

A Practitioner's Guide to Integrated Approaches for Food and Nutrition Security: Insights from Project SENU



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Integrated Approach in the Context of Food and Nutrition Security

Food and nutrition insecurity is shaped by a web of interconnected factors: poverty, limited access to land and resources, weak governance systems, climate stress, entrenched gender inequities, and gaps in knowledge or services. Tackling such a multi-dimensional challenge requires more than sectoral solutions. It requires different actors working together and pooling their strengths, aligning their actions, and building accountability across levels.

An Integrated Approach recognises that food and nutrition security cannot be solved by one department, one policy, or one programme alone. Health, agriculture, social protection, education, rural development, and community governance, all influence whether families have access to safe, affordable, and nutritious food. Instead of working in silos, these sectors are brought together in a deliberate, coordinated manner. Their unique expertise and resources are connected towards a shared goal: ensuring sustainable food and nutrition security, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

At the heart of integration lies nutrition governance. This means fostering accountability, inclusion, and transparency, so that decision-making is not top-down but participatory, responsive, and fair. It also means addressing social inequities and recognising the critical role of women, and other community actors, while involving men, local leaders, and institutions as allies for change.

Put simply, an Integrated Approach is both a strategy and a way of working. It is about building synergy between knowledge domains, sectors, and actors. By combining efforts, interventions become not only more effective, but also more sustainable and community driven.



Why an Integrated Approach Matters?

Traditionally, development programmes have been designed and implemented within the boundaries of specific sectors, health, agriculture, education, livelihoods, or infrastructure. While each sector contributes valuable services, such fragmentation often leaves gaps unaddressed. For example:

- Nutrition education without access to diverse foods limits impact.
- Livelihood schemes without gender sensitivity may reinforce inequalities.
- Agriculture support without links to health may increase yields but not dietary diversity.

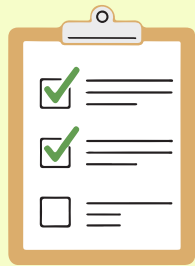
The Integrated Approach addresses these gaps by looking at problems holistically. It recognises interdependence: better farming practices influence diets, empowered women influence household decision-making, strong local governance ensures fair access to resources, and inclusive policies create enabling conditions for scale.

- **For communities, this translates into joined-up solutions:** nutrition education linked to food production, income opportunities connected with social protection schemes, and women's empowerment supported by local governance and men's engagement.
- **For governments,** integration brings policy coherence and efficiency, helping different departments to plan together, avoid duplication, and achieve multiple goals with shared resources.
- **For civil society and markets,** it opens opportunities for innovation, partnerships, and scale-up.

Ultimately, an Integrated Approach is not an add-on, it is a necessity. It acknowledges the reality that food and nutrition insecurity is deeply interconnected with social, economic, and institutional factors. By weaving together, the strengths of different sectors and actors, it creates solutions that are more responsive to community needs, more equitable in reach, and more sustainable in impact.

For India, and for Madhya Pradesh in particular, such integration has already shown promise through initiatives like the SENU Project.

This guidebook captures these lessons and offers practical insights for implementers and policymakers alike illustrating that when integration is embedded from design to delivery, the pathway to nutrition security becomes both inclusive and achievable.



Objective of the Guide

This guide shares clear, practical ideas and resources for implementors and policy advocates drawing from the experience of GIZ India's Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience (SENU) project. It offers structured support for planning, implementing, and coordinating interventions that enhance food and nutrition security through an integrated, participatory, and inclusive approach. It is particularly relevant for professionals in the cooperation sector. The key objectives of this guide are:

- **Converting SENU's experience into actionable guidance:** This involves translating tools, methodologies, and participatory strategies from the SENU project into user-friendly steps that practitioners can adapt locally.
- **Encouraging integration across sectors:** Drawing from SENU's multisectoral alignment involving agriculture, nutrition education, WASH (water, sanitation, hygiene), health, social protection, and behavioural change, the guide promotes collaborative planning and programming.
- **Embedding participatory and inclusive methods:** The guide emphasises Nutrition- Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) as well as Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs) and provide links to technical and implementation manuals and training tools.
- **Supporting practitioners and policymakers:** The guide offers direction to ensure both strategic coherence and practical relevance, whether users are direct implementers, advisory staff within NGOs, or donors and government partners planning new projects.

