



FROM PRIDE TO STaRTuPS

catalysing stories of change





Contents

01	Foreword - IKEA Foundation	5
02	Foreword - PRADAN	6
03	PRIDE and STaRTuP projects: At a Glance	8
04	Section A: The Power of Collectives	10

05	Section B: Stories of Self-sufficiency and prosperity	26
06	Section C: Health and Nutrition drive a change	42
07	Section D: Youth building a better tomorrow	58
08	Glimpses from IWitness Global Citizens Program	68



Foreword

IKEA Foundation



Per Heggenes,
Chief Executive Officer
IKEA Foundation

We are proud to partner with PRADAN and of their achievements in improving the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of women and their families in rural India.

The stories in this book demonstrate the success of PRADAN's model to strengthen the social capital of women combined with practical actions on the ground. Their capacity to mobilise so many women in impoverished areas of India is a valuable resource that we are keen to support.

PRADAN also has a strong record on engaging with and leveraging public development resources towards underserved communities. This is an excellent example of how civil society and public entities can work together to increase the impact of resources available to support rural households, especially women, living in poverty.

Both the PRIDE and STaRTuP projects have shown that investing in women's

self-management capacity pays off at all levels, whether in individual households, self-help-groups, community groups or federations. As women's economic position improves, the whole household benefits from better nutrition. And at the same time, women are empowered to influence local decision making and get access to public resources through their self-organised social structures.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the rural areas of India hard, not only in terms of infections but also because many workers had to return to their villages from the cities. The women's groups and communities supported by PRADAN have shown a high level of resilience and ability to organise themselves to respond effectively to the pandemic. We see this as further evidence of the long-term impact of PRADAN's work and the value of their community-led approach.

PRADAN



D. Narendranath
Executive Director
PRADAN

India is among the world's fastest-growing economies. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Indian economy has rebounded well despite the pandemic. However, the macro trends do not seem to reflect the life of the underprivileged. The recently published World Economic Report underlines that the top 10% of the Indian population holds 57% wealth while the bottom 50% have only a 6% share in the pie. The Multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) report (2021) unveiled by the Niti Aayog points out that more than one-fourth of the population suffers from multiple and simultaneous deprivations. The report points out that five out of six multidimensionally poor people belong to Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste or the Other Backward Castes.

PRADAN works in the Central and Eastern India tribal belt that ranks lowest in the multi-dimensional poverty index in India. This foregrounds the need to develop evidence-based models to help these communities overcome poverty of all manifestations. This was the basis of our discussion with the IKEA Foundation when we partnered with them a decade back. In the subsequent approach, PRADAN followed up on multiple issues. With support from IKEA Foundation's PRIDE and STaRTuP projects, we piloted interventions addressing the issue of not only income but also malnutrition, gender equality, resource access, entitlements and government schemes to enhance the overall well-being of the households.

In this work, PRADAN had partnered with organisations like Public Health Resource Society, Child in Need

Institute, Transform Rural India Foundation, Prajayatna, Vidyabhavana, Vikramshila for technical support and guidance. This helped PRADAN build its perspectives and knowledge of multiple deprivations and their interconnectedness. We developed comprehensive and sustainable models of community engagement that would help us bring systemic changes in the manner the issues of poverty and deprivation were addressed.

Under the PRIDE project, PRADAN piloted projects in collaboration with the aforesaid organisations and evolved its model interventions to address multiple deprivations. The STaRTuP project was the opportunity to scale-test the models developed in two distinct geographical clusters i.e., Mahakaushal in Madhya Pradesh and Santhal Pargana in Bihar and Jharkhand. The project and the partner civil society organisations, government departments, Panchayati Raj Institutions and the market institutions supported the women's collectives in giving shape to a collaborative eco-system.

It is a matter of great satisfaction for PRADAN that the women collective-led comprehensive model visibly improved community living conditions. Insights from the comprehensive models developed under the PRIDE and STaRTuP project can now inform policy-level discussions. The comprehensive models developed can also be readily adopted or replicated by other civil society organisations and government programmes to bring systemic changes addressed at poverty eradication programmes.



We are grateful to the Ikea Foundation, which has been a great support throughout, for its immense faith in the partnership with PRADAN. The rich discussions with the IKEA Foundation project anchors, Petra Hans and Nico Janssen, at the time of conceptualising the projects, during their field visits and subsequent reviews added a global perspective and enriched the discussions. We are delighted that as we close these two projects, we are entering into another partnership with the Foundation to develop scalable models around Green Transformation Pathways.

As the PRIDE and STaRTuP projects come to a closure, we have compiled 18 stories of transformation drawn from the lives of women we worked with under the projects. These stories were first published on the PRADAN Knowledge portal 'Sampark.Net' and mainstream digital media platforms Civil Society, Gaon

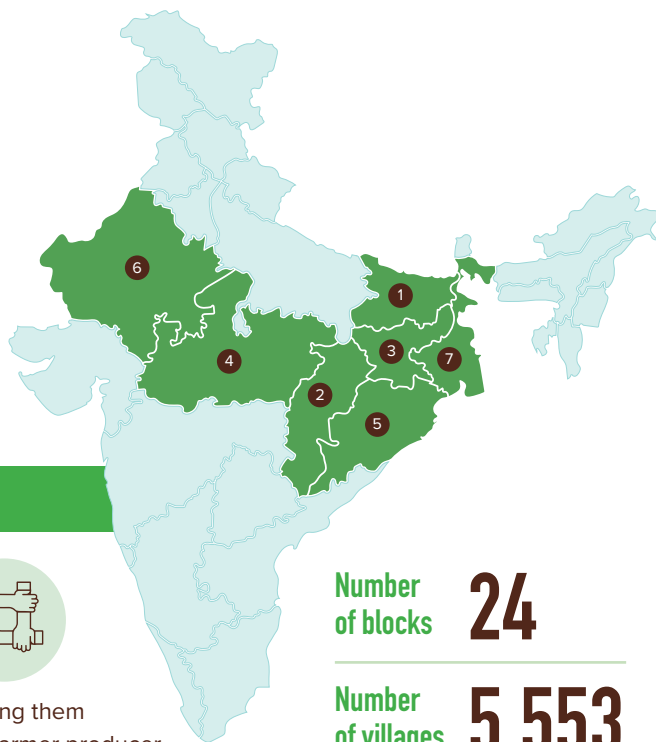
Connection, Village Square, Feminism in India, Tehelka, Reader's Digest, Better India, The Quint, Down to Earth etc. We are grateful to the media houses for publishing these stories of hope on their platforms for greater outreach. We also acknowledge the contribution of all the authors, whether our colleagues from PRADAN or mainstream journalists, in documenting these inspiring stories.

These are the stories of change and hope. The protagonists in the stories are rural poor women or other marginalised people who have struggled to stay afloat. They may have lost the hope of better days, yet, with their resolve and small help from the projects they brought hope to their collectives and broke the cycle of poverty and misery for their families. Now, they are the beacon of light for many in their villages. Hope these stories will inspire our readers too, and motivate all of us in improving the life around us.



PRIDE and STaRTuP projects: At a Glance

1	Bihar	Banka, Jamui
2	Chattisgarh	Dhamtari, Uttar Bastar Kanker
3	Jharkhand	Gumla, Dumka, Ramgarh Godda Khunti
4	MP	Balaghat, Dindori, Mandla,
5	Odisha	Rayagada, Mayurbhanj
6	Rajasthan	Sirohi
7	West Bengal	Bankura, Purulia



Creating identity of women as farmers by improving



Their access to knowledge, information, technology, government schemes, credit and market



Ensuring their agency through their involvement in decision making, goal setting and control over income



Organising them around farmer producer groups for collective action and support

Number of blocks **24**

Number of villages **5,553**



275,558

women engaging around improved agriculture interventions



79,620

women engaged in small livestock rearing



132,268

women have helped their families come out of poverty and increasing the annual household income to more than INR 100,000 through multiple livelihood interventions

Working with 408,877 women from vulnerable communities

Organised them in

34,272 Self Help Groups (SHGs)

2,607 Village Organisations

107 Cluster Level Federations

24 Block level Federations

To provide a safe space for women that provide mutual support and solidarity to each other.



4,277 million

mobilised from various government programs for livelihood asset creation and rural infrastructure development

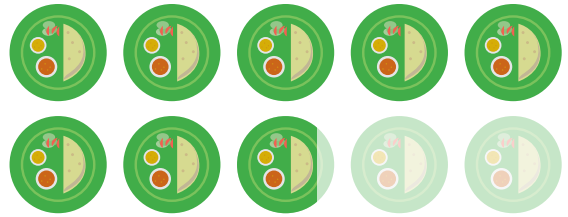


Central and State Government's flagship programmes for effective implementation of government programs

Improving health conditions for women and children

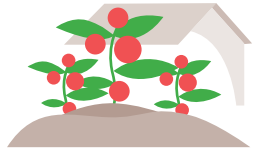
5,935
SHG members

trained as Change Vectors to create awareness and collective action around health and nutrition issues



78%

of the families have a food consumption score (frequency of consumption of different groups in a week) in acceptable category than poor and borderline category



64,116 women

have developed kitchen gardens in their backyard to ensure dietary diversity



Working with Frontline workers to ensure:

- regular check-ups and institutional delivery of pregnant women
- immunisation of children
- supplementary food for pregnant and nursing mothers and children



Educating Adolescent girls around menstrual hygiene, sexual and reproductive health and creating safe space for them by organising them in peer groups; provided training around menstrual hygiene, sexual and reproductive health, career counselling

Organised women farmers into Farmer Producer Organisations

210

educated local youth trained as Agriculture Entrepreneurs to support women farmers in providing quality input services and marketing



12

FPOs registered as Farmer Producer company



57,545

women farmers organised into farmer producer groups



Increasing the impact of our work through partnerships

Enhancing skills and creating opportunities for rural youth,

13,644

youth are engaged as community service providers



Collaborating with other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) – formed Development cluster forums (DCF) with local CSOs for cross-learning, scaling up interventions and for collaborative actions

1. Sustainable Development Initiatives (SDI-MP) - 24 CSOs
2. Santhal Pargana Development Initiatives (SPDI), - 13 CSO partners



Partnering with expert and thematic CSO partners in building perspective and knowledge on multiple themes: Public Health Resource Society (PHRS), Child In Need Institute (CINI), Transform Rural India Foundation (TRIF), Prajayatna, Vidyabhavana, Vikramshila

Section A

The power of collectives

- **'Badlav Didi' : A Women's Group in Rural Jharkhand is Improving Access to Justice**
- **Villagers' fear of vaccines wanes slowly with awareness**
- **Women talk out domestic abuse with a little help**
- **Women bring Cultural Change in Agriculture**
- **How the women of one Jharkhand village built their own bathrooms**





‘Badlav didi’:

A women’s group in rural Jharkhand is improving access to justice

The Nari Nyay Sangh, composed of 19 women from Jharkhand’s Godda district, works to protect the legal rights of women facing domestic, social or sexual violence.

Amit Pandey



“After her husband’s death, her brother-in-law tried to axe her. He claimed she had eaten the soul of her husband,” said Yukta Devi, recalling a witch-hunting episode in Ghatkurawa village in Jharkhand’s Godda district. “After that, the entire community assembled to bring in an ojha (exorcist).”

“When we learned about this, I informed all the women in my panchayat. My husband locked me in a room because he knew I would intervene,” added 36-year-old Yukta Devi. “Thankfully, the other women arrived and stepped in.”

They proceeded to file a police report under the Prevention of Witch Practices Act and made sure that the woman accused of being a witch was treated with respect.

Fondly called ‘Badlav Didi’, Yukta and the other women in the story are part of the Nari Nyay Sangh, a group of 19 women belonging to different panchayats, who work towards protecting the legal rights of women facing domestic, social or sexual violence.

Recalling the longest-running case taken up by the Nari Nyay Sangh since its inception in 2016, another member Geeta Devi shared the story of Gulshan Ara, a 35-year-old paddy field worker from Chaura village in Godda. After six years of marriage, Gulshan’s husband had divorced her using triple talaq. The primary reason was they did

not have any children. After the divorce, her marital family wanted to keep Gulshan out of the village. This was when the Nari Nyay Sangh stepped in. “After we warned her husband and mother-in-law of legal action, they agreed to reconcile,” explained Geeta. Now, despite their separation, Gulshan is able to live in the same hamlet as her husband.

“After we warned her husband and mother-in-law of legal action, they agreed to reconcile,” explained Geeta.

Their *modus operandi*

“When someone comes to us with a complaint, we first take a handwritten application from them,” said 50-year-old Rajmani Devi, explaining the Nari Nyay Sangh’s standard operating procedure. After reviewing the application, someone from the Sangh contacts the complainant via a phone call and attempts to thoroughly understand the issue. Thereafter, a group of six to seven ‘didis’ go to the field and enquire about the dispute with the complainant’s neighbours.

All aspects of ongoing cases are discussed during fortnightly Sangh meetings, which take place on the 13th and 26th of every month.

“We ask the complainant whether she prefers reconciliation or a legal case as the next step,” said Rajmani. If the complainant prefers reconciliation, the didi’s talk to both parties and try to get them on the same page. If this is not preferred, then the Sangh proceed with legal proceedings, as per the complainant’s wishes.

Manisha, an active member of the organisation, said she always carries a brown diary with her, in which she has jotted down all the relevant portions of the IPC (Indian Penal Code) as well as various dos and don’ts that pertain to such instances.

“The very first thing we have to do is file an FIR at the nearest police station and take a photocopy of the FIR,” explained Manisha. She firmly stated that they cannot be denied from filing an FIR. **“Bolna bhi mera adhikar hai, pehnana bhi mera adhikar hai, FIR likhwana bhi adhikar hai (I have the right to speak, to wear what I want, and to file an FIR),”** Manisha said in a sing-song voice.

“The justice system may be blind but we will be their sight,” she added, with pride.

Their struggles

The women of the Nari Nyay Sangh have been at odds with the justice system, on various occasions.

Sharing a story of being threatened by a local police officer, Manisha said, “He told us that he would tie us to a tree and beat us with a cane.” She added that this did not stop her or any of the other didis.

“If we receive proper authority or identity cards, then it will be easier for us,” Geeta continued. **“In the judicial order, we currently hold no power.”**

The women have faced resistance not only from the legal system but also their own families.

“When I joined the Nari Nyay Sangh, my husband started fighting and arguing with me,” said Geeta. “He insults me everyday, and my children do the same now.”

Geeta went on, “But now I know how to ignore them.”

“Didi samvidhan se chalti hain aur dada samaj se chalte hain. (Sister Geeta follows the Constitution while her husband follows societal norms),” explained Manisha, evoking laughter from all the other women present.

She added, “We confront the wrath of not only our relatives, but also of victims’ families who fight with us because of our work. We have to listen to their nonsense and abuse.”

