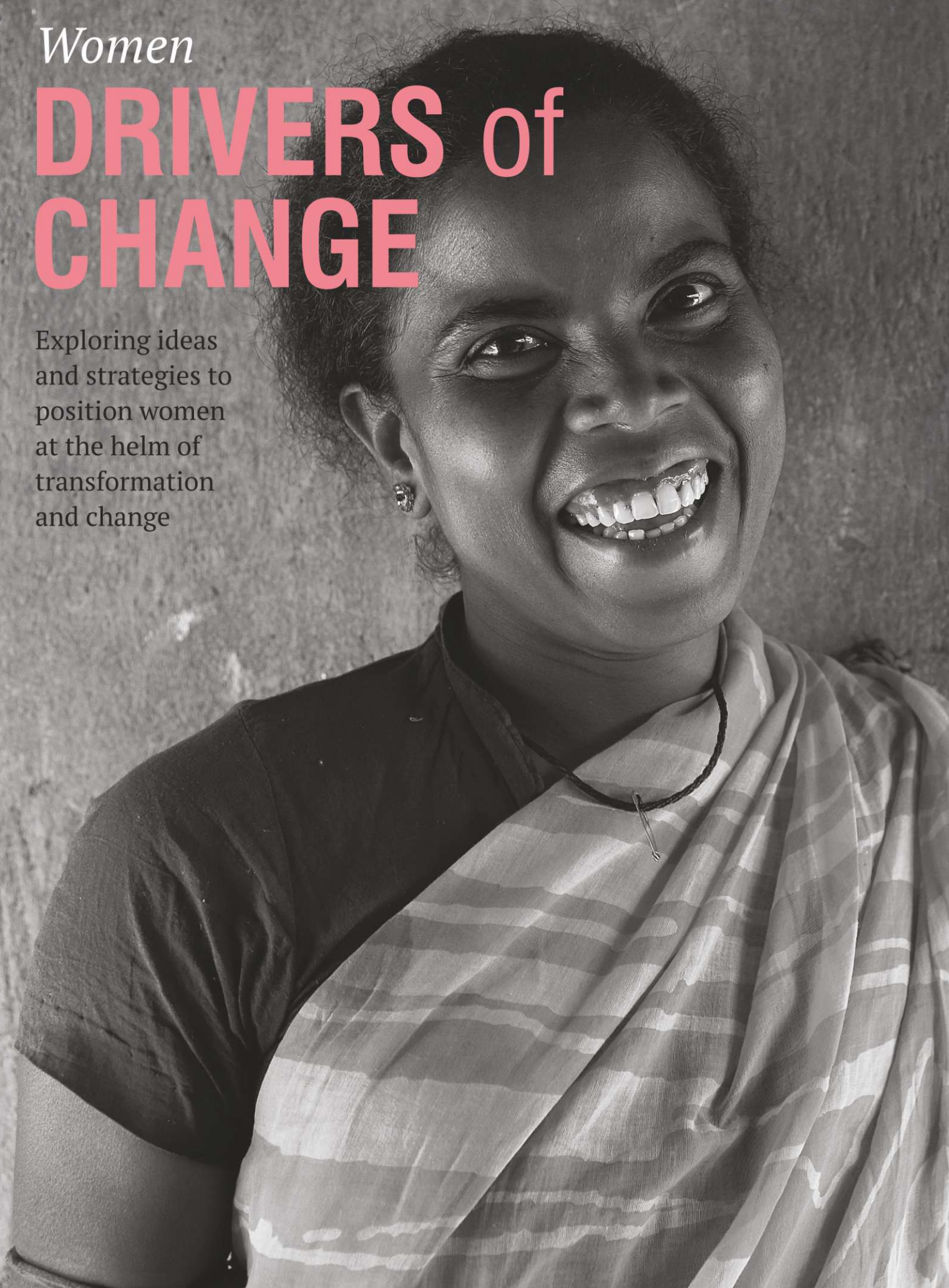


Women

DRIVERS of CHANGE

Exploring ideas
and strategies to
position women
at the helm of
transformation
and change



Our vision of a just and equitable society relies on individuals and their collectives having an enhanced 'sense of agency'. And ensuring that the usually excluded voices of women, dalits and tribals are heard.

