, crop planning, low production, crop wastage, price realization, etc. Traditionally, vegetable cultivation has been individual-centric and collective crop planning is unheard of in the region. This perpetuates farmers with a low scale of production to be content with the low price offered by middlemen or market intermediaries. Collective raising of seedlings, transplantation and harvesting by the farmers make the proposition lucrative enough for bigger players, interested in bulk buying; in the process, they willingly share the additional profit with the producer.

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Around 600 farmers from different hamlets of contiguous villages came together to form an APC. Youth were identified to work as conduits, providing the much-required backward and forward linkages. Based on the collective assessment of the requirement of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides,

the young entrepreneurs act as village-level suppliers of farm inputs at competitive rates. Similarly, service providers/entrepreneurs are created to aggregate and sell the produce to the market.

PRADAN has been working in the district since 1996. Gumla district in Jharkhand has 67 per cent tribal population (2001 Census). The district is covered by dense forests, hills and rivers. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for about 80 per cent of the families. Undulating terrain, rain-fed agriculture, lack of technical knowledge and poverty are the major challenges for the farmers of Gumla. The district has strategic geographic advantage. Ranchi, the state capital, is just 104 km to the east and Rourkela, the industrial town in neighbouring Orissa, is just 160 km to the south. To the south-west, the district shares its borders with Chhattisgarh and is around 200 km away from Ambikapur district in Chhattisgarh. The presence of these developed towns and cities in its periphery provides ample marketing opportunities for farm and other produce.

Ensuring round-the-year food security to the impoverished populace was the primary target for PRADAN. The first step was the large-scale social mobilization through the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and the creation of community based livelihood assets by undertaking soil and water conservation,

and initiating irrigation infrastructure development projects. Recognizing the potential that agriculture has to change the lives of the producers, especially the small landholders, initiatives to develop an APC was taken under the Special SGSY Project. Until 2009, crop productivity enhancement measures, through technological and procedural interventions, remained the focus of PRADAN.

However, in 2009, it was realized that the benefits were still not being realized by the primary agriculture producers because the extra profits were mainly being devoured by the middlemen and other market intermediaries.

The project drew from the learnings of previous interventions that helped in promoting an APC such as round-the-year controlled grazing, credit availability to the SHGs, irrigation support up to an extent, good community mobilization, trust of the community and the experience of working in the area.

Whereas production was enhanced and reached a desired level, the market remained an enigma for farmers. Any incremental effort in the production enhancement programme was being counteracted by imperfect market conditions. To provide decent living conditions to farmers through interventions made for improving crop productivity, PRADAN set a modest yearly target of providing Rs 50,000 cash earning per family. However, the district's ability to consume this incremental gain in crop produce was judged to be abysmally low.

With an objective of providing round-the-year food security to the Project families along with creating a provision of an additional income, PRADAN set the following modest targets:

Whereas production was enhanced and reached a desired level, the market remained an enigma for farmers. Any incremental effort in the production enhancement programme was being counteracted by imperfect market conditions.

- A. Achieve year-round food security for 3,000 target families.
- B. Provide an additional Rs 50,000 as cash income annually per family for 3,000 families through year-around vegetable production
- C. By 2015, saturate four blocks of Gumla district, by ensuring round-the-year food security and the above cash income
- D. By 2015, build a system for input/output/enablers around agriculture.

As a precursory step to establishing an APC, a market diagnostic study was undertaken, to understand market dynamics, supply-demand factors and trends, and the value chain of different crops. The study was conducted in Gumla and the adjoining districts of Ranchi, Rourkela and Ambikapur. Discussions were held with major market players such as vegetable wholesalers, transporters, small traders and producers. The study brought out the following:

- ♦ The demand for fresh vegetables well surpassed the existing supply of products in the region. This deficit in the regional market for fresh vegetables created an opportunity for the promotion of an APC in Gumla.
- ♦ Due to heavy downpour and water-logging between August and December, the farms of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Jharkhand are not suitable for vegetable production. Therefore, vegetables come from distant places, as far as Bangalore and Nasik.
- ♦ Middlemen, between the producer and the market agent, make huge profits, resulting in a longer and costlier value chain of vegetables.

- ◆ Market intermediaries are ready to pay a premium of Rs 2–3 per kg for fresh vegetables.
- ◆ Sorting-grading-packaging is an important component in marketing, which is grossly ignored by small and marginal producers.

The baseline survey conducted with the farmers to understand the existing cropping pattern revealed the practice of cultivating more than 30 types of crops in a year; the cultivation of vegetables, however, was mostly confined to household consumption only. Household-level nutritional security, low input cost, and lower susceptibility to pest and disease attacks were the important parameters determining the farmers' choice of which vegetables to grow.

To promote production clusters, some crops were selected on the basis of the small-holder's attractiveness and market attractiveness. After discussions with the farmers and a thorough market scan, crops for large-scale commercial cultivation were selected. The district mainly has marginal farmers, with low landholding of less than 2–3 acres; therefore, the growing of high-risk vegetables was ruled out.

From a list of 30 types of vegetables—tomato, chilli and cabbage for the *kharif* season; cauliflower and green pea for the *rabi*; and cucumber, bitter gourd and watermelon for the summer season were selected for intensive cultivation. In order to get maximum returns from the harvest, the sowing time was so planned that the harvest would be available either 15–20 days prior to or after the normal crop produce cycle.

Table 1: Criteria for Identifying Farmers

Criteria	Description
Social mobilization	Existence of vibrant SHGs to support the farmers by providing credit and to collectivize them for input-output linkage
Road connectivity	Should have all-weather, good road connectivity
Labour	Off-season vegetable demands intensive labour; therefore, families with at least two adult members were identified

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE APCs

- ◆ Increasing and intensifying the production of selected crops through the adoption of improved technology, optimal Package of Practices (PoP) and strengthening of input market linkages
- ◆ Utilizing land in the most efficient manner possible, growing crops that are both profitable, sustainable and cater to local, regional and national market demand
- ◆ Ensuring optimal price realization through:
 - a. Improving quality through sorting/grading, packaging.
 - b. Building linkages with output markets and direct market linkage.
- ◆ Building farmer capabilities and perspective on the elements of production and marketing, and establishing community institutions, where required, to support farmers.
- ◆ Ensuring vegetable production as a sustainable and integrated part of any other livelihood.

AREA AND FARMER SELECTION

Initially villages and hamlets with a predominance of farmers with a fair level of vegetable growing experience were selected. The criteria mentioned here were used to finalize the cluster.

Criteria	Description
Land size	Families with at least 15 decimals of irrigated land
No. of families/ cluster	25 to 30 farmers per hamlet for ensuring minimum level of product aggregation

KEY INTERVENTIONS IN PRODUCTION

Access to quality input and building an input management system

Raising the same crop at the same time creates a surge in demand for critical input items. Ensuring the timely and adequate availability of quality input material at a reasonable price in the local market poses, therefore, a plethora of challenges. An input management system has been devised. Based on the indenting, all inputs are to be arranged collectively by the SHG, thereby lowering the input cost. Support services to farmers for building relationships with seed, fertilizer and pesticide companies and shops have been established. A cross-learning forum for farmers, regarding the input and its quality, has also been established. Arrangements have been made for a few of the locally unavailable inputs (dolomite, boron, etc.) to be sourced by the villagers from the outside market; at a later stage, entrepreneurs will be encouraged to establish village-level input shops.

Enhancing production capacity of small farmers with standard quality

Owing to the market becoming increasingly quality conscious, fresh and high quality vegetables are critical for penetrating existing markets. Whereas the local markets are more price sensitive, the bigger and regional markets in Ranchi, Ambikapur and Rourkela are willing to pay premium rates for quality products. The production of quality crops in large volumes could, therefore, attract big players. Various steps have been undertaken

to increase the vegetable production in the region. Refinement of the package of practices (POPs) on the basis of farmers' experience and expert advice has been sought. New varieties and new crops have been experimented with. The prime focus has been on the selection of land and field sanitation, and bunding. Time-bound intervention, planning and execution have been streamlined, and the use of compost, trichoderma and glyricidia has been promoted. The use of micro-nutrients such as zinc, magnesium, calcium and boron has been introduced. Steps have also been taken to increase the quality of vegetable production, to meet the standards for grading and sorting of produce. Proper packaging of the produce has also been undertaken to ensure better prices.

Skill and knowledge development of small farmers

The grooming of local/community resource persons (CRPs) to support farmers in their production practices has been completed. The CRPs and the farmers have been exposed to many different production areas and to the regional markets. Regular training has been provided for technical, motivational and system settings. Entrepreneur skill-building training has been provided to the local youth, helping them understand the business opportunities around an APC. Farmers have been provided with cross-learning forums, and their performance, processes, problems and progress is reviewed regularly. The performance of CRPs is also reviewed on a regular basis.