Their beginnings

Prior to founding the Nari Nyay Sangh, most of the 19 members were part of self-help groups. “Many women would come to us with incidents of domestic abuse, child marriage and other injustice,” recounted Geeta, adding that they usually attempted to address disputes, despite their lack of legal knowledge at the time.

Based on a comparison of National Family Health Survey and National Crime Records Bureau data, an analysis by Pramit Bhattacharya and Tadit Kundu for The Mint had found that an estimated 99.1% cases of sexual violence



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go unreported. In most of such instances, the violence is perpetrated by the victim’s husband. There is also a correlation between lower literacy and under-reporting of violence.

“This is a rural and backward region. Most of the time, women either accept male domination or do not raise their voice due to lack of legal awareness and poverty,” Geeta explained.

This is why Geeta and her colleagues felt the need to form a women-led organisation to deal with instances of violence against women.

The women participated in workshops on the legal system, conducted by PRADAN, an NGO that works with women’s collectives. Equipped with better awareness, they set up the Nari Nyay Sangh. They were the driving force behind this transformation, which was made possible by the IKEA Foundation’s project STaRtuP (SHG-led transformation of Rural Communities via Partnership).

The organisation acts as a bridge between women facing violence and the legal system that is often inaccessible to such women.

The story was published in Mojo Story in November, 2021. To read the original article, please click [here](#).

Villagers' fear of vaccines wanes slowly with awareness

Counselling and convincing various village influencers, and encouraging youth volunteers on their campaign drives have helped communities get past rumors and fears to get vaccinated

Alok Kumar Sharma



Awareness campaigns, in addition to convincing local healers and priests, changed villagers' mindset about vaccines

“You people have brought this disease to our village. Earlier we had no such disease. And now you plan to kill us with these vaccines.” Such were the words of Jharkhand’s villagers who genuinely believed that healthcare workers had brought the disease and that the vaccine would kill them. That was why they refused to get vaccinated.

Dependency on medicine men or quacks for treatment, the influence of local religious leaders, unavailability of adequate medical infrastructure and many other reasons have caused greater fear among the tribal communities of the state.

The task forces, comprising accredited social health activists (ASHAs), anganwadi workers, auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs) and self-help group (SHG) members faced strong opposition to the vaccination drive. Officials in remote villages have to battle not only the pandemic but also the misinformation and rumors. Their strategies to overcome these challenges are slowly bearing results.



Vaccination strategy involving leaders of traditional governance system could not take off when villagers’ fears increased during the second wave

Derailed plans

On 1 March 2021, a vaccination drive against COVID-19 for people above 45 years was initiated in the tribal villages of Jharkhand. Walk-in vaccination centers were set up in the panchayats for an estimated target population of 83 lakhs.

The vaccination drive was strategically focused to involve the manjhi (headman) and other leaders of traditional local governance system to mobilize the villagers. However, the massive spread of the second wave resulted in fear among the people, jeopardizing the efforts of the state government.

The villagers feared the side effects of the vaccine and blamed the vaccination drive for the sudden spread of COVID-19 and the adverse health conditions in their villages. Bureaucrats had a hard time convincing the tribes to take the shots.

Vaccine myths

Those who had taken the first dose were slipping into a chasm of anxiety and mistrust about taking the second dose. Battling the spread of COVID-19 was one major concern; the other was to change the mindset of the villagers, who resisted taking the vaccine, believing in the myth that it would kill them.

In Dumka district of Jharkhand, the estimated target population in the 45+ age group is about 3.35 lakhs. In Kathikund administrative block, the target was 18,111. During the first phase, which ended on 31 March 2021, almost 8.5% of the target population, that is, 1,540 people were vaccinated in the block. People continued to get vaccinated till the end of first phase.

However, there was a drastic change from the beginning of April when a large number of people fell sick, a normal reaction to the vaccine. This resulted in people fearing the vaccine, and it generated strong resistance and misconceptions among them. The fearful villagers started threatening frontline workers and health workers in the villages.





Myth-busting strategies

On 3 April 2021, seeing the chaos and mistrust that surrounded the vaccine, the block administration called for a joint meeting with Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) and other partners who were facilitating the drive. At the meeting we prepared a detailed strategy for Kathikund block, to overcome the challenge emerging out of the misconceptions.

PRADAN surveyed casualties and post-vaccine deaths in order to compile data. The results were shared with the district administration. This was the first level of data that provided the block and district administration the exact situation on the ground.

The data showed that there indeed was a real reason for fear among the people: six people had died within two weeks of taking the vaccine. However, what is pertinent is that those who died had reportedly been ill prior to their vaccination. Yet they had been vaccinated.

The news of the deaths was enough to give rise to rumors about the adverse effects of the vaccine. To eradicate this fear, a stringent post-vaccination system was set up. To be doubly sure, PRADAN's panchayat facilitators were roped in to work with the frontline workers in dissipating fears.

The block administration tracked the people who had been vaccinated, so as to get medical help if anyone got severely ill after vaccination. If one had fever, paracetamol was given; if there was no improvement, then we referred them to hospitals and arranged ambulance to take them.

We had separate meetings with 25 quacks, 72 religious leaders of different religions and 80 community leaders.

Rallying influencers

There was also a lack of awareness about COVID-19 besides lack of adequate healthcare facilities. The villagers ignored their fever, cough and other symptoms till the conditions got worse. Then they turned to the local quacks, who reportedly administered medication for typhoid and jaundice.

When the block administration learnt about it, it called for an urgent meeting with the quacks and the medical officer in charge of the community. Unlike the traditional healers, quacks prescribe allopathy medicines. They are often the nearest recourse for the villagers.

The doctor explained about the disease, and shared information about the symptoms and steps to be taken if infected. Though unregistered, as the community depends on them, the doctor and the block development officer convinced the quacks to prescribe appropriate medicines. Armed with the right information, they agreed to help us in the vaccination drive too.

We had separate meetings with 25 quacks, 72 religious leaders of different religions and 80 community leaders. The religious leaders and faith-based groups could not be convinced as easily as the quacks. Initially, it was difficult to even reach the local religious leaders.

Two meetings with the priests did not yield any results. "We will not ask people to take the vaccine nor will we take it ourselves. Whatever happens, god will take care of us," said a local priest from Sikarpara village in Kathikund block.

They resisted getting vaccinated and making the community aware. A few religious leaders, however, were convinced and led the way by taking the vaccine and by asking others to get vaccinated. These religious leaders built some faith in the community by showing the way.

Community collectives' support

SHG members played a significant role in the vaccination awareness drive. Since they are a part of the local community, language was not a barrier for them. The local communities could relate to them, engage with them and were more open to listening to their advice.

Therefore, these community leaders emerged as a great support system, inspiring other eligible SHG members to come forward and join the vaccination drive. In Kathikund block, the board members of block-level federation Naya Savera were among the first of the 45+ age group to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Youth volunteers' campaign

The participation of the local youth in any awareness drive plays a crucial role because they can pass on correct information through their smartphones in no time. They are also familiar with the rural ecosystem. However, this has its own risks as false rumors could also be spread through smartphones. Therefore, we invited a few youth who had some positive influence among the tribal community for a meeting.

The local youth organized awareness camps in the villages and at the same time launched a social media campaign, #KathikundKeYoddha – meaning warrior of Kathikund, to promote vaccination. **The campaign, which included T-shirts with a printed slogan, soon reached many when the portal opened for the 18+ age group.**

Many young people uploaded their post-vaccination pictures on social media platforms and the campaign helped lowering the fear of vaccines among the tribes. Deputy commissioner and deputy development commissioner, Dumka appreciated the awareness campaign led by the youth.

Facilitating vaccination

Reaching remote locations is another obstacle we worked on. People live in remote villages in the Kathikund region. Women found it difficult to travel from far-off villages to vaccination centers. To resolve this issue, three auto rickshaws were arranged to ferry them from these villages to the vaccination centers. This initiative increased their mobility and the vaccination.

The scarcity of technological resources and the lack of knowledge on how to use it were other barriers when the CoWIN portal was introduced. Initially we roped in rozgar sevaks who facilitate MGNREGA works, poshan sakhis who work towards better nutrition intake among communities, and panchayat facilitators to help people register, after training them; however, this did not work out as expected.

The block administration introduced a registration counter-cum-help desk to enable walk-in vaccinations. Kathikund became the first block in the district that initiated this system. Later, the state government replicated this method in all other blocks.

By 25 June 2021,



52% of the people in the 45+ age group



and 4% in the 18+ age group had taken the vaccine shots.

Successful multipronged strategy

Kathikund achieved 46% vaccination coverage on 5 June, whereas the other blocks in Dumka such as Gopikand block covered only 36% and Sikarpara block vaccinated 26% of its population. Kathikund achieved this by following the strategy explained above.

We have a long way to go. There are seven villages in Kathikund block that have achieved 100% vaccination in the 45+ age category. By 25 June 2021, 52% of the people in the 45+ age group and 4% in the 18+ age group had taken the vaccine shots.

The availability of vaccines for the 18+ group is a major issue. Due to unavailability of vaccines, Kathikund block had to shut its centers for a few days. Anti-social elements still spread rumors and anti-vaccination messages through various modes.

Despite such challenges, Kathikund has shown that tracking rigorously, generating awareness and counselling local people helps in combating these fears to a great extent. The coming together of SHGs, local healers, religious leaders and youth, to mobilize the community is a lesson that can be taken forward in India's drive for total vaccination in rural areas.

The story was published in Village Square in July, 2021. To read the original article, please click [here](#).


Women talk out domestic abuse with a little help

As important as it is to identify and support viable livelihoods in villages, equally vital it is that issues of gender and sex, gender and patriarchy, and gender and violence are discussed in safe spaces such as SHGs, Clusters and Federations, helping women live lives of equality, dignity and freedom

Sumita Kasana & Bharti Raghuvanshi



A Gender Sathi ties a rope across a woman to dramatically demonstrate how social norms restrict a woman's freedom



Rajni was in deep distress. Her husband and in-laws shunned her. Her father and brother had rebuked her.

The villagers approved of the jati panchayat's decision to punish her because they agreed that she had brought shame to her family.

Rajni's fault was that she had dared to restrain her brother-in-law's hand when he was beating her. Her brother-in-law felt humiliated. He could not believe that a woman of his house would resist him. He had only been punishing her for her misconduct, he felt.

He took the matter to the jati panchayat which ordered Rajni to feed the entire village chicken and roti. She was made to publicly apologise to her brother-in-law. The jati panchayat's verdict was that a woman cannot hold her brother-in-law's hand, whatever the situation. Rajni had no choice but to succumb to their diktat. She took a loan from her brothers to arrange for the feast.

Three months later, a trained para-legal worker, Reena, came to the village, Udadna, to teach the women, mostly about issues of domestic violence. To support women in distress, Reena used to go to the block headquarters, the police station and other places. But her husband did not want her to go out for work, believing she had relationships with other men. He used to remain inebriated most of the time and, lately, had started beating and abusing her. When she resisted he called the jati panchayat.

Reena was fined ₹1,000 by the jati panchayat and told to respect her husband and follow his orders. She stopped going out for work. Her husband, however, didn't stop abusing her. In fact, he became more violent. And the leaders of the jati panchayat did not intervene on her behalf.

Such stories are fairly common at the grassroots.

Reena is from Narayanganj block in Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh which lies in the vicinity of the Kanha National Park. Gonds and Baigas are the predominant tribes living there. Although it is believed that tribal women have more freedom, cases of violence against them are frequent and community customs are primarily biased in favour of the men. The women themselves believe that there is nothing wrong with such norms. They succumb to atrocities without resistance, fearing repercussions if they were to resist.

To tackle domestic violence, PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) mobilised more than 10,000 women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

in Narayanganj. The women further congregated in village-level clusters (VLCs) and block-level federations for mutual support and solidarity. Women discuss and resolve issues related to their lives and livelihoods in such forums. An issue that often surfaced was violence against women. Many women had been victims of violence and abuse. The topic generated varying views from the women. Some waved it away, saying it was a common household problem and the women should think of their livelihoods instead. This is the fate of women, we should just bear it, was their response.

But other women said, domestic violence isn't only about our rights but also about equality and respect. If there is no equality, what is the point of such meetings? **Finally, it was decided that domestic violence needed wider discussion with SHGs and at cluster meetings.**

PRADAN trained selected women as Gender Sathis in Narayanganj. Topics such as gender and sex, gender and patriarchy, and gender and violence were discussed and debated. The Gender Sathis created awareness. Women who would earlier shy away from discussing these matters now found a safe space in the SHGs and the VLCs to talk openly about such issues.

Gender Sathis reached out to women who were suffering silently. Among them was Reena. Encouraged, she started working as a para-legal worker again. She knew the law. She knew that whatever was happening with her was wrong. Finding support from other women, she filed an FIR under Section 498A of the IPC (Indian Penal Code), a non-bailable offence. Her husband was immediately jailed.

Due to pressure from her relatives and the villagers, Reena withdrew the case after a month. Overwhelmed by the experience, her husband mended his ways. He no longer interfered in Reena's work.





The panchayat's support of the men and penalisation of the women hiked the men's impunity. Taking up the matter legally, through the police and the courts, could be an alternative solution.

Reena's case was highlighted as a success story. If she could stop violence against her, why couldn't the others? Taking their case to the jati panchayat served no purpose. In fact, the panchayat's support of the men and penalisation of the women hiked the men's impunity. Taking up the matter legally, through the police and the courts, could be an alternative solution.

But whereas women like Reena, who were more exposed to the outside world, could take their case to the police, it wasn't easy for other women to do so. First, they would be dependent on others for support. Fighting legally involved the hassles of visiting the police station, going to court, bribing, and so on. Officials weren't always cooperative or sensitised to handle such cases. Moreover, such steps meant facing the ire of their family members. **Women wanted to live peacefully with them. They did not want issues about their family and village to go to court.** Also, all cases were not of violence. There were varied issues, which could be better dealt with at the community or village level.

Apart from the jati panchayat, there was also the Shaurya Dal at village level, comprising five women and five men. This group had been promoted by the Madhya Pradesh government. Members of the Shaurya Dal were selected by the gram sabha. Their role was to curb violence and atrocities against women and girls,

with the philosophy that the solution to such problems lies within the community. But the women were unaware of the Shaurya Dal.

PRADAN, with the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and Jagori, designed a rigorous training programme to sensitise Shaurya Dal members about gender and sex, patriarchy, violence, relevant laws, constitutional rights, provisions like the Domestic Incident Report.

Many cases were taken up, analysed and options decided on. Sensitising men, role reversals and constructive dialogue had a positive impact. The Shaurya Dal was exposed to the police station, the block and district headquarters, and the Women and Child Development department.

Gender-based violence against women is deeply rooted in our society. Such violence occurs often within the family. And it is perpetuated by societal norms. It is normalized, and women themselves do not find it wrong if men abuse or hit them. They continue to suffer in silence because they have no space or forum to raise such issues. Whereas traditional spaces such as the jati panchayat have a bias against women, legal spaces are also insensitive and inconsiderate. Women also fear the dire consequences of taking legal action because they have to remain in the same society and neighbourhood.

