

Traversing the Rural Landscape In India

Looking Back at the Livelihoods
Journey between 2009 and 2017





**Indo-Global
Social Service Society**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| AAJ | – Antyodaya Anna Yojana |
| AIDS | – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome |
| BDO | – Block Development Officer |
| BPL | – Below Poverty Line |
| CAG | – Community Action Group |
| CBO | – Community Based Organisation |
| CCA | – Climate Change Adaptation |
| DRDA | – District Rural Development Agency |
| DUDA | – District Urban Development Agency |
| FNS | – Food and Nutrition Security |
| FRA | – Forest Rights Act |
| FRC | – Farmer Resource Centre |
| HIV | – Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| ICDS | – Integrated Child Development Services |
| IEC | – Information Education and Communication |
| IGP | – Income Generating Programme |
| IGSSS | – Indo-Global Social Service Society |
| IIE | – Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship |
| KVK | – Krishi Vigyan Kendras |
| LDA | – Lucknow Development Authority |
| MGNREGS | – Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme |
| MSME | – Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises |
| NABARD | – National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development |
| NDRF | – National Disaster Rescue Force |
| NREGS | – National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme |
| NRM | – Natural Resource Management |
| OBC | – Other Backward Class |
| ODC | – Organisation for Development Coordination |
| ORRC | – Organisation for Rural Reconstruction |
| PDS | – Public Distribution System |
| PEARL | – People’s Empowerment for Accessing Rights to Livelihood |
| PEDO | – People’s Education and Development Organisation |
| PRI | – Panchayati Raj Institution |
| RTI | – Right to Information |
| SAREL | – State Alliance for Rights Empowerment and Livelihood |
| SC | – Scheduled Caste |
| SGRY | – Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana |
| SGSY | – Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana |
| SHG | – Self Help Group |
| SOUL | – Sustainable Options for Uplifting Livelihood |
| SRI | – System of Rice Intensification |
| SC | – Scheduled Caste |
| ST | – Scheduled Tribe |
| UP | – Uttar Pradesh |
| VDC | – Village Development Committees |





“We had Tongues
but could not
Speak

We had Feet but
could not Walk

Now that We have
our Land

We have the
Strength to Speak
and Walk”



PREFACE

I
IGSSS has been working on the issue of rural sustainable livelihoods through its partnership projects PEARL (People’s

Empowerment for Accessing Rights to Livelihood) and SOUL (Sustainable Options for Uplifting Livelihoods) since 2009. This study traces the journey travelled with our rural partners and seeks to assess the qualitative impact of this programming over the last decade. In our livelihoods programming, we have envisaged an overall vision of improved livelihoods for the most excluded rural poor communities and a commensurate improvement in their quality of life. Against this, we have tried to measure specific outcomes on food insecurity reduction, climate change adaptation, improved agricultural and off farm based measures and improved convergence/ institution building. The aggregation of these outcomes do not automatically accrue to a situation of improved livelihoods – hence the recent move towards an integrated framework on wellbeing, with sensitive markers for income enhancement, improved nutritional status and judicious management of natural resources.

The successes have been many. Income enhancement, through portfolio diversification and increased production, has been a clear achievement for the rural poor worked with. Proactive contributions have been made in increasing the food security of the families by facilitating and ensuring effective access to and availing of government entitlements, introducing kitchen gardens and dietary diversity at the household level, improving various agricultural practices, and an overall diversification of agriculture. The next level of action looks at issues of nutrition security, in addition to increased physical and social access to food. The livelihoods programme has also helped the vulnerable groups to apply for and access the social security benefits devised for them; the benefits of such access have been both monetary and qualitative in nature. The role of organic and strong community based organisations in steering such convergences also indicate that they are well poised to claim control over their own processes of development within the rural landscape. They have given us the confidence to withdraw and reinvest in newer, more vulnerable constituencies over the years.

The learnings have been manifold. There is an urgent need to articulate livelihoods perspectives with concerns of knowledge, politics, scale and dynamics. Basic questions of political economy and history matter: the nature of the state, the influence of private capital and terms of trade, alongside

other wider structural forces, influence livelihoods in particular places. This is conditioned by histories of places and peoples, and their wider interactions with the market, state making and globalization. Given the cluster based programming on livelihoods being implemented in PEARL and SOUL, actions and strategies unfolded against a critical socio-economic-environmental framework of the broader contiguous geography. The attention to how livelihoods are structured by relations of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion and cultural identity has become a critical influencer, especially over the last few years. In working with several special interest groups, we have managed to reach particular vulnerable constituencies; but, equally, may not have been able to fully optimize the opportunity of addressing their livelihoods sustainably, linked as they are intrinsically with issues of identity. This will inform the future programming on livelihoods within the organisation. It is with this optimism and a greater understanding of our responsibility that we present this learning document to the wider public.