Infrastructure development

The project simultaneously worked on improving production and marketing functions. To ensure round-the-year agriculture, irrigation support structures were established. Water conservation models such as land levelling, five per cent tanks, seepage tanks, check dams were created. One thousand crates were provided for packaging. Sorting and grading centres as well as cold storage centres were established. Farmers have been encouraged to understand their needs and place their demands before the *gram sabha*. As a strategy to help farmers access and derive benefit from the various government schemes, *Kisan Melas* (Farmers' Fairs) were organized; government officials visited these *melas*, to and get an understanding of APCs. Annual APC workshops with different stakeholders were also organized.

Collective effort

Collectivization in all the components was required because Gumla has small and marginal farmers. The areas for collectivization were in input management, production, infrastructure development and marketing.

CRITICAL STEPS FOLLOWED TO MAKE THE APC SUCCESSFUL

Planning and review meetings with the farmers

At the beginning of each cropping season, that is, *kharif*, *rabi* and summer, a planning and review meeting is held with the farmers.

The components of this meeting are:

- ◆ Reviewing the last season's performance, drawbacks and successes
- ◆ Setting systems for input arrangement, monitoring and marketing
- ◆ Discussing crucial interventions
- ◆ Assessing the learning from the last session.
- ◆ Finalizing the action plan such as what to do, when to do and how to do

Calendar planning

In order to ensure standardization in the production process, a calendar of commonly agreed activities is prepared by the vegetable growers.

Table 2: Calendar of Activities for Vegetable Growers

Mid-April to Mid-May	Planning meeting for <i>kharif</i>
End-May	Money collection and input arrangement for <i>kharif</i> by the SHG
1 st June	1st phase nursery for tomato and chilli
15 th June	2nd phase nursery for tomato and chilli
1 st July	Transplantation
1 st July to 1 st August	Review meeting for <i>kharif</i> and planning meeting for <i>rabi</i>
End-August to 1 st September	Marketing of tomato and chilli
1 st September	Money collection and input arrangement for <i>rabi</i> by the SHG
10 th September	Nursery for cauliflower and cabbage
1 st October	Transplantation of cauliflower and cabbage
End-October to 1 st November	Transplantation of green pea

Mid-April to Mid-May	Planning meeting for <i>kharif</i>
1 st November to mid-November	Review meeting for <i>rabi</i> and planning meeting for summer
End-November	Money collection and input arrangement for summer by the SHG
1 st December	Poly-tube nursery for cucumber and bitter gourd.
End-December to 1 st January	Marketing of cauliflower and cabbage
Mid-January	Transplantation of summer crops
End-January	Marketing of green pea
Mid-March to 1 st April	Marketing of summer crops

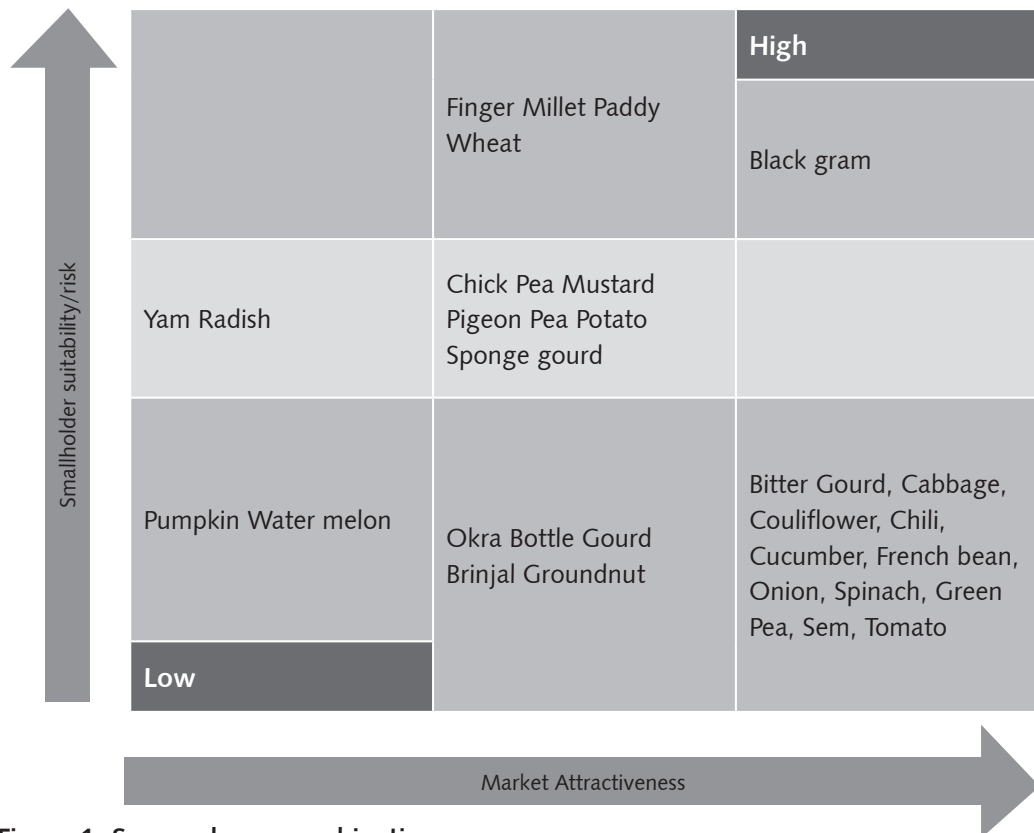


Figure 1: Seasonal crop combination

The seasonal crop matrix clearly indicates that there is no vegetable that is highly market attractive and is suitable for small-holders. The analysis of the suitability of crops indicates that to get market demand, small-holders need to take a calculated risk. To mitigate the risk, farmers are encouraged to grow more than one crop, in which the raising of seedlings is done in two separate cycles. For example, in kharif season, farmers grow tomato and chilli together. If one crop fails, the other helps in minimizing the loss. Here, the two crops are of different types (species). If, therefore, it rains heavily, the tomato yield may be low; however, this will be compensated by the higher yield of chilli.

Selection of variety

The selection of the variety of vegetables is crucial to manoeuvre the normal cropping time. Through experimentation, discussions with farmers, interactions with the input suppliers and consulting experts, the varieties were identified. With convergence support from the various schemes, crops of diverse varieties were tested in different farm conditions. Trials with varieties of cauliflower in the rabi season have equipped farmers with the understanding of eight different varieties of cauliflower.

Collective nursery with net house

Community nurseries, measuring 1,500 sq ft with a capacity to accommodate 30 nursery beds, often shaded by nets canopying beds of dimension 9 by 4 ft, were constructed at the hamlet level. Farmers have arrived at innovative solutions by using local material such as bamboo and mosquito nets to keep the cost low. Community seedlings are grown on raised beds in a common nursery on a fixed date. The responsibility of preparing and

nurturing the beds lies with the concerned individual. On an average, each farmer grows vegetables on 15–20 decimals of land. For a group of 30 farmers, the cost of one such structure comes to approximately Rs 100 per farmer.

The setting up of collective nurseries under a net house has many advantages. It develops a feeling of unity and empathy among farmers, and also promotes peer learning. A collective nursery helps in the promotion of standard PoPs and in pest management. For example, the viral attack on tomatoes, through the white fly, has been controlled to a great extent. The nursery is also protected from cattle and birds, and heavy rainfall. The temperature maintained in the nursery is conducive for germination, considerably improving the germination percentage and seedling quality. Because the date of sowing of seeds is the same for all farmers, the produce is ready at around the same time, thereby helping collective marketing. CRPs find this easier to monitor because all the nurseries are in the same place.

Review of CRPs

Initially, PRADAN provided the handholding and mentoring support to the farmers. From the third year (2012–13) *kharif* season onwards, the review and payment of CRPs are being carried out by the community itself. In this system, the SHG or the farmers' club reviews the performance of a CRP and gives him/her payment as per performance. A performance sheet is prepared with a rate chart for each of the activities. Farmers collect an amount for the CRP's payment (for example, Rs 80 for tomato) and based on the performance assessment of the CRP, payment to the CRP is made.

Marketing System

When there is large-scale production of a particular crop at particular time, a glut is created in the local market thus leading to undercutting of prices. To avoid this, linkages with the regional market are crucial. In order to establish a market system, value chain analyses of selected crops were conducted and, on this basis, linkages with the traders of the regional markets were established. The services of the local youth were requisitioned, to establish these linkages. Commission agents from regional markets were taken around and shown the APC areas, and farmers from the APC were sent to the local *mandis* and regional markets. Aggregation of the produce was done at the village level, and direct marketing in the regional market was also done.

In the initial year of APC promotion, the middlemen directly took the produce from the village to the *mandi* (market). The middleman kept a margin of Rs 3–5 per kg of produce. They came only when the market would fetch a better return and when the selling of the produce was easy. The behaviour of the middlemen with the producers was often derogatory. The middlemen often trapped the farmers by creating a credit balance and then forced the indebted farmers to sell the produce to clear their previous dues. They also exploited the farmers by manipulating the weight.

From the second year onwards, a few young, business-oriented villagers were identified and groomed as entrepreneurs. After rigorous training and adequate exposure to markets, these entrepreneurs were involved in vegetable trading. A commission of Rs 0.50 per kg of produce sold was provided to the

To assess whether the crop selection and variety selection is suitable for the area is also one of PRADAN's responsibilities, as is arranging the exposure visits for the farmers, the CRPs and the entrepreneurs to production areas and markets.

community entrepreneur, who earned around Rs 15,000 per vegetable season.