The guide builds on the following knowledge products (linked ahead) developed under the SENU project on integrated food and nutrition security over the last ten years:

- Implementation and technical manual for Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs).
- Trainers' manual on strengthening behaviour change skills.
- Participatory tools for community nutrition education/ training such as training and learning modules, play cards, recipe booklets.
- Resources on Positive Deviance (PD) approaches, and relevant Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) strategies.



The SENU Project: Partners, Purpose and the Path to Food and Nutrition Security

About the SENU Project:

The 'Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience' (SENU) Project is an Indo-German development cooperation project under the Special Initiative 'Transformation of Agricultural and Food Systems' (SI AGER) by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH in cooperation with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India.

- The project implemented a Social Behaviour Change (SBC) driven, nutrition-sensitive integrated approach in four districts of Madhya Pradesh (Barwani, Khandwa, Sheopur, and Chhatarpur) in cooperation with the Department of Women and Child development and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) of the Department of Rural development and Panchayati Raj.
- The project trained 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 such as the elderly. The trainings were linked with women-led CNGs to improve access and availability of nutritious food at household and community level.
- The CNGs engaged landless women from vulnerable communities who are organised in women's collectives, i.e., self-help groups (SHGs) comprising 10-15 women. The SHGs develop and maintain the CNGs and receive wages for their work through the government's wage employment scheme, the MGNREGS (100 day of employment per year for up to 5 years). Hence, CNGs not only improve the access and availability of a variety of healthy foods but also diversify sources of income through paid work under MGNREGS along with the sale of surplus produce.

This integrated approach brings together multiple sectors, stakeholders, and knowledge domains to holistically address the complex challenge of food and nutrition insecurity. It breaks traditional silos and promotes synergies between departments, institutions, and communities.

Key Stakeholders Involved:

- Department of Women & Child Development (Nutrition education through N-PLA).
- Department of Rural Development (overall guidelines for establishing CNGs, livelihoods through MGNREGS, integration through SHGs under state rural livelihood mission (SRLM), market linkages, capacity building, monitoring and Panchayati Raj Institutions for local governance).
- Integration with
 - i. Department of Agriculture (trainings and capacity building),
 - ii. Department of Horticulture (seeds, saplings),
 - iii. Department of Revenue (land identification and sanctioning),
 - iv. Department of Education (convergence with mid-day meal scheme at village level) and
 - v. Civil Society (steering the processes, learning, capacity building, scaling up and innovations)





The Importance of Integration

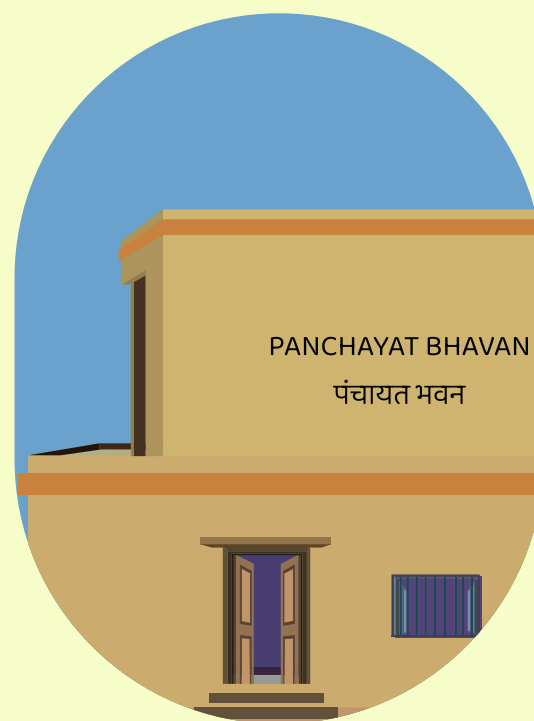
The causes of food and nutrition insecurity are diverse and interconnected. On a broader scale, they include conflicts, economic shocks, rising inequality, high food prices, particularly for healthy diets, extreme weather events linked to the advancing climate crisis, and lack of access to basic services, among others. Within this complex landscape, the integrated approach of the SENU project focuses on addressing structural and local drivers such as inadequate policy coordination, weak local governance, social inequities, limited access to resources, and deeply entrenched unequal gender norms by:



Alignment of community nutrition efforts to provide and receive quality health and nutrition services (e.g. Nutrition-PLA) with diversification of food production towards production of nutrient rich foods as well as provision of income generating opportunities (e.g. CNGs).