We thank and appreciate Dr. Rajiv Balakrishnan for patiently and persistently sifting through many documents and reports in order to produce this study.

Mr. John Peter Nelson
Executive Director IGSSS

“If many little
people
In many little
places
Do many little
deeds
They can change
The face of the
earth”

—African Proverb¹



INTRODUCTION

Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) is a non-profit organisation working for a humane social order based on truth, justice, freedom and equity. IGSSS has a presence in 22 states and one Union Territory of India.² It works with diverse marginalised communities, such as those of migrant workers, urban poor, small and marginal farmers, unorganised sector workers, disaster- and conflict-afflicted communities, and tribal and Scheduled Caste communities. In the financial year 2015-16, IGSSS reached out to 1,24,692 families, of which 92 per cent were from the SC (Scheduled Caste), ST (Scheduled Tribe) and OBC (Other Backward Class) categories.

Where IGSSS Began

IGSSS, originally called Indo-German Social Service Society, was constituted in 1961 as the Indian partner of MISEREOR, a donor

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1. <https://www.misereor.org/about-us/> (accessed on 21 November 2017)
 2. For details, see Appendix 1.

organisation founded a few years earlier by a group of Catholic bishops of the former West Germany. IGSSS has built on this over the years and moved out on its own individual course of organisational development. It continues to share many of MISEREOR's values and approaches. Chief among these are compassion for the poor and disempowered, and reaching out to the most disadvantaged communities irrespective of their religious beliefs. IGSSS confines itself to development activities only; correspondingly, MISEREOR '...rules out the promotion of pastoral or missionary measures'.³ Finally, overarching all IGSSS work, is an emphasis on empowering people at the grassroots so that they are able to act as autonomous agents of change.

Over the years, IGSSS has grown to be more broad-based in terms of the raising

of resources⁴ and working in partnership with several groups for more effective implementation of its developmental work. In 2004-2005, reflecting this change in the organisation's functioning, its name underwent a change – from Indo-German Social Service Society to its present name, i.e., Indo-Global Social Service Society. The abbreviation IGSSS remained unchanged.

In 2006, Indo-Global Social Service Society won the prestigious Golden Peacock Award for Philanthropy in Emerging Economies.

IGSSS now stands as a major player in the development sector in India. This document reports on two of its major projects, namely, PEARL (People's Empowerment for Accessing Rights to Livelihood) and SOUL (Sustainable Options for Uplifting Livelihood). Both these projects were supported by MISERIOR.

3. Ibid

4. As of September 2017, the donors include, in addition to MISEREOR: Caritas Germany, Caritas Italiana, Charities Aid Foundation, Disney, DK Austria, HDFC Bank, Irish Aid, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Quest Alliance, Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) and Secours Catholique.

PEOPLE'S EMPOWERMENT FOR ACCESSING RIGHTS TO LIVELIHOOD (PEARL)

APRIL 2009 TO MARCH 2013

The story begins with the first phase of PEARL, where IGSSS adopted a rigorous process to identify target groups for project implementation. India's erstwhile Planning Commission and the Ministry for Rural Development, Government of India, had each prepared a list of the poorest districts in the country. IGSSS consulted both lists and after deliberations, selected clusters of districts for intervention. A detailed situational analysis was then carried out. Following this, the major findings were discussed, and target groups and locations for interventions were finalised.

Four Rights

PEARL focused on four rights for improving the conditions of marginalised people, namely, the right to food, the right to work, the right to natural resources and the right to credit.

Right to Food

The focus of the right to food programme under PEARL was two-pronged. It entailed: (i) strengthening people's access to various existing public food-security schemes, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS), the mid-day meal scheme, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), widow pensions, old-age pensions, Annapurna Yojana⁵ and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY),⁶ and (ii) improvement of the carrying capacity of agriculture through suitable farming inputs.

(i) Strengthening access to social security schemes

In order to facilitate people's access to public schemes, it was necessary to first spread awareness about the provisions of those schemes. Therefore, the programme disseminated Information Education and Communication (IEC) material on government schemes and programmes. It organised public

5. Annapurna Yojana is a centrally sponsored scheme under which '...old destitutes who are not getting the National Old Age Pension (NOAPS) but have its eligibility, are being provided 10 kg food-grain (6 kg wheat + 4 kg rice) per month free of cost as Food Security'. <http://www.fcp.bih.nic.in/Annapurna.htm> accessed on 04 January 2018.