There were some challenges, however, during this process. The entrepreneur had no risk as the commission was fixed; hence, he exhibited low concern about the selling price. Also, because the area for the entrepreneur was pre-fixed, sporadic incidents of monopoly were reported.

From the learning of the last two years, the concept of area demarcation for an entrepreneur was abolished and the commission was fixed as Rs 7.00 per kg of produce. A common rate chart was also prepared and distributed to the farmers. This helped the farmers understand the relation between the *mandi* price and the farm gate price.

ROLE OF PRADAN

The role of PRADAN is to identify new areas, carry out the concept seeding and to conduct the village- or hamlet-level planning. The role is also to provide training to the farmers, the CRPs and the entrepreneurs. PRADAN is also responsible for the development and continuous up-gradation of POPs, building linkages of the community with the bank, government departments and suppliers. PRADAN also acts as the intermediary with the external stakeholder, conducts the market study, carries out the value chain analysis and sets up the system for marketing, reviews and monitors the programme, provides a forum to the farmers for cross-learning, helps the community in asset creation, prepares process facilitation for entrepreneur development, finalizes the norms of cultivation and trading, manages crises and provides supportive supervision.

INNOVATION AND LEARNING IN APC

There has been a lot of innovation in the APC. A common nursery with a low-cost net house has been constructed and a compost pit has been formed in the vegetable plot. An entrepreneur model for output marketing has been established; input arrangement through informal collectives has been completed and a critical volume of production for marketing has been achieved. Inter-cropping of short-duration vegetables has been promoted, along with long-duration vegetables. Poly tube nurseries for creepers have been initiated and market-driven, off-season vegetable cultivation has also been started. Inorganic fertilizer has been replaced with glyricidia.

Farmers have been taken on exposure visits at three critical stages of crop production as a strategy for scaling up production. A training module for promoting vegetable production with small farmers has been developed. Critical steps have been taken for enhancing the capacity of small farmers and also the crop combination of low-risk crop with high-risk vegetables.

IMPACT OF APC

The average income of a family has increased by Rs 25,000 to 30,000 per annum because of APC. Considering the potential of the APC, a family can earn Rs 50,000 per annum from 15 decimals of land. Changes and transformation can be observed in families and even at the

village level. Because they are part of the APC, farmers have been relieved of the burden of marketing their produce. The youth of the villages are very enthused by the establishment of the APC because it has provided the people with a means of dignified engagement in agri-business. The formation of the APC has also checked seasonal migration. Because output and input is a group-managed activity, even the most beleaguered family of a single woman or a physically challenged person can meaningfully participate in the APC. A hamlet of 30 farmers can easily earn Rs 7–10 lakhs per annum from the market. Collectivization at all levels is helping them in asset creation and credit linkage as a result of which some marginal farmers are now emerging as big farmers. The overall development of the APC areas is being noticed by the block and district administrations. Knowledge and skill-building, both in production and marketing, are visible. Gumla district is now known as the vegetable production cluster in the regional markets of Ranchi, Ambikapur and Rourkela.

LOOKING AHEAD

There is need to establish a more stable marketing system, with a focus on summer crops, following the area saturation model. This model also needs to be expanded to other areas. The next step could also be to move towards natural farming by reducing the use of inorganic inputs.

Social Mobilization through the Special SGSY Project in Dumka

JIBDAS SAHU

Laying a strong foundation of SHGs and Clusters, introducing poverty alleviation projects under Special SGSY, and hand-holding the community as it ventures into new areas of cultivation and agricultural practices is bringing about slow yet steady transformation in the lives of the marginalized and the poor

BACKGROUND

The Special Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) project in Dumka district, built on the edifice of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and UNDP-supported Community Based Pro-Poor Initiative (CBPPI) and social mobilization around Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM), introduced poverty alleviation projects under which 350 SHGs were formed and nurtured in four blocks. The objective was to provide means of dignified living to the indigent populace by augmenting their income and ensuring round-the-year food security. This project targeted around 5,000 poor families belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SC), the Scheduled Tribes (ST), and other socially and economically backward population.

During the first phase, the main focus was to promote new SHGs, build solidarity through the formation of Clusters, link these groups with banks through credit linkage programmes, pilot *arhar* cultivation, undertake tasar host-tree plantation and initiate tasar reeling activities. Around 4,500 women from more than 350 SHGs were familiarized with the various modules of social mobilization and livelihoods. Large-scale credit linkages with banks were established successfully. SHGs repaid loans and interests to the tune of Rs 50 lakhs every year. Schemes under Micro Economic Social Organization (MESO) and watersheds were mobilized; crop productivity improvement trials were conducted and new activities such as poultry farming, manufacturing vermi-compost and spinning were introduced.

PROCESS

In the earlier MoRD projects, the focus was on large-scale social mobilization, incubation of livelihood prototypes and creation of service providers, by which the involvement of the community remained confined to the recipients of the programme benefits and who had a limited say in the overall programme implementation.

However, the Special SGSY project set a milestone by ensuring participatory planning and implementation mechanisms through the preparation of a Diversified Activities Plan (DAP) by the benefitting families, project execution and monitoring through the *tola sabhas* and mandatory community contribution in all programme activities. These measures have cumulatively stimulated a high level of accountability and ownership among the community and also established high work-quality standards.

Transparent and prompt wage payment mechanisms, meaningful asset creation and direct involvement of the community at each stage of planning, execution and monitoring of soil and water conservation activities infused a greater sense of ownership and pride among the community members. Regular visits by SHG women to the work site, to check quality and track expenses, ensured timely work execution and maintenance of a standard quality. The women were taught simple techniques, to measure the progress of work. SHG members of all the *tola sabhas* participated in the planning and implementation of the land and water development activities enthusiastically and can now measure their land areas accurately.

The Special SGSY project set a milestone by ensuring participatory planning and implementation mechanisms through the preparation of a Diversified Activities Plan by the benefitting families, project execution and monitoring through the tola sabhas and mandatory community contribution in all programme activities. These measures have cumulatively stimulated a high level of accountability and ownership among the community and also established high work-quality standards.

The plan prepared by the *tola sabhas*, through a participatory process (assessing the prevalent situation by visiting each and every plot and analyzing the topography, the economic condition of the family, the assets possessed through earlier schemes, etc.), ensured an equitable sharing of financial resources by the community, while maintaining its focus on poorer families. Moreover, because the members are from homogenous SHGs and enjoy a strong bond of solidarity and compassion, the chances of discrimination in the allocation of resources is almost ruled out.

The aim was to treat the land in an integrated fashion. As a result of these integrated and contiguous treatments of vast patches of land, there has been a perceptible change in a concentrated geography. This has encouraged more families to plant in the *kharif* season and experiment with additional crops in the peripheral patches, eventually reducing the risk of crops being grazed, stolen or destroyed.

The learning from past experiences led to the formation of a State Cell located in the Rural Development department for smooth co-ordination of the project work between the department and all the five project teams. The Cell helped speed the release of funds and created an enabling environment by establishing co-ordination between the district and the state administration. The State Cell facilitated the visits of various senior government officials, which ultimately created a mechanism of trust, transparency and mutual learning for all stakeholders.

CAPACITY BUILDING

One of the core objectives of the project was to build the capacity of the community. A series of exposure visits, class-room as well as field-based training, and visioning exercises were conducted. The fulcrum of the project interventions revolved around natural resource management (NRM); therefore, exposure visits to successful models of the land husbandry mechanism remained the thrust area. To make the programme more effective, the participation of both women and men was ensured. PRADAN project sites in Banka and Purulia of West Bengal, and Chaibasa and Gumla in Jharkhand were extensively visited by the community, to understand the various kinds of land categories and the relevant land treatment mechanisms. Mango plantations in homestead land, seepage tanks in lowlands, the five per cent model, land treatment in the medium uplands, goat rearing for the landless families in nearby forest fringe areas, etc., attracted the attention of farmers.

Besides these projects, people were also shown earlier activities of the team such as horticulture, land water activities and Arjuna (tasar host tree) plantations in the districts. To promote improved agriculture, PRADAN encouraged and facilitated the families to cultivate *kharif* and *rabi* vegetables on a large scale. For this, they were shown the practices being followed in Pithoriya (near Ranchi) and Siltha, Barapagar and Parmanear Hansdiha in Dumka district. As a result, five agriculture production Clusters (APCs) have emerged.

Along with the Community Service Providers (CSPs) working on the project, PRADAN professionals also got direct hands-on experience of conducting market surveys and

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creating linkages with the market. The CSPs, the professionals, the CEO, the Marketing Officer of the Ekta Mahila Kukkut Palak Swabalambi Sahakarita Samitee Ltd. (a poultry co-operative) played a vital role in making vegetable and poultry production successful and giving the families involved in these activities a brighter future.