Forums such as the Shaurya Dal are good initiatives; however, just forming such structures is not enough. Representatives need to be aware of their role and also be capable and sensitive enough to deal with the cases that come up in these forums. In Narayanganj, members of the Shaurya Dal, both men and women, are being trained to look at the issues from a gender lens. It becomes more effective when the men talk on the issues of women. **Challenging patriarchy may be a long haul; however, the greater need is to provide a safe space where women's voices are heard and solutions are provided so that there is equality and respectful coexistence within the family and in society.**

The story was published in Civil Society in November, 2018. To read the original article, click [here](#).



Women bring cultural change in agriculture

Initiating new techniques in farming, the women of Samnapur have started taking the lead in agricultural practices such as introducing the cultivation of vegetables, growing paddy through SRI, going to the market to sell vegetables and asserting their identity as farmers in their families and in society, thereby bringing about a sea change in the way they are perceived and in their confidence as decision-makers.

Minu Marydas and Krishna Tiwari



It is raining heavily. The Sun has not yet set yet. There is no one in sight but one person. Far away, in the distance, there is a person ploughing the land, despite the heavy rain. This might not be an unusual sight in a village. In a culture that recognises the land as the mother, ploughing

is done only by men so that the land becomes more fertile. However, in Kureili village in Samnapur block, despite the rains, the person ploughing the land is a woman.

Chandrakali is the determined and fearless farmer.

The story goes back a few years. Chandrakali was waiting in the field for her husband to plough the land. But her husband was nowhere in sight. It was about to rain, and she decided to plough the land herself. She put on a raincoat and ploughed the land for the first time. She was apprehensive at first, because she did not know whether she would be able to do it. Once she started, she got the hang of it. It was no rocket science. She did not fear anyone. If at all someone were to catch her, she was ready to pay the fine or face the consequences. She finished ploughing the land before her husband returned home.

“I was very scared that my husband would get angry with me. I have broken the age old norms. But he was glad to know that I could plough the land. He jokingly told me that from now on I could plough the land with him. However, because ploughing by women is against the norm, he himself had to do it. At that moment, I was relieved that such rules existed, otherwise the entire burden of agricultural work would have fallen upon women”, exclaimed Chandrakali.

“I was very scared that my husband would get angry with me. I have broken the age old norms. But he was glad to know that I could plough the land. He jokingly told me that from now on I could plough the land with him.”, exclaimed Chandrakali.

Even though women are intensively involved in agriculture, usually it is a man's picture that comes to mind when one thinks of a farmer. Women are regarded only as labourers, not farmers. They are not involved in deciding which crops to grow, which method to use and so on. Women, it is assumed, have no knowledge about these things.

This perception started breaking with discussions around women's role in agriculture started in women collectives.

One of the requirements was to technically equip women and train them so that they have a technical know-how about the agricultural practices.

In 2017, with the support of IKEA Foundation STaRTuP project, we could provide such streamlined training around improved farming, crop planning, disease and pest management and marketing. Along with this gender training was conducted for women so that they understand the age-old norms and have the confidence to challenge those norms.

Ansuiya's story is one such example. Her family's main source of income is agriculture. Earlier, during the kharif season, the family used to grow paddy using the broadcasting method. In one of the agricultural trainings, conducted at the block level, the women were shown a video on growing paddy through the SRI method. Ansuiya was fascinated by it. She couldn't believe that one could produce 40 quintals of rice out of 1 kg of seeds. Even though she was apprehensive about the soil quality, she thought of trying it once.

She believed in learning by doing. Her father-in-law was not happy with this idea. He asked her to stay out of decisions on agriculture as she had no past experience in it. However, she remained firm on her decision and used SRI in around 30 decimals of land. In the beginning, the field looked empty. Her father-in-law mocked her saying, “This time our daughter-in-law will incur losses in agriculture.” His mockery made her even more determined to work in the field. She worked day and night, just to prove her father-in-law wrong.

Earlier, the family used to produce 250–300 kg of paddy from five acres of land. Ansuiya's determination and hard work gave the family a produce of 10 quintals from 30 decimals of land.. The following year, a few other members also started growing paddy through SRI or improved paddy methods. Today, most of the families in her village, Newsa, grow paddy using this technique. She has become an inspiration to many in her village.

Ansuiya is a trend-setter in her village and has inspired and given confidence to other women to become decision-makers in agriculture and not just be the labourers. She strongly believes that there is no work that women cannot do. Even though social norms restrict them from carrying out certain activities such as ploughing, it does not mean that they are not capable of doing it.

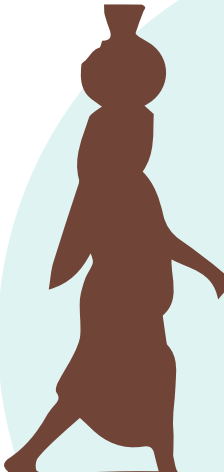


Lalita's journey is yet another inspirational example. After being involved with her SHG for some time, she got to know about vegetable cultivation. She took a loan of Rs 7000 from the SHG and grew brinjal, tomato, ladyfinger and beans.

Lalita's journey is yet another inspirational example. After being involved with her SHG for some time, she got to know about vegetable cultivation. She took a loan of Rs 7000 from the SHG and grew brinjal, tomato, ladyfinger and beans. She hired a few women as labourers and worked very hard in the field. Owing to a lack of support in the market linkage during that time, she couldn't sell all the vegetables she had grown. However, she managed a nonprofit no-loss return.

Lalita proudly states, "Earlier I was zero and now I am hundred out of hundred." She ensures that whatever work she does, she involves the other women as well. Her wish is that all the other women become self-dependent and confident just as she is today.

Along with enhancing the livelihood of the household and reaffirming the women's role as farmers and decision-makers, efforts have been taken to reduce their drudgery as well. Women are involved in most agricultural activities, which are tedious and painful. In order to reduce this drudgery, various implements have been introduced recently, such as the weeder. This not only reduces the amount of energy required in weeding but also saves a lot of time.



Along with enhancing the livelihood of the household and reaffirming the women's role as farmers and decision-makers, efforts have been taken to reduce their drudgery as well. Women are involved in most agricultural activities, which are tedious and painful.

Over the years, women have started to break norms and set new trends, wherein they are the norm-setters. There have been many cases in which women have played a very influential role in enhancing the income of the family by engaging in livelihood activities, using innovative techniques and ideas. They have also taken the lead in the family to initiate activities (such as vegetable cultivation) that were earlier alien to them.

Chandrakali is one such inspirational farmer in Kureili. She was awarded the 'Best Farmer Award' from the block, this year. Through hard work and determination, she managed to earn more than Rs 1.5 lakhs from the six acres of land she owned. Along with vegetable cultivation and SRI, she experimented with more techniques, such as growing lentils alongside the boundary of the paddy field (medh). She has utilized the land resource available to her optimally.

One can see a visible change in most of the villages (if not all) with regard to the culture in agriculture in terms of changes in the crops grown or adding new crops, adoption of new techniques for cultivation, change of perspective regarding agriculture from subsistence farming to commercial farming and also the role of women in initiating these changes in their families and asserting their identity as farmers.

In the beginning there were challenges. Even though there were some farmers ready to experiment with a few changes in agricultural techniques and practices, the conviction and confidence was not high. Moreover, the sarcastic remarks from the relatives and friends did not help. **The outcome, however, boosted the energy and confidence of the farmers. The attitude of taking a risk and the readiness to accept consequences helped bring about these changes. Women, specifically, had to face extreme disapproval from family members. Today, the attitude has changed. Women have started going out to sell their produce in the market.**

For sure, there are many more miles to cover. Changes in agricultural patterns and perspectives can be seen in all the villages that PRADAN is working in but this is not so in all the households of those villages. In some cases, it has percolated into a majority of the village and in some cases into some households in a village. Overall, the change across the villages is yet to be seen. A spark has definitely been lit; the fire is yet to be ignited.

The longer version of the story is published in '2018 March-April' issue of the NewsReach. To read the original article, click [here](#).

How the women of one Jharkhand village built their own bathrooms

The collective effort by all the women of Telleya has made it a model village in the entire Gumla district

Meghna Mukherjee



A year ago, when a few researchers from our team were working on the research topic Bathing practices followed by rural women in India and its conditions, behaviour and consequences, they found that rural women did not prioritise bathing and that bathrooms were a luxury for them.

They also found that women in rural India never felt the need for a bathroom as issues like age-old practices, financial constraints and other competing priorities never allowed them to consider bathing in a secure space a priority.

However, a few non-profits have made concerted efforts in this direction by constructing bathrooms and toilets. But even among them, very few have been motivated by popular demand.

Thus, **women in rural India do not prioritise bathing as maintaining hygiene is secondary for them.**

But the women of Telleya village of Jharkhand's Gumla district had their priorities clear. They realised the importance of bathrooms and considered it as an integral aspect of their daily lives.

Women decided and demanded separate bathrooms for every household. Their demand was put forward to their local non-profit partner PRADAN, which not only encouraged them but also left no stone unturned to fulfill their demand.

It all started when PRADAN asked the women to list any development project that would allow them to look 'Beyond the farm' and thus lead to betterment in their overall quality of life.

The women of Telleya, after having a meeting, suggested that water connectivity and provision of separate enclosures for bathrooms along with toilets would have a positive impact on their lives.

This suggestion was taken up by PRADAN members who initiated the process by organising an exposure visit for a few women. **Around 30 women from the village were taken to Lakhampur in Odisha where non-profit Gram Vikas had worked extensively and had constructed toilets with bathrooms along with a secure water connection.**

Taking inspiration from such structures, it was decided unanimously that similar structures would be constructed in Telleya.

The struggle

However, the journey to transform their dream into a reality was full of roadblocks. “Our story has all the twists and plots of being a super-hit movie,” Aarti Devi, a village-level representative told me. So what made the demand for a bathroom into a blockbuster movie?

The first issue at hand was to ensure a secure water connection. For that, a water tank connected to an underground pipeline, in turn connected to a stream had to be constructed. A pump/powerhouse also needed to be built near the stream bed which would pump water into the water tank.

“Since it was decided to build our water tank on the top of a hill, the task became all the more difficult. We had to climb the hill carrying headloads of water, cement and chips,” recalls Aarti Devi.

However, the task was not as easy as it sounded. “Since it was decided to build our water tank on the top of a hill, the task became all the more difficult. We had to climb the hill carrying headloads of water, cement and chips,” recalls Aarti Devi.

“The men used to go and work in the pump house. Since we had to complete the work before monsoons, we used to wake up as early as 4:30 am, complete our household work and then work to complete our deadline before noon,” she adds.

The problems did not end there. As soon as they solved one, another would crop up. During a meeting with PRADAN members, **the women of the village decided that after finishing more than half of the work on the water tank, they themselves would bake the bricks for the construction of the bathrooms. This would ensure lower cost and efficiency.**

So, loads of wood were cut by the male members of the village to prepare for baking brick. “We poured



the mixture into the moulds and kept it in the fields for drying. But later that night, thunderstorm and rains ruined all our effort,” a disheartened Aarti Devi told me.

The village residents had lost hope as all their efforts went in vain. Disheartened, they decided to buy bricks along with other construction materials after discussing with members of PRADAN.

However, it was soon realised that even that option was not smooth. Members from PRADAN were refused any form of payment when they approached the block office for disbursement of funds to construct bathrooms and toilets.

Payment was refused because on paper, every household in that village had a toilet under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Building of a separate enclosure for taking a bath was, however, not approved.

Their task was made all the more difficult as it was seen that even a lady officer at district office couldn't understand the need for a bathroom. But after a lot of convincing, the officers did agree to disburse the amount on the condition that it would be treated as a loan. The women were also instructed to take photos of toilets built and send them.

Apart from the funds collected through the district office, every household contributed Rs 13,000 each for building this structure. The women self-help groups operating in Telleya made sure that the payments against the loan were made on time.

The next step

Despite all odds, women were able to fulfill their dream of having a separate bathroom. The total amount of the loan was also repaid in the next two years.

The collective effort by all the women of Telleya has made it a model village in the entire Gumla district. The decision and determination of women has also been highly appreciated. It is worth wondering as to when the government will make concerted efforts in this direction and be able to recognise the need of having a secure bathroom by the rural women of India.

The story was published in Down to Earth in November, 2019. To read the original article, click [here](#).

Section B

Stories of self-sufficiency & prosperity

- **Jharkhand's Women Are Using Marigolds To Earn Lakhs & Beat Illegal Opium Farming**
- **Extraordinary Indians:**
How Chandrakali Markam transformed her small Adivasi community through the power of microenterprise
- **Sustainable Farming:**
A Collective Learning Approach
- **How Women's Collectives Are Solving The Problems Of Barren Land, Water Shortage In A MP Village**
- **From Bulbs to Grinders:**
How the Power of the Sun Transformed 12 Jharkhand Villages





Jharkhand's women are using marigolds to earn lakhs and beat illegal opium farming

Khunti district in Jharkhand has been infamous for illegal poppy farming for a long time with dealers luring the villagers to cultivate opium, offering them huge amounts of money.

Kelly Kislaya




Ranchi: Palo Devi (name changed), earned approximately Rs 40,000 in just two and a half months, while happily working amidst flowers.

She no longer has to worry about her future since her husband stopped cultivating poppy, which is used for making opium, at their field in Sosokuti village of Arki block in Jharkhand's Khunti district.

Palo is now the breadwinner of the family. She started

marigold cultivation in her field, which was earlier used for opium cultivation in July, and in just a few months, she was able to sell the flowers at the Durga Puja market, making a huge profit.

"When my husband cultivated poppy, I was always worried about him being arrested for the illegal cultivation or of our fields being destroyed by the police. Now, I can earn a decent amount of money legally," she says.



Palo is one of the hundreds of women in Khunti district, whose families were earlier involved in illegal poppy cultivation but have now switched to marigold farming.

Khunti district in Jharkhand has been infamous for illegal poppy farming for a long time with dealers luring the villagers to cultivate opium, offering them huge amounts of money.

To deal with the menace, the district administration, the police and a social organisation, Pradan, started working towards spreading awareness and providing other livelihood opportunities.

Pradan started mobilising the villagers five years ago and now after years of efforts, the villagers are gradually shifting from opium to marigold farming.

Prem Shankar, team coordinator of Pradan at Khunti, notes, “At present, 1,023 families in the district are associated with marigold farming, and they have cultivated on 93 acres of land in Murhu, Khunti, Torpa and Arki blocks of the district.”

The amount of money earned by selling illegal opium and marigold flowers is almost the same. A local source informed, on the terms of anonymity that a farmer gets between Rs 2-2.5 lakh by cultivating poppy on a one-acre land while marigold cultivation earns around Rs 2 lakh on the same area.

