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# NewsReach







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# The PRADAN-Jagori Collaboration for Gender Equality

ANUBHA SINGH

*Going beyond organizing collectives for savings and credit, and generating livelihoods, two civil society organizations, with different areas of expertise and approaches of engaging with women, have committed, for the first time, to challenge the existing patriarchal structures and devising strategies for women's political, economic and social empowerment*

Women's empowerment, as a distinct strategy for growth and development, was recognized by the Planning Commission, Government of India (GoI), for the first time in the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992–97). By the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002–07), targets had been set for a few key indicators of human development, which included reduction in the gender gap in the basic services of education, health and livelihoods. The Plan document called for a three-pronged strategy of social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice.

The aim was to create an enabling environment of positive economic and social policies for women and to eliminate discrimination against them. It was an attempt to advance gender equality goals (Annual Report, MWCD, 2008). The Eleventh and Twelfth Five Year Plans have focused on inclusive growth, with a commitment to gender equality. Over the last two decades, the planning process of the state, in reference to the issues of women, has changed from a 'welfare' approach to an 'empowerment' and a 'rights-based' approach.

Ground realities, however, reveal less than satisfactory achievements in almost all the important human development indicators, pointing out that the benefits of development have failed to reach half the population. India is ranked 101 of 136 countries, scoring 0.655 on a scale of 0 to 1 in the Global Gender Gap Index (with 0 denoting inequality and 1 denoting equality). The index tries to measure the 'relative' gaps between women and men across countries in four key areas—health, education, economics and politics (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2013).

Whereas the analyses of trends show some positive improvements, the situation is worrisome when the country-level data is disaggregated and there remain wide regional variations. A report on Gendering Human Development Indices, brought out by the Ministry of Women and Child Development

(MWCD), captures the wide disparity in gender equality across states and emphasizes the need for focused attention in certain parts of the country. Much remains to be done in the endemic poverty regions of central and eastern India (Gol, 2009).

Despite good intentions and vast inputs by civil society organizations (CSOs) and the state at the local level, there was need to rethink the way in which gender gaps in the social, economic and political realms could be addressed and to bring about transformative changes in people's lives. There was also need to understand the complexities involved in concepts such as poverty, empowerment and gender equality, and the overlap of these in working towards the envisioned change.

### THE PRADAN-JAGORI PARTNERSHIP

When PRADAN began working in the rural, marginalized and poverty-stricken pockets of the country three decades back, the most immediate challenge it faced was that of providing food security to the people and poverty alleviation through livelihoods generation. This required the intense engagement of professionals at the field level, building on people's capacities and the introduction of appropriate technology to support their efforts. The depth and scale of PRADAN's engagement with communities in the remote and backward districts of the country, all of them diverse and with a

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differential nature of outreach and development, has indeed been a challenging task.

PRADAN's expertise was mainly in organizing women around issues of developing sustainable livelihoods and working towards their economic empowerment.

PRADAN's work focused on analyzing and responding to economic challenges. Through intense engagement at the field level, a large number of women from disadvantaged socio-cultural backgrounds, belonging mostly to the Scheduled Tribes and Castes, have been associated with the collectives mobilized by PRADAN, initially through its Self Help Groups (SHGs).

A significant improvement in the community's economic status and general well-being has become evident over a course of time. Yet, although this engagement provided economic benefits, it did not bring about a change in the women's status or challenge the gender relations within the home or society.

PRADAN, therefore, made a crucial policy level shift in 2010, by undertaking a pilot programme called 'Facilitating Women in Endemic Poverty Regions of India to Access, Actualize and Sustain Provisions on Women Empowerment', with the support of the Fund for Gender Equality, UN Women, whose core values were rooted in the principles of Gender Equality and women's rights.

It was the beginning of a vital phase of transition. PRADAN reflected on its approach of engaging with women at the grass roots, to enhance their capacities and facilitate their access to rights and entitlements on a sustainable basis, and made a shift in its strategy. This shift saw the organization adopting a more conscientious, rights-based

and empowerment approach in strengthening the solidarity and building capacities of their teams and of the rural and tribal women.

A unique partnership with Jagori, a feminist training and resource centre working for and advocating issues of women's rights, was thus shaped, in which the two organizations combined efforts and began a process of transformative capacity building for the empowerment of women belonging to the marginalized sections from eight endemic poverty zones of the country. A noteworthy strength of this partnership was that for the first time two CSOs with different areas of expertise and approaches of engaging with women were committed to challenging the existing patriarchal structures and devising strategies for women's political, economic and social empowerment. Jagori's role as a technical partner in this process was envisioned as providing support to PRADAN in developing a conceptual framework, building staff capacities and tools for training communities on issues of women's rights and gender issues, and supporting women's leadership for policy advocacy.

The partnership rationale was based on building on the 'core competence' of each partner agency, to maximize impact in attaining tangible results at the grass-roots level as well as to influence policy. Jagori had worked with PRADAN earlier, as part of engendering their Human Resources Orientation for new staff. However, this was the first time that the two organizations were partnering at the programme implementation level.

*The focus here was on enhancing women's abilities and bringing about a change in the structures and ideologies of subordination. Empowerment, thus, was not a one-time input entity but a process of progressive change*

## A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Based on PRADAN's experience of developing sustainable livelihood for 'empowerment', it was jointly acknowledged that there was need to unpack the various complexities that are associated with understanding 'empowerment' and that there was no uni-dimensional defined

approach to it. Drawing from over 30 years of experience of Jagori in spreading feminist consciousness and also from the vast body of feminist literature available, empowerment was understood to be 'an ongoing and dynamic process, which enhances women's and any other marginalized and alienated group's abilities to change the structures and ideologies that keep them subordinate' (Acharya & Ghimire, 2005).

The focus here was on enhancing women's abilities and bringing about a change in the structures and ideologies of subordination. Empowerment, thus, was not a one-time input entity but a process of progressive change. Women's empowerment, however, needs greater understanding of unequal power relations and the interplay of systems of domination and subordination on women because the 'locus of disempowerment is the household itself' (Mishra & Tripathi, 2011).

In the existing patriarchal power structures, women are denied access to resources and opportunities and do not have the decision-making abilities necessary for their well-being and making strategic life choices, both within and outside the household. Bhasin & Dhar (1998) argue that empowerment is 'a process of making present power structures more inclusive' (Acharya & Ghimire, 2005).



It is important to understand the multi-dimensional nature of exclusion. "Exclusion can take many forms—social, economic, political, geographical, and cultural and the inter-play of these with one another" (Acharya & Ghimire, 2005). Women find themselves at the intersection of all these categories; women's empowerment, thus, has to be understood in terms of women's position in both the household and the society, which is affected by power relations defined by the larger socio-political structures. Srilatha Batliwala (2005) sums this up:

*Jagori's engagement with the Mahila Samakhya programme in the 1990s has taught it that women's empowerment is to be understood as a socio-political process of challenging and transforming existing patriarchal structures, unequal power relations and discriminatory ideology to enhance women's abilities to have access and control over material and knowledge resources.*

" ... 'women's empowerment' as a more political and transformatory idea for struggles that challenged not only patriarchy, but the mediating structures of class, race, ethnicity—and, in India, caste and religion—which determine the nature of women's position and condition in developing societies..... the term stressed that empowerment was a socio-political process, and that the critical operating concept within empowerment was power, and that empowerment was about shifts in political, social, and economic power between and across both individuals and social groups."

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over material and knowledge resources. It is a process that aims at transforming the social, political and economic power structures, and making them more inclusive.

Jagori's experience of working with women highlights that women are not passive victims of poverty and human rights violations. They are, rather, constantly engaged in a struggle to survive and gain control over the social, political and cultural resources, and lead a life of dignity. Building women's agency and their capacities to transform their realities, hence,

becomes a crucial focal point for sustainability and effectiveness of efforts aiming at women's empowerment.

The aim is to bring about a shift in women's perception so that they themselves are able to define choices and self-interest, and with that knowledge challenge the status quo. Women's agency, thus, is an important component of women's empowerment. Naila Kabeer (2001) has stressed upon the role of women's agency by conceptualizing three inter-related components of women's empowerment—"resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency, which is at the heart of the process through which choices are made, and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices" (Mishra & Tripathi, 2011).

However, enhancing women's capacities for effective agency building is a complex process because women's agency is not delinked from the existing social relations of domination and subordination. 'It is rooted in social structural realities' (Raju, 2009). Hence, women's

agency has to be understood as a result of 'negotiation' between different social actors/structures and their realities. Jagori's work of training and capacity building over the last 30 years shows that there is a limit to which the ground realities can be altered unless the effort is aimed at bringing about a shift in the structures of domination and subordination. Women's empowerment is an on-going process of transforming the patriarchal structures of subordination by enabling women's capacities and building on their agency, having informed knowledge of the influence of various social, political and cultural systems of subordination and domination upon them. The process of empowerment is hence, "iterative, non-linear and perhaps never complete" (Murthy, 2001).

### THE PROCESS OF CHANGE (APPROACH)

Rooted in the ideological belief of enabling women to bring about desired transformation in the existing power relations and to become 'change agents' in their own lives by challenging the status quo, PRADAN and Jagori began working together on the project. The project was built on PRADAN's existing strength of mobilizing women from marginalized and disadvantaged communities into SHGs and their secondary and tertiary associations.

However, besides working in the area of economic empowerment, the focus was now also on 'impacting the well-being' of these women and achieving that by following a 'rights-based' approach, by which women can

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make claims to their rights and entitlements. This programme was an important initiative for both PRADAN and Jagori because it was for the first time that an attempt was being made to work intensively on the issues of women's rights without diluting existing livelihood interventions. It was supposed in the concept note of the project that, if successful, this programme would demonstrate how the agenda of women's lives and livelihood security need not be dealt with as an 'either-or' but rather can be approached together. This is where the vast experience and expertise of the two implementing partners was

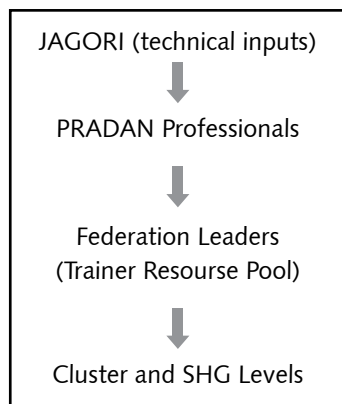
vital. This larger aim of the project was also complemented by the stated programme goal and the strategies adopted.

"By 2020, rural women from marginalized communities and their collectives, in nine districts in four states of Central India, will be able to raise their voice against violations and access their political and economic rights as mandated under the Central and State Government policies."

Some key outcomes of the programme envisaged in the project document were:

- ♦ Enhanced autonomy of women
- ♦ Enhanced respect and influence of women within the family and neighbourhood and informal/formal local governance bodies
- ♦ Assured access of women to various basic services/programmes run by the government

- ♦ Drawing of critical lessons from the grass-roots experience and bringing these to bear on policy formulation.



The programme was located in eight districts of four states—Balaghat, Dindori and Betul districts in Madhya Pradesh; Mayurbhanj and Rayagada districts in Odisha, Koderma and Hazaribagh districts in Jharkhand, and Purulia district in West Bengal. All the programme sites are areas with poor economic, social and gender indicators. One of the aims of the programme was to reach out to 75,000 women in these areas and help them raise their voice and make significant changes in their lives. Given their background, it was necessary to adopt some crucial strategies, which would mirror the programme's vision of change, without diluting the content in the process of reaching out. A cascade model of learning was adopted, to build a basic and common understanding of the core conceptual issues across tiers, providing a foundation upon which to build. The process of the capacity-building work began with providing training inputs to a cadre of PRADAN professionals, who form the front line in field areas and are directly involved in working with women at the grass roots. For this, a pool of trainers and gender experts with a diverse range of competencies and sectoral expertise that complement the programme requirements were brought together by Jagori. This team of experts, who have been part of

some of the most innovative experiments in the country, along with the Jagori team, was spread over the geographical location of the eight districts, to provide in-depth inputs for strengthening awareness and building understanding of gender issues of different PRADAN teams.

An extensive process of assessing gender needs, at the level of the PRADAN team and the field level, was conducted. Through this exercise, gender-related issues and discriminatory practices in the field areas, along with a general level of understanding of gender relations and power structures of PRADAN professionals, were identified, which informed the design of the programme. The needs to develop conceptual clarity of gender-related issues and to build in-depth understanding of patriarchy at all tiers of the programme were then identified.

The resource persons team of Jagori, along with trained PRADAN professionals, began capacity building exercises with women leaders from the communities in collectives. The application of principles of 'Feminist Training' methodology for capacity building was a conscious political choice made by Jagori, which was rooted in a conceptual framework, with the practice of mutuality, equality and collective action. The two teams of professionals relied upon Jagori's experience of working with Mahila Samakhya. Working with collectives is central to its philosophy because such learning has the potential to initiate formations that can become platforms for action and change.

*"These training programmes have helped me understand things from a larger canvas and their inter-relations. It has helped me frame some questions of engagement"*

*-PRADAN professional during Second Advanced Workshop, New Delhi*



Training programmes for capacity building were not merely a series of events but rather “a complex progression of several inter-connected and on-going collective learning processes” (Bhaiya & Menon-Sen, 1996). The capacity building of women took place around a wide variety of issues, ranging from livelihoods, politics and governance, accessing entitlements, patriarchy, gender discrimination and violence against women. These programmes were conducted with the aim of raising women's consciousness, initiating a process of identification and challenging the status quo. The intensive inputs provided at various tiers, especially to the women, resulted in the development of a Trainer Resource Pool that, in turn, takes training programmes to the women in the SHGs. This ensured that the capacity building efforts reach a large number of women.