IMPACT

The project created vibrant community institutions such as SHGs and *tola sabhas*. It also mobilized a large pool of rural youth, who helped in transactional roles such as book- and accounts-keeping, undertaking measurement, preparing reports and meeting compliance as per the instructions of the *tola sabha*. One of the significant developments of such an engagement with the community is that these *tola sabhas* are now coming out to assist other villagers to plan and execute similar programmes under MGNREGA.

Another important objective of the project was to extend social mobilization. This was met by saturating the existing area through promotion and nurturing of SHGs, and replicating the process in nearby blocks such as Gopikander and Masaliya, through those SHG members, who had the experience and who were instrumental in bringing about transformation in their respective *tolas* or villages. As a result, 1,300 women have been organized into 100 SHGs in Masaliya.

The project brought about new experiences in terms of managing programmes through the *tola sabhas*. The SHG women and their spouses formed an integral part of the *tola sabhas*. Project Executive Committees were formed, with three designated signatories, to

undertake financial transactions. Giving more space to the women in planning, execution and conflict resolution activities, to bring about large-scale change in society, made the existing traditional *gram sabha* more active, functional and participatory. So far the women have converted 89 ha of wasteland into cultivable land through levelling, bunding and lime application, made 125 ha of medium uplands into assured paddy fields through the five per cent model, converted 350 ha of land into assured irrigated field (creating potential for double cropping) by means of 41 narrow wells, 24 broad wells, 10 earthen dams, five lift irrigation units and 443 seepage tanks. Another 165 families have made poultry sheds, with the round-the-year income going to women members of the families. Besides these, the villagers have seen crop demonstration, goat rearing, nursery/seedling raising under a net house, etc.

ROLE OF THE TOLA SABHA IN HELPING REALIZE DREAMS

Life was always a struggle for Bijli Devi and Shamlal Mandal of Patharia village of Saraiyhat block. Being a mother of three, Bijli Devi struggled hard to ensure a square meal daily for the family. Unpredictable and scanty rainfall failed to give them food security. Two acres of her 3.4 acres of land are uplands, 0.6 acres are medium uplands and 0.8 acres are lowlands. Most of her uplands had been uncultivated and remained fallow for years. The major blow came when Shamlal in some litigation was put behind bars. With the absence of an earning member, Bijli Devi found it almost impossible to manage the family affairs and lost all hope. Even in this precarious condition and despondency, she remained a member of the SHG—Sita Mahila Mandal. At this juncture, when Bijli was on the verge of caving in, the other members of Bijli's SHG showed solidarity and came forward to

support the beleaguered family, rescheduled her loan repayment dates, assisted her by providing another loan of Rs 8,000 and attended to the legal prosecution during her husband's six month imprisonment period. The *tola sabha* sanctioned four seepage tanks and 1.5 acres of mango plantation to the family, to ensure a sustainable return from her land. She was allowed to avail irrigation facilities from a broad well in a nearby plot belonging to other families. They helped her recover from the shock.

Six months later, when Shamlal came out from prison, the family was in debt to a large extent. Shamlal and Bijli found a new ray of hope in one of the *tola sabha* meetings when they were cajoled into undertaking mango plantation work in their uplands. The Project Execution Committee members suggested Shamlal's name for an exposure visit to Gumla mango orchards. Seeing the profitability achieved by the farmers in Gumla within five years, Shamlal and Bijli were determined to have their own orchard. Now in their 1.5 acres of orchard with 162 grafted mango seedlings, the couple have engaged themselves, with a lot of zeal, in inter-cropping with cauliflower, bitter gourd, ground nut and tomato. Though this is just the first step, it still is enough of an incentive to dream of a future, in which life will no longer be a struggle but a journey to cherish.

There are many such cases where families who came together through their initial journey via SHGs are fulfilling life's needs.

Salgi Murmu of Baha Bagan Mahila Mandal from Mackrachapar is today a more confident person. In 2010, when the district was facing drought, Salgi decided to dig a five per cent model (40' x 30' x 10') in her rocky barren land. She planted okra and bitter gourd in 3.5 decimals of land each. In spite of the continual

dry spells, she managed to save 90 per cent of the sown seeds, using the small amount of water that accumulated in the structure. She earned Rs 3,500 by selling the crops from a land from which she did not even expect sufficient vegetables for her own household consumption. With the onset of heavy rain, adequate water filled the structure, in which she then reared fish. The fingerlings cost her Rs 200 whereas the income she earned was Rs 2,000, thus providing the family with an additional source of cash income.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND APPRECIATION

The success of the Special SGSY programmes is being lauded by officials from various line departments. Government officials now seek assistance for other SGSY-promoted SHGs from the PRADAN-promoted poultry co-operative for input supply, quality control, training programmes as well as market linkages for the products. In the process of planning and implementation, many officials from the district have visited the field where work is in progress! The project resource persons are being actively used by various line departments

Government officials now seek assistance for other SGSY-promoted SHGs from the PRADAN-promoted poultry co-operative for input supply, quality control, training programmes as well as market linkages for the products.

for their training programmes. The Krishi Vikas Kendra (KVK) has sent batches of agriculture students from Birsa Agriculture University (BAU) to gain first-hand experience from such projects. Similarly, an orientation programme for new recruits of village-level workers was conducted in the Special SGSY project. The Director of DRDA

and a group of Lady Extension Officer have seen the poultry activities and also sought expertise as trainers.

CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

The project's vision of making *toila sabhas* the convergence nodes for various welfare/well-being programmes has miles to go. At least 10 *toila sabhas* have prepared plans for the remaining areas of the villages and have submitted them to the block as well as district administration for inclusion under MGNREGA. Apathy and carelessness seem to be holding back the administration from allotting the work to the *toila sabhas*. Some more time is possibly needed for the department to have the confidence that the communities have the capacity, skills and will to manage their own programmes.

Initiating Organized Broiler Farming: The Significance of Collective Action

TARAK NATH DAS

Providing employment to more than three million people in the country, poultry rearing as a livelihood option brings hope of financial and food security for the rural poor and the small-holder, reducing distress migration, enhancing confidence and paving the way for possibilities of education for the next generation

INTRODUCTION

Sonamuni Devi, Biti Soren and Sadori Devi's smiles, body language and confident way of speaking were enough for Manager, Parasnath Jha, to notice them among the men and women assembled in Vananchal Gramin Bank (VGB), to conduct their routine banking transactions. These rural women were a part of the Godda Gramin Poultry Self-Supporting Co-operative Society Limited (GGPSSCS Ltd.). In a short span of three years, the co-operative society has made an enduring impact on the lives of the landless and marginal poor women, who earlier had few earning options. It provided them with opportunities to earn an adequate living within the village, giving them an identity and indomitable strength.

The journey to self-sufficiency, however, was not smooth. Working with rural women, through a co-operative society, in one of the remotest districts of Jharkhand, with no past tradition or exposure to the poultry business, was no mean task. Convincing the families and neighbours of the viability of the enterprise required intensive and patient engagement with the community. They were not only skeptical but at times openly obstructive. It was only after five or six batches of birds were successfully reared and sold that the inhibitions gradually faded away. This article discusses some of the salient aspects of the venture.

BACKGROUND

Some SHG members owned no land or had very small pieces of low productive land and had no alternative employable skill sets. They were invariably compelled to undertake seasonal distress migration. After the PRADAN team's success in Godda in tasar and the agricultural sector, the organization was on the lookout for more opportunities to augment income through off-farm activities. The additional income from new activities would directly benefit those at the bottom of the pyramid as well as provide additional incremental income to existing beneficiaries. SHG members agreed to take up poultry rearing as an additional income generation activity. The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and the rural development department (RDD), Government of Jharkhand (GoJ)-supported Special SGSY project has substantial provisions for asset, capital and capacity support to start-ups.

PRADAN was actively engaged in the promotion of various livelihood activities in five blocks of Godda. The team had to decide where the initial 250 poultry sheds would be installed. Taking into consideration the land-holdings, road connectivity, market accessibility and willingness of the people to take risks, it decided to introduce the activity in Pathargama block of the district.

Whereas poultry rearing is recognized as a key poverty reduction strategy, with a number of schemes focused on poultry development and promotion, the high growth in the sector is currently confined to the commercial, organized sector.

to household food and nutrition security. Whereas poultry rearing is recognized as a key poverty reduction strategy, with a number of schemes focused on poultry development and promotion, the high growth in the sector is currently confined to the commercial, organized sector.

This is largely on account of the poor risk-bearing capacity of

small-holders; the lack of coordinated supply of inputs, extension and market services; and limited access to new knowledge and technology among small-holders.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE POULTRY BUSINESS

India has three per cent of the world's total poultry population (648 million poultry birds), providing employment to more than three million people in the country and is one of the fastest growing sectors (10–15 per cent) per annum, for the last decade. The organized poultry sector contributes 70–75 per cent of the total production, of which 95 per cent is sold as live chickens. Families of disadvantaged communities are the major contributors to this sector. Business growth in the rural areas, however, is limited by the following factors:

- ◆ Lack of knowledge and initiative among small-holders
- ◆ Poor risk-bearing capacity of small-holders
- ◆ Lack of coordinated supply of inputs, extension and market services
- ◆ Inability of the poor to enter the sector without outside support because commercial poultry is organized, complex, highly competitive and market oriented.