He says, **“Poppy cultivation is not just illegal but also harmful for health.** Many pregnant women have suffered miscarriages due to constantly inhaling the pollens of poppy. It affects the health of small children too. Also, farmers get addicted to using opium, which leads to a lot of family problems.”

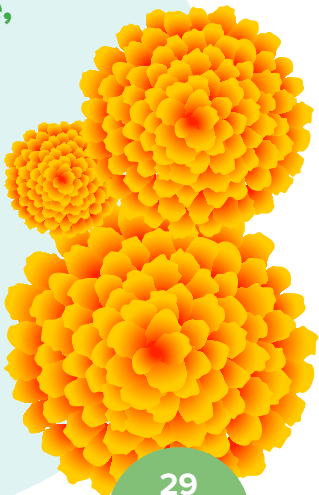
“Now, I do not have to worry about my husband being intoxicated all the time. The money is lesser than earlier, but the work is legal and profitable, and our future is also secured,” said a woman farmer, on the condition of anonymity.

Marigold farming is playing a significant role in making the women of the village self-dependent. “Everything, right from the plantation of saplings, to making and selling garlands in the market, is being done by the women,” Shankar shares.

A marigold plant takes around 60 to 75 days to be prepared and bloom. A farmer says, **“Once the flowers bloom in all the plants, we make garlands and take them to the market immediately, where we sell them to the customers directly or to the big florists. If there is a festival coming, then we wait till the market is ready for selling before plucking the flowers.**

With women taking the lead in marigold farming, their husbands, who were earlier farming poppy are now helping them by ploughing the fields and doing other laborious work. A man whose wife recently began her first lot of flower farming says, “My wife and I share the work in the field. While I plough the field and put fertilisers, she plants the saplings and makes the garlands for selling.”

With so much at stake, when the district administration and Pradan approached the village women regarding marigold farming, they were happy to accept it.





Nevertheless, arrests and raids were not the only way to stop opium cultivation, so the district administration and Khunti police started a drive to educate the villagers against the ill-effects.

Prem Shankar said that after Durga Puja, the marigold farmers are now eyeing the flower market during Diwali. He says, “There is a huge demand for marigold during Diwali and to meet this demand, the vendors buy flowers from West Bengal. If more villagers take it up in Jharkhand, the state will also become self-sufficient.”

The path to convincing the farmers to give up illegal opium farming has not been easy. In opium cultivation there is a good network of input and service providers as well as a steady base of buyers. So, all the farmer has to do is to invest his land and labour.

However, when it comes to other crops or horticulture, farmers have to face challenges, right from input supply to farming technology, then struggle with finding a market, which makes them reluctant to switch from opium farming to the cultivation of any other crop.

“Constant awareness programmes are the only way to address this issue,” notes Shankar.

Ashwini Kumar Sinha, Superintendent of Police, Khunti, shares, “In the last two years, we destroyed around 2,600 acres where opium was cultivated, recovered 110 kg of opium, and sent many smugglers as well as cultivators to jail.”

Sinha says, “Awareness drives are constantly being organised at community gatherings and fairs. People are being told about what a serious crime it is and how they will have to face repercussions if caught. A smuggler can

get a prison term of up to 10 years as has happened in a case here recently.”

Apart from the legal aspects, the villagers are also being informed about the effects of opium farming on health and the quality of the soil in the fields.

“If opium is cultivated on a field for a long time, the land becomes infertile. We tell this to people, so they stop ruining their source of income,” Sinha states.

The district administration has also put up banners and posters and is distributing pamphlets written in Hindi and Mundari (a local tribal language) to the innermost villages of the district, informing people about the ill-effects of opium farming.

Suraj Kumar, Deputy Commissioner, Khunti, concludes, “We are working towards eradicating opium cultivation from the district. It is good to see that our efforts are paying off and we hope that in the coming days, more villagers will take up marigold farming for their own betterment.”

The former opium farmers now feel safer on farming marigold flowers. **“Earlier, there was always a fear that the police will come and destroy our crops. Now, we know that we are safe and so are our fields; we can now live with pride,” a male farmer said.**

The story was published in 'The Better India' in November, 2018. To read the original article, click [here](#).

Extraordinary Indians: How Chandrakali Markam transformed her small Adivasi community through the power of microenterprise

Uneducated, co-dependent and powerless, women in Barga, MP are routinely limited to invisible roles. That is until Chandrakali Markam took the future into her own hands.

Ishani Nandi

THE WOMAN WHO RAISED A VILLAGE

Chandrakali Markam, 35

Born into the family of a poor Adivasi farmer from the Agaria tribe in Barga, a village in the Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh, life offered Chandrakali Markam few choices. Poverty, regressive norms and limited connection to the world beyond the surrounding forests left Barga's residents struggling to think any further than the next meal.

"Life was very difficult in those days," says Markam, now 35. "My brothers would travel very far in search of work. Without money to buy seeds our family's patch of land stayed untillied," she adds, her voice dipping as memories of depleted food stores and desperation surface.

Her story is not a unique one. Rain-dependent farming and land fragmentation make livelihoods untenable in this remote terrain. Uneducated, co-dependent and powerless, women are routinely limited to invisible roles: unpaid field workers, child-bearers. Taken out of school in class five and married off at the age of 11, Markam remembers tearfully protesting. "Father said, 'You're a girl. Why would you need to study any further?'" she recalls. It is not without irony then that it was Markam, along with scores of women like her from across the district, who brought prosperity and self-reliance to the impoverished community through small savings and self-help groups (SHGs).



Markam, then a 19-year-old mother, connected with, and then secretly joined, the first SHG in her village, formed under the aegis of the grassroots organization PRADAN—a decision that opened up her closed-door world to a slew of new ideas and opportunities. “I could never have imagined such things were possible on my own,” she says. Learning all she could through workshops and meetings, Markam soon began galvanizing others to take part in savings schemes and livelihood ventures. Her efforts had an impact—women who began saving as little as 50 paise per week, built their deposits up to Rs 20 and SHGs came up in every village in her taluk, each around 20 members strong.

“I visit all the farms to make sure they are running smoothly. My husband helps me too,” she says. Under her supervision, the cooperative showed a turnover of Rs 14.5 crore and a net profit of Rs 8 lakh in 2018–19. She has also launched other income-generating initiatives, such as kitchen vegetable gardens and mushroom cultivation.

In 2006, Markam became the driving force behind a registered poultry farming cooperative for landless families. From 60 producers, the enterprise is now powered by 360 across 23 villages. “I visit all the farms to make sure they are running smoothly. My husband helps me too,” she says. Under her supervision, the cooperative showed a turnover of Rs 14.5 crore and a net profit of Rs 8 lakh in 2018–19. She has also launched

other income-generating initiatives, such as kitchen vegetable gardens and mushroom cultivation. That she achieved this without any real formal education and in the face of naysayers who doubted and disparaged a woman playing an active role in the community, is astonishing.

Markam’s work has also affected the perceived roles of women in her community and she regularly raises important issues, such as the need for higher education for girls and breaking gender stereotypes in domestic work, at community meetings. “People have seen that women can make a difference too and should be treated with more respect. We are now much better cared for,” she adds proudly.

On earning the 2020 Women Exemplar award from the CII Foundation, which supports women from deprived communities in their development efforts, Markam says, “It feels amazing to have helped so many people. None of this would have been possible without support and partnership—both from the outside and among our people.”

When asked about her plans for the Rs 3-lakh prize money, she sounds hesitant—perhaps unfamiliar with such personal windfalls: “I’ve bought a motorcycle to help me travel.” She ponders for a beat: “I also want to open a general-goods shop in my village, so people can get supplies without going to the nearest store nine kms away,” she adds, more confidently.

The story was published in ‘Reader’s Digest’ in January, 2021. To read the original article, click [here](#).



Sustainable Farming: A collective learning approach

Bringing to life the dying land, ravaged by years of chemical use, farmers in Bhandaro village choose to risk going back to organic methods of crop cultivation, controlling diseases and pests through indigenous ways. The results were theirs to experience... better yield, richer soil, and rejuvenated natural resources

Deepak Kumar



Every year we have to use more and more fertilizers in our fields. Our fields also dry up very quickly,” grumbled Sushila Hembrom, as she showed me her dry paddy fields in despair. Another farmer said, “We have been applying urea for almost 20–25 years now.”

However, over the years, there was stagnation in production. Year by year, their fields were asking for more and more chemicals. The farmers had no option but to invest more in their fields or to give up agriculture and migrate again.



The story of these farmers from Bhandaro village is no different from that of many other farmers of Kathikund block in Jharkhand. The effects of using chemical-based fertilizers have begun to show up in the land and are taking a toll on the farmers.

In the village-level meeting, the villagers reiterated that their current farming practices necessitated high input costs in terms of hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. There was low retention of moisture in the land, and the quality of the land was getting degraded every year due to excessive application of chemical fertilizers. Soil erosion was high too owing to the undulating topography of the area.

When PRADAN shared with the community the possibility of non-chemical-based practices, there were mixed responses. Many said that it was impossible to have a good yield without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. People also assumed that organic farming would be very costly and cumbersome. Some, on the other hand, supported the idea. One farmer “If we do not adopt organic methods of farming, our lands will become barren in time and our coming generations will not be able to do any cultivation.” Even though the villagers were not very sure, they were interested in knowing more about the non-chemical based agriculture. A three-day workshop was organized for them, in which the people from Bhandaro village and the nearby Jitpur village participated.

The workshop focused on existing farming practices vis-a-vis traditional farming practices. The farmers shared how they used to cultivate different varieties of crops on their agriculture land. They had never used chemicals in their crops. One such crop, which the people nowadays have stopped cultivating, was millet. It was now limited to only a few families in the village. Anita Murmu, an SHG member said, “Earlier, people would work very hard and lived much longer. Even today, there are 4 or 5 people in the villages who are more than 80 years old.”

Piloting in Bhandaro and Jitpur villages

To begin with, two experienced change animators, Pushpa Devi and Bimla Devi, from an organization called PRAN (Preservation and Proliferation of Rural Natural Resources and Nature), with extensive experience in organic interventions, were engaged to support the villagers in Bhandaro and Jitpur. The animators supported the community for almost a year, helping bring about a shift in the practices and enhancing the skills and the knowledge of the farmers about NPM farming.

Training was provided to farmers through audiovisual aids. A farm-field school, an informal set-up, was created for farmers to support each other, to enable a group-based learning process, enhance their skills and knowledge and help them make informed decisions.

For example, the farmers collected different types of insects and disease affected plants from the field and brought them to a common place for further discussion. They discussed the types of insects (both sucking and chewing). They learned whether an insect was harmful or beneficial for their plants.

Clearly, going full steam into organic farming would be counter effective; instead, a gradual transition from one practice to the other would be a better alternative

The farmers monitored the texture of the soil, the growth of plants and any attacks by pests in their fields and countered these with the application of organic preparations. They also used these preparations in the patches where they had used chemical-based methods. Subsequently, they did an impact analysis in the organic and the inorganic patches, and discussed the results in their SHG meetings for further course of action. They took decisions, collectively, on some crops and monitored them commonly. Accordingly, they also prepared a crop-wise pest and disease calendar. The whole idea was that the community gets engaged in the learning process, doing active experimentation and taking informed decisions.

Some remarkable changes that the farmers of Bhandaro and Jitpur villages adopted, while doing non-chemical based interventions were: the adoption of SRI practices, resulting in increased yield of paddy and vegetables during the kharif and the rabi seasons; improved water and animal waste management; preparation of organic pesticides and fertilizers; inculcating NPM interventions in farming practices; creation of awareness about the side-effects of chemical pesticides on human health as well as the ecology; identifying pests and learning how to eliminate them; taking a community approach in learning and making decisions; creating a knowledge nucleus around NPM by building expert resources; demonstrating clear differences between current practices and NPM-based agriculture interventions with the community; and to be able to bring the community on the same platform.

Evident changes

In both the villages, farmers found visible changes in their fields after using organic practices. Soil health improved as was evident from the change in the colour of the soil from reddish to black. The farmers also said that diseases and pest attacks were fewer because of better soil health, seed treatment and preventive measures taken such as sticky traps and plantation of marigold.

Bitiya Marandi, who did organic and inorganic paddy in two patches of her land, had a yield difference of seven quintals per acre with a mix of organic practices and improved practice of cultivation than through chemical-based farming.

Sonamati Tudu cultivated tomatoes through organic practices as well as the chemical based method in two patches of 10 decimals each. She had a produce of 20

I would often question, why we were working here? Why am I here? What change will I bring here, where things are already in a certain stage of development? Is there a real need for us to work here?

quintals in the organic field, where she used Pranamrit as fertilizer and sticky trap and Neemastra (bio pesticide) to control pest attacks. **The yield from the field in which she used DAP was 14 quintals.**

The farmers said that the cost of cultivation had decreased, contrary to the thinking of the people that organic practices would be costlier and more time consuming.

The most visible change observed was in the quality and the taste of the produce. SHG members said that the vegetables produced were much tastier. This also helped them fetch better prices in the market. Their produce was in high demand in the haat (local market).

Making the idea viral

Bhandaro and Jitpur villages, in two years, have become the nucleus for the rest of the block for non-chemical-based agriculture. Exposure visits were conducted for the farmers of other villages during the kharif and rabi seasons.

Farmers from Bhandaro and Jitpur created awareness around non-chemical based agriculture in their Cluster and in the panchayat. **At present, more than 1,000 farmers are venturing into non-chemical-based farming. Some have shifted entirely while the others have made a partial shift.**

Although very gradual, the transition process is natural and is without external coercion. The community has taken its own time to explore, understand and improvise on practices. Convinced, they are now taking it upon themselves to reach out to the other farmers and are inviting them to explore, creating a learning environment that helps them make informed.

The longer version of the story is published in 2018 January-February issue of the NewsReach. To read the original article, click [here](#).

How women's collectives are solving the problems of barren land, water shortage in a MP village

Jigyasa Mishra



Usha Bairagi would not walk out in the village, alone, till a few years back. She says she believed that the world outside the house belongs to the men. But now Usha has not only started moving out frequently, but also successfully developed leadership qualities within herself and other women of the village. “We have come a long way together. We got our Sarpanch changed because he was no less than a dictator for us. To get

a check dam made on the forest land we even had to fight with the department. All of us collectively met the department officials to discuss the issue and thankfully the forest department understood us. **From not being allowed to move out of the house on our own to dealing with the forest department we gained courage and power. It was not only for the society and family but for ourselves as well,”** said Usha.

“We have come a long way together. We got our Sarpanch changed because he was no less than a dictator for us. To get a check dam made on the forest land we even had to fight with the department. All of us collectively met the department officials to discuss the issue and thankfully the forest department understood us. From not being allowed to move out of the house on our own to dealing with the forest department we gained courage and power. It was not only for the society and family but for ourselves as well,” said Usha.

