

COMMUNITY ANIMAL HEALTH WORKERS: Way Beyond Being Just Service Providers

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Taking the training they receive to a different level of engagement altogether, CAHWs are instrumental in bringing about change at various levels, helping women find their confidence, dignity and recognition, thereby making them a force to reckon with

THEY CALL THEMSELVES ‘Service Providers’ for animals, or Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs). Their work reflects their diligence. They work for a cause and with purpose, and are engaged at the ground level, from dawn to dusk, in creating awareness about the scientific methods of livestock-rearing. Their involvement, however, goes beyond this work, in ways that have not been taught to them in their training. They have vowed to reach every family in their vicinity. They are determined to touch the life of every woman and motivate her to leading a dignified life. Their efforts indicate that a new era of empowerment has dawned. Their journey is in progress...and a long path is yet to be traversed. They have sprung from the women’s collectives, making their presence felt not only in the SHGs, but also in the hearts of the community where they work.

With a gendered division of work and severe restrictions on their activities, a woman's significant contribution in running a household usually remains unnoticed and unacknowledged

"I may not have the stars of serendipity

I may be living under patriarchal sovereignty

Although my prodigies are always ignored

Still...

The ecstasy... is to create a difference.

And the quest for an Identity.

My striving is not just for a while,

Centuries I have struggled;

It is time to traverse miles..."

EVOLUTION OF THE CAHW CONCEPT

Patriarchy plays a significant role when it comes to earning and feeding a family. With a gendered division of work and severe restrictions on their activities, a woman's significant contribution in running a household usually remains unnoticed and unacknowledged. Because women, over the centuries, have been gradually restricted, the income-generating activities that were earlier being conducted by them became the responsibility of men. Women have been relegated to the role of reproduction in the family rather than directly taking part in income-generating activities. This

value was unchallenged until now when women's collectives were introduced and the villages and society have started to unfreeze. These collectives have begun to grow in the form of Self Help Groups (SHGs).

Apart from the micro-finance activities in SHGs, women have also begun to take part in livelihood initiatives such as agriculture and livestock-rearing, and have started earning money of their own. Once the women began to participate in economic activities, the need arose to provide them with adequate technical knowhow and support to sustain their plans and proceedings. These collectives gradually unfolded the latent needs of the women and also became the platform for them to discuss the injustices that they face. During some of the discussions in these forums, the women expressed the need for guidance and support for their new ventures. One of the areas where the need for technical support was felt was in animal health.

PRADAN assessed the situation and decided to train some of the SHG members as service providers for animal health, calling them CAHWs. CAHWs provide technical support to

women farmers in the livestock-rearing activity. Because a CAHW is a member of the SHG and in close contact with the women, she is able to relate to and understand the needs and queries of the village women and help them.

SURVIVAL OF THE CAHW THEORY

When the idea of a CAHW was first suggested, the women were enthusiastic and curious; there were many among them who wanted the role. More than 50 women were selected from different villages and they went through the training process to become CAHWs. Once the novelty wore off, however, more than 50 per cent of the women dropped out. Many of the selected members could not continue because their families did not agree to the kind of work they started to do.

The role of an animal health worker required some communication skills, which the women did not have. Therefore, merely training them and providing them with the technical knowhow would not have been enough. In order to examine the reasons for the high dropout rate and the diminishing enthusiasm of the service providers and the dampening energies to continue

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their work, some brainstorming was needed. What were the reasons? What had gone wrong? Who were continuing with the work? Why and how were they managing to continue?

Many such questions plagued a development practitioner's mind. We decided to zoom in into the lives of some of the experienced CAHWs. We present below case studies of four CAHWs from two blocks, who kept their diligence high, irrespective of the crests and troughs they continue to navigate in their lives.

JOURNEY OF FOUR CAHWs

CAHWs are operating in Karanjia and Patna blocks with distinct boldness and great confidence. When we zoomed into the personal lives of these confident ladies, some interesting stories came to light. We noticed that the challenges and hurdles they faced were similar to those that had broken their counterparts and had pushed the latter to dropout from the CAHW list. Let us look at the experiences of these four and understand what made them succeed.