The rapid advancement of the poultry sector has, however, largely by-passed the poor, for whom poultry rearing has been a traditional livelihood activity, contributing significantly

To facilitate effective participation by small-holders in the poultry sector and help them benefit from this rapidly expanding commercial activity, a specially designed approach is required—based on the existing knowledge, resources, access to inputs and markets, and which will enable small-holders to graduate from a nutrition-and-food-security-focused intervention, to a livelihood and income-earning intervention.

BENEFICIARY SELECTION

The selection of beneficiaries was a key aspect in this activity. Several meetings and exposure visits were organized with functioning SHGs, to help the villagers understand the concepts of operating through a collective, the rearing technicalities, estimating the cost of a poultry-shed, raising the working capital, the grant and loan component, and making business plans. For the first time, 50 beneficiaries were selected, based on the Below the Poverty Line (BPL) list, their interest in the activity, their land-holding (less than 50 decimals), person power in the family, their economic vulnerability, their willingness to take a loan for the shed, equipment, working capital, etc.

SETTING UP A PRODUCER INSTITUTION (PI): A KEY AREA

Poultry business is a high-risk business, totally dependent on an uncertain and highly volatile market. The poultry industry is exposed to many external vagaries such as bird flu, demand fluctuation and price fall. The direct exposure of small producers to highly volatile markets and business conditions runs the extremely high risk of turning the economic table against the producers almost overnight. These issues create a high entry barrier for small producers. Hence, a proper shield was required to protect the interests of small producers, whose business accounts for a mere 20 per cent of the total produce in the state.

A co-operative was promoted to keep the risk of the rearer to a bare minimum, to enhance cost-effectiveness through the collective procurement of inputs and sale of birds, to achieve economies of scale, and to organize backward and forward integration.

FORMATION AND REGISTRATION

In January 2010, in a general meeting, the producer institution GGPSSS Ltd. was formed with the 50 beneficiaries from seven villages. The Governing Board members were selected. According to the decision of the first Governing Board, 103 people became members by purchasing 10 shares (1 share was Rs 100) and by depositing Rs 20 as processing fee. They then applied for legal registration, following the Bihar Co-operative Registration Act 1996; and the producer's institution was registered on 14 August 2010.

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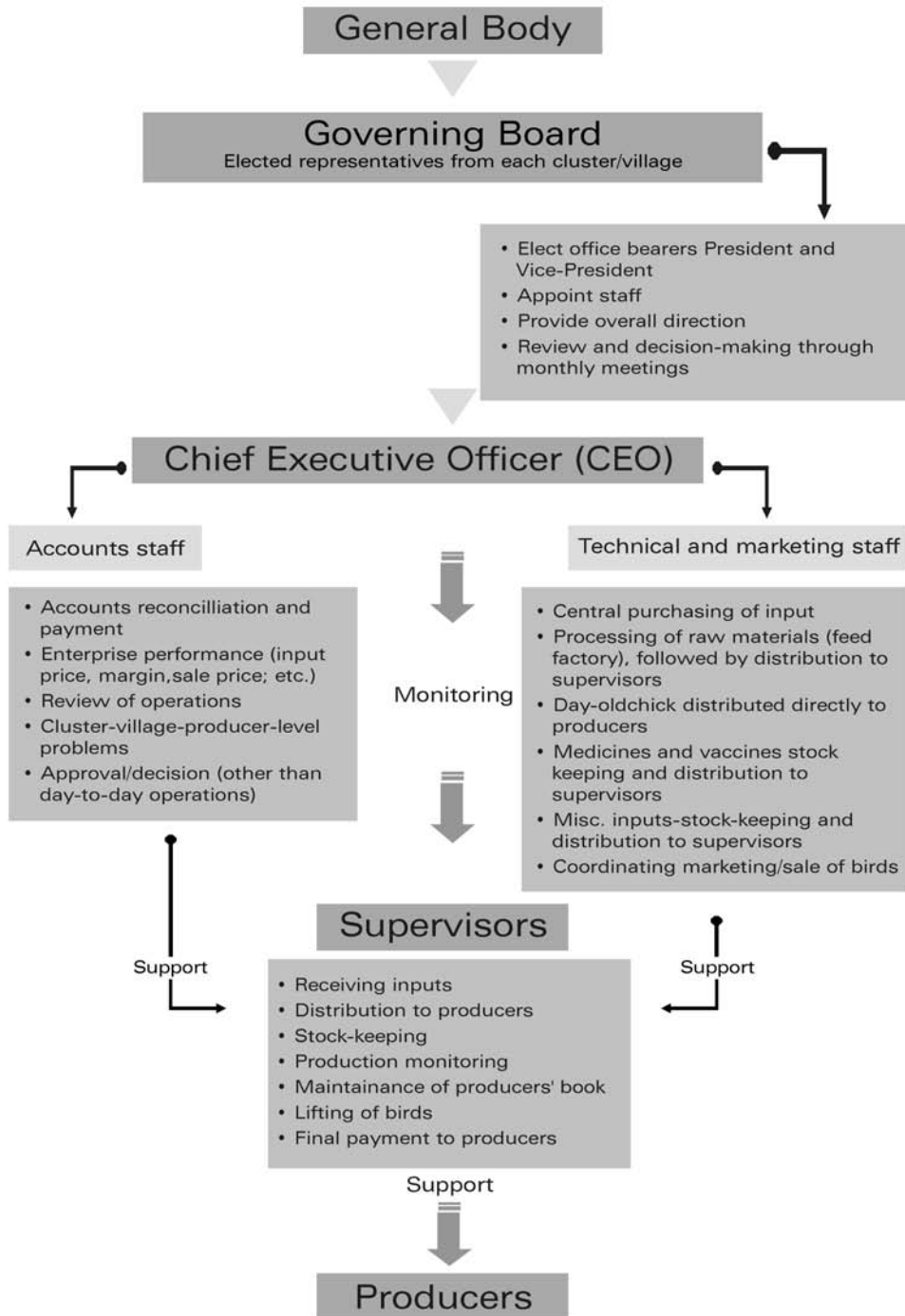
MANPOWER

The co-operative recruited a CEO-cum Veterinary Doctor to ensure that the operations in the field and in the office run smoothly and to co-ordinate the whole business process, including the technicalities involved in poultry rearing. Village-level supervisors were engaged to make two visits a day to each poultry shed in

their respective areas. One Central Supervisor was recruited to manage and follow up on the operations of the supervisors, mainly at the field-level and report directly to the CEO. An accountant was engaged to maintain accounts, input data into the Udyog Munshi (the dedicated livelihood and accounting MIS) and to capture business intricacies. Weekly review and planning meetings, conducted by the CEO, of all the staff helped in developing a common understanding and building a vibrant team.

INPUT AND OUTPUT MANAGEMENT

The co-operative is accountable to the rearers and is responsible for the arrangement of all the inputs and is required to purchase equipment, bedding material, chicks, vitamins and minerals, medicine, vaccine, feed, etc., from the distributors and suppliers. All inputs are then distributed to the beneficiaries through the supervisors. The CEO and the Central Supervisor are directly engaged in this operation. All the beneficiaries are bound to sell the outputs, for example, the ready birds, through the collective and not individually. The co-operative is responsible for establishing market linkages and building relationships with the buyers, who collect the birds from the poultry-sheds. The CEO is in charge of this, and he fixes the price by taking the market rate into consideration. The co-operative sells its produce in the local (Godda, Hansdiha and Mahagama) and nearby (Deoghar, Tinpahar and Bhagalpur) markets.



Management of individual production units

Figure 1: Governance Structure and Function of the GGPSSS

REARING AND TECHNICAL ASPECTS

In Godda, the production cycle began in November 2010. In the beginning, there were many technicalities involved, for example, cleaning and spraying the sheds with medicine, applying lime in the sheds, using bricks to prepare for brooding, procuring the material and the medicines needed during the placement of chicks, applying glucose, procuring and arranging feed (pre-starter, starter and finisher, according to the age of the chicks) and applying medicines to control diseases. Beneficiaries learn the process in one cycle and then, supported by the cadres of 10 trained para-veterinarians (supervisors), they manage these aspects themselves.

ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT

Maintaining accounts is a very important component, especially when large volumes of money transactions are involved. Co-operatives maintain different types of cash books and registers for the input and output management; they make entries in the Udyog Munshi, pay the beneficiaries depending on their Efficiency Index (EI)*, based on different components and aspects of rearing. A mandatory, annual audit is also conducted.