PRADAN professionals in different field areas were also a part of these capacity building exercises; this triggered a simultaneous process of gender mainstreaming of the organization. Questioning and challenging conventional approaches, adopting a more inclusive and participatory style of working, and exploring new avenues of working started taking place. A shift was slowly unfolding at the level of awareness of the professionals, wherein incorporating a gender perspective in PRADAN's on-going work was gradually becoming a priority. This change was not limited to a change in the organizational mandate. Because of these activities, the

*“There has been a shift in the Implementing Partner's approach from ‘working with women’ to ‘working with a gender perspective that informs all its programmes’, which is significant and critical to strengthening and sustaining the work initiated through this programme.”*

*- Mid-term Review Report,*

professionals also went through a phase of self-reflection and personal change.

This was exemplified by the PRADAN teams being able to identify some common issues that have emerged and have been responded to, during the course of this programme. The issues, identified by the Mid Term Review Report included domestic violence, gender-

*“It is heartwarming to see women come out of their houses and demand their rights against issues of violence – without any external support! Women are more conscious now.”*

*Team Leader, Hazaribagh team during a training exercise*

based discriminatory practices (dowry, witch hunting and early child marriage), gender gap in education, low awareness about entitlements and participation in schemes, the inability to play decision-making roles within the household, in agriculture and livelihood-related activities and low participation in local governance. Various joint review and planning meetings between Jagori and PRADAN show a progressive change with regard to gender equality; this is becoming more noticeable with time.

These periodic review meetings were one of the main forums to identify the trends and emerging needs. Participatory training, it was very soon realized, is only one strategy for capacity building of women and professionals; it had to be accompanied by other mitigating strategies. Engagement with women, thus, began taking place at different levels by the resource persons of Jagori and PRADAN professionals.

In addition to the training programmes, consistent efforts were made to strengthen the solidarity of the women's collectives by

formulating various strategies of working for them. One such was to develop the capacities of women as para-legal workers, who could then take up issues related to Violence against Women (VAW) and other problems concerning discrimination against women in the community.

*Instances of women, who either, individually or collectively, were fighting against various forms of inequality and were progressing towards reclaiming their right to live life with dignity, are being commonly quoted.*

The women were also provided with an interface with the government officials, through which they could advocate for their rights and entitlements. Presenting the women's manifesto to the representatives of the various political parties during the Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections by the members of the Betul-based Narmada Mahila Sangh and Dindori-based Rani Durgawati Mahila Sangh is an example of one such effort.

*"The clarity and shift in approach of the PRADAN team can be seen... as a transformation from one of 'livelihood through micro-finance and increase in production for family well-being' to one of seeing 'women as knowledgeable, trained decision makers, establishing their identity as farmers and controlling and contributing to income as individuals and not only as family members'."*

*- Mid-term Review Report*

Alongside, following a two-pronged approach, sensitization programmes and workshops were organized for government officials and PRI representatives, to make structures and institutions more responsive to the requirements of women. Exposure visits were organized for the community leaders, to give them an opportunity to learn from models or organizations, working outside of their areas. Encouragement and support was also provided to them by Jagori, to connect with other local

networks and develop a local support structure in different districts. In conjunction, Jagori continued the orientation of the programme staff and conducted basic and advanced capacity building exercises for them. Material and modules were developed and distributed extensively by Jagori, suiting the project requirement, which could be used by women in the field.

A regular feature of the programme was to conduct periodic meetings and exercises, to discuss and reiterate learning and progress, and to reflect and evolve new and suitable strategies of working. This process of intensive input provision of raising awareness, consciousness and capacity building for enhanced women's agency at various tiers continued over the programme period.

## THE BEGINNING OF CHANGE

The results of these efforts are slowly being seen in all the programme areas. Instances of women, who either, individually or collectively, were fighting against various forms of inequality and were progressing towards reclaiming their right to live life with dignity, are being commonly quoted. As noted in the project Mid-term Review Report, this process of strengthening awareness and building consciousness around issues of gender equality has brought about "operational insight of designing and following up an activity in such a way that it leads to a logical end. Once the women understand that this new approach brings with it social and political power which only enhances the steps they have taken to improve their economic status through the agriculture and savings and credit activities carried out before, there shall be no looking back."

In Dindori, SHG members began questioning the Fair Price Shop agent about the quantity and rates of the rations they were entitled to and compelled him to give the right amount of grain at the right price. In Kesla, members of the Narmada

*A common feature across all teams is that women are now choosing to speak and raising their voices collectively about both domestic and societal violence.*

Mahila Sangh took up cases of VAW, including trafficking of girls in their district and villages. Nyaya Samitis in Hazaribagh and Koderma continue to provide women with formal and regular spaces to engage with cases of VAW through Nari Adalats.

The women in these districts have been trained on legal issues and take cases up to a higher appellate with the support of the PRADAN team. In Purulia and Balaghat, intensive training programmes on new farming technologies are being provided to women. Special efforts have been made in Balaghat to make women take control of all the agricultural operations as trained farmers, including with knowledge of preparing organic pesticides and fertilizers. Purulia attempted to break farming-related gender-based stereotypes and create an identity of women as farmers, as part of a farmer school initiative for women known as *Chasi Sathi* (Farmer Friend).

A common feature across all teams is that women are now choosing to speak and are raising their voices collectively about both domestic and societal violence.

PRADAN has undergone an organizational shift and has made significant changes in its approach. This change can be seen in its implementation strategies in field areas. Significant changes on the ground show that the approach has been effective and that women have begun the process of making changes in their lives by questioning the status quo and recognizing the existing unequal

relations. The programme is seen to be moving towards its envisioned goal of rural women's empowerment for reclaiming their rights and entitlements. In the course of this programme, however, some challenges did emerge such as:

- ♦ Reaching out to large numbers at the same pace across multiple sites, with varied contextual realities, programmatic focus and team strengths
- ♦ Ensuring quality in large outreach and the fear of dilution of content in working with the cascade model
- ♦ Sustaining efforts on the ground

Strategies adopted by Jagori over the programme period for development of feminist consciousness, independent thinking, challenging the status quo and broadening of arenas for action have started bearing result; the women in PRADAN's programmatic activities are seen as central to development. Women's empowerment is now seen as an effective way of ensuring women's participation in various processes of development. Significant strides have been made in building a progressive understanding of gender equality at the level of the organization and at the grass roots, through which a cadre of field-based leaders and trainers have emerged as conscious and independent activists, who continue to be rooted in their own milieu, from where their agendas emerge.

The main achievement of the pilot programme has been that PRADAN now views gender equality as one of the important pillars of development in its work and is committed to making policy level changes for the same. The PRADAN-Jagori coalition has been mutually rewarding and has been the great strength of this programme, adding a greater level of dynamism to it.



# Accessing Institutions: A Step Forward in Women's Empowerment

JYOTI REKHA ROY PRADHAN

*Widening their sphere of influence, the women of Karanjia stake their claim to and participate in village institutions thereby throwing open the path to greater access to their rights and entitlements, increased awareness and ownership of the decisions affecting their lives*

The SHG members of Rasamtala took charge of monitoring the running of the girls' residential school in their village. They found that neither was food given to children according to protocol nor was the quality of food good. They had complained to the School Management Committee but the matter was pushed under the carpet and no action was taken. The members then collected the data of proof for misconduct and registered an FIR in the police station and also informed the Block Development Officer and the District Collector. The headmaster of the school was replaced within 24 hours. Since then, the members regularly monitor the management of the school.

In Dumbi Sahi village, members of the Sarjamburu, Dinga Marshall and Gaonshree Chandiapat SHGs realized that their children were not getting proper attention because the village did not have any infrastructure for running the *anganwadi* centre, which was located in a verandah. The women discussed this issue in their SHG meetings and came up with the solution that they could approach the Upper Primary School in their village, which had some rooms to spare. They negotiated with the headmaster of the school, who agreed to allot one room for the *anganwadi*. The SHG members are now vigilant about the quality of food provided to the children of the *anganwadi* as well as the school.

When two SHGs in Hatibari village began participating actively in the Gaon Kalyan Samiti (GKS) meetings, they were privy to information about its purpose and budget. GKS is a committee under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM); its brief is to involve the community in planning, implementation and monitoring of health and other allied activities at the village level. This body is also responsible for creating awareness about maternal health, hygiene, environment, sanitation, etc. The villagers were unaware of the purpose of GKS and were thus reluctant to use the funds because they were apprehensive about mis-utilizing the money. Once SHG members understood the broader purpose of GKS, they volunteered to maintain the environmental hygiene of their village.

In Karanjia block, people have been increasingly attending the *gram sabha* and participating in village development initiatives. The Federation members prepared village development plans (VDPs) for 96 villages and submitted it to the *gram sabha* for approval. Almost 70 per cent of the women in the block participated, to get their village plan approved.

Similar reports are pouring in from other villages in Karanjia, where women are taking charge and are determined to make changes in their life, their village and society. Women are not only demanding but also taking action, by negotiating for their rights and entitlements and working out solutions.

## BACKGROUND

The Karanjia block lies in the south-western sub-division of Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. PRADAN started operating in Karanjia in 2000 by promoting women SHGs. These SHGs were involved in the savings-and-credit activity, and in promoting farm and non-farm based livelihood activities. The computer munshi system was adopted in 2003, to streamline the SHG accounting system. The computerized accounting systems helped SHGs maintain their accounts, and the women were able to track the status of their funds easily. Around the same time, SHG Clusters also evolved; these were a platform for sharing and learning as well as planning and reviewing the activities of the SHGs.

With time, SHGs became very vibrant and began to monitor their own growth actively. In the Clusters, the women associated with other

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women and shared their issues and concerns. In these meetings, PRADAN professionals acted only as facilitators while the women tried to solve the issues related to the villages and the *panchayats*. In 2005, discussions in the Clusters resulted in the formation of a block-level Federation—the Sampurna Federation. Today 430 SHGs are members of Sampurna.

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and entitlements, and help them access these, increase their linkages with various mainstream agencies, enhance the position of women in the family and society, and to help build the self-confidence of its members. It also lays emphasis on the participation of women in local self-governance. In the 2012 *Panchayati Raj* elections, Sampurna played an active role in generating awareness among its members about voting and nominating themselves for various posts. Sampurna also aims at enhancing the economic condition and improving the health and education facilities of their villages.

During the 2011–12 annual planning session of Sampurna, its members voiced an interest in working on strategically linking its members with various institutions and preparing an action plan to access resources. The need to have access to institutions was felt because SHG members were dependent on PRADAN professionals or the Federation for various resources or solutions to their problems. Although SHGs carried out their task functions such as conducting regular meetings, keeping

account of savings and credit, and engaging in livelihood activities successfully, they were not very aware of the wider developmental perspective of their village. The issues of non-entitlement in their SHGs or Clusters would be raised; however, they were unable to take action.

*During a Visioning exercise conducted in the Federation, members articulated their vision for their village; it was then that they realized that linkages with various institutions were necessary to actualize those dreams.*

In the baseline survey conducted with 187 SHG members in 2011–12, under the UN Women Project on Gender Equality Programme in Karanjia, it was found that 86 per cent of the women did not take any action about their dissatisfaction with the working of government agencies, and 72 per cent of them were not aware of any village committees that they could approach. It was also evident in the SHG meetings and the Cluster meetings that the women had very little awareness about the various committees and institutions in their village and had almost no understanding about their functioning.

During a Visioning exercise conducted in the Federation, members articulated their vision for their village; it was then that they realized that linkages with various institutions were necessary to actualize those dreams. The SHG members wanted to unlock the power of the institutions around them and use them for their well being and development. The Federation, in its action plan, also focused on creating awareness about the various institutions, government schemes and projects existing in the village and the *panchayat*, and helping members understand the roles and functions of these institutions and how they could be accessed.

It was important that all the SHG members became aware of the various institutions and also learned how to exercise their presence and

voice in the system. However, it was a big task. The women were content with maintaining the status quo. They did not think that becoming involved in these matters would be worth their time. Because the focus of PRADAN's engagement with the community had always been in promoting SHGs and livelihoods, the women did not discuss the issues of involvement in

institutions with the team. PRADAN's identity as 'livelihood *wallas*' prevented the women from sharing with it other issues affecting them.

Adding more dimensions to PRADAN's work perspective was difficult to implement and for the community to accept. In some meetings, when the PRADAN team tried to encourage a discussion on the well-being and their rights or entitlements of the members, some of them would react by saying, "Let's discuss our agenda and finish the meeting. Why are we discussing other issues?"

The team then conducted a small exercise on Institution mapping with the SHG members, in order to generate awareness among them about the various institutions and to help them build linkages with the institutions.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL MAPPING EXERCISE

The exercise was first piloted with the Maa Tarini SHG in Jhalakiani village of Karanjia block. The assumption behind conducting the exercise was that the SHG members would gain an understanding of the existing institutions in their immediate environment and learn about their functioning. They would be able to identify the important institutions and understand their impact on their lives and on the SHGs. They would then become



empowered to prepare an action plan to influence their immediate environment by using these institutions.

The exercise began with the objective sharing followed by the Marble game (a tool used for analysis of power and resource distribution). This tool helps participants realize that their abject poverty and exclusion are due to their social positioning and exclusion from the institutional processes. This realization arouses the need to pro-actively become linked with the institutions.

