

Empowered Communities Towards Resilient and Healthy Future

A Decade of Cultivating Change in India



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New Delhi, October 2025

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Preface

This booklet captures stories, the voices and experiences of community members who were part of the decade-long journey of the “Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience” (SENU) project in India.

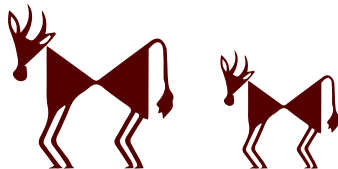
These are narratives of resilience and determination that reveal the essence of the communities involved in our work. More than numbers and impact metrics, these stories illuminate the experience that drives meaningful change. They showcase not only the geographical diversity of our engagement across Madhya Pradesh and beyond, but also the lifes, challenges, and triumphs that define community-led transformation which was key to our project outcomes.

Implemented from 2015 to 2025, SENU represents a collaborative effort between the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India. As part of the larger Global Programme under the Special Initiative “Transformation of Agricultural and Food Systems” (SI AGER) by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the project provides technical assistance to improve nutrition outcomes for women of reproductive age (15–49 years), adolescent girls (14–18 years), and young children (6–23 months) from vulnerable communities across 10 Utkarsh districts.

The stories in this booklet illustrate how systematic approaches to behaviour change can take root in communities and flourish into lasting transformation. These accounts bring to life the project’s two key components: from Nutrition-Participatory Learning Action (N-PLA) sessions that sparked community conversations about nutrition and gender roles, to Community Nutrition Gardens that provided year-round access to diverse foods while creating livelihood opportunities for women through MGNREGS. These accounts in the booklet help us understand how each project component worked on the ground.

These stories reveal the human faces behind our project’s approach, demonstrating that sustainable change happens not through top-down mandates, but through the collective commitment of communities to embrace new possibilities.

The design is inspired by traditional Warli Art, a tribal art form from Maharashtra known for its depiction of community life and nature.



Acknowledgements

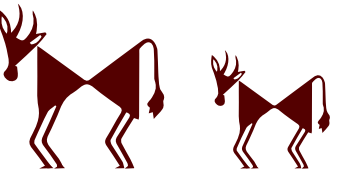
We wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of EKA – The Communicators Collective for their dedicated work in documenting the stories and images that bring this booklet to life. We thank Arul Anand and Sajana Jayaraj for their photography and Seema Kurup, Archana Sharma, and Shachindra Shrivastava for conducting interviews and capturing the authentic voices of the women, families, and partners featured here.

At the heart of this journey are the women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Madhya Pradesh and Frontline Workers and community members in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, whose commitment and collective spirit have turned barren plots into vibrant Community Nutrition Gardens. Their leadership is the driving force behind everything this booklet represents.

The Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, along with District Project Officers (DPOs), Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), and Anganwadi Workers who served as the backbone of implementation at the grassroots level.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), The State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM), Community Resource Persons (CRPs), and Gram Panchayats with Gram Rozgar Sahayaks (GRS) who provided daily operational and financial support that made community interventions possible under the state department of rural development and Panchayati Raj, Madhya Pradesh. The Agriculture and Horticulture Departments and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) who brought technical expertise to enhance agricultural practices and nutrition outcomes. The supportive district and block-level officials, whose strategic vision and coordination helped connect local efforts to broader systems of change.

Our implementation partners Welthungerhilfe (WHH), SRIJAN, Harsha Trust, PRADAN, and local NGO partners across all districts who offered technical guidance and capacity building that strengthened community-level interventions. Above all, we are deeply thankful to the community members who welcomed us into their homes and lives, shared their experiences with openness and trust, and allowed us to carry their stories forward.

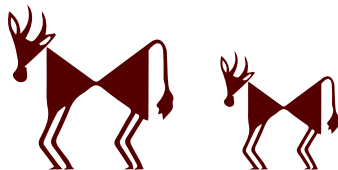


List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

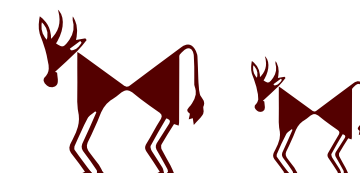
ANC	Antenatal Care	MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife	NGERA	National Gender Resource Agency
ANMs	Auxiliary Nurse Midwives	NPLA	Nutrition-sensitive Participatory Learning and Action
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist	NRC	Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre
AWC	Anganwadi Centre	NRCs	Nutritional Rehabilitation Centres
AWW	Anganwadi Worker	SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development	SBCC	Social and Behaviour Change Communication
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer	SENU	Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience
CNGs	Community Nutrition Gardens	SRLM	State Rural Livelihood Mission
CRP	Community Resource Person	SHG	Self-Help Group
DPO	District Project Officer	SSP	Self-Help Group Service Provider
FaNS	Food and Nutrition Security	THR	Take-Home Ration
GRS	Gram Rozgar Sahayaks	ToT	Training of Trainers
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services	WHH	Welthungerhilfe
KJBF	Kamalnarayan Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation		
KVKs	Krishi Vigyan Kendras		
MAM	Moderate Acute Malnutrition		

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Introduction



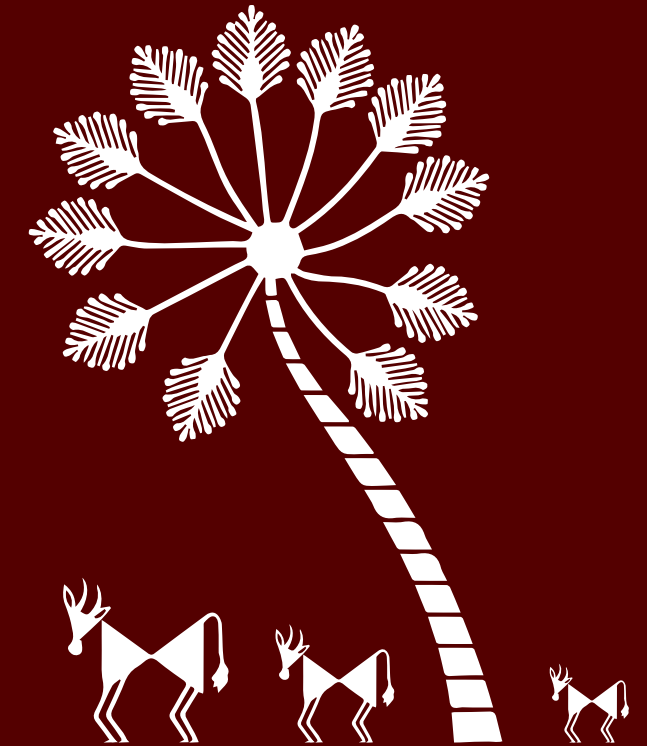
Introduction



Maharashtra



Madhya Pradesh



INTRODUCTION



The stories that follow capture these moments of transformation, voices and experiences of community members who were part of the decade-long journey of the “Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience” (SENU) project. These are narratives of resilience and determination that reveal how sustainable change happens when communities become the architects of their own transformation.

In Madhya Pradesh, these accounts bring to life how SENU’s Social Behaviour Change (SBC) driven integrated approach worked on the ground across four districts: Barwani, Khandwa, and Chhatarpur. The stories showcase how Nutrition-Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) sessions sparked transformative conversations about nutrition, hygiene, and gender roles, creating ripple effects that extended far beyond community into family *aangans* (backyards) and Panchayat decisions.

In Maharashtra, the stories reveal how N-PLA approaches complemented innovative digital solutions, particularly the Take-Home Rations (THR) application that transformed supply chain transparency and efficiency, ensuring quality nutrition reaches the most vulnerable children and families.

Through close collaboration with frontline workers, local institutions, and state partners, these narratives show how an enabling environment has been created where women, families, and communities could take informed actions to improve their nutritional well-being.



Image 1: Children eating at AWC, Badgoan Village, Bharwani District, Madhya Pradesh

The stories that demonstrate how the project’s core principles came alive through community action:

- **Integrated Approach:** Linking agriculture, health, nutrition, WASH, and livelihoods to address multiple causes of malnutrition through coordinated interventions that reinforced each other.
- **Community Participation:** Engaging local communities as active agents of change through participatory planning and implementation, where grassroots stakeholders played central roles in designing context-specific solutions.
- **Gender Transformative Approach:** Promoting women’s leadership, decision-making, and access to resources while challenging traditional gender roles in nutrition, food production, and childcare.
- **Capacity Strengthening:** Supporting frontline workers, village institutions, and local governance systems through systematic training and skill-building for sustained impact.

These principles manifested through mutually reinforcing interventions: promoting dietary diversity through local food production, improving access to entitlements like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Public Distribution System (PDS), and health services, strengthening hygiene and sanitation practices, and supporting women’s collectives and youth.

Through behaviour change communication, skill-building, and systems strengthening, these stories showcase how sustainable improvements in food systems and health outcomes have been fostered. Each narrative demonstrates what becomes possible when development work honours collective action, supports women’s leadership, and creates space for people to design their own pathways to change.



MAHARASHTRA



Maharashtra, is one of India's most industrialised states, has a population of over 124 million people. Despite its economic strength, the state faces deep-rooted developmental disparities, particularly in its rural and tribal regions. Access to nutrition remains a significant public health challenge.

The SENU project operates in three districts in Maharashtra (Wardha, Washim and Thane), each representing distinct development contexts and challenges.

- **Wardha and Washim:** Located in the Vidarbha region, these predominantly agrarian districts have a combined population of about 2.3 million. They are highly vulnerable to erratic rainfall, water scarcity, and economic distress among farming communities, which in turn exacerbate food insecurity. Both districts have higher-than-average rates of stunting and anaemia in children. (Nutritional Trainings)
- **Thane:** Is one of the most populous districts in India, with over 11 million residents. Thane presents a complex socio-economic landscape. It encompasses urban slums, peri-urban villages, and remote tribal pockets in hilly terrain. The district's rapid urbanisation has brought high levels of in-migration and infrastructure pressures, resulting in stark inequalities in access to nutrition, healthcare, and sanitation. (THR Application)



Img 2: Master Trainer Geeta with children, Keli, Washim District, Maharashtra



- **Nandurbar:** Located in the north-western corner of Maharashtra, Nandurbar is predominantly rural and home to a large tribal population. With around 1.6 million residents, the district faces persistent challenges linked to poverty, undernutrition, and limited healthcare access. It's hilly terrain and scattered villages make service delivery difficult, while low literacy rates and inadequate infrastructure compound the barriers to development. Seasonal migration for labour is common, adding to the district's socio-economic vulnerability. (Nutrition Trainings)

By working across these contrasting geographic and socio-economic settings, the programme has been able to adapt strategies to local realities addressing rural vulnerabilities such as climate-sensitive agriculture and livelihood insecurity in Wardha and Washim, while tackling urban inequities in nutrition and public health in Thane through the THR Application in collaboration with DWCD Maharashtra. The field stories emerging from Maharashtra highlight community resilience, adaptive innovation, and the role of local leadership in driving sustainable change.



MADHYA PRADESH

Madhya Pradesh, one of India's largest states, lies at the heart of the country and is marked by vast geographic diversity and deep developmental challenges. Home to over 74 million people, it bears the highest burden of nutrition-related problems in India. The SENU project has been working in Madhya Pradesh since 2015 to improve nutritional status, enhancing resilience of the communities and strengthening the capacities of frontline workers.

From 2021 to 2025, the project helped in developing 200 Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs) across four districts Barwani, Khandwa, Chhatarpur, and Sheopur, including 20 pilot CNGs established in 2019–2020. The success of the pilot in Chhatarpur and Sheopur attracted the attention of the Madhya Pradesh's Ministry of Rural Development, which subsequently decided to set up one CNG in every block of Madhya Pradesh's 52 districts.

This CNG initiative leveraged over 6.5 million EUR through MGNREGS, providing wages, fencing, and essential agricultural inputs such as seeds, saplings, irrigation systems, and manure to Self-Help Groups (SHGs). To date, 1,000 CNGs have provided nutritious food and livelihood support to 16,800 women and their families. The initiative has not only improved nutrition but also advanced women's empowerment by enhancing their self-belief, agency, income opportunities, and social recognition.

The SENU project also works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, grassroots NGOs like SPANDAN, and civil society organizations. It operates across six districts Barwani, Chhatarpur, Khandwa, Mandla and Sheopur spanning diverse ecological zones, social



Image 3: AWC at Pati and Gudi, Bharwani District, Madhya Pradesh



contexts and vulnerabilities. Despite these differences, all share a persistent barrierL limited access to adequate nutrition.

The project also works on capacity building of Anganwadi workers (AWWs) who are the forefront of providing knowledge and awareness to reproductive age women and infants. SENU project capacity building work is done in the

- **Barwani:** Located along the western tribal belt, these districts are predominantly inhabited by *Adivasi* communities and face acute challenges in nutrition, maternal and child health, and access to quality education. Seasonal migration, poor connectivity, and inadequate frontline service delivery exacerbate inequalities.
- **Sheopur:** One of India's most socio-economically disadvantaged districts, with a largely tribal population and forested terrain. It ranks low on human development indicators and faces high levels of undernutrition among children and women.
- **Chhatarpur:** Situated in drought-prone Bundelkhand, this district suffers from chronic water scarcity, poor agricultural productivity, and limited livelihood options. However, strong local institutions provide a foundation for community-led solutions.
- **Khandwa and Mandla:** Both districts have mixed tribal and non-tribal populations. Khandwa faces migration-linked vulnerabilities and inconsistent public service access, while Mandla, a forested tribal district, grapples with nutritional insecurity and challenges linked to traditional farming practices.

Across these districts, the program adopts a context-sensitive, community-led approach that recognises unique cultural, geographic, and socio-economic realities. The experiences from these regions highlight not only the transformative impact of targeted interventions but also the resilience, leadership, and innovation within rural and tribal communities.





Maharashtra

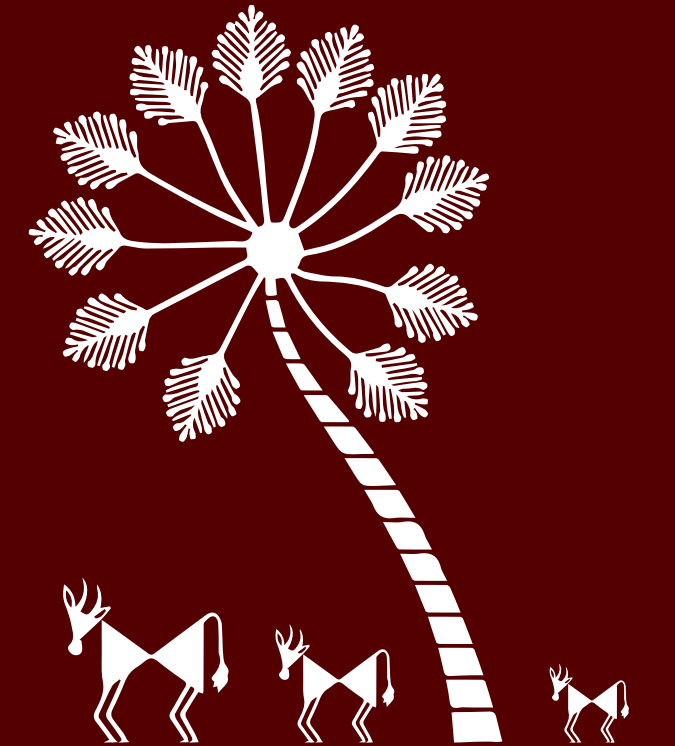
Wardha



Reviving the Land One Seed at a Time



From the Farm to Piyush's Plate





Wardha

REVIVING THE LAND, ONE SEED AT A TIME

With inputs from the SENU project, Varsha, a Community Resource Person (CRP) at Kamalnayan Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation (KJBF) has demonstrated revival of traditional farming practices and promotion of homestead nutrition gardens in her village Pilapur, in the Wardha district of Maharashtra. Varsha engages in seed distribution, establishing kitchen gardens, Grey Water Management, MHM, Health and WASH awareness, promoting dietary diversity, and the WADI system. In the current day, around 60 farmers are practising the WADI system. Of these, nearly 50 have taken up Jowar revival, with a total harvest of 250 quintals. While the total input cost for initiating WADIs is around 72,000/- rupees, KJBF contributes a basic fund of around 11,500/- rupees. Currently, Pilapur has 125 kitchen gardens with 25 varieties of fruit and vegetable plants. Here is an introduction to Varsha’s path-breaking work in Pilapur.

Themes

Nutrition

Capacity
Development

Crop
Diversification

Frontline Workers



Image 1: CRP Varsha, Pilapur, Wardha District, Maharashtra

The wind blows gently in Pilapur village. The able-bodied are working in the farms, while the elderly hold their position on coir cots, at times minding a toddler or two. In most sun-lit verandas, young mothers are bathing their babies. A grandma comes out to lay the sorghum out for drying in the sun. The greenery is lush, flowers are abundant, and the kitchen gardens bear an inviting look. With a fragrant mogra flower in her long hair, Varsha gels seamlessly into her surroundings. She bears her smile with ease and grace as she walks down the lane, stopping by each house to greet people.

Someone calls out, “Varsha, the girls were looking for you!” A group of girls, exuding energy run to her. Elderly Shanta tai beckons Varsha and demands that she inspect the brinjal bed in her garden, a mini-forest in itself. Just beneath the flat beans’ creepers, tiny papaya saplings have cropped up. Brinjals, cluster beans, moringa, a patch of spinach and fenugreek, a radish waiting to be plucked, guavas, lemon, and in one corner, a lush coriander patch. Varsha runs a quick eye to check for any pest attacks. “These are growing well, grandma,” she tells the elderly Shanta tai, who hands over a pack of papayas, lemon, and guavas to Varsha. “My plants are all growing well from the good seeds you gave.”, says Shanta tai.

Varsha and her girls bask in the compliments. After all, they had worked hard to set up the

seed bank and share seeds with families in their village. Painstakingly collected and stored in clay pots, these are the very seeds that have nurtured all the kitchen gardens in Pilapur.

A bird’s eye view will show homestead gardens and farms with standing crops that form a green quilt for the Pilapur landscape. The promise of a bountiful harvest is in the air. In the one-acre WADIs, orange and lemon trees stand benevolently next to the cotton and black gram plants, waiting patiently for the harvesters to arrive. Meanwhile the ground is dotted with oranges and cotton fluff. Women are collecting tender pulse pods. “Crushed green pod dish to go with sorghum rotis today,” declares the farmhand. Varsha, however, is busy examining the fallen fruits for worm infestation. Pilapur is fortunate to be watched over by their ever-alert Community Resource Person who leaves nothing to chance.

The experiment of WADI one-acre farming with inter-cropping technique has paid off. After decades of struggling with soil degradation and poor yield due to cash crop farming, Pilapur is now returning to traditional methods of farming. Haribhai, an elderly farmer who, despite his bad knees, insists on watching over the standing crops, says, “We scolded this girl when she tried to convince us. She said we should try WADI farming. Now, who would take that risk? We hold little land. What if the crop fails? And

who will pay for the input costs? But Varsha said, grandfather, let us try. We followed her advice and look at our farms today. We have harvested gold. Mosambi is a success."

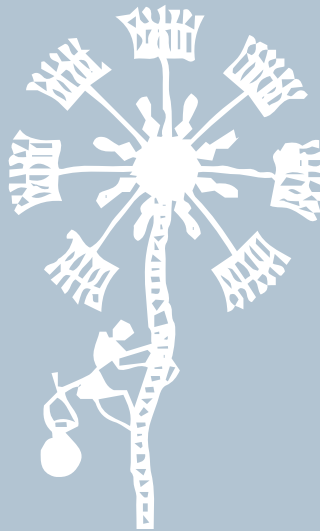
Varsha, however, looks further. In the Nutrition-Participatory Learning Approach (N-PLA) one topic held her interest. "Sorghum revival interests me. I learnt about the nutrition benefits of millets for children and young mothers. Our elders used to grow it. But wheat and soyabean have killed our traditional crops. The few farmers who persisted gave up soon because keeping the birds away was impossible. So, millets went missing from our *thaalis*. Young daughters-in-law do not know how to cook millets. Children do not know the taste! If this food is good for our children, we should revive it. That was the thought that led me to discussions with our farmers for reviving sorghum. I faced unanimous resistance!", she says.

Determination dispelled doubts eventually. Varsha had the Kamalnayan Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation team to fall back on. They supported her with information that she learnt from the farmer's meet at the *Kisan Pathshala* (Farmer's School). Varsha says, "In the stick game, I learnt that it is impossible to break collective efforts. Sorghum farming is a collective's work. No farmer can grow it alone. Slowly, a couple of farmers took it up. They had a good harvest."

Varsha forges ahead with support from her family, especially her husband and her son. "Plants and children are the same," she says. "Both need care, love, and attention to grow well." Babies in the Anganwadi Centre where she supports the Take Home Ration distribution and immunisation process honour her with their toothless smiles.

Seated amidst a young mothers' group, Varsha shares recipes that she has learnt in the N-PLA trainings. A young mother, Prabha Aatram, says, "Varsha Tai, I had prepared a sabzi from radish leaves. Everyone liked the taste. I mixed it with some rice and fed him as well," she says, holding her cherubic toddler. Varsha responds, "Yes, most vegetable leaves are edible. You should try cauliflower leaves as well."

The careful eye is still active. She gently stops a young mother from wiping her baby's nose with her sari's edge. "It is very difficult to maintain hygiene in a house with small children. So, I keep reminding them. That's how they change their habits and take up new ones. The elders in our village had refused to use the newly built toilets. But look at them now! We need to keep supporting each other with new habits. You can see this in my home as well. My husband is taking care of the household chores as I finish my work here. Times are changing; so should we."



“

The land revival movement in Pilapur was spearheaded by Varsha. The TDF project was already in place. When we started engaging with women Varsha led the process by conducting regular meetings to promote Nutrition Gardens, WADI farming, sorghum revival, improving dietary practices and assisting WASH related behaviour change. She has worked tirelessly with women and adolescent girls to promote Nutrition Education. Today, we are seeing a shift from monoculture of cotton and soyabean. There is a revival of their traditional crops- sorghum, green gram and flat beans.

”

— Sonali Phate, Project Development Officer, KJBF

Backed by the KJBF, Varsha's leadership skills grew as she attended trainings, exposure visits and engaged in several learning forums like the Kisaan Pathshala. Despite lack of formal education, Varsha's effective communication skills enabled her to win hearts both in the organization she represented and the community she worked with. Gradually, she was able to establish the connect between agriculture, nutrition, and community well-being.

Through the KJBF intervention, Varsha was able to introduce a diverse variety of seeds as compared to basic options like spinach or fenugreek. Impact on the biodiversity of the village can be seen in the abundant range of vegetables like tomatoes, brinjals, cluster beans, radish, beetroot, cauliflower, ladyfingers, all varieties of gourds, leafy vegetables, and fruit trees. Besides enriching the diet, the nutrition training process has significantly decreased dependency on market-bought produce. "We have to break the *Kuposhan Chakra* (malnutrition cycle). That's my goal," says Varsha with her familiar look of resolve. "I encourage them to add fish, prawns, eggs, meat to their diet. Every community has the right to get the kind of food that is in their culture."

The presence of young fathers with children in the Anganwadis signifies a shift in gender roles. Parenting is now a shared activity. Collecting a packet of THR, Anil Sayare, a young father,

says, "I trust Varsha Tai's advice. She knows what is good for children."

Late evening, when the farmers return from the fields, Varsha stands at the entrance, gently reminding them to attend the meeting. As night falls, the meeting picks up pace. There is silence as Varsha stands up to speak, "With everybody's consent we have decided to take up sorghum farming. Let the birds come back to our village to reclaim their share of the sorghum crop! Our children and the birds will share the harvest."

Elders in the village applaud in approval. Gathering their mats and registers, the woman leader and her group of girls head back home, satisfied with the outcomes. That should end the day for Varsha. But like the mogra in her hair that refuses to wilt, Varsha is busy calculating the quantity of seeds required for the next sowing period.

A leader never rests!



Image 2: Village Meeting, Pilapur, Wardha District, Maharashtra

Pilapur a tribal village with its 180 odd households nests a population of 732 people mostly from the Gond tribe. 40% of the population till the land, while the rest work as farm labourers in the neighbouring village during harvesting season earning around 250 to 300 rupees per day. When the TDF project was initiated, the team identified issues such as consumption of packaged snacks by children, alcoholism, life style related diseases and low dietary diversity. Anganwadi Helper, ASHA Worker, Police Patil, Adolescent girls all work together with Varsha, the CRP as part of the FaNS Initiative.

Bajaj Foundation had a policy regarding community contribution for any development project. Households and the Gram Panchayat were equal contributors, while KJBF took care of the deficit to avoid burdening the farmers with input costs. The foundations plans to establish FPOs to support the local economy and find markets for the agricultural produce.





FROM THE FARM TO PIYUSH'S PLATE

The SENU project team has written a success story in Pandhurna village of Wardha, Maharashtra. Enabling women farmers to invest a part of their farmland in vegetable farming while promoting homestead gardens, the project team has been able to guide the community back to their traditional practices with a combination of scientific knowledge and on-site support. Pandhurna is now on its way to experimenting with land revitalisation techniques, including crop shifting, that hold much promise for bringing in dietary diversity and eradicating malnutrition.

Themes

Frontline
Workers

Women as
Farmers

Crop
Diversification

Nutrition
counselling

Capacity
building



Image 3. Piyush with grandmother and friends, Pandhurna, Wardha District, Maharashtra

The Anganwadi Centre (AWC) in the forest village of Pandhurna is in a busy hustle. A fragrant smell of cardamom, jaggery and roasted sorghum flour fills the air. Inside, young women are gathered around Sheetal, each shaping the flour mix into balls. The much awaited *laddus* are taking shape. Little Piyush edges towards the mixing bowl. "*Maushi*, will I get a *laddu* now?" The women indulge Piyush with the very first *laddu*. Happily settling down into a corner, he relishes the well-earned sweet. After all, he has been diligently attending all FaNS meetings at the Anganwadi Centre in the hope of snacking on some *laddus* or *methi paranthas*! Priya, his mother, is relieved to see him eating. "Just six months back he would cry for packaged snacks. Look at him now! Truly, Sheetal has weaved magic!"

