

## JEEVIKA in Bihar

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### Abstract

The Government of Bihar (GoB), through the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS), an autonomous body under the Department of Rural Development, is spearheading the World Bank aided Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (BRLP), locally known as JEEVIKA with the objective of social & economic empowerment of the rural poor. Subsequently, the Livelihoods Restoration and Enhancement component of Bihar Kosi Flood Recovery Project (BKFRP) was also taken into the fold of JEEVIKA. Livelihoods projects have been an important modality of development assistance in many parts of the developing world for at least two decades. Such projects aim to reach out to the rural poor and link them with sustainable livelihoods opportunities, and are in place or proposed in

India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malawi, Madagascar and Zambia. One such project is the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project, initiated by the Government of Bihar in 2006. This program fell under the ambit of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) of India, which was launched by the national Ministry of Rural Development in 2011.<sup>1</sup> The NRLM aimed to build grassroots institutions for the poor, and to use these as a platform through which to link the poor to financial institutions and livelihoods opportunities at a total cost of over USD 5 billion.<sup>2</sup> Under the framework of the NRLM, various states in India have established their own livelihoods promotion societies to implement these larger goals.

**Keywords:** Financial Institutions; Grassroots Work; Important Modality; Rural Livelihoods

## Introduction

As we celebrate three years of some very challenging and fulfilling work in Bihar, we thought it was time to start exploring ways to strengthen our partnership with our partner, Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society (BRLPS) locally known as JEEViKA by increasing the involvement of JEEViKA's staff in implementation of our model of behavioral change communication. For this purpose on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2015, we organized an orientation programme for the District Communication Managers of 26 districts that we work in, on our approach, current status of project and goals ahead. This was in line with the project goals envisaged by Digital Green and JEEViKA, which seeks to ensure greater involvement of JEEViKA staff and to have an in-house team to improve the quality of videos, make them more interesting and attract more viewers, creating better possibilities for adoptions. Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India (GoI) has restructured the Central Scheme Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) into National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM). The cornerstone of the SGSY strategy that was implemented since 1999 was that the poor need to be organized and their capacities built up systematically so that they can access self-employment opportunities. SGSY has been more successful wherever mobilization of the poor into SHGs and their capacity building and skill development was taken up in a systematic manner. It was in this background that GoI has launched NRLM, to be implemented in a mission mode across the country. It builds on the core strengths of the SGSY and incorporates the important lessons from large scale experiences in the country.

As a first step in the implementation of NRLM in the state, GoB has designated BRLPS as the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) for implementation of NRLM in the state. This has been done in view of the successful experience of BRLPS in implementing a similar approach

in the state over the last few years under the project – JEEViKA. The next important step undertaken has been the preparation of the State Perspective and Implementation Plan (SPIP), a long term strategic plan that would guide the implementation of NRLM in the state.

## Objective of Studies

Despite an increasing body of research on the impact of women's self-help groups (SHGs) on women's empowerment, wide gaps in understanding their costs and cost effectiveness remain. An ongoing study by the Evidence Consortium on Women's Groups (ECWG) seeks to address these evidence gaps by conducting an analysis of the costs and return on investment (ROI) of JEEViKA, the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (BRLP).

## "Didis" of Jeevika

The term "Didi", used to address an elder sister in northern India, embodies the sense of respect given to an elder sibling. In JEEViKA the term is formally used to address SHG members to spread collegiality and break all social barriers of caste, religion or age. 10-12 women in a village form an SHG that provides them a mechanism for savings and borrowing. These SHGs in a village are federated to form a Village Organisation that are responsible for development projects and provide funds for health, education and skill building through Community Investment Funds. Through their participation in BRLP, SHG women have gained a voice and have created an identity beyond their gender roles. They have been able to build up vast savings, own loan funds and build up a capital. More than 85% of the SHGs have a savings account and 75% have accessed institutional credit at least once. Their increasing role in financial inclusion has not only increased their earning capacity but has also improved their household situation. In VO and SHG meetings women can raise concerns against domestic violence alongside financial ones. Their

members act together to help women who have faced violence. The issue of alcoholism received the strongest attention from women followed by child marriage and their children's education. In 2015, the Government of Bihar made a decision and announced the decision to ban liquor in the entire state. JEEVIKA is committed to the need for women's empowerment and is doing every bit to improve their status in the community. More women are raising their voice to seek equal rights and building an identity with bigger aspirations for themselves and their daughters.

### Existing Good Practices and Promising Efforts

Women leaders have a strong understanding of discrimination in their contexts and are motivated to improve the situation

#### 1. Understanding of Gender Equality

- a. Many women members/leaders, have a strong understanding, consciousness about discrimination, patriarchal norms and violence within their context and are motivated to improve the situation through collective action.
- b. Women clearly articulate how the programme has empowered them and brought about significant positive changes in their lives – economic transformation, improved confidence, access to entitlements and their increased awareness across several issues of interest and priority.
- c. All state-level officials acknowledged challenges that the state faces including women's education, women's employment and livelihoods opportunities, and deeply entrenched conventional social norms in rural Bihar.