In the Marble game, the participants were divided into three groups. The first group had three members, the second group had six members and all the other members were in the third group. A circle was drawn on the floor where a hundred marbles were placed. The smallest group stood closest to the circle and the largest group stood the farthest from the circle. Three square pieces of wood of different sizes were given to the three different groups. The first group was given the largest wooden piece, the second group was given the middle-sized piece and the third group was given the smallest. Each group was given a chance to throw the wooden piece at the marbles in the middle of the circle. The marbles which came out of the circle would belong to the group that threw the wood. It was expected that the first group would earn more marbles because of their proximity to the circle and the fact that the wooden piece they had was larger. The third group would earn the least as they were the farthest from the circle and because they had the smallest wooden piece.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE INSTITUTIONAL MAPPING EXERCISE

The exercise captured the women's attention. They shared their feelings and emotions about the game. The members of the first group

were obviously the happiest because they had managed to get more than two-thirds of the marbles. The members of the second group expressed a mixed reaction. It was the third group that expressed intense frustration as they had got only a few marbles. They thought that justice had not been done to them. They were very sad because they were made to stand the farthest and were given a very small piece of wood. They were more in number but received the least.

The members were then asked to share some experiences from their day-to-day events, to help them explore the reasons of this unequal distribution of power and resources. They were able to connect their reality to the game—that some influential people snatch away whatever schemes are available and the poor are left with a small share.

This was followed by a discussion on what institutions are and what they mean to the people; the women began to recognize the various institutions around them. They were asked to list out all the institutions in their villages and the nearby areas. They started with their own SHG, Cluster, Federation, PRADAN, *gram sabha*, School Management Committee, GKS, *anganwadi*, Block, Agriculture Department, *Jungle Suraksha* Committee, Watershed Management Committee, Village Development Committee, *Pala* Committee (a committee which promotes *Pala*, a form of song and play), Sports Committee, Youth Club, *Laxmi Puja* Committee, etc.

After identifying these institutions, the women were helped to map the institutions, based on the accessibility and their importance in their lives. The women drew a circle with their SHG in the centre and the different institutions around it. The institutions with which the women had greater access or a better relationship were placed near the SHG and those with which the

women had lesser linkages were placed farther away from the centre and the SHG.

Similarly, the size of an institution represented its importance—the more important the institution in their lives, the bigger it was drawn. In this way the importance and the linkage of the SHG with the various institutions were mapped. After this exercise was completed, the members were asked to analyze the present situation. The picture revealed, in most cases, that the institutions that delivered entitlements to the citizens were actually far from the SHG. The gram sabha was one such institution. The women had the least interaction with it, and yet most of the entitlements had to be accessed through it.

The women realized that they were also unaware of the GKS and the School Management Committee; their interaction with these could give them an opportunity for a cleaner environment and better educational facilities for their children. The members found that they were closer to religious committees and sports committees because they donated money for these; yet they did not get any direct benefit from these.

In Jhalkiani, the SHG members resonated with this realization and said, “The same thing happens with us. When any government scheme or programme is introduced, we are not informed about it and the benefit is accessed by a few well-off people.” The exercise was helpful and the women realized that because they do not demand their rights, they are left out. Now that they have become aware, hopefully, they will be able to change the situation and will no longer be mute spectators; they will perhaps be able to work together, united.

*The women said that because they had a very limited understanding of the process and the functioning of the gram sabha, they remained absent from it. They were, therefore, not familiar with the village plan and, by and large, remained excluded from the decision-making process.*

After the exercise, the women were asked to choose two or three institutions on which they would like to focus and then to identify strategies to become involved in it and establish a linkage. Some of the action plans included gathering knowledge of the *gram sabha* from the ward *panch* or *sarpanch*, attending the gram sabha, checking the services provided in *anganwadis*, monitoring the functioning of the school, etc.

Women marked the *gram sabha* as the most important institution because it was the forum in which the development plans of the whole village was made and the beneficiaries for the various schemes were prioritized. The women said that because they had a very limited understanding of the process and the functioning of the *gram sabha*, they remained absent from it. They were, therefore, not familiar with the village plan and, by and large, remained excluded from the decision-making process.

The women made a decision to attend and participate in the *gram sabha* of their village. As per the baseline survey conducted under the UN Women's Project by PRADAN, 68 per cent of the women did not attend the *gram sabha* earlier; after the members took a conscious decision to participate, the situation has improved. In the recent *gram sabha*, 83 per cent of the participants that attended were women. It also had a positive impact on the VDP. The women played a crucial role in developing the village plan, based on the Integrated Natural Management (INRM) approach, and also in prioritizing the Shelf of Project (SOP) in the *gram sabha*.

## INCREASING ENGAGEMENT

Seeing the positive impact of the exercise on women's engagement with the institutions, the process was conducted in all 430 SHGs in the Karanjia block. A pool of resource persons were trained to conduct the institutional mapping exercise, initially with the support of the PRADAN professionals.

After the primary exercises at the SHG level, the learning and action plan of the SHGs were consolidated at the Cluster level. The basic objective was that the Clusters, being active and vibrant collectives, would regularly review the action plan of the SHGs and extend their support to them. Also, the Clusters could generate momentum within the member base on a greater scale and quantum.

During 2011, the Cluster review process was also modified, in view of the women's engagement with institutions. Apart from financial parameters and livelihoods, the focus now was also on what the SHGs had planned to work on vis-à-vis the institutions. The SHGs shared their experience of the institutional mapping exercise and how they wanted to take it forward and increase their understanding on how to engage with the various institutions.

Another small exercise was conducted at the Cluster level to prioritize their engagement with the institutions, depending upon the role and functions that each institution played in their life. All the Clusters drew up a priority list, which included institutions/programmes such as *gram panchayat*, MGNREGS, GKS, *anganwadi*, the school and the Watershed Management Committees.

*The Cluster decided that because the gram panchayat was the power hub, the women needed to enter its purview and access their rights and entitlements. They would become a part of the system, in which they would not only be demanding from the system but also would engage actively in creating a space for themselves while being able to influence the system.*

The Cluster decided that because the *gram panchayat* was the power hub, the women needed to enter its purview and access their rights and entitlements. They would become a part of the system, in which they would not only be demanding from the system but also would engage actively in creating a space for themselves while being able to influence the system.

The *anganwadi* was the obvious choice of the women because the scheme focused on the development of women and children. During the discussions, the women were able to relate

with the *anganwadis* to a great extent because these centres catered to the needs of the pre-schoolers and the pregnant and lactating women, and were easy to access. The women wanted to work on the functioning of the *anganwadi* because they were dissatisfied with the quality and the amount of the take-home rations provided to them.

They also wanted to work with the MGNREGS because it is a central government scheme and very much a part of their livelihoods generation.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF ACCESSING INSTITUTIONS

Although the women began to enter and, to some extent, participate in the functioning of institutions, they were not able to negotiate strongly. They would return having been shouted at by the concerned authority. Gradually, there were a few positive experiences and the women drew inspiration from them. They found it difficult to confront the *anganwadi* worker because



often she would be a member of their own SHG. There were also instances where the *gram panchayat* office bearers such as the *Panchayat* Extension Officer and the *Gram Rojgar Sahahyak* expressed discomfort over the women's changed attitude. For example, when the women began accessing institutions and complaining about the discrepancies, the

office-bearers attributed this to the leaders and the PRADAN professionals. Many leaders and trainers received threats from the *gram panchayat* office bearers and the *Sarpanch*. In one instance, a trainer from the Kendumundi Cluster was threatened by the *Sarpanch* after she started making the SHG members aware about the MGNREGA. The SHG members began demanding work at the *gram panchayat*, according to procedure. The *gram panchayat* office bearers were caught because they had wanted to avoid the work load. They approached the *Sarpanch* and he went to the trainer completely drunk and began threatening her of dire consequences. The SHG members came together in her support and he walked out.

## MILES TO GO

The SHG members have been thoroughly trained and regular discussions have taken place in the SHG, Cluster and Federation meetings. The women are now very aware about the various schemes being generated. They extend support to each other because they see it not as an issue of a single SHG or Cluster, but of all the members in the Federation.

The women are now more confident of approaching the *gram panchayat* and the block and the district officials. They may still

*The women are now very aware about the various schemes being generated. They extend support to each other because they see it not as an issue of a single SHG or Cluster, but of all the members in the Federation.*

not be able to negotiate alone; however, as a group, they certainly can demand their rights and entitlements. The women are also supported by the trained community resource persons (CRPs), who help them in writing applications and quoting laws. Various workshops have been conducted to sensitize the duty bearers and the PRIs.

The process of institutional mapping has been pivotal because it has stimulated SHG members to think beyond their horizon of savings and credit, and become aware of the various other institutions around them. This shift in focus has helped them look at these institutions in a different perspective; a shift from being just receivers to demanders, a shift from exclusion to inclusion. The exercise has helped women understand the various institutions and their importance in their lives as well as realize how little they knew about the work and the functioning of these institutions.

In most places, there is now large-scale participation of women in the local governance institutions. New PRI representatives have been elected; and SHG members too have been elected as representatives in many of these bodies. Women feel empowered by their new practice of attending a forum wherein, traditionally, women did not participate or were very few in number. The women are curious and eager to know what transpires in this space, hitherto occupied mostly by men. However, this energy and enthusiasm has to be simultaneously supported by perspective, knowledge and information, which is the next level of challenge.

Realizing their strength, many collectives are making choices about whom to elect to these spaces. Many women leaders are getting

elected to these institutions as people's representatives. In Karanjia alone, 105 women leaders were elected to the PRIs. During the UN-women mid-term review in 2013, it was found that there was considerable enhancement in the mobility of women and increased linkage between women and various institutions.

The women have now started accessing institutions, questioning and demanding their rights and entitlements. They have also now started making complaints in case there is any discrepancy. To support the women, the

*Realizing their strength, many collectives are making choices about whom to elect to these spaces. Many women leaders are getting elected into these institutions as people's representatives. In Karanjia alone, 105 women leaders were elected to the PRIs.*

Federation has started a grievance redressal system, which they can file any complaints regarding the operations of the MGNREGA in their village. The complaints are then registered by the accountant of the Federation and forwarded to the concerned authority. If issues are not resolved within seven days, the complaints are sent to the next higher appellate authority.

All these steps together have brought about a positive shift in the women who now have greater confidence and greater self-esteem.

# A Field of My Own

SAILABALA PANDA

*Securing land rights for women equal to that of men not only gave women financial and livelihoods security but also helped them find their rightful place as farmers capable of making life-altering and life-enriching decisions, and gave them dignity and recognition in society that had been hitherto denied them*

I would like to share my reflections with you. I have been questioning myself and trying to listen to my inner calling. I am passionate about securing land rights for women. This is not a stand-alone issue but a vital missing link in the entire schema of engagement with women. Securing land rights for women is very relevant in my struggle for women's agency. Where do I begin my sharing? Should I start from my own field? Is my fight for these rights limited to my work life? Will it always be an intrinsic part of my professional life? I may need to start with myself and my family, understanding the patriarchal norms and barriers preventing women—daughters, sisters, mothers, wives—to own, access, control and utilize land and property. Women accessing land rights may not be the only way to build a just and equal society but it is a crucial dimension in our endeavour for development.

## Revisiting those days

I am an agriculture engineer and I joined PRADAN in 2003. My first assignment was in Khunti, Jharkhand, and I worked there till 2010 when I was transferred to Rayagada in Odisha. In the last decade, I have had the opportunity to work closely with tribal women, mobilizing them to form and join Self Help Groups (SHGs), nurturing and strengthening SHGs to secondary and tertiary level collectives such as Clusters and Federations/Co-operatives.

My core focus was on enhancing women's livelihoods and helping them work towards food security in a sustainable manner. Along the way, the women identified various livelihood options such as off-farm, on-farm micro-enterprises such as poultry rearing, goat rearing or forest-based activities such as lac rearing, to bring about positive change in their lives. The facilitative role that I played as part of the PRADAN team encouraged the women to articulate their aspirations in life and move towards this vision. I feel grateful for getting the opportunity to be a catalyst in their journey from being restricted to the four walls of their homes to becoming women of confidence, contributing to the economic well-being of their families.

Earlier, when I thought about livelihoods, the phrases that came immediately to mind were: the best livelihood portfolios, managing the land and recharging the land, the best use of land to get a better return, input-output linkage, the best technology, capacity building systems, food security and the women's stake in the entire process. Many of the women I engaged with have emerged as good farmers, who have sound technical know-how and greater bargaining power with stakeholders such as input suppliers, the bank and the market. I considered this as success.

In Rayagada, I became involved with the UN Women-supported Gender Equality Project (GEP), which opened up the scope for me to interact with women through a gender perspective. During in-house training programmes with the leaders, I heard many painful stories and became more aware of the discrimination that women face from birth to death.

*During in-house training programmes with the leaders, I heard many painful stories and became more aware of the discrimination that women face from birth to death*

I learned that in the Kandha tribe of Rayagada, polygamy is a common practice. Men bring home a second wife, abandoning the first. Often, the first wife is evicted from her in-laws' house and also not accepted in her maternal home. In this context, her being a good SHG member

or SRI grower, with sound technical knowledge about farming become irrelevant issues. When a woman is in a functioning household, it may not matter who has the rights to the family's land. Customs and roles/rights can work for women. When the household breaks down (abandonment, death, divorce, physical violence, alcoholism, in-laws who are against her), however, the women stand to lose the most. They lose their rights to land and serious consequences follow. In this context, suddenly my earlier work of engaging women in livelihood creation did not seem like a success because I realized that many issues of insecurity prevail beneath those success stories.