Usha, like 300 other residents of her village, went through extensive agriculture and livelihood training from PRADAN. The agricultural skill enhancement training focused on the themes of nursery, updated farming methods, creating structures for water conservation and for equitable gender representation. Called the STaRTuP project, the engagement of PRADAN with support of IKEA Foundation at Partala Panchayat began in the year 2017 in the form of collectives with the aim to increase livelihood, enhancement of gender equality, leadership quality and confidence among the residents of Partala. Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) focusing and Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) approach began in the year 2012. As a result of this, 300 families got benefitted.

The women of the village were divided in different self-help groups (SHGs) which came together and initiated the IWMP and INRM approaches in their village. This community engagement and sense of ownership among women boosted up the program and steadily, they observed an increase in their crop yield as a result of soil being moist due to the construction of water beds. 54-year-old Ashok Kumar Bairagi says, “They have not just achieved a way to conserve and collect water. But our income and knowledge also got enhanced ever since they joined hands with PRADAN.”





developing nursery for plants, line sowing, SRI (system of root intensification) and other things. We used to be so scared of fertilizers earlier but then organic fertilizers were introduced to us. Now, we make organic fertilisers and there is a visible growth in the quality of production,” she further adds.

Neeraj, who is the block coordinator at Narayanganj for PRADAN, says, “Nestled amidst high mountains and vast stretches of barren land, the INRM activity paved the way to ensure land and water development in Partala village, allowing farmers to cultivate on otherwise fallow land and increasing productivity and livelihood opportunities in the village. The planning for land and water development works paved the way for women to take onus for the development of the village, pushed them into the governance arena where they have now stood up to ask for their rights and entitlements in the Gram Sabha. **The strengthening of women collectives also pushed forth agendas like nutritional wellbeing and drinking water shortage, the first was addressed through collective led processes and planning to set up nutrition gardens in the village and the second through a series of requests to get the Nal Jal Yojana in the village.**”

Ashok has been actively involved in IWMP and INRM projects and even at the age of 60, he only wishes to do more. “We have learned a lot but there is still so much to learn. We see so many better educated and informed people, when we move out, and we aspire to be better with each passing day,” he says.

The story was published in ‘Feminism In India’ in October, 2021. To read the original article, click [here](#).

“While we were first introduced to making water beds to store water, we were not convinced with the idea,” said Manvati Urveti, 30. She further adds, “We used to wonder how digging could help our rocky lands. But within a year of the completion, we saw a big difference. Earlier people in a village would dig up to 30 feet in search of water but after we made waterbeds, we would get water just below 3 to 3.5 feet.”

Laxmi Bai Bairagi, 55 shares her experience, “It was nothing short of magical to see how our barra zameen (infertile/ rocky land) turned into a fertile one, a most one.

We steadily started growing rice. We even observed a good increase in the amount of production of our crops.”

“We got training on using new techniques in agriculture such as creeper vegetables on trellis,



From bulbs to grinders: How the power of the sun transformed 12 Jharkhand villages

Now, the villagers of Bhinjpur have light bulbs, television and the latest electrical gadgets. The kitchens of their houses have been upgraded, and the women can be seen using mixers instead of mortar and pestles, and cooling water in fridges.

Kelly Kislaya



With a toothless grin on her face, 75-year-old Mangari Devi excitedly shows the switches installed in her small mud house, saying, “Our village has become a town.”

With electricity in her Benduakona hamlet of Ramja Village (Koba Panchayat) in Jharkhand’s Gumla district, Mangari, a widow, lives alone in her single room house.

She can now cook after dark.

Mangari is one of the beneficiaries of the solar electrification project implemented by social organisation, Pradan, in the six Panchayats of Gumla district. This project has been funded by Bank of America.

In a state like Jharkhand, where an uninterrupted power supply is still a distant dream even in the capital, 12 villages housing more than 500 families in two blocks (Gumla and Raidih) are getting a 24×7 power supply, thanks to solar electrification.



A woman shows the light bulb in her mud house in a Gumla village.

“There was no power connection in our village earlier, and we used to light kerosene lamps at night. Not only do we use bulbs now but also use various electrical gadgets,” says Geeta Devi, a mother of two. Her children can now study after dark.

Bhinjpur, a village in the Raidih block, has a population of 700 with 113 houses. The village is about 60 kms away from the district headquarters with no pukka roads to reach there. One has to cross around 16 km of dense forest to reach this interior village.

The village, which had no electricity connection, was freed from the lantern era in 2017 with Pradan’s help.

Debanjan Ghatak, team coordinator of Pradan in Gumla, says, “Earlier, the villagers used kerosene lamps which generated excessive carbon monoxide, which is harmful to the lungs. Also, it used to be too expensive for the villagers at Rs 51 per litre. The public distribution system too was irregular.”

Now, the villagers of Bhinjpur have light bulbs, television and the latest electrical gadgets. The kitchens of their houses have been upgraded, and the women can be seen using mixers instead of mortar and pestles, and cooling water in fridges.

More than 30 houses in the village not only have television sets but also DTH connections.

Drigpal Singh, a resident of Bhinjpur village, and member of the Panchayat Sadasya Samiti at Kobja Panchayat, says, “Earlier, we were cut off from the entire world, but now, we can watch the happenings across the globe on our television.”

Ghatak said, “We have also installed street lights in all the villages. The women can move around at night without the fear of being a victim to any crime.”

Pradan has successfully entered the third year of the solar electrification project in 12 villages of the district. Further, since the project started, none of these villages has suffered a power cut even for a minute.





Solar electricity is also helping the villagers to earn a better living. Right from using solar power in irrigation and farming to starting their own photocopy and cold drink shops, the villagers have come a long way.

Santoshi Devi says, “I have bought a mini rice mill which works on solar energy. I charge Re 1 per kg from those who want to use it. It has made me an entrepreneur.”

She makes between Rs 5,000-10,000 during the harvest season.

Vinod Kumar has started a photocopy shop in the village. He says, “People would have to go to the market around 25 km away to get any documents photocopied. But now, my shop caters to three neighbouring villages along with mine.”

In addition to his earnings from farming, he makes up to Rs 5,000 per month from this shop.

Rahul Pathak, a field executive of Pradan working with the beneficiaries, informed that in 2016, Bank of America had given a one-time grant for the solar grid installation. Its ownership has now been given to the community. He shares that the women of the villages do everything, right from planning the installation of the power grids to the maintenance. And the land for grid installation had been given by the Gram Samiti.

The installation of a solar power grid costs around Rs 50,000 per family. Thus, if a village has 50 families, the installation cost for that village would be Rs 25 lakh.

Pathak adds, “While BoA has given us a one-time fund under their CSR activity and the batteries have a guarantee of five years, the maintenance work after the fifth year required expenditure. To meet this expense, a meter had been installed in every household, for which, the families pay a small price.”

The minimum price is fixed at Rs 60, after which the villagers pay the bill on per unit of consumption. Depending on their usage, each household pays between Rs 90 and 150 per month.

Pathak continues, “The money is deposited in the bank account of the women committee in every village. It is being used to pay the operators of the grid, while the remaining amount is being saved for maintenance purposes.”

In its third year of solar electrification, Pradan now works towards providing clean drinking water using solar water filters in 12 villages. These fall under seven Gram Panchayats in Gumla–Parsa, Kansir, Sikoe, Kobja, Jarjatta, Silam and Dumardih.

Debanjan Ghatak concludes, “Around 500 families will be benefitted under this scheme. The work is on and the water filter plants will be handed over to the community in another six months.”

The story was published in 'The Better India' in November, 2018. To read the original article, click [here](#).

Section C

Health & nutrition drive a change

- Scripting change via nutrition gardens
- Lohe ki kadhai and tricolour thaali show the way to a nutritious life in Jharkhand
- Idea of setting our backyards as kitchen garden saved us during pandemic
- 'I Gave A Condom To My Bahu': The Importance Of Sexual Health Awareness Among Young Women
- Village Girls Shed Fear and Shame About Menstruation





Scripting change via nutrition gardens

A large number of women in Jharkhand's Godda district have benefitted from a nutrition intervention programme since 2018. Now, it is getting further boost due to the state government's Didi Badi Yojana, reports Deepanwita Gita Niyogi

Deepanwita Gita Niyogi



Reena Devi, a resident of Amba village in Boarjior block of Jharkhand's Godda district, has been mentoring women since 2018 to set up nutrition gardens on plots ranging from 1.5 to 5 decimals of land for growing fruits and vegetables instead of buying from the market. These gardens on small plots of land are either set up in the backyard or in the front space of rural homes and ensure dietary diversity for the entire family.

"I have been mobilising women for the past two years. **My job is to bring about a change in their thinking and defeat malnutrition in the district. I offer them tips on the intake of iron tablets, the need to consume nutritious food and take regular measurement of children to check their weight. This has been possible after many women started kitchen gardens and also inspired their neighbours to do the same,**" Reena, who is in charge of two panchayats and works with 350 women under her, said.

Reena conceded that earlier, the women had no idea about the concept of nutrition gardens. Most of them

belong to poor families. The biggest advantage of growing vegetables and leafy greens in homes is that these can be grown organically, she added. "The women are experimenting with different types of vegetables depending on the season and the availability of seeds. They realised during training how nutrition gardens can transform their lives."

One such woman is Poonam Devi from the same block. She started a nutrition garden after seeing other women start the same. Now, **Poonam grows vegetables throughout the year and her family gets to eat something or the other every day. It is sufficient for meeting her family's daily needs. She usually grows spinach, radish coriander and cauliflower.**

However, Poonam rues that there is not enough produce to sell in the market. "But there has been a sea change in people's attitude. Even a few years back, women did not bother to attend discussions on malnutrition on the pretext of household chores, but now there is regular attendance," she added.

The initiative

As part of the large-scale nutrition project in Godda district, which is part of the Santhal Pargana region of Jharkhand, the idea was to enhance crop as well as dietary diversity. “When we started working, there were critical issues like early marriage of girls mostly at 13-14 years, teenage pregnancy and malnutrition in children. To tackle the situation, the nutrition programme was interlinked with gender intervention measures, alongside large-scale mobilisation to prevent early marriages,” said Ashisa Kumar Rath, team coordinator at PRADAN. The organisation urged women to set up nutrition gardens by arranging for seeds and giving them technical support.

“When we started working, there were critical issues like early marriage of girls mostly at 13-14 years, teenage pregnancy and malnutrition in children. To tackle the situation, the nutrition programme was interlinked with gender intervention measures, alongside large-scale mobilisation to prevent early marriages,” said Ashisa Kumar Rath, team coordinator at PRADAN.

Rath added that side by side there was also a focus on the cultivation of nutritious crops like green gram and pigeon pea aimed at changing the food habit of local residents. Earlier, food habit was mostly restricted to rice and a few veggies. Now, in many parts of the district millets are being cultivated and the area coverage under both millets and pulses has grown considerably, he pointed out.

Most women, who have nutrition gardens, use kitchen wastewater for cultivation. According to Abhishek Kumar of PRADAN, who is the project executive and is based in Godda, **a total of 14 different types of vegetables are being promoted under the nutrition garden concept, besides papaya and moringa, as part of the nutrition-sensitive agriculture approach. There are around 15,000 such gardens in the district created from 2018 till 2020 December.**

“When we started promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture in Godda, the focus was specifically on nutrition gardens. We concentrated on the district in a specific manner as maximum number women have small land plots in their backyards. We also tried to promote moringa for better health and nutrition,” Kumar added.

Pinki Devi from Boarjor block said as women have gained considerable awareness on health and nutrition aspects through the concept of nutrition garden, the prevalence of anaemia has reduced to a great extent.

Sushila Devi, whose small garden feeds a family of five, said there has been a behavioural change as well. Girls now get married at the age of 18-19 instead of 14-15 as was the custom.

The Government role

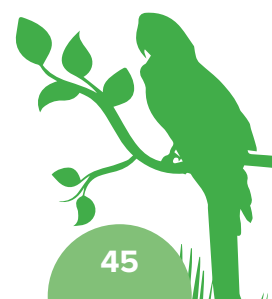
Seeing the success of the nutrition garden initiative, the Jharkhand government launched the Didi Wadi Yojana in 2020 October and linked it to MGNREGA. **In Godda, already 5,531 nutrition gardens have been completed under convergence with MGNREGA.** Adeline Hansda, district project officer, said as many women benefitted from nutrition gardens, it was implemented under MGNREGA with the cooperation of the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) under the rural development department. “We are distributing vegetable seeds to the beneficiaries free of cost as part of the programme. Wages will depend on the decimal size of land plots. **For 1.3 decimal plot of land, a beneficiary will get 194 as wage per day for a period of 38 days totalling 7,372.**

Rath pointed out that under MGNREGA, the state government is paying the women for setting up nutrition gardens and this will act as an encouragement. In this way, a greater number of beneficiaries can be reached. “Back in 2018 when we started, communities were mobilised to take up this programme. **The problem is that sometimes women keep seeds in homes and do not bother to sow them. Still, we encouraged families to buy seeds on their own and arranged for the seeds from our nurseries.** We encouraged them to start the process anyhow. On our own, we can only reach a few families but the government scheme will be far reaching,” he said.

Reena explained that the Didi Wadi Yojana focuses a lot on the exact measurement of plots for setting up nutrition gardens. Previously, many women used to set up the gardens in a haphazard manner. **The nutrition garden concept has come in as a blessing for the rural poor during the COVID-19 pandemic when many families cannot afford to buy food from the market.**

Hansda added that under the scheme, which will continue for three years, women will continue to get seed kits by the JSLPS procured from the National Seeds Corporation Limited.

The story was published in Tehelka in January, 2021. To read the original article, click [here](#).



Lohe ki kadhai and tricolour thaali show the way to a nutritious life in Jharkhand

September is Poshan Maah or nutrition month and rural women in Godda district of Jharkhand are making changes in their approach to food by starting kitchen gardens and cooking in iron cauldrons to fight anaemia and malnutrition.

Amit Pandey



Women celebrating the Poshan Maah or nutrition month.

Godda, Jharkhand

The Durga Mandi temple in Bhadaria village in Godda district Jharkhand is abuzz with chatter. Women of the village have gathered there to observe poshan maha or nutrition month. Each woman, sitting cross legged on the floor, holds lohe ki kadhai (iron cauldron).

The temple premise is decorated with colourful rangolis made using millets, pulses and vegetables. Using these healthy food items, the women have also written a slogan – ‘sahi poshan, desh roshan’ (right nutrition, enlightened country).

Together they are celebrating the Poshan Maah or nutrition month to spread awareness on the importance of eating right for a healthy life. And, the lohe ki kadhai is an integral part of this celebration.

Holding her lohe ki kadhai, Manisha Devi from Bhadaria village, addressed the gathering. **“Cooking food in iron utensils fulfils the need for iron in our body. Iron is a must for our body especially for pregnant and lactating mothers. It helps the body in the production of blood. Iron-deficiency can lead to anaemia,” the mother of a toddler explained.**

Manisha was married when she was only eighteen years old and hardly had any idea about nutrition, the young mother told Gaon Connection. “I had no understanding of nutrition and I frequently had headaches, joint pains and general weakness,” she recounted.