Doors were slammed in their faces. Humiliation was heaped upon them by the men of the

villages. When they attended the training, allegations were made about them eloping with other men. These were the difficulties they faced in their initial working days. The male-dominated society in rural Odisha usually feels reluctant and apprehensive if women go out for any kind of work. Women are meant to stay inside the house, and their work and roles are clearly defined. If any woman violates the rules set by men, vulgar adjectives are heaped on her and she becomes the subject of gossip at gatherings and card-playing sessions of the unemployed men.

The traditional belief that women are only meant to be home-makers was about to be challenged and broken in many villages. CAHWs were about to change the norms of their villages and the picture of the livestock industry. Slowly and gradually,

*"I may not have the life of
fraternity
I might be simmering inside
responsibility
But remember
My voice of freedom has not
died yet,
Just that the walk to break the
barriers...
Has not been tried yet!"*

village women got ready to begin a new chapter in their empowerment.

Jasasmita Mahanta is 26 years old. She is married and has a child. She lives with her in-laws. She not only earns money by vaccinating and de-worming animals but is also motivating other women to become involved in livestock activity; in the process, she is evolving as a public speaker.

When she first expressed a desire to study further after her marriage, her in-laws emphatically said no. Today, however, she is a graduate and her in-laws ask her opinion in every decision of the family. She told us her story of how she used to be a very shy, homely and introverted young lady. In 2008, she joined an SHG and became an active member and represented her SHG in a Cluster as a livelihoods leader. She received training in leadership, gender and livelihoods from PRADAN in her village Clusters. Her ability to reflect and her desire to learn and practice new things set her apart from the others. Later, in 2013, the village-level body selected her as a CAHW, she took the training and started doing her work.

Jasasmita, however, did not care what the others were saying. She believed that if she continued to do her part, the villagers would realize their mistake in accusing her of being a characterless woman.

The patriarchal mindset of society tried to stop her work; the men and some women of the village would not accept the services of a woman, who they did not consider to be sound in terms of technical expertise. Jasasmita, however, did not care what the others were saying. She believed that if she continued to do her part, the villagers would realize their mistake in accusing her of being a characterless woman.

In three years, she proved herself to the villagers through her work and continuous effort; today people trust her and call her to vaccinate and de-worm their goats and birds as per the vaccination calendar. She is now the hope for more than 100 families of her village when it comes to disease and treatment of goats and poultry. Jasasmita also explains to the farmers about the diseases and symptoms before vaccinating the livestock. In the process, the farmers not only understand why Jasasmita is taking livestock inventories but also that she is a responsible woman, who actually understands what is important for the livestock.

Apart from her work, she is an active member of her village *pallisabha*. She broke the belief

that women should not go to the *pallisabha*. Similarly, other SHG women are attending the *pallisabha* in her village, Dhatikabeda; this change has happened over time. She is also a tuition teacher, teaching three children in the evening. She manages her household work in which she is supported by her husband. Her work has given her name and fame and a broader perspective on life. Her continuous training and her constant association with people has helped in honing her skills.

Appreciating the role that Jasasmita plays, one SHG member Suru Sardar of village Kadalibadi said, "*Amar Jasa hi darkar chheli kukuda ku tika karba paain...se val kari bujheipare au val ni katha hiye.* (I need only Jasasmita to take care of my livestock inventory...she explains things in such a manner that I understand it and she talks really well)."

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Jashoda Nayak works with the tribal women of her village. She has significantly improved her income in three years. Even she was buffeted by hurdles and problems. She was also selected by her SHG to become an animal

health worker. This 35-year-old woman convinced her husband to support her in her work. Initially, no one supported her but later on when she became proficient in administering vaccinations and treatment, and the villagers witnessed the significant shift in the small ruminant mortality rate, her husband started supporting her.