## LAND RIGHTS A VITAL NECESSITY

### ***Amit Huika's uncertainty***

During the course of a study of cotton farmers in Rayagada, I met a farmer, Amit Huika, of Boriguda village, growing cotton successfully for seven to eight years. He earned a reasonably good profit every year, irrespective of the high fluctuation in the Minimum Support Price (MSP) from Rs 3,900 to 7,000 per quintal. One year, he earned a profit of more than one lakh. I was with Jitesh (an independent consultant hired by Tradecraft) and my colleague Sibabrata when I realized that Amit was skeptical about his land use. Amit was a landless farmer, growing cotton on government-encroached land (nearly three acres). I was disturbed by the uncertainty behind his story of success.

Amit told us that the encroached plot was the only land he had to support himself with and the wages he earned were his only means of sustenance. Amit was one among many landless farmers in his village and the adjacent Clusters; all of them struggled with uncertainty about earning their daily livelihood from the government land they encroached.



In India, land reforms are a state subject whereas forest land is a central subject. The central government has demarcated large tracts of forest land as Reserve Forests, which means that the people who have always lived in these forests have no rights over this land and will never have. The tribes and the local forest dwellers suddenly find themselves to be encroachers, who can be evicted from their homes and can no longer use the land to earn a living.

So what is the future of farmers like Amit Huika?

- Struggle of tenant farmers

Tenant farmers do not have their own land and rent out land on which they farm. During a study of cotton farmers in Rayagada, my colleague Jagat and I interacted with Chilika and Subha Rao in Burjuguda village. Both of them are tenant farmers. It is a struggle for them to get land on rent to grow crops. One of the reasons for landlords not wanting to give their land on rent is that the farmers use chemicals.

The rent varies, depending on the crop the farmers want to grow. Most of these tenancy agreements are oral/non-written; so the tenants are not sure whether they will get a plot on rent until it is sowing time. Sometimes, they get land away from their habitation, increasing their difficulty in cultivating these, or they are given a plot near the forest, and which needs to be cleared of the trees and prepared for cultivation; often, after they clear the land, it is used by the landlord. This discourages the tenants from investing in the land.

To see hectares of fallow land when Chilika and Subha Rao struggled to get land on rent to grow their crops was disturbing. There are so many such cases in our operating areas. Land distribution is skewed—the non-growers have more land and the real farmers struggle to get a plot to cultivate for their survival. My engagement thus far had been largely with landed women (ownership with the men, however) and excluded the struggle of these needy tenants.

- Worries and fears during the agriculture planning process

Often, during the agriculture planning exercise in SHGs, women were worried because they want to grow several crops but they did not have any land to cultivate these crops. Sometimes, the SHGs offered to identify some land on rent for landless members—a plan which did not always materialize.

How did the people become landless? Did they not inherit land? Was their land grabbed by powerful people? Had they mortgaged their land and were not able to recover it? What happened to those successful SRI growers? If they were absolutely landless, were they eligible for land through the government allocation process? These questions rarely found any space in my daily engagement because my work was more focused on landed women.

## Discrimination Begins at Home

I have observed the lives of the women of the Munda and the Kandha tribes closely. They are discriminated against from the time they are little girls. They are treated differently from their boy siblings in many ways—they receive less or no education; they bear the burden of the household work; they are given low nutrition, etc. They move out from their maternal home when they are married, with some movable property such as ornaments, furniture and livestock. Usually, this is considered their share of the property and they cannot ask for any more in the future.

The women spend the rest of their lives in their in-laws' house; often, they don't get a share of the land that they cultivate as they are considered outsiders to the blood line. The issue of a woman inheriting the land in her name is brought up only after the death of her husband.

In many tribes such as the Munda and the Kandha (as I have observed in Khunti in Jharkhand and Rayagada in Odisha), it is a customary practice that the subject of women's right to the land arises only if there is no male person in three generations in the male line of descent. For example, a woman would get land ownership only if she does not have a father-in-law, a brother-in-law or a son of the brother-in-law. These practices override and close all possibilities of women inheriting any land.

If a woman becomes a widow, her right to land depends on the sex of the child she has given birth to. If she only has girl children, she cannot inherit the land and the land is taken by the male relatives of her husband. If she has a

*If a woman becomes a widow, her right to land depends on the sex of the child she has given birth to. If she only has girl children, she cannot inherit the land and the land is taken by the male relatives of her husband*

boy child, she can use the land to grow crops and produce yield but cannot mortgage or sell the land; after her death, the land reverts to the original paternal source.

Women cultivate the land and work hard in the sun and the rain, and yet the Indian agriculture policy denies them

the recognition as farmers because they have no land records in their name. This makes them ineligible for any credit schemes, government welfare benefits or agricultural extension schemes.

## MEANING OF FEMINIZATION

My focus has always been on women during all my implementation efforts; from the outside, it looks like a 'feminization' of interventions. However, 'feminization' is more than women's involvement and increasing their technical know-how. For me, it is about giving the women a stake in their work, by making pro-women activities to enhance their sense of agency. As of now, all we have are the feminizing of risks such as taking credit and repaying, and the feminizing of all the drudgery of work. In fact, all our interventions add to their drudgery and do not give them the right to the land that they cultivate.

If we were to ask an SHG member producing the highest yield in SRI or an SHG member with a good mango orchard, "Didi, who is the owner of this plot?" the answer would most often be, "My husband, my father-in-law, my brother-in-law or my son." We have not feminized the assets that they use or given them control over the produce that they grow. Women rarely have control over the money they earn. They have always been a means/worker whereas the land owner/the male

head always has been the beneficiary of the earnings from her work. What then should my focus be? What can be done to bring about the shift to their becoming the owners of their earnings, instead of just a means of earning?

### **LAND RIGHTS AS A GAME CHANGER**

In my years of helping women recognize their own power and contribution, there is no doubt that they have emerged as good managers of land, have become technical experts, are producers with access to banks and markets, and have contributed positively to the economic well-being of the family. With no legal rights on the land they cultivate and with less/no voice on the produce and income from the land, however, they rarely have the confidence to say 'no' to domestic violence that they face in their homes. They rarely protest

when their husbands bring home a second wife and exclude them from family matters. They rarely speak up when not valued or considered worthy of participating in the decision-making process. The deep-rooted patriarchal norm always devalues the women and considers them less than human. For generations, the women have been discriminated against with respect to land.

I question myself, "Are my actions pro-active enough in addressing these issues? How much am I disturbed by these matters?" I often think that had I spent my earlier years enabling women by impacting livelihoods on the secure land of women, it might have resulted in greater agency, and they might have been empowered enough to tackle many other land insecurity issues.

### **Land Rights in India**

In India, land and land reform are state subjects. However forest land is a central subject. Land is governed by two departments, that is, Revenue and Forests. The Revenue administration deals with all the land issues in revenue villages and the Forest administration deals with forest land. Each state has its own laws, sometimes more than 100 laws governing land rights. Tribal and ethnic groups have their own customary laws.

Forest land, being a central subject, is governed by laws such as Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, Forest Conservation Act 1980, Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and Panchayat Extension to Schedule Areas Act (PESA).

There have been some progressive pro-poor attempts such as the Ceiling Surplus Operation and Bhoodan, and campaigns such as 'my land and my homestead land'. The gap between the laws and practice remains unchanged, and landlessness, illegal land transfer and unavailability of land records continue to plague the system.

After the Sixth Five Year Plan of the Government of India, some states modified their guidelines of land allocation programmes to include women's names in land titles, joint titling and exclusive titling in women's names. The Odisha government implements a land allocation programme called the Vasundhara, with a focus on women.

Women's biological right to inherit property, as per the Hindu Succession Amendment Act 2005, has led to a progressive and pro-women policy framework. But the implementation of these policies and laws has been slow.

## ACTS GOVERNING INHERITANCE

### Hindu: (Hindu Succession Act)

- ♦ Daughters and sons have equal rights.
- ♦ Women can transfer land.
- ♦ Women have residential rights over their parental house. They cannot sell the land but can claim their share in case of a sale.
- ♦ Widows will naturally inherit their husband's property unless they remarry.

### Muslim: (Property Right Act)

- ♦ The son gets double of what the daughter gets.
- ♦ The wife does not have any right over her husband's property as long as her husband is alive.
- ♦ Widows are entitled to one-fourth of their husband's property, and one-eighth in case of a joint family.

### Christian: (Property Right of Christian Women 1925)

- ♦ Daughters have equal rights as the son.
- ♦ The wife does not have any rights over her husband's property as long as her husband is alive.
- ♦ A widow gets one-third of her husband's property.

### Women need distinct land rights because:

- ♦ Strengthening the land rights of vulnerable populations may not improve the Women's Land Rights, without specific focus on intra-household distribution of rights.
- ♦ Almost 35 per cent of the rural households in India, according to the Government of India data, are de-facto woman-headed, because of widowhood, marital breakdown or male migration.
- ♦ As more men shift to urban or non-farm rural livelihoods, more and more households depend on women for managing the farms and bearing the burden of family subsistence.
- ♦ According to the Agricultural Census (Govt. of India, 2003), women own only seven per cent of the total agricultural land.
- ♦ In the absence of land rights, women are not able to cultivate their land efficiently because they lack access to institutional credit facilities for lack of collateral.
- ♦ When the household breaks down (abandonment, death, divorce, physical violence, alcoholism, in-laws who are against her), women lose their rights to the land—and serious consequences follow.

When a woman has legal rights on the land, it has implications beyond simply the possession



of land, or agricultural and economic benefit. For a woman it is a means of identity, recognition, power, equality, justice and social empowerment within her family and in society. A land title is not just a piece of paper awarding ownership to her, but a step for her to negotiate power, experience security and enjoy equality. According to Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

- Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
- No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

It is, therefore, unjust to see women deprived of their rights to land and property.

My belief is that securing Women's Land Rights would empower them, help them discover their inner strength and voice to act and react as valued humans in their own life, family, community and society at large.

### **BARRIERS IN WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS**

The typical attitude of women is that they prefer family security rather than independence. Gender-biased statutory laws, traditions and social norms lead them to believe that women cannot use, access, control, own, rent, lease or inherit property without the consent of men. These deep-rooted patriarchal norms and gender bias, the social construct of a secondary status of women do not allow women to own property. Despite being provided legal

### **'WOMEN'S IDENTITY AS FARMERS'**

'Women's Identity as Farmers' is a training programme that aims at encouraging women to acknowledge their contribution in agriculture and accept themselves as farmers. During the exercises, the women responded to questions of ownership by often saying, "Men are the farmers and women are the labourers/*muliani* /*kuli* in own farms." All the drudgery of work is done by the women whereas all the decision-making work was done by the men. The women work hard on the land and there is no rest for them—even if they are menstruating, or during advanced pregnancy, or when breast-feeding their babies. There is no respite and they work on. They contribute immensely to the cultivation and production of the crop; yet, they have little claim on the yield.

Through games such as 'Gender and work division in agriculture' and 'Gender and decision-making in agriculture', women realize the burden of the work that they are doing. They are sad when they understand that they are being discriminated against. They realized that it was unfair to recognize only the men as farmers. The women are farmers as well. The women do more work on the land than the men; it, therefore, made sense to them that women should be considered the first or primary farmers and men the secondary farmers. The women, however, lacked the confidence to acknowledge this because they did not have the land in their name.

I remember the outburst of an SHG member of the Jamulelibadi village in Rayagada. She said, "I will never, never be called a farmer. I'm a widow and my son is the head of the family. He takes the decisions. When my husband was alive, I was working in the field and everybody said it was his land, his crop. Nobody recognized me. It doesn't matter if I call myself a farmer because no man in the village will call me a farmer!"

inheritance rights/laws and policies, women and their families do not see it as an instrument they can use, making it difficult to implement. Women claiming a share of the marital property or natal property are seen as a sign of greed that will lead to the disruption of social relations.

*Gender-biased statutory laws, traditions and social norms lead them to believe that women cannot use, access, control, own, rent, lease or inherit property without the consent of men*

on them. Their struggles and experiences have inspired others and their circle of influence has crossed the boundaries of SHGs to include the whole village, the *panchayat* and also to non-SHG members. The awareness about equality and justice is spreading.

As I reflect on my journey in PRADAN, I realize that the

work done with the women on savings-credit, livelihoods and co-operatives helped the women and their families positively. It has been a long and, at times, difficult journey to connect with the women and to earn their trust but the GEP approach has been powerful and has offered a window of opportunity for making women the agents of change in its true sense.

Earlier, women believed that land is something the women should not own, that land ownership should flow from the male line, over generations. They thought that if they had land in their name, people would laugh at them, saying that they were trying to be men. When they are made aware of the insecurities in their own lives and how the ownership of

### Windows of Opportunity

PRADAN's introduction of the Gender Equality Project (GEP) funded by UN-Women is a new approach that will bring about the much-needed change. GEP is exactly what I was seeking for the last five to six years. It is an approach that I resonate with on a very personal level. This project provides women with a platform for equality, rights and justice. Self Help Groups (SHGs) are gradually becoming the forum for issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, property rights, polygamy and wife-beating being discussed openly. The role of SHGs is no longer restricted to the management of savings and credit. Women are increasingly being able to identify inequalities and expressing and taking action

### Positive Implications of Women Having Land Rights

- ♦ Women have control over household decisions, more likely to negotiate power towards experiencing equality and security.
- ♦ Women are more likely than men to spend income from family resources (including land) on children's nutrition and education.
- ♦ Increase in female land-holdings is associated with increase in household food expenditure.
- ♦ Women are less likely to be the victims of violence.
- ♦ Increased security for single or deserted women.
- ♦ Women will have better access to micro-credit.
- ♦ When mothers own the land, they will think about inheritance of the land to the girl child.

land would empower them, however, they realize the importance of legal rights on land.