Recognition of women as central actors in food systems, but involvement of men and other family and community members as agents of change.



Functioning of Gram Panchayats (village-level local councils) as lead planners and coordinators.

Key Steps of Implementation

1

Understand the Local Context

- Map community needs and power structures through participatory tools (social/resource mapping, SHG consultations).
- Identify the most marginalised households according to agreed-upon criteria.
- Analyse causes of undernutrition, resource gaps, and local decision-making dynamics.



Project Materials:

Sustaining Community Nutrition Gardens – Potential Market Linkage
Options and Opportunities for Side-Enterprises: A Scoping
Assessment Conducted in Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

Baseline Research Brief

Multi Country Gender Study

SBC Barrier and Enabler Study

2

Build a shared understanding and vision for change

- Facilitate dialogues among communities, SHGs, frontline workers, Panchayats, and government departments to develop a common understanding of local nutrition and gender dynamics.
- Recognise how entrenched gender roles, unequal access to resources, and service gaps affect food and nutrition security.
- Co-create a vision for change that reflects community aspirations and sets collective priorities (e.g. improved child diets, women's leadership, equitable workloads, stronger local governance).
- Use participatory tools such as Nutrition-Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA), multi-stakeholder meetings, and visioning exercises to translate diverse perspectives into shared goals.



Project Materials:

[SBC Strategy: Policy and Strategic Approach for Department of Women and Child Development, Madhya Pradesh](#)

[Transforming Nutrition and Gender Roles in Madhya Pradesh \(Video\)](#)

[Social Behaviour Change \(SBC\): From Knowledge To Action \(Research Brief\)](#)

[Gender Transformative Action \(Research Brief\)](#)

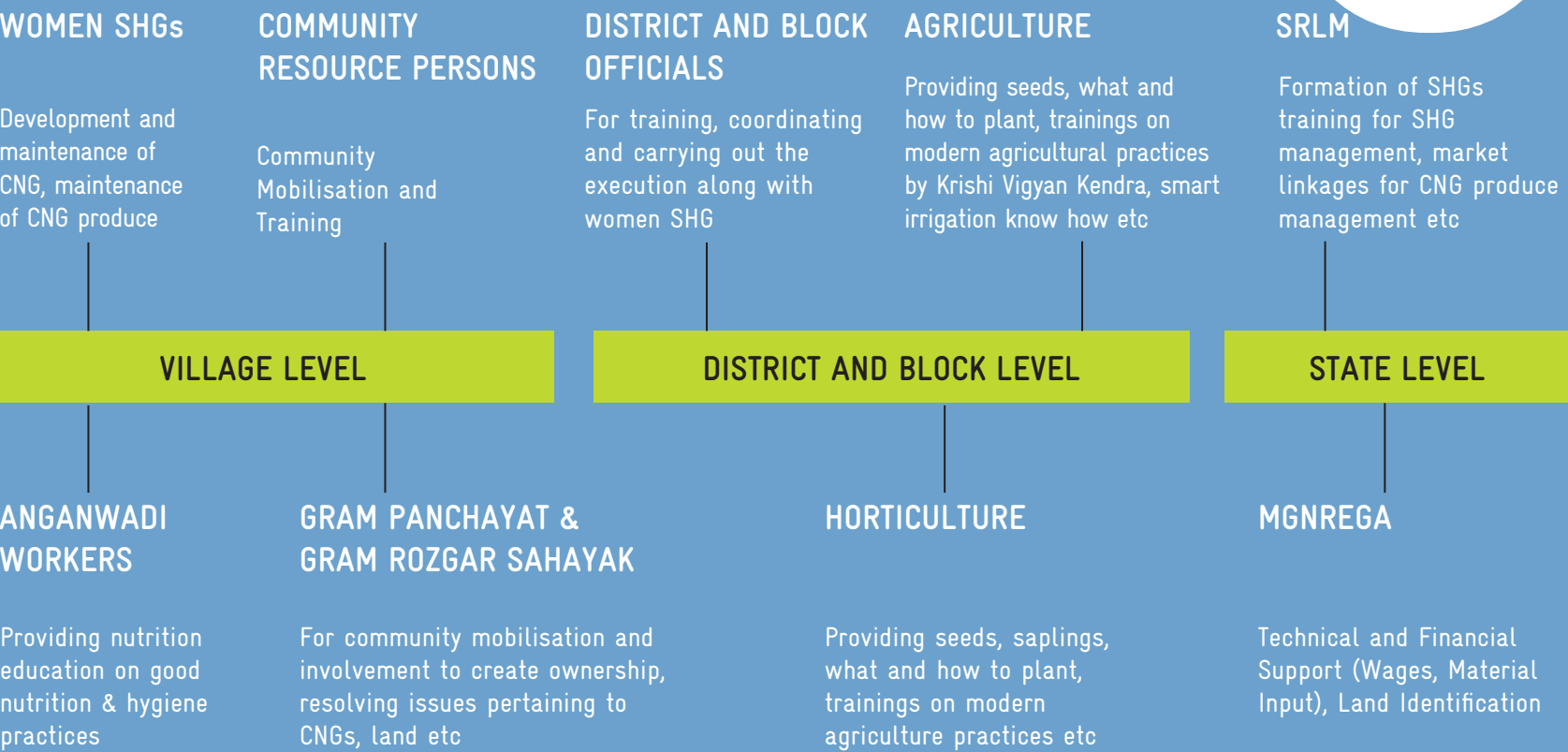
[SENU Project SBC Strategy](#)