6. Antyodaya Anna Yojana is '...a Government of India sponsored scheme to provide highly subsidised food to millions of the poorest families'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antyodaya_Annayojana Accessed on 04 January 2018.



meetings and hearings to facilitate the proper functioning of PDS and ICDS centres.

Repeated home visits helped build a good rapport with the local people. These visits also boosted the confidence of marginalised communities such as the Musahar. As a result, people were motivated to come forward to claim benefits. They started to raise their voice through district core committees and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) against anomalies and irregularities in the supply of food items by PDS and ICDS.

Jansangathans (people's organisations) and Self Help Groups demanded timely and adequate supply of PDS foodstuffs at a fair price. In some states, student associations such as All Assam Students Union, Gorkha Student Union and all the Tea Tribe Students Associations got involved in this campaign and provided volunteers for monitoring PDS.

Monitoring of various government schemes forced public functionaries to distribute regular and nutritive food through the ICDS and mid-day meal programmes. Access to widow pension and old age pension increased.

In another initiative, PRI (Panchayati Raj Institution) members were sensitised to the need to identify persons eligible to be beneficiaries under social security schemes. This would strengthen the grassroots governance system and facilitate proper delivery mechanisms. Interface meetings were organised with beneficiaries and government officials to ensure quality execution of the PDS, ICDS and mid-day meal programmes, and to facilitate linkages with the concerned line departments.



(ii) Inputs to improve agriculture

In rural areas, food security is critically dependent on the status of agriculture. Hence, a key focus was on improving agricultural yields. Agricultural practices such as the System of Rice Intensification (SRI)⁷ technique facilitated food security. SRI and kitchen / nutrition gardening have created new hope for small and marginal farmers.

The programme propagated knowledge pertaining to low-cost agriculture and the production and preservation of seeds. Exposure visits to promote sustainable organic farming were organised for youth leaders, which enabled them to tap into the expertise of Krishi Vigyan Kendras.⁸ These visits helped young people follow biodiversity

7. SRI—System of Rice Intensification '... is a methodology aimed at increasing the yield of rice produced in farming. It is a low-water, labour-intensive method that uses younger seedlings singly spaced and typically hand-weeded with special tools.' https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/System_of_Rice_Intensification accessed on 27 January 2018.

8. 'Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) are agricultural extension centres created by ICAR (Indian Council for Agricultural Research) and its affiliated institutions at the district level to provide various types of farm support to the agricultural sector.' <http://www.indianeconomy.net/splclassroom/213/what-is-krishi-vigyan-kendra/> accessed 11 November 2017.

methods, such as intercropping and best seed identification.