Clusters are now handling women's land rights issues. For example, in Rayagada as per customary laws, widows who have only a girl child are not allowed to cultivate land; this is grabbed by the relatives of her husband. Issues such as these are now handled by

women leaders. They have been successful in getting the land back for a widow so that she can cultivate it. Other teams in Mayurbhanj, Hazaribagh, Kesla, Dindori, Balaghat and Koderma have also had success stories regarding women's rights and entitlements. The new stance encourages taking up issues across teams.

### **RUKUNA MUTUKA FIGHTS TO RETAIN HER OWN LAND**

Rukuna Mutuka, a tribal lady of 65, has been a member of the Maa Laxmi SHG for the last three years. She lives in Badachampia village, of the Bankili *gram panchayat* in Kolnara block with her younger daughter Jyoti; her two elder daughters, Sulachana and Bijaya, are married. She lost her husband Gindiri Mutuka three years ago.

The background of the case begins with Kari Mutuka, Rukuna's father-in-law. Kari Mutuka had four sons, namely, Damba, Gindiri, Saranga and Aparao. Damba had one daughter, Puspaa; Gindiri had three daughters, Sulochana, Bijaya and Jyoti; Saranga had one daughter, Chandrabati, and a son, Dharmarao, and Aparao had two sons, Ashoka and Rabindra, and a daughter, Sailu. Except Saranga, all the other brothers have passed away.

Kari Mutuka had five acres of land (21 plots). After the demise of Kari Mutuka, the three brothers Gindiri, Saranga and Aparao distributed the land among themselves and Damba refused to take a share. He had been adopted by another family where he had inherited some property. The land was distributed among the brothers by mutual understanding and the legal document remained in the name of Kari Mutuka. The brothers cultivated the land individually.

Since Gindiri died three years earlier, Rukuna had been doing the farming on her own. Her agricultural land is about 1.5 acres. A dispute occurred in the kharif season when Dharmarao (Rukuna's brother-in-law's son) forcefully captured Rukuna's land, on the grounds that since Gindiri had no son, he becomes the legatee of the land. When Rukuna asked him to vacate the land, he threatened her. He told Rukuna that as she has no son and that he was the real heir of the land. Rukuna is very poor and illiterate, and she did not dare to take any legal action against him. She shared her problem with her SHG members. They decided to discuss the matter with four other SHGs of the village. All the members of the five SHGs then decided to talk with Dharmarao.

When he was approached, Dharmarao became very angry and declared that the women should be inside the four walls of their homes and shouldn't try to be leaders. He told them to stay out of his family business. He also threatened them, "I'll see Rukuna, if anyone dares to speak for her."

After this altercation with Dharmarao, the SHG members decided to put the matter before their SHG Cluster, Jagatjanani.

The matter was discussed at the Cluster meeting and the members decided that they would conduct another panchayat-level meeting, to discuss the issue. They planned to invite some elders from nearby villages, the PRI members and Dharmarao to that meeting. On the stipulated date, everyone gathered at the mango orchard in their village. The meeting was hosted by the SHG members and the invitees were also requested to put forward their points.

The SHG women quoted the law that every girl or woman has a right over her paternal property; that the boy and girl child are equal before the law; that no one can take the land of someone who has only daughters and no son. They concluded that Dharmarao was in the wrong. The SHG members discussed how the matter could be solved. Some women suggested that they go to the police to lodge a complaint whereas some others suggested that they go to Court.

The women decided to go to the Women's Protection Cell at Rayagada. Dharmarao came to the meeting soon after, almost three hours late. The SHG members had another discussion with Dharmarao. At first, he was not willing to vacate the land. But when the SHG members and others villagers told him that he was capturing another person's land and that he was committing a crime, he withdrew.

Giving in to the pressure from the villagers, he agreed to vacate the land. The SHG members were successful in their fight against injustice in a peaceful and non-violent way. Rukuna had to go through much suffering because she was not a legal holder of the land on paper. There is, therefore, great need to work on women's land rights issues of women to reduce their vulnerability.



# Women's Movement against Liquor Shops: Towards Creating a Better Society

BHAVANA MISHRA AND SUBHANKAR CHAKROBORTY

*Identifying addiction to alcohol as one of the prime reasons for gender-based violence, the empowered women of SHGs collectively protest the presence of illegal liquor shops and move the administration and police to act in their favour*

"You have come from Jhalda-II?" asked a very surprised Additional District Magistrate-General (ADM-G) of Purulia when he saw the women from the poorest block of West Bengal arrive at his office at the end of the working day on 20 November 2013. "Why have you come so far? Your faces are pale—have you eaten anything all day?"

One of the women stepped forward to make the introduction. "We are from the Kangsabati Nari Maryada Mahasangha, a Federation of 202 womens Self Help Groups."

The ADM-G interrupted, "You are from the SHG Federation? Who is the President, the Secretary or the Treasurer?"

There was silence for a few seconds and then one of the women politely told him, "We don't have such things. We have 2,595 members and one Board Member from each of the 23 Clusters. We have come here today because we want to stop all the liquor shops in our area and we need your help and support to make it happen."

The ADM's first response was, "It's not possible to stop all the liquor shops. Are you talking about illegal shops?"

The representatives of the Kangsabati Nari Maryada Mahasangha then explained to him their journey and struggle. Their journey had begun at the end of 2007 when the women of Jhalda-II Block had first started coming out from their homes to form Self Help Groups (SHGs), with the help of PRADAN. Awareness about their common struggles inspired the women to work together and support each other.

The area they live in (famous for the 'Purulia arms drop case' in 1995) borders the forest; it has undulating terrain and low soil depth, and experiences drought almost every other year. The people largely belong to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Communications and other services in the area are poor, literacy rate is very low (especially women's literacy) and the community is driven by a few influential persons. In this male-dominated socio-economic condition, the women are the biggest sufferers, both within the family and in society.

Before PRADAN's intervention, many SHGs had been formed through *panchayat* initiatives, and almost all the SHGs were run and controlled by male members. Women members in the SHGs had become the means of receiving grants and subsidies from various government departments and organizations. Yet, women did not have any say in their own savings, and financial indiscipline became a common practice for most of them.

Although there were some women in the SHGs six years ago, it was beyond the imagination of the community that the women of the village would have a platform to discuss their issues and have any say in matters of the community. The idea of forming SHGs as a women's platform that would encourage weekly savings and credit was a new concept.

The women themselves were hesitant to come forward and the men were not ready to allow the women to participate in the meetings. After many discussions and deliberations, some of the women took the initiative to form SHGs and this inspired the others. The weekly savings and credit in SHG meetings were

*Although there were some women in the SHGs six years ago, it was beyond the imagination of the community that the women of the village would have a platform to discuss their issues and have any say in matters of the community.*

not only financial transactions but helped create mutual trust and inter-dependency among women members. Gradually, the women gained confidence in their ability to run SHGs and began to trust each other enough to work together as a collective for creating a better society.

The excessive liquor consumption by the men and its impact on the well-being of families and the village was a subject that came up often in their discussions. SHG members spoke about their anguish in the meetings:

*"Matal hole to uhara karur kotha bhabe na. Baccha gulan ki khabe? Sangsar ki kore choilbe? (Drunken men are not concerned about anyone. What the children will eat? How will the day-to-day affairs of the family be taken care of?)"*

*"Saradin khate lute anbo, ar uhara sei takay mod khabe—na dile dharabe. (We work hard all day and earn something; and the men use that money to drink alcohol. And if we refuse, they beat us up.)"*

*"Taka na thakle ghorer chal niye bhati jabe. (If there is no money at home, they take rice from the house and sell it to go to the local liquor shop)."*

*"School jawa chhila gulano ekhon mod dhoreche. (School-going children are also getting addicted to alcohol.)"*

*"Moder jalay uhader jami gulano bikain gelo—uh jaldi morle tobu bhalo hoito...bou-chila chas kore khato. (They are selling their land because they are addicted to alcohol—if they were to die, it would be better for the*

family...at least their wives and children could cultivate those lands...)"

*"Amra bhaibchi chas-bas barhabo, ar uhara din-rat mod khaye pore thaikche. (While we are planning on how to improve our agriculture, they are drunk most of the time.)"*

*"Ei didir ki ekhon bidhaba howar boyos hoyeche? Moder jalay ehar samir jibon gelo. (Is this the age for a woman to become a widow? Her husband just died due to alcohol addiction)."*

These words, discussed in the SHG meetings, were familiar to almost all the women members. In five years, nine Clusters have tried to stop illegal liquor brewing and selling within their villages. The women have smashed some of the illegal shops; they have organized rallies in the villages and have gone on a deputation to the police. The administration has not quite supported the women and the only action that has been taken is the destroying of some illegal shops and the arrest of a few persons immediately after the deputation. Unfortunately, the women's protests only have an impact for a few weeks after which the men find their liquor vends again and also make jokes about women and their anti-liquor movement. The efforts of the collective to minimize violence against women cause other forms of violence against women, which inhibits them from moving forward.

The situation in Supurdi village (a forest-fringe tribal village where most of the families sell fuel wood daily) was no different. One incident, however, has changed the mind-set of the women of the village.

*Although the men of the village tried to arrange for the money for the treatment, it was the SHG women who came forward to give Rs 12,000 from their SHG savings fund.*

One of the SHG members and her husband used to sell liquor within the village; this did not change even after several warnings from other SHG members. On one afternoon in November, 2012, a woman came out of her hut shouting, *"Amake didira bacha, ami agune jole-pure morli* (Save my life, I

am going to die of burns)." Some of the SHG members rushed to the spot and found that the woman had burns all over her body. Her husband refused to help her, quite fearful of a police case despite the assurances by the SHG that they would save him from the police. They tried to impress upon him how important it was to save his wife's life. She had a six-month-old child! It was a difficult situation for the women in the village because they did not know what to do. Some of the women ran to the *panchayat*, asking it to arrange for a vehicle to take the woman to the hospital, which the *pradhan* did.

After the initial treatment at the Block Primary Health Centre (BPHC), she was referred to the district hospital. Although the men of the village tried to arrange for the money for the treatment, it was the SHG women who came forward to give Rs 12,000 from their SHG savings fund. The woman stayed in the hospital for a month, and during that period, they brought her powder milk, arranged for cow's milk for the child, took care of her child and also helped the family in household work. The sensitivity and magnanimity demonstrated by the rural tribal women are quite rare in our society.

The women, however, did not forget the cause of the incident—alcoholism. The day after the incident, they called a meeting of all the

men and women of the village, in which they resolved that from then on nobody would be allowed to run any illegal liquor shops in the village and also no one would be allowed to create any disturbance within the village after consuming liquor. Some of the villagers were not ready to accept the resolution. The Cluster then took the help of the police a few times to stop the illegal liquor shops.

Murguma is a neighbouring village of Supurdi and the women of that village started forming SHGs since early 2013. They showed interest in the details of the incident in Supurdi because they too faced similar problems in their village. Approximately 150 SHG members of Murguma and Laxmipur together decided to pull down and destroy the illegal liquor shops; they did so with the help of the police force on the afternoon of 20<sup>th</sup> September 2013. The liquor shops, however, soon re-opened. Even though the police arrested the vendors every time they re-opened their shops, the vendors were released within a few hours, and the whole purpose of the drive was defeated.

In the meantime, on 15 and 16 March 2013, 162 SHGs of Jhalda-II Block organized the first SHG Mahadhivesan with 2,200 members. At that overnight event, the Kangsabati Nari Maryada Mahasangha, a block-level Federation was formed. The Federation Board Members were selected by the Cluster-level sub-groups during the overnight event. It was also decided and agreed upon by all the members that the Kangsabati Nari Maryada Mahasangha would act as a platform of solidarity for SHG members, provide an identity to thousands of women and work for creating a better society.

At 11 a.m. on 12 November 2013, 1600 women congregated at the Kotshila police station. The people at Kotshila market were surprised to see these amazing women collect under the banner of Kangsabati Nari Maryada

Mahasangha. This had already been decided on 4 November 2013 at a Federation meeting. During the meeting, one of the Federation Board Members from Supurdi village spoke of the ongoing struggle of trying to shut the liquor shops in Murguma. They requested the Federation to take up the issue and help them close the liquor shops permanently. They described how the police would arrest the liquor shop owners and then release them within a few hours. They said that this was frustrating.

As the members pondered over how to solve the problem, common to all the women of the Kangsabati Nari Maryada Mahasangha, one of them suggested, "Let us take out a mass rally towards the Kotshila police station and the Block Development Officer's (BDO's) office, so that they understand the strength of our SHGs and then be compelled to take action against the liquor shops."

The Board Members agreed to the proposition and called an urgent meeting, to discuss the issue with all the members. The members agreed that they would not create any disorder for the administration. "We have to politely convince them of the rationale behind our movement and draw support for the same," was their conclusion. The date and time was fixed through consensus.