Sense of agency is the ability to take action, make choices and influence one's own life; it arises from understanding the significance of self, and the belief that 'I matter'.

In our work, we engage with women's collectives on issues of gender, caste and class, governance, discrimination, violence, and self identity. This strengthens their belief in their own ability to influence and control their lives.

This year, together with women's collectives we actively explored ideas and strategies to position them at the helm of the transformation agenda and change processes.

The action on ground included expanding the leadership pool of women to spread the concept and the creation of self-help groups (SHGs) to newer areas. We also helped create and build village organizations to facilitate more women's access to public forums, such as Gram Sabhas and other statutory committees, to demand their rights.

A significant aspect of the change process was their continually evolving self-identity, where women acknowledged and asserted their role as farmers and citizens in their own right, and identified areas of development for their own selves and their communities.

Outcomes of Our New Approach

This year, SHG members themselves proactively mobilized 108,000 women to form 9,025 SHGs marking a 29% annual growth as compared to an average growth of 13% over the last 4 years.

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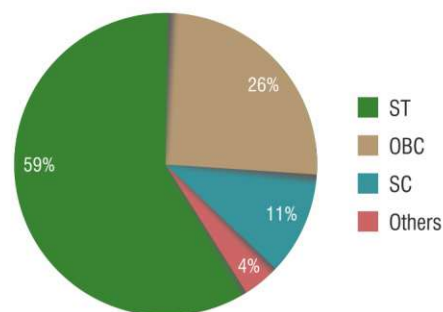
REACHING THE UNREACHED

With our shift in approach of working at the grassroots, we have:

- Stepped back from playing the role of change makers and have, instead, taken up the responsibility to groom women themselves to lead the change;
- Reduced the number of 'paid' community service providers (CSPs) involved in inclusion and strengthening the SHG network. This was to let people's own initiative and sense of responsibility towards their community come forth.
- Begun building and strengthening associative SHG tiers at various levels.

Village organizations (VOs), comprising members of SHGs as well as non-members, responsible for bringing all eligible families into the SHG network, were set up. The commitment and initiative of a large number of SHG members ensured saturation in many villages on a mission mode.

To spread the SHG concept to new areas multiple opportunities were created for non-SHG members to see and experience the dynamic of SHGs in action. Additionally, *Mahadhivesans*—they are annual congregations of women's collectives—brought all women in the SHG network together, to celebrate their journey and achievements. *Mahadhivesans* had gatherings of up to 10,000 women, with cultural events, exhibitions, and technical sessions.



Overall Outreach FY 2015–16: **482, 157 Households**

The year witnessed a total outreach to 482,157 poor households in 116 blocks across 6,780 villages in 37 districts across 7 states





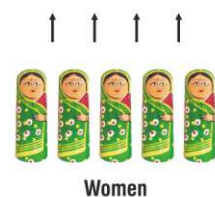
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Representatives from VOs and SHGs formed Gram Panchayat level federations (GPLFs)/ cluster level federations (CLFs), some of which developed into block level federations (BLFs) – the next tiers of association, to work with the local government at their levels.

A total of 2,731 VOs were formed or reorganized from existing clusters, as a platform for women to congregate on village development issues.

The total number of GPLFs and BLFs were 80 at the end of the year. The following table gives comparative growth figures of SHGs and their associative tiers including financials and group health.