GOVERNANCE AND OPERATION

According to the by-laws of the GGPSSS Ltd., the Governing Board comprises 11 members selected through the Annual General Meeting (AGM), held once a year. The operational body comprises the CEO, supervisors, trainers, accountants and other technical and marketing staff, paid by the co-operative. Meetings of the Governing Board are held once a month, in which the operational/executive body presents the monthly progress report and

Beneficiaries had to undergo mandatory training, thereby enhancing their understanding of the activity and improving their production skills.

deliberates on performance issues at length. Similarly, poultry development committees hold weekly meetings in each of the villages, facilitate prudent decision-making and address issues arising in the business.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

While the interventions were being initiated, a series of training programmes and exposure visits were organized, covering the theory and the practice of the business. Beneficiaries had to undergo mandatory training, thereby enhancing their understanding of the activity and improving their production skills. The training programmes organized are aimed at:

- ◆ Orientating the entrepreneurs to the nuances of the broiler farming enterprise
- ◆ Emphasizing the importance of collectivization
- ◆ Providing practical on-the-job training of supervisors for one complete batch cycle of around one-and-a-half months
- ◆ Enabling accountants to work on the Udyog Munshi, for the smooth operation of the MIS
- ◆ Providing an initial eight-day training on production and management to the new beneficiaries
- ◆ Creating awareness and enhancing motivation among beneficiaries
- ◆ Grooming and training Governing Board members, once a month,
- ◆ Conducting the Annual General Meeting (AGM), with Sub-Group Activities (SGAs), to announce the physical and financial status of the preceding year
- ◆ Conducting multi-stage training of trainers

Key Processes in a New Area

1. PRADAN conducts a rapid assessment of two core components:
 - Socio-technical feasibility (understanding the local livelihoods portfolio and checking road and water access, prevailing wage rates, share of member in family's livelihood portfolio);
 - Market and financial feasibility (understanding the prevailing market conditions demand, input supply, margin per bird);
2. Approach existing/potential producers, who are already organized into SHGs and have a good track record in transactions
3. Train members in the methods of broiler poultry rearing. The training lasts for a whole cycle of production and is carried out under the supervision of the Technical Supervisors
4. Give each member a batch of 400–500 birds to rear. The birds are procured from a hatchery identified by the Federation and then distributed among the members. Each producer is also given a producer's book, to record all the transactions made.
5. Administer vaccines to the birds through the feed.
6. Choose a para-vet from the community and train her/him to monitor the birds;
7. Pay producers according to the quality of the birds reared by them at the end of a batch, that is, a period of approximately 45 days.
8. Calculate the EI of the batch. The EI captures the livability, Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR), weight and the number of days that the birds have been reared.

Livability (%) x Average
Body Weight (in
kilogrammes)

Efficiency Index (EI)-----X100

FCR x No. of Days

A minimum EI of 160 is required for the producer to get a decent return on the birds. A score of less than 160 accounts for negative points and the birds are sold at the basic price.

The poultry industry is prone to volatile fluctuations in price, which is determined by the Hyderabad prices. The Jharkhand State Women's Self Supporting Poultry Federation (JSWSSPF) has a committee to negotiate and fix prices. The committee has two members, one from the JSWSSPF and the other from the co-operative.

When an order for buying the birds arrives, the buyer has to first go to the co-operative office and place the order and pay the amount. The buyer shows the receipt and procures the birds from the village through the supervisor.

A Governing Board meeting for the co-operative is held on the 11th of every month, in which representatives from the villages come to share their experiences and the information on the physical and financials of the cooperative.

Weekly meetings with rearers take place in every village. It is mandatory to address all issues that arise.

INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED, ROLES PLAYED

- A) **PRADAN** initiated the intervention and was instrumental in forming the groups and the co-operative, and evolved the model right up to the formation of the producers' company.

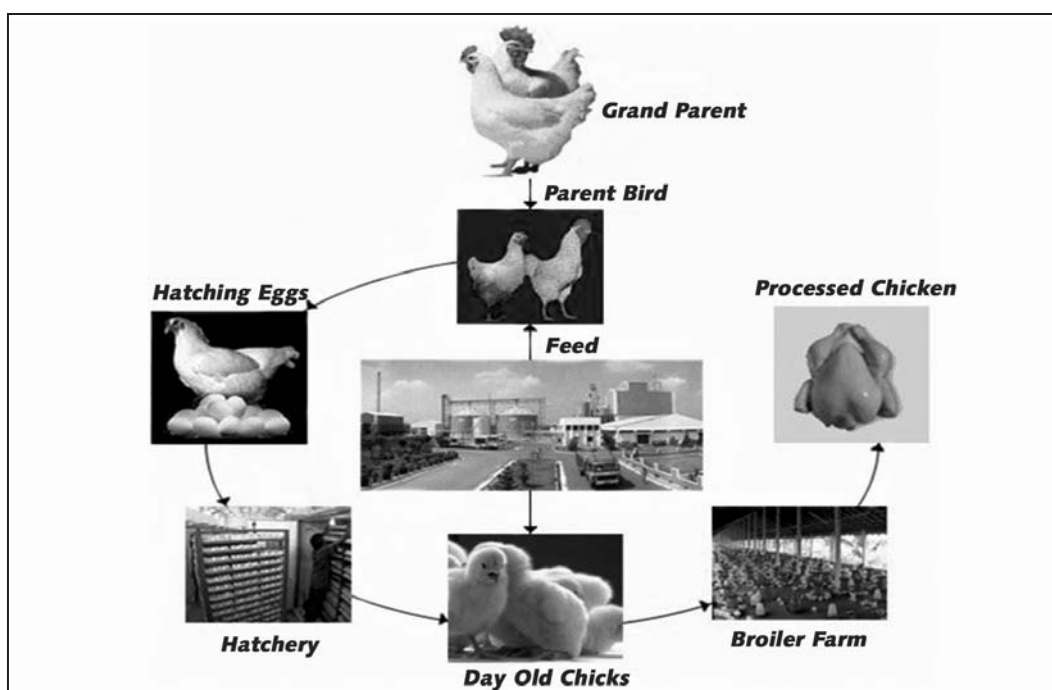


Figure 2: Business Process From Farm to Market

- B) **JSWSSPF** is a Federation of nine poultry co-operatives in Jharkhand. It purchases the raw material require and passes it on to the co-operatives, manufactures feed, conducts the internal audit and the quarterly assessment of the respective co-operatives, and provides training to the stakeholders, when required.
- C) **GGPSSCS** Ltd. introduced robust management into the system. It is an important link between the producers and the producers' institution.

HUMAN RESOURCES INVOLVED

The co-operative has one CEO to manage its day-to-day affairs. Each co-operative has a Technical Supervisor, who makes regular visits to the poultry farms and checks the birds. There is also one central para-vet, from the community, to assist the Supervisor in his work. The co-operative also employs an accountant to manage financial transactions.

Funds and Costs and Other Resources

Approximately 75 per cent of the co-operatives' turnover goes into the hands of the producers and 25 per cent is retained by the co-operative to meet its expenses. Financial help sought through the Special SGSY is to primarily construct the poultry sheds and meet part of the working capital requirement.

CHALLENGES

The initiative was new for the community as well as the district team professionals. It took concerted efforts to demystify the business for the community.

Even though poultry is common livestock among the tribals as well as the backward sections, the rearing of broiler birds was an entirely different ball game for producers. The technology-intensive process made many people hesitant to take this up as a primary source of livelihood. At the outset, during

the community meetings in villages at Pathargama in Godda, community members were cynical about taking up broiler farming as a livelihood option. However, regular exposure visits and training, and continuous engagement and dialoguing with the community allayed their apprehensions and inhibitions.

The project mandated to work with more than 90 per cent of the BPL families. However, there were many landless villagers who were not given the BPL status and thus could not be reached.

As per project design, the shed capacity had to be 400 sq ft for 400 birds. But PRADAN, Godda along with the co-operative members decided to increase the shed capacity to 500 sq ft for 500 birds so that the beneficiary could earn more in the same time. The extra funds for the additional shed capacity and rearing equipments (brooder, chicks guard, feeder and drinker) was leveraged through a five-year bank loan of Rs 20,000 per producer.

In order to help build community ownership for the initiative, the project warranted Rs 6,000 to be leveraged from the contribution of the *swarajgari* (beneficiaries). This amount, equivalent to around 42 days of the MGNREGA wage (calculated @Rs 140 per day) was difficult for a daily wage labour to arrange. However, motivational training programmes and regular visits by PRADAN professionals paid off. Most of the contribution came through masonry, wage labour and bricks, although this prolonged the shed completion work in the early phases.

In the beginning, arranging a loan for the shed and the working capital posed a challenge. A

Even though poultry is common livestock among the tribals as well as the backward sections, the rearing of broiler birds was an entirely different ball game for producers. The technology-intensive process made many people hesitant to take this up as a primary source of livelihood.

batch cycle of 500 birds required a working capital of about Rs 40,000. If 40 per cent of this amount, that is, Rs 24,000 were available, the co-operative could manage the whole cycle because the placement of chicks usually happens in a staggered manner. The government sanctioned a grant of only Rs 8,000. The remaining Rs 16,000 had to be garnered through bank loans, which were refused outright by the service area

banks, including by the regional rural bank, thus seriously jeopardizing the co-operative's production plan. At this juncture, JWSPCFL, the poultry Federation, extended its support by approaching NABARD for a working capital loan of Rs 16,000 and equipment cost of Rs 6,000 per beneficiary. PRADAN helped in raising the remaining amount of Rs 14,000 for shed construction from the Dewan Foundation, Delhi.