On 11 November 2013, most of the Clusters conducted village-level meetings and some of them called the Office-in-Charge (OC), Kotshila police station, to take an appointment for the deputation and meeting. The OC anticipated some disorder on that day. He started taking action against illegal liquor selling and said he was busy and would not be available at the Kotshila police station the next day. PRADAN then talked to the OC to help him understand that the purpose of the meeting was that the Administration and the



Federation could find a way to work together to solve the problems of the people.

Thousands of women reached the police station the next day. Overwhelmed by the crowd, the police agreed to support the women and shut the illegal liquor shops. The women insisted that the police accompany them to the BDO. The police were reluctant at first but one of the women stepped forward and said “*Aj ei didi-ta mar kheyechhe, amader hajar-hajar didira roj emon mar khay—apni amder sathe jaben na?*” (This woman has been beaten by her husband this morning. This happens daily to thousands of women—you don’t want to accompany us?).” The woman was able to emotionally convince the police to escort the 1,600 women to the BDO’s office.

The BDO spoke to the representatives, heard their grievances and responded gently. When they received this response from the BDO, the members felt supported and encouraged. Bubbling with high energy, the members prepared a long list of illegal liquor shops and submitted it to the BDO.

Responding to the unusual outburst from the women, the BDO, together with the local police, took prompt action and the Excise Department began raiding the villages from the very next day. The media also came forward to cover the news, and that helped spread awareness to many others of the big initiative by the women’s collective. The Federation leaders also contacted Mr. Shantiram Mahato, the SHG minister, West Bengal, and took an appointment to discuss the issue with

*Responding to the unusual outburst from the women, the BDO, together with the local police, took prompt action and the Excise Department began raiding the villages from the very next day. The media also came forward to cover the news, and that helped spread awareness to many others of the big initiative by the women’s collective*

him on 17 November 2013. Representatives from Kangsabati Nari Maryada Mahasangha met the minister and presented him with an application, seeking support for their cause.

Under pressure by the mobilization of women, the officials from the Excise Department agreed to meet with the members of Kangsabati Nari Maryada Mahasangha on 20 November 2013 to discuss the issue. Around 100 members assembled at Jhalda to meet the officials, which unfortunately,

on the eve of the meeting, the Excise Officials decided not to attend. This incident angered the members. After much deliberation, they decided that if the Excise Officer would not come to them, they would go to him.

It was afternoon then; 21 members went to Purulia to meet the ADM-G, who agreed to support them and suggested they meet with the Excise Department as well. The DM talked with the Superintendent, Excise Department and advised him to help the women. The members then went to the Excise Department and shared their concerns with the officials. The women not only got a commitment from the officials that they would visit all the illegal liquor shops of the area but also an apology for not meeting them at the appointed hour.

SHG members have realized their own strength and have understood the impact that they can have by working together. Within 15 days of the movement, the Excise Department has started raiding the liquor shops in 14 villages and have arrested four people.

At the same time, many members are facing threats from their men and are being taunted in their villages. The men challenge the women, saying that they will not be able to do anything and that they should restrict themselves to attending SHGs. The women are now sharing ideas on how to stop violence against women. In Simni village, the women said, "*Tora amader grame ene onek otyachar korechis, ar natun kaoke korte dibo na—amader grame biha bandha kore debo, ki kore tora bangsa barhaba bara.* (You men have brought us to this village and have committed a lot of violence against us. We will not allow it any more. We will stop all the marriages in these villages. We will not allow another generation of children to be born)."

Some of the women have become demoralized by the challenges whereas some have become more aggressive. In this tense environment, it requires courage and maturity to laugh about the threats that the women are facing. "*Tui chinta koris na, jodi andolan korte giye moris tobe tor nam-e mondir korbo ar prota bachhar 2,500 didi niye mela korbo.* (Don't worry, if you die in this movement, we will build a temple in your name and organize a fair every year with our 2,500 members)."

Regular discussions are taking place among the women on how to sustain the movement. The women have conducted meetings with the MLA, the *gram panchayat pradhan* and other relevant stakeholders. Sometimes they draw support from the women of other villages, to conduct meetings with the men and respond to threats. The institution leaders conduct meetings in specific villages, where the resistance is quite high.

For PRADAN to be co-travellers with these women and share their struggle for what they believe in is a unique experience. This movement requires that the women remain united. The objective of the movement is to not only stop illegal liquor brewing and selling within the villages but also to stop the adverse effects it has for the family and society, where the woman is the biggest sufferer. The practice of consuming liquor by men and their behaviour after that is largely connected with the different forms of gender-based violence within society and family. Through this movement, the journey of the women's collective for creating a better society carries on...

# Curbing Human Trafficking—Need for Collective Effort

MANSOOR NAQVI

*Creating an awareness of gender issues among women, sharing information with them on related laws and legal rights, and building their confidence to demand action, as a collective, from the officials are some of the ways by which the heinous crime of human trafficking is being addressed in the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh*

## INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is prohibited by domestic and international laws, and yet thousands fall victim to the organized crime of human exploitation. Trafficking of women and children is a grave crime, extending beyond boundaries and jurisdictions. Capitalizing on economic desperation, low levels of literacy, and deep-seated gender inequality, traffickers prey on individuals most vulnerable to exploitation.

The Trafficking Protocol is an international agreement under the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (CTOC), signed on 25 December, 2003. It defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, transfer, transportation, harbouring and receipt of persons, by means of blatant force or violence, or subtle inducements that capitalize on an individual’s vulnerability to achieve consent.” It is marked by the intent to coerce, deceive and exploit.

## CONTEXT

Human trafficking affects every country in the world, regardless of socio-economic status, history or political structure. Human traffickers cash in on a lucrative international market for trade in human beings, based on the demand for commercial sex and cheap labour.

An estimated 20.9 million men, women and children are trafficked for commercial sex or forced labour around the world today. Victims are trafficked both within and across international borders. Migrants and internally displaced persons are particularly vulnerable.

There is a growing recognition of the links between labour trafficking, the regulation of supply chains, and the power of the consumer to end widespread exploitation by choosing goods that are not tainted by forced or child labour. The US Department of Labour has identified 122 such goods that are produced using forced labour, child labour, or both.

In India, trafficking is a rapidly growing crime, especially for sex trade. In the last decades, there have been thousands of such cases. In 2012, as many as 3,554 incidents of crimes relating to human trafficking were reported in the country, an increase of 1.1 per cent over

the previous year (3,517) and a sharp increase of 17.3 per cent over 2008.

Table 1 lists the details of the reported crimes from 2008 to 2012, along with the percentage variation, year 2012 over 2011.

According to the report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 10,493 human trafficking cases were registered and 5,931 persons were convicted, for the period January 2010 to December 2012. These statistics, however, do not tell the real picture because the grass-roots reality is that most cases go unreported; we can, therefore, assume that the figures are much higher than listed.

**Table 1: Incidence of Various Crimes under Human Trafficking during 2008–12**

No.	Crime	Year					Percentage Variation in 2012 over 2011
		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
1	Procurement of minor girls	224	237	679	862	809	-6.1
2	Import of girls from foreign countries	67	48	36	80	59	-26.3
3	Selling of girls for prostitution	49	57	130	113	108	-4.4
4	Buying of girls for prostitution	30	32	78	27	15	-44.4
5	Immoral trafficking	2,659	2,474	2,499	2,435	2,563	5.3
	Total	3,029	2,848	3,422	3,517	3,554	1.1

Source: NCRB, 2012

**Table 2: Trafficking in India from 2010–12**

Crime	Cases Registered	Cases Charge-sheeted	Cases Convicted	Persons Arrested	Persons Charge-sheeted	Persons Convicted
Immoral trafficking	7,497	6,921	2,789	22,408	21,193	5,931
Buying of minor girls for prostitution	120	85	7	182	139	10
Selling of minor girls for prostitution	351	198	9	450	308	22
Procurement of minor girls	2,350	1,525	103	2,342	2,033	136
Import of girls from foreign countries	175	131	19	348	360	24
<b>Total number of crimes committed under human trafficking</b>	<b>10,493</b>	<b>8,860</b>	<b>2,927</b>	<b>25,730</b>	<b>24,033</b>	<b>6,123</b>

Source: NCRB, 2012

### Trafficking in Madhya Pradesh (MP)

Tribals form 20 per cent of the population in MP; of these 97.6 per cent reside in rural areas and are poor. Beset by extreme poverty, the desire for urban life, and a fragile voice and community structure, tribal girls easily fall prey to traffickers. Trafficking is a crime that affects people closely; yet it is not recognized as a crime and not taken very seriously, either by the families or by the police in areas such as Betul, Mandla, Dindori and many other districts of the state.

As per the data of the MP Legislative Assembly booklet, Hifazat, 8,345 children were reported missing in MP in 2011, of which 5,271 were

girls. As many as 3,303 people remained untraced over the year. According to Hifazat, between 2004 and 2011, as many as 65,559 children were reported missing, of which 34,572 were girls. Government records reveal that 10,298 children remain untraced. Of this figure, 40 per cent of the cases of missing children, (of which 37 per cent are untraced), were reported from the 21 tribal districts of MP.

Women and girls are trafficked for the purposes of prostitution, forced marriage and domestic work that often entail sexual abuse. Women and girls are mainly sold as commercial sex



**Table 3: Data of Trafficking Crimes in Madhya Pradesh, 2011–12**

Crime	Cases Registered	Cases Charge-sheeted	Cases Convicted	Persons Arrested	Persons Charge-sheeted	Persons Convicted
Immoral trafficking	56	55	36	343	343	109
Buying of minor girls for prostitution	2	2	0	5	5	0
Selling of minor girls for prostitution	10	12	3	43	43	14
Procurement of minor girls	59	49	7	76	76	19
Import of girls from foreign countries	56	53	1	207	207	3
<b>Total crimes committed under human trafficking</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>674</b>	<b>674</b>	<b>145</b>

Source: NCRB, 2012

workers. The skewed sex ratio (because of sex selective foeticide and infanticide) is an important reason for trafficking in states where the sex ratio is very poor, especially in the North Indian states such as Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. Many incidents have come to light of women from the poverty stricken belt of India being sold as brides into forced marriages. Young girls and their families are also lured away from home with promises of good jobs, and then placed as domestic help in urban areas for very low wages. This trend is increasing, with the demand for domestic help in urban areas and the unrestricted migration of girls from tribal and poverty stricken areas to distant places. The traffickers lure the girls, promising to marry them or to give them better job opportunities.

The attitude of the police and the administration is, at best, complacent. They do not prioritize trafficking as an offence. In many cases, the victims themselves are harassed and marginalized by the police. The legal framework is not well-defined and the many statutes in The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (IMTA) create more confusion and, thus, lead to its misuse. Combating and preventing human trafficking requires a holistic approach by all those affected by it. It needs coordinated action on prosecution, prevention and protection, and, above all, awareness among the people, especially the girls and their parents. This rapidly growing heinous crime needs to be brought to light through advocacy. It is as important as rape, and yet there is no policy to deal with it.

According to NCRB, Betul is one of the most-affected districts of the country, in terms of crimes against women. The area reported the highest number of rape cases in the last ten years in India, which itself explains the status of women in this district, where the tribal population is 40 per cent. Many times voices

are raised by civil society organizations, the opposition, women's organizations, etc., but no action is taken on the ground. The biggest hurdle is the response of the police and the administration, which is, by and large, apathetic.

In April 2013, the disappearance of a minor girl and her sister-in-law turned out to be a case of human trafficking. Gitabai, one of the survivors, escaped from the clutches of the traffickers and narrated her story to SHG members. Although she had managed to run away, her minor sister-in-law, Mangli, is still with the traffickers and her whereabouts are unknown.

The SHG members took this matter to the Narmada Mahila Sangh (NMS), which went to the police station to register a case under the appropriate section of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). However, this was not easy because the police refused to register the case. Gitabai's family was threatened by them, resulting in the family having to hide in Itarsi. Despite the non-cooperation and the hostile attitude of the administration and the police, the local Federation was finally able to register the case. However, the police still did not take any action and the offender was not arrested.

*The attitude of the police and the administration is at best complacent.*

*They do not prioritize trafficking as an offence. In many cases, the victims themselves are harassed and marginalized by the police.*

Meanwhile, Gitabai and her family continued to receive threats. NMS then made the matter public and took it to the media. It approached all the officials of the police and the administration, and any other person of influence, who could help resolve the issue. The women leaders of NMS took the

support of the villagers and made it a state-level issue. Finally, two of the accused were arrested and the girl was rescued and brought back home. Investigations in this case, have encouraged people from other villages to seek police action, and 11 more cases have come to light and are now being investigated.

## **ISSUES WHEN DEALING WITH CASES OF TRAFFICKING**

### **The Attitude of the Community**

There have been cases when a girl has eloped with a man and come back after he refused to marry her. The then punishes the girl by forcing her to marry a widower, an aged man, a physically disabled person, etc. If the girl returns after living with someone of a different caste or community, a ritual called Jaat Milauni has to be performed, in which the family of the girl has to lay out a feast for the whole community. This is a huge burden for the family, which already has been through humiliation in the community. Such rituals hamper rescue operations; this is one of the biggest challenges as far as the rehabilitation of girls is concerned. Often, the girls do not return to their village for fear of not being accepted by the community.

## GITABAI'S ESCAPE

When we first met Gitabai, she was scared to even look directly at us. Her voice was so low that it was barely audible. Her husband too hesitated to share the details of what had happened. Somtibai, a Community Service Provider, made her comfortable asked her to narrate the chain of events. She spoke of it in bits and pieces and, as with many other victims of trafficking, her story was bloodcurdling.