SHG & ASSOCIATED TIERS	Mar-14	Mar-15	Mar-16
Number of SHGs	22,618	28,669	37,617
Number of clusters	2,526	2,003	696
Number of village organizations	–	–	2,731
Number of block and panchayat level federations	78	85	80
SHG DETAILS			
Net owned funds (in ₹ millions)	799	1,015	1,399
Cumulative credit disbursed till date (₹ millions)	455	494	1,831
Loan outstanding (₹ millions)	346	431	928
SHGs with satisfactory quality of book keeping (cash book, passbooks, minutes)	16,094	21,458	25,570
SHGs with annually audited accounts	–	–	20,452
SHGs with computerized data maintenance	13,390	19,456	21,596
Number of SHGs with savings bank accounts	–	–	27,760
Cumulative number of SHGs that are credit linked (cash credit or term loan)	3,335	2,800	6,125



Structure of a Women's Federation from grassroots upwards

BOLSTERING GOVERNANCE

Women's collectives took the initiative to demand for their rights and entitlements under different government programs

The year saw women influencing local governance through concerted efforts to improve the functioning of public institutions and their functionaries. Women have influenced decisions affecting their lives through increased participation in Gram Sabhas, *Jati* Panchayats (informal caste-based groups) and local administration.

There is a shift in the way women regard themselves today. They see themselves less as 'beneficiaries' and more as key stakeholders at all stages of implementation of government programs created for their benefit.

A critique and analysis of public institutions opened up better means to contribute in improving their functioning and mapping ways of engagement.

Women's collectives took the initiative to demand for their rights and entitlements under different government programs such as the Public Distribution System (PDS), employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and for better nutrition and child health under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).

Apart from expanding the SHG network, VOs played a significant role in supporting women's participation at various village level committees (VLCs) as members, and facilitated their access to information on government schemes and programs.

Through the women, communities proactively addressed the problems they faced. Approximately 2,000 VOs and multiple VLCs sorted out various delivery



Growing Community-based Institutions

Some geographic areas, where women's collectives have reached a level of maturity, were identified and 8 teams were dedicated to these places to build a federation structure and groom office bearers. The teams' focus was to strengthen and facilitate these mature federations in their management and governance processes.

This model of SHG federation, which focuses on women's socio-economic development and empowerment to claim their rights and entitlements, has not been worked upon by many organizations. There are also very few existing institutions to learn from, making the task much more challenging. In the coming years the focus will be on the process of organization development.

issues in MNREGS, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), PDS and Right to Education (RTE).

People asserted themselves during the Rozgar Diwas, demanding for redressal camps, and also to link them to relevant office bearers to address different issues. They actively participated in the Integrated Participatory Planning Exercise (IPPE - II), the flagship initiative of the Ministry of Rural

Development (MoRD), Government of India. Besides influencing local institutions from the outside, at least 6,000 SHG members contested elections held for the local self-governance (LSG) institutions across our development clusters. In Jharkhand alone, 350 women candidates were elected to LSG institutions.

Mainstreaming women's role in the public sphere and rights-based action for

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citizenship engagement is a goal of the NRLM-MGNREGS-CFT (National Rural Livelihoods Mission-Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme-Cluster Facilitation Teams) initiative, developed by the MoRD. It intends to enhance the quality of MGNREGS processes in the 250 most backward blocks of the country. The plan has immense potential for generating wage employment, asset creation, livelihood enhancement and strengthening local governance.

In Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh, women's collectives actively took part in several government sponsored initiatives aimed at promoting decentralized planning, and participatory processes of monitoring and engagement with PRIs to strengthen development planning for village and panchayats. For example, the IPPE-II, and Gram Panchayat Development Planning (GPDP) were the major programs that saw large-scale participation of women collectives to improve planning around natural resources, livelihoods, well-being

services and, more importantly, to bring marginalized and excluded households into mainstream development processes.

Decentralized planning exercises were further reinforced through convergence of public investments through flagship programs such as the NRLM-MGNREGS-CFT to trigger large-scale assetization around land, water and tree resources.

