

Enhancing livelihood opportunity for tribal women

Projection location: Deoghar district, Jharkhand

Thematic area of study: Livelihoods

Context: [circa (c.) 150 words] this is a few sentences at the beginning outlining the country in question and outlining statistics on the state of the sector in question (for example, education, health, livelihoods).

Agriculture provides livelihood support to about two thirds of India's population and employment to 58.4% of country's work force which is the single largest private sector occupation. It also accounts 10% of total export earnings. Above all agriculture is the only source of food security for the nation. So, fostering rapid and sustained agricultural growth remained a priority agenda.

However, food insecurity in the poorest parts of India is getting more acute by the day, with increasing pressure on land, rapid environmental degradation, frequent natural calamities, and inequitable distribution of resources.

The situation is particularly serious in Jharkhand. In spite of its huge natural resources, Jharkhand is among the Indian states lowest on the ladder of development indicators. Around 2% of its population suffers chronic hunger and 10% experience seasonal food insecurity. According to the BPL (below the poverty line) survey of 1997-2002, of the 3.77 million rural families in the state, 2.32 million families live below the poverty line.

Although agriculture is the main source of livelihood, nearly 70% of the people of Jharkhand are either small or marginal farmers with less than 1 hectare of farmland. Stabilising agriculture and looking for new livelihood options are the most urgent developmental challenges Jharkhand faces. The priority areas are: combating drought; increasing the productivity of agriculture and allied activities; strengthening and generating farm-based livelihoods; and linking micro-finance to new livelihood efforts.

Summary: [c.150 words] this is a boxed summary that can be read quickly – explaining what the case study is all about and summarising the key elements.

The Jharkhand – Deoghar district project for enhancing livelihood opportunity for tribal women described here was implemented by Network for Enterprise Enhancement and Development Support (NEEDS), a local partner organisation of VSO India in four blocks of Palojori, Devipur, Sarwa, and Chandan. The aim of the project was to create sustainable avenues for the tribal women to address the issues that inhibit them from exploiting their livelihood opportunities.

This would create greater opportunities for poor and marginalised tribal communities in Deoghar particularly the women by enhancing their skills, awareness, knowledge and bringing in linkages to markets and financial institutions.

The project developed a potentially replicable model comprising strengthening of tribal women, self help groups (SHGs), volunteer group mobilisation and training, and linkage to markets and financial institutions. Benefits include augmentation in the production of lead crops like paddy, potatoes, chili, tomatoes, and maize; market linkage and use of Systematic Rice Intensification (SRI) technology for bringing in more value; financial linkages for group credit; and awareness and linkages to government livelihood opportunities.