Throwing their head loads of Sorghum (millet) cobs aside, women farmers stop by to check the proceedings. A quick tasting round later, the *laddus* receive their approval. "We can smell it from a mile away!", says Sonali Masram, Priya's neighbour, adding, "Sheetal brings a new recipe every time," Piyush runs to sit in her lap. Cuddling the child, she says, "See these stunted sorghum cobs here. A year ago, Piyush was like that. Very small, always crying, and sickly. Now, he is much better after eating all the *methi* from his mother's farm! When his mother is away at work, I make the *paranthas* for him." Priya has twin beds of spinach and *methi* growing on her farm. "Men grow for the markets. Women grow for their family. Our small vegetable patches are doing as well as the lemon WADIs," exclaims Nilima Bhalavi.

Up until a couple of years ago, women were not recognised as professional farmers in the community despite them doing the bulk of the farming tasks. Sonali Phate, team lead at

Kamanayan Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation (KJBF), says, “It’s high time we acknowledged the contribution made by women farmers in the agricultural economy. Nurturing comes naturally to women. Just look at these flourishing kitchen gardens!”

Sheetal, the Community Resource Person in the Tribal Development Project, has received inputs on nutrition education through the SENU Project. Having completed her class 12 exams, Sheetal applied for the position of CRP and was selected by the KBF team. Assisted by the young ASHA worker, Mangala Shriram, Sheetal is now trained to respond to any query about improving dietary diversity among young children and their mothers.

Pandhurna has several visitors throughout the year from government departments and development agencies. As a Community Resource Person from the KJBF, Sheetal organises several events for foregrounding the work around nutrition education. It’s here that the women farmers pitch their achievements. Chandrakala Sidam says excitedly, “I will show them my pigeon pea farm. It’s ready for harvest.” She practises intercropping pigeon pea and cotton with lemon trees. Another woman is eager to showcase the diversity of vegetables in her nutrition garden. It’s a warm, welcoming village eager to share their experiments in WADI farming and their struggles with growing millets.

“ I felt challenged by Piyush’s poor health. He was underweight, irritable, and refusing to accept complementary food. Finally, it was the FaNS trainings that came to our rescue. With Piyush as our centre point, we started practising recipes that he would find appealing. It worked. The Anganwadi Worker also monitored him regularly. Today, I feel satisfied to see his health improving. ”

—Sheetal, Community Resource Person, KJBF

Pandhurana, Wardha District, Maharashtra



Image 4: Sheetal and Mangla, Pandhurana, Wardha District, Maharashtra

Sheetal’s key task includes helping families diversify their nutrition garden by sharing seeds of different varieties of plants. The KJBF has introduced farmers to WADI one-acre farming through *Kisaan Pathshalas* (Farmer Schools) and handholding sessions on their farms.

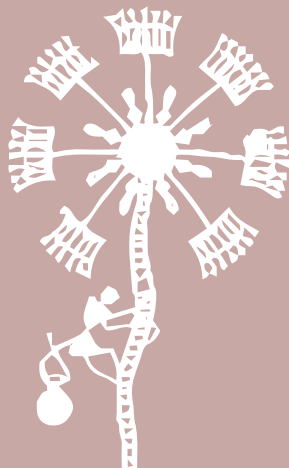
In one such farm, an elderly Gond farmer, Narayan Surpam with wobbly legs supported by a worn-out bamboo stick, watches as the contractors empty the lemon orchards. Their onwards journey is towards the market in Wardha and Nagpur. “It is a good crop. But we could have done better. The wild boars destroy everything,” he says. Worry digs deep lines into his forehead; his feet bear testimony of the many seasons he has manoeuvred. “In our times, we would just kill the wild boars. But now, we are forbidden to kill wild animals. The government is concerned about wild boars and tigers, not human beings. Tiger reserves protect animals, but what about farmers? Where will we go?” he says, voice raising in anger. The human-animal conflict is here to stay as the human settlement boundaries foray further into the forests.

Concept of WADI: One Acre Fruit Farming

The *Gonds*, tribespeople who depend on the forests for their basic needs, are spread over several districts in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. The tribes have experienced intergenerational undernutrition due to a combination of factors, including the shrinking of forest land. Today, inhabitants of the forests experience human-animal conflict as each claim the land as their own. Pandhurna, perched on the Satpura hill range in Wardha district, is one such village where the human-animal conflict plays out even as the farmers attempt to set up their WADI and millet farms. In the changing environment, the Gonds, who are now farmers, make yet another attempt to save their fruit trees from being demolished by their fellow inhabitants of the forest – the wild boars, small animals, birds, and monkeys.

The KJBF Support

Pandhurna village has benefitted from several tribal welfare schemes for housing, farming, irrigation, education and livelihoods. “We need to try netted fencing instead of barbed wire fencing,” states a farmer. The KJBF team actively responds to all feedback from the farmers. The support extended by the foundation includes digging pits, fruit saplings, subsidised motor pumps, support for digging wells, manure and other equipment support.



“ We have a policy of contribution. Farmers are required to share costs for setting up the WADI. Since, we are trying to encourage the farmers to take this up, the support is subsidised heavily so that they don’t feel the burden of input costs. ”

—Guneshwar, Programme Officer, KJBF,

Pandhurana, Wardha District, Maharashtra

Guneshwar and Sonali have personally hand-held the farmers through the WADI process. Sheetal monitors the farms and shares progress with her team.

Information is segregated. Farmers receive information about shifting crops to black gram, green gram, chickpea and wheat. Homestead gardens are advised about seeds, manure, and growing fruit trees. Young couples learn more about improved nutritional practices. Pandhurna is receptive to all the information flowing in. The outcome can be seen in the farms, in the homestead gardens and in the health of its youngest children. The village have revived their traditional cropping patterns.

Steady profits are a motivating factor for farmers as they shift to grow different crops. Yadav Rao Madavi, a retired government employee says, “Earlier we used to grow soyabean and cotton. These were giving us profits, but our land was dying. When Guneshwar shared the concept of revitalising our land, we were eager to try it out. After all, our very lives are dependent on our farms. We are now focusing on reviving millets, fruit trees and vegetable farming. These are bringing in good profits.” One of the oldest residents in Pandhurna, farmer Nirmala Surpam remarks, “We used to eat sorghum (millet) in our days. Wheat crops replaced sorghum, even the PDS

shops hand out wheat, so we are forced to eat wheat rotis since the past two decades. When the craving strikes, we buy some sorghum from the market to make bhakris. Now, we can hope to have some sorghum stock in our homes as well. There is strength in this grain. Our young ones do not know the taste of this grain.”

While women do not directly deal with the market, their farming advice holds much importance. “They tell us what to sow this year. They know the household requirements for nutrition and advise us accordingly,” says local farmer Dattuji Parteti. “They are now advising us to sow sorghum,” he smiles. With the changing climate patterns, farmers are moving cautiously with upscaling the millet crop. Shankar Rao Bhalavi says, “We cannot store much now. Earlier, our forefathers used to store grains in the ground to save them from forest wildfires. Not a worm could make its way into the ground store. Now, storage systems are different. They cannot keep away the worms.”

The vegetables and fruits grown in the homestead farms by women farmers are now finding their way into the plates of their children. Young mothers talk confidently about the benefits of feeding their young children paranthas made from fenugreek leaves, spinach, beetroot, and several other vegetables.

Meanwhile in Bhavesh’s house, the chickens scamper around. “14 eggs a week is what we harvest,” shares Piyush’s mother. “It is enough to feed all the children in our joint family. Piyush gets to eat 2–3 eggs in a week.” Holding 3 and a half acres of land, Priya was determined to retain one acre of land for her vegetable patches. “I primarily grow fenugreek, spinach, radish, carrots, several types of beans, brinjals, ladyfingers, and gourds. I grow these with my son’s health in mind. I grow what he would like to eat. That’s the spinach from my farm in his paratha,” she laughs.

Priya’s 4-year-long tryst with her son’s poor nutritional status has been her deepest concern. “My life centred around what I could feed him. He was born small, only 2.250 kgs. After we came back home, his weight decreased further. It’s only since the last 6 months that his weight has started improving. The Anganwadi worker tried her best to revive his health. She advises not to give him packaged snacks. We even tried khichdi (a rice and lentil stew). But it was Sheetal’s recipes that worked. He was earlier only 9 kgs. Now he is 11 kgs,” she says gratefully. Piyush’s demand for processed and packaged snacks has reduced since he now has access to fruits, healthy snacks, and vegetables of his choice.



Img 5: Shankar, Pandhurna, Wardha District, Maharashtra

As dusk falls on Pandhurna, the retreating sunlight seems to be unwilling to move away from Nirmala’s sorghum crop. After all, this harvest will go on to tell the tale of this resilient tribal community who are learning to revive their lands. Pandhurna then awaits its next millet harvest.





Maharashtra

Washim



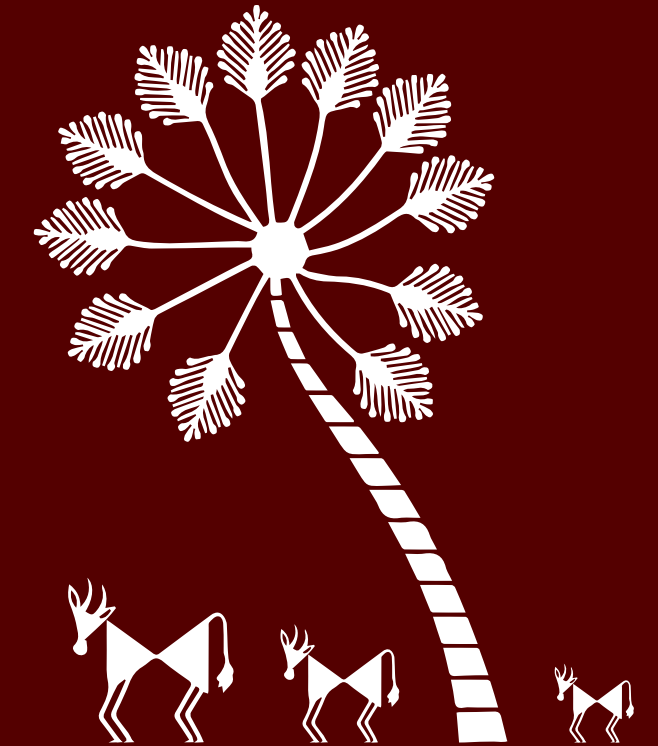
A Conscious Journey to Being the Ideal Couple




The Pied Piper of Keli



Women in the Learning Cascade



Washim



A CONSCIOUS JOURNEY TO BEING THE IDEAL COUPLE

A resilient couple wins the “Ideal Couple Award” for successfully integrating most learnings from the N-PLA process to improve dietary diversity and enhance household-level nutrition. Mutual understanding, support and respect for each other complement their resolve to do the best for their child Shivansh, making them the apt choice for the Ideal Couple award. They have broken several social and gender norms, making them role models among their peers. Choosing scientific information over superstition, the couple has managed to tide over the loss of two children and a difficult pregnancy, childbirth and continued ill health of their baby. Today, the couple have overcome most hurdles and have ensured improved nutritional and health outcomes for their child.

Themes

NPLA

Positive Deviance

Capacity Building

SBCC



Img 1: Mital and Naineshwari with Son Shivansh, Shaha, Washim District, Maharashtra

Brick and mortar houses dominate village Shaha’s landscape, haphazard in their layout, one overlapping with another. Housing schemes have ensured concrete shelters with a basic layout. One can see a range of unfinished houses, waiting for funds to be completed. Hence, unplastered, half-constructed stairs, and floors without tiles are a common feature of many of the houses in Shaha. Joint families now have segregated spaces for couples, within a larger structure, each with their own kitchen. Children keep the spaces connected with their movement and interaction throughout the segregations. Mischief personified, toddler Shivansh is on one such mission to reach his cousins in the adjacent house where he will play, run around and demand food from the mother in that kitchen. Irrespective of disagreements among family members, young children receive food unconditionally from all such divided spaces. Most of these houses have backyards with blooming kitchen

Dyaneshwari and Vitthal live in one such concrete house that has custard apples, lemons, papayas, mangoes, and guavas growing in their backyard. All the children in the house, including Shivansh, have access to a variety of fruits. The garden is abloom with a green leafy vegetables including fenugreek, spinach, coriander, curry leaves, sambhar all growing beside the almond, neem, and mango trees. It’s

in this environment that the story of Shivansh’s gradual but steady revival from malnourishment and ill health begins.

Shivansh is the third and only living child of his parents Dyaneshwari and Vitthal Mardane. The couple has gone through a traumatic period having lost two children before Shivansh. Married at 17 years, Dyaneshwari had a miscarriage at three months. When she conceived again, doctors advised her to abort the child due to complications in her pregnancy. The third pregnancy was therefore very crucial for the couple. Dynaneshwari was severely under-nourished and was advised bedrest by the doctors. Shivansh was born premature, through C-section. He had a hole in his heart, was under-weight and did not have the strength to suckle. Dyaneshwari says, “We fed him cow’s milk for over a month when he was in the incubator. It broke my heart to see my child so frail.” The couple decided to pay high fees at private hospitals and medicines to ensure that their child survived one month of incubation. And finally, one day they could bring him home.

Bina, field coordinator at SSP, had been facilitating the N-PLA process in Shaha to support the local Anganwadi Worker (AWW) Sunita. As part of her routine work, Sunita had closely monitored Dyaneshwari’s pregnancies through home visits. It was helpful that

Shivansh's birth coincided with the introduction of N-PLA in Shaha. Dyaneshwari and Vitthal received the benefits of this process for their child. For a year and a half this determined couple battled several odds to revive their child. Shivansh is a chubby child today, cheerful in his disposition and highly active. Weight monitoring twice a month, multiple home-visits by the Anganwadi worker, and a planned diet to increase Shivansh's weight at the rate of 1 kg per month worked well.

To their credit, both parents diligently worked as a team with the AWW Sunita, following her instructions and choosing scientific methods over superstition. Vitthal says, "We made visits to temples and saints for our child. But we kept our focus on the advice given from the Anganwadi centre (AWC) and Bina Tai (NGO partner staff)." Vitthal also ensured support to his wife so that she could focus on taking care of the child. They would cook, clean, and take turns to care for Shivansh. A barber by profession, Vitthal is thankful for his steady source of income. "Since I had my own shop in partnership with my brother, I could choose my working hours. I would take care of the child while she cooked. In the Poshan baithak (nutrition meeting) I attended, they had once talked about workload of men and women. I never realised that women work so much! That meeting made me think. After that, I started

sharing household chores with her," he says. Dyaneshwari says, "Living in a joint family meant a lot of work. So, we shifted our kitchen. We take all these decisions jointly. There are fights, but our understanding is much deeper. We have suffered a lot together, that holds us close. All in all, we are able to focus on our child better."

Shivansh is a much-loved child in the larger family as well. Pratibha, Dyaneshwari's sister-in-law, dotes on him. "He is always here in our space, eating, playing, and fighting with my children. They are always together. We are glad he is healthy now," she says.

Vitthal and Dyaneshwari share a smile when asked about the Ideal Couple Award. "Our only focus was our child. We received a lot of new information and tried our best to use this information for our child's health. We did this together, and maybe that is why we are the ideal couple!" she exclaims. At 22 years old, Dyaneshwari is pregnant for the fourth time. Vitthal says, "It was our joint decision. Shivansh was doing well, and Dyaneshwari's health is looking better. So, we decided to try for a girl-child that we wanted to complete our family." At 25 years, Vitthal is emulating the choices of other young men in the village rather than be a single-child family. "One should have siblings to play with. Otherwise,

how will families grow?" asks Vitthal. Sunita's regular home visits, the couple's attendance in the N-PLA meetings as well as regular Ante Natal Checkups have ensured a good pregnancy period for Dyaneshwari.

Shivansh, as always, demands food when hungry. The parents immediately respond to his demand and offer him some freshly cooked halwa. Bina says, "They are highly responsive towards their child's needs. Dyaneshwari was a regular at the N-PLA meetings and a good listener as well. Often Vitthal would come to ask for advice. They understood the *Kuposhan Chakra* (cycle of malnutrition) and had many questions. After attending the session on gender-based division of work, they decided to share household chores. We could see the changes immediately after. They completely deserved the Ideal couple award."

Vitthal says, "I liked their way of explaining topics step by step. Their advice was very different from what we hear in our families, right from the appropriate combination of foods and prompt medical attention, rather than home-based remedies." Dyaneshwari adds, "We are lucky to have a lot of fruit trees in our backyard. Shivansh likes fruits and eats them regularly. Despite being vegetarians, we make sure to feed him eggs 3-4 days in a week. Right

from a paste of dry fruits to a combination of mashed dals and leafy vegetables, we have offered him everything. Thankfully, he likes eating all of this." Shivansh is learning to eat on his own, from his own plate. The family sits together to eat. The child is encouraged to eat but never forced to finish his food.

The Anganwadi Centre (AWC) is just a five-minute walk from their house. Shivansh's *Annprashan* ceremony (ritual for the first solid food given to a baby) was done at the AWC with much celebration from his family. The couple takes extreme care to ensure timely vaccination. "Earlier we were not so particular about hygiene. But after Sunita Tai's advice we ensure hygiene in the house and our personal hygiene as well. You will find no flies now in our house!" It's perhaps this single-minded focus on adopting progressive behavioural practices for their family that makes Vitthal and Dyaneshwari a good choice for the Ideal Couple Award!

Key advice that the couple adopted:

1. No packaged snacks from outside.
2. No food from the fridge to be fed to the child.
3. Maintain hygiene
4. Keep flies away.
5. Bathe and clean the child regularly.
6. Ensure handwashing with soap.
7. Use home grown food for the baby as far as possible.
8. Both parents spend time with and look after the child.
9. Share household chores so that the mother has enough time to breastfeed in peace
10. Ensure a good diet for the mother.
11. Ensure that the mother is stress-free and faces no violence from her partner.
12. Feed the child eggs 3-4 times a week.
13. Buys vegetables from known farmers in the village who do not use pesticides.



Vitthal says, "The only advice from Sunita Tai that we did not agree to was to send Shivansh to the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) in Washim. We refused outright! We had heard about the death of a child in our village. We did not want to take a risk. Instead, we chose home-based management of his malnutrition with support from Sunita tai. He revived after that without going to the NRC."

Currently 6 months pregnant, Dynaneshwari is a picture of good health. "I am taking care of myself. I drink milk, coconut water and eat fruits. My sonography shows my baby is well. I also eat *jowari* (millet) rotis in one meal, daily. I ensure eating a variety of *chutneys* with my *bhakri*, with peanuts and sesame." Having learnt recipes in the N-PLA meetings, Dyaneshwari dries leafy vegetables and uses them in the monsoons. She also includes uncultivated leafy vegetables like *ambadi*, *tarota*, *tekode*, *kadki*, and *sherni*. The couple follows some traditional home remedies like turmeric milk and bitter gourd juice for worm infestation and applying a mixture of raw eggs and turmeric for stomach aches.

Vitthal smiles shyly as he admits, "I do consume liquor occasionally. But I never create a ruckus!" Often the N-PLA meetings would face questions

from women regarding alcoholism among men that directly impacted the health and well-being of their children. Vitthal too was part of these discussions and had made sincere attempts to keep alcoholism at bay.

In the N-PLA meetings, men usually get impatient and leave before the N-PLA meeting ends. The AWW worker struggles to retain their interest. It's here that Vitthal's active participation comes in handy and helps engage other men. Men have now begun to enquire about schemes for their children, dietary and health-related advice from the AWC.

Bina looks at the couple with much pride. She says, "It takes years for a couple to build this kind of understanding. But they are bonded by their struggle, which has made them sensitive to each other's needs. I truly hope they have a relaxed life ahead with healthy children. Truly, N-PLA has impacted this family in ways that we could never have imagined!"



Washim



THE PIED PIPER OF KELI

Master Trainer par excellence, Geeta demonstrates an effective combination of Nutrition and WASH Education for Behaviour Change. One of the youngest among her peers, Geeta enjoys her work as a Master Trainer in the Nutrition-Participatory Learning Action (N-PLA) process besides her regular responsibilities as an Anganwadi Worker. Her love for children makes her a favourite among young people. Picking up tiny yet relevant initiatives like the Tippy Tap installation with children at the forefront, Geeta has led several successful campaigns in her community. With a zest for learning, outreach and strong communication skills, Geeta has ensured that the learnings of the N-PLA process reach her community with positive impact.

Themes

- NPLA
- Positive Deviance
- Capacity Building of Frontline Workers



Img 2: Master Trainer Geeta with children, Keli, Washim District, Maharashtra

Strains of a song float through the by-lanes of Keli village, flitting over the marigold blooms, grazing over the ears of the kid goats, examining the ripe papayas and finally settling down lightly on Rukmini’s shoulder as she picks out firewood for her woodstove. Rukmini smiles at the gentle reminder. “Yes, surely. But let me at least finish lighting up my stove!” The song strains travel across the village, rousing everyone. Little Manav and his peers have taken over the streets, marching with their song, checking all the 25 Tippy Tap installations in the neighbourhood. Wiping her hands on her sari, Rukmini comes out to watch the troupe pass by. She playfully shows them her freshly washed hands. The song hits a high note in approval, grateful for being heard.

An exuberant young woman trails behind, greeting everyone and asking them to remember the messages. Rukmini smiles at the young woman passing by, “There goes the leader of the troupe! She’s the one who gave them the song.” Geeta, meanwhile, is busy picking up the youngest child of the troupe to jump over a puddle and helping another who has forgotten the lines. She claps and sings along all the time, passing by her house, where her husband and mother-in-law wave out to her.

The troupe arrives at the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) where an “*Annprashan*” ceremony (a ritual for the first solid food given to a baby) is getting ready. In this ceremony, babies held by young mothers will receive their first taste of complementary food today. The

group stops to wash their hands at the Tippy Tap installation outside the Anganwadi centre, singing their handwashing song with much vigour. Others follow the ritual. In the ceremony, the handwashing squad gets some sweet snacks for their hard work. Babies try out solid food, their expressions making everyone laugh. It's a festive day in the Anganwadi witnessed by the youngest generation of change-makers in the village. The young ones watch with admiration as Geeta communicates with the gathering. Manav declares, "I will work like madam does when I grow up."

Setting examples comes easily to Geeta. One can apply several adjectives to describe her. Hard-working, enthusiastic, charming, cheerful, proactive! Geeta is an out-of-box thinker and has strong mobilisation skills. Her impactful communication skills won over the community's support. Children especially adolescent girls, rally around her, assisting her in the Anganwadi tasks. In the primary school as well, the teachers and children await her weekly visits and sessions. "Children are my driving force. I had promised myself that I will let no child in my village suffer. I play, sing, dance, laugh with them, listen to their talk and try to be one of them. If you listen to children, they respond very well. That's all they need!"



Img 3: Children washing hands, Keli, Washim District, Maharashtra

“ I support Geeta in her tasks as a Master Trainer. We together often engage with women in the field – AWWs, ASHAs, ANMs, young mothers, grandmothers, adolescent girls, and other women in the reproductive age group. Currently, we have started engaging with men as well. Men of this generation are actively parenting their young children and hence seek information on how to do it well. Many of them are educated, have exposure and are keen to participate in knowledge-sharing meetings. As field workers, it is our primary task to reach out, share information and ensure participation of men in improving nutrition practices. We use tools like the I-Monitor App that stores our data, reflects changes, and guides our overall work through N-PLA. Geeta has been trained to use this App to monitor her own progress. ”

— Anita, Master Trainer, Partner Organisation,

Washim District, Maharashtra

That's Geeta for you, the youngest Anganwadi Worker and Master Trainer in the N-PLA process from her batch. Selected for her academic competencies, Geeta has, in a short span of three years, won the hearts of her peers and seniors in her department. Her own child, a toddler, follows her everywhere, lipsing the song, hanging on to her sari's *pallu*. He has been a constant factor in Geeta's journey – through long bus rides to attend trainings and meetings, befriending other Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and being a cooperative child all along. Geeta laughs as she pulls the child close. "Despite the exhausting journeys, I could see that my seniors, my fellow workers, were all trying to help me reach my goals. They held my child as I facilitated the workshop. I couldn't have moved forward without this support," she says, her eyes brimming over, a plethora of emotions flitting across her face.

Participating in the N-PLA process proved to be a turning point for Geeta. The trainings made an impact on her young mind. "I was sure about learning everything I could – the picture cards, the songs, role-play, recipes, facilitation, presentations, and even the way the trainer conducted herself!" Geeta started facilitating meetings with the women in her village and met with some resistance initially. "Everything seemed do-able in the trainings. But organising and facilitating the meetings was very difficult!" she recalls. She, however, persisted and eventually brought together a steady group around nutrition education. "The entire community attended my 7th meeting (Round 1 of N-PLA). Our women demonstrated everything that they had learnt in the past 6 meetings. I never imagined we could achieve so much!"

Keli village was chosen for the presentation since they could highlight tangible changes especially related to hygiene. They emphasised the distinctive aspects of their work, such as the regular meetings, growth monitoring, and mobilisation of women for community meetings, its inclusive nature and celebration of key milestones in the growth and development of children, engagement and support from community improving access to the Anganwadi services. Geeta was at the forefront of the presentation, "I felt proud to represent my village!" She exclaims. "I came back and narrated the entire story to my little friends. After all, it was they who had done all the hard work.

“ We had seen the Tippy Tap model during our learning visit to Mahatma Gandhi Sewa Ashram (MGSA), Sheopur. We shared our learnings with the master trainer AWWs. Geeta especially responded well to the need for introducing WASH components along with the Round 1 sessions. That's how we have the Tippy Tap initiative gaining popularity in the community. She has even organised children into a group that actively campaigns on various hygiene-related topics. Her energy and enthusiasm is child-like! Maybe that is why they bond together so well. They have together led the change in their village. Geeta has been a catalyst in the process, walking her talk and showing tangible results. ”

– Anita, Master Trainer, Partner Organisation,

Washim District, Maharashtra

Besides her work in the community and among her peers, Geeta had several moments of recognition and pride. She was selected for a team of AWWs, CDPOs, DPO and the project partners for showcasing their work at a State-level workshop. The exposure was a turning point in Geeta's journey. She says, "Appreciation propels one forward. I felt responsible after being selected and worked very hard to make our presentation a success. It felt like a dream, making a presentation in a big city like Mumbai before the Commissioner Madam!"