A feed mill needed to be constructed for sustainability. Two beneficiaries from Jamjori village agreed to donate the land needed for the building. During the course of construction, conflict arose between the contractor and the villagers due to the poor quality of work. Ultimately, the co-operative changed the contractor, and the feed mill took about a year to complete. Now a semi-automatic machine has been installed. However, the electricity supply is erratic; a generator will be purchased soon and production is expected thereafter.

The conditions of the roads of every village in a poultry Cluster were far from adequate for transporting the chicks. During the monsoon, the co-operative struggled hard to sell the ready birds as well as to store inputs in the feed godown.

Initially, most of the Governing Body members did not understand the business process and its nuances. Regular information about the concept of a co-operative, the setting up of systems and defining the role of the members helped groom them to take decisions.

Marketing was a challenge initially because the members/co-operative had never been exposed to the market dynamics. Chickens were being supplied mainly from the neighbouring Bengal market. Entering that established market was difficult. The co-operative studied the demand of the product and started making a slow but firm entry into the business. They learned that the timing of the placement of the chicks was crucial to ensure a reasonable rate for the ready birds. Gradually, the co-operative was able to establish its own placement plan and thus penetrated 35 per cent of the local market.

Disease control is another major problem. Though the farm size is small and good hygiene is maintained, the birds have faced the threat of deadly viruses such as the avian flu, ranikhet and others.

IMPACT AND CHANGES

In spite of the numerous challenges, the co-operative has made significant strides in the business. After two-and-a-half years, the changes are now clearly visible among the target community. One poultry farmer earned a net profit Rs 2,800 per batch (the highest amount paid was Rs 8,100 from one cycle) of 500 birds. On an average, a farmer rears six batch cycles per year, thus earning an additional income in the range of Rs 15,000 to 25,000.

The awareness level of the women poultry farmers regarding the business aspect of poultry rearing is increasing. They feel empowered and even have no hesitation in

Biti Soren, the wife of Santlal Murmu from Jokelaghat village, Paraspani panchayat is one of the 15 members that started poultry rearing under the co-operative in November 2010. The perennial source of income has infused her with high enthusiasm and confidence. She can now afford the cost of studies of her two sons, who are now studying in Central and Mission schools at Godda. She is a source of inspiration for many other parents, who are now investing the earnings from poultry into their children's future.

meeting officials and raising their voice in *panchayat* meetings. Owing to the fact that they now have a regular and reliable cash flow, their say in the family and societal affairs has considerably increased.

Looking into the initial success of the co-operative, there has been a sudden upsurge in the demand for forming new SHGs in the vicinity. Now an additional 80 SHGs have been formed within the same poultry Clusters, which otherwise were blasé to the idea of poultry rearing.

About 50 per cent of the poultry farmers are now more conscious about their children's education. Most of them have purchased the necessary books for their children, have even engaged tutors and are sending their children to hostels of reputed government and mission schools in the area.

Field visits by the Deputy Commissioner, Deputy District Commissioner, Block Development Officer and the representatives from GTZ and NABARD, and experience-sharing by co-operative members in various development forums has helped to mobilize funds. Appreciation and exposure has

contributed immensely in enhancing the confidence of the rearers, and has also brought about a paradigm shift in the perception of all stakeholders.

Some poultry farmers have retrieved the jewellery/ornaments they had pledged and some of them have purchased new ones.

The intervention allows both spouses to earn for their family. Most of the men in the family now no longer go outside to find jobs. With poultry rearing, they earn adequate income around the year.

THE ENABLING FACTORS

Several factors contributed significantly to the success of the programme, including the

presence of strong community institutions such as the SHGs. The existing 21 SHGs at the beginning of the intervention prepared a strong social ground for sharing and nurturing of new ideas. The success exhibited in areas such as tasar, and agriculture production enhancement created a thirst for improvement. The provisions under the Special SGSY programme ensured the much needed capital support for testing, budding and scaling the idea. And PRADAN's past experience of developing and working with poultry co-operatives in other districts of the State, provided the much, required-in-house techno-managerial expertise and motivation. The professional support available to the community from PRADAN as well as the community service providers enabled the critical hand-holding support during project vicissitudes.

PUSIYA DEVI, A POULTRY FARMER

Pusiya Devi, a lanky lady aged around 50, had a difficult time providing meals for her family from the 50 decimals of land that she owned and another 60 decimals of leased land that she tilled. With her husband unable to work due to old age and poor health, she had taken up the responsibility of rearing her family.

The initial hurdles in starting the enterprise came in the form of objections from her family, who were against poultry rearing. However, her exposure visit to the business and a ten-day residential training in Bokaro in April 2010 convinced her to take up the activity. Her commitment grew when she heard that she could earn around Rs 5,000 per batch. Perhaps, because her host in Bokaro was one of the best producers and would have earned that amount, it was her firm belief that she would get around Rs 5,000 per batch from poultry as a net income. Pusiya Devi went back to her village along with the other members of her Cluster, with a firm belief that she was going to be successful in her venture.

Infused with excitement, she completed her shed and placed the first batch of chicks around December 2010. During the rearing phase, the District Development Commissioner (DDC) and District Development Managers (DDM), NABARD, visited the Cluster and shared their views about the potential of this activity to earn as much as Rs 5,000 per cycle. Her understanding about the profitability was further reinforced. Pusiya Devi now had no doubts about being able to earn Rs 5,000 within a few weeks of beginning work.

But her hopes were shattered when her first batch fetched her only Rs 1,431 as net income. The rate of mortality and the Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR) were high and the weight of the birds was around 1.2 kg. Her disappointment and disillusionment, when faced with this reality, almost led her to give up the activity. She blamed PRADAN for causing her loss. Extremely upset with the returns, she decided not to participate anymore. A few meetings were organized with all the producers, where queries on business economics were addressed. After about thirty days or so, a second batch of birds was placed in this tiny village named Jamjori under the Paraspani panchayat, about 12 km from the district headquarters.

Recovering from the disappointment of the failure of her first batch and putting it down to a learning experience, she invested in the project once more. The second batch of rearing fetched her an income of Rs 4,101, which made her believe in the business again. Pusiya Devi has reared 12 batch cycles so far and has had a net profit of Rs 35,813 at the rate of Rs 2,984 per batch with an investment of about half a day's engagement for 38 days, per batch. Owing to the profits earned from the business, her son and daughter-in-law both are now pursuing a Bachelors Course.

Poverty Alleviation in Damray: The impact of Special SGSY

SHAHNAWAZ ALAM

Emerging as a source of inspiration for neighbouring villages, the farmers of Damray have found success and sustenance, thanks to PRADAN and Special SGSY, by utilizing the natural resources of the land, multi cropping and diversifying from growing paddy once a year to cultivating vegetables and flowers throughout the year, both on the uplands and lowlands

Last Diwali was special for the residents of Damray village. The buyers in the local Khunti market had queued up to buy fresh garlands of marigold from Damray. Within no time, the entire stock of flowers was sold out at a premium rate of Rs 15 per metre. This was unprecedented in a village known for its poverty, debt and distress migration.

Over the last three years, Damray, a tribal village in the interiors of Khunti District in Jharkhand, has emerged as a source of inspiration for the region. It is a small village under the Kewra *panchayat* of Murhu block, with a population of 30 households of the Munda tribe. It is situated 25 km south east of the district headquarters, and the nearby historic and beautiful Sarwada Church. There is no public transport system to the village, and the people usually rely on bicycles to reach the block headquarters at Murhu, around 15 km away.

With the support of Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), a civil society organization, and because of the opportunities created under the Special Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (Special SGSY), Damray village has not only changed its own fate but is showing the path of socio-economic development to the surrounding villages.

In 2009, when PRADAN intervened in Damray, the households had an average food sufficiency for six or seven months from their own land and relied on supplies from Public Distribution System for the rest of the year or were compelled to migrate to places such as Delhi, Goa, Assam and even to Andaman and Nicobar to earn some money.

Damray was the first village of the Kewra *panchayat* where PRADAN intervened and the women were organized to form two Self Help Groups (SHGs), namely, *Chameli Mahila Mandal* and *Prakash Mahila Mandal*, with a total membership of around 30. In the first year of intervention, the focus remained on the strengthening of the people's institutions, that is, SHGs and *gram sabhas*. The role of the SHGs here was not limited to the weekly savings and credit; the group members were involved in organizing and facilitating such activities among the villagers that helped them identify and recognize the potential of their resources to lead a better life. They helped the villagers change their fate and not to be content with limited agricultural production. The women of these SHGs made ambitious plans and set a landmark target, to secure round-the-year food sufficiency for all households. They also aspired for additional minimum cash income of Rs 3,000 per annum from agriculture.

In order to boost the morale of these SHGs, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and the Government of Jharkhand supported the Special SGSY project. Systematic training programmes and exposure visits were organized, to strengthen the traditional *gram sabha* as an institution for the development of the village. These initiatives helped break the hegemony of the men-folk, who traditionally took all the decisions in the *gram sabha*. These decisions often lacked far-sightedness and failed to find any lasting solutions to the perpetual and complex problem of poverty.