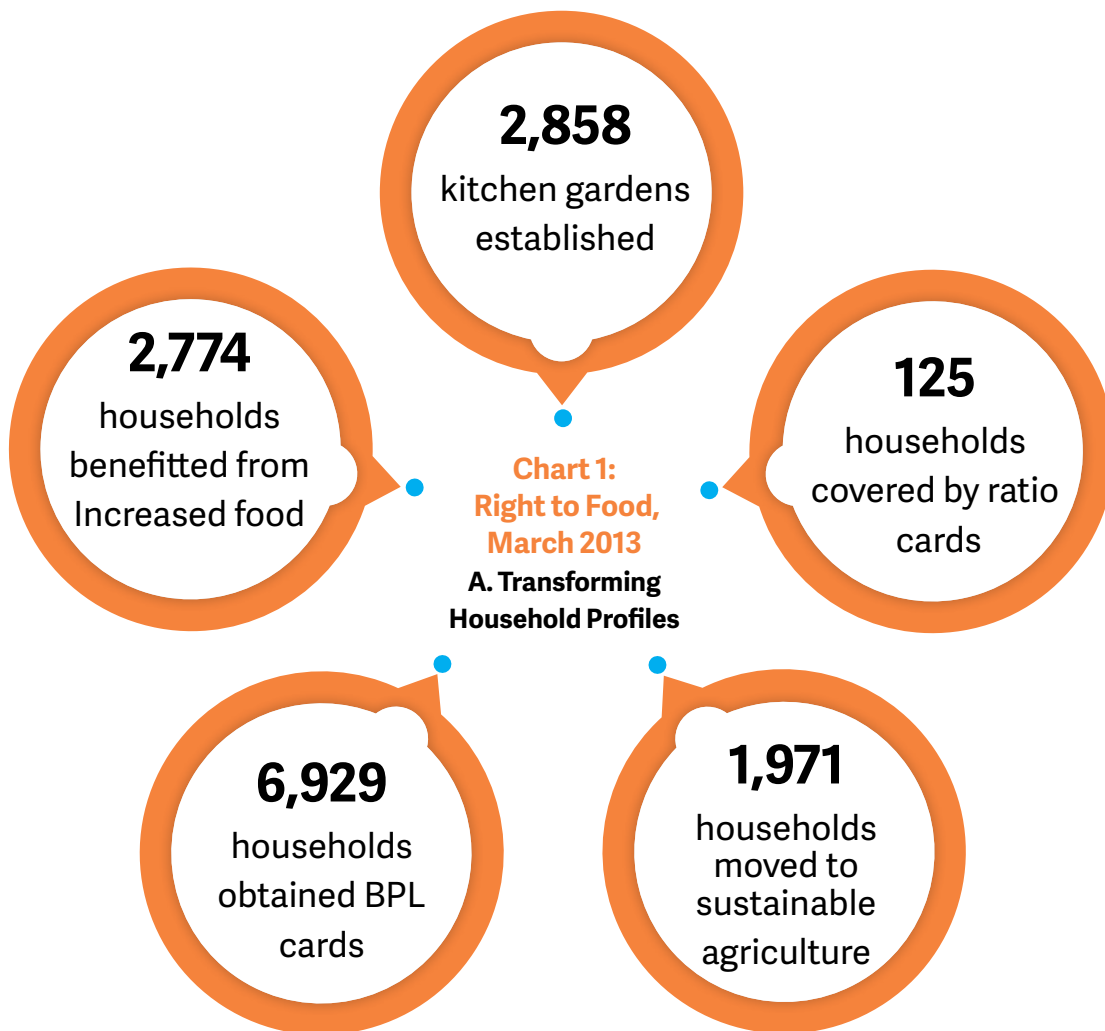
Training programmes were carried out on food security schemes, sustainable agriculture practices, horticulture, land preparation, and the use of organic pesticides such as neem for kitchen gardens and vegetable cultivation.

Linkages were established with the agriculture department for the supply of vermicompost, saplings and organic manure. Households were linked to the market for the purpose of selling the vegetable they grew. Food calendars were developed. Seed banks and grain banks were established in programme villages to help marginalised

families access food and seeds during the lean season.

Families most affected by drought were identified by CAGs (Community Action Groups) through the survey method and were provided grain. Development of nutrition gardens in schools has made the students more aware of matters related to agriculture. The gardens have also helped improve their nutritional intake through the mid-day meal scheme.

Chart 1 profiles the achievements of the right to food programme. It shows two categories of interventions: (i) transforming individuals or households and (ii) transforming social infrastructure.



7. A food calendar is a Participatory Rural Appraisal tool to capture food availability at different times of the year.

B. Transforming Social Infrastructure

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Citizens' Involvement Forums | 112 livelihood security forums formed 80 effective grain banks and seed banks established 26 effective vigilance committees on food security established |
| Food and Nutrition Security | 164 ICDS centres functioning effectively 249 PDS Public Distribution Systems functioning effectively |
| Schools | 217 schools providing mid-day meals |
| Village Coverage | 639 villages provided with corrected entitlement cards 23 villages covered by social audit and public hearing on food security schemes |

Right to Work

(i) National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

The right to work programme laid special emphasis on building the community's awareness of its entitlements under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). People had limited information about their entitlements. Even the Village Councils and PRIs responsible for the implementation of NREGS had little knowledge of the guidelines. Mobilisation of the community, including women, to demand

access to NREGS, ensure minimum wages and build community assets have been the core thrust of IGSSS activities to promote the right to work.

Meetings were held with the village councils and PRIs to facilitate proper implementation of NREGS. Awareness programmes were organised through posters, video shows and street plays on the provisions and processes of getting job cards from the panchayat. Vulnerable families were helped to access job cards and apply for jobs. Families that applied for job cards under NREGS gained access to employment generation schemes such as SGSY (Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana) and SGRY (Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana). Representatives were trained in maintaining village-wise registers of NREGS beneficiaries to monitor the status of work availability and engage in dialogue when required.

IGSSS conducted state-level studies of NREGS to identify and assess challenges in its implementation. Village-level social audits and public hearings gave a detailed picture of the sort of problems that posed barriers in the way of an effective and equitable execution of NREGS.