Her husband drops her to and from her work of vaccinating animals and birds in nearby villages. She tells us that she enjoys the ride with her husband on his bike. Because of the work Jashoda is doing as a small entrepreneur, she never falls short of money. People come to her home and say, "This is what we owe you for the de-worming/vaccination, take it."

Jashoda is an active participant in her Cluster; this adds to her personality and today her village knows her as a CAHW and not as Rudra's wife. She cherishes this identity and talks about it enthusiastically in forums. She is always keen to expand her knowledge and help people rear livestock in a way that reduces losses due to mortality and morbidity, and enhances the income of village women.

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The way she shares her knowledge, reveals her interest in imbibing and applying the concepts of the training, leading to her success. It requires courage to practice the learning on the ground; ultimately, it is a person's motivation that helps one persevere until one becomes an expert. Jashoda challenged herself and stood firm in her decision not to quit work because she wanted her daughter to know that her mother was not a loser but a winner. She wanted the villagers to witness a married woman doing something different! "Women too can do..." was what she wanted to prove to the village. Jashoda Nayak's story left me speechless.

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Kabita Panigrahi is 38 years old. She started her journey as a CAHW in June 2013. Prior to that, Kabita was a home-maker and often felt frustrated because housework was very routine and boring. She wanted to experience something different. She was selected by the village Cluster to become a CAHW. She was excited because she knew she was heading towards a new beginning. When the technical training of integrated livestock rearing ended, she realized that

it was not enough. Kabita wanted to change the picture, and for that one needed conviction and experience. She was thinking not as an entrepreneur but as a leader. She could have easily just done the task, but she visualized a scenario and started working for it.

She decided to go to the nearby Veterinary Department and request the Livestock Inspector (LI) to teach her how to give injections, to show her what first-aid was available and to tell her the details of the typologies of the antibiotics. Initially, the LI tried to dismiss her because she was a woman but Kabita persisted. After a year of her constant visits, he finally agreed to help her. The LI began to take her with him to village camps and she began to be trained by the Veterinary Department itself. She mastered many techniques and, with permission from the Veterinary Department, she began to practice what she had learnt. Being from the upper caste, she faced many difficulties at the family level, but a shortage of money and the small demands of her daughter made her work rigorously.

She faced many difficulties over a period of three years. There

was a time when she did not work for seven months because of family pressure and the deteriorating health condition of her husband. She, however, remained determined to work and rejoined her counterparts. She wanted to have her own identity and build a reputation for herself in the village as a CAHW. She also noticed that some of the CAHWs had started quitting; she, however, maintained her commitment to change the livestock picture even though the payment for services was minimal. She knew that the people would accept her when there was a visible change in their livestock's health. With this core understanding, she continued her work and, slowly, she witnessed a steady rise in demand. People from nearby villages also began to request for her services because Kabita was giving doorstep services to the people.

Today, Kabita is not only earning money and fulfilling her family's and her daughter's needs but has also become a role model for other CAHWs of her block. She is also a trainer and has started working as a block-level resource person and visits the nearby *gram panchayats* and villages to provide training to new CAHWs.

Premalata is happy with her income because she can now help her family in financial matters. Villagers have stopped whistling at her, closed doors have opened up for her. She is recognized today as an Animal Health Worker.

I noticed that when these women, whose passion is livestock-rearing, sit in any gathering, they discuss field-level problems and achievements. They talk about the areas where women are facing problems due to the mortality of animals and what can be done in those areas to prevent disease; they make suggestions to the Federations about the measures that can be taken.

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“So long as your eyes are on your goal, you don’t see obstacles,” says Premalata Mohanta from Patna block, who has been working for a relatively long time as a CAHW. She has also gone through the same challenges as the women mentioned earlier. She started work in June 2011. She was trained by GALVMED experts and was supported by PRADAN. Various tools and booklets were provided to her and vaccine support was also given initially. Because she had no prior experience, she was afraid of giving vaccinations to goats and poultry.

