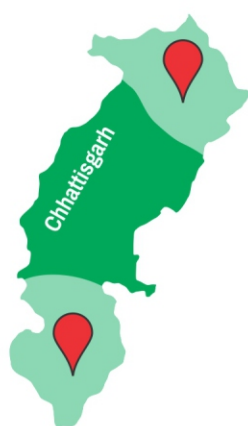


XI

North and South Chhattisgarh Development Cluster (NSCDC)



North and South Chhattisgarh Development Cluster comprises of 13 districts of Chhattisgarh. In PRADAN's work area, at least 50 percent population is tribal. This is the largest concentration of STs in any state in India outside the North East. Gond is the major tribe of the region. According to the Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011, more than 80 percent households in this DC face multidimensional deprivations. The Maoist movement has had a significant presence in the southern districts of Chhattisgarh since the 1980s. Wide disparity persists in the literacy rates of males (79.27 percent) and females (60.07 percent).

OVERVIEW OF PRADAN'S OPERATIONS IN NSCDC

Particulars	DC Total	PRADAN Outreach
Districts	13	4
Population	10 million	300,210
Percent of Rural Population	82	100
Percent of ST and SC Population	60	73
Households	1.9 million	60,042

Particulars	Scale
Number of SHGs	4,983
Number of VOs	359
Households covered under Livelihoods	24,471
PRADAN teams	6

Themes	Community Collectives
Health and Nutrition	55 SHGs
Gender and Governance	2,006 SHGs

PRADAN started working in Bilaspur district (then a part of Madhya Pradesh) in the year 1991 as a development consulting organization. The current approach of direct engagement was initiated in 1999 with the setting up of a team in Raigarh district. Gradually the operations spread to three more districts namely Dhamtari, Kanker and Bastar. Over these years, we have worked intensively in NSCDC, promoting and strengthening women's institutions, livelihood options, access to assets and services, and facilitated women's participation in local governance. We have also partnered with the State and 12 CSOs to accelerate the change process.

Strengthening Local Governance through Capacity Building

In NSCDC, PRADAN has developed capacities of women's collectives, especially of VOs, to facilitate women's participation in Gram Sabhas. This includes developing the Gram Panchayat Development Plan and MGNREGS plan, in addition to strengthening the social security programs such as PDS.

Implementing MGNREGS

As we facilitated implementation of MGNREGS in the DC, we faced multiple challenges. Sensitizing women's collectives for assertive development action, and helping the line departments to effectively implement the program were two of the key challenges.

We mobilized thousands of women to participate in Gram Sabhas. This was achieved through numerous meetings and trainings to develop women's awareness of their rights and entitlements under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The collectives demanded employment

on Rozgar Diwas (Employment Day), discussed issues of delayed payment and organized meetings for linking Aadhaar number with job card and bank account number for smooth payment process.

A total of INR 107 million (US\$ 1.64 million) was mobilized from MGNREGS, out of this INR 103 million (US\$ 1.6 million) was invested in creating individual assets like irrigation infrastructure and land development.



Photo: Ashutosh Nanda

United We Stand, United We Can

Organized poor women with a united voice are always a force to reckon with. They can bring about many societal changes including ensuring rightful payment of MGNREGS dues.

Photo: Ashutosh Nanda



“Kyun aaye ho sab milke? Chahti kya ho aap log?”

“Why have you gathered here? What do you want?” said the Police Officer to members of Ekta Mahila Sangh, the block level federation of women SHGs promoted by Chhattisgarh SRLM and facilitated by PRADAN. Ekta Mahila Sangh is an association of 515 SHGs with more than 5,000 memberships in Kanker district of Chhattisgarh. Eighty percent of the members are from the tribal group.

“Humare paas ekattha jama hone ka permission hai aur hum kanoon ke hisaab se hi kaam kar rahe hain”

“We have permission for the gathering and we are acting as per the law”, replied the women who had gathered to demand their rightful dues.

About a thousand persistent women members had gathered in front of the block office, with a common purpose. Their wage payment and unemployment compensation under MGNREGS had not been cleared. It was close to a year for some without any payment for past work. Despite constitutional guarantees for work, there seem to be little headway. But this strong grassroots institution of the poor which is a platform for collective action, as envisioned by SRLM, was not ready to give up.

The women had come with placards that read

*“Hum humara haq mangte
Nahi kisi se bheek mangte”*

“We are demanding our rights, not begging from anyone.”

A thousand unorganized poor women is just a mass but a united voice of strong collective is always a force to reckon with. Raising their voice and singing songs, they were in the block office to highlight their grievances, with all necessary documents in tow.

It was not the first time that the women were raising this issue. Repetitive demands at various levels had failed to generate affirmative action.

Several meetings were conducted at hamlets and villages to concretise evidence-based documentation and creating awareness. Initially officials paid no heed. However, after the initial phases of 'prayers and petitions' from the women, when it turned into a collective action involving a thousand of them, the administration was bound to take notice.

At the block office, a high-level meeting was called by senior officials, including the CEO of the MGNREGS cell and police officials. The administration also understood the gravity of the situation and was supportive of their rightful demand.

The news of more than a thousand women demanding their rightful dues made it to local newspapers. Photographs, quotes and news covering this initiative of largely poor and illiterate but united tribal women got adequate media attention.

All grievance applications were accepted and the women got their rightful dues under MGNREGS.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNANCE ACROSS PRADAN LOCATIONS

The objectives of our governance interventions are better implementation of the government programs like MGNREGS and improved access to government services like PDS by the community. For doing this, we engaged with the state representatives and government functionaries to sensitize them about women collectives and helped CBOs in identifying and addressing community needs.

We made efforts to ensure that poor farmers got maximum specified work under MGNREGS and received payments as per the MGNREGS provisions.

Our initiatives have resulted in collectives raising issues of service delivery and access to social service schemes, and have ensured enhanced participation of women in the Gram Sabha and local elections. Across our locations, a total of 1,890 VOs are involved in Gram Sabha and INR 400 million (US\$ 6.14 million) was mobilized under MGNREGS for facilitating land and water development activities.