[How to CNGs in India Climate Resilient? \(Research Brief\)](#)

Forge Partnerships and Synergy

- Engage with government departments (e.g. Women and Child Development, Agriculture, Rural Development) to build a common vision and acknowledge synergies and roles.
- Facilitate regular joint meetings for coordinated, coherent planning and critical review.
- Build consensus on shared objectives: improving diets, empowering women, securing livelihoods for overall resilience and well-being.

3



Project Materials:

Upscaling of Community Nutrition Gardens in Madhya Pradesh (Leaflet)

4

Empower intermediaries and change agents in Communities

- Capacitate SHG women on implementation of CNG activities, planning, budgeting, record keeping, leadership, monitoring and market linkages.
- Capacitate frontline workers (AWWs, CRPs, GRS, agriculture extension officers) for facilitating community dialogues and nutrition trainings.
- Conduct SBC driven activities such as mass media campaigns, cooking demonstrations, theatres, puppet shows, exhibitions.
- Involve community leaders and other change agents (e.g. faith leaders) in all activities.
- Make local nutrition governance visible in Gram Sabha (local governance) discussions, e.g. through nutrition sensitive village development plans.
- Build capacities continuously by conducting refresher trainings for all actors.



Project Materials:

Strengthening Behaviour Change Skills to Facilitate Effective Trainings on the Implementation of Community Nutrition Garden (CNGs) (Manual for Trainers (English))

CNG Technical Training Manual

CNG Implementation Manual

NPLA Modules (Round 1, Round 2, Round 3 in Hindi)

Positive Deviance Toolkit for Frontline Workers, Gender Modules

NPLA Compressed Module English

NPLA Compressed Module Hindi

Make Governance Work

- Support Gram Panchayats to lead Integrated Planning using the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).
- Facilitate the allocation land and funds for CNGs.
- Ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups in planning and benefits.

5



6

Ensure Convergence in Practice

- Link CNG (production) with N-PLA (behaviour change) with clear, practical activities. For example: sharing CNG produce with Mid-day meal scheme (school meal programme in India to provide free lunches in schools) and with Aanganwadi centers AWCs); CNGs as a learning hub for the community members at village level.
- Involve AWWs, SHGs, Community resource persons (CRPs; also known as Krishi Sakhis), Panchayat representatives such as Gram Rozgar Sahayak (GRS; field level workers who assist in implementation of MGNREGS) in all phases: planning, action, monitoring.
- Leverage funds from MGNREGS for labour and infrastructure; use Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs; local self-governance bodies at the village, intermediate and district levels) funds for inputs such seeds, fencing, water supply etc.

Production: CNG women cultivating diverse vegetables and pulses.

Service Delivery: Harvest shared with AWC.

Improved nutrition: Children eating nutritious meals at AWC.