There were tremendous hurdles at the first stage of registration and acquiring of job cards. Some officials demanded proof of





identity and 'fees' for registration. Even when individuals got job cards, it did not always translate to access to employment: there was reluctance to accept applications for work or they did not get work and wages as per their entitlement. There is no case reported of an individual having received an unemployment allowance. The effort, therefore, was to enable people to get cards and for card holders to access employment opportunities.

Women-headed households and joint families were found to be at a disadvantage as the provision of work to one person of the household was interpreted to mean for the male head of the household.

There appeared to be a lack of transparency in the allocation of works. In several instances, no reasonable explanation was given for the selective distribution of works to certain hamlets within a village, or to specific individuals. Dalits, women, minority groups and persons with disabilities were getting excluded in this selective process of allocation. Facilities for shade, water, first aid and crèches were not being provided at the work site. The muster roll showed more work days and wages paid than was borne out by the workers' statements; the monitoring committees were not functioning; and nothing was posted on the information board.

The airing of these grievances put pressure on the government functionaries responsible for the proper execution of NREGS. Village cadres were developed and capacitated to demand jobs under NREGS. A number of CAGs (Community Action Groups) were put in place at the village level for monitoring village-level assets (Common Property Resources) and the functioning of PRIs and food and employment schemes, including NREGS. Vision Development Workshops were conducted for 41 CAGs.

As a result of lobbying with the Deputy Commissioner, the concerned officers agreed to provide the implementation status of NREGS to all Village Committees. This led to the development of a system for collection and compilation of the status of NREGS in all villages.

(ii) Alternative livelihoods

Apart from a focus on NREGS, skill and vocational trainings were provided to youth and farmers. Training and exposure were provided for non-farm work and IGPs (Income Generating Programmes). Micro-plans were developed for creation of community assets. Landless and unorganised labourers were linked to alternative income-generating opportunities.

Chart 2 depicts the results of the right to work programme in transforming individuals, households, social infrastructure.



| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Labour Associations | 163 labour associations formed |
| Labour Union Addas | 4 labour union addas displayed rate boards |
| Village Coverage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 villages prepared action plans and guidelines 46 villages saw women begin self-employment after interventions on skill enhancement and market linkages 1736 villages given information regarding government schemes 153 villages got Improved market linkages for value added products 134 assets created through NREGS (such as village roads, ponds, goat/pig sheds) |

(iii) Access to credit

Consolidating and mobilising vulnerable and backward communities into Self Help Groups and linking them to micro-finance institutions were the prime activities undertaken under the right to credit component. The factors emphasised were the formation of SHGs and their federations, guidelines for group formation, management and book keeping, helping SHGs open bank accounts and access bank linkages and loans, and ensuring compliance with the guidelines of banks and financial institutions.

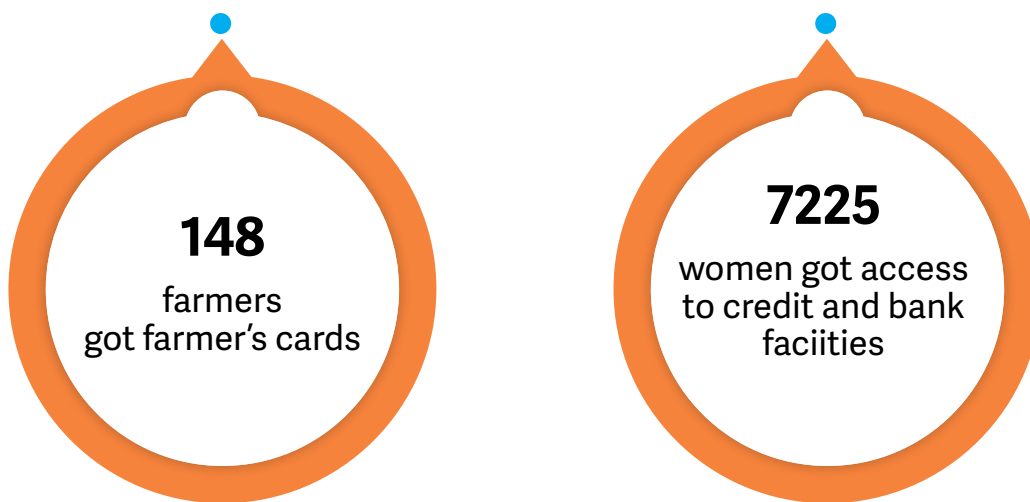
The SHG members were trained in Income Generating Programmes (IGPs) and leadership activities. Skill enhancement and marketing trainings were provided to SHG women. The

SHGs were encouraged to conduct monthly meetings and save on a regular basis.