In our project areas, SHG collectives spearheaded the initiative to facilitate the inclusion of small and marginal farm households to access public investments to create durable assets. Decentralized planning and participatory monitoring by SHG collectives contributed greatly to the quality of plans, the community's access to mainstream services, and efficiency of program delivery by the system. These efforts have also facilitated stakeholder alignment to sustainably improve governance at the lowest tier, and the responsiveness of public systems to their needs. Across 7 states, communities

Across 7 states communities mobilized more than ₹ 300 million from MGNREGS to create individual as well as common infrastructure for their villages





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In Jharkhand, PRADAN as a resource organization has facilitated collectives to participate at all stages of MGNREGS' implementation in 18 blocks.

In Balaghat district, Madhya Pradesh, 23 special Gram Sabhas were organized by SHG members on different issues. Women participated in various events related to rights of women farmers, women's land rights, and articulated and placed a charter of demands to the administration in the Mahakaushal development cluster.

In other areas of the state, VLCs created interface between the community, office bearers and frontline workers for different services. These collaborations with the local administration have grown visibly with women monitoring Anganwadi Centers, PDS shops and other activities in schools. Scaling this up across all villages is the next challenge for the federations.

In Chhattisgarh, women's cluster level federations (CLFs) have been involved in preparing village development plans. A grievance redressal camp, demanded by the women in the cluster, was organized by the

Zila Panchayat under the chairpersonship of CEO, Zila Panchayat. It was a significant achievement where approximately 530 SHG members submitted 406 applications related to MGNREGS, opening of bank branches in the area, safe drinking water, toilets, irrigation infrastructure, agriculture assets, etc. to different departments. Out of these, 386 cases were resolved on the same day.

In another instance, during the Rozgar Diwas, the collectives demanded employment under the MGNREGS, discussed issues related to payment of wages, and organized meetings to demand linking Aadhar cards with job cards and account numbers for smooth payment. They also demanded for increased number of labor days by ensuring an increase in the labor budget in their Gram Panchayats.

Through their action, ₹ 92 million was mobilized from MGNREGS out of which ₹ 84 million was invested to create individual assets like irrigation infrastructure and other land and water interventions.

Women across 45 blocks in Jharkhand participated in the Yojana Banao Abhiyaan-YBA (a local name for IPPE-II) to make village development plans with the government.

Overall, women have influenced different government programs and helped create a large number of physical assets aiding livelihoods, with support from our teams, for integrated natural resource management (INRM).

—
Nearly 35,000 families participated in asset creation to develop land and water resources.

—
More than 7,500 infrastructure facilities: water harvesting structures and seepage tanks for irrigation were created, irrigating a command area of 5,000 hectares (ha).

—
More than 6,000 ha of land was treated and improved through bunding, leveling and terracing.

RECOGNIZING WOMEN AS FARMERS

Despite their active engagement in agricultural activities, women are rarely regarded as farmers in their own right; they are treated more as farm laborers.

Helping women explore and practice roles beyond conventionally defined boundaries is one of PRADAN's primary mandates. It is a long journey of self-awareness and evolution that begins with acknowledging deeply held beliefs about one's 'self' and moves to recognizing one's value and consequently asserting oneself as an 'equal decision maker'. Our engagement continued with women and their collectives in this journey of evolving identities.

In the sphere of farm-based activities, women expressed interest in developing skills and technical know-how to reinforce their position as decision makers in crop planning, implementation and marketing. In response, basic training modules that encouraged reflection and strengthened



their confidence as trainers and progressive farmers were developed. These not only contributed to a shift in perception of their own 'selves' but also helped them extend themselves to impart knowledge and provide services to other local farmers.

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Earning Respect as a Farmer

Nilai Hikaka

Nilai, a tribal woman of Gopikankubadi village, Odisha, never had a formal education. With a family of 6 and a sick husband, she was surviving on wage labor as a stone crusher. She earned ₹ 15,000-16,000 a year, which provided the family with only 3-4 months of food.

It was impossible for her to provide even the most basic of necessities to her family – food on the plate, education for her children, and medical care for her husband and children. Her 3-acre undulating

agricultural land remained unproductive for many years, till she connected with the local self-help group. This was the start of a new journey for her.