Project Materials:

Behaviour Change: NPLA meetings, SHG women & mothers using CNG produce as learning materials

Checklist for implementation of integrated approach

Monitor Together, Learn Together

- Conduct joint reviews to reflect on progress and challenges.
- Update plans based on community feedback.
- Document success stories and scale-up opportunities.

7



Project Materials:

[Planting seeds of change in India: How communal gardening and nutrition trainings transform gender roles \(Leaflet\)](#)

[How to Incorporate Participatory Nutrition Trainings in your Project \(Brochure\)](#)

[Community Nutrition Gardens Women Empowerment Study](#)

[Growing Together: Women-Led Gardens Reviving Land, Culture, and Local Nutrition \(Coffee Table Book\)](#)

[Qualitative Assessment of Integrated Approach](#)

[Empowered Communities Towards Resilient and Healthy Future: A Decade of Cultivating Change \(Compendium of Stories\)](#)

[Self-Help Group Monitoring Sheets](#)

[Endline Research Brief](#)

Success Factors for SENU's Integrated Approach

- Strong leadership and coordination by the Department of Women and Child Development and Department of rural development (MGNREGS and SRLM) in Madhya Pradesh.
- Shared understanding of nutrition and gender dynamics as well as a vision towards transformation of the same.
- Role clarity and participation of Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Capacity and motivation of frontline workers (AWWs), SHGs and CRPs, including strong community support.

Challenge

Siloed planning

Low policy alignment

Lack of community ownership

Power inequities

Complex frameworks

Coping Strategy

Build a shared vision as well as shared planning platforms and joint reviews

Conduct policy audits and promote inter-sectoral guidelines

Advocate for nutrition. Sensitise for barriers and enablers, including gender roles. Prioritise inclusion, transparency, and role clarity

Understand local dynamics, involve local change makers and build leadership across groups

Use practical tools and real-life examples for trainings

Key Takeaways for Policy and Practice

- Integration is not an add-on; it must be embedded from design to delivery.
- Local stakeholders, especially local government Panchayats must be strengthened and resourced to coordinate locally.
- Women and SHGs as well as professional intermediaries (frontline workers, CRPs, GRS and agriculture extension workers) are central actors; their leadership must be recognised.
- Monitoring should focus on both outcomes and ownership.

Annex: Knowledge Products

Step 1: Understand the Local Context

Sustaining Community Nutrition Gardens – Potential Market Linkage Options and Opportunities for Side-Enterprises: A Scoping Assessment Conducted in Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



Baseline Research Brief



Multi-Country Gender Study



SBC Barrier and Enabler Study



Step 2: Build a shared understanding and vision for change

SBC Strategy: Policy and Strategic Approach for Department of Women and Child Development, Madhya Pradesh



Transforming Nutrition and Gender Roles in Madhya Pradesh (Video)



Social Behaviour Change (SBC): From Knowledge To Action (Research Brief)



Gender Transformative Action (Research Brief)



SENU Project SBC Strategy



How to CNGs in India Climate Resilient? (Research Brief)



Step 3: Forge Partnerships and Synergy

Upscaling of Community Nutrition Gardens in Madhya Pradesh (Leaflet)



Step 4: Empower intermediaries and change agents in Communities

Strengthening Behaviour Change Skills to Facilitate Effective Trainings on the Implementation of Community Nutrition Garden (CNGs) (Manual for Trainers in English)



CNG Technical Training Manual



CNG Implementation Manual



NPLA Modules (Round 1, Round 2, Round 3 in Hindi)



NPLA Compressed Module Hindi



NPLA Compressed Module English



Positive Deviance Toolkit for Frontline Workers, Gender Modules



Step 6: Ensure Convergence in Practice

Checklist for implementation of integrated approach



Step 7: Monitor Together, Learn Together

Planting Seeds of Change in India: How Communal Gardening and Nutrition Trainings Transform Gender Roles (Leaflet)



How to Incorporate Participatory Nutrition Trainings in your Project (Brochure)



Growing Together: Women-Led Gardens Reviving Land, Culture, and Local Nutrition
(Coffee Table Book)



Empowered Communities Towards Resilient and Healthy Future: A Decade of Cultivating Change
(Compendium of Stories)



Qualitative Assessment of Integrated Approach



Community Nutrition Gardens Women Empowerment Study



Self-Help Group Monitoring Sheets



Endline Research Brief