The newly formed SHG federations facilitated internal lending. They helped ensure the increased participation of women in local self-governance and in running programmes like the mid-day meal scheme. The SHGs and VDCs (Village Development Committees) received trainings in organisation building and leadership. The SHG leaders were capacitated to take part in local-level governance and to monitor the implementation of schemes. Working relations were established with municipal corporations, schools, etc. Getting insurance companies to issue health policy cards was an important achievement.

Chart 3: Right to Credit, March 2013

A. Transforming Household Profiles



B. Transforming Social Infrastructure

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Institutions | 94 micro-finance institutions established |
| Groups | 26 groups engaged in IGP activities |
| | 18 SHG federations active |
| | 214 groups mobilised financial grants from SGSY, NABARD, etc. |
| | 468 groups increased credit circulation |

Right to Natural Resources

Under the right to natural resources, the focus was on promoting activities like organic farming (which does not require costly inputs), vegetable cultivation, use of low-cost composting methods, and alternative land-use systems. Other key foci included securing government land for agriculture, sensitising people to their entitlements under the Forest Rights Act and forming seed banks and farmers' clubs.

The initial work spread awareness about locally available natural resources. The community, including the women, were given orientation to gear them to protect, utilise and conserve local natural resources, including forest cover, common lands, and village tanks. Techniques like resource mapping and micro-plan development in villages

fostered awareness regarding the available natural resources and their importance in people's livelihoods. The community was also sensitised to their entitlements under the Forest Rights Act 2006. Meetings were organised on the provisions and procedures for claiming rights to forest land under FRA. The programme facilitated the submission of application forms to the gram panchayat for claiming rights to forest land.

Village camps were organised around the issue of joint house and land titles and facilitation of interactions with government officials. Campaigns in the form of rallies, conventions, workshops and submission of memoranda were carried out to ensure land rights to SCs in Bihar and STs in Jharkhand. Campaigns were organised around land rights and distribution of land pattas (title deeds) to forest dwellers and tribals.



Village authorities were capacitated to develop a village plan for resource management. Activities undertaken under the head of resource management included planting of trees in the jhum field area, growing orchids and medicinal plants, and demarcation of forest patches for conservation. Training and exposure visits were organised with respect to activities such as watershed management, government schemes pertaining to NRM and community assets, sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and animal husbandry. Farmer Resource Centres (FRCs) were formed with the objective of providing information and

technical support to farmers. Van samitis (forest committees) were formed in the operational area.

Traditional water-harvesting structures were renovated and scaled up. Linkages were established with agricultural and horticultural departments, and seeds and saplings distributed. Wastelands were developed by bringing them under horticulture. Training in and exposure to sustainable agriculture led to the establishment of vermicompost units and the adoption of SRI techniques. Farmers who had received theoretical knowledge participated in the demonstration programmes.

Chart 4: Right to Natural Resources, March 2013

A. Transforming Household Profiles



B. Transforming Social Infrastructure

| | |
|----------|--|
| Plans | 56 micro-plans for integrated farming system prepared |
| Villages | 86 villages involved in watershed management schemes. 21 villages harvesting or utilising forest products |



PEARL Urban Cluster

The focus of the urban cluster of PEARL was on informal sector workers, i.e., rickshaw-pullers and labourers in Lucknow and Kanpur.¹⁰ Details of the programme, as of 2011, are given below. The target group comprised 9000 construction workers and 3000 rickshaw-pullers at 48 locations. IGSSS worked with four partners in these locations.

The focus here was on access to the available government food and social security schemes and services, basic amenities and education. There was also an emphasis on access to information and its role in

empowering individuals and communities. Besides facilitating access to the available services, advocacy and linkages with concerned departments helped empower the community.

The target people at all locations were aware about the mid-day meal scheme, ICDS, and PDS. The programme facilitated applications for ration cards and voter ID cards.

Children were enrolled in Anganwadis and primary schools with the help of partner organisations (Diocesan Social Work Society, Lucknow, and Asian Institution of Management).

7. See Appendix 2 for more details of PEARL urban cluster.

To secure housing for the urban poor, application forms for Kanshiram Shahri Awas Yojana were submitted to the District Urban Development Agency (DUDA). Advocacy programmes on the circumstances of construction workers and rickshaw pullers were organised by IGSSS with the support of urban partners. As a result, funding was approved for shelters (ran basera) for the urban poor and for sheds at rickshaw stands for rickshaw pullers.

As result of linkages and advocacy meetings, measures were taken to cater to the water needs of households. Compensations were secured for residents in a burnt hutments case.