Chosen based on her academic achievements and despite not having received any job training as an Anganwadi Worker, Geeta has steadily moved forward in putting her village Keli on the state map for best nutritional practices. She now awaits completion of her Round 3 sessions. "N-PLA is learning with fun. There are games, songs, picture cards, role play, and competitions. Everything is made in a way so that women in villages can understand it and try adopting it in their lives. We talk about periods, solid & liquid waste management, segregation of waste, composting among so many other topics."

Home visits help Geeta to identify issues that she can bring into her sessions with women.

"Flies. We have thousands of them! With livestock and people sharing living spaces, it is difficult to maintain hygiene and keep off flies. We traditionally store water at a height, but is that water clean? Is it safe for small children? These are some of the topics we discuss in our meetings. Young mothers respond well. They are the most active participants and willing to try new practices."

Keli has undergone a transformation thanks to the efforts of its youngest people. Active participants in the process of social change, the community at Keli has supported Geeta by accepting her knowledge sharing efforts. It's the interactive nature of the Nutrition Education program that is creating ripples in Keli.

For someone who is herself a source of inspiration, Geeta feels grateful for all the opportunities she has received. "I am blessed to be entrusted with the task of shaping our youngest generation, work for my people, improve the quality of life in our small village. I couldn't have asked for more!" Her enabling presence and work are an inspiring story to be told. Do visit Keli once and we assure you that you will come back with that very song on your lips!




Manav the Child Who Build 25 Tippy Taps

Manav, a primary school student was captivated by the idea of the Tippy Tap when he first saw it in the Anganwadi Centre. He went on to build one at his home despite being scolded by his family. Ever since he has been motivating and supporting his friends to build one at their homes. So far, Manav has helped install 25 Tippy Taps in his neighbourhood. Geeta is a mentor to Manav and his friends.



Washim



WOMEN IN THE LEARNING CASCADE

The women-led team of AWWs, Supervisors, CDPOs and Master Trainers spear-leading the N-PLA process in Washim district of Maharashtra are an outcome of an intensive cascade training process with Participatory methodology at its core. A young woman CDPO now heads a team of women functionaries bringing about visible changes in her block, especially related to nutrition, gender, health and WASH. NGO partners in the project work hand in hand with the ICDS functionaries to combat the high rates of malnutrition in the district and block.

Themes

NPLA

Positive Deviance

Frontline Workers

Capacity Building

Women Empowerment



Img 4: Women’s Training Meeting, Keli, Washim District, Maharashtra

Not very long ago, a young and reluctant officer arrived in Washim to take charge of the CDPO’s office in the block in the Department of Women & Child Development. Demarcated as an aspirational district due to its low sex ratio and other development indicators, Washim was a challenging posting for fresh recruits, especially women. A large human resource gap stared back at her, only 16 supervisors in a district that needed 45 supervisors! Most Workers (AWWs) were semi-literate making the beat/cluster meetings a challenge to hold. The Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) lacked resources, and community interest was limited to collecting Take Home Ration (THR), and AWWs struggled with the high rate of malnutrition. Policy-level gaps like the lack of induction training for new Anganwadi workers (AWWs) added to the low performance indicators. This formed the context for Priyanka Gawli, the young officer, as she undertook the role of the CDPO in Washim block.

When selected as an aspirational district, Washim had access to funds and support from several development agencies to emerge from the low status. GIZ’s SENU project in collaboration with WHH was one such key opportunity for enhancing food and nutrition security among mothers and young children. Priyanka wasted no time in adapting to the challenges that awaited her. So, there she was at the launch of the Nutrition-Participatory

Learning and Action (N-PLA) project in the Panchayat Samiti office of the Washim block. “The project seemed to be tailor-made for Washim. It offered multiple solutions: training, learning resources, data management and monitoring support of the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) activities. This would help us achieve our goals.”

Anita, lead trainer at the local implementing partner SSP, seconds Priyanka. “We had a common goal of eradicating malnutrition from the district. The CDPO was interested in girl child education as well. Our combined focus on gender, women’s empowerment, and nutrition was a great launching ground for the N-PLA process. However, initially the enthusiasm of the team was met with high resistance from the AWWs. “The workers were already overburdened and outright rejected the project. But we held intensive meetings at the grassroots and eventually built confidence among the AWWs. Today, the AWWs themselves support the process. We were right there with them when they rolled out the N-PLA process,”, says Priyanka, adding, “We cannot just sit in our offices and expect the AWWs to struggle with the implementation on the ground.”

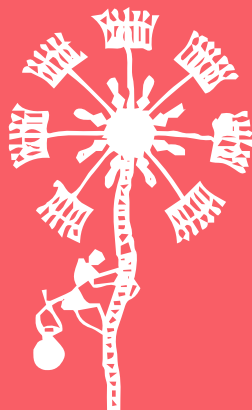
This dynamic group of young women set the tone for change in their block. They adopted traditional and cultural methods while planning community events. The *Poshan Dindi* was one such creatively designed event, where women and adolescent girls came out on the streets in large numbers, singing, dancing, playing traditional games, displaying nutritious recipes, and engaging the community in quizzes, communicating messages on gender and nutrition-related topics. Supervisors, AWWs and even the CDPO participated in the event, interacting with the audiences. Celebrating the birth of a girl child with tree plantation also sent out a strong message.

Priyanka says, “To me personally, the sight of so many girls out on the streets engaging with the public was a powerful experience! These are the small things that can gradually tilt the gender balance. The public perception about the capacities of girls should change. It’s a matter of great pride when girls declare that they wish to access higher education and work like we do.”

Participatory tools, methods and approaches, along with clear messages and technically correct content, in simple audio-visual formats using local languages, were already embedded within the N-PLA process. AWWs in Washim district received intensive training on the N-PLA using participatory tools and methods. Several

insights emerged as the AWWs rolled out the process in the field. Priyanka reflects, “The trainings received unanimous appreciation and acceptance. Back in the field, some AWWs were able to facilitate the meetings; others struggled. But the SSP team of trainers hand-held them through the process until they felt confident. This boosted the morale of the AWWs.”

Inter-departmental convergence at the grassroots level catalysed the process of change. Departments of Health, Education and Women & Child Development pooled in efforts for gender, nutrition, girl child education and abolition of early marriage. Regular dialogue with the *Krishi Vigyan Kendras* (KVKs) ensured support to the seed saving and distribution programme. The combination of efforts was reflected in the community. Priyanka says, “Homestead nutrition gardens flourished, attendance of young parents in the AWC increased, community participation in nutrition-related events improved and the rate of malnutrition among children came down. We had even successfully managed to stop several child marriages in the district by taking legal action. The same has served as a deterrent to others. These are remarkable changes, given the fact that we are severely understaffed.”



“ We keep advising pregnant women to consume 4-5 small meals during the day and get adequate rest. But the decision-makers in the family are older women and men. If they understand, this can be implemented easily. ”

—Anita, Lead Trainer, SSP,
Wardha District, Maharashtra

“ When I saw Rekha, our AWW, I was very pleasantly surprised. Her confidence, communication and facilitation skills were outstanding. We never knew our AWWs had such hidden talents! That’s the strength of the N-PLA process. ”

— Priyanka, CDPO,
Wardha District, Maharashtra

The N-PLA also managed to gather some curiosity among men. Young fathers especially were keen to educate themselves about the health and nutrition of their children. The N-PLA created space for them to participate, gain knowledge, and receive support while, they put their new learnings into practice. “Men find it difficult to transcend traditional social norms that reinforce gender roles. The Ideal Couple award that honours couples who challenge gender roles to improve the health and nutrition of the family gained much popularity among men. Men are convinced by the visible impact of the nutrition education in their own homes. However, engaging men is a process-intensive journey; we are breaking generations of socio-cultural norms, after all,” says Priyanka.

Priyanka feels confident about the sustainability of the N-PLA process after the project duration. “Tools, methods, approach, knowledge, and skills have all been transferred to us. We just need refresher trainings to ensure updated information on all nutrition-related topics. Much also depends on the leadership. Participatory work cannot be done with a dictatorship approach!”

That’s the persuasive all-women’s team driving change in Washim!

SUPERVISORS STORIES FROM WASHIM DISTRICT

Supervisor 1:

“We are doing the same work that we used to do earlier. But the N-PLA method is different. It has impacted the way we do our programmes. Community participation has improved. Earlier, they would get bored with the content. But now the use of games, songs and role-play has helped transfer key messages effectively. Now the in-laws are getting involved as well.”

Supervisor 2:

“Following the N-PLA trainings, the AWWs carried out the role play of the ‘Ideal Couple’, which was very well received by the community. It was simple, in a local language that everyone could understand. The N-PLA methods are interesting and elicit people’s participation. These tools should be integrated into our regular work. I have personally enjoyed working with the GIZ project team. They don’t train and leave us; they handhold us through the process. This builds confidence.”

Supervisor 3:

“If the tools are standardised, it will help us to roll out some standard procedures. The AWWs are very receptive to the trainings. They respond to the follow-up visits from the project staff and enjoy doing their community meetings. Yes, it is true that we have seen many of our workers transform from silent, low-performing workers to dynamic facilitators with excellent communication skills. Often, we wonder, ‘Where did that come from?’”

“

The WCD in Washim engages with several development agencies who provide technical support on various topics. All these inputs are crucial for building the knowledge and skills of the Anganwadi Worker. Planning at the beat/cluster level is well-coordinated to ensure that the AWC services are not impacted while the AWWs attend various trainings for their learning and development.”

”

— Anita, Lead Trainer, SSP,

Wardha District, Maharashtra

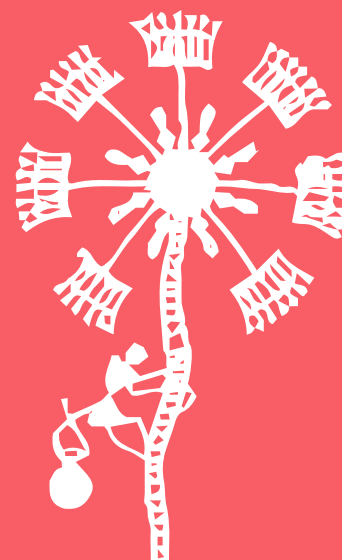


Img 5: Mayur, Shubedha and Sowmya, Kata, Washim District, Maharashtra

We share information about Menstrual Hygiene Management with adolescent girls. They can now talk confidently about periods in meetings and answer questions about periods. Some other topics for discussion include child marriage and girl-child education. These are all linked and help us stay connected with the girls. In aspirational districts, adolescent girls also receive THR. Girls therefore receive a lot of support from the WCD.

Migratory families often take their young children with them. The health of children suffers since the families do not collect THR from the destination points where they go to work in sugarcane or turmeric farms. The contractors make them move from one farm to the other every 15 days. Once they return, they ensure picking up of the THR from the AWC. The AWWs include the monitoring of migratory families with small children in their daily work.

AWWs have grasped the content very well in all the 6 blocks. This content is conveyed effectively through village level Poshanam meetings. The impact is felt in several ways. Today, the number of Kitchen Gardens have gone up, especially those promoted by pregnant women. Exposure visits and seed distribution have helped promote nutrition gardens. At the household level, participation of men in the kitchen and shared nurturing of children is becoming a popular idea. So is the engagement of older women for influencing dietary practices. Seed banks are being set up and sharing of seeds is a common activity in the community. The quality of home visits by AWWs has improved and children in the SAM/MAM category are being intensively monitored. Messaging around nutrition is focused on the entire household, not just the mothers. There are several stories from the ground that we have collated that illustrate the achievement of the nutrition education process.”



“

Most AWWs are semi-literate, may not own a mobile phone and are hence dependent on their husband’s phone. Maintaining timely records becomes a challenge for them. The Poshan Tracker App is a simple to use tool that requires minimum assistance for recording data. The I-Monitor introduced by GlZ helps project staff to track the N-PLA progress. Data sharing and cross –verification are done in the Beat meetings. We often help them convert the data from hard to soft format. It’s extremely time-taking but it’s a great support to the workers. All AWCs are easily monitored through this process.

”

– Uttam Patole, Project Coordinator, SSP,

Wardha District, Maharashtra



Maharashtra

Thane



Food Supply Monitoring System (FSMS)



Thane

FOOD SUPPLY MONITORING SYSTEM (FSMS)

Themes

Nutrition

Food Security

Community Support

Take Home Ration



Image 1: Anganwadi Worker using the THR Application, Thane District, Maharashtra

THR FOOD SUPPLY MONITORING SYSTEM: NEED & SCOPE

Take-Home Ration (THR) is a combination of micronutrient fortified blended foods and/or energy dense foods that are distributed as part of the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS) to fill the nutrition gap and improve Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices. Maharashtra state has around 64 lakh beneficiaries registered at 110,000+ Anganwadi Centres, across 36 districts. Through these AWCs, Take Home Ration (THR) is distributed to the beneficiaries which includes children (6 months to 3 years of age), pregnant women, lactating mothers, severely underweight children (6 months to 6 years of age) and adolescent girls (in 4 aspirational districts) of the state.

The THR supply chain system has in the past met with challenges including delay in delivery, loss of quality during delayed transit and discrepancies in quantity of supply across various geographies where the Anganwadi Centres are located. These are the primary distribution points for THR. The department of Women and Child Development works with its team of Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs) and District Programme Officers (DPOs) Supervisors and Anganwadis to address barriers in the THR supply chain, ensures it reaches the beneficiaries in time

and promotes regular consumption. However, there was a felt need to improve the supply chain management and make it more transparent and efficient with the long-term goal of eliminating malnutrition among young children, pregnant and lactating women.

An IT Solution to address this felt need was proposed by GIZ and taken up by the Department of Women and Child Development. Through the “Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience” (SENU) project, GIZ has developed an IT solution, ‘Food Supply Monitoring System’ (FSMS) to monitor the supply chain of THR packets. The IT solution seeks to bring in transparency and efficiency in the overall system. The solution has been designed after understanding the ecosystem and challenges of the existing supply chain system. The technical team at GIZ developing the IT solution has interacted with the users to understand their requirements.



Image 2: Login Page of the THR Application

The IT Solution:

- Consists of a web application and a mobile app.
- It is used by department officials (both state level and district level), THR suppliers and the Anganwadi Workers.
- Web application includes the functionalities of demand generation based on count and category of beneficiaries, supply order generation, dashboards, and delivery status reports for its users.
- The mobile app records the receiving of THR packets at the Anganwadi Centre as per the quantities ordered and has provision for capturing the reason for rejection of delivery in case of quality issues along with the photos of the packets received.
- It works in both online and offline modes.
- The application is multi-lingual (Marathi, Hindi and English)
- It has been piloted in two districts (Thane and Palghar) of the state.
- The solution has been introduced to users in pilot districts and at the state level, through trainings

The pilot in Thane and Palghar showed good results and was very helpful. It has empowered the involved stakeholders by providing real-time tracking of demand, supply and delivery of THR packets at the Anganwadi Centre. At the same time, it also instilled discipline in the system in terms of adherence to quality and timelines.

Overall, it has ensured the availability of THR packets for the beneficiaries at the Anganwadi Centre in the right quantities with the right quality at the right time. After seeing the positive results of the pilot, the Department of Women and Child Welfare has decided to upscale the solution across Maharashtra.

KAMBHA ANGANWADI CENTRES

The Kambha Anganwadi Centres are well-ventilated and vibrant rooms painted for young children's engagement. Play, education, nutrition and childcare are integrated by the Anganwadi Workers, Chhaya Nirkute and Karuna Bansare and their Anganwadi Helpers. Some young mothers have come in to collect their THR packets. Karuna briskly completes the procedure, handing over the pre-mixes and getting their Aadhaar verification done.

KAMBHA ANGANWADI CENTRES

The Kambha Anganwadi Centres are well-ventilated and vibrant rooms painted for young children's engagement. Play, education, nutrition and childcare are integrated by the Anganwadi Workers, Chhaya Nirkute and Karuna Bansare and their Anganwadi Helpers. Some young mothers have come in to collect their THR packets. Karuna briskly completes the procedure, handing over the pre-mixes and getting their Aadhaar verification done.

Manisha, mother to a 3-year-old child, says, "I had initially refused to take the THR. But Karuna Tai convinced me and also taught me several recipes that I can cook with these pre-mixes. The packets always arrive on time, so we never run out of supplies. I can understand the quantity of THR that my child has consumed in two months. I adjust home-made complementary food accordingly."

With their inputs in the Mobile App both the Anganwadi Worker and the young mother become active participants in the Food Supply Monitoring System. As beneficiary and end-user of the THR, Manisha plays a crucial role in ensuring the efficacy of the THR supply chain management by agreeing to receive the THR, giving feedback to the quality of the THR, and integrating the same in her child's diet. The AWW, with support from her Supervisor is able to influence several beneficiaries like Manisha who have inhibitions in using the THR.



Image 3: Anganwadi Center, Thane District, Maharashtra

AWW CHAYA NIRKUTE

In Dahagaon village, Anganwadi Worker, Chaya Nirkute is busy screening the supplies that has just arrived at her AWC. She ensures proper counting as per her demand sheet and ensures that the packets are not damaged. After scanning the QR code of the challan, she fills in the details in the mobile App. Chaya says, "When the App was first introduced, we felt that it would increase our work load. But when we started using it, we realized that it actually reduced our work. Even an Anganwadi worker with low literacy skills can handle the App. The best feature of the App is that we can identify several important factors right on the spot. The app carries details of the THR that is being supplied."

Sometimes the suppliers may make errors. But the App helps us get in touch with them directly. This was not possible earlier and we had to go through several channels to register a complaint.

Another useful feature of the App is that it calculates the quantity of THR to be handed over to the beneficiary thereby saving us a lot of time and making the record error-free. Now we do not need to do manual calculations for the supplies given to each beneficiary.

We can also record any error in the supplies. We need not wait to approach the Supervisor or higher authorities. Thus, we save a lot of time in going back and forth with a complaint. It's good that the errors are recorded instantly."

Chaya Nirkute says, "While generating demand, the AWW needs to be ensure correct number of beneficiaries. Both offline and online data should match while generating demand. While doing this the AWW should look into the change of beneficiary category from pregnant to lactating woman, additional children into the 6 months group and so on. Failing to ensure this will create errors in the THR supply system. Hence, beneficiary details should be updated every month and all details in the Poshan Tracker, Anganwadi registers and FSMS should match."

In July 2023, GIZ India introduced the monitoring app through a pilot project in two districts of Maharashtra: Thane and Palghar. Palghar is a predominantly tribal district, while Thane is an industrial district in the neighbouring state capital, Mumbai. Aditya Nigam, Project Coordinator, FSMS, is responsible for ensuring a smooth roll-out of the pilot in both districts with the ICDS. Aditya says, "Take Home Ration (THR) under the ICDS covers children in the age group of 6 months to 3 years, pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls and severely underweight children. This value addition to the beneficiary's nutrition enables them to retain the required nutritional levels and hence, good health. One challenge faced in the THR distribution system was coordination gaps in supply chain management. The FSMS (Food Supply Monitoring System) App seeks to assist the ICDS in ensuring effective coordination in the THR supply chain management to cover all recorded beneficiaries under the scheme."

The ICDS with technical assistance from GIZ India had initiated a pilot run of the FSMS App in July 2023 in two districts of Thane and Palghar, covering a total of 20 projects with approximately 70,000 beneficiaries. Following a successful run with positive feedback from the ICDS team, the State has agreed to upscale the FSMS in all 36 districts of Maharashtra covering 555 ICDS project areas with approximately 30 lakh beneficiaries.

GIZ had designed the FSMS App to strengthen transparency in the supply system and to speed up timely delivery of THR. The App holds several key data references related to the THR supply system that is useful for all stakeholders including the Anganwadi Worker, Supplier, the ICDS administrative system and the beneficiaries on ground. It helps to calculate the penalty for delay if any on part of the supplier. Key feature of the App is that it keeps the entire ICDS administrative system and the Anganwadi Worker in the same loop creating a truly transparent system of demand generation, monitoring and immediate reporting and redressal of errors.

The FSMS includes the CDPO, DPO as the key monitoring officials. With its efficient data management system, senior officials can understand with few clicks the overall status of demand generation in their district, thus saving time and resources that would have otherwise been spent in real time, in-field monitoring. The ICDS Commissioner carries out periodical monitoring to address gaps and grievances raised by the Anganwadi workers related to the THR supply system.

Orientation of FSMS has been initiated with CDPOs and DPOs in all 36 districts of Maharashtra. Nodal officers have been appointed who understand the overall system and will be in direct contact for monitoring. A WhatsApp group has been set up to receive queries and update information related to the App with support from the GIZ technical team.

FSMS IT Solution Implementation Process

- The Anganwadi Worker raises a demand.
- The Supervisor checks the demand raised by all AWWs in her sector and sends it ahead to the CDPO
- The CDPO checks the demand from various sectors and sends it across to the DPO for approval
- The DPO reviews the demand generation from various sectors and approves the same. The DPO raises the final demand from the district.
- A message is generated that reaches the Supplier. Simultaneously, the Anganwadi Workers receive a message informing them that their demand has been raised and will be met in 45 days.
- The supplier ensures supplies to all Anganwadis within a time period of 45 days.
- The AWW receives the supplies and checks and scans the challan to confirm receipt.
- The AWW ensures supply in a matter of 3-4 days after receipt of the THR supply. She collects beneficiaries' signatures through the Aadhar verification process. The same is recorded in the App.
- The AWW checks the category of beneficiaries for the next two months and raises a demand, thereby continuing the cycle.
- Errors, if any, are recorded and rectified by all the stakeholders in the system.

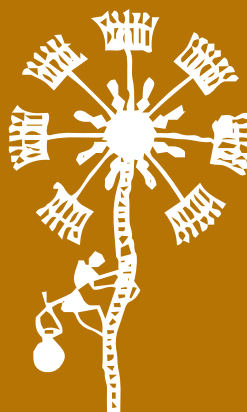


AWW KARUNA MOTIRAM BANSARE

The Kambha Anganwadi is attended by around 60 children. Pregnant and lactating women diligently follow the nutrition-related advice shared by Anganwadi Worker, Karuna Motiram Bansare. Karuna ensures timely reach of the THR to all the beneficiaries at the Anganwadi Centre. She says, "Earlier we used to keep handwritten records and take the signature of parents while handing over the THR supplies. But now, the App is streamlining the process. The App ensures that the THR, reaches the mother and children timely and in correct quantities. We also do demonstrations on how to use the THR correctly. The parents are then able to replicate the same."

"The beneficiary record is already present in the App. The supplier gives us a receipt for the delivery. We check the quantity, input in the App and check if it matches with the demand that we had generated. There are two sections for pregnant and lactating woman and another for children. The App calculates the quantity of THR allotted for each beneficiary. We need not calculate by hand. We check the packets for tear and expiry dates as well. If we find any damage, we report the same in the App. We then do the Aadhar verification of the beneficiary before handing over the THR to them. The App holds all data that helps us to monitor THR receipt and delivery effectively at our Anganwadis."

"For the next demand generation, we revisit our list of beneficiaries in case of migration (from pregnant to lactating woman or 3 years to above 3 years child). The App also lists out-of-school adolescent girls and malnourished children. We calculate our overall THR requirements accordingly and generate demand for each centre once in two months."



“

I find this App useful in many ways. It helps us to understand un-reached beneficiaries if any and cover them as well. The App requires us to verify at every stage of take over and hand over of THR. It gives us details about our working area and strengthens our record keeping. It is a transparent system that allows us to check and record errors if any. I find the scan feature most useful. With this simple scan of the supplier's receipt we can rule out any chances of errors, in a matter of minutes.

”

— Swati Madan Jadhav, Anganwadi Worker,

—Wali, Thane District Maharashtra

Pradyna Nipurte and Usha Landge, Supervisors at ICDS Kalyan appreciate the FSMS App. Pradnya says, "After our orientation about the App, we can effectively monitor all the demand generation in each of the Anganwadi Centres in our Beat (Cluster). We are given a link that we open with a password. The dashboard gives us information about the total number of AWCs in our Beat, number of Anganwadi Workers, total number of beneficiaries and the total quantity of THR required. Accordingly, we input the demand required. This goes to each Beat and a total quantity is generated. It further reaches the CDPO, who goes through the demand and sends it to the DPO for overall approval. This way, the actual demand is generated at the Anganwadi level by the Anganwadi worker with the help of the beneficiary records registered in her Anganwadi Centre. So, the entire process moves from bottom to top. It is based on actual records at the ground level."

Referring to the advance demand generation process by the Anganwadi Workers, Usha says, "The AWW sends us the demand 50 days in advance. We then ensure the provision of THR for 2 months in advance so that it can reach the AWC in time. Once it reaches the AWC, we ensure that it reaches all the beneficiaries within 2-3 days. When we put in a demand for the current day, we get the demand for the previous pending packets as well. As beneficiaries change categories, we input the same and start counselling with them to inform them about the shift in the THR."

Through the app we also get to know which families do not accept the THR. Accordingly, we accompany the AWW to the family and carry out a demonstration of how the THR can be used for different recipes. We also inform the parents about the value addition that the THR does for the child's growth and development. It's only then that the reluctant family finally on-boards with us. The timely reach of the THR helps to retain continuity with the parents and win their trust. Thus, the app helps us understand the number of parents who are resistant to using the THR when we check the dashboard.

Accordingly, we strategise to reach and convince them. This also helps us understand the reasons for non-coverage of beneficiaries as per information recorded by the AWW. We can locate the beneficiary beforehand with this app easily. The App assists us in improving our work. If scaled up, the App will make a meaningful contribution to arresting malnutrition among children."

"Once we sign in to the FSMS App, we get details of all AWCs and beneficiaries count. We can see the older demand, add new beneficiaries and check the total demand in each sector. We can edit the new demand to add in any previous pending demand. We can learn about any decline or increase in the number of beneficiaries. We can also save or reset and initiate the process all over again. The Food Supply Monitoring System App allows us to get the details of an entire beat in a matter of clicks."



Image 4: AWW Swati Madan Jadhav, Thane District, Maharashtra

SANJAY BAGOLE, DPO, ICDS

Sanjay Bagole, DPO, ICDS, Thane is appreciative of the App's performance in the two pilot districts of Maharashtra. He says, "Earlier, the distribution system of THR was done manually. AWW would generate demand and approach the Supervisor for checking, who would further send it to the CDPO for checking. The DPO checked it ahead before sending it to the Commissioner for approval. Only after approval from the Commissioner, the consolidated demand would be sent to the Supplier. This not only took a lot of time but also created delays in the supply of THR meant for young children, pregnant and lactating women. Last year in July 2023, we were introduced to the FSMS App, an online system for monitoring the THR supply which was a good experience for us. Having adopted this App, we are able to cut down drastically on the time required for supply of THR. There is now more transparency in the process, specifically related to the on-time generation of demand. With the help of photos uploaded by the Anganwadi Worker, we are able to verify that the delivery has been done timely in a particular location. Senior officials make periodical checks to ensure smooth functioning of the supply chain system using the monitoring App.