Gitabai got married to Basant of Jamundhana village in 2008 when she was 18 years old. She gave birth to a daughter after one year of marriage, and to a baby boy after another year. Basant was a daily wage labourer and Gita's in-laws were very poor (they didn't even have their own place to live). Basant was addicted to alcohol, and once inebriated, used to beat Gita. There was sometimes no money at home, even for food.

One summer morning, their relative Kapoor and two people came to her home. Kapoor introduced the two as a bank official and a contractor. They said that they were just passing through Jamundhana and had stopped to drink water. They said they were working in the area and, in passing, mentioned that they were looking to get married but were not finding a proper match. They wanted a girl who was beautiful and young. They asked the family to help them.

This was the first meeting. After that, they began coming to her home regularly. Their way of living, their money and their status overawed Gitabai. Mangli, her sister-in-law, became attracted to one of them called Manoj. Nobody noticed this except Gitabai. Manoj promised Mangli that he would marry her. He then asked her to persuade Gitabai to marry his friend Madan because he was interested in her. He promised her that they would both be well supported.

Mangli shared this with Gitabai, and began to convince her that a better future awaited her with these men. All this happened when Basant was away in Bangalore for work at that time. All the conditions were favourable. One day, the women left their home with Manoj and Madan. On the very first night they were separated, drugged and then raped.

After a few days, Gitabai realized her mistake and asked Madan to let her go back home. Madan insisted that he wanted to marry her. There were other family members of Madan present, who confirmed to her his intentions and also promised her that they would bring her children to her, once the marriage was solemnized. She spent some days there. After a week, the effects of the drugs wore out and she became fully conscious. She started to cry, insisting that she wanted to go home.

Madan told her that that was no longer possible and that she would have to spend her life with him. He then asked his parents to take care of her as she might try to run away. His mother and sisters kept an eye on her. In fact, she had to take her bath in front of them because they would not leave her alone at all. After one month, in mid-December, she

somehow managed to contact her husband, Basant, over the phone and pleaded with him to come and fetch her. She told him she was being held captive in Bhangia village.

Basant contacted Bhoura chowki for help but the police asked for a bribe. After taking money from Basant, they went to Bhangia village and contacted Gitabai. All the family members of Madan insisted that she had come of her own free will and forced her to give a statement stating this; the police returned, unable to bring her back with them.

After a few days of the incident, Madan told Gitabai that they needed to go to Niwai in Rajasthan for a wedding. There she met with another girl from Betul and came to know that they had been brought to Rajasthan, to be sold as brides.

Gitabai pleaded with Madan to take her back and that she would marry him and work like a slave for him. Madan agreed but when he asked the people in Rajasthan to cancel the deal, they refused and locked both of them in a room. The two managed to escape after three days when they were taken out of the room for some food. They ran to a nearby police station. The police gave them Rs 150 for food and put them on a train for Bina station.

They returned to Bhangia on 24 March. Madan asked her to marry him. She said that she was ready but wanted her children with her. On 29 April, Madan agreed, and she contacted her husband to ask for her children. They decided to meet at Gitabai's maternal home in Basaniya, where Basant would bring the children.

Madan decided to go alone for the children. When Madan left home, Gitabai called her husband again and told him that Madan was alone and that he should do something. Basant and two other people of Jamundhana caught Madan when he arrived and asked him to bring back Gitabai. Trapped, Madan called his home and asked them to send Gitabai.

She was lucky to have come back. She then took the assistance of her SHG to find Mangl.

### The Attitude of the Police

*"Nahin bhaiyya, hamein nahin dhoondna apni ladki ko, agar wahan jayenge to police wale hamein bahut maareng, wo to kismat mein hua to khud hi aa jayegi.* (No brother, we do not want to find our daughter. The police will beat us. If we are lucky, she will come back on her own)." This was the response of the father of a girl who had been trafficked. The police had beaten him just because he had wanted to file an F.I.R of his missing daughter.

In Gitabai's case too, instead of registering her case, the police threatened her family, which made them run away from the village. This is the typical response of the police to the community, especially the poor, and in cases of violence against women. Often, the police stand by the oppressor/perpetrator/criminal and work as their agents; and they seem to have enough support from senior officials. The unresponsiveness of the police serves the criminals who then commit crimes without any

fear. To deal with the situation, the first and foremost task is to make the police responsible and sensitive.

### **The Attitude of the Administration**

On 12 April, 2013, around 40–50 women visited the District Collector's office, to follow-up on Gitabai's case. The Collector refused to meet them but then later called them. When NMS members asked him to take action on the case and rescue the minor girl, he flung their application away and asked Gitabai in a harsh tone, *"Kyon, kya kami thi tumhen jo bhag gayin? Do-do bachchon ki amma hokar bhag jaati hain mahilayen aur baad mein aa jaati hain ki ye hua, wo hua. Tera pati kahan hai?"* (What was it that you didn't have that you ran away from home? Even after being a mother of two children, these women run away and then come to us and say that they were abducted. Where is your husband?) He then turned to the husband and humiliated him, *"Kyon kya kami thi tere mein jo teri patni bhag gayi?"* (What was wrong with you that your wife ran away?)

The NMS women asked him to at least listen to the case. He replied, *"Main chehra dekhkar hi samajh jaata hoon do minute mein ki kya sachchai hai; jao achche se likhkar lao apni baat aur S.P. se mil lo, phir dekhte hain ki kya kahani hai tumhaari.* (I can look at a face for two minutes and gauge the truth. Go and write your application properly and meet the SP; then we will see what your story is.)

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The women were highly demotivated and inconsolable after being humiliated so badly. If this is the response of the District Collector, how can villagers expect any issues to be raised or even heard? The people are afraid to go to these officers for fear of humiliation. This brings questions to mind as to what

kind of a country we are living in? What can be done when the authorities are so insensitive? Is there any hope that things will get any better? Which direction are we heading in, as a community? And above all, are we safe?

### **Initiatives by PRADAN**

PRADAN has been working with women's groups in Betul and NMS and has been active in flagging issues of atrocities against women. The issue of trafficking was not brought to light until recently when women spoke about this issue in SHG and Cluster meetings. This took place after the women underwent a series of deliberations and training programmes on issues of gender and equality. Until recently, these cases were treated as elopements, in which women or girls went willingly with the traffickers. Family members too did not make an effort to find the girls who went missing not did they discuss it with other villagers because they feared humiliation. However, now women are raising their voices against the issue and have realized that women and girls are victims of deceit.

Girls who have returned are now being heard. They narrate how they were lured with a promise of a better future, and then sold and resold, beaten, bruised and raped repeatedly. When they somehow escape from the clutches of the traffickers and return home, they are treated as outcastes and humiliated by the villagers and not accepted by their own families.

PRADAN professionals, in their work with women on the issues of gender and their attempt at obtaining equal rights for women, found it difficult not to address the issue of trafficking. Trafficking is a crime and a social issue. Young girls and women are increasingly becoming victims and because no steps have been taken, such cases are on the rise.

To begin with, PRADAN organized meetings with women in 28 villages to understand the problem. There were 13 cases in these villages of girls and women found missing.

PRADAN, now in partnership with other civil society organizations such as Action-Aid and Pradeepan, is conducting a fact-finding study in the area. Although the study is yet to be completed, the facts that are emerging are very disturbing. The context, the trend, the pattern and the responses of the community, the police and the administration about trafficking are becoming clearer. Based on this, PRADAN is formulating ways to approach the issue of trafficking, generating awareness about it as well as helping in rehabilitating victims. Information about each case has been gathered, in order to follow it up further and help the family take it forward.

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The issue of trafficking is not one-dimensional but involves the community and the administration. Many young girls become a target of the traffickers because of their vulnerability. Traffickers are able to manipulate them and lure them with promises of a better future or a better job in the city. The cases that we came across were mostly where the victim travelled willingly with the abductor because she was unaware of his intentions.

PRADAN's approach is to create a favourable environment and put in place mechanisms, to adequately assist and protect the victims of trafficking as well as create awareness among people about such crimes. It is equally important to recognize the need for protecting trafficked survivors as well as sensitizing the community so that the victims are accepted by their families and are able to lead normal lives.

## PLANS

### Awareness generation and sensitization

- ♦ Generating awareness in NMS members as well as SHGs on the issue of trafficking and its implications on women and young girls. Sensitization and awareness programmes for girls, especially teenagers, through training programmes, posters, films, campaigns and theatre forums
- ♦ Awareness and sensitization of the community through the 'Theatre of Oppressed' forums at the village level, mainly to make people aware of such crimes and to provoke them into taking precautions against them in their village



- ♦ Awareness of the community about social norms that are against women/girls and how these dogmas are contributing to the girls being easily lured away to escape their life in the village. Also, counselling the community to accept the victims when they return
- ♦ Awareness of the community about suspicious people and their activities in the village
- ♦ Sensitization workshops for the police, the Anti-human Trafficking Cell and the Administration through training programmes as well as discussion forums, to combat human trafficking.

### **Capacity building**

- ♦ Developing understanding of legal issues among PRADAN staff
- ♦ Capacity building of the paralegals developed by PRADAN, to understand the legalities when dealing with such cases
- ♦ Capacity building of NMS as well as SHG members, to address these issues

### **Tracking cases**

- ♦ Documentation of people migrating from villages, the agents and the destinations
- ♦ Follow-up of all cases through NMS
- ♦ Networking with like-minded organizations and people, working on the same issues.
- ♦ Counselling victims, helping them overcome trauma and creating an environment so that they are able to lead normal lives again within the family

### **Accomplishments so far:**

- ♦ The SHG women, trained on legal issues by PRADAN, have started following up these cases and have also started discussing the issue of trafficking in villages, clusters and other forums of the community. This has helped create awareness among people, has made them take precautions, and register cases with the police and bring them to the knowledge of the media.
- ♦ This is the biggest challenge the women have taken up, facing strong resistance from the police, the administration and, in some cases, the local politicians. They have taken the help of the Federation, have met the Superintendent of Police, the Collector and the media. They have found strength in the collective. Around 150 women went to the District Office and met with officials, introduced the parents of the victims to the officials and presented them with details of the cases in writing. They demanded action by the police, which took place only after they put pressure on them and after meeting many other officials of the state.
- ♦ Many cases are now registered, with the paralegals following up on these, going from the villages to the police station to the Court and also further, if needed.
- ♦ A strong network of civil society organizations such as PRADAN, Pradeepan, Action-Aid, the Women's Federation-NMS, and also some like-minded officials, journalists and social workers has been established, to deal with trafficking in Betul district.

- ♦ Three girls were rescued and many others have been identified, and there is a hope that they will be found. Eight cases, which had not been filed earlier, are now registered with the police, who seem to be making efforts to trace the missing. An Anti-human Trafficking Cell has now been formed, following a demand for it by NMS.
- ♦ One more gang of traffickers has been unearthed through the efforts of the NMS. The case against the gang has been registered and the members have been jailed.
- ♦ A theatre group has been formed with the help of experts from the 'Theatre of Oppressed' and has started conducting forums in villages to create awareness and to sensitize the community.

# Woman Service Providers to the Fore

AMITAVA RAKSHIT

*From being mere implementers and wage labourers in a traditionally patriarchal society, the women of Koderma have created an identity and space for themselves as farmers and service providers, capable of guiding and hand-holding other women farmers, leading to greater utilization of the land and other resources, and proving that together they can achieve self-sufficiency*

## BACK TO KODERMA

I joined PRADAN in 2007 as a Development Apprentice at its Koderma project. Six months later I was transferred to the Bokaro project where I worked for five years. My major engagement at Bokaro was to work with SHGs and help promote livelihoods through the Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) approach.

I moved back to Koderma in June 2013. I was surprised by the vibrancy of the SHG members and wondered what had brought about the change in the last five years. I remember that livelihoods had not been the foremost need of the community, especially in Chandwara and Jainagar blocks, and how as a team we had struggled to make it so.

I worked on planning the crop with the women for the *kharif* season; I found that, unlike earlier, they set themselves a huge target and the crop portfolio was very high. I was struck by the fact that all the Service Providers working in the Clusters were women. And because many of them were not educated, I wondered whether they would be able to deliver the kind of critical interventions that were needed to promote crops. As I began to engage with them, however, I found that they were not only competent to promote crops but had in many ways changed the way we looked at agriculture.

## MOVING OUT OF AGRICULTURE

Koderma is situated in the northern part of Jharkhand and shares its border with Bihar. Unlike PRADAN's other locations in Jharkhand, Koderma has a non-tribal population, dominated by Bhumihars and Yadavs. The economy in Koderma is largely dependent upon agriculture. However, because of the skewed land distribution, the Scheduled Castes, SCs, (Rabidas and Bhuyia) come under the category of low marginal farmers or the landless. High indebtedness to the local *mahajans* is quite common because people borrow money for health, consumption and other exigencies. Owing to low productivity of the land, the villagers are mostly dependent upon wages; a large number of youth, therefore, migrates to other parts of the country to work as contractual labour. Access to the major growth centres of the country is easy because the region is well connected to Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai by rail and road. Migration is especially common amongst the landless SC communities, who migrate en masse, due to the lack of employment opportunities in the local areas.

The prolonged absence of men from the village impacts households adversely. The land remains poorly cultivated and the family is deprived of food that could have been produced through farming. Often, the remittances from towns become irregular and this forces the family to take loans from the local moneylenders. The lack of food and indebtedness affect women both physically and emotionally.

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They bear the additional burden of supplementing the family income or borrowing from moneylenders to run the households. Because of the patriarchal norms of the society, women do not usually indulge in farming as an activity. Working as a daily wage labourer during the agriculture season is the only source of income for the women.