#### 2. State-level Initiatives and Engendering the System

Gender intervention efforts are understood as cross-cutting and officials acknowledge that integrating gender equity principles across all programming efforts is critical.

#### 3. Capacity Building on Gender Equality and Integration

- a. Gender Training initiatives were introduced before the pandemic. However, they unfortunately came to a standstill due to lockdown restrictions, and will be restarted in due course.
- b. At the VO and CLF, an orientation training is held with selected SAC members (3 in number) on various themes of social justice through addressing local needs by leveraging the strength of the collective.
- c. Social Development team members at the state level have been trained on Gender Operational Strategy developed at the National level.
- d. Social Development Programme managers and a few select staff members with exposure to past interventions have a better grasp of the gender issues integration.
- e. A separate training module is being used borrowing learnings from efforts made by feminist organizations and existing available material.
- f. The modules focus on the importance of collectivization, the differences between sex and gender, and how to identify and prioritize issues.

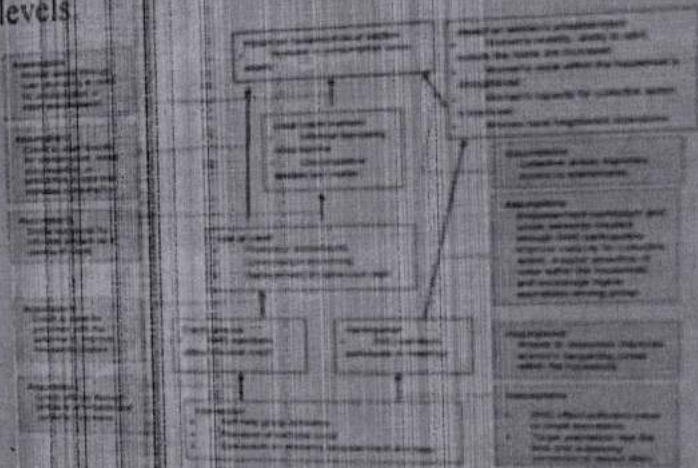
#### 4. Monitoring, Learning and Evaluations

- a. Pilot interventions such as the adolescent groups (TARA program) and educational initiatives (iSaksham, Turn the Bus), introduced by the Social Development vertical are being monitored and documented both at the level of the partners, as well as the state.
- b. The team is familiar with the tracking mechanism (MIS) being discussed at the national level, and are keen on adopting monitoring tracking indicators developed at national level.

#### Theory of Change Diagram

Qualitative data collection and analysis were conducted alongside the quantitative evaluation

to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying impacts that we observe. This is intended to help us better understand the processes of change with respect to culture and gender that resulted in observed social impacts. Such a focus sheds light on the sociological underpinnings of behavior and the negotiated relational processes at household and community levels.



At present, Livelihood Managers of JEEVIKA support DG's intervention as anchors for their respective districts. They play a crucial role – approving the storyboards and videos after looking into content and processes since most of the videos in Bihar have been about agricultural practices. However, Livelihood Managers have limited knowledge about the quality of videos.

The JEEVIKA project started the day-long orientation by explaining the livelihood approach and the evolution of our partnership with JEEVIKA in Bihar. We then shared the current status of videos produced, dissemination among community members and adoptions along with the goals to be achieved by end of 2015. The Communication Managers of JEEVIKA also shared their current roles and responsibilities with our team, which followed an interesting dialogue about the possibilities they saw of contributing towards the DG and JEEVIKA partnership model. During the course of the orientation, we screened four videos on different aspects such as Digital Green's story and approach, equipment handling and agricultural practices during the meeting. The participants appreciated the videos and were very surprised to learn that the videos on agricultural

practices were shot by a video comprising of Village Resource the participants had earlier had that the livelihood shoots all a meeting provided us with an opportunity to myths like this and reinforce the community participation which is model.

## Conclusion

JEEVIKA has strengthened women and enabled women to meet, build and negotiate as a group. At the same time, recognition that this change needs to accelerate for women to be able to prevalent norms around domestic violence harassment, or education and mobility. Building and sustaining a strong gender that addresses and responds to women needs at the state level, while incorporating gender transformative approach is required. overarching focus should be on strengthening community institutions to develop and implement Gender Action Plans, set up Gender Desk, designated focal points and community centers, attempt to converge and coordinate with supportive infrastructure. Reinforcing institution system via gender sensitisation training at the state level, building capacities of JEEVIKA staff on the importance of understanding and addressing women's social needs, is also required to further build upon the successes that JEEVIKA has achieved.

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