Through the SHG, Nilai gained information and experience which allowed her to question and think of possibilities that could make life more comfortable. She began medical care for her husband through small loans from the SHG.

She and her husband then mobilized funds under MGNREGS to treat their land with various soil and water conservation measures under integrated natural resource management. Today, they earn more than ₹ 100,000 a year, having adopted improved agriculture practices.

They are food sufficient all year round; the younger children go to school while the older son is enrolled at an ITI to become an electrician after the diploma.

Nilai saves money in her own bank account and considers herself an accomplished farmer today.

They earn more than ₹ 100,000 a year, having adopted improved agriculture practices. Nilai considers herself an accomplished farmer today



TOWARDS ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Today, vegetable cultivation is considered a vital engagement; almost 70% of the households involved in agriculture are cultivating a wide range of vegetables

Since poor households depend on multiple avenues for secure income enhancement, livelihood support is centered on five broad categories: agriculture and horticulture, forest based livelihoods, livestock and micro enterprises.

Over the years, our teams have developed different livelihood prototypes calibrated for local areas with varying resource endowments.

Women's collectives, this year, worked with 224,939 women in livelihood activities; which comprised 47% of the total families in the SHG network.

Farm-based Livelihoods

Our approach to farm-based livelihoods includes promoting integrated natural resource management (INRM), ensuring food sufficiency round the year from one's own land, and earning cash incomes sufficient for the family to sustain itself in the village without being forced into distress migration.

Agricultural interventions for the year were planned through a consultative process involving women farmers, volunteers, CSPs, professionals, technical experts, government officials of line departments, etc. Cluster level *melas* were held to bring in many members to engage in improved farm-based activities.

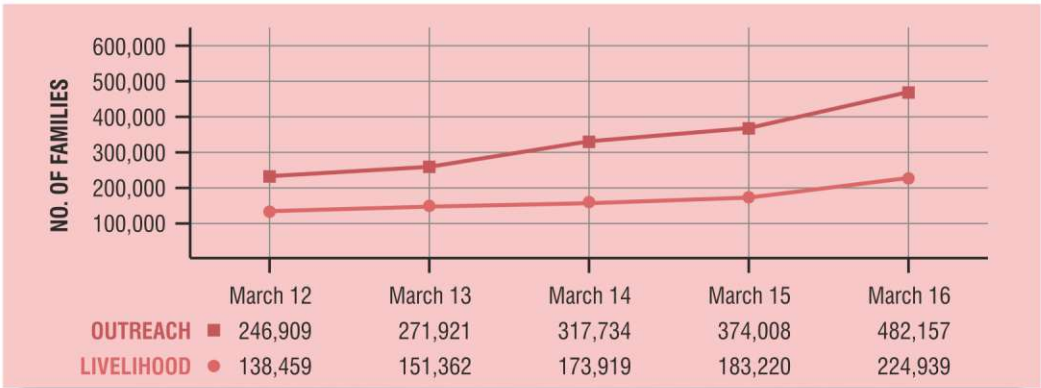
During the year, 214,715 families worked on agriculture, horticulture and floriculture covering 76,478 ha of cultivable land.

Adopting improved practices of using new and better quality seeds, treating old seeds for increased productivity, setting up short duration nurseries, following line planting with adequate spacing, System of Rice Intensification (SRI), Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) and using agriculture implements such as weeding machines and markers have resulted in better returns on investment.

Communities diversified cultivation by using different types of locally adapted vegetables on their tracts of land. This addressed nutritional security and economic viability, which often gets ignored in monoculture farming practices. Today, vegetable cultivation is considered a vital engagement for them; almost 70% of the households involved in agriculture are cultivating a wide range of vegetables. Some new techniques such as grafting tomatoes were introduced along with improved practices of raised-bed nurseries for vegetables, use of nylon threads and bamboo for staking tomatoes, use of insecticides and fungicides during nursery preparation, mosquito net and transparent polyethylene, and preparing *machan*/trellis for creepers.

With each family, an average of 3 varieties of crop interventions was made during the year.