Fortunately for Manisha, she happened to attend a meeting in 2018 organised by the non profit, Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) that works with the rural poor in seven of the poorest states in the country. PRADAN had conducted a meeting at Godda to spread awareness on nutrition, as part of the project STaRtuP (SHG led transformation of Rural communities through Partnership) supported by the IKEA Foundation.

It was at the same meeting that Manisha learnt the advantages of cooking in an iron kadhai. She claimed that ever since she started doing that, her aches and pains reduced dramatically.

She now spreads that information amongst her fellow village inhabitants. Most of the women gathered at the temple for celebrating the Poshan Maah knew that the body used iron to make haemoglobin, and that iron deficiency led to anaemia.

Towards a healthy STaRtuP lifestyle

“The project began in December 2018, when we recruited eight mentor didis for working on health and nutrition, each covering two panchayats in Godda,” Abhishek Kumar, project executive, told Gaon Connection. The didis are volunteers from the villages, and we will soon be looking at getting more didis, to spread awareness about nutrition amongst the villages in the district,” Kumar added.

It took some time before the women truly appreciated the importance of iron in their nutrition. “The first time I cooked vegetables in the lohe ka kadhai, they turned black! My husband warned me never to cook in that



again,” 26-year-old Anku Devi, from Bhadaria, told Gaon Connection.

But, then she learnt that after cooking, she had to transfer the vegetables to another container, and the vegetables would not turn black then. Now, her husband has also come around to her way of thinking, she laughed and told Gaon Connection.

According to the National Family Health Survey 2015-16 (NFHS-4), 8.6 per cent of children, 53.2 per cent of non-pregnant women and 50.4 per cent of pregnant women were anaemic in the country. The national survey also revealed that Jharkhand had the highest percentage of women (15-49 years) with anaemia with 65.2 per cent, followed by Haryana at 62.7 per cent and West Bengal at 62.5 per cent.

In Jharkhand, 62.6 per cent of the pregnant women (15-49 years) were found to be anaemic in the health survey of 2015-16. As far as child malnutrition is concerned, the NFHS-4 found 47.8 per cent under-5 kids in the state to be underweight.



Tiranga thali

The women of Godda district, cooked mainly with rice and corn, which was their main source of nutrition. However, they were trained by the SHGs and non profit PRADAN in cultivating and adding vegetables to their daily diet too.

In order to bring home the importance of eating a diverse diet, PRADAN introduced the rural women to the concept of a tiranga thali (a tricolour meal).

“When we initially heard about it, we assumed they were referring to three different coloured plates,” laughed Gayatri Devi. **“We learnt later that they were actually talking to us about including at least three different coloured foods in our diet,”** the 58-year-old told Gaon Connection.

The women were encouraged to use orange or yellow coloured pulses, white rice, and green vegetables. “We will be free of all illnesses if we have the tiranga thali thrice a week,” Gayatri said.

Rural women have also been trained to set up their kitchen gardens and grow their own vegetables. With proper guidance from PRADAN, Gayatri and many others like her, prepared the beds to receive the seeds and

sowed spinach, coriander, cauliflower, radish, etc. “We harvest them and add them to our own meals, and the extra vegetables we manage to sell,” she said.

“Our family would have to spend more than five hundred rupees on green vegetables and fruits in a month if we had to consume them,” Vishaka, who said she was from a low income family, told Gaon Connection. The 45-year-old described fresh vegetables as luxury. But, soon she tried growing her own vegetables. “I was nervous at first, but as the first batch grew, my confidence grew,” Vishaka admitted.

“A handful of coriander will set you back five rupees, and it is not fresh. However, we can now harvest as much fresh coriander as we need,” Vishaka said. “This kitchen garden satisfies our nutritional needs, provides us with food, and provides us with a source of cash too. Now we save money on fruits and vegetables while also making money from them, and we occasionally give the balance of the fruits and veggies to our relatives,” she concluded.

Significantly, awareness on nutrition and prioritising their health, has brought about certain changes in age old and patriarchal social practices too. “In most households, women eat only after the male members have finished eating and are often left with nothing more than just rice and roti,” Manisha from Pathargama village pointed out. This is a very common practice in many households and one of the main reasons that leave the women undernourished, she added.

“But now we encourage family members to sit together and have their meals and in this way ensure food is shared equally amongst everyone, men, women and children,” Manisha said.

The story was published in Gaon Connection in October, 2021. To read the original article, click [here](#).



Idea of setting our backyards as kitchen garden saved us during pandemic:

Anaemic women in MP

Jigyasa Mishra

Sanjo shares how most of the young mothers in her village are anaemic and underweight and kitchen garden has been a boon to all such women.



Sanjo Parte has cooked bottle gourd curry and rice for lunch today. 27-year-old Sanjo hands a bowl of rice-curry to her daughter as she covers her son with a mosquito net. He is a few months old and Sanjo uses the net to protect him from flies and mosquitoes, who are in abundance in her house and around. "This is how it is during the monsoon. It's muddy all around and the flies just won't leave us alone," Parte says. "I had cooked masoor dal (lentil) yesterday," she adds.

We sat in Sanjo's mud house in Dhamanpani village of block Mohgaon in Mandala district in Madhya Pradesh, which is being restored because one of its walls fell due to a heavy storm, few days back.

Madhya Pradesh has a significant tribal population, which constitutes more than one-fourth of its total population and 14.7 percent of India's total tribal population. Out of the total population of MP, about 72.4% live in rural areas. According to the Tendulkar Committee Report 2009,

nearly 48.6% of the population is estimated as living Below Poverty Line (BPL) with rural poverty ratio.

According to census 2011, In rural MP, 30% children weighed less than 2.5kgs at birth, while in Mandala the figure hikes to around 35%.

Lucknow based gynaecologist, Dr Neelam Singh says, "the quality and quantity of food intake of pregnant women affects her own health during and after delivery as well as her children's. Less intake of nutrients could lead to anaemia, which in worst conditions could even lead to mortality."

Parte further adds that, "See, I had learnt in the Poshan Karyakram (nutrition program) that we must eat well. And we can't afford to buy vegetables, we shall opt for growing it ourselves, so have I done." She says and mentions the vegetables she had in her kitchen garden- cucumbers, potatoes, bitter guard, tomatoes etc.

"It is not feasible for us to buy vegetables and go to the market, regularly, in the first place. But the idea of setting up our own backyards as Poshan Vatika (kitchen garden) saved us. Though, it was a challenge to convince men of our house, initially because they have been using the land for traditional cropping only but once we began growing vegetables they were impressed to, Sanjo further adds.

"See, I had learnt in the Poshan Karyakram (nutrition program) that we must eat well. And we can't afford to buy vegetables, we shall opt for growing it ourselves, so have I done."

Sanjo shares how most of the young mothers in her village are anaemic and underweight and kitchen garden has been a boon to all such women. "Apart from improving our diet by adding colours in our plate, we have started to question old, traditional ways of delivery

and post-natal care because premature delivery was another common problem among the women of our villages," she says.

In Dhamanpani, where Sanjo lives, 40 anaemic women started kitchen gardening and some have even recovered from anaemia.

Experts blame imbalance in dietary pattern – due to poverty (in rural) and consumption of junk food (in urbans) for anaemia.

Anemia is the condition of having a lower-than-normal number of red blood cells or quantity of hemoglobin. It can make one feel tired, cold, dizzy, irritable and short of breath, among other symptoms.

The COVID19 crisis in the country resulted in an increase in micronutrient malnutrition, including anemia due to the disruption of health services and food systems on top of an economic crisis.

Soon after the announcement of first national lockdown, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had announced that all Below Poverty Line (BPL) families would be provided a month's ration free.

Kamlawati's life has changed

Similarly, **Kamlawati's life has changed** post PRADAN's trainings with the support of IKEA Foundation. **Being a new mother, Kamlawati now eats regularly, rests well and even opted for institutional delivery. She even cooks in the iron pan to increase the iron intake in her body.**

Kamlawati lays in a charpoy, breastfeeding her infant as we speak to her. The charpoy is placed behind the door to restrict sunlight and direct visibility from the passer-by. She has not moved out of her two-room house, post-delivery. She is supposed not to for at least a week now.

34-year-old Kamlawati Tumrachi, who lives in Machhla village of Mohgaon block in district Mandala, has given birth for the third time. But what's different this time is her awareness about the postnatal care. "Amma, babu would say that I need to feed the baby in the fourth or fifth month itself. That's what everyone in the village does. They'd even make the baby lick honey in the first few months and I was fine with all of this unless I was told how this could affect the infant," Tumrachi says, as she covers her head with a woollen scarf. Her daughter and attending classes with her neighbour, on the only smartphone the family has.

Tumrachi further tells, "In our village, children are bathed right after the birth, as a part of tradition. This is regardless of the season and weather. But I resisted it. **My Haemoglobin was 7 and weighed 30, before delivery, during the first trimester of pregnancy, both of this below average. But now I am in a better condition with around 11 g/dl,**" she concludes.

"As a part of our Poshan Abhiyan, Perspective Building has been categorized in preparation of delivery and family planning among the women. The mothers-to-be were made aware about the importance of consuming nutritious food and ways to combat diseases.

The mothers-to-be were made aware about the importance of consuming nutritious food and ways to combat diseases.

Women were also encouraged to know their rights,” says Dikhyani from PRADAN who has been observing Kamalwati’s health and lifestyle closely, apart from hundreds of others in the block, under the STaRtuP project supported by IKEA Foundation. PRADAN is a non-profit organisation, working with women of several villages to ensure the overall wellbeing of their family by improving nutrition and agriculture of the women.

Kamlawati shares that 3-time meals in a day had been a dream for her till very recently. It is the case for most of the women. “I even know many families in my neighbourhood where women skip one meal due to insufficient quantity of food. Mostly men of the house would consume Pej (Maize soup/ juice) as breakfast while women would be busy cooking their first meal- lunch,” she tells. Pej is considered to be the best source of energy by local people. Pej is also taken during diarrhoea.

Pandemic and nutrition

Covid-19 further tested India’s food production and supply systems, which were already stressed due to the climate crises.

“As breadwinners lose jobs, fall ill or die, the food security and nutrition of millions of women and men are under threat, with those in low-income countries, particularly the most marginalized populations, which include small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples, being hardest hit,” read a WHO report published in October 22.

“As breadwinners lose jobs, fall ill or die, the food security and nutrition of millions of women and men are under threat, with those in low-income countries, particularly the most marginalized populations, which include small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples, being hardest hit,”

Kamalwati was underweight during her pregnancy. “I weighed 30kg during the first trimester of pregnancy,” she said. “That’s when I began regular check-ups with the auxiliary nursing midwife (ANM).”

She began growing green vegetables and fruits in her backyard, the only way she could boost her nutrition, as the cost of vegetables skyrocketed. Besides, rice along with dal twice a day (morning and night) is her constant meal. Here, pulses are grown in abundance. Only shortage is intake of vitamins, iron and other minerals which have its sources in fruits and vegetables. Carbohydrate and protein intake is common in the majority of households. Pej, which is taken during the day, is also a source of carbohydrate.

Under the STaRtuP project (Self-help group led Transformation of Rural communities through Partnerships) supported by IKEA Foundation, messaging of basic concepts and technical information around different aspects of health and nutrition was done through two modules: Perspective Building 1 and Perspective Building 2 which contained a total of 9 sessions. The major forms used in the modules for dissemination were about early marriage and how it relates to deteriorating health among women. **It focused on how tricolour food can be consumed at low cost through kitchen gardens and how it can enhance the practice of better food intake practice of women along with other family members.**

The STaRtuP project adopts a cascade approach where Mentors (trained cadre and paid from project) support the change vectors (non-paid volunteers) in the transaction of the pictorial, story-based micro modules with SHG members. Women were trained around health & nutrition, dietary diversity (tri- colour food), nutri-sensitive agriculture, introduction of strategic actions like: use of iron vessels to cook; kitchen garden etc.

These training programs were designed by Pradan’s technical partner, Public Health Resource Society (<https://phrsindia.org/>). “PHRS not only trained people and made mentors in the villages but also conducted training for PRADAN staff and mentors. Then, with the help of change vectors and mentors, we approached the other residents in our villages and ensured that the learnings were in practice,” added Dikhyani.

In 1000 sq ft of land, she planted tomatoes, brinjal, bananas and a mixture of leafy climbers.

Kamalwati’s husband, Mayaram Tumrachi, a mason in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh was one among millions of migrant workers who had to find their way home on foot or on other unreliable transport in 2020 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide lockdown without sufficient notice. Back in the village, Kamalwati stayed with her parents, and her pre-teen daughters managed her fields, dreaming of having three meals a day.

“I know many women in my neighbourhood who skip one meal due to insufficient quantity of food,” she said. **“Most men of the house would consume Pej (maize soup/ juice) as breakfast, while women would be busy cooking their first meal- lunch.”**

In October 2016, the project’s piloting was done in 30 villages with 281 SHGs (around 3000 HHs) in Mohgaon block which was the only block for piloting in Mandla. Later in 2019, it was extended to the rest of the villages in the block.

The story was published in Maktoob in October, 2021. To read the original article, click [here](#).

‘I gave A condom to my Bahu’: The importance of sexual health awareness among young women

Amit Pandey



Sulekha Mal greeted us with homemade Maalpoha (dessert) when we arrived at her residence. Sulekha has earned a reputation for herself in her hamlet of Gamra in Sikaripara Block, Jharkhand, for her revolutionary efforts in the field of health. Gawra, situated on the border between Jharkhand and West Bengal, is isolated from basic health and education services.

Sulekha sat with us and told us about her experience after she was free of her routine responsibilities. Sulekha Mal, 45, is a member of the Mal Pahariya Tribe, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PTGs). **The Dhebhar Commission established the Primitive Tribal Groupings as a separate category in 1973, indicating that they are the least developed of the tribal groups. The PTGs were renamed PVTGs by the government in 2006.**

There are 75 PTGs among the 705 Scheduled Tribes. They are mainly homogeneous, have a tiny population, are relatively physically separated, lack written language, have primitive technology, and change happens at a slower pace.

Sulekha said, **“When I was younger, I wanted to be a nurse so that I could help those who are sick. Even I had intended to study science after tenth grade. However, due to family pressure, my father married me after the tenth result. Consequentially, I had to leave my studies behind.”** Sulekha currently works as a cook at a neighbouring government school and volunteers as a Badlav Didi, (teaching woman) in her community for basic health etiquette.

Sulekha was married at a very early age and because of this, her reproductive health was not developed properly. She told us, “After five years of my marriage, I was not able to get pregnant. My father-in-law was talking about a second marriage for his son, but thanks to god I got pregnant that year. Now, I am a mother of two boys.”