The active and effective participation of women in these meetings allowed for more meaningful deliberations on the ways and means to improve the socio-economic life of

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villagers. All these organized efforts started to show results in 2010 when 13 of the 30 families cultivated tomatoes for the first time in the rainy season. Each of the families earned a profit ranging from Rs 5,000 to 9,000, which was unprecedented and beyond their wildest imagination. This first taste of triumph further propelled the confidence and motivation level

of the farmers. Encouraged, in the subsequent winter, the farmers cultivated garden peas, bottle gourd, brinjal, potatoes, tomatoes and cauliflower. Even in the *rabi* season, agriculture was attempted in a small area of four acres with an irrigation facility.

These small successes unleashed the latent potential of agriculture in Damray. It led to a paradigm shift in the way people practised agriculture and perceived the value and utility of their natural resources, especially land. Earlier people considered their uplands as the least worthy and ranked it as No. 3 (grade), and termed their lowlands, where paddy—the staple crop—was grown and considered to be No.1 grade. Concerted efforts and investments in creating awareness, training of people, crop demonstration and the strengthening of the *gram sabha* meetings made people realize that the uplands, which accounted for a significantly larger portion of the land asset, was the most suited for vegetable cultivation and had immense potential to fetch high returns in terms of cash income.

The villagers, until then, had restricted their agriculture to the *kharif* season only because of the depletion of the water resources. A series of orientation meetings and training programmes were held to create awareness that, if scientifically harnessed, Damray had an abundance of water to meet the farming

and other needs of the villagers. If the monsoon rainwater could be preserved for some time, the vast patch of uplands, which invariably remained fallow almost round the year, could be brought under vegetable cultivation.

The annual average rainfall in the state is about 1,400 mm, which occurs mainly during four months (June–September). About 80–85 per cent of the total precipitation is received in three-and-a-half months, from mid-June to end-September, and 10–15 per cent from October to January; very little rainfall is received during the rest of the year.

Of the total rainfall, 60 per cent is wasted due to the surface run-off and leaching. Therefore, only 40 per cent of the rainfall remains for crop use. As per the estimates of the average annual precipitation, about 20 per cent of the water is lost to the atmosphere, 50 per cent flows as surface runoff and the balance 30 per cent soaks into the ground as soil moisture and ground water.

The villagers realized that owing to the shrinking opportunities in agriculture due to the lack of irrigation facilities, over time people were being forced to migrate. However, if livelihood opportunities were to be created in the village itself, they would be happy to stay at home.

PRADAN spoke to the villagers about the possibilities of introducing the Special SGSY programme, which was being implemented in 95 villages of Khunti district. The villagers were excited by the prospect of creating assured irrigation, learning improved farming and earning wage income—all based on

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interventions in their own land and village. They planned to create a series of seepage tanks (small farm ponds 30 x 30 x 10 ft) along with other activities such as land development (which mainly includes land levelling and farm bunding) and irrigation wells. The prime focus was to create in situ water conservation that would provide life saving irrigation during dry spells in the *kharif* season and would recharge precious underground

aquifers so that water use would become sustainable and remain available all round the year. A total of 12 seepage tanks were dug, costing Rs 5,000–8,000 each, depending on their size.

The immediate effect was wage generation and asset creation for the families; in the long run, these measures converted the village into a vegetable bed and changed the land-use pattern from mono-cropping to multi-cropping. Vegetable cultivation has now become a round-the-year activity. People begin vegetable cultivation in the uplands in the rainy season and gradually go down to the lowlands in the summer season where there is assured irrigation from seepage tanks. There is manifold increase in the range of crops and the area under cultivation. Farmers now confidently cultivate vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, chilli, tomato, potato, okra, brinjal and garden peas in large quantities.

Agriculture is no longer just a means of sustenance but has grown into an enterprise. Farmers are beginning to cultivate and sell high-value products such as broccoli and capsicum. Looking into the supply deficit market of the state capital, Ranchi, and the district headquarters, the audacious farmers of

Damray have even successfully ventured into floriculture. Scores of farmers have taken up marigold cultivation as a cash crop for the first time in their lives.

In just four years of project interventions, from 2009 to 2013, the number of families engaged in intense vegetable cultivation has multiplied from 13 to 27 (of a total of 30) and the total area under vegetable cultivation has increased to more than 31 acres. Some farmers also grow summer paddy, using the SRI method. Rajen Hassa Purty, a resident of Damray, earned more than Rs 40,000 last year by selling vegetables and flowers from his piece of land of one-and-a-half acres. He was awarded the best farmer of the *panchayat* in a *Kisan Mela* organized by the Murhu block.

It is hard to believe that before the project inception, the same land use was covered with *putus* (a locally available grass) bushes and remained fallow. Encouraged by the output, Rajen cleared and brought another acre of land under cultivation. With the surplus income earned, he has installed a sprinkler set so that water can be more judiciously used. Along with crop diversification, he has also started mixed cropping. For example, okra and bottle gourd have been transplanted in the garden pea field so that more income can be generated from the same piece of land. This year, he is hoping to earn more than Rs 60,000 from vegetable cultivation alone.

Along with Rajen, Elisaba Purty, Prisca Purty and Martin Purty have also cultivated a variety of vegetables in more than two acres of land each. To support the efforts of the villagers and to encourage scientific cultivation, a green net house has been installed through the Special SGSY, to ensure healthy seedlings.

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interventions in their villages. Like true champions of development, the SHG members of Damray have organized themselves and taken up the task of mobilizing the remaining villages of the *panchayat* around the Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM)-based livelihood interventions.

Till date, they have formed 19 additional SHGs in nine neighbouring hamlets and villages and created two Clusters (representative body of SHGs to discuss and resolve the issues of the member SHGs and to promote cross learning). The members are also an integral part of the Jharia Mahila Sangh, the first-ever block-level SHG Federation in Khunti district, an output of the Special SGSY Project. Capitalizing on these social mobilization initiatives, the nearby villages have gradually moved to follow the trajectory set by Damray. Farmers from adjoining villages such as Chendagutu, Simbua, Iti, Murud and Dekela have already been exposed to the social mobilization around the INRM process, as demonstrated in Damray. Farmers like Rajen Hassa Purty of Damray, along with the others, constantly extend support to these villagers, who are striving to come out of abject poverty.

The farmers are now involved in healthy competition with each other. This year, in the *kharif* season, all the families, except six in Iti village, were engaged in intensive cropping.

Thirty-nine families of this village demonstrated the production of vegetable soya bean (a new variety of soya bean, which is consumed as a green vegetable as well as a pulse and contains a high amount of protein). They also organized field days and market days, to promote the crop and its taste in the nearby villages, hoping to share the benefits of development witnessed by the residents of Damray. Mutual support and cross-learning are helping the entire area move towards socio-economic prosperity.

The project received immense support from PRADAN's two partner organizations, namely, Asia Vegetable Research and Development Centre (AVRDC) and Digital Green. Experts from AVRDC helped in the selection of various lines of seeds and crops, and the adoption of the best practices in vegetable cultivation. On the other hand, Digital Green helped in creating awareness of the practices through the very simple technique of shooting videos of the best fields and their Package of Practices (PoP) in the local language and disseminating them in other villages with the help of a DVD set or a pocket projector.

The Special SGSY programme has not only created avenues of livelihood in the area but

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has also impacted social aspects of life. In March 2013, around 300 village women organized themselves and campaigned against social evils such as violence against women, liquor consumption, superstition and corruption. They also celebrated their first Cluster *Adhiveshan*

(the annual General Meeting of the group of SHGs), where they took an oath to work for the overall socio-economic development of the area. The SHG Federation has constantly extended its support for such social activities.

The overall impact of these efforts and women's empowerment is evident in the local governance. Mrs. Lucia Jojo, an SHG member of the Prakash Mahila Mandal of Chendagutu village, won the post of *mukhiya* in the very first *Panchayati Raj* elections held in Jharkhand.

The experiences of the Special SGSY programme in Damray have further strengthened the belief that poverty can be alleviated through collective efforts. Synchronizing the government's programme with the people's aspirations and dedicated professionals engaging with the community are bound to bring lasting change in the lives of the poor.



Farmers have arrived at innovative solutions by forming community nurseries using local material such as bamboo and mosquito nets to keep the costs low. Community seedlings are grown on raised beds in a common nursery on a fixed date. On an average, each farmer grows vegetables on 15–20 decimals of land. For a group of 30 farmers, the cost of one such structure comes to approximately Rs 100 per farmer. In the picture above, farmers from Gumla in Jharkhand maintain their vegetable nursery beds inside the net house.



PRADAN is a voluntary organization registered in Delhi under the Societies Registration Act. PRADAN works through small teams of professionals in selected villages across eight states. The focus of PRADAN's work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for the rural poor. It involves organizing the poor, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their income and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. The professionals work directly with the poor, using their knowledge and skills to help remove poverty. *NewsReach*, PRADAN's monthly journal, is a forum for sharing the thoughts and experiences of these professionals working in remote and far-flung areas in the field. *NewsReach* helps them to reach out and connect with each other, the development fraternity and the outside world.

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