>
Total Outreach
vis-a-vis Families
in Livelihoods



ON-FIELD INTERVENTIONS	CULTIVATED AREA (ha)		PARTICIPATING FAMILIES	
	<i>Kharif</i>	<i>Rabi</i>	<i>Kharif</i>	<i>Rabi</i>
Cereal Crops	46,158	7,460	180,812	35,474
Pulses	3,609	889	49,413	13,046
Oilseeds	1,132	2,604	19,764	25,841
Vegetables	7,971	3,581	120,122	65,050
Vegetables (summer)	411		12,328	
Floriculture	56		1,283	
Fruit Orchards	2,606		12,099	

Details of farmers' on-field interventions are given in the table above.

Agriculture Production Clusters (APCs) aimed at intensifying crop production in a given geography (cluster of 4-6 villages,

200-400 families) and facilitating strong linkages with the markets, became more active in many areas. By improving information dissemination, the intervention has enabled farmers to make better use of opportunities available in the market.



Production Increases by 3 Metric Tonnes (mt) per Hectare (ha).

Across different locations, paddy has shown increase from 2 mt per ha to 4.5 - 5 mt per ha. The DSR technology saw large-scale introduction and acceptance in various communities given its increased tolerance to drought conditions. Increased yield was noticed in the following crops:

- Improved maize cultivation (from 1.5 mt per ha to 3.5 to 5 mt per ha).
- Yield of wheat increased 2.5 times by changing the cultivation methodology coupled with availability of irrigation.



Highlights from Agriculture Production Clusters

— 200 families joined an APC to cultivate cucumber and tomatoes in the Khunti block, Khunti district, South Chhotanagpur development cluster (SCDC), Jharkhand.

Sowing cucumbers and raising tomato nurseries were done at the same time to ensure produce harvest and marketing coincided. Despite a poor monsoon, households producing cucumber earned an average net income of ₹ 6,000 to 8,000 while tomato farmers earned an average of ₹ 15,000 to 20,000.

— The Gumakia APC spread across 4 villages (Gumakia, Dalapata, Bondaguda and Gaglimaha) in Balliguda block, Kandhamal

district, South Odisha development cluster (SODC), supported 80 families with technical support and farmer training. Trainings focused on strengthening bean cultivation for bulk marketing through quality seeds, addressing working capital requirements, and coordinated sowing, all of which generated a substantial income enhancement for farmers. Average income of the participating families was ₹ 11,250, of which 26 families earned a net income of over ₹ 20,000.

— Banana cultivation began in collaboration with the horticulture department. Thirteen women from 3 SHGs planted Grand Nain (G-9), a high yielding variety of banana across 10 hectares in Ghagra block, Gumla district in the SCDC.



The productivity of tomato plants went up to 15-20 kgs per plant from 2-3 kgs, a five-fold increase

Optimizing Tomato Yields: Adopting Innovations

Tomato cultivation was introduced for small and marginal farmers to get better returns from small pieces of land, especially in the rainy season. Although tomato plants can grow under a wide range of climatic conditions, they are extremely sensitive to heat and humidity.

Over the last few years, researchers and farmers of Bangladesh have made an innovation in tomato production technology. It is widely known as 'Summer Tomato Cultivation' or 'Poly Tunnel Technology'.

We adopted this technology two years ago at our Jangal Mahal development cluster (JMDC) in Purulia, Bankura and Paschim Midnapore districts of West Bengal. The experiment, yielding mixed results, was a learning experience that demonstrated the potential of this technology. To address gaps and adapt the technology to India, our teams have been adjusting the model and building in more rigor to achieve desired productivity and income.

They have successfully demonstrated the practice of this technique to more than 200 small and marginal farmers in both rain-fed and dry land areas. It is called 'Rain-shelter Tomato Cultivation'.

The productivity of tomato plants went up to 15-20 kgs per plant from 2-3 kgs. A five-fold increase.