She recalled that the early days for her family were not easy. “We did not have a proper house, sometimes we even had to sleep empty stomach. I worked as a maid in a few houses, and then slowly, things improved for us. **We invest in the education of our elder son, I promised myself that I will do anything to teach my son and he will fulfil my dream by becoming a doctor. We enrolled him in science after the tenth, he was also performing well, but...**”

Sulekha paused for a second and continued, “In 2018, he brought home a sixteen-year-old girl and we had to accept her as our Bahu (daughter-in-law). At the age of twenty, my son got married. I was so tensed that I did not eat a single meal for two days.” There is a live-in relationship tradition in the Mal Pahariya tribe. People usually go to the weekend markets, and if they like each other, they come home together, explained Sulekha.

“At that point, I realised I couldn’t sit like this any longer. I would not put my daughter-in-law through the same ordeal that I endured. It was self-evident that if they both live together, there would be a high likelihood of physical intimacy.” With hand gestures, she told us, “If that’s the case, I would be in double trouble. My son’s schooling would be jeopardised, and my daughter-in-law’s health would be put at risk.”

She extrapolated to us that she had received health training from PRADAN— a non-profit organisation, and that they had taught her about sexual health and family planning. “So I decided to give my daughter-in-law a condom to prevent early pregnancy. First, I was worried,

Her daughter-in-law Mala Mal, who is now 19 years old, told us that relatives frequently enquire about her sexual health. “My senior mother-in-law questioned me, Do you have a problem with periods? Why haven’t you had a child yet?” she said. Mala quickly responded, “My mother gave me a condom to avoid pre-age pregnancy. I was married before I was eighteen, therefore giving birth now would be detrimental to my health”



wondering if it was correct or incorrect. But then I gathered my courage and walked into my daughter-in-law’s room. I moved my hand slowly towards her and handed her a condom. I was expecting her to object, but she gladly accepted it, politely,” said Sulekha.

I also informed my husband about the situation, and he was supportive and did not protest. My son was a medical student, so he readily accepted. “However, it was mocked by the neighbours. They teased me about the kind of mother I am. Who delivers this gandhi cheez (Bad stuff) to her son?”, Sulekha recalled. I didn’t answer at first, but after a while, I raged at them, saying, “Who will look after my daughter-in-law during her pregnancy. What about the schooling of my son? Giving contraceptives to my son was the correct thing to do.” No one talks about it after that. **“My daughter-in-law has not been pregnant till now,” Sulekha thanks god, by pressing her hands in a namaste.**

Her daughter-in-law Mala Mal, who is now 19 years old, told us that relatives frequently enquire about her sexual health. “My senior mother-in-law questioned me, Do you have a problem with periods? Why haven’t you had a child yet?” she said. Mala quickly responded, **“My mother gave me a condom to avoid pre-age pregnancy. I was married before I was eighteen, therefore giving birth now would be detrimental to my health.”**



In India, a substantial number of women aged 19 to 29 years die during or shortly after childbirth. According to the Sample Registration System (SRS), in 2015 and 2017, 34 per cent of pregnant women under the age of 30 died during their pregnancy. According to UNICEF, India and Nigeria were responsible for a third of all maternal fatalities worldwide in 2017. Three years ago, both countries reported around 35 per cent of the projected number of maternal deaths.

As per the National Family Health Survey 2015-16, 12 per cent of the women aged between 15-19 years had already become mothers or were pregnant at the time of the survey. This number rose to 13.9 per cent in rural Jharkhand. This same survey also highlights that only 2.2 per cent of people prefer condoms for family planning purposes, which is a cheap, easy to use method to avoid pregnancy. The majority of them prefer female sterilisation for family planning.

“During their periods, I recommended them to use sanitary pads. Instead of pads, you can use a clean cotton cloth. I constantly tell them to throw away used sanitary pads and cloths in a pit or burn them. Take a bath on a regular basis to keep the body clean. All of the girls thanked me for the knowledge after the training,” she says

Sulekha now works as a health educator for other women. “I told the principal at my school that I wanted to teach young girls about menstruation. My principal agreed by advising me to distribute government-supplied sanitary pads to the girls”, Sulekha remembers. Sulekha educated girls about menstrual hygiene during a school presentation.

“During their periods, I recommended them to use sanitary pads. Instead of pads, you can use a clean cotton cloth. I constantly tell them to throw away used

sanitary pads and cloths in a pit or burn them. Take a bath on a regular basis to keep the body clean. All of the girls thanked me for the knowledge after the training,” she says.

Sulekha also educates pregnant women so that there would be no problem at the delivery. She proudly informed us, “In my village, all deliveries took place in hospitals.”

She told us, **“After getting training from PRADAN, my dream to become a nurse felt fulfilled.”** PRADAN educates and positions well-educated people with empathy at the grassroots, who support and engage with strong women’s collectives working to improve the human situation on a large scale. They were the driving force behind this transformation, which was made possible by the IKEA Foundation’s project STaRtuP (SHG-led transformation of Rural Communities via Partnership).

“We train Change vector didis as part of this project. We educate them about health, nutrition, and how to make a living during this training. Furthermore, our primary training focuses on the usage of contraceptives as well as how to care for pregnant women and infants. This information was communicated by a Change vector to three Self Help Groups (SHG), each of which consisted of 10 women, implying that a single CV trained thirty women at once,” explains Kratika, Executive, PRADAN.

She further added, “For technical support, we partnered with the Public Health Resource Society (PHRS) who provided training to PRADAN staff as well as developed training modules for the community to build their perspective around health and nutrition issues.”

“Sulekha has been an active change vector didi during the entire training. Her interest in nursing also aided her, and the way she individually applies all of the learning makes her an inspiration to others”, Karthika said.

The story was published in Feminism In India in November, 2021. To read the original article, click [here](#).

Village girls shed fear and shame about menstruation

Through a health initiative that demystifies menstruation by using games and stories, schoolgirls in rural Jharkhand are learning about menstrual health and the importance of nutrition

Kandala Singh

Through stories and games that demystify menstruation, schoolgirls in rural Jharkhand learn about menstrual cycle and hygiene.



Sunita Kumari, a class VIII student, was at school when she reached menarche. Scared and ashamed of the stain in her uniform, she informed the teacher and ran home. **“No one had told me what to do in such a situation. I was scared that the boys would see the stain and laugh at me. I had seen the boys laughing at another girl when she got her period while at school,”** she said.

This is Sunita’s memory of her first period. She lives in Patratu village in Ramgarh district, Jharkhand. Here

and in most parts of rural India, a tradition of trauma and shame persists around menstruation, menarche in particular.

A health initiative is now creating awareness among adolescent girls in rural Jharkhand about reproductive health in general, and about menstruation and menstrual hygiene in particular, so that the girls do not shy away from discussing their problems.

Cultural inhibitions

46-year old Emlia Guria of Ronhe village in Torpa administrative block, Khunti district, is a nodal teacher in the government-run Adolescence Education Program in a middle school. She distributes iron tablets and sanitary pads supplied by the government, and counsels adolescents on different life skills.

She said that she found it difficult to get the adolescent girls to talk about their menstruation-related issues because of cultural factors and the shame associated with menstruation. **“I had the same problems as these adolescent girls when I was growing up; my back would hurt, but I was too ashamed to tell anyone,”** she said.

Open discussions

When two non-governmental organizations, Public Health Resource Network (PHRN) and Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) approached her school to conduct sessions with adolescent girls on issues of reproductive health and nutrition, Guria and the school authorities readily agreed.

The PHRN-PRADAN team that conducts the sessions has been working in several blocks of Jharkhand since 2016 as part of a multi-partner health intervention, anchored by Transform Rural India Foundation. VillageSquare is an initiative of Transform Rural India Foundation.

Awareness about menstruation among girls in rural schools helps them discuss their problems without inhibitions. Over the course of one or two sessions in each school, the PHRN-PRADAN team discussed adolescent and reproductive health with girls in classes VI to X, through storytelling, experience sharing and

interactive games. **They discussed about the physical and emotional changes that take place during adolescence, importance of nutrition, anemia, shame associated with menstruation and early marriage, to name a few.**

Learning through stories

14-year old Sunita said that she felt better after hearing the story of Shila (a character in the adolescent health module taught in the school) during the session. Like her, Shila also got her first period when she was in school.

While Shila seemed as scared as Sunita was, none of the boys in school made fun of her, and she later learnt how to take care of herself during her periods: how to clean her private parts, and to dispose of the menstrual cloth after three months of use.

“I have learnt everything from Shila’s story. I also dispose of my sanitary pads and cloth properly now; I clean and then bury them in the ground instead of throwing them into the local pond,” she said.

“I have learnt everything from Shila’s story. I also dispose of my sanitary pads and cloth properly now; I clean and then bury them in the ground instead of throwing them into the local pond,” said Sunita.



Two-pronged strategy

One of the components of this initiative is training women volunteers from the villages. Called change vectors or badlav didis, they are selected by the self-help groups (SHGs) they belong to, and trained in different aspects of health and nutrition, ranging from immunization to adolescent health. They in turn train their peers, promoting individual and collective action for better health and nutrition.

“For three months during monsoon, the SHGs do not have any meetings as the women are engaged in rice transplantation,” said Sunil Thakur, the PHRN block coordinator in Torpa. “We were already running a module on adolescent health with adult women. So we thought of utilizing this time to take it directly to adolescent girls.”

With the permission and support of the block level education officer (BEO) of Torpa, the team conducted a meeting with the nodal teachers of the block in August 2018. This was followed by visits to middle and secondary schools in the block to conduct workshops with adolescent girls.

“We liked the idea a lot, because the messages on adolescent health and nutrition can reach each household through two routes: through the mother in SHG meetings, and the daughter through school,” said Rahul Chandra, the PHRN block coordinator in Gola administrative block in Ramgarh district.

Health and nutrition

Guria said that several of the adolescent girls she works with don't get nutritious food, become anemic and grow weak during their adolescent years. However, the two-pronged approach adopted by the PHRN-PRADAN team has proven effective.

Neha Bhengra, a class VII student in Torpa block, said that after attending the meeting at school, she started taking the iron tablets distributed at school once a week. **“Earlier, I wouldn't take them because they made me feel nauseous, but the didi who came to school said that I would not feel weak if I took them and the nauseous feeling would go away after the first few times,”** said Neha.

12-year-old Ailin Hiren, standard class VII student in Sonpurgarh village of Torpa block, is proud that she has helped change the diet in her household. After attending the meeting on nutrition, she discussed the importance of eating green leafy vegetables with her mother and sister.

Everyone in Ailin's household now eats a tri-colored meal which includes saag (green leafy vegetables), rice (white) and dal (yellow), at least once a day. She said that, during their periods, she and her sister do not feel so weak as before.



Shedding embarrassment

At the heart of such changes at the household level is better awareness, combined with a questioning of the shyness and shame associated with menstruation. So far, the program has reached over 3,000 adolescent girls across 80 schools in Jharkhand.

Bhagwati Bala, the headmistress of a secondary school in Murudih village in Gola block said that the meetings have helped the girls open up and feel less scared and ashamed to talk about their periods. “Earlier, some of them wouldn't even tell their parents about their periods, but now they talk at least to their mothers,” said Bala.

“Neha told me that it is important to dry the menstrual cloth in the sun, so that all the germs are killed completely and we don't fall sick. I didn't know this earlier. I have now started drying our cloths in a sunny part of our backyard,” said Phulmani Bhengra.

Phulmani Bhengra, a mother of six children in Sonpurgarh, agrees about the awareness. “Two of my daughters told me that they discussed about menstruation at school,” said Bhengra. “Neha told me that it is important to dry the menstrual cloth in the sun, so that all the germs are killed completely and we don't fall sick. I didn't know this earlier. I have now started drying our cloths in a sunny part of our backyard.”

“Yes, we dry it in the sun now. Ma'am said that everyone menstruates and it's a normal thing, so why should we be ashamed?” said her daughter Neha. With this awareness, adolescent girls as well as the older women are shedding their fear and shame associated with menstruation.

The story was published in Village Square in July, 2019. To read the original article, click [here](#).

Section D

Youth building a better tomorrow

- **Mentoring helps tribal youth choose new careers**
- **Meet The Agricultural Entrepreneurs From Various Remote Regions**
- **How Bihar's Lahanti Club is preserving Santhali culture**





Mentoring helps tribal youth choose new careers

Career counseling and training help tribal youth develop skills and choose new vocations, resulting in social upliftment, women's empowerment and changes in societal norms

Aniruddh Kumar Shastri



A new program has helped young men and women from tribal districts find employment after mentoring and training

Fair employment has become a major problem for youth. **Currently 17 crore skilled and unskilled people are unemployed in India.** Increasing use of modern techniques worsens the job scenario. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, businesses have been badly affected. This has not only made finding new jobs difficult, but has put current jobs in jeopardy.

The problem of employment is worse in villages, especially in tribal areas. Wage labor and migrating for livelihood have become common. Youth have very limited skill-training and quality education opportunities, which further impairs their ability to get employment. A vicious cycle, this problem continues for generations.

Yuva Shastra, a mentoring program, provides skill-based training, education, awareness and shows employment

avenues to tribal youth. With these new opportunities, they are able to achieve success, help their families financially, and be a motivation for other youth.

Rural challenges

When Yuva Shastra program was started with a view to give a new and better direction to the future of tribal youth, the organizers were able to see that the reason for the backwardness of tribal youth was their lack of understanding on many issues.

Apart from this, lack of confidence, lack of education, lack of economic resources, inability to understand the events and their effects around the world, etc. are the reasons that make life difficult for the youth from tribal areas.



Yuva Shastra program offers career counseling to tribal youth, trains them and helps find placement

Due to limited educational resources, education is restricted to a minimum level in tribal areas. **A survey showed that 40% of the youth drop out after passing class X and class XII, due to economic reasons. This hampers their progress.**

The level of education is so weak that the youth who have completed class X and XII have poor knowledge in their subjects. Only four out of every 10 youth want to go out for higher education or for a job. **The study also showed that only 1.58% of the youth stay outside their village for one to two years.**

Yuva Shastra Program

Lack of self-confidence affects their ability to make decisions. Keeping this fact in mind, the Yuva Shastra program ensures participation of youth in self-help groups and village organizations in the first phase. Youth clubs have been formed at the panchayat level, to ensure all round development of youth through various activities and sports.

In the second phase, a workshop on Re-Imaging the Future (RIF) is organized, which gives a lot of clarity about their direction in life, in terms of education and employment opportunities. This year, there are plans to conduct RIF workshops for all youth in more villages. Out

of more than 1,000 youth registered for employment and education through Yuva Shastra, 700 participated in RIF workshops.

Then through Jeevika Counseling (career counseling), youth are given information in many fields like higher education, advanced agriculture, animal husbandry, hotel management, small scale industries, etc. After the counseling, during the mentoring process, they learn communication and various skills, based on their career choices.

Positive outcomes

After participating in the Yuva Shastra program, six young women and three young men from Narayanganj block got a job in October, in the textile department of Welspun India Limited located in Kutch, Gujarat.