The DPO also supports the roll out of the App to the entire state of Maharashtra following the successful pilot run in Thane and Palghar districts. He says, "One of the key tasks of the ICDS is to work towards elimination of malnutrition for which THR as a complementary food plays a key role. Timely receipt

and appropriate consumption of the THR can be instrumental in reducing the rates of Malnutrition. The App ensures transparency in the process and delays if any are resolved immediately through revisions in demand generation by Anganwadi Worker and penalty payment by the supplier. The penalty clause also ensures timely delivery by supplier at various locations."

The App was received with some apprehension initially. The DPO says, "After orientation, the team realized that it actually cuts down on our time spent for monitoring. Currently, we are able to effectively monitor from our offices and desktop. Now our Anganwadi Worker has become a "Smart" Anganwadi Worker due to the smartphones we have given to them. They are able to sync their other online work together with the FSMS tool. Anganwadi Workers and Supervisors are both satisfied with the tool. With qualitative and responsive technical handholding from the GIZ team we are able to resolve queries in real time. Before roll-out in the State, we will need to train the entire ICDS team. Most of our AWWs are class 10 or 12 class pass-outs and are using the Poshan Tracker App effectively. So they will adapt easily to this App as well." Technical training and handholding is a USP that allows the App to be easily adapted by the user group and has built a supportive environment for initiating up-scaling in the state.

“

The FSMS is an efficient monitoring tool developed by GIZ. Our ICDS team has found this tool to be useful in their work, especially for ensuring timely reach of THR supply to the beneficiaries. Our ICDS team is able to carry out timely demand generation. The vendor also follows timely delivery norms, helping the smooth functioning of the supply chain management system. Calculations related to the THR stock is also done quickly online. We can speed up our delivery process as well as eliminate errors to the maximum extent possible. GIZ has developed an effective tool for us, and I am sure it will have an impactful run in the state when up-scaled. This will add value to our long-term goal of eliminating malnutrition among young children, pregnant and lactating women. In future, we hope that GIZ extends their support to us to ensure that the demand and supply chain moves ahead smoothly in the State to ensure 62 lakh beneficiaries receive their rightful entitlements of THR in time.

”

— Kailas Pagare, Commissioner Integrated Child Development Services,

—Wauli, Thane District Maharashtra

The ICDS Commissioner, Maharashtra is supportive of the FSMS tool developed by GIZ. Having witnessed a successful pilot run of the tool, the Commissioner has given his approval for upscaling of the tool to all districts in Maharashtra.

Having established a supportive ecosystem for the IT Solution, the GIZ-WCD Maharashtra collaboration looks forward to the scaling up of the project in the state to achieve the desired goal of positively impacting nutrition security for young children, pregnant and lactating women.



Maharashtra

Nandurbar



Behaviour Change Communication with Young Couples



Reversing Malnutrition in Remote Villages



Breaking the Glass Ceiling





BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION WITH YOUNG COUPLES

The Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) in Nandurbar have adopted a focused strategy for impactful nutrition communication. Having identified the key audience for their messaging, the AWWs support them throughout the cycle of pregnancy, childbirth, birth, and post-natal care. The key audience, young couples in this case and their families, are open to receiving new information that enhances the overall health of their young children, pregnant and lactating women. Having upgraded their skills and knowledge through the Nutrition-Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) sessions, the AWWs are now confident of carrying forward the impactful behaviour change process.

Themes

SBCC

Nutritional
Communication

Participatory
Learning

Prenatal Care
& Nutrition

NPLA
Tools



Image 1: AWW Bebi Rajendra Gavit, Sonare Village,
Nandurbar District, Maharashtra

Bebi Rajendra Gavit serves as the Anganwadi Worker (AWW) in Sonare, a remote tribal village nestled amidst forested hills near the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border. The village falls within the Khandesh geo-cultural region, which spans north-western Maharashtra.

Bebi works primarily with the *Barda/Pawara* tribal community, also known as the *Khandeshi Bhils*. They commonly speak *Khandeshi*, and increasingly Marathi, outside their community. Agriculture is their main livelihood, with *jowar*, *bajra*, paddy, groundnut, and cotton as the primary crops. However, farming does not provide sufficient income. As a result, many villagers migrate to Surat, a major commercial and industrial city in neighbouring Gujarat. Surat, which shares a border with Nandurbar district, attracts several unskilled labourers from the village in its manufacturing units. These migrants often return home only during major occasions such as harvests, weddings, or festivals. Typically, some family members usually the elderly or those with children stay back in the village to manage the household and fields.

Bebi is highly respected and popular among the village women. Known for her sincerity and sensitivity, she ensures effective delivery of ICDS services and works closely with the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM). Her commitment has fostered trust within the community, leading to a notable trend of women returning to the village from the city to give birth.

SEEMA

Seema is a trained nurse. She had earlier worked in a hospital in Surat, a large commercial and economic centre in Gujarat. Her husband, Sanju, worked in a manufacturing unit there. She relocated to Nandurbar about a year and a half when she was five months pregnant. It is counterintuitive to move back from a city to a remote village for delivery because of the huge disparity in health services. But she and Sanju were convinced that moving back with family would ensure better support.

She regularly attended the Poshanam (NPLA) sessions at the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) along with her mother-in-law. She found the sessions conducted by the AWWs useful since they focused on improved nutrition and hygiene practices. Seema was also the beneficiary of the Abdul Kalam Amrut scheme, which provides one full hot cooked nutritious meal to pregnant and lactating women in tribal areas. Seema incorporated millets in her food. She ensured that she had sufficient greens and fruits in season.

The women in the house also assisted with looking after the baby. Her mother-in-law, who goes to Bardoli, a nearby town in neighbouring Gujarat for daily wage work, also took a break to help her.



Image 2: Archan with Family, Sonare Village, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra

Bebi has been part of a project that provides systematic capacity building and trainings for ICDS frontline workers. As part of the project's nutrition governance work, she undertakes Nutrition – Participatory Learning Action (N-PLA) meeting sessions in her village spanning four phases, each comprising several meetings. The agenda is to improve maternal and child nutrition through improved knowledge on nutrition and hygiene practices of mothers, fathers, and the surrounding communities. The sessions cover nutrition, water sanitation and hygiene, and nutrition gardens, with gender roles and socio-cultural power dynamics being an integral part. Additionally, the project works on nutrition gardens, social and behavior change strategy (to positively transform the status of women), and gender transformative approaches (focused on changing attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes on nutrition, food production and childcare at individual, family, and community levels).

The N-PLA is a community-based approach that uses group learning and reflection to improve health and social outcomes. It intends to transform community behaviors around nutrition and hygiene practices through community mobilisation, women's empowerment, community decisions, action-based methods, and N-PLA meeting cycles. Women get actively engaged in the N-PLA meetings through action-based tools, e.g. cooking demonstrations and role plays. The 20 meetings with women, including

two community sessions involving men, district administration, and the Gram Panchayat, have capacitated the women to improve their dietary diversity at the household level.

NITISHA

A former brick kiln worker, 20-year-old Nitisha is pregnant for a second time. Nitisha was a child bride who, at 15, had eloped with Ganesh, who was the same age. Ganesh now works as a casual labourer on construction sites, mostly at Bardoli, a nearby town in neighbouring Gujarat.

Nitisha had attended the Poshanam sessions along with Ganesh's great-grandmother which helped her change her attitude and perception about motherhood. Today, she knows much more about nutrition, food production, and childcare at the individual and family levels. She appreciates the need to engage her husband in nutrition and household chores, and connect with service providers as well. Kalodi, her great-grandmother, also found the sessions interesting. She feels that the traditional system, which did little to empower mothers and transform habits, had its limitations. She supports the project initiative that focuses on livelihood opportunities for women and engages with the community as well. Kalodi also appreciates the value of the daily hot cooked nutritious meal for pregnant and lactating women at the Anganwadi Centre, because it helps women from poor households like hers to ensure good health and well-being of their children.

Bebi feels that the N-PLA tools, such as Power Walk, problem picture cards, cooking demonstrations of child-friendly foods, participatory preparation of a seasonal food calendar, posters on 10 food groups, games, role-play and storytelling, were very effective in reinforcing behaviour change. She appreciated the

ARCHANA

Archana, 28 years old, has a 5-year-old daughter, Preshti. Archana is now pregnant again. Archana's first pregnancy ended in a miscarriage. She realised that she required rest, additional care, and medical treatment. For Preshti's delivery, she went to her mother's house as per local custom. She rested for almost 7 months of the pregnancy. Post Preshti's birth, she and her husband decided to wait another five years before having another child. The idea was to give the best possible care and attention to the firstborn.

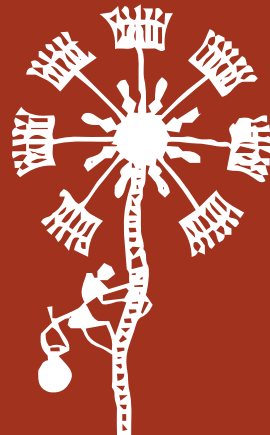
She has returned this time with her daughter and mother-in-law for her delivery. The family believed that the services and support systems in their village were better than those in Surat. Archana learnt a lot from the Poshanam sessions – the difference a Nutrition Garden can make in the household diet, the value of diverse and nutritious

input where the entire family was required to participate in improving nutrition- and hygiene-related practices, especially in ensuring rest for pregnant and lactating women.

foods, the need to change behaviour with respect to nutrition, the role of the status of women in ensuring a healthy child, and the necessity to change attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes.

Archana says, "I do not do heavy work; I eat in time; I rest. My mother -in -law takes good care of me. I focus on having different kinds of food on my plate, especially protein-rich foods. I take my medicines on time and rest well. I also make sure to consume the hot cooked meal provided by the Anganwadi Centre. Our family ensures that we follow the Anganwadi Worker's advice."

Supervisor Poornima Kardak appreciates the efforts put in by her AWWs and the NGO partner team for introducing and rolling out N-PLA in the block. She says,



“ I believe that malnutrition has come down to a great extent. Earlier, we used to have 6-7 SAM (Severe and Acutely Malnourished) children in the Anganwadi Centres. But now we have no SAM children at all and a couple of children in the MAM category. This reflects the improved status of nutrition and health in our district. ”

— Ms. Poornima Kardak, AWW Supervisor

Nandurbar District, Maharashtra

The community was cooperative. Earlier they wouldn't attend meetings regularly. But the N-PLA sessions are creative and interesting, with new information using innovative tools and methods. Being interactive, there are no boring speeches! The entire family attends the Poshanam meetings. We talk about various topics related to nutrition including Homestead Gardening, storing seeds, and making diverse nutritious recipes. I believe that malnutrition has come down to a great extent. Earlier we used to have 6-7 SAM (Severe and Acutely Malnourished) children in the Anganwadi Centres. But now we have no SAM children at all and a couple of children in the MAM (Moderate Acute Malnutrition) category. This reflects the improved status of nutrition and health in our district. The participation of men has increased. We encourage them to participate in household chores and ensure enough rest for the women in the family, especially pregnant and lactating women. We often compare new behaviours with the older ones and encourage them to reflect on the benefits of adopting new behaviors

Having imbibed the methodology and the participatory approach of working with communities, Poornima is confident that they can sustain the learnings from the project in their future work, even if the project withdraws.

RIBIKA

Ribika's husband is a government employee posted in another village. Ribika stayed with her husband until she got pregnant and then shifted to her in-laws' house in Sonare. Her son is a year old, and she is expecting another baby. Other women at home ensure she does not do heavy work and she limits herself to cooking and caring for the baby. When she rests or cooks, her mother-in-law looks after the baby. Ribika is particular about health checkups and her son's immunisation. Many a time, her mother and father-in-laws take the baby to the AWC for immunisation and checkups. Her husband too keeps himself informed about the baby's progress.

Bebi is focused on communication with young couples, who in turn trust her advice and ensure that they implement a good part of all that they learn from the Poshanam meetings. The changes are reflected in the households in the village, especially with pregnant and lactating women.

Today, Bebi has become self-confident through the trainings. She can empower her beneficiaries and community to address the issue of nutrition and health of pregnant and lactating women and children. N-PLA has helped substantially enhance her social capital and given her the confidence to promote individual, family and community involvement in the areas of child protection and women's empowerment.



Image 3: Rubika with child, Sonare Village, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra

Nandurbar



REVERSING MALNUTRITION IN REMOTE VILLAGES

Lalita Valvi, the Anganwadi Worker of Retpada, a remote village in Madhya Pradesh, could have complained about the multiple challenges she faced. She chose to share stories of change where households in Retpada have adopted new practices to improve the nutrition status of their young children and women. An effective communicator who shares a deep bond with the community, Lalita invests a lot of her time in home visits, supporting families in identifying problems and emerging from them by adopting new practices learnt from the Nutrition-Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) *Poshanam* (nutrition) meetings. Several community members bear testimony to Lalita's consistent work.

Themes

Nutritional
Management

Community
Support

Nutrition
Trainings

Men's
Involvement



Image 4: AWW Lalita Valvi, Retpada Village, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra

It's an enchanting road to Retpada village. During monsoons the landscape turns into a burst of spectacular green set off by the black tar road. Dotted with paddy fields, huge trees and seasonal millet and vegetable crops, Retpada, like most remote tribal villages, offers a serene environment, undisturbed by intrusions like urbanisation. Sounds of nature can be heard from the bushes – it could be a wild fox or maybe a cow grazing on a farm!

Sunshine personified, Lalita, the Anganwadi worker, walks through this green path, warmly greeting people along the way. She stops by to pluck some leaves and berries for Rani an expectant mother. The moment Lalita enters the village, a group of young children run up to her to greet and hug her. These are children from the Anganwadi centre and primary school – Lalita's little army that supports her in most activities. Be it welcoming guests, supporting campaigns, distributing Take Home Ration (THR) or even during immunisation, the young ones run around in the village as messengers of the Anganwadi centre. Lalita says, "They are my *saathis* (friends/colleagues) who are always by my side." Proving her point is a primary school student, busily clicking photos of the meeting with her mobile phone that will be later shared with her peers and supervisor.

Her immediate focus is to ensure all the children registered in the Anganwadi have eaten their fill of the nutritious meal served by the Anganwadi helper. She also supervises the full hot meal being cooked for pregnant women. The children talk to her about various happenings of the day and follow her instructions for various activities. Lalita pays attention to every single child and responds to their queries, at times even feeding them, if required. With a hawk eye on each child's plate, she ensures that all children eat well. Lalita says, "I ensure that all registered children come to the Anganwadi for their meals. Children see each other, eat well, and don't throw the tantrums they throw at home! Even parents understand this fact."

Parents of young children look up to Lalita's advice not just for child and mother care but also for other problems. Lalita counsels them effectively and encourages them to take joint decisions. Retpada has several young parents in the age group of 18–25 years who are regulars at the *Poshanam* meetings.

Munni, a resident of Retpada is a tailor by training. Her husband, Govind, is a contractual employee at a local bank and supports the community with banking activities. Their older daughter Supriya studies in a hostel in Nandurbar.

Their younger daughter, Shraddha, attends the local primary school in the village. Munni nurtures a homestead garden on her rooftop, growing several varieties of gourds and cucumbers.

She says, “I attended the *Poshnam* meetings regularly. Occasionally, my mother-in-law would come too. Before *Poshnam* I thought that I was educated and well-versed with running a household and bringing up children. After attending the sessions, I realised that I did not know enough about health, nutrition, and hygiene. These can be very affordable, and there are several local solutions to ensure good nutrition, like ensuring daily consumption of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein-rich foods, and dairy; growing a variety of fruits and vegetables in our backyards and farms; bringing back the traditional practice of eating millets; and so on! I realised that if children do not receive enough nutrients in the womb or during their first two years, it impacts their health and development for the rest of their lives. And that their growth can be limited both physically and mentally. I found the recipe sessions very useful. Now I always give homemade food to my children. It’s easy to just buy from the market, especially snacks. But I make it a point to make things at home.”

Munni and Govind have been selected as an “ideal couple” under the SENU project gender activities (peer-to-peer discussion with couples and the idea couples sharing their experiences

in NPLA). Lalita appreciates the couple’s support for each other and their coordination for running the household with equal sharing of responsibilities. Munni says, “I feel we are a much better couple than most in my age group in the village. My husband discusses all issues with me, consults me in all discussions, and helps with the children. He supports me when I take a stance. Unlike other men, he does not ignore my wishes just because his parents are not consenting. Whether it is running the household, saving money, making large purchases, children’s education, deciding when and how many children to have? We always discuss and decide. He supports me in dealings with my in-laws. Without this kind of partnership, it would not have been able to have a family of two girl children.” Despite the trend of son preference, Govind and Munni have decided to stop at two girls, choosing to give them a good education rather than try another pregnancy in the hope of a son.

The *Poshanam* meetings, where Munni and her other friends gained information, is a popular event in the community attended by more than 20 women per session. The community is proactive about all activities she initiates. Vandana, is another regular at the *Poshanam* meetings. Nikhil, Vandana’s fourth child, was born underweight and was categorised as a MAM (Moderate Acute Malnutrition) child.



Image 5: *Poshnam* meetings, Retpada Village, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra

Nikhil's household was among the relatively more prosperous in the village, yet Nikhil was not growing well. He did not have any medical complications but had a low appetite and was generally irritable. During the home visits, Lalita counselled Vandana, her in-laws, and her husband about home-based care of malnourished children. With a combination of nutrition education, counselling, and appropriate feeding methods, Nikhil soon crossed over from the MAM category to being a healthy child.

Vandana says, “Lalita tai (a term of endearment that translates to aunt) guided me through Nikhil’s rehabilitation process. She insisted that I attend the *Poshanam* sessions that I tended to skip. Not just at the *Poshnam* meetings, she also provided me nutrition education in personal sessions during home visits. She made regular visits and helped me monitor Nikhil’s diet. I used locally available foods to improve nutrition and provide nutrient-dense foods to help him gain weight and height. The recipes shared in the *Poshnam* meeting proved helpful in getting him to eat. Tai also provided supplementary food for Nikhil from the Anganwadi Centre (AWC). Sprouts, millet *daliya* made with jaggery were very much loved by Nikhil. He still eats them, as he had developed a taste for it.”



Ready-to-eat Energy Dense Nutritious Food (EDNF) paste was provided as vitamin supplements to fight Nikhil's deficiencies. The ready-to-eat EDNF is made of peanuts, oil, sugar, milk powder, nuts, and other nutrition-rich ingredients. It was given to Nikhil along with other meals at the AWC. Nikhil is now an active, healthy child and one of Lalita's comrades!

One of the women attending the *Poshanam* meeting says, “The overall quality of food in our families has improved. The food on our plates is more diverse and hence richer. It does not cost a lot; we just need to pay attention to what we eat and where we can source it from. Most of our daily requirements are already available on our farms. We just have to be mindful of bringing them to our plates.”

Another member says, "I ensure variety every day. And use all kinds of grains, grown fruits, and vegetables. I rarely serve packaged food. We no longer get fruits and vegetables from the weekly bazaar. We still get things from the market, but much of my ingredients are from my farm and homestead garden. Money helps with good nutrition, but knowledge about what we need to eat and how to include it in our daily diet is much more important. Our farms and forests can be a great source of nutrition."

Lalita says, “Women also need to look after themselves. They work all day, neglect their own diet, and have little opportunity to rest. All this takes a toll on their health and well-being. I practice this principle in my own life. See how healthy I am, despite working long hours!” Everyone agrees. Indeed, Lalita has demonstrated what she preaches by adopting most practices in her own life.

Lalita’s role in improving maternal and child nutrition in Retpada is visible in the group of children who always surround her. They are healthy, cheerful, active, energetic, and full of life! The parents watch affectionately as the children escort her to the edge of the lane from where she will walk back to her home in the adjoining village. Lalita walks on, confident and satisfied with a day of good work behind her.



Image 8: Village Scene, Retpada Village, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra

Nandurbar



BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

Trailblazer Anita never hesitates to ask difficult questions, especially when it comes to gender roles and division of labour, while managing household-level responsibilities. An ardent champion of gender equality, Anita draws from her own life experiences, having received unconditional support from her husband in her work and life. With extensive capacity-building support from the N-PLA trainings, where she was groomed as a Master Trainer, Anita has eventually worked her way into being a powerful orator and an effective facilitator of participatory processes. The outcome of this dedicated capacitation process can be witnessed on the ground, in remote tribal villages, where Anita works to ensure better nutrition and health status for young children and mothers.

Themes

- Frontline Workers
- Capacity Building
- Women Empowerment
- Positive Deviance Approach



Image 9: AWW Anita Ravindra Patil, Vikraan Village, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra

The clouds threaten to give way and rain heavily on the gathering. The entire community of Sorapada has assembled for the day-long *Poshan Maah* (nutrition month) event. They cheer the Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) who give speeches confidently, perform skits, sing songs, and even crack jokes. The local elected representative is impressed by the gathering. It's a jovial environment with community youth volunteers efficiently managing the event that has an exhibition of nutritious foods as well. Poshanam (nutrition) group members introduce guests to the diverse varieties of food on display. The event is a huge ground for learning and sharing knowledge on nutrition -related practices. There is a lot of noise and excitement all around, as one would expect at such an event.

But when Anita steps onto to the dais, all attention is focused on the speaker. She speaks passionately about the malnutrition distress that communities had faced earlier, including the death of children. The AWWs did their best, but more children continued to fall prey to the condition. Anita speaks about the *Poshanam* program where the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), NGO partners and the community came together, resolving to eradicate malnutrition. She enumerates the painstaking work done by this team and the results that they have achieved. The crowd gives her a thundering applause. Her peers – other AWWs – beam at her, proud to have her as a leader. That's Anita Ravindra Patil for you.

Shy in an instant when showered with compliments, yet capable of transforming into a confident communicator when required.

Anita Ravindra Patil is the AWW for Vikraan village in Nandurbar. It's a village with a mixed population of *Marathas*, *Patils*, *Bardas*, and *Pawaras*. The *Marathas* and *Patils* are prosperous farming communities, while the *Bardas* and *Pawaras* are tribal communities. Majority of the population are either farmers or farm labourers. The labourers and small landholders, migrate to cities in nearby Gujarat as factory or construction workers or to work in sugarcane fields. In her Anganwadi Centre (AWC), about half the beneficiaries are from tribal communities.

Women in her community were pushed to confirm to patriarchal practices. This included being disallowed to sit with men, use footwear, and access opportunities for education and training. Anita says, "We faced several barriers in our work. Superstition about vaccination harming children was one such barrier. However, we persisted and made regular and repeated home visits to convince the community. Change happens gradually. Earlier the community used to come only to take the THR (Take Home Rations). Now they come to learn new information. This is a huge shift."

When working with men's groups, Anita focuses on building a rapport, so that they are receptive to further discussions. Her questions usually create discomfort, but she prods her group to respond even if there are no right answers. The men mull over the questions – "Does anyone invite the woman to come and sit together for dinner? Ask her if she has eaten anything? What has she eaten? Did she rest? Do we support the women in our families? Why do women eat last in our families? How does this affect her overall well-being? Does the produce from our homestead gardens reach the woman's plate? Why does she face deprivation? Are you observant about this? Do you respond to this?" Young men are the first to respond, while older men crack jokes about being dominated by their wives. Gradually, Anita leads them into a discussion about gender roles. It's a slow, gradual process where the outcomes can be seen only months later. However, they are a positive, definitive peg in dismantling patriarchy.

Anita explains why she was selected as the master trainer. "Maybe because I speak well. Or for the fact that I do not get angry or cross with anyone. I keep patience and do not get frustrated. This is very difficult for AWWs because most often we are heavily burdened and overworked." Reminiscing about the N-PLA trainings, Anita says, "I have attended 3 rounds of Poshanam trainings. In the first round, we got to understand the problems of a particular

village. People began to participate better, men began to participate, and the discussion gained momentum. We would have several need-based, local solutions to many of the problems identified in the meetings. Homestead gardening, construction of toilets, change in dietary practices, breaking gender stereotypes – we could witness all these changes taking place."

Anita shares that the Poshanam meetings also succeeded in breaking the taboo around weighing children. The community believed that weighing made the children sick. Anita says, "We used several tools like games, song, picture cards, and even role plays to explain facts to the community. Now, the community comes on their own to the AWC to weigh their children. I cannot explain how important this progress has been for all of us working to curb malnutrition! Finally, we can break the malnutrition cycle."

Anita was studying in her last year of her Bachelor's course when she got married to Ravindra. The marriage ended her education, but her husband was supportive. She says, "Like Jyotiba Phule, my husband too encouraged me to study and apply for a job. There was no other graduate girl in my village. I applied for the AWW's post and got appointed." Anita was diligent and enthusiastic and was noticed by the ICDS officials, who proposed her name as Master Trainer for the 'Securing Nutrition and Enhancing Resilience' (SENU) project.



Image 10: Men's group at the *Poshanam* Program, Vikraan Village, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra

A total of 1,949 AWWs had to be trained in Nandurbar during 2021–23. Being a large programme, some proactive AWWs with good communication skills were selected as Master Trainers. The Master Trainers received regular training input, after which they started training their peers. The cascade method not only efficiently trained several AWWs in the district, but has also ensured in-house capacity building for the ICDS in Nandurbar. Anita is one among the 61 Master Trainers, selected by the project for district Nandurbar.

Anita believes she got selected because she has always made special efforts to implement effectively what her seniors had advised. She feels that the fact that she was able to convince her husband and in-laws might have worked in her favor too. Her agency in her household that ensured easy mobility in the area, might have been a contributing factor. Anita's seniors appreciate her pleasant demeanor, her acceptability in the community, and her willingness to embrace new learnings.

The first round of Training of Trainers (ToT) was Anita's first experience of being in a residential workshop and not returning home for the night. Staying in Nandurbar, away from family, was a life-changing experience. Her in-laws had doubts about her safety, but she managed to convince them and attend the ToT. In the current day, Anita continues to travel across the district training

several AWWs. She presents the project activities to people's representatives, handholds co-AWWs, and supports community meetings in other villages. Today she is not just a much more efficient AWW but a changed woman: independent, decisive, and fearless.