This protective practice has emerged as a better alternative to conventional tomato cultivation, not only in terms of higher returns on investment but also in terms of reducing both physical drudgery as well as worry about the success of the plantation.

*With support from PRADAN, NSPDT was formed as a separate for-profit organization to take forward the agenda of promoting smallholder poultry in the country.

NSPDT's support helped producers rear 28,065 metric tonnes of live birds and generated a turnover of ₹ 2,869 million

Other Major Livelihoods Interventions

Apart from farm-based livelihoods, members participated in forest based activities and micro enterprises to enhance incomes. These included broiler farming, goat rearing, tasar rearing, lac cultivation and mulberry sericulture. Fish rearing has also come up as a new initiative in many areas.

Broiler Farming

For continued income throughout the year, 9,183 women producers were encouraged to take up broiler poultry rearing. This has emerged as a powerful livelihood activity accounting for robust incomes for families. Through techno-managerial guidance from the National Smallholder Poultry Development Trust (NSPDT)* poultry producers were grouped into cooperatives and trained to set up broiler units.

The poultry producers' cooperatives, supported by NSPDT, marketed live birds to serve the growing needs of small towns and urban markets.

NSPDT's support helped producers rear 28,065 metric tonnes of live birds and generated a turnover of ₹ 2,869 million.

Goat Rearing

A smallholder goat rearing model has been standardized across locations. It includes proper shed construction, improved breeding through the induction of good quality bucks, etc. In the initial stages, groups of women were promoted to implement different activities through peer learning and support. However, as the scale of operation increased, nearly 300 Community Animal Health Workers (CAHW) were introduced to take responsibility of follow up, timely deworming, vaccinations, first aid and good management practices. Increased income generation has been the primary reason for the growing interest in the activity.

8,185 families have been involved in goat rearing, in more than 300 villages. Of the families involved, nearly 50% had an income of more than ₹ 10,000 per annum.





Tasar Rearing

Tasar Development Foundation (TDF), a sectoral organization worked with 9,750 farmers/ rearers in tasar silk rearing during the year. Farmers were supported by grainage entrepreneurs for seed rearing. At par in quality with the Central Silk Board's standards, the seed cocoons produced by these farmers were enough to cover the entire year's requirement.

A total of 1.3 million disease-free layings (DFLs) and 60 million cocoons were produced, helping rearers earn an income of ₹ 161 million.

Mulberry Sericulture

The outreach of mulberry sericulture increased two-fold, covering 726 farmers in 50 villages (Madhya Pradesh).

PRADAN has helped set up a for-profit organization of mulberry sericulture producers, called Samuha. It is planned to be registered as a company under the Companies Act.

It is currently operating in 7 *chawki* (silkworm rearing areas) rearing centers to get quality DFLs for its farmers, which is an important factor for productivity and production. There has been significant growth in production and income during the year. Currently 70% farmers earn more than ₹ 40,000 (annually). The producer's collective had a gross turnover of ₹ 26 million, earning a profit of ₹ 3.5 million.

Cultivating Lac

Lac rearing and cultivation is a traditional occupation and an important source of income for tribal families residing in forest fringes. To help families get more support in this venture, our teams helped establish links between the families and officials of the forest department.

There are 6,380 families who have taken up lac rearing and cultivation across our development clusters. In Mayurbhanj district, Odisha, 533 families in 14 villages began this activity this year and each family, on an average was able to earn an income of ₹ 15,000 annually.

Fish Rearing

Fishery is fast emerging as a livelihood option in many communities. Presently 609 families are participating in this effort in certain geographies. In Churchu block, Hazaribagh district, a group of about 100 fish farmers collectively known as Kisan Matshya Utpadak Samuh, have found this to be a sustainable livelihood option considering the demand for fresh fish in the local markets of Jharkhand.

Teams have expanded their focus in this activity by providing training on improved rearing practices along with direct inputs such as fingerlings, feed and medicines.

8,185 families have been involved in goat rearing in more than 300 villages, of whom nearly 50% had an income of more than ₹ 10,000 per annum