



## Planting seeds of change in India: How communal gardening and nutrition trainings transform gender roles

### About Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience Project (SENU)

The Indo-German project 'Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience (SENU) – India' is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ GmbH) in collaboration with the Indian Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). It is part of the Special Initiative "Transformation of Agricultural and Food Systems" (SI AGER) by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and is co-financed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

### Aim

- Improvement of the nutritional situation of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) and small children (6-23 months) in six districts in the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra
- Gender equality as important secondary objective of SENU

*Achieving food and nutrition security is intricately linked to gender equality.*

### How we work on linking nutrition and gender

SENU implements a Social Behaviour Change (SBC) driven integrated approach linking nutrition and agriculture. The project trains more than 10,000 female *Anganwadi* workers (government frontline workers) in counselling families on nutrition, food production and hygiene practices through regular Nutrition Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) trainings for pregnant and lactating women, fathers, adolescents, and extended family members. The trainings are linked with women-led Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs) to improve access and availability of nutritious food at household and community level. The CNGs engage landless women from vulnerable communities who are organised in women collectives, called Self-Help Groups (SHGs) comprising 10-15 women. The SHGs develop and maintain the CNGs and receive wages for their work through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) of the Government of India.

### Impact



### Transforming Gender Roles

Deeply rooted gender role divisions manifest in lack of engagement by men and other family members in nutrition constitutes a main challenge to lasting impact. Informed by research about gender norms and practices, SENU developed a comprehensive gender-transformative approach (GTA).



*Just like two wheels are required for stability, similarly husband and wife should share equal love, care and responsibility for a happy and healthy family.*

Bhagsingh Songhara, a man who participated in the street theatre



*Earlier I used to wonder why I was born at all if I don't have anything. But now it feels good that I can do a lot. Being part of this initiative [CNG] makes me feel that I can touch the sky.*



Anita Bai Shiv, member of a SHG





## With the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) in our project...



...attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes on nutrition, food production and childcare are changed at all levels (individual, family, community)



...specific interventions target women livelihoods, engagement of men in nutrition and household chores, engaging with community leaders, etc.



...men are involved in tailor-made N-PLA trainings and participatory gender theatre performances that challenge traditional views of masculinity.



...parents jointly learn about child feeding, dietary diversity, and gender roles.



...capacity building on GTA of implementing partners, field executives and SHG members through 'Gender Makes Nutrition Sense trainings'



*People at home appreciate us, and we are starting to get respect from people in the village.*

Rajkumari Renuka,  
member of a SHG



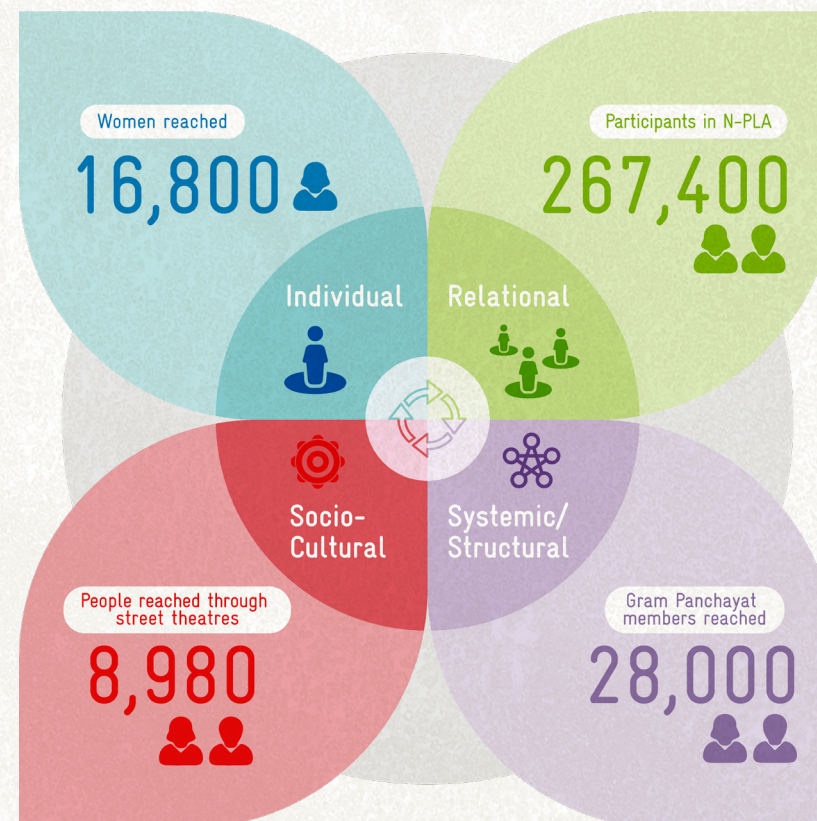
*Husband and wife should go together to the market and should decide together about buying food and materials for the household.*

Sonaji More Devrikhurda, a male  
participant in the N-PLA trainings



## To achieve this, SENU drew from the 'Quadrants of Change for Empowerment':

- Strengthening livelihoods of women by mobilising them in SHGs to maintain Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs)
- Engagement of all household members in CNGs and N-PLA
- Dialogues in community on roles of men and women in nutrition



- Campaigns (e.g. #MenCare), participatory and community-based street theatres
- “Gender Makes Nutrition Sense” Training
- Multisectoral CNG model with MGNREGS (government level)
- SBC strategy with Department for Women and Child Development Madhya Pradesh (state level)
- Capacity building of change agents (across all levels)

## About reinventing the wheel

A study by SENU on uncommon practices among families with well-nourished mothers and young children revealed gender-related aspects. The motto “*people are not empty vessels*” assumes that in every community, there are people who have found ways to overcome their challenges with their own solutions that do not require any additional resources. In line with post-colonial and power-critical approaches, SENU also adopted the *Positive Deviance (PD) approach*. The research findings indicate that when husbands and wives have equal standing, families tend to be more nourished and healthier. Various methods to achieve this balance are evident in different communities. Examples include families prioritising shared meals where mothers aren’t consistently the last to eat, engaging in joint decision-making, particularly regarding family planning, and opting for later marriage ages compared to prevailing norms.



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