Anita feels that the participatory methodology has empowered her both as a service provider and as a trainer. The adult learning principles and soft skills techniques in N-PLA modules are effective in promoting desired behaviours both among the AWWs and the community. Pregnant and lactating women consume much more fruits, vegetables, seeds, pulses, eggs, and dairy. Many more women and their husbands are convinced that consuming vegetables/fruits contributes to safer delivery and helps the child be healthy. She ensures that the women consume them daily. Anita says, "I feel satisfied when I see an increase in the number of men accompanying women for health check-ups and immunisation."

Anita reminisces from the first meeting where it was difficult to find a couple of participants to now when women attend meetings voluntarily, helping each other and the wider community.

Gathering her books and toolkits, Anita gets back to work. She is scheduled to train a batch of Anganwadi workers the next day. Another day of learning and facilitating a small yet significant step in achieving the goal of a malnutrition-free community.





Madhya Pradesh

Barwani



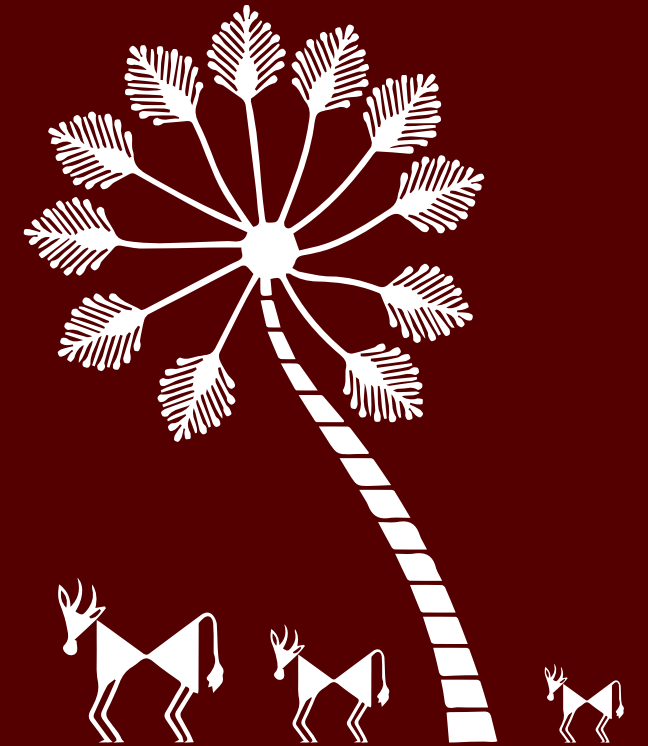
From Farm Labourers to Farmers



The Game Changer of Gudi



The Compassionate Professional



Barwani



FROM FARM LABOURERS TO FARMERS

A family in migration carries generational poverty aggravated by land degradation, climate change and lack of localised livelihood opportunities. Women and children suffer the most living in acutely compromised status of health and nutrition. Malnutrition and anaemia are some of the consequences impacting especially pregnant and lactating women and young children. Community Nutrition Gardens implemented by SHGs from the most marginalised backgrounds across districts in Central India offer one such opportunity. With guided inputs from the SENU project the SHGs are now scripting stories of change, from migration distress to ownership of land, cultivating vegetables and fruits to ensure livelihoods and dietary diversity.

Themes

Dietary
Diversity

Women
Empowerment

CNG,
Agroecological
Practices

Economic
Gains



Image 1: Members of Khedapati Hanuman SHG, Lafangoan, Bharwani District, Madhya Pradesh

The border district of Barwani is home to over 900,000 *adivasis* (original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent), particularly the *Bhil*, *Bhilala*, and *Barela* communities. As the forest cover continues to shrink, many people migrate to Maharashtra and Gujarat each season in search of work. This seasonal migration offers landless and marginal families—who rely on rain-fed agriculture—the chances to reduce borrowing, repay debts, and improve their overall quality of life. However, the constant insecurity that comes with distress migration often undermines the very well-being these families seek. The border district of Barwani is home to over 900,000 *adivasis* (original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent), particularly the *Bhil*, *Bhilala*, and *Barela* communities. As the forest cover continues to shrink, many people migrate to Maharashtra and Gujarat each season in search of work. This seasonal migration offers landless and marginal families—who rely on rain-fed agriculture—the chances to reduce borrowing, repay debts, and improve their overall quality of life. However, the constant insecurity that comes with distress migration often undermines the very well-being these families seek.

The impact on women and children, particularly the generational poverty they experience, including food insecurity, malnutrition, and poor health, has been a critical area of research and

development work at the grassroots. Women, often trapped in gender-normative roles, disproportionately suffer the effects of socio-economic and cultural subjugation. While government schemes provide some assistance, the challenge lies in creating localised, need-based livelihood options. The SENU project, with its focus on improving food and nutrition security for women and young children through grassroots interventions, presents a promising opportunity for marginalized families.



Image 2: Susheela Bai, Lafangoan, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh

In the remote village of Lafangaon in Barwani district, a handful of tribal women are making waves in their community, spearheading change processes and redefining gender roles to create an identity for themselves. The 12-member Khedapati Hanuman SHG in Lafangaon has demonstrated a collective effort to overcome food insecurity and migration related distress with support from external agencies, district administration, Gram Panchayat, and community. Setting up a Community Nutrition Garden (CNG) has been the cornerstone of the success story of this self-help group (SHG). Former migrants with low land holdings, the SHG women have seized the opportunity to leverage themselves from the margins.

Much before women farmers were officially recognised for their labour, they were toiling away were toiling away in farm-based tasks, at par with men. They had specialised skills that waned in comparison to the macro-tasks that men are engaged in, especially handling the market and taking financial decisions. Bhuri bai, member of the CNG says, “We do much more, we toil day and night, and we know the soil like we know the skin of our children. Yet, we are never called farmers. Why not? What would farming be without women? Who would do all the difficult tasks like sowing, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, and clearing the field? In our family farms, we are just farm labourers. But in our CNG, we have the status of owners and farmers.”

With no land entitlements to their name, the SHG women today proudly claim collective ownership over the CNG that they began from nothing. “Drunken men would trespass into our CNG, snatch away our working tools and even threatened to kill us if we continued our work. But we did not step back. We asked the Patwari, the Gram Panchayat Secretary, and the Sarpanch to intervene. Finally, after much ado, the matter was settled. The men had viewed the CNG as an encroachment on the Gram Panchayat land. They would also reach our families and poison their ears, saying, “Your women are loitering outside, they will spoil your family name, go get them back!” This would lead to conflicts in our family, but we persisted. All 12 of us decided we will stick together, no matter what happens. We pledged to work hard, prepare the land, and sow the seeds that we had received. After years of toil, a life of drudgery, we are able build our identity as a group of women achievers. Why would we let go of that?” Turli bai asks with determination.

Seasoned migrant workers themselves, these women behind the CNG have spent their younger years moving from one location to another seeking work in sugarcane or cotton farms. Turli bai has worked in a Jennings mill in Barwani. “I worked night shifts from 12 am to 12 noon. We had no choice but to accept this drudgery. Once back home, more work awaited us. At times, I would just walk out of the house with my food,



Image 3: Mamta Bai with her husband, Lafangaon, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh

“ I feel immense joy when I see our CNG greening up in the monsoon. It is a fruit of our hard labour. ”

—Bhuri Bai, SHG Member,

Lafaongoa, Bharwani District, Madhya Pradesh



sit under a tree, and cry out of sheer exhaustion. One had to eat irrespective of whether we were happy or sad. We had only that much. Such was the life of women back then!”

Meanwhile, Mamta bai gives Susheela an earful. “Yesterday, you had to leave early, that was okay. But finish work on weeding the fenugreek patch before you leave.” The women share a camaraderie having weathered several storms together. Susheela sportingly absorbs the reprimand and gets down to work. Like their daily harvest, the leadership is shared between the 12 women, with each woman rising to the occasion as and when needed.

Bhuri bai alternates between hard frown and quick smile as she stacks her basket with brinjals, spinach, radish, and coriander leaves. “Land gets divided between men, gets passed on to men. We have this land in our names, we plough this land and grow all that we wish to. This may be very less, but it gives us a deep satisfaction to eat what we grow. I feel immense joy when I see our CNG greening up in the monsoon. It is a fruit of our hard labour.”

Mamta bai calls out to her husband to create pathways for the water to flow between the vegetable beds. Watching him work, she says with a weary smile, “They have been very supportive. But you should have seen them in the initial phase! Things have changed now. Regular wages

from the Gram Panchayat for our labour is also helping us continue our work in the CNG. Now that the CNG is reaping harvest after harvest, our families are gaining confidence in our work. Even the community comes asking for produce from the CNG. They are aware that our vegetables are pesticide-free!”



Image 4: Diverse Food and Vegetables from the CNG, Lafangaon, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh

Susheela bai is back with her basket of freshly harvested greens from the CNG. As the day ends, the women pool in all the vegetables and divide it equally between them. “Some days when we have excess produce, we sell it in the market. On a good day, we may earn up to 1,000 rupees.” Jheenu bai is keen to take back some radish. “My daughter had asked for some (radish) in the morning. She makes fresh salad every day from what I take home. Imagine we could only eat roti and dal 2



Image 5: SHG Members, Lafangaon, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh

years back! We now have vegetables twice a day, all days of the week, besides dal and salads. My health is also better now. I have never eaten so well in my entire life.”

As is the practice in most village, the weekly bazaar is the only source of vegetables and fruits for the community. Dietary diversity has improved with the functional CNG that provides vegetables for all days of the week for the families. Besides saving money, the families now have access to a range of chemical-free, nutritious food. Today Munni bai takes home anything from 250 grams to 500 grams of greens to her family.

Initiating a CNG also gave exposure to the women to engage in conversations around gender and empowerment. The women learnt to assert themselves at work, on their wages, entitlements, and rights.

Mamta bai laughs as she shares, “We used to wear a long veil earlier. We could not write, maintain the registers, or even sign our names! Then, the organisation staff taught us how to sign. We would practice it all day – writing our names in the roti flour, in the mud, on our plates, in the rice and even in our dreams! Finally, we learnt to sign our names.” The women beam with a sense of achievement.

Their papaya bed is flourishing with a yield of 5–7 kilos every day. In the market, sale from the produce may earn them up to 2,000 rupees per month. Says Turli bai “Onions and eggplants may fetch up to 200 rupees per sale. Papayas get sold for 40 rupees per kilo. Leafy vegetables get picked up soon for 10 rupees a bunch. We bought a pipe for watering our plants from the sale money. All of us contributed 100 rupees additionally. We can now pump water to our vegetable beds.”

The CNG does not use any pesticides. The women are trained to make their own organic manure and pesticide which they store in the CNG premises. Vermi-composting too has been initiated to add organic manure to their farm.

Bhuri bai meanwhile makes a video of the day's harvest. The women have learnt to document their journey and share it with others. The CNG has 600 plants of different varieties. They have 150 custard apple trees, 30 mango plants, 30 jackfruit plants, 200 chiku plants, 30 banana plants, and 30 papaya plants that are almost 2 years old. She says with pride, "Our vegetables have a different taste, they do not need much oil while cooking. In another two years, this garden will be in full bloom with fruit trees and fruits. It will be like a huge fruit forest!"

Married early at ages between 12 and 16 years, the women now seek peaceful work that they enjoy doing. Munni bai says, "Life of women has changed. Today, girls are getting educated, they marry later, and they have fewer children. They go to work or open their own shops. Their lives are planned. Ours just happened!" she laughs. Mamta bai grumbles, "They are educated girls, but they cannot make a *makka* (corn) roti!" Bhuri says, "I make tea for my daughter-in-law, I listen to her carefully. I do that because no one ever listened to me when I was a young woman."

Hoisting head loads of produce, the women make their way back to the village, laughing and cracking jokes leaving behind a blooming garden that will soon allow several others to sit in its shade and plan their dreams.



Image 6: Bhuribai, Lafangaon, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 7: Organic Manure being used in the CNG, Lafangaon, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh

“ Development interventions have better results if they are centred on women. Hence, work with SHGs and CNGs help establish women's ownership. Drudgery related work in farming is mostly taken up by women, but they have no identity as a farmer. We still have to work around improving decision-making and participation of women in market related tasks of agriculture. Breaking the stereotype of a farmer as a male role, the CNG helps establish women as farmers. These women have negotiated several barriers; they are here to stay! ”

— Laxman Jethani, District Coordinator, SRIJAN,

Lafaongoa, Bharwani District, Madhya Pradesh

Bharwani

THE GAME CHANGER OF GUDI

The Nutrition Participatory Learning & Action Approach (N-PLA) has been an effective tool for engaging with communities and duty-bearers to positively impact nutritional outcomes, especially for young children, pregnant, and lactating women. N-PLA is a capacity building process in cascade mode facilitated initially by trainers from NGO partners. They train Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), who in turn take the learnings to their communities working through regular, planned group meetings. Inputs from the community meetings reach households and influence social and behaviour change, especially related to nutrition. Through the trainings, Master Trainers are selected from among the AWWs who support block and sector-level training. Manisha from Gudi, a remote tribal village in Pati block of Barwani is now a Master Trainer, co-facilitating workshops with the District Trainer.

Themes

NPLA

WASH Practices

Women Empowerment

Frontline Workers



Image 8: AWC at Pati and Gudi, Keli, Bharwani District, Madhya Pradesh

Clutching the training module, Manisha Jhamre moves forward to occupy the central position in the group. The slight tremor in her hands threatens to give her away. She gulps and smiles nervously at Purva who reassures her, “Don’t worry, you will do well.” As Manisha begins to speak, the quiver in her voice settles down gradually. She invites everyone to sing along the nutrition song given in the module. Soon, voices of the women resonate as one in the hall. Now, Manisha is in her element – facilitating sessions and engaging with the participants, prodding the shy ones to speak, making them read through the Nutrition Participatory Learning Approach (N-PLA) module, encouraging, and responding to questions deftly. During the session, Purva lends a helping hand by adding information that Manisha may have missed. At times, in the middle of the session, Manisha slips a side to take notes.

All the 30 participants in the group are Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) from tribal villages in Pati. A predominantly tribal region, the Pati sector of the ICDS is considered to be a challenging region for outreach. With low indicators of child and mother nutrition and health, Pati was selected as one of the project villages under the SENU project, which focused on building community resilience for ensuring nutritional outcomes, especially for young

children and mothers. The AWWs are participating in an N-PLA workshop where they will receive inputs on participation, communication, and facilitation of community-level meetings around nutrition.

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Most AWWs participating in the workshop speak only the local dialect and struggle to read the Hindi content in the manuals. However, Manisha patiently handholds them through the reading and comprehension process, a skill that she has acquired from the District Nutrition Master Trainer – Purva. Manisha smiles, “Even I was so scared initially. But I liked the topics. I wanted to learn them all! Not just the topics, but the way the topics were conveyed to others.

In my experience, I would often struggle to convey messages to the community. In the N-PLA trainings, we were introduced to several tools that gave very clear messages. I was fascinated by the songs and the drawings on the banners. People feel connected to songs, performances and pictures. They think, 'Oh, that is me and my baby; they are talking about me!'"

A tea break finds all the participants talking animatedly. There is much excitement about the play that will be presented by Manisha and her training peers. The play is a grand, entertaining, and gripping performance by the AWW. They lead the trainees through the life cycle of a baby girl – covering adolescence, age at marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. The audience cheers as the young girl gets married. The newly married bride successfully facilitates several behaviour changes in her new family especially stopping open defecation, washing hands with soap, segregating waste, and maintaining hygiene. The young bride is appreciated for her wise ways. Later, in her pregnancy, she follows all the advice from the AWW. As a young mother, she has a focus on her child's nutrition. In a nutshell, it's an informed and aware, educated young woman in charge of her own well-being and that of her family as well. The audience gives them a thundering applause! Manisha beams with pride in having performed her real –life role. "This is my story. I have done this!"

A visit to Manisha's village, Gudi, puts things into perspective. Married into a farm labourer's family, Manisha has four other co-sisters in her large joint family – all with young children. Her co-sisters are graduates or post-graduates, with dreams to apply for government exams and land a job, like Manisha. One of her sisters is an AWW as well. The men in the family are school or college dropouts, choosing to work on the farms rather than pursue education. The women all wear veils. Elders in the family are supportive but expect Manisha to follow norms as a daughter-in-law, including child care and looking after the household.

The landscape is beautiful yet turns rough during monsoons. Gudi is located on a hill-top, like most other villages in the Pati block. Students, daily wagers, farmers, pregnant women, young mothers all take a steep walk up and down the hillock as part of their daily routine. Carrying out home-visits besides other duties as an AWW, is a challenge for Manisha and most of her peers, involving extreme physical strain. However, Manisha has soared across all the barriers to earn the position as a Master Trainer in the N-PLA process. Her older sister, making jowari rotis (millet bread) in the family kitchen, says proudly, "You should see her speak in large community meetings. She is very confident, sits next to the Sarpanch and officers. Not just us, but the entire village is proud of her. We always have visitors in our

house asking for Manisha. I think she has now become very famous. But at home, she is like us – a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Only when she wears her uniform sari, she become a different woman!"

Manisha then, is a source of inspiration and awe for many other young women in her village. Her younger sister says, "I am appearing for government exams. I am sure to get a job soon. If Manisha can do it, we can do it as well." Her young husband, just back from cattle-herding smiles, "Oh yes, all the women in our family are bright! But our men have never made it past high school!"

For many women, attending school, taking exams, securing a job, and fulfilling job responsibilities may seem like a normal progression. However, for women in remote tribal areas, every dream is accompanied by socio-cultural hurdles they must navigate. Very few women receive the social support needed to achieve their aspirations. Manisha's journey is particularly significant as she steps into the role of a Master Trainer, selected from the Pati block. Her guidance for young mothers is drawn from personal experience, and her conversations with adolescent girls are both insightful and engaging. Her empathy for young fathers, who are learning to be equal partners, stems from her own



Image 9: Landscape, Pati and Gudi, Keli, Bharwami District, Madhya Pradesh

experience as a young wife. In this way, role-playing complements her natural, vibrant self.

Back in the training hall, the group is picking up tips for improving their communication in large groups about making their village free of open defecation. Manisha says grimly, “It is a very challenging task. Everyone says yes in public meetings. But once they are back home, they refuse to use the toilet that they have themselves built!” In the last series of meetings in Round 1 and 2 of N-PLA, Manisha has managed to get across several messages, both to women in her village and the other AWWs. She says excitedly, “Pregnant women ensure they get rest, they eat in time and make sure they have atleast 4-5 food groups on their plate. Green vegetables, meat, eggs, chicken, fruits, uncultivated wild foods – all these rich and diverse foods are available in our village, in abundance. But slowly we are learning to ensure a mix of most food groups.”

Plodding through the muddy, un-motorable roads could be highly demotivating. But Manisha ensures she never misses her home-visit schedule. “If home visits are done well, you will surely see the changes. Now men have started coming to the Anganwadi. 50% of them are aware about the immunisation schedule of their child, weight, and height as well. This participation of men in child-care is a new development in our community.”

District Nutrition Lead trainer, Purva Joshi from SENU’s NGO partner, PAHAL says, “During Round 1

“ In the N-PLA trainings, we were introduced to several tools that gave very clear messages. I was fascinated by the songs and the drawings on the banners.”

— Purva, District Nutrition Master Trainer,

Gudi, Bharwani District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 10: NPLA Learning Materials, Gudi, Bharwami District, Madhya Pradesh

training, we selected Master Trainers based on their skills and ability to communicate messages correctly. 59 Master Trainers were selected from 1,784 AWWs in the district. Manisha Jhamre stood out with her confidence and her earnestness to learn. She has been successfully facilitating sessions with our team of trainers. Manisha has also done exceptionally well in her own village in the Round 1 and Round 2 meetings. Her community meetings were well-attended. The impact can be seen in her village at the household and community level, especially in the health of young children and young mothers.”

Surrounded by visual banners on nutrition and related topics, the group is busy preparing to take a pledge for practising handwashing with soap. The floor is occupied by N-PLA manuals and picture cards. It’s an environment that draws focus on nutrition as an all-encompassing theme, right from Gender Equality to growing organic food for home consumption, ensuring food security and being “nutri-smart villages”. At the centre of it all are these women, the AWWs in charge of working across hurdles to achieve the desired nutritional and health outcomes for their community. One cannot but admire the gathering of learners, especially the woman at the centre, leading the process, gently steering the group to take up one challenge at a time. Manisha, the Master Trainer puts out one hand forward to take the pledge in all solemnity. The rest follow.



Bharwani

THE COMPASSIONATE PROFESSIONAL

Anganwadi worker Kiran works with a special group of people who face discrimination and are shunned by the society around them. This colony of people suffering from leprosy lives in a segregated colony which further marginalises them as they struggle to access livelihood opportunities, social acceptance, health, and food security. Kiran refuses to discriminate against this group of people, instead responding to their special needs for care, treatment, and nutrition. With her compassionate nature, she has built trust with the community, who in turn seek her advice for all matters related to nutrition, childcare, pregnancy care, and accessing government schemes. Kiran has been able to successfully realise improved nutritional outcomes for this special community.

Themes

Capacity Building

NPLA Training

Frontline Workers

Community Engagement



Image 11: AWW Kiran with children at the AWC, Bandgoan, Bharwni District, Madhya Pradesh

As the Auxiliary Nurse and Midwife (ANM) walks in with her immunisation kit, the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) at Badgaon turns chaotic with 20-odd babies crying in unison. It's immunisation day, and the universal fear of being pricked is creating much panic. Mothers scramble to catch hold of the older children who make attempts to run out of the AWC. Sensing disturbance, the youngest of babies wake up from deep slumber and get fidgety. The ANM, however, goes about her job, seemingly unaffected by the pandemonium. A 4-year-old clings to the Anganwadi Worker's (AWW) saari, weeping copiously. She holds the child close and comforts her, wiping her tears, promising her a chocolate once the ANM goes away. Several pricks later, the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) empties out.

Outside, yet another group of mothers patiently wait for their turn. AWW Kiran interacts with all the babies and mothers, just as she had done with the earlier group. A young mother asks nervously, "Should I get her checked up? What if she shows symptoms later on?" Kiran settles her fear, saying, "Of course, you should get her checked up at the hospital and start medicines if the doctor says so." One of the grandmothers bringing in a baby covers her wounded face and bandaged hands nervously, apologising, "Her mother had to go to work today, so I came." Kiran engages with her as the ANM attends to

the baby. Immunisation day ends in two shifts for two groups in the same community.

Badgaon village is home to a community living with leprosy. Around three decades ago, Leprosy patients who had been shunned by their families and the broader community were rehabilitated into this settlement by district officials. The children at the AWC are now the fourth generation of families who are regularly checked by their parents for any symptoms of leprosy. As new cases emerge, families take precautionary measures, including medication for prevention.

Despite this, the community continues to face discrimination from other families living in Badgaon, who remain hostile and fearful of them. Due to this divide, the AWW is forced to provide services in two separate batches. Exhausted after a long day of immunisation, Kiran reflects, "They refuse to let their children mingle with the children from the colony. They fear infection. I know this is wrong, but we cannot go against either community. I have to give all the information twice!"

The colony of people living with leprosy has recently welcomed two newborn babies. Geeta, with her 3-day-old baby, receives a home visit by the AWW. Holding up the baby, she smiles,

“Look at her, how is she any different from the other babies? She was born 3.5 kgs at birth and is perfectly healthy. But some people will only view her as a baby carrying the disease. There is a lot of misinformation about the disease regarding prevention, treatment, and cure. Doctors often hold camps here to provide services. Young couples who come to me for advice often fear the stigma will follow their children and impact their prospects.”

AWW Kiran’s responsibility becomes multi-fold then, as she works in this environment of discrimination to bring a focus around nutrition, especially dietary diversity. “I fear for my health as well, because I move around in households where the older members are still undergoing treatment. But that does not stop me from doing my duty. “That’s what God has willed me to take up!” she says, rocking the baby.

Geeta the young mother, adds, “We often meet at the AWC, where didi (reference to the AWW) counsels pregnant and lactating women about diet and nutrition. I follow all the advice she gives. I can see the difference between my first child and second child. I had a lot of rest, ate well, and did light work during my pregnancy as advised by didi. She visited me at home as well. She was always available for any doubt that I had in my mind. I owe the good health of my newborn child to didi’s advice.”

Most days in a week, AWW Kiran makes home visits to the colony. She stops at an elderly couple’s house undergoing treatment for their condition. They are Sangeeta’s grandparents who take care of her children when she goes out to work. Always apologetic, distanced, hesitant and nervous – the gentle community members fear any probability of discrimination. The AWW goes about her work, informing the family about the child’s progress. Before moving to the second house, she suggests to the family, “Make sure your plate has food with at least 5 different colours. Buy vegetables accordingly.”

In the backyard, a tiny kitchen garden promoted by the AWW is growing well. “These are structured land plots that were allotted to them with small houses. There is no land to grow anything. They manage some creepers,” Kiran remarks, adding, “The discrimination faced by the community will take time to end. Till then, this generation of people can change their lives if they have access to better nutrition. For them, it is not just about improving dietary practices, they also must keep the disease at bay. Our nutrition advice must integrate this aspect.”

On most days of the month, especially on auspicious days, vehicles arrive in the colony to distribute food. These are charitable organisations, families or religious groups that



Image 12: AWW Kiran, Bandgoan, Bharwni District, Madhya Pradesh,

donate food to the underprivileged. On one such day, a rich family distributes food in memory of their late father. Colony residents line up with plates and containers. The sight reveals the actual presence of those living with leprosy in the community with limbs and, at times, faces consumed by the disease. The food is dropped into their plates. Kiran says, “I usually advise the donors to offer nutritious food. Mostly, they bring khichdi. It saddens me to see that my community is treated like beggars and shunned. Soon, when these children grow up and take up jobs like Sangeeta, their situation will change.”

Heena’s newborn baby smiles at the AWW, as if she recognises her. “Why wouldn’t she? I was a regular at her household when Heena was pregnant. She knows me from the womb!” Kiran counsels Heena’s husband, who has dropped in for lunch, “She should not be doing much housework now in the first month, at least. Why not help her with the household chores? Don’t you want both mother and child to be healthy?” The young man nods and promises to heed her advice. Kiran says, “Young couples are more receptive to information. They are educated and are more attentive towards their children. I find it easy to interact with them.”