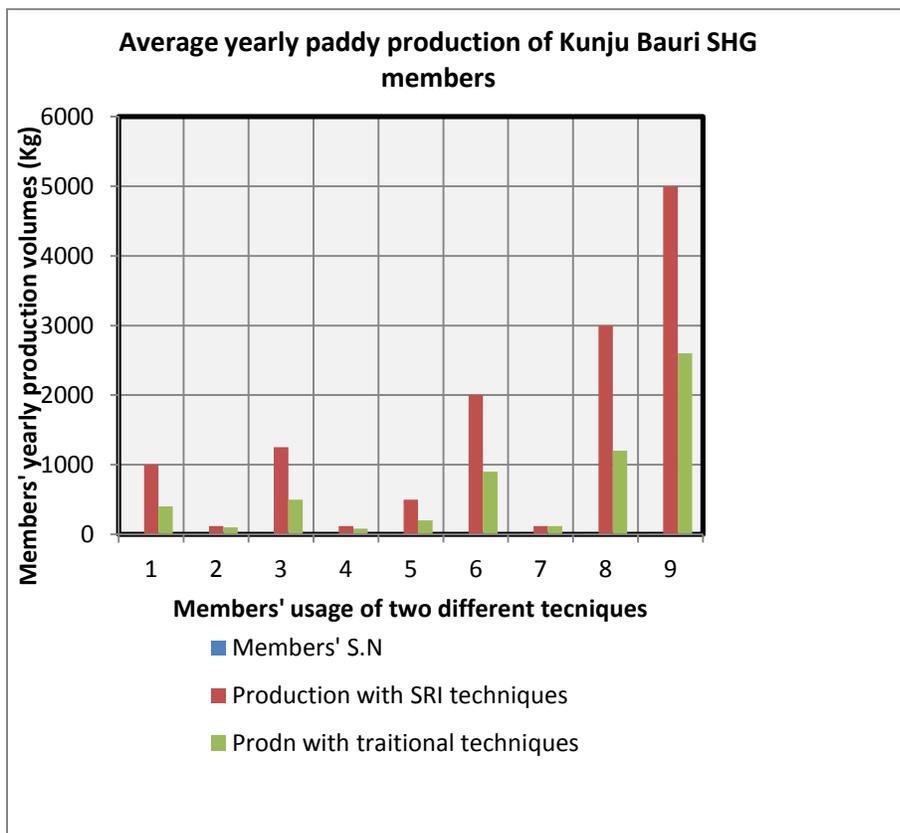
A short evaluation sample survey demonstrated large and statistically significant income and poverty reduction gains from participation in the project. Longer term sustainability, especially of the group-based organisational model was examined and proved useful and being undertaken. This verified the gains observed three years after completion.

Identified need: [c.200 words] [this explains the situation pre-intervention, the rationale for the intervention and particular choice of programme, engaging with the broader need in the sector as well](#)

The livelihood systems in the area of study are primarily dependent on combinations of agriculture, forests and labouring. Due to very small holding and very low productivity of the land, most households eke out a living by maintaining a diversified pattern of occupations; no single activity provides sufficient resources to entirely ensure their livelihood. Vegetables are cultivated nearly year round and overall food security can extend from five to seven months only. Women's work is regarded as crucial for the survival of tribal households in terms of provisioning for food, earning income and managing of financial resources. Food gathering is a vital economic activity even for women of other agricultural tribes. Due to tribal women's role in trade and marketing and having primary responsibility for household provisioning, they are act as managers of most household income, as well as of the agricultural produce. In order to ensure women's productive and effective participation in the development among tribal groupings in Jharkhand, there is a need for intensive and sustained training on an on-going basis Women would also be encouraged to go on exposures and training outside the village, as the exposure to areas of new developments will be relevant in opening a window of livelihood opportunities.

Statistical overview: [c.100 words] [this is a box that is inserted alongside the context and identified need – so that the reader can see – at a glance – the context that the programme is operating in, what it has done \(provided X workshops, trainings, for X teachers etc\) and the impact that it is having \(ideally focused on outcomes as well as outputs\).](#)

A total of 200 community women and men volunteers have the skills in farm activities particularly to augment production of paddy and other crops through use of agro based techniques. These include use of khaki crop stabilisation package of practices SRI; 750 women self help groups have the capacity to manage cropping pattern, develop annual cropping timeline and credit mapping; Over 10,000 families have a livelihood source which enables them to derive an income up to INR 10, 000 per year on an average and have food security on an average of 300 days in a year; 6,500 women members of SHGs have received bank credit of over INR 36,00,000 for livelihood activity augmentation; and 3,400 women have access to work through the MGNREGA which guarantees them with 100 days of work in a year with minimum wages



Methodology: [c.200 words] this is a brief boxed summary of what was done – because it is a case study (as opposed to an evaluation) it is not the focus and should not be integrated with the narrative. But it provides a useful reference point and opportunity to share learning regarding the way in which the exercise was conducted.

The case study was conducted applying a participatory approach and included interviews with partner organisation, other stakeholders (community volunteers) and a representative sample of beneficiaries (SHGs members) of the project under consideration. The field visits to project sites were all done in Palojori block of Deoghar district. The first meeting was

conducted in Keriwa village in Sagarjor Panchayat with women of Phool SHG that comprises of 18 members but 15 were in attendance. The second group meeting was conducted with women of Chalbali village, Bhurkundi Panchayat, Kunju Bauri SHG. The group comprises of 16 members but 9 members were in attendance.