Women in need got support under Mahamaya Garib Arthik Madad Yojana. Applications for registration of construction labourers were submitted through the labour commissioner to the labour welfare department. Meetings were held with the municipal corporation and corporate houses ensure basic amenities (drinking water, night shelters, mobile toilets, and health facilities) at work sites.

Right to Information (RTI) applications were filed to seek relevant information on ICDS, PDS, social welfare schemes, DUDA, and UP housing schemes such as LDA, Awas Ewam Vikas Parishad, and DPO.

Achievements of PEARL

PEARL brought a change in the socio-economic conditions of the people. Women's groups, especially, were active in taking up collective village development initiatives. Knowledge has improved on different social security schemes, sustainable agricultural practices and concepts of credit and savings. The programme interventions were successful in creating community institutions through which people acquired jobs and BPL cards, and were able to access select government schemes.

People were able to share their problems on a public platform in front of district or government officials over the course of public hearings. This has resulted in prompt action being taken by the relevant government departments.

People in the PEARL intervention areas gained a heightened awareness of their rights and entitlements. They organised themselves and raised their voices. This was found to be very effective in empowering the community.

Women, especially from the adivasi, Dalit and OBC groups, in the project areas have been mobilised and organised through SHGs. Many SHGs have been linked to banks.

Group formation has helped in increasing women's participation (through emergence of women's leadership) in different decision-making processes, both at the family and the community level. Members of women's groups and individuals became a part of the social action programme.

Irregularities in various government programmes in the intervention areas have been reduced. The PDS has become functional in the target areas and process delay in NREGS has been reduced. This is one of the key achievements of the collectivisation and community mobilisation that has taken place under PEARL.

Many farmers were motivated to adopt new agricultural techniques or methods to reduce to climate-related vulnerability and increased their productivity. As a result, their incomes increased considerably.

Access to government food schemes – e.g., quality mid-day meals at primary schools – has improved with CBOs (Community Based Organisations) actively engaged in monitoring them.

Engagement with local administration and the forest department has helped register land

in the names of the local families. As per the Forest Rights Act, land owners got their land registered, and the landless got land pattas (titles).

PEARL: Bottlenecks and Challenges

Serious bottlenecks and challenges emerged very strongly from the experience gained of the various phases of the PEARL programme over a period of 39 months.

Economically disadvantaged people were not able to access their dues from the various government schemes.¹¹ NREGS was badly hampered by multiple issues, making facilitating access to its benefits a struggle. PRI representatives were not motivated to take up developmental issues in their areas of jurisdiction.

There is iniquitous distribution of land. The small and marginal farmer families of the project areas had little access to irrigation

whereas lands belonging to the upper-caste community had better access to traditional irrigation systems.

Though agricultural wages were one of the main sources of livelihood, the daily wage rates were far below the minimum permissible by the government. Women were paid even less than men.

Large-scale distress out-migration was a common phenomenon. In a considerable number of cases, they encountered a very exploitative system and numerous health hazards at the work site and during travel.

Exorbitant rates of interest and various kinds of mortgaging were features of the informal credit systems that were the main source of credit in the villages.

The status of women in all caste groups was very low in the operational areas, and caste-based violence against women was widely prevalent.

7. The many government supported welfare and development schemes for the poor in the project areas included NREGS, SGSY (Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana), the MDMS (mid day meal programme), Kisan Credit Card, and Antodaya Yojana.



SOUL (SUSTAINABLE OPTIONS FOR UPLIFTING LIVELIHOOD), 2013-2017

PEARL had been carried on in phases between 2008 and 2013. The next phase of livelihood programming was SOUL – Sustainable Options for Uplifting Livelihood.

Programming under SOUL was carried out under the following main heads: (i) climate change adaptation (CCA), (ii) food and nutrition security (FNS), (iii) informal sector workers, (iv) youth development, (v) gender, and (vi) tribal development.

Climate Change Adaptation (CCA)

Weather conditions that disrupt agriculture undermine livelihoods; droughts impact on crop yield, ocean acidification alters the eco-system and causes a decline of the fish population, and extreme weather conditions wreak havoc. In such a scenario, climate-resilient farming and alternative livelihoods are clearly the need of the hour. To address the situation that climate variability has created in the project villages, several adaptation and mitigation models/measures were implemented (see Appendix 3).

Food and Nutrition Security (FNS)

In India, the agricultural system provides food security for a limited period of time in a year. The low level of irrigation and the recurring droughts in the central heartland have an impact on the carrying capacity of agriculture in the region. Malnutrition is another serious issue; it has reached alarming proportions in a few states and is poised to become disastrous if not tackled on a war footing. On a positive note, medical and diagnostic models of intervention dealing largely with treatment and prevention are being implemented by the government through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Department of Health.