In the Nutrition Participatory Learning Approach (N-PLA) trainings that Kiran attended, she stood out as a special case due to the situation of her community. "I liked the training. They had a lot of songs, role-play, pictures, and banners. We discussed a lot. I shared my problems in the group. But the fact is that we have to find our own solutions for the community where we work. I have adapted some of the N-PLA messages to suit my community needs. My community meetings are well-attended, but the regular meetings suffer since all women refuse to meet in the same space. For me, home-visit is the best way to work. I spend a lot of time interacting with households, especially those living with leprosy," says Kiran.

"I was posted here in 2017. Slowly, I gained the community's trust. Since my community had special needs, the N-PLA trainings helped me focus on nutrition and health outcomes. I attended the training with 50 other AWWs, made new friends and learnt a lot of new tools and methods. In my Poshan baithaks (N-PLA meetings) I work with small groups of young mothers and pregnant women. Rest of my work is done through the home visits. You can see the changes in the women and the new generation of babies, they have good weight at birth, mothers follow exclusive breastfeeding, pregnant women now come to ask for iron folic tablets and follow up on immunisation. They eat well,



Image 13: AWW with NPLA training material, Bandgoan, Bharwni District, Madhya Pradesh

“ Young couples are more receptive to information. They are educated and are more attentive towards their children. I find it easy to interact with them. ”

— Ms. Kiran, Anaganwadi Worker,

Gudi, Bandgoan, Bharwni District, Madhya Pradesh

their dietary diversity has improved, and the situation of household hygiene is better as well. Given the situation in one part of my community, I need to work closely with the health department as well. I do this irrespective of whether it falls in my line of responsibilities or not," she says.

At times Kiran meets with some resistance in the community, especially when it comes to rehabilitation of malnourished children in the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres (NRC). "One of the most useful inputs in the N-PLA training was about communication, especially with those who resist change. I have learnt to use these tools with a combination of my own techniques of dealing with the community. I am not alone, we are a team here – the ANM, ASHA and myself, even our supervisors. If we have a family to convince, all of us work as one. Clearly, malnutrition is not the work of any one department." Her devoted work has won over the community's trust who earlier would avoid the AWC, believing that it would make children and pregnant women ill. Today, the Anganwadi welcomes children from all backgrounds, albeit in separate batches.

Reflecting on the status of nutrition in the village, Kiran says, "The overall health of the current generation is average. Now, with these

nutrition-related inputs we are reclaiming our health. It's a matter of being attentive to what we are eating. We once ate millets but are forced to consume wheat today. Besides this, we have to guard our children from packaged snacks like Kurkure (a packaged spicy and crunchy snack). This is the most difficult part – keeping children away from the poison!"

Newborns are recording an average weight at birth of 3 kgs, an improvement from the earlier 2.5 kgs. Kiran gives credit to the N-PLA process. "Children eat well in the AWC where they see each other. For me, this is the most important practice, if children learn to eat on their own and eat a hot, cooked meal for a full stomach – they will have better chances of retaining good health."

As evening sets in, Kiran ends the day, moving towards the bus stop. A child calls out to her, "Daadi (Grandma), will you bring a chocolate when you come tomorrow?" She smiles at the child's demand and waves out to him. This is the same child who had lined up for the food earlier in the day. AWW Kiran could be the catalyst that helps the community overcome their challenges, improving their situation – one well-nourished child at a time.



Image 14: Hot cooked meal at the AWC, Bandgoan, Bharwni District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 15: Children eating a meal at the AWC, Bandgoan, Bharwni District, Madhya Pradesh



Madhya Pradesh

Chattarpur



Communication for Change at the Grassroots



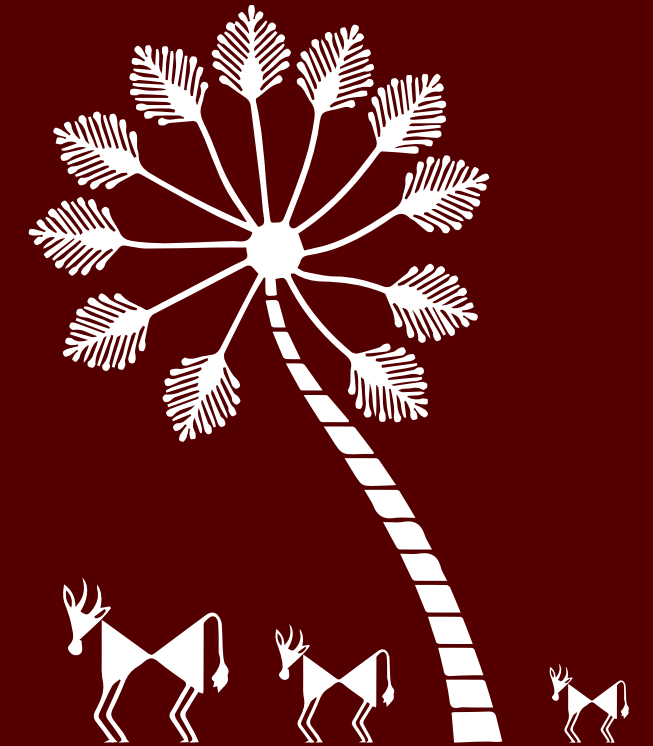
From Farm to Plate: Realising the Dream of a Nutri-Smart Village



The Transforamtion of Padariya Village



When Women Set the Narrative for Social Change





COMMUNICATION FOR CHANGE AT GRASSROOTS

In the heart of Madhya Pradesh lies Kalapani, a village near Chattarpur, where life is gradually changing, thanks to the Nutrition Participatory Learning Approach (N-PLA) meetings that are organised with the support of the SENU project. These meetings are facilitated by the dedicated Anganwadi workers (fondly called Didi) who have revolutionised nutrition, childcare, and community health practices, bringing a new era of awareness and well-being. With inputs from external agencies the Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) are on a mission to eradicate malnutrition from their village.

Themes

- SBCC
- NPLA
- Community Nutrition Gardens
- Hygiene



Image 1: AWW Vinita, Kalapani, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

SONGS OF HOPE AND HEALTH

The community of Kalapani has always found solace and strength in their cultural heritage, particularly through songs. Leveraging this tradition, groups of adolescents have crafted songs that convey crucial health messages, all under the guidance of the Anganwadi Didi. One popular song begins with vibrant descriptions of growing green leafy vegetables both in Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs) and at home. The chorus rings out, “Raise your haemoglobin, strengthen the fight against malnutrition,” emphasising the importance of a balanced diet with seven essential food groups.

The lyrics advocate for the consumption of fruits and leafy greens and stress the necessity of covering food items to keep them safe from contamination. Another song takes a more personal and celebratory tone. It tells the story of a newborn’s arrival, a moment of immense joy and responsibility shared by the entire family. The song’s narrative unfolds through the voices of different family members: the mother, father, grandparents, and siblings, each expressing their hopes and dreams for the new baby. The mother sings about the importance of breastfeeding and her role in providing the best nutrition for her child. The father’s verse speaks of his duty to support the mother and ensure she has all she needs to stay healthy and strong.

Through these melodious narratives, the community not only learns about the vital health practices but also internalises them in a way that deeply resonates with and enriches their daily lives. These songs also emphasise crop diversification in Community Nutrition Gardens (CNG), highlighting crops like green leafy vegetables, beans, gourds, brinjal, cauliflower, tomatoes, and green chillies among others that help combat malnutrition and ensure a steady supply of nutritious food.

TRANSFORMATIVE N-PLA MEETINGS

The N-PLA meetings have been a cornerstone of change in Kalapani. These gatherings provide a structured platform for educating the community about nutrition and childcare. Sushma, a regular participant in the meetings, reflects on the impact. “We attended all the Poshanam meetings where we learned about child nutrition and care. Before these meetings, we didn’t have structured guidance. Now, we understand the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and the gradual introduction of solid foods,” she says.

Vinita, an Anganwadi worker (AWW) in Kalapani, shared her observations: “Initially, we explained things, and they would listen and understand. But now, they actively do things themselves during the meetings. They see the benefits and incorporate them into their routine.” This shift from passive learning to active implementation marks a significant evolution in the community’s health practices.

Vinita also noted improvements in breastfeeding practices. “We used to explain breastfeeding to women, but now we use picture cards to show the correct method and benefits of breastfeeding. Initially, there was confusion, especially among older women and mothers-in-law, who believed that breastfeeding for nine months could make the child sick. Older women believed that if a child vomited, it was due to the breast milk. They would therefore disallow women from breastfeeding the baby, leaving the baby hungry and prone to malnourishment. We clarified that this was a misconception. They also disallowed colostrum feeding. But we explained to them that the thick, yellow milk is the most protective tonic for the child and helps build the child’s immunity.”

Vinita observed significant health differences in children who were not breastfed for the first nine months compared to those who were. She says, “If a mother doesn’t breastfeed properly in the early



Image 2: Renu and Subasha, Kalapani, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

months, she faces problems like pain due to clogging of milk in her breasts. When asked if they breastfed on time, some admit they didn’t, leading to such issues. Slowly, there is a shift in their practices. Most women breastfeed their babies regularly, with guidance from us.” Currently, none of the 0–6-month children have been admitted to the NRC (Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre) in the past one or two years, indicating an improvement in overall child health.

Sushma adds, “The meetings taught us the importance of child vaccinations and regular health check-ups. We get vaccination schedules from the Anganwadi, and they keep track of the child’s weight and health at 3-month, 6-month, and 8-month intervals.”



Image 3: Food, Kalapani, Bharwni District, Madhya Pradesh

BRIDGING GENERATION: TRADITION MEETS MODERNITY

One of the most profound impacts of the N-PLA meetings has been the bridging of generational gaps in knowledge and practices. Earlier, the wisdom of grandmothers dictated childcare practices, which often involved traditional remedies and practices. Aarti recalls, “We used to substitute breast milk with cow milk or goat milk for babies in the first 3–6 months, even if the mother was available for breastfeeding. This practice continued until recently. Now, thanks to the meetings, we understand the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and proper nutrition.”

The conflict between traditional practices and modern health advice is not uncommon. Aarti shares, “Sometimes there are disagreements. For instance, earlier, when a child fell sick, we used home remedies using honey or Acau leaves, or other herbs. Now, we focus on timely referral to the doctor for advice and treatment, correct nutrition, and cleanliness.”

Older women often share their experiences of raising children two decades ago, highlighting the differences in childcare practices over the years. “Back then, mothers would exclusively breastfeed

for six months and then gradually introduce foods like rice and corn porridge and soft mashed foods. This was all given in small amounts with careful attention,” she explained.

When asked about the level of attention given to breastfeeding, she noted, “Earlier, it used to be once or twice a day, but now it’s more frequent, almost every three hours.” She acknowledged the significant improvements brought by the Anganwadi centres, adding, “Previously, we didn’t measure the child’s weight regularly, but now, we are aware about our child’s growth since the Anganwadi worker takes their weight and height regularly. We also keep track.”

She also reflected on the care during pregnancy, saying, “Usually, the mother-in-law would take care of the soon-to-be mother, providing whatever was available in the house. The care depended on the family’s means. If they had



Image 4: Food, Kalapani, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

resources, they provided well; if not, they did what they could.”

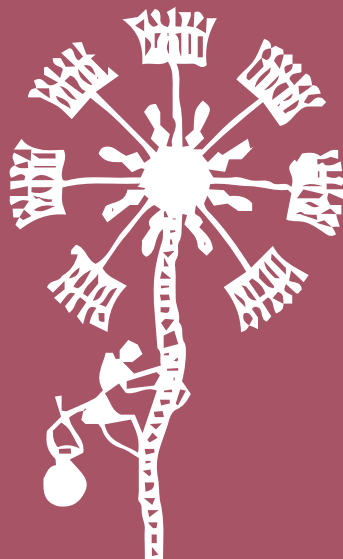
ENHANCED HYGIENE PRACTICES

Hygiene practices in Kalapani have seen a remarkable improvement over the past few years. Families now regularly wash hands before meals and ensure thorough cleaning of vegetables and utensils. This shift is crucial in preventing diseases and promoting overall health. Sushma observes, “Earlier, people used to go to the fields for open defecation, but this has significantly reduced now.”

MEN’S INVOLVEMENT: A NEW DYNAMIC

The increased involvement of men in childcare and nutrition has been a significant and positive change. Traditionally, men were less engaged, leaving these responsibilities to the women. However, the N-PLA meetings have encouraged a more inclusive approach. Vinita notes, “Men now participate in activities like vaccinations and child feeding. They actively ask for information regarding child health, nutrition, and care during pregnancy and post-delivery. This is very encouraging since earlier men wouldn’t bother.”

Sushma adds, “Nowadays, even men stay around during deliveries, which wasn’t common before. It’s important for men to also take care of the mother and child. They should be aware and supportive during pregnancy, ensuring that the



“Men now participate in activities like vaccinations and child feeding. They actively ask for information regarding child health, nutrition, and care during pregnancy and post-delivery.”

— Sushma, Community Memeber,

Kalapani, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

mother eats well and even accompanying her to the hospital. If the husband isn’t available, other family members can help.”

This increased involvement of men has fostered a supportive environment for mothers and children. They ensure that the mothers eat well, accompany them to the hospital, and take an active interest in the health and nutrition of their children.

FLOURISHING COMMUNITY NUTRITION GARDENS

Community Nutrition Gardens (CNG) have brought tangible benefits to Kalapani. These gardens focus on crop diversification, which helps combat malnutrition. By growing their own produce, locals ensure a steady supply of nutritious food, reinforcing the learnings from the N-PLA meetings.

LOOKING AHEAD: A HEALTHIER FUTURE

The N-PLA meetings, as part of the SENU project, have not only educated the community about nutrition and childcare but have also inspired a collective shift towards healthier practices. The establishment of community nutrition gardens highlight a holistic approach to combating malnutrition and promoting well-being.

As Kalapani continues to embrace these changes, the health and future of its children look brighter than ever. The village’s journey from traditional practices to modern health awareness is a testament to the power of education and community involvement in creating lasting change.



Chattarpur



FROM FARM TO PLATE: REALISING THE DREAM OF A NUTRI-SMART VILLAGE

In less than two years, Pathwapurwa village in Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh has scripted a success story in the domain of nutrition and food security. From 29 children in the Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) category to zero, Pathwapurwa has undertaken an inspiring journey for eradicating malnutrition among young children in the community. Ensuring dietary diversity through an integrated approach spearheaded by a local women's group has been a key process to achieve this challenging goal. Today, most houses in Pathwapurwa have kitchen gardens blooming with green vegetables and fruits. The Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs) managed by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are an example of crop diversity yielding produce that reaches families, Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) and homes of pregnant and lactating women with nutritional deficiencies. Several farmers in the village have adopted crop diversification, breaking a decades-long mono-cropping pattern that dominated Pathwapurwa. Women of Pathwapurwa are on the path to making their village nutrition and food secure.

Themes

Community
Nutritional Gardens

Women
Empowerment

Agroecological
Practices



Image 5: AWW children being fed diverse food at the AWC, Pathwapurwa, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

Clad in a red sari, Sita Devi (57), a Self-Help Group (SHG) member sings a song on nutrition that she has learnt and composed with her group in a Nutrition-Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) meeting. The song attaches the importance of diverse food groups to different gods, to make the concept of dietary diversity more relevant for the residents of Pathwapurwa village. Songs, games, picture cards, discussions and demonstrations are some of the tools used in the N-PLA meetings to share information on nutrition related topics. The project team from the NGOs Harsha Trust and Darshana facilitate these meetings and on-site conversations and handhold the women through actual demonstrations in the CNG to ensure behaviour change and efficacy of the models proposed.

Located 50 Kilometres away from the district headquarters, Pathwapurwa village adopted traditional methods of farming — mono-cropping with heavy reliance on chemical inputs to enhance crop productivity. Produce is sold at a local market. Sarita Devi, a 55-year-old CNG member says, "We didn't grow vegetables for home consumption in the farms. Wheat, corn, black gram, and soya grew in our farms. All the vegetables that we got from the market were full of chemical pesticides! It tasted bad, our people developed illnesses from eating them, but we didn't have any choice. Today, we grow our own vegetables such as bottle gourd, brinjal,

beans, fenugreek, ladyfingers, pumpkin, spinach, amaranth, cucumber and much more. We use them at home and share it with our neighbours. All our vegetables are pesticide-free.”

The CNG women are trained to prepare and use organic manure that enhances overall productivity in the farm. Innovative ideas such as creation of seed banks have ensured conservation and production of indigenous varieties of crops. This is an outcome of intensive community mobilisation and education that has happened via the N-PLA and CNG processes.

The transformation from being a nutrition-deficit village towards being a “nutri-smart” village was a gradual process with Anganwadi Workers facilitating key processes. The CNG women too, persisted through several challenges of land acquisition, soil quality, irregular rains, and flooding to emerge with a fully functional farm that became the centre of discussion in the village and neighbouring areas. As in the CNG, the results of the efforts were reflected in the Anganwadi records as well.

Priyanka, a local Anganwadi worker, says “When I started working in the village, I observed that parents had no information about correct eating practices especially with young children. This in turn led to under-nourishment among young children. Following our N-PLA training, we tried

to address this information gap, by engaging women in monthly meetings. They appreciated the inputs and responded by making several changes in their cooking and feeding practices, maintaining hygiene, and involving family members in childcare. You can see the change in our Anganwadi records as well. This generation of children are healthier than the previous one, thanks to the N-PLA inputs. We have no SAM children in our Anganwadi Centre (AWC) today.”



Image 6: Organic manure used in CNGs, Pathwapurwa, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 7: Happy children the AWC, Pathwapurwa, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

The health system until recently had not been responsive to community needs. The AWC too was 4 kms from the main village, creating a gap in service delivery mechanisms in the community. Jeetu, Project Coordinator at Darshana, an NGO partner of the SENU project, recalls “It was not at all an easy task to start working on these issues directly. It took a lot of time for us to understand the dynamics of each village, prepare a team, and start conversations with the local community members.” Despite the challenges, the NGO partner teams built a relationship of trust with the community, dispelling all doubts with the gradual results from the CNG and N-PLA process. Soon, women and young couples themselves began to promote the meetings.

Women of Pathwapura have been at the centre of this massive and positive change leading to overall community development. They ushered health and lifestyle reforms in the village by introducing significant interventions such as handwashing, end to open defecation, adolescent education, and menstrual hygiene. N-PLA has been a significant tool in mobilising the local community.

Pathwapura was selected as the first pilot village for implementing N-PLA. It was because of this strategy that villagers recognised and started working towards the concept of “farm to plate.” N-PLA succeeded in educating the people

of Pathwapuwra about nutrition security, WASH, nutrition-sensitive agriculture practices, gender inclusion, and breastfeeding. In this process, it was important to ensure diversity of produce from the CNG and kitchen gardens and that this produce reached maximum households.

Dhirendra, a community resource person at Darshana reminiscences, "Women didn't feel interested in joining us for discussion, initially. Also, their husbands would not allow it. But this is where the beauty of N-PLA lies. It is designed in such a way that people start joining in, voluntarily. Soon, from the second or third meeting onwards, men too started showing up to the meetings." Stakeholders such as panchayat officials and district administration have given their approval and support to the nutrition education process. The WCD collaborates through the Anganwadi workers who are trained in facilitating meetings at the community level. Jeetu Chouhan, nutrition lead trainer from NGO Darshana, says, "The meetings are designed to generate interest among the participants and motivate them to join for future sessions as well."

Young couples are the primary forces promoting gender equality in the community. Backed by school education and exposure to new ways of thinking, the youth is willing to take up the challenge of breaking gender norms. Men are



Image 8: Nutritious Food, Pathwapurwa, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

– Ram Kumari, Local SHG Member,

actively engaging in the process of monitoring their child's growth and development. Pathwapurwa today is well on its way to being a nutri-smart village – one that has adopted several progressive behaviour changes, both at the household and community levels.

Dhirendra, a community resource person at Darshana reminisces, "Women didn't feel interested in joining us for discussion, initially. Also, their husbands would not allow it. But this is where the beauty of N-PLA lies. It is designed in such a way that people start joining in, voluntarily. Soon, from the second or third meeting onwards, men too started showing up to the meetings." Stakeholders such as panchayat officials and district administration have given their approval and support to the nutrition education process. The WCD collaborates through the Anganwadi workers who are trained in facilitating meetings at the community level. Jeetu Chouhan, nutrition lead trainer from NGO Darshana, says, "The meetings are designed to generate interest among the participants and motivate them to join for future sessions as well."



Image 9: AWW Neelam, Pathwapurwa, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

“

Traditionally, Pathwapurwa households grew produce in kitchen gardens. They knew about the importance of preservation of seeds as well. But this practice has slowly declined. With N-PLA, we have revived our homestead gardens and are planting diverse varieties of vegetables and fruits including new plants like long beans, amaranth leaves, and kidney beans. Women are learning to dry vegetables in peak season and use them in their dishes during the lean seasons. They make various pickles, papads, laddus, and snacks from sesame, jaggery, and peanuts. They try to implement everything that they learn from the sessions. We are slowly returning to our roots by sourcing uncultivated food including berries and seasonal leafy greens. Our community was already growing 6-7 types of food groups but did not include them in their diet. The N-PLA session has enabled the intake of these additional food groups, enhancing the dietary diversity of the community. Since 2017 I had taken 30 children to the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres. But after 2021 since the N-PLA, not a single SAM child has been recorded in my Anganwadi.

”

– Neelam, Anganwadi Worker,

Pathwapurwa, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

“The community was introduced to crop diversification through several meetings and was encouraged to set up homestead gardens as well. Once the result met the approval of the community, it became a popular practice. They also learnt to prepare organic manure that enriched the produce with health benefits. Financial gains included money saved from not procuring chemical fertilisers and pesticides along with the sale of additional produce from the homestead gardens and vegetable farms in the market. Today, they have been able to create a steady demand for organic produce in the market. Soon, the time will come when the market will be dependent on the community and not vice-versa!”

— Krishnapal Singh, Field Officer, Darshana,

Pathwapurwa, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 10: DMKS Team, Pathwapurwa, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

Chattarpur



THE TRANSFORMATION OF PADARIYA VILLAGE

A quiet revolution is unfolding in the rural landscape of Padariya village near Chhatarpur. Traditionally, gender roles in Indian villages have been rigid, with men primarily responsible for earning a livelihood and women shouldering the burden of household chores and childcare. The lack of male participation in domestic work means women frequently suffer from exhaustion and have less time to devote to self-care, nutrition and well-being which are especially crucial during pregnancy and child-rearing. While 81% of women are engaged in household chores, only 26% of men contribute to household work. However, Padariya is witnessing a remarkable transformation, thanks to the Nutrition Participatory Learning Approach (N-PLA), introduced as part of the SENU Project.

Themes

SBCC

NPLA

Increasing Men's
Role in Care Giving
Activities



Image 12: Jeetu Chauhan, Project Coordinator, Padariya Village, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

The Nutrition Participatory Learning Approach (N-PLA) is a community-based educational program aimed at improving nutritional practices and health outcomes. Through participatory learning sessions, community members, both men and women, are educated about nutrition, hygiene, and the importance of shared responsibilities within households. This initiative has become a catalyst for redefining gender roles in Padariya, fostering greater male participation in household duties and childcare.

CHANGING GENDER ROLES

For years, fathers in Padariya were distant figures in the nurturing process of their children. But change is in the air. A participant recalled, "In the past, fathers often overlooked the emotional needs of their children, but today, fathers embrace the new ways, holding their children close, nurturing them with care, and facing life's challenges together.". This shift in paternal roles was just the beginning of a broader transformation.

Ramvati, a vibrant woman and active participant in N-PLA meetings from the village, vividly described the evolving role of fathers and husbands during pregnancy. "These days, the role of fathers and husbands during pregnancy has changed significantly in our village. They are now fully involved in the process, accompanying their wives to the Anganwadi Centre for regular check-ups, taking care of their diet, and contributing to household chores like cooking and maintaining cleanliness around the house."

A COUPLE'S JOURNEY

The story of Avadh and Mohini stands out as a testament to the transformative power of the Nutrition Participatory Learning Approach (N-PLA). Their journey from traditional roles to shared responsibilities began quietly but grew into a powerful example for the entire community.

Their transformation started when Mohini began attending the Anganwadi meetings organized by Krishna Tiwari, the Anganwadi worker in Padariya. At first, Avadh was sceptical. He saw these meetings as just another task that took his wife away from her duties. However, Mohini was persistent. She would come home and share the insights she gained about nutrition, hygiene, and childcare, hoping to make Avadh see the importance of these practices.

One evening, Mohini returned from a meeting with a particularly compelling story. She spoke about how a simple practice like handwashing could prevent numerous illnesses. Her passion and the practical benefits she outlined began to chip away at Avadh's scepticism.

One evening, Mohini returned from a meeting with a particularly compelling story. She spoke about how a simple practice like handwashing could prevent numerous illnesses. Her passion

and the practical benefits she outlined began to chip away at Avadh's scepticism.

During one session, Krishna introduced the concept of shared responsibilities in childcare and household chores. She used real-life examples to illustrate how a father's involvement could positively impact the entire family's well-being. This piqued Avadh's interest and post that meeting he shared, "In our village, it used to be that men had very little to do with caring for newborns. But now, thanks to the knowledge shared by Anganwadi didi, my mother and wife, I've learned how important it is to be involved in our child's diet, vaccination, and overall care."

Mohini further added, "Our whole family now participates in taking care of our child. By dividing tasks based on what's needed, it really eases the burden on me. It's a team effort, and it makes a big difference," she said with a smile. The cooperation and shared responsibility brought them closer as a couple and created a more supportive environment for their child.



Image 13: A couple feeding child, Padariya Village, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

SONGS OF CHANGE

The transformation in Padariya village wasn't just about meetings and discussions, it was also about music, joy, and shared experiences. In one of the meetings, Krishna Tiwari, the dedicated Anganwadi worker, decided to try something different to engage the community. She brought a simple idea to the village: a song.

The song, infused with the local dialect and familiar melodies, spoke about the importance of washing hands, eating a balanced diet, and keeping the surroundings clean. The lyrics were simple yet powerful, relating good hygiene to the blessings of gods, making the concepts more relatable and memorable.