It must be noted however, that due to time and other constraints, the number of beneficiaries that could be interviewed had to be limited to between 0.3-1% of project beneficiaries. The questions used to conduct beneficiary interviews were derived from the key elements that the study needed to emphasis on as stipulated by the provided standard template. This study also took into consideration the final report and proposal of the project as the major source of secondary data.

Outline of implementation: [c.200 words] *what the programme has done, what was the underlying anticipated Theory of Change (however, and to whatever extent it was articulated and understood – essentially ‘why did you think that A would lead to B?’).*

Community meetings were conducted in strategic locations in four blocks (Palajori, Devipur, Sarwa and Chandan) for selection of lead volunteers. A total of 100 women volunteers from the women’s self help groups and 100 men from the farmers groups were selected as community volunteers.

During the community volunteer’s selection process, motivational tests were conducted for all in batches based on the requirements of the programme and expected volunteering results. A group of 20 lead volunteers were trained as resource persons and a five days training was organised on the following aspects: *leadership skills, motivation; micro level planning; understanding issues of exclusion and community mobilisation; credit planning; crops of monsoon as part of technology transfer; and SRI cultivation methodology.*

The technical training included system of rice intensification which has helped in increasing the productivity two third folds with use of low chemical and water for production of paddy, maize, chili, potato, tomato and vegetables.

Post the training, 20 lead volunteers were engaged in training the community volunteers at the panchayat level. The community volunteers then developed a plan to reach out to the larger population. Each volunteer had a target of reaching out to 50 families.

The focus (TOC) was on the creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities for tribal women that would lead to a reduction in poverty among rural tribal households. It would create sustainable livelihood opportunities by mobilising them into representative and self-managed institutions at the grassroots level—women’s self-help groups (SHGs). Working exclusively through tribal rural women and their organisations, this project would

have impact on gender issues and could be a game changer in terms of improving on nutrition, gender and poverty reduction.

Further investments of capital and capacity building will federate the SHGs at the village level and beyond an institutional platform, so that poor households can access services and livelihood opportunities previously beyond their reach. This platform will also give poor households a voice and strong self esteem to demand services and other safety nets as needed.

Impact and evidence (findings): [c.700 words] this is about what change was observed and how we can tell that it changed because of the programme. This will drill in-depth in to the example programmes, using quotations, statistics and stories to demonstrate the situation, and linking to secondary sources (latest/well respected research on education) throughout.

Institutional capacity building through various trainings in System of Rice Intensification (SRI) techniques that reached out to over 10,000 women in 750 SHGs exposed the rural tribal women towards the understanding of better agricultural practices has led to improved knowledge, attitude, and practices in livelihood activities in tribal community. This has enhanced the quality of life of the tribal women and their entire households.

Increased rice productivity and allied activities over an area of approximately 20 kathas of land covering over 750 SHG members led to at least 25% increase in the crop productivity, with most women recording up to 50% increment, and average increase in income by Rs 5,000 – Rs 8,000 through improved paddy growing practices. The increase in income from the sale of paddy has resulted into improved purchasing power of women for basic essential items like clothing, sandals, body creams, soap, salt, and scholastic materials for their school going children.

Improved food grain availability has resulted in reduction of hunger or reduction in under-nutrition. The improved paddy yield has helped in insulating this economically and socially deprived sections of the community from seasonal food insecurity. There was a reported substantial improvement in nutrition security among the SHG women members resulting from an improvement in the food intake even though the diet may be inadequate in terms of meeting energy and protein needs. This is therefore an indication of an improved nutritional status of women and children as compared to 'before' the project.

SHGs members interviewed reported that the groups provided: confidence and mutual support for women striving for social change; a forum in which tribal women could critically analyze their situations and devise collective strategies to overcome their difficulties; a support for awareness training, confidence building, dissemination of information and delivery of services and for developing communal self reliance and collective action; and a vehicle for the promotion of economic activities.