Presently, 158 youth are employed in various multi-national companies. "It is like a dream come true," said Surendra Varkade, a youth from Kudamallee village working in Welspun India Limited. **"Today, I am not only self-sufficient, but I am also able to help my family financially."**



Young men and women, who have opted for different careers, are a role model to other youth in their village

The program has helped young women also to opt for new livelihoods. Seven young women opted for ophthalmology course at Shankara Eye Hospital in Jaipur.

“I had never been out of my block before, and this is the first time I am on such a long journey of 1,500 km to Kutch district of Gujarat in a train,” said Yashwanti Markam, a young woman from Beejgaon village.

“Even after a day’s labor, it was difficult for our family to get food for two days. Yet we started saving money for my girl’s higher education many months in advance,” said Lakhan Vishwakarma, whose daughter Aarti has selected an ophthalmic course.

Changing norms

“Since childhood I was taught to do household chores, and was forbidden to go to school. I rarely got freedom to play,” said an emotional Yashoda, who has been selected to work in Welspun India Limited. **“The arguments always centered around marriage when I talked about education.”**

Ruby Patta of Kumha said that parents send their children to the anganwadi (daycare center) so that they would get nutritious food. “Education was never their intent. But now both the atmosphere and the customs about education of young women in the village are changing,” she said.

“I did not want our daughter to discontinue studies and stay in the village,” said Ahilya Bai, resident of Kumha village. **“Today she can speak Hindi, English and Tamil. She is the first working member of our family and we are very happy with her success.”**

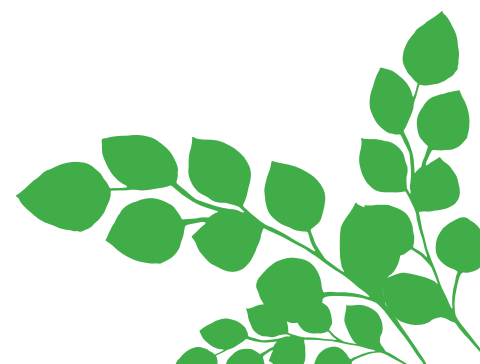
Role models

Education is a powerful medium through which positive changes can be made in the lives of people of these tribal areas. Such programs prove to be a positive step to motivate the other youths of the district and to become aware of the possible progress of their village.

In the coming years, the youth who are moving ahead in life after participating in Yuva Shastra program, will be able to encourage the other youth, and give momentum towards development in the future.

“Through the Yuva Shastra program, there is an opportunity for those youth who have the ability to strengthen the foundation of society. Society will get to know that these youth can prove themselves when given the opportunity,” said Chetan, officer for human resources at Welspun India Limited.

The story was published in Village Square in November, 2020. To read the original article, click [here](#).



Meet the agricultural entrepreneurs from various remote regions

Amit Pandey



“At first, I was afraid to adopt this, but as time went on, I gained confidence, and other women were inspired by my development.”, said Sunita.

Sunita, who was carrying her five-year-old child, said, “At first, I was afraid to adopt this, but as time went on, I gained confidence, and other women were inspired by my development.” In the next years, I plan to expand my farming operations and invest the savings in children’s education.

“We were largely reliant on paddy for our sustenance prior to 2016, when PRADAN NGO introduced us to vegetable cultivation” Sunita Hasdeo, a 26 year old explained to us while travelling around her vegetation, “In 2017, I cultivated Brinjal in upper land, then Bitter gourd, and in 2019, I grew Brinjal again.” Sunita, a woman from the Santhal tribe, is uneducated, yet she appreciates the PRADAN’s assistance.

“My husband is a farmer, and agriculture is our family’s primary source of income. Our livelihood has much improved as a result of vegetable cultivation; **today we earn more than ₹ 15,000 per year from it in addition to our daily needs,**” Sunita explained. She now considers herself an “Agricultural entrepreneur” because she not only grows her own veggies but also encourages other women to start vegetable growing on their own land. Sunita resides in Sundarpari village, Godda, Jharkhand, where paddy is the principal crop. Paddy is often grown in lowland areas with sufficient water availability, whereas upper land is typically left uncultivated. These women used solar water lifters to irrigate the vegetable land as part of the STaRtuP (SHG driven Transformation of Rural Communities via Partnership) project, which was supported by the IKEA Foundation.

Sunita, who was carrying her five-year-old child, said, “At first, I was afraid to adopt this, but as time went on, I gained confidence, and other women were inspired by my development.” In the next years, I plan to expand my farming operations and invest the savings in children’s education.

“Our watermelon harvest was devastated last year because of the lockdown, but I will continue to practise vegetable growing because it is profitable,” said Kailash Mahato, who has been in this business for four years. Kailash, who is just in his 12th year, earns more than Rupees 50,000 every year from this business. “I had built a nursery in which I grew the small plants and then sold them to the farmers for rupees one apiece,” he explained. My relationship with farmers has grown in recent years since my plants produce higher yields than those available on the market.” **He recalls having to borrow ₹ 26,000 to pay for his brother’s hospitalisation. I was depressed at the moment because the sum was quite large for a jobless person like me. “The training in Godda city was told to me by Prasanna from PRADAN. I was initially uninterested in it, but after visiting it, my feelings about it changed,”** Kailash explained. Now, I’m working on vegetation in areas larger than ten hectares. Kailash went on to say that as a result of this, his financial circumstances improved and he was able to pay off his debt.

“I don’t know about the future, but I, like everyone else, aspired to send my children to good private schools. With this money, I’m also intending to open a new textile shop,” Kailash revealed. He went on to say, **“Because of this business, I know the farmers, thus it will be simpler for me to establish a customer base for my textile shop.”**

Pooja Hemdoha said her husband lost his job in Bangalore following the first lockdown and had to return to their home in Chakai, Bihar. Pooja recalled her financial position at the time: “Our financial situation was not good at the time; we had food to eat but no clothes to wear.” Pooja joined the training of nursery production in 2019, she informed us. “I was sceptical at first because I was investing a significant chunk of money on it. But then I thought to myself, “Agar main Sahi Kar rahi hun to Dar kaisa.” (If I’m doing the right thing, why should I be afraid?) Pooja made a profit of more than Rupees 5,000 in the first two batches. She also mentioned that she intends to get a sewing machine and expand her business.

Later, she explained to us why her saplings are of higher quality than those sold in stores: **“I grew seed on trays, therefore my saplings are always free of soil pests.”**

“I was sceptical at first because I was investing a significant chunk of money on it. But then I thought to myself, “Agar main Sahi Kar rahi hun to Dar kaisa.”

Instead of using fertilisers as commercial saplings, I used Coconut husk powder, which is good for growth.”

My customer recently complimented me, saying, “Your sapling produces an excellent and healthy crop.” With a beaming smile, Pooja explained how she is establishing trust in the market and among the locals.

Pooja’s business was difficult to start because she had to listen to society’s taunts. “People in my community said horrible things to me and raised questions about me, but when they saw how I started making money, their mouths quickly zipped shut,” Pooja recounted.

Muniya Murmu, the fifth woman in line, introduced herself as an “Agricultural Entrepreneur” as she stood in front of her 6-hectare nursery. Because of her outstanding efforts in nursery output over the previous two years, she has become an icon for her village women. **“There is a great probability of locust assault during the rainy season, and even precipitation is damaging to these saplings,”** Muniya said why building this structure is vital for improved production. That is why we must use transparent polythene and netting to cover these plants.” After getting training from PRADAN NGO, she gains confidence in herself and now earns more than forty thousand rupees yearly from her nursery.

“My husband used to work as a labourer, but now we both work in this nursery to make more money. I also informed him about the production, which piqued his interest.” Muniya described how her husband assisted her as she was carrying her grandchild. Muniya is unfamiliar with any Indian entrepreneur’s name, although she is well-versed in the agricultural industry. “Is it required to wear a coat and tie to become an entrepreneur?” she also inquired. Muniya comes from Bihar’s Chakai region, where water scarcity is common, therefore relying solely on paddy crops is a dangerous thing to do.” Vegetable output has expanded in recent years because we can no longer rely solely on rice to meet our nutritional needs.” We were informed by her.

PRADAN NGO assisted in the training of all of these Agricultural Entrepreneurs. PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) is India’s most well-known organisation dedicated to alleviating large-scale rural poverty. PRADAN’s programme was supported by the IKEA Foundation’s STaRtuP (SHG driven transformation of Rural Communities via Partnership) project.

The story was published in The Logical Indian in October, 2021. To read the original article, click [here](#).



How Bihar's Lahanti club is preserving Santhali culture

Urvashi Dev Rawal



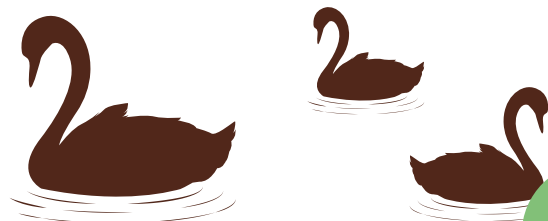
Twelve-year-old Premlal and his friends spend hours every day in the paddy fields of their village Bhinjain in Chakai block of south Bihar. It is monsoon and the children use an age-old technique of blocking water in paddy fields by putting up barriers. **The water is then drained out, leaving behind large puddles. Since fishes reach fields with rain water during monsoon, children can easily catch them.** Premlal is a Santhal, member of the scheduled tribe largely concentrated in Jharkhand, Bihar, Tripura, Odisha and West Bengal.

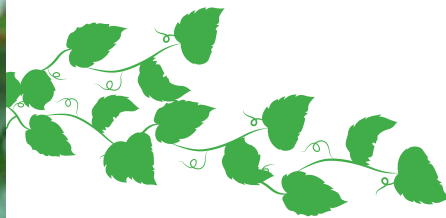
Premlal knows exactly how to hold the fish to ensure it doesn't slip back into the puddle. **After filling up his wide deep plate with many fishes, he rubs each of them in sand to remove the outer skin.** Premlal has learned this child-friendly fish catching technique from his grandparents.

In another Santhal village Govindpur, in Chakai, youths are volunteering to teach children in their indigenous

language to help them better relate to subjects taught in government schools. It will also help keep alive the traditional practices like fish-catching in monsoons as done by Premlal.

These volunteers are part of the Lahanti Club, set up in 25 villages in Jamui district of south Bihar, to preserve the rich knowledge, culture and language of the Santhals, who are among the largest tribal groups in South East Asia.





Documenting Santhali traditions

The new pedagogy is not only cognitive but also contextual and creative, helping the next generation of Santhals understand and live their culture, which stands threatened by rapid modernisation. The Lahanti Club project has been initiated by NGO Pradan and Sinchan Education and Rural Entrepreneurship Foundation, launched in 2019 by Shuvajit Chakraborty and Gautam Bisht. Lahanti means progressive in Santhali.

Two-three centuries back, the tribals used to forage for food in the forests and knew which plants were available during these months so they would not go hungry.

Chakraborty and Bisht were researching Santhals in Chakai when they realised that their knowledge must be documented and preserved. **“For instance, they know about medicinal herbs and nutritive plants in the forests. In this area, April to June is known as the hunger period when there is little available to eat,”** says Chakraborty, who also works as an action researcher with Pradan.

Now, with governments providing food, eating habits of tribals have changed and their staple is rice and potatoes. **“Modernisation has resulted in pulling them away from their traditional food, language, and forced them to move to cities in search of work. Our aim is to help them document their culture and stick to their roots. We are not against development or English or Hindi,”** says Chakraborty.

Anita Shil, team coordinator with Pradan for Chakai block says, “Pradan works on the livelihood component of villagers. Agriculture promotion is a major activity. We focus on retaining traditional community practices and add scientific methods to increase production.”

Shil said the Lahanti Club members are the next generation of the Santhali community and it's important for them to be aware of the nutritional value of their traditional foods in the forest.

Apart from India, Santhals live in Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. They all speak Santhali, the most widely spoken Munda language.

A new ethnic pedagogy of Santhali culture

During his research, Bisht found that the dropout rate of Santhali kids was very high. In government schools, there was no mention of Santhali culture, rituals, festivals, heroes or language.

“Language is a storehouse of a community's knowledge, food habits, rituals, culture, aspirations and entrepreneurship and must be preserved,” says Chakraborty.

With financial help from the Ikea Pride project of Pradan, Lahanti Club developed the new pedagogy. With 23 Santhal youths volunteering as teachers, almost a thousand students now learn in classes held six days a week. Children are taught the school syllabus along with Santhali language and culture. Chakraborty teaches them theatre and photography as well.

NGOs iSaksham and Pratham helped in training the teachers. The volunteers have now created a Santhali varnamala and a dictionary of Santhali to Hindi and English. They are also making Santhali versions of Hindi textbooks.



Teaching with toys and technology

Volunteers use local games and toys such as bows and arrows or cycle tyres to teach the principles of physics. They are also creating audio modules to teach history and science over mobile phones as classes have been suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. The volunteers also make short videos on Santhali culture that are screened in villages.

This work is being done under the Chirag project supported by Pradan, Gramvaani and Kalinga Institute. Sinchan has received an award of Rs 30 lakh by the Global Challenge Resource Fund and UK Research Initiative.

Kavita Marandi, 17 has been associated with Lahanti Club in Govindpur village for the last two years. “When I was in school, I wished I could answer like other children who were quick learners. But language was a barrier,” she says.

“There’s a Santhali game called kit-kit, in which we draw nine squares and they move a stone from one square to the other. We use it to teach numbers to kids,” says Marandi, who is paid Rs 2,500 by the Chirag project.

She is also involved in creating the dictionary which should be ready in two months. “We hope that not only Santhali kids but teachers in government schools too will use it to explain things better to children.”

Sonalal Marandi, 21, also a Lahanti Club volunteer, has made some educational videos for children. He received the initial training in video-making from Bisht and later saw videos on YouTube. The volunteers are paid Rs 1,500 for a 3-4 minute video. “I made videos on Santhali food that are shown to children in the club and also screened in Govindpur to educate people about preserving our heritage,” he says.

The buildings for the clubs are given by the villagers or they are run in government schools. There are libraries and some laptops that have been acquired through donations and funding by NGOs. Children themselves join bamboos to make shelves for storing books in libraries.

Chakraborty says they have found that the school dropout rate has declined after kids started attending the Lahanti Club. For instance, in one of the government schools, of 80 enrolled kids, 17-18 would attend school. After the club, the attendance has gone up to 59-60.”

Premlal has also benefited from the club. He enjoys going to the school as much as he likes fishing. “I will tell mom to make fish curry and chutney with my catch today,” he says with a smile.

The story was published in 30 Stades in September, 2020. To read the original article, click [here](#).

Glimpses from IWitness Visit to PRADAN project team

12 co-workers from IKEA China, Portugal, and India visited the Project team in Jharkhand in December 2019 to understand the changes that IKEA Foundation's development programs are triggering in the community. The visit was organised under the IWitness Global Citizen's Program.







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