To everyone's surprise, the melody caught on quickly. Women, who were initially hesitant to attend the meetings, started clapping and singing along. The children joined in with their high-pitched voices, adding to the chorus. But the real breakthrough came when the men, who usually stayed on the periphery, began tapping their feet and humming the tune.

Krishna reflected on this musical journey, "When I first started conducting N-PLA meetings in Padariya village, only women participated. But over the years, male participation has increased significantly. Now, male members are very interested in learning about nutrition and cleanliness, and they understand the importance of sharing the workload and their role in childcare."

IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Tulsidas, a respected elder, spoke passionately about the power of knowledge sharing. "Knowledge sharing and meetings organized by the Anganwadi didi have been crucial in changing the attitudes of men in our village regarding their role in childcare. In the past, there was a lack of understanding, but now we see that taking care of a newborn is a collaborative process.". Her words echoed the sentiment of many men in the village who had begun to see the value in shared responsibilities.

GENERATIONS OF CHNAGE

Kera Devi and her daughter-in-law, Rubi, represented two generations of change. Kera Devi recalled, "When I was pregnant, my husband's contribution to my care and that of our newborn was very minimal due to his busy schedule and the different social dynamics of that time.". Rubi, however, painted a different picture. "My husband was fully involved in taking care of my health during pregnancy. He helped with heavy lifting, assisted in cooking, and attended every appointment with the doctor and Anganwadi didi with me."

REASONS BEHIND INCREASED MALE PARTICIPATION

Jeetu Chauhan, Project Coordinator at Darshana Mahila Kalyan Samiti, shares her insights on the increasing male participation. She says, "A significant factor has been our effective nutrition education sessions, especially the second meeting where both men and women sit together. However, even before that, the role of the

Anganwadi workers, our project team, and our community stakeholders has been crucial. Bringing men together has been a big challenge in the community because men often stay away from discussions where many women are present."

Jeetu continues, "We understood that if men couldn't participate in every task, they could still help with smaller tasks to support the women. Family members also started to pitch in, making it clear that we were talking about the nutrition of the entire family. For better family nutrition, the responsibility should be shared by the whole family, particularly between both parents. Whether

it's related to household chores, buying vegetables, vaccinations, weighing the child, the mother's diet, registering pregnant women, or deciding where deliveries should take place, we are working to ensure equal responsibility between men and women.

"We have seen some positive results in the community, but we are still on the journey to bring the entire community along. Some men have adopted positive behaviours, and seeing their actions, others are also getting inspired and moving forward."

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACH AND TEAMWORK

Jeetu highlights the significance of the initial efforts and teamwork in the SENU Project. "The beautiful experience of this entire program lies in the strong, capable team we have. Our team members' interest and understanding of the subject have played a major role. The colleagues from WHH (Welthungerhilfe) have built the capacity of our entire team. They taught us how to understand and implement this process at the district, block, and community levels to achieve better behaviour change. This led to the emergence of a strong group of trainers who played a crucial role in advancing the program and delivering better results."

Jeetu continues, "These trainers then developed the skills of Anganwadi workers, who in turn carried the learnings to the community. Our team provided handholding support to ensure effective facilitation, proper monitoring, and actual behaviour change in the community. We created follow-up plans to ensure that discussions led to real change, not just talk."

Jeetu emphasizes the multi-sectoral nature of the project, stating, "Our collaboration with various departments has been essential. The ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) department has been a major supporter at different levels.

From the district level with the DPO (District Program Officer) to the block level with CDPOs (Child Development Project Officers), their approval and support have been crucial for our activities."

She explains, "In the community nutrition garden (CNG) work, departments like horticulture and agriculture have played key roles. They provided technical guidance on what and how to grow. The support from NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and SRLM (State Rural Livelihood Mission) officials was also vital. This multi-sectoral approach ensured that all relevant departments contributed to the project's success, as nutrition is connected to every sector."

Rajiv from XX department further added, "Over the past 8–10 years, the impact of these multi-stakeholder efforts became increasingly visible. In earlier times, the dietary needs of families were met by growing various crops around their homes. However, the shift towards commercial cropping for monetary gains reduced the dependence on kitchen gardens. This change negatively affected nutritional security, as the assumption that money could buy all nutritional needs from the market proved problematic due to availability and cost issues. Despite these

challenges, the experience with the Darshana and Srijan teams has been overwhelmingly positive. They worked tirelessly to create a ripple effect in the system, fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual support."

The story of Padariya village is a testament to the power of community-driven change. Through the Nutrition Participatory Learning Approach, traditional roles have been redefined, leading to increased male participation in household chores and childcare. This journey of transformation underscores the importance of education, collaboration, and a shared vision for a healthier, more supportive community. The lessons learnt offer hope and inspiration for other villages seeking similar paths to progress.



Image 14: AWW leading an NPLA session, Padariya Village, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh



WHEN WOMEN SET THE
NARRATIVE FOR SOCIAL
CHANGE

The Community Nutrition Garden as a site for
engaging women in community development
process.

Themes

CNG
Model

Integrated
Approach

Nutrition

Crop
diversification



Image 15: Women SHG Members, Khonp Village, Chattarpur
District, Madhya Pradesh

A year ago, the narrative about Khonp would have been
different.

It would be mostly about a project team meeting with the
Panchyati Raj Institutions of Khonp to share the concept of
the Community Nutrition Garden (CNG). And yet another set of
meetings with the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in the village to
convince them to begin the CNG. Denied permissions, delay,
resistance, lack of interest, doubts pushed the project team to
the brink of despair and frustration. "But we were not the
ones to buckle under the pressure!", smiles Dilip, project team
member in the current day. "We persevered. And finally, step
by step, we were able to convince both the Panchayati Raj
Institutions and one of the SHGs to start work.". The journey of
a CNG always begins with a struggle in the initial phase. Set
in resource-poor settings, with quality of soil and water
scarcity as the major obstacles, the project team stood their
ground, has been trained to overcome hurdles. The narrative
changes when women enter the process. Questions and
uncertainties notwithstanding, the women were finally willing
to risk their efforts for the promise of a flourishing farm.

And then, follow the children with their little buckets and water
containers, each day without fail at 12 noon. They would trek up
and down to the CNG from their homes to water the plants,
ensuring that not a single plant wilted in the dry summer. CNG
member Archana says, "We would take turns. 10-12 noon and 2
pm till 5 pm, was the time when women would water the CNG.
It was back-breaking work to carry headloads of water all the
time. When children started volunteering, we got some respite.
At times even our family members would come forth to help.
Together, we pushed our CNG through the dry season."

The group approached the Gram Panchayat for fencing, borewell and electricity connection. Despite repeated requests the Gram Panchayat made no efforts to support the CNG. The MNREGS also took time to enter into the partnership. Encouraged by the project team, the women decided to take the matter up with the District Collector, a position held by a woman officer. Parvati says, “I had never spoken in front of anyone, had hid behind my long veil all my life. But this was a do or die situation! We started speaking and did not stop! We were able to convince Collector madam about our need for water. To our surprise, in less than a week, we got the water connection! This was a turning point in our journey. We learnt to take initiative and get our work done. One had the choice to complain or take destinies in our own hands!”

Dhirendra, project team member says, “They are a resilient set of women. Even with their *ghoonghat* (veil), they are able to negotiate for their demands. With each passing month, they have grown stronger. They face several barriers but push them away as well with their planned action. The Gram Panchayat had no option but to start paying attention to their CNG requirements.”

The current day narrative therefore has a thriving, flourishing CNG with diverse varieties of vegetables, fruits and other crops. Paravati says, “Our large family used to subsist on just

half a kilo of vegetables, each day. It was too little. Today, we can take over a kilo of vegetables from the CNG to our homes. You can see the change in our health. We used to fall ill several times during the year and waste money on health expenses. Now, it has been a really long time that we visited any hospital. We owe our good health to the chemical-free food we are getting from the CNG. It also tastes better than the market bought vegetables.”. Earlier, a farm-labourer herself, Parvati now has learnt new farming techniques through the CNG process. “I tell everyone, I am farmer, with my own farm, in my own name”, she says proudly.

The first harvest brought much joy to the women. They took the tiny portions back home to cook and serve to their families. “We used to cook plain dal earlier. Now, we add spinach, fenugreek, other vegetables to make it more nourishing and tastier. Salad is now a regular part of our meal. This is the result of our farm!”, says Parvati.

Project team member Shiva says, “With the CNG, the household level practices changed, behaviours shifted. They could now include up to 6-7 food groups in their diet. Gender equations changed when the women gained confidence and became articulate. Having participated in the N-PLA meetings as well, the women went back with relevant information that were shared with the family as well. They learn from the



Image 16: The flourishing CNG after women’s hard labour, Khonp Village, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh

Anganwadi Centre and apply it in their homes, like the homestead nutrition garden that most of the houses in Khonp have today. The households exchange the produced vegetables which ensures a good mix of nutrients for all. It takes a year to functionalise a CNG, with all the challenges of building water structures, electricity connection, readying the land and integrating it with the MNREGA and the Gram Panchayat. But at the end of the day, to see the CNG learnings and benefits spread out to the entire community gives us all a deep satisfaction.”

.The Anganwadi worker as the frontline facilitator of the N-PLA process played a key role in enabling behaviour change along with the ASHA and ANM workers. With the convergent efforts, the grassroots workers were able to impact several health and nutrition outcomes. Soon the number of food groups that is available for the community may go up to 10. Feeding practices of young children have also improved. Pregnant women who earlier would not disclose their pregnancies now register themselves at the Anganwadi Center and seek iron, folic and calcium tablets, besides ensuring regular ANC’s and institutional deliveries. This has been the result of collective efforts as part of the integrated approach of the SENU project.

The success story of the CNG model has been the empowerment of women in the local communities and their participation in the issues of community development and leadership. Today, these women are more confident in organising themselves and advocating for the social and governance issues that plague their communities. Their families have also become more supportive as they can see tangible outcomes of their leadership in the community.

CNG member Kaushalya says, "SRIJAN has held our hand all through. We had no voice, confidence or any idea of the world outside. But they pushed us to move ahead, speak up. Now we speak for all other women as well. We have emerged from darkness. *Naari Shakti Zindabad* (Long live the power of women)!"



Image 17: Parvati, Khonp Village, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 18: The CNG Produce, Khonp Village, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh



Madhya Pradesh

Khandwa



Landless Women Leading Land Revival through Community Nutrition Gardens (CNG)



Promoting Behaviour Change Communication through the Integrated Approach



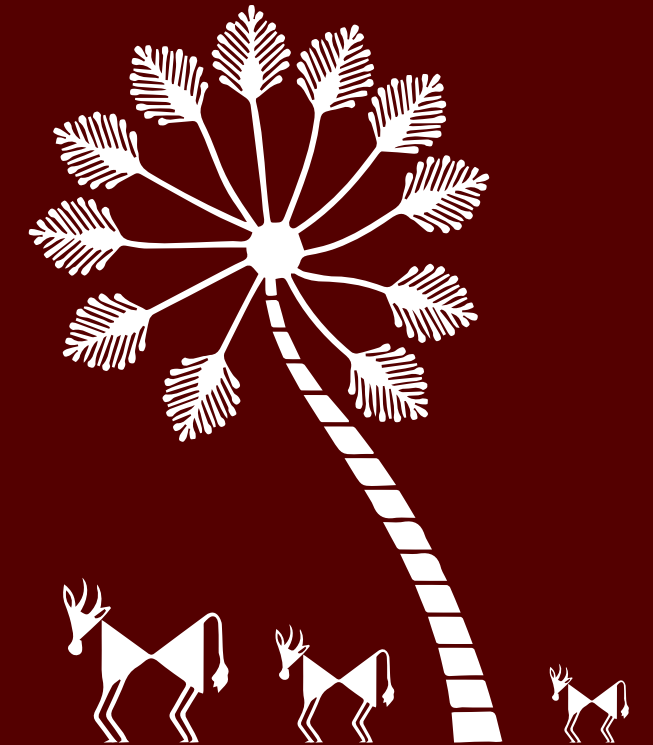
Rising from the Ashes to Stake Their Claim for the Skies



Teaming up with the Soothsayer for Saving Lives - the Nutrition Ambassadors of Seetabedi



The Millet-Growers of Mojwadi





LANDLESS WOMEN LEADING LAND REVIVAL THROUGH COMMUNITY NUTRITION GARDENS (CNG)

A group of women farmers have over seasons demonstrated the possibilities of retaining natural farming methods and traditional crops, including millets. Tilling land, claiming land ownership, entering the markets and demonstrating collective work, the CNG women have come a long way from their earlier impoverished status to ensure a better quality of life for their families. Land that was earlier fallow now produces steady harvests throughout the year, setting an example for other farmers in the village.

Themes

Community
Nutritional Gardens

Women
Empowerment

Agroecological
Practices



Image 1: Tulsibai, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

Perched on high trees, the parrots of Sitabedi village await the right moment to swoop down and feast on the jowari (millet) crop. The only deterrent is the woman with hawk eyes, guarding the crops, occasionally sending slingshots of stones across the field. Visibly exhausted, the woman takes a break to steady the scarecrow that seems to have lost its power to scare the birds. And that's when the pandemonium of parrots descends on the field to get a peckful of their favourite jowari cob. A slingshot and several expletives later, the parrots fly back to safety. Every such leaves the cobs with more cavities. On an average, farmers end up harvesting only half a cob each season.

One among the handful of persistent millet farmers in the village, the woman refuses to give up. Others have switched to cash crops long back. This little patch of land will help satiate the cravings of the elderly in her family that grew up on a millet diet. What could be harder – sourcing millets from the market at 40 rupees per kg or watching over a tiny patch of a millet field day and night? Marginal farmers and landless families often have little choice.

Despite their daily squabble with the birds, the community is benevolent towards them. Briskly patting out a jowari roti, local Community Nutrition Garden (CNG) member Sheela Dhurve says, "It's their share, actually. If all of us start

growing millets, the birds can have their full and it will not make a difference." That then, is the tribal wisdom and principle of co-existence that is being challenged by the dominance of cash-crops and mono-cropping.

Sitabedi was once rich with varied local millets– *Raala, Sawa, Sama, Kodo, Kutki* and even *Sawariya*. The last decade has marked the slow disappearance of these millets from the plates of the tribal populace. Shyama, Ms. Dhurve's neighbour remarks, "Our *Korku, Barela, Bhilala* tribes here would offer millet porridge (Sawa) to young mothers after delivery to ease lactation and provide vital nutrients to the mother and child. But now it is tough to get these even in the market. Till last year I used to sow *Sawa*, but the birds leave nothing behind. Now, our young women go to the hospital to bear their children. They get medicines and food there. But we still ensure that millets are included in their diet," she says.

Ms. Dhurve and others from her CNG have been working hard to revive traditional methods of farming, saving seeds, growing millets, ensuring it stays in their diets and is introduced to the young. A hectare of land for the CNG may not be sufficient to demonstrate all of this, but the women are well on their way to influencing farming practices in their village. Their CNG meanwhile awaits its third sowing season.

Ms. Dhurve's husband Atal Singh Dhurve, an elderly farmer, blames the indiscriminate use of chemical fertilisers for his heart ailment. "We are inhaling poison every minute we work as farmhands in the soyabean and wheat farms. Our land holdings are too small to sustain our household requirements. So, we have to work on other farms. We had grown up eating millets, roots, tubers, and wild fruits from the forest. Now, we are forced to eat wheat that smells of pesticides! That thing has no taste, no texture, does not satiate hunger! On other days we eat corn. It is more expensive to mill. These (CNG) women are growing pesticide free vegetables and fruits. But will they be able to stand in the market amidst other farmers and sell their produce?" he asks with some disdain before going on to narrate his experience of distress-selling an entire Brinjal crop at just 1 rupee.

The other CNG women have learnt to not react to cynicism. "It's not much, but we are able to take fresh vegetables home. Then, we have our homestead nutrition garden produce as well. Soon, we will start expanding our millet patch."

Outward migration renders Sitabedi empty during the dry season. 60% of the village leaves for migration related work in mills and farms, taking their families with them. Young mothers and children would suffer due to the harsh



Image 2: Atal Singh Dhurve, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

conditions of living in transit dwellings. Of the 153 children registered in the local Anganwadi Centre, around 20-25 attend the centre daily.

Multiple external agencies have entered the rural landscape offering livelihood options as farm hands, construction labourers and other jobs in industrial belts in cities. However, most poor families crave the luxury of staying back in their own land, with the assurance of livelihood in their familiar local setting.

The Indo-German development cooperation project Securing Nutrition Enhancing Resilience (SENU) offers such an opportunity for poorest families. The project is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and is implemented in India by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

The SENU project's approach focuses on the most marginalised families with an objective to improve the household-level nutritional status, eventually impacting community nutrition. The CNG set up and managed by a local Self-Help Group (SHG) of women is a step forward in this direction. Identification of land, levelling, ploughing, sowing, facing barriers of water logging, wage allocation from the central government wage programme Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and resistance from their families were some of the challenges that the women have overcome in establishing the CNG.

Currently, the women await the sowing season with plans to grow Spinach, Fenugreek, Radish, Beans, Bitter gourd, Bottle gourd, Chillies, Coriander, Brinjal, Moringa and fruit saplings. Balancing work on their family farms and the CNG, the group makes it a point to spend at least 2-3 hours each day in the

CNG. The group has interests in expanding their work with millets.

Ms. Sheela, a regular at the Poshanam (NPLA) meetings says, "The elderly in the village still stick to their millet diet. They fall ill and weak if they do not get their regular diet of millet rotis or porridge, with salt and chillies on the side. We make sure to buy it for them. It suits them. We plan to sow larger patches of millets in our CNG soon." The women's group have been considering proposing a revival of collective millet farming in the meetings. Ms. Tulsabai Uike, Sarpanch and CNG member, says, "We will hold meetings at the Panchayat and place a request to all farmers in the village to grow millets on at least one patch of their land. Hopefully, the men will listen to us. The women are already convinced," she says.

In the face of poverty and adverse living conditions, the poorest, especially women, have no choice but to be resilient. The village is receptive to change. The women are choosing to harness their energies positively to steer an entire community towards an improved quality of life. Babies are picking up the taste of millet porridge coupled with mashed greens from the CNG. Young mothers are learning millet recipes and bringing back millets in their kitchen stock, men are considering natural farming methods that are being promoted through the CNG. Previously landless women are leading the way for land revival movement. Time will tell if the farmers of Sitabedi will be able to harvest more than half a millet cob in their farms!

“

The current crop of maize has dwindled from 10-15 quintals per acre to 6 quintals per acre. What is happening to our land? If we do not act soon, it will go barren. Times have changed. Earlier we used to get wheat only for festivals. But now we get millets only for festivals!

”

— Ms. Tulsabai, Community Member,

Mojwadi, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

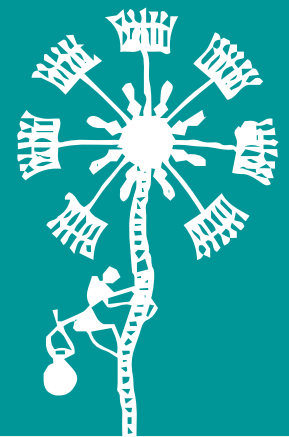
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In the past, we could offer only black tea to visitors from the city. Now, we can offer them milk tea! Our children are healthier, our daughters-in-law also. All children are above 3 kgs when they are born. We are making gradual progress.

”

— Ms. Sheela, Community Member,

Mojwadi, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



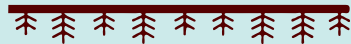
BUILDING SYNERGY WITH THE COMMUNITY:

Sitabedi women ensure that young women receive a millet diet during pregnancy and after delivery. They have several recipes for nutritious laddus and porridges that include almonds, dry coconut, jaggery, ghee, pulses among others. Asafoetida is added as a key ingredient to ensure digestion. Since the N-PLA process encourages communities to explore their traditional dietary practices, it has met with much appreciation from the older generation. They continue to follow their traditional healing practices as well that include a combination of herbs from their farms and forest.

COMMUNITY NUTRITION GARDENS:

Community Nutrition Gardens are a social engineering initiative in which women, organised in self-help groups (SHG) under State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM), are encouraged to set up a CNG in a community area of at least 1-hectare size in a village. These SHG women jointly develop the garden on the community land allotted to them through Gram Panchayats and relevant Government departments. The SHG members get the usufructuary rights over the land and the garden.

CNG is a way to promote year-round nutrition – gardens and household consumption of its produce which shall lead to increased household food security and dietary diversity on a sustained basis for women and their children.



“


The initial phase saw several community meetings to share the concept of CNG, followed by selection of the SHG and proposed land. The Sarpanch was supportive, but the women had to break their backs to level the land. The tube well had low water levels. Despite the hardships, the women did not give up. They levelled and ploughed the land with help from their families and machines,” says, an Indian non-profit organisation.

”

– Ramesh Mandloi, Community Resource Person, Harsha Trust,

Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

Khandwa



PROMOTING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE
THROUGH THE INTEGRATED
APPROACH

Can a Community Nutrition Garden (CNG) be a catalyst for initiating behavior change related to improved nutrition in a village? In Segwal village in Khandwa district, this vision has become a reality. By combining the insights and strategies from Nutrition-Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) meetings with the practical application of a CNG, the community has successfully fostered better nutrition practices. Local Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), trained to facilitate these meetings, work in tandem with the Self-Help Group (SHG) managing the CNG. Through periodic N-PLA sessions, the women of Segwal engage in conversations that blend learning with action. These discussions, grounded in a Gender Transformative Approach, provide the foundation for conversations that challenge and shift community attitudes and behaviors towards improved nutrition and a more equitable approach to household responsibilities and care.

Themes

NPLA
Practice

Community
Nutrion Gardens

Capacity
Building

Dietary Diversity



Image 15: Burst of Green in the CNG, Segwal Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

It's a burst of green in the women's Community Nutrition Garden (CNG) in Segwal village. The cauliflower leaves spread out in all their glory, soon to cradle florets carefully nurtured by the local SHG (Self-Help Group) women, who keep a sharp eye out for worm infestations. At the far end, pumpkin vines coil in preparation for fruiting. A soft green carpet of fenugreek thrives beside a bustling brinjal patch that is slowly taking over the radish bed. But it's the coriander patch that fills the air with fragrance as Ms. Malti Bai gently crushes a few leaves in her hands.

All around, women bend over the beds, busy weeding out pests from their precious plants. SHG member Ms. Kiran Bai gathers brinjals, coriander, and fenugreek leaves in the edge of her sari. "This is for Santosh. She's pregnant and wanted some methi (fenugreek leaves) to cook with. If our community garden can nourish her and her baby, we are truly blessed," she says with pride.

The CNG in Segwal is a successful initiative of the local SHG women. Despite many challenges, they have created a thriving green space that now supplies produce to the local Anganwadi Centre, several pregnant and lactating women, and their own households. There's enough for every family to prepare a vegetable dish, a salad, or greens to flavor their dal—a favorite with young children. Their tagline "Pesticide-Free"

reflects their commitment to safe, sustainable farming. What's more, the women are the sole decision-makers of the CNG, earning them recognition as farmers in an otherwise male-dominated agricultural landscape.

The women have received hands-on guidance from the non-profit Harsha Trust, under the Indo-German development cooperation project Securing Nutrition Enhancing Resilience (SENU) which is implemented in India by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Thanks to this engagement, the women have adopted innovative practices and strengthened their resilience.

Not far from the garden, little Priya eats her hot, cooked meal at the Anganwadi Centre, served by Ms. Kalavati, an Anganwadi Worker (AWW). "At home, she fusses over vegetables. But here, she eats happily with the others," Ms. Kalavati smiles. The fresh pumpkin in Priya's meal was harvested from the CNG. Ms. Jijabai, an SHG member who cooks at the centre, watches with satisfaction as the children ask for more.

Ms. Roshni, local non-profit SPANDAN, remarks, "A flourishing CNG can be a sustainable source of organic produce for nutrition service providers like Anganwadis and schools."

It's also at the Anganwadi that pregnant women like Ms. Santosh and Ms. Arti attend Nutrition Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) sessions. These monthly meetings combine storytelling and technical inputs with live cooking demonstrations. Participants—pregnant women, lactating mothers, adolescent girls, grandmothers, and even young fathers—take away practical lessons easily implemented at home.

Ms. Deepika, an AWW, recalls her N-PLA training-of-trainers: "We enjoyed all three batches. The training was participatory and used stories, games, songs, theatre, picture cards, and film screenings. It was easy to understand and made us confident facilitators."

Her favorite session? "The one on the division of labour between men and women. Young couples really connected with it. Over time, we saw men helping more at home. Some even came to us directly for advice. My own husband changed his behaviour after I shared what I learnt."

The presence of CNG women in these meetings strengthens the initiative further. Ms. Shadma from Harsha Trust shares, "Most of these women come from marginalised communities—Scheduled Castes and Tribes. They faced many challenges: barren and rocky land, community resistance, even the risk of flooding. But with support from



Image 16: Little Priya Eating a hot meal made from the CNG produce at the AWC, Segwal Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

“ The CNG model works. Kitchen gardens are growing. People love the ‘farm to plate’ idea. Several households now have access to chemical-free produce. Dietary diversity has improved. Many families now consume 3–5 food groups. We hope to reach 7–10 soon. ”

— Ms. Roshni, Team Member, SPANDAN,
Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

“ I eat jowar roti daily. It's our tradition, and the Anganwadi workers advise the same as well. It's good for my health. I listen to both—my elders and the Anganwadi workers. ”

— Ms. Santosh, Local Tribal Woman
Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

“ “I attend all N-PLA sessions and follow the advice—nutrition, rest, and regular check-ups are part of my routine.” ”

— Ms. Monica Rajput, Local Pregnant Woman
Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

the new Sarpanch and seed inputs, they succeeded. Today, their farm is a treasure trove of vegetables and fruits.”

Another AWW shares, “Everyone respects the CNG women. They helped us mobilise women for N-PLA meetings. No one could say no to them!” As a result, meeting attendance rose from 10–12 to over 45 participants. Open community sessions were also well received, further boosting the morale of facilitators.

Stories of change abound. After a severely malnourished child was rehabilitated at the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC), even a previously resistant grandmother began following the Anganwadi Workers’ advice. Pregnant women are now regular participants, adopting better hygiene and dietary habits. “Earlier, newborns weighed less than 2.7 kg. Now, most weigh 3 kg or more,” says Ms. Kalavati. The state Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) promotes iron and calcium supplements, while N-PLA reinforces these messages—improving health and introducing gender equality as a key message.