She told us that her in-laws were completely against her decision because this work demanded minimum two-hour visits to people’s houses in the morning

and in the evening. Her in-laws were very reluctant and opposed it strongly. However, Premalata *did* stand firm in her decision to work. She vowed to reach out to the poorest families of five nearby villages and do her work. She did not stop because her family and relatives disapproved. Although she was subjected to whistles, comments and many de-motivating statements from the villagers, she did not stop working.

Premalata also faced resistance from the people when she tried to convince them to vaccinate and de-worm their livestock. People asked her for her identity card and certification of her work. She simply used to reply, “Tomorrow you are going to call me for sure.” And she would move on to knock at another door to convince the people and repeat the same words she said at the earlier home. This trend went on and she continued to persist; now, she has a flourishing practice with as many as 300 families who rely on her. Premalata is happy with her income because she can now help her family in financial matters. Villagers have stopped whistling at her, and closed doors have opened up for her. She is recognized today as an Animal Health Worker.

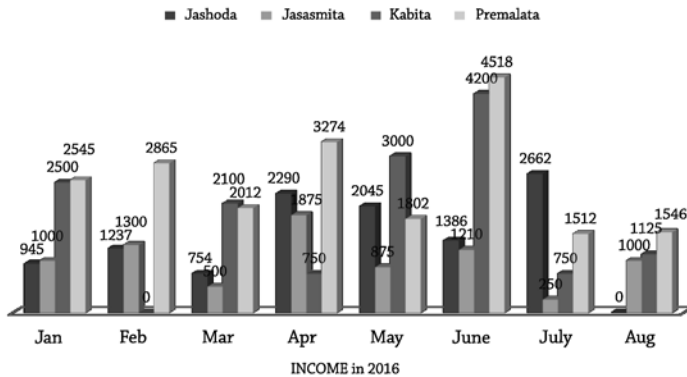
Her struggles and consequent success have made her a role model for the families with whom she is working. She is also an active member of the Baitarani Mahila Sangh and has vowed to strengthen collectives in the area with her motivating words. She visits SHGs to make them functional and lectures on how to earn money through goats and hens. She has a dream she wants to fulfill in 2017. She wants to open a big poultry farm, with a large number of birds and employ a few women to work with her. She has seen many sunrises and many sunsets, and gone through many ups and downs, but her conviction levels have remained high. Her journey is inspiring.

Basic data from these four Animal Health Workers on how much they are earning each month from vaccination and de-worming only (apart from treatment and selling own livestock) show:

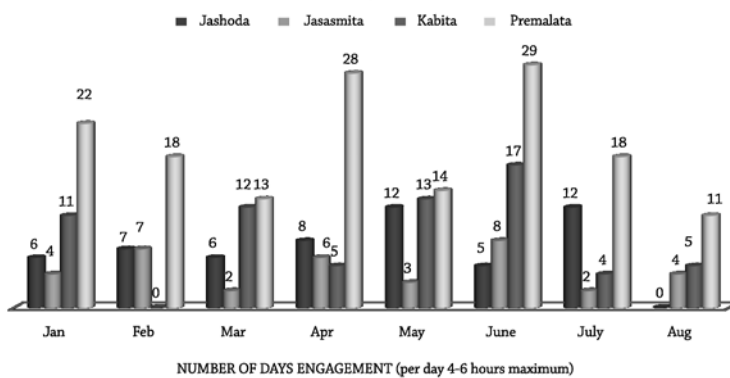
From the above charts it is clear that CAHWs are earning substantially, especially considering the number of days of engagement. The rest of the time they devote to community capacity building, public interaction, attending meetings and events at the village, *gram panchayat* and block levels.

They relate to their Federation and feel proud of it. They tell us that when they say the name of their Federation, people in the villages give them respect and behave politely.

Eight Month's Income Chart of Four CAHWs



Number of Days They Worked



In a nutshell, it can be seen that these four women work very few days as CAHWs, although Premalata is an exception. They get ample time for building relationships with villagers, women and other stakeholders. They derive space from their routine CAHW work, and they use this space and time for their own capacity building and, in the process, emerge as vibrant leaders

as well as role models for their community.