SHGs provided access to credit to their members that they used for purchasing farm inputs as a group; helped to promote savings and yielded moderate economic benefits; reduced the

dependence on moneylenders who used to charge up to 50% interest; and resulted in empowerment benefits to the tribal women. Also, women members were found to have become more assertive in confronting social evils and problem situations.

Successes and constraints (learning): [c.700 words] this is about the learning that is taking place, considering what are the most significant successes and most significant constraints identified? It will examine what was done well, and what could be done differently. Successes: what were the main successes, why did they happen, how could they be enhanced, how could others learn from them? Constraints: what were the constraints, why did they happen, how could they be/were they overcome, how could others learn from them? [This could be further illustrated through a table if considered appropriate]

A sample survey of SHGs supported by NEEDS under this project was undertaken in one of the main paddy-producing blocks of the district. Since women who participated in the project were majorly tribal women, they were sampled using SHG lists obtained from NEEDS, the implementing partner. In total, the sample comprised 24 women, all of which were SHG members.

At the time of this study, 750 participatory SHGs have been strengthened in 4 target blocks. This has been a highly participatory and gender sensitive exercise. Most women groups have accessed credit facilities of at least Rs. 15,000. The group credit helped the women to acquire farm inputs like seeds, and local seed treatment materials.

The project benefited from a training approach. All the beneficiaries interviewed appreciated the high standard of training for example the SRI technology of treating and preserving paddy seeds using locally available resources like salt, water, and pesticides. It was observed that the new techniques learnt, were and are still being applied by the beneficiaries. Nevertheless, the application of the learning and skills as well as the overall success of the project, to a large extent, depended on individual circumstances of the beneficiaries including their specific skills, land availability, and motivation. While some beneficiaries had clearly displayed better entrepreneurial abilities, the performance of others was either average or poor.

Monitoring was done at different levels involving the community volunteers, implementing partner as well as Project Officer. The assistance extended by the Program Officer from NEEDS was highly appreciated. Monitoring and follow up included regular visits by the project staff, regular meetings involving the beneficiaries and community volunteers. In the case of Palojori block, even though the project completed in 2011, monitoring continued till date, which invoked the continuing commitment of the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries appreciated the continuous support extended by the implementing organisation (NEEDS)

and the different departments such as the Dept of Agriculture for conducting continued monitoring visits.

The skills acquired were sighted as the key driver in the continuity of the project. The sustainability of the project is dependent on the interest and commitment of beneficiaries engaged in project activities as well as other circumstances like land availability. The interest to continue with project activities is in turn shaped by project outcomes like increased paddy yields leading to improved incomes and food security and other external factors. All the beneficiaries interviewed expressed their interest and commitment to continue with project activities.

Recommendations: [c.300 words] this builds on the successes and constraints (above) and focuses on two levels: the programme in question and the place of VSO's work in the sector in question more broadly.

The women reported lack of irrigation facilities as a big challenge to their efforts. Investments in water control mechanisms should be planned and implemented in the much broader framework of agricultural and rural livelihood development intervention for such communities. Increase in production, access to markets and finance and infrastructure should be conceived holistically and as mutually supporting. Livelihood frameworks must ensure equitable access to water resources for crops and animals, and effective access to markets for agricultural products by such marginalized communities.

The implementing partners must be supported to assess properly their intended target outreach at the designing and planning stages of the project. The project was too ambitious for effective monitoring and outcomes. Although no serious flaws or lapses could be outlined in respect of monitoring of the project, had the project focused on a smaller number of women groups (SHGs), project progress could have been monitored more effectively.

Beneficiaries should not be treated as a homogenous group possessing similar skills and capabilities. Some beneficiaries may need training in specific aspects like enterprise development while some others might need continuous training in all aspects. As evidenced from the group discussions, some members were lagging behind in performance because of the generalisation made during the activities implementation.