Ms. Jijabai reflects, “In our time, we had no doctors, no medicine, and little food. Women suffered. Today, young women have information and access, they just need to follow our advice.” Women who once avoided iron tablets

“ In the meetings, we learnt about the importance of a varied diet, rest, safe delivery practices, and postnatal care. I followed the advice—and both my baby and I are healthy. My husband also supported me. That means a lot to me. ”

Ms. Arti Kantilal, Young Mother

— Segwal Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 17: Ms. Roshni, Segwal Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

now come asking for them. “They’ve learned about the benefits through the meetings and from other mothers with healthy babies,” says Ms. Kalavati. Now, instead of an occasional vegetable dish, families cook vegetables twice a day—a strong sign of improved nutrition.

The AWWs say, “Nutrition will always be a community priority. Even after this project ends, we’re committed to continuing. We’ve been given the tools—it’s our responsibility now to ensure these changes last.”



“ In our time, vegetables were a luxury. We were told not to eat brinjals, curd, or rice during pregnancy. I used to give the same advice to my daughter-in-law. But the sessions changed my thinking. We won’t send her back to work until the baby is older. ”

Ms. Jijabai, Local Women

— Segwal Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 18: Kiranbhai in the CNG, Segwal Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



RISING FROM THE ASHES TO STAKE THEIR CLAIM FOR THE SKIES

Self-help groups have been instrumental in introducing progressive social change in their villages. The SHG managing the newly initiated Community Nutrition Garden in Amalpura village in Madhya Pradesh is no different. This group of women from diverse socio-cultural-religious backgrounds stand tall in the face of adversities and are determined to revive their neglected CNG to full bloom. From carrying headloads of water during the ruthless summer months to negotiating with the community to retain their landholding, the women have moved from strength to strength.

Themes

Community Nutrition
Gardens (CNGs)

Women
Empowerment

Resilience of the
Communities



Image 3: Chinta Bhai and Subai Bhai, Amalpura Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

Her name is Ms. Parveen Chauhan, and that's enough to stir up an animated conversation in Amalpura village. Having entered an inter-faith marriage, the 36-year-old invites much awe as the first woman in her community to transcend socio-cultural norms especially around marriage. It's not an easy task even in a village with a diverse set of SC, ST, OBC and General Communities. Born a Muslim, Ms. Chauhan settled easily into her Hindu in-laws' family with support from her husband and the neighbours. Once the initial hullabaloo settled, Ms. Chauhan set about looking for work, beginning with the local Self-Help Group (SHG) in her village, the Shri Ram SHG, where she was unanimously chosen as the President. With her consistent work, Ms. Chauhan slowly won respect from the other women members. The group trusted her advice, and she emerged as an articulate and confident leader of the group.

The idea of setting up a Community Nutrition Garden (CNG) in the village was first floated by the non-profit organisation Harsha Trust). Ms. Chauhan promptly responded to the challenge.

With exemplary organising skills, she soon mobilised her SHG to work for the CNG. A series of meetings with the organisation team followed, where they received technical inputs and guidance on the need and scope of a CNG. Ms. Chauhan was also selected as a Community Resource Person (CRP).

A patch of government land was identified to set up the CNG. It was close to some of the SHG member's houses, including Parveen's. This proximity would facilitate the task of caretaking of the land once the work is initiated. Soon, the women set down to work.

It wasn't without its challenges. Ms. Chauhan says, "Our CNG was just 6 months old. We had our land ready before the monsoon set in. Our women worked hard to remove the rocks and level the land. Finally, we could sow the first seeds that the Harsha Trust team shared with us. We had seeds of ridge gourds, bottle gourd, flat beans, cluster beans, eggplant and chillies. People from the village also shared some seeds with us. We did our work with much care. Much to our delight, the shoots began to appear – a sign of that our hard work was paying off. But our joy was short-lived. Within weeks, disaster struck. Grazing cattle trampled over our shoots, ate everything up and destroyed our CNG. It felt like all our hard work had gone to waste."

Despite these setbacks, the women remained undeterred. Their one-and-a-half-acre plot of land became the center of conflict between cattle-grazing households and the SHG. Ms. Subai bai, group member, reminisces about the initial phase of the CNG, "See, this even land that you see now was not so a year back. It was a mountain of rocks! The neighbours cursed us



Image 4: CNG in progress, Amalpura Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

since we had taken over their grazing land. They would attack us. Even our families wanted us to backtrack. We had no option but to complain to the Gram Rozgar Sahayak (GRS) and the Panchayat (Local Council). But they refused to act asking us women to 'deal with each other'. Here in our village, the SC, ST and OBCs communities live together without much conflict. But at that time, the tension escalated when our neighbour broke our wire fencing. We got the Sarpanch to intervene, and after a heated exchange, we managed to resolve the issue."

Once both parties reached a truce, the CNG was finally protected with makeshift fencing. The women began their second attempt at sowing. But nature had other plans. Delayed rains meant that the women had to manually carry headloads of water uphill to nourish their plants. "We decided that each woman would carry at least four headloads of water each day," Ms. Shadma, a team member from Harsha Trust, reminisces, "It was hard, but we had to keep going."

Others in the community felt that the CNG women were chasing an impossible dream. Ms. Shadma laughs, "We were used to hearing men say, 'Nothing will grow here in this barren hill. Better to leave the land for grazing cattle.' There were many to demotivate us, but we continued watering our plants."

In September 2023, when the CNG finally got a lush green cover, heavy rains lashed the region making the stream nearby overflow right into the CNG. The floodwater washed away all the young plants, upturned many fruit saplings, leaving the CNG and its women devastated. Ms. Chauhan reflects, "We sat there for a while, holding our heads in our hands. It was a crushing moment. But we are the daughters of farmers. We've seen crops fail before, and we know that's just part of life. We had to get up and try again."

The task of reviving the CNG was at the centre of the women's lives. They went back straight into work even after facing resistance from their own families.

The CNG members take turns to finish tasks, weeding & watering being the most gruelling work. At times, some women may not turn up during peak season. Other women fill in for them, without many complaints. "They have no choice. If they come here, their families will have to hire labourers in their farms," says Ms. Chinta Bai, another local SHG member. At times, some of us may get angry, and we argue over who spends the maximum time working in the CNG! But then, we settle down and fall back into our group structure. Nothing can break our collective. We will fight surely, but we will stay together. It's a new group; it will take time to settle!"

Watering the saplings, Ms. Chauhan says, “One day our children will get a stomach full of fresh vegetables to eat from here. We are doing this for our children, our families. Our savings are improving, we will soon have enough to buy our own seeds in bigger lots. See, now we have bought 545 rupees’ worth of seeds. When we asked the shopkeeper for the bill, he laughed. What do women need bills for? Little does he know that these women will soon have their own seeds, saved each year! Then, there will be no need to go to him.”

Ms. Khushboo, another member, notes, “Our CNG is leased for the next five years, and if we’re successful, it may be extended for another four. We’ve bought a pipe to draw water from the river, which will make watering easier. When our vegetables are ready, we will give one batch to the Anganwadi Centre and Gram Panchayat, and one batch to the state government’s Ajeevika Mission office as well.”

The women also attend Nutrition-Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) sessions in the Anganwadi Centre, where they learn about the importance of nutrition, especially for pregnant and lactating women. “We will ensure that our CNG vegetables reach families who need them the most—those with undernourished children,” Ms. Khushboo explains.



Image 5: Kushboo Jaiswal, Amalpura Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 6: Ms Leela Valke, Amalpura Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

Ms. Leela walks up to the tent that the women have put up on the CNG premises. A cozy haven, the women rest here post-lunch hours. Girls from the village fetch them water and guavas plucked from their homestead nutrition gardens. They hang around the women, listening to their discussions and at times staying till they finish their meeting. Some press their tired feet, giving the women much needed respite. “Our girls are our backbones. They never let their mothers get too overwhelmed by work,” says Ms. Leela. She looks up at the clear skies and says, “The Sarpanch had promised electric supply to our CNG. Then, we will no longer need to carry headloads of water.”

As of now, the CNG is flourishing, with the bottle gourds standing tall. “This time, we won’t let anything destroy our hard work,” Ms. Chauhan says with determination. “Once the bottle gourd harvest is ready, we’ll cook a vegetable dish for our families. It’ll be the first dish from our harvest, and we’ll know that our hard work was worth it.”





TEAMING UP WITH THE FOLK HEALER TO SAVE LIVES: THE NUTRITION AMBASSADORS OF SEETABEDI

For several decades, development agencies and the government have been exploring innovative approaches for eliminating malnutrition especially in remote tribal areas. The tribal community is known to deeply revere their traditional practices. In an attempt to improve communication and awareness around mother and child health, the Indo-German development cooperation project Securing Nutrition Enhancing Resilience (SENU) initiated a partnership with local influencers for nutrition related messaging and positively impacting behaviours. Following regular meetings, this group of ambassadors has been doing commendable work in the project villages by shifting their messaging to include inputs on nutrition and dietary diversity for women and children. *Padiyaars*, traditional soothsayers in Madhya Pradesh's Khandwa district are leading the way in this direction.

Themes

Community
Participation

Women
Empowerment

NPLA Model

Nutrition Practices



Image 7: Chotelal: Village Shaman, Seetabedi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

In one of the farthest hamlets of Seetabedi village, a frail, sparsely clothed, elderly figure weeds his farm in solitude. He is the village folk healer, locally known as *Padiyaar Baba*. His appearance, home, and demeanour hardly capture the immense sway he holds over the community.

Baba has visitors. A family arrives with gifts – some fruits, sweets, and cash. They prostrate before him with gratitude, thanking him for curing their child. *Baba* blesses them with some advice, “Apply the holy ash on his stomach. Remember to feed the child only freshly cooked food and mashed vegetables. My blessings are with you.” As the family takes leave, *baba* gets back to his farm work. Unassuming about the tremendous respect and influence he commands in the community, *baba* says, “It’s their faith. I am only a messenger of the Almighty!” Ms. Tulsabai Uike, the village *Sarpanch* says with much reverence, “Baba can bring back people from death. He has revived dying babies, saved pregnant women. He is our God!”

The *Padiyaars*, are a key feature in the cultural context of Khandwa’s tribal belt, especially in the Khalwa block which has around 40 *Padiyaars*. Each village has its own *Padiyaar* who is believed to hold deep knowledge of traditional herbs and methods of healing. People flock to the *Padiyaars* with unmanageable ailments, confident of a cure. Their methods include prayers, herbal medicines, offering sacrifices, and chanting. Earlier, the practice of *chechua*, which is scalding the body with a hot iron rod on severely weak and ill children was prevalent. It has diminished in the last decade, following interventions by government and development agencies.

Today, the *Padiyaar baba* of Seetabedi offers different solutions in his new role as a “nutrition ambassador” with the local CNG members, Sarpanch, Auxiliary Nurse Mid wife (ANM), Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), and Anganwadi workers. This path-breaking initiative was a key component of the Social & Behaviour Change Communication process adopted by the local NGO partner in Khandwa.

Padiyaar baba smiles, “my priority is that the child gets well. Blessings, medicines, and care by family are saving children’s lives.” While *baba* does not mind the additional advice, he continues to practice his folk healing. Seetabedi community has learnt to mix traditional healing methods and modern medicines. This ensures that the *baba* remains relevant today. Having participated in the local Nutrition-Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) meetings, the young parents of Seetabedi village chose scientific methods for improved health and nutrition outcomes.

The idea of working towards dietary diversity especially for children has appealed to people across generations. Local nutrition ambassadors, like the *Padiyaar baba* have played a key role in promoting nutritional practices leading to this wave of change. As an impact, the Anganwadi workers can register better growth and monitor results for young children. Young mothers are now open to advice from the AWW, ASHA and ANM indicating a shift in communication practices of these grassroots workers.

Ms. Roshni, a team member from SPANDAN, says, “During our Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) workshop, we identified the importance of engaging local influencers to

CHECHUA

The practice of scalding a human body with a hot iron rod to cure it of an ailment is still found in some parts of Khalwa block.

Children suffering from Pneumonia and other ailments related to indigestion were taken to the *Padiyaar* (soothsayer) for treatment. Following much public outrage around this practice by tribal communities, reporting of *chechua* cases faded out.

Hospitals at times report cases of complications due to *chechua*, indicating that the practice may still be followed covertly. Adults and even animals are administered this method by the *Padiyaars*. Khalwa block has nearly 40 *Padiyaars* who are popular in the community.

“

We identified the importance of engaging local influencers to promote better nutritional practices. The *Padiyaar* held significant sway in the community. Unlike ASHAs, ANMs, AWWs, or Sarpanches, he wasn’t a government official with a designated role. We were careful not to challenge traditional practices but instead focused on integrating nutrition-related messages into his existing communication. The community paid close attention when this group collectively endorsed a particular practice.

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— Ms. Roshni, Team Member,
SPANDAN,

Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

promote better nutritional practices. The *Padiyaar* held significant sway in the community. Unlike ASHAs, ANMs, AWWs, or Sarpanches, he wasn't a government official with a designated role. We met with him multiple times before he agreed to join our team of nutrition ambassadors. We were careful not to challenge traditional practices but instead focused on integrating nutrition-related messages into his existing communication. The community paid close attention when this group collectively endorsed a particular practice. We observed a positive shift in dietary behaviours when this group of ambassadors began addressing the issue. Severely ill children are now being referred to hospital care. Previously, the *baba* would advise pregnant women to avoid rice, ghee, papaya, and curds. After participating in our meetings, he has started encouraging pregnant women to consume these foods. *Baba* laments the loss of millets in his community, which he believes are the most nutritious food. Consequently, he is actively promoting millet cultivation and a diet that includes millets."

The nutrition ambassadors take every opportunity to convey their message to the community, especially during festivals like Durga pooja and Ganesh Chaturthi, which draws an attentive audience. Having received inputs from several meetings on inter-personal and group communication skills, the ambassadors are able to fulfil their roles effectively. Additionally, the group also serves as a conflict resolution group

in the community. Young couples who seek scientific information on issues related to the well-being of their children are a key audience for social behaviour change.

ASHA worker Uma says, "Earlier too, we would have messaging targets. But it helps when the Padiyaar baba supports our communication. People acknowledge our efforts. All the 30 pregnant women and 24 lactating women in our Anganwadi follow our advice. All the deliveries in the past year have resulted in healthy babies. This is exactly what we are working towards. Our team of government workers and local people is making an impact."

The nutrition ambassadors receive regular inputs through trainings and meetings with local NGO partners of the SENU project. The government workers find that the process adds value to their routine tasks. Anganwadi worker Ms. Resham says, "We have received several trainings throughout our service period, but the N-PLA process gives us hands-on support, preparing us to take up field-based tasks with guided supervision. I am enjoying my role as a nutrition ambassador. I work with the local influencers which is helping me achieve my targets in the Anganwadi."

Ms. Tulsabai, a first-time Sarpanch is excited to enter the role of a community leader and is slowly learning to speak up in public forums. She



Image 8: AWW Uma Kalish, Sitabedi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

says, “In the past, women would give birth at home. But the food we consumed then was of a better quality, unlike now when chemicals have taken over. It is impacting our women and children especially. We need to revive our traditional dietary practices. Fortunately, young women are educated; they do not accept harmful practices. Their children are healthier. We talk about reviving our millet crops as well. Hopefully, the community will follow our advice.”

Moving from one nutritional goal to another, guided by the SENU project team, the nutrition ambassadors of Seetabedi are treading gently while proposing new ideas. Adding to the traditional dietary practices, reviving millets, demonstrating nutritious recipes, showcasing the impact of the Community Nutrition Garden initiative, respecting cultural practices even while engaging with them – the team is gradually steering their community towards being a nutrition-smart village that is responsive towards social and behaviour change communication efforts.



Image 9: Tulsi Bai, Sitabedi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



Image 10: Women Meeting Sitabedi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

Khandwa



THE MILLET-GROWERS OF MOJWADI

Home to a traditionally millet growing community, Mojwadi village in Madhya Pradesh's Khandwa district has seen an influx of cash crops on their farms and the disappearance of traditional their millet varieties over the last few decades. The elderly lament the loss, yet hold on defiantly to their legacy, preserving seeds and passing on their knowledge to the younger ones. SENU acts as a catalyst in this scenario with key inputs related to promotion of millets with focus groups like Anganwadi workers and Self-Help Group (SHG) members. These groups, in turn, bring the knowledge to their households, impacting dietary practices, making them inclusive of millets. Despite the incursion of cash crops, Mojwadi continues to cultivate their traditional grains through organic farming practices.

Themes

Local Foods

Nutrition

Community Led
Nutrition Initiative



Image 11: Prakash and Seema, Mojwadi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

A small patch of the *Sawa* (a kind of millet) crop stands out in the middle of the visibly dry land village. This belongs to Ms. Priya, whose modest house stands at the edge of the farm. A young mother, Priya emerges from amidst the tall plants to wash up before breastfeeding her baby.

Part of the small and declining number of millet-growers in her region, Ms. Priya says, "We had sowed *Sawa* in a small patch on our farm. *Sawa* does not require much water. It is a sturdy crop and grows well on its own. Only during harvest and processing do we have to put in a lot of effort. Many in our village have stopped sowing *Sawa*, so these families need to borrow *Sawa* grains for their rituals. It's the strength-giving *Sawa* diet that protects our women during the most difficult period in their life: as they become a mother. If we give up on growing millets, the health of our women and children will suffer."

Traditionally, *Sawa* porridge forms the base diet for women post-partum. Believed to assist lactation, tribal families ensure an exclusive diet of *Sawa* for young mothers. Millets are an inherent element of festivals and other cultural rituals in the tribal community, especially related to the birth of babies. As a welcoming ritual, new born babies are placed in a winnow of *Sawa* grain. It's only after this ritual that the millet is used for consumption. Ms. Priya used the millets from her own farm to welcome her baby. Now

grown up, her child enjoys the sweet *Sawa* porridge that his mother often makes for him. To cook *Jowari* (another type of millet) she first needs to clean it and then send it to the mill for de-husking and grinding. It must be done in small batches due to its short shelf life.

Mr. Rajendra, from local non-profit SPANDAN, says, "Underground mud storage systems held the millet crop in earlier times. They would layer it with *neem* leaves to prevent infestation. This way, the millet could be stored for over a year. Once milled, millets have a short shelf life. So, they grind small quantities for use. With reports of *Kodo* (millet) causing dizziness and ill-health in consumers, farmers have been advised not to grow them. But this is actually because of the chemical fertilisers. No chemicals should be used on millets. It poisons the crop. Currently, finding organic millet seeds is a challenge. The market only has the hybrid variety. If at all, it will be found in households with farmers."

The Indo-German development cooperation project Securing Nutrition Enhancing Resilience (SENU) which is implemented in India by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), has partnered with Spandan in Mojwadi. The aim of the project is to improve dietary diversity and ensure community resilience for nutritional

outcomes. The project employs an integrated approach combining Nutrition-Participatory Learning Action (N-PLA) trainings, setting up Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs), and an over-arching Gender Transformative Approach to engage with communities.

Another millet grower from Mojwadi, elderly Ms. Mangrubai, is winnowing husk away from a batch of *Sawariya* millet. She has seen it all: the declining forest cover, changing cropping patterns impacting dietary practices and the proliferation of cash crops. Ms. Mangrubai holds a wealth of traditional wisdom and knowledge that can guide her people back to being a food-secure community. Saddened by the current scenario, Ms. Mangrubai minces no words about the declining millet fields. She says, “People have become lazy and greedy. They care only for money. They only want to grow soyabean and wheat, feed their children *Sattu*. *Sattu* is no good compared to our *Sawa pech* (*Sawa* porridge)! The *Sawa* grain holds enough strength to build our children’s health and extend their lifespans. But nobody wants to grow it, take it for threshing, mill it, and cook it. How can anyone shun their own grain that the ancestors have handed down to us?”

Local farmer, Mr. Baru has recently welcomed a new-born in his family of a wife and three daughters. Son preference, yet another external



Image 12: Local Farmer's Family, Mojwadi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

influence, is rapidly taking over the tribal community. Speaking about his millet farm Mr. Baru says, “If I sow about 6 kgs of corn seeds, I get an output of 7 quintals of corn. I additionally need to purchase fertilisers to grow it. But if I sow *Kodo* and *Kutki* millets, with just 1 kg of seeds, I get a yield of 2 quintals without any chemicals and using little water. On one side of my farm, I grow wheat and gram, and on the other side which has less water, I sow millets. With each year, the yield is getting lower. The chemicals are killing our land, but we have no option.” Toiling in a farm of 9 acres shared between brothers and cousins, Mr. Baru has spent 35,000 rupees to set up an electricity connection. Finally, the family has access to irrigation means.

The tribal community relies on the barter system to meet their basic needs. Local farmer Mr. Santosh says, “I used to trade wheat for millet varieties that we do not grow in our farm. That’s how we could ensure *Kodo* and *Kutki* in our house. I ask my wife to mix millet flour in the corn flour. Our children refuse to eat *jowari* and corn rotis. They prefer wheat rotis.” Mr. Baru is very particular about what his children eat. “No processed chips or snacks from the shop for my children. We make everything at home and feed them,” he says.

Ms. Seema Prakash, founder-member of SPANDAN says, “Millets are considered to be heat-inducing. *Korku* tribals make both sweet and salty porridge from this. They make *laddus* from *gond*, *charoli* seeds, peanuts and *mahua* for women to consume post-partum. *Sawa* is cooked like rice and eaten with *dal*. This along with the many uncultivated leafy greens available in the farms and forest offer a robust dietary input to the tribal

community. What they however struggle with is protein deficiency which is now being taken up as a key topic in the Nutrition-Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) meetings in the village.”

Mojwadi is one of the few villages in the Khalwa block of Khandwa district that continues to grow millets even today. Of the 800 families in the village, around 25 grow the Sawa millet and around 450 households grow Jowar which is mostly for home consumption. The rest source it from the markets at a cost between 40 rupees per kg to 80 rupees per kg depending on the type of millet. Sawa is one the most expensive millets priced between 60 rupees to 80 rupees per kg. A millet growing family may sow 250 grams of seeds, yielding a quintal of millet. Since there are no machines readily available for millet threshing, it is mostly done by hand. They largely store the millet is stored and hand-mill only small quantities for consumption as and when needed. Growing Jowar is a challenge since it requires intensive protection from birds, rats and other pests. Jowar, which was once the staple diet of the region's Korku tribal community, now faces the threat of being replaced by wheat.

Posing a challenge to millet farming is the low presence of processing units for milling and access to markets. Clearing the millet field is also a time-taking process. A single machine can thresh about 25 kgs of millets in an hour or two.



Image 13: Millet Porridge, Mojwadi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

It must be milled twice and hence costs more. The machine itself costs around 25,000 rupees making it expensive for marginal farmers. In this scenario, the joint efforts of project SENU and the local community are bringing about a revival of millets locally. Encouraged by the impact of the N-PLA process, the community is open to take up millet-farming on a sustainable scale once again. Young mothers backed by better education, exposure to information, and access to resources are taking the first steps ahead to hold on to their traditional practices. With women showing the way, community-led micro-initiatives hold potential to influence the market demand for organic millet produce.



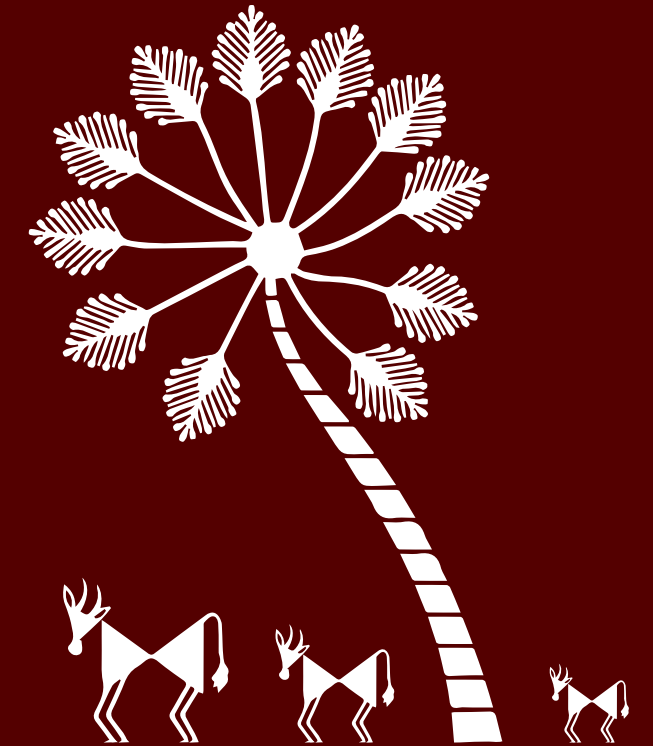
Image 14: A Millet Farm, Mojwadi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



A Call to Action



Call to Action



CALL TO ACTION



This collection of stories underscores how change, when driven from within the community, can be both sustainable and impactful.

We saw how through Nutrition Participatory Learning and Action (N-PLA) sessions, women emerged as local agents of change. They not only acquired knowledge but also the self-confidence to question entrenched practices, advocate for better nutrition, and influence household and community behaviours. Their leadership was not imposed. It was cultivated organically in spaces where their voices were heard, valued, and acted upon.

Responding to local social dynamics, the N-PLA sessions consciously included mothers-in-law of the young women who formed the heart of the intervention. This helped foster more equitable partnerships within families where daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law could be a team. However, the most unique aspect of this journey has been the deliberate inclusion of men in conversations around nutrition, care work, and household responsibilities. The shift resulting from this inclusion is pivotal. It recognises that gender equity is not a women's issue alone.

Solutions to improve nutrition do not always lie in external interventions but often in restoring forgotten practices and revaluing local knowledge. Therefore, revival of indigenous crops played an equally important part in these accounts. This has been conducted through Women Self-Help Groups who brough



barren land to live, by establishing Community Nutrition Gardens. But the effort did not stop there: Through collaborative action a Take-Home Rations (THR) application transforms supply chain transparency and efficiency, ensuring quality nutrition reaches the most vulnerable children and families.

The close of this volume brings us to the beginning of a model of change. Let these stories be an invitation to listen deeply, engage honestly, and act boldly. Whether as practitioners, policymakers, researchers, or citizens, we each have a role to play in nutrition-secure futures. The work continues, and it needs all of us.



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