

# North East Bihar Development Cluster (NEBDC)

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North East Bihar Development Cluster lies close to international borders with Nepal in the north and Bangladesh in the south, which makes it an important strategic zone. Owing to high rainfall during monsoons this area which has a wide network of rivers, rivulets and stream is quite prone to floods (both flash floods and submergence). The region is characterized by low forest cover and high population density. So, people use cow dung cakes, crop residue and green manure crops as cooking fuel. Soil health is adversely impacted as it does not get this necessary organic content, which is used as fuel.

North East Bihar ranks among India's most economically and socially backward regions. In districts like Araria, Katihar, Kishanganj and Purnea, about 62 percent of the population belongs to SC, ST and minority communities. The area has a high Muslim population. The region has witnessed about 30 percent population growth in the last decade. Its sex ratio stands at 924 and the average literacy of the area is 54.54 percent. Landlessness (75 percent) is the major reason for lack of livelihood and food security in the region. A report prepared by the Institute for Human Development (IHD) and the World Food Program (WFP) put Araria, Katihar and Purnea as severe food-insecure districts while Kishanganj as an extremely food-insecure district. Women are more marginalized due to low literacy rates, *purdah* system and various social and religious taboos. Among the four NEBDC districts, PRADAN currently works in two districts – Kishanganj and Araria.

## OVERVIEW OF PRADAN'S OPERATIONS IN NEBDC

| Particulars                     | DC Total        | PRADAN Outreach |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Districts                       | 4               | 2               |
| Population                      | 4.72 million    | 89,480          |
| Percent of Rural Population     | 90              | 100             |
| Percent of ST and SC Population | 62 <sup>1</sup> | 89              |
| Households                      | 960,000         | 17,896          |

| Particulars                          | Scale |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Number of SHGs                       | 1,545 |
| Number of VOs                        | 64    |
| Households covered under Livelihoods | 4,734 |
| PRADAN teams                         | 2     |

| Themes                | Community Collectives |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Health and Nutrition  | 69 SHGs               |
| Gender and Governance | 216 SHGs              |

1. Fifty percent belongs to Muslim community and 12 percent are from the ST and SC groups

PRADAN started work in this DC in January 2013. Since the area is severely food-deficit, our initial interventions focused on livelihoods and improved farm productivity. In the course of this engagement, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society to jointly work in six Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) for nurturing self-sustained community institutions.

### Strengthening Women's Collectives

In the last four and half years, we have mobilized 17,896 women to form 1,545 SHGs. We set up

systems for nurturing the women's collectives. We worked to saturate the Gram Panchayats we are engaged in, by mobilizing new families into SHGs.

During the year 2017-18, the DC focused on improving SHG systems and norms by providing training to the new members. The systematic functioning of SHGs has brought vibrancy in the collectives of this area. The DC has made considerable progress in SHG - bank linkage program. This year more than 300 SHGs received credit from banks.

## Breaking Stereotypes: One Step at a Time

*"Kadam badhaa ke  
chalna hain toh pau  
pasaare mat baitho"*



Photo: Shashant Vijay

"If we want to move ahead, let's not remain idly seated", rings a determined voice of Wasima, from a small hamlet in Bahadurganj block of Bihar. True to her words, rural women from Muslim communities in North East Bihar are bringing change, one step at a time, for justice and equality.

*"Gaon ke baahar akele pehli baar aayi hoon"*

"This is the first time that I have ventured outside my village all alone", the excitement and nervousness quite visible in her voice. Wasima was at the block headquarters, some 30 kilometres away from her village to attend the SHG foundation training. Stepping out of her home without being accompanied by male member(s) of her family was something unfathomable for this mother of four children from a conservative household.



The SHG foundation training was just the first step for the women of the Anjali group. What began as a tentative beginning is today a vibrant collective of women from poor households belonging to diverse backgrounds. As the group norms were set and regular saving and inter-lending began, the women realized that the group was much more than merely an instrument for financial support in times of need. It was the first time in the village that women from different castes and religions were sitting together and discussing issues pertaining to their lives and their village. They now aspired for a different and a better life where they are the masters of their own destiny.



Photo: Juba Pratim Gogoi

### *“Logon ka bolne se pet nahi bharega na!”*

“People who pass comments will not solve my problems”, says Wasima explaining how she no more cares about unwarranted comments coming her way as she challenges entrenched societal norms. Wasima was on an exposure visit on rug-making at Gaya, which is about 400 kilometres from her village. Incidentally, Wasima was the only woman from her village ever to have gone out for a week without being accompanied by a male member of the family. In the weekly SHG meeting, she shared her insights from the visit to Gaya. Incredibly, the women of this SHG are now planning to pilot something similar in their village. It is a brave ambition for women who are supposed to look after their households and work in their farms.

As they wrap up the meeting, One cannot help but feel their sense of quiet confidence as Wasima and her friends break one stereotype after another. It is still a long way to go for this collective but the seeds of change have been sown.

#### **COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION ACROSS PRADAN LOCATIONS**

In 2017-18, we witnessed 19 percent growth in community outreach. We reached out to 111,397 new households, and overall we worked with 700,226 families. This growth can be attributed to the community led model of SHG expansion that has been in place for the last 3-4 years. A large

number of SHG members volunteered to enroll the remaining village women into SHGs. Commensurate to growth in the household coverage, the number of SHGs increased to 56,500 from last year's total of 46,416 SHGs (up by 22 percent).