IN SEARCH OF AN IDENTITY

When asked about what the Federation means to them, the CAHWs responded with these statements.

“Our Sampurnna.. Our Swayamsiddha... Our Baitarani

MahilaSangh gave us the identity... we will never ever leave our Federation. We are committed to work for our Federation and we will continue our work as CAHWs. We feel happy. “

“We feel proud when we say we are from the Federation...A Federation of women like us.”

“I have seen the Federation in all its growing stages, I am an old member of it and I feel for it.”

They relate to their Federation and feel proud of it. They tell us that when they say the name of their Federation, people in the villages give them respect and behave politely. Their work gets easier; of course, effort is needed even after a big reference. Still, they agree that the name of the Federation helps them to a great extent.

They have an identity as CAHWs; another identity that they have is that they are members of the Federation. And there is a zest for an identity, which is beyond all these, and that is the spiritual connection they experience when helping other women. Why would a woman help another woman who is vulnerable? What would be their common need to help each other? This question crosses the minds of many newcomers.

Conflicts are necessary for cooperation. A large section of women in society have a conflict with patriarchy, oppression, domestic violence, supremacy of blind beliefs and many more. These problems and conditions are the binding agents that unite the women and help them, gradually, evolve as a Federation.

Someone once said, conflicts are necessary for cooperation. A large section of women in society have a conflict with patriarchy, oppression, domestic violence, supremacy of blind beliefs and many more. These problems and conditions are the binding agents that unite the women and help them, gradually, evolve as a Federation. They have found their common ground.

Although it may not be expressed and articulated clearly, CAHWs relate to all the women of their territory. They say that they

have to reach each and every woman of nearby areas. The zeal to do something for vulnerable women makes them something beyond just CAHWs. They feel happy as they share their success stories enthusiastically, all of them growing together in confidence. There is always a story behind an achievement; beneath every success are stories of transformation. These women, who the community designated as CAHWs, go way beyond their work and share an empathetic connection with the village women, which is rock solid. They

work not just for the money but because this is their passion. They are the change agents whose pathway may have begun with bringing change to the livestock scenario; however, they also look at the dimensions of a woman's life and feel their pain.

CONCLUSION

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Women are the most neglected section of the human race. Masculinity has always dominated over femininity and has thus dampened the



On-field vaccination training to CAHWs

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energies of the women. The male-dominated lens has a clouded vision, and disregards the inner and outer struggles of women. Culture and tradition forced women to manage household affairs whereas men went out to earn money—making them the dominant individuals in the family. Men are not culprits but victims of patriarchy too. This needs to be challenged, and many are doing so in their own distinct ways.

I listen to the stories of the service providers and the difficulties that they have faced and how they have tried to overcome the challenges through their strong motivation and adapted themselves to play the role of guides and counsellors to other women. I realize that the term community service provider has been given by us and we have defined its role. We have given them training, and groomed them technically, according to what we thought was needed.

Many of them have not limited themselves to the task assigned to them or those they have been trained to perform. They have grown beyond this and seem to be traversing their own journey towards excellence—a journey not captured in any format or in our Annual Progress Sheet.

Besides these four women, many other service providers are very passionate and are changing the scenario in agriculture, gender, governance, health and nutrition and other areas. They have the motivation, the energy and the drive to fight the restrictive attitude of society, and they have the courage to face the abuse and, sometimes even stones, thrown at them by the community. This strength may help them in the long run to establish a bigger identity for themselves. If our engagements remain limited to monitoring only their work, there is a great chance of their dropping out because our professional involvement may not touch

“Every woman is a leader—growing and glowing in disguise...”

They are on the way.

Breaking the clods, erasing the dots

Doing something with the clay;

Unfreezing the existing

Designing the master thing

Its the Beginning of their Day.

Way beyond a worker,

Identity deserves to be an inventor.

Secretly may be,

The world is making its way.

their individual lives. Let us engage with them in such a way that we can learn from their life experiences and derive greater lessons that will motivate us to achieve our goals.

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