### Women as Farm Labourers

PRADAN began its engagement in Koderma by promoting women SHGs. The area was so highly dependent upon moneylenders that the savings and credit activity within the

SHG picked up; the women discovered that the SHG is a source from which they could take loans for their consumption needs. They found that, in their SHGs, they could share their problems with other women as well as seek support for themselves, when required.

Although the women actively took part in SHG meetings, as well as Cluster and Federation programmes, their lack of involvement in livelihoods was an issue of concern for the team. The SHGs took loans from banks mainly for consumption needs, debt redemption, renovation of houses, health needs and for the marriages of their children. The women remained heavily dependent on their men folk to repay loans.

Loans for livelihood purposes were very few compared to other loans. SHG members believed that thinking about running the household economy was a man's domain whereas their role was to look after household chores. They did not feel confident taking decisions regarding agriculture interventions,

even when the men were not present. They worked as agricultural labourers in others' as well as their own fields whereas the men took all the decisions. The women thought that they had no technical understanding of farming; even those women, who were engaged in agricultural promotion through PRADAN's intervention, were completely dependent upon the Service Provider (SP) whose instructions they followed without understanding. Engaging in livelihoods, especially agriculture, did not appear to be the primary need of the community because its economy was mostly dependent on labour wages.

### Identity of Women as Farmers

With the team's engagement in the Gender Equality Programme, (GEP) its stance towards livelihoods changed. Livelihoods are now seen from a gender perspective. The PRADAN team had been working with the women and had kept its focus on promoting livelihoods. Now, however, there has been a change in perspective and women are no longer viewed merely as implementers but as farmers and owners. The focus has shifted towards creating an identity and space for women. Before initiating any intervention with the women, the questions being asked were: Are women able to take decisions? Are they able to negotiate their position? Who has control over the income? Is the intervention reducing the drudgery of women? Is it giving dignity to the women? Do women have appropriate knowledge and skills? Are women feeling confident? What sort of issues would they face while engaged in this activity?

The team had intensive discussions with the Cluster and Federation members about

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the issues the women face in promoting livelihoods, especially farm-based livelihoods. The team also realized that the SPs who supported the team in the livelihood intervention were all men, and the women did not feel comfortable discussing their issues with them, also considering that it was socially inappropriate; their interactions, therefore, remained transactional rather than for seeking guidance and developing confidence.

The team developed a new strategy, in view of these problems, for intervening in livelihoods promotion, which would lead to women taking the initiative and becoming the decision-makers. The team's role would be more as a catalyst. The members of the team would not go into the village with a basket of livelihood options but would rather focus on the women members in the SHGs.

### Women in Farm Extension

To reach out to them and to encourage a large number of SHG members to participate, a pool of skilled women Community Service Providers (CSPs) was created. These women CSPs were to act as trainers as well as mentors to other women in the village. The idea was well accepted in the Federation and the Clusters and some of the women leaders volunteered to tread into this hitherto male-dominated 'more technical field'.

The women CSPs were SHG members, who had already initiated agriculture in their own fields and were now willing to extend themselves. The team groomed the women CSPs, providing them not only with the necessary skills and knowledge but also the confidence that they could bring about change. The women were

largely uneducated/less educated; therefore, the training programmes were designed to be more experiential and the classroom lessons were designed using pictorial tools.

The PRADAN team ensured regular support and hand-holding to the women CSPs during their discourse in the field. The women CSPs also underwent gender training so that they would be able to look at the issues in a broader perspective and work towards a scenario, where women would be in control and in charge of their family, society and the larger environment affecting them and their livelihoods. This made a tremendous impact on women SHG members because they did not feel inhibited in asking for the support of women CSPs. They recognized the CSP as one among themselves and someone who would understand them. The CSPs became confident enough to deal with the farmers and support them to execute critical interventions in the field.

During the training programmes, the team impressed upon the CSPs that they should encourage SHG members to initiate action and to become an economic agent of their families so that their status within their family rises and they also feel more confident.

### **Sanju Devi as Agriculture CSP**

Thirty-one year old, Sanju Devi became a widow when she was only 19 and a mother of two little girls. She prefers not to use the prefix *masomat* (which is a common nomenclature used for widows) with her name. She believes that she has an identity beyond that of a widow. Today, she works as an agriculture SP for her Cluster, is the accountant for five SHGs and is a resourceful trainer on gender issues.

Sanju Devi got married at the tender age of 13 to Manoj Ram, who worked as a contractor in Delhi. Her in-laws stay about 20 km from her own house in Charadih village. At the age of 17, when she was still an adolescent, Sanju Devi had her first girl child. Two years later, she had another girl child. Her in-laws were not happy and used to curse her all the time and would ill-treat her often. One day, she got the terrible news from some of the villagers that her husband had been murdered. She was left alone with her two children. Her miseries increased manifold.

It became difficult for her to stay at her in-laws' house. In fact, they wanted her to leave the house. Her brothers told her to come back home but she realized that if she were to leave her in-laws' house, she would not be able to claim the piece of land that had belonged to her husband and that now belonged to her daughters and would be useful in their upbringing. In spite of all the difficulties, she stayed back at her in-laws' house and fought for her share.

However, she was finally forced to leave the house and she returned to her parental village in Bhadki Damrai in 2002, where she joined the Durga Mahila Mandal, a PRADAN-promoted SHG. In the SHG, she began to regain her confidence and became an active member. After one year she was selected as a Cluster leader from her SHG and then as a Federation representative. She built a poultry shed under the Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojna (RSVY) project and proved to be an efficient poultry producer. With her own income in hand, she began to hope and believe that she would be able to provide her daughters with a good life. With the Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangh at her side, she found the strength to fight against her in-laws and managed to get two rooms of her share in their house.



## Setting an Example

This was the time that the team decided to groom women SPs for agriculture. Sanju Devi was unanimously selected by the Badki Dhamrai Cluster as their SP. She had proved herself to be a good farmer and used to readily extend her support to other members of her SHG.

She was trained by PRADAN professionals on the Package of Practices (POP) on various crops. She began motivating other SHG members to practise improved ways of agriculture. Initially, it was very difficult because nobody was interested in what she had to say; yet she never gave up hope. She started reading material provided to her in training programme before she went to SHG meetings or before providing trainings. The result of her hard work and interest can easily be seen. Initially, she started with just five farmers from her own SHG. She supported them in cultivating the kharif tomato and ensured that all the critical interventions in their fields were followed.

She took support from PRADAN professionals whenever she felt nervous and displayed an eagerness to learn at every step. The five farmers of the Durga Mahila Mandal reaped a huge produce for the first time and earned up to Rs 18,000 each. Her performance gave the team members hope and also strengthened the belief that women SPs could ensure critical interventions efficiently and could provide such services to a group of farmers competently.

Growing in confidence, Sanju Devi was always the first SP to try new crops for demonstration. That very year in the *rabi* season, Sanju Devi helped 16 farmers cultivate mustard using the SRI technique and the results were

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outstanding. Sanju Devi shared with the team that her belief is that the foremost thing is to build trust among the farmers and to win their hearts—and with time she has won the hearts of many farmers. Today, Sanju Devi supports the farmers of 18 SHGs and women increasingly look up to her for guidance. She is confident that farmers will begin to pay for her services in the future, and that she will be supporting all the farmers of Badki Dhamrai village. She hopes to make Badki Dhamrai an agriculturally affluent village.

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At present, 81 women SPs are based in various Clusters, to support the agriculture programme of the team. The CSPs are based at the Cluster so that they are easily accessible. Collectively, they now support approximately 6,000 women farmers in improved agriculture practices. The women CSPs help SHG members in their agriculture planning, deliberating on various topics such as why women should come forward to participate in agriculture, how women can act as economic agents for their family, what crop to choose, which crop would be suitable for the type of land a

member has, which variety of seeds to choose, how to treat the seeds, how the nurseries need to be prepared, how to transplant and what

inter-culture operations to use to get a good produce. The CSPs then regularly help the women in following the POPs.

### **MALTI DIDI'S JOURNEY AS A FARMER**

Malti Didi is 45 years old. She lives in Puto village of Chandwara block. She has been a member of the Shiv Mahila Mandal SHG for the last 13 years. Her husband is a rajmistri and earns about Rs 150 to 300 on a per day basis. The work he does is not available regularly, especially not in the rainy season. They have some land where they grow paddy, maize, potato and some vegetables.

She has been living in Puto for 33 years, ever since her marriage. Earlier, when she was not in the SHG, her family did not have money to provide treatment for her newborn baby because of which the baby died. Her husband Jhari Pandit was an unskilled labourer at that time and his income was not enough to run a family. With time, the family started increasing. She now has four children and providing for their upbringing is challenging.

At one point, the family faced such a scarcity of cash that they had to sell a share of their land. But the scenario began to change after she joined the SHG. For the last two to three years, they have adopted some new techniques of agriculture, in addition to the traditional, with the help of the CSP, who visits her regularly in the field and supports her by giving her information about the good varieties of seeds, the amount of fertilizer to be used and the medicine required to prevent diseases. She also receives guidance on sowing paddy in a row, maintaining some space in between two seedlings, sowing hybrid seeds of potato, brinjal, the timely application of fertilizers and medicines, etc.

In addition to this, last year she adopted another new technique of growing creepers on trellis. She adopted three different crops namely bottle gourd, bitter gourd and boda (lentil) in the same trellis. She took her variety of crops to the daily market in Telaiya. Each month she went to the market about 10 times, with a gap of two to three days each. She cultivated a patch of five decimals and earned about Rs 8000.

She also shared that earlier she was dependent on her husband for money even for the household consumption. But for the last three months, she has not asked her husband for a single rupee for any reason—whether to buy the groceries needed to run the household, a sari for herself, for her married daughter, for the educational expenses of her children, repairing of the roof of their house, etc. Most importantly, the family eats different vegetables at every meal. Their food habits have, therefore, become better. Seeing the quality of the produce, her husband has begun helping her in the fields rather than doing his own work. Today, Malti Didi is confident about the technology she has adopted with the help of the CSP and has decided to increase the area under trellis next year.

To reduce the drudgery faced by women, new technologies are now being used such as creeper and indeterminate tomato cultivation through trellis and the use of the Cono-weeder.

### **Women Taking Charge of Agriculture**

The CSPs attend all the SHG meetings that come under their working Cluster. They are present to help in the agriculture planning by each woman member. They discuss with the women the economics of the crops, the inputs required and then help them schedule the intervention. PRADAN professionals help the CSPs in a few SHGs so that they gain the confidence to carry on discussions in other SHGs. When a member expresses interest in trying out improved agriculture practices, the CSPs go to the fields of the members to demonstrate the treatment of the seeds and the raising of the nurseries. After that they conduct several follow-up visits and ensure that the members understand the technicalities behind the POPs and follow them properly. Every month, the CSPs meet thrice with the PRADAN professionals and share their experiences and problems. The aim is that the women understand the mechanics and the why and how of each step involved in promoting a crop.

It was believed that because the women SPs were not educated, they would need regular support for the technical know-how. Their restricted mobility was also a concern. But once the women were appointed as SPs, they have been increasingly engaging themselves as farmers. The team's agriculture portfolio

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has also increased manifold and now the women feel confident in venturing into newer crops. They produce maize, paddy, pigeon pea, wheat, mustard and vegetables such as tomato, potato and cabbage. The women now say that they do not look to the men in their family to do farming, and their lands are producing better crops and yields. Initially, many women found it difficult to make the family agree to experiment with

new crops but their zeal as SHG members and as economic agents of their families has helped them to cross all the hurdles. After the success of the crop, their families feel confident about the technology they had adopted, and they are planning to increase the area of cultivation through trellis.

### **CHALLENGES**

There are, of course, challenges. CSPs need to be more technically sound and the systems of their work need to be strengthened. However, this is not expected to take place in one day and needs the continuous engagement of the CSPs with the community. With the belief that women CSPs can be very resourceful, the team's efforts to train and groom such resources is continuing. There is hope that this will become a prototype in the coming years and the understanding will be that 'Women are proficient agents of Development'.

### **IMPACT**

The impact of the CSP's work is now being recognized in the district as well. In 2011-12, the Deputy Commissioner of Koderma, Mr. Rajesh Sharma, after visiting PRADAN's operational area and after meeting the SHG members and the CSPs, insisted that the

PRADAN team design an agriculture project that would be relevant for the area and would cater to a large number of SHG members. The team, after discussions with the Federation members, proposed creeper cultivation in trellis with 2,453 SHG members. The project was sanctioned under the Integrated Action Plan (IAP), in which each member received a subsidy of Rs 1,500 for purchasing yarn, GI wire and fishing net for preparing the trellis. The cost of cultivation of the creepers in 10

decimals of land in trellis was Rs 12,150, of which Rs 1,500 was subsidy and Rs 10,650 was the contribution of the farmer.

The project was implemented successfully by the Federation with the help of the women CSPs. PRADAN provided training to the CSPs on the construction of trellis and on the POP of the creepers. The CSPs were called machhan wali didis, as the crops started appearing. The project was a huge success and members earned from Rs 6,000–18,000.





Women showcasing their strength in Mahadhiveshan, Kesla, Madhya Pradesh

Women's empowerment is an on-going process of transforming the patriarchal structures of subordination by enabling women's capacities and building on their agency, having informed knowledge of the influence of various social, political and cultural systems of subordination and domination upon them.



**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 bimonthly 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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