Overall, food and nutrition security was promoted through (i) farm-based activities, (ii)

non-farm activities and (iii) wage and social security.

(i) Farm-Based Activities

This entailed the introduction of suitable agricultural techniques and inputs, and promotion of kitchen gardening and food forests.

In an initiative of VAT/VDA members, with the participation of the community, a nursery was established in Jhirjhira village of Koraput. The project raised a variety of saplings for distribution to community members to start kitchen gardens.

Farmers and CBO leaders in four villages of Koraput were sensitised to the benefits of 'food forests' in ensuring food security in adverse climatic conditions. The idea behind the concept of a food forest was to restore uncultivated, fallow (and mostly sloping) land by growing fruit trees, vegetables, tubers and climbers. As a primary step, the villagers planted fruit and tuber crops on the slopes.

In the villages of Saintala block, Bolangir, Odisha, initiatives assessed the available uncultivated food, mostly the wild edible variety, including leaves, fruits and tubers, as a natural insurance against climatic shocks. After this learning, efforts were made to develop a food forest in one village. A multi-layered plantation of drought-tolerant agro-eco-specific tubers and medicinal plants was carried out by communities collectively.

(ii) Non-farm Activities

Activities involved capacitating SHGs and women's groups with respect to pisciculture, lac cultivation, and the rearing of poultry, goats and pigs. A key factor was creating linkages with the government departments for fisheries, animal husbandry and veterinary to avail of resources and benefits.

(iii) Wage and Social Security

Food security was promoted also by way of leveraging benefits from government schemes such as the PDS (Public Distribution



System), NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), the mid-day meal scheme, ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) and various pensions which target the most marginalised – aged women, widows and the disabled. The strategy of convergence of CBOs with the line departments/PRI through meetings, filing of applications and subsequent follow-up was adopted successfully, as well. The learning here is that it is possible for marginalised people to work with government as opposed to mobilising to leverage entitlements from it.

Informal Sector Workers

Through its evolving engagement with urban poverty, IGSSS is committed to working for the rights of informal sector workers. It seeks to secure their labour and livelihood rights and entitlements. Previously, in Uttar Pradesh, the inclusion of traditional artisanal means of livelihood under NREGS was taken up proactively, with a certain measure of success. Informal sector workers that IGSSS have worked with include (i) handloom sector workers in and around Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, (ii) tea garden workers of north Bengal, (iii) stone crushers of Barapahari, West Bengal, (iv) salt pan workers of Gujarat, and (v) manual scavengers belonging to Gujarat's Valmiki community.

Handloom Sector Workers

The handloom sector provides employment to more than 43 lakh weavers and allied workers, mostly from the SC, ST, backward and minority communities. It accounts for approximately 15 per cent of India's textile production and makes a significant contribution to export earnings.

Discerning retailers look for regular, reliable sources of supply of authentic handloom products. However, handloom weavers, being unorganised, face problems in supplying large orders. Therefore, IGSSS focused on scaling up its pilot intervention with the weavers in and around Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.



Advocacy is needed to resolve moot points such as the integration of artisans into the NREGS ambit, bettering conditions of sale and purchase for local weavers, and promotion of the concept of green handlooms.

State Alliance for Rights Empowerment and Livelihood (SAREL) has strongly advocated the inclusion of the work of artisans/weavers under the ambit of MGNREGS. This yielded positive results when a Central Minister announced that he was in favour of it, and thus artisans got the support of government departments and financial institutions. This was largely due to the visibility created by the alliance at the regional level in Uttar Pradesh.

Tea Garden Workers

Another vulnerable constituency is the erstwhile tea garden workers of North Bengal. The falling price of tea in the auction market had resulted in massive financial loss, causing closure of the previously functioning



tea gardens. These were the major socio-economic fallouts:

(i) Right to food: After the closure of the gardens, the workers were denied their subsidised cereal ration as a benefit under the Plantation Labour Act 1951. There have been a large number of deaths – more than 900 in the year 2002-2003 – resulting from a combination of starvation, malnutrition, general debilitation, and disease.

(ii) Right to work: Because of the isolated nature of the tea gardens, the workers had no access to other sustainable livelihoods and were forced by economic necessity to enter activities unsuited to their age and strength. Women became vulnerable to trafficking. The tea gardens crisis has also led to alarming levels of out-migration.

(iii) Right to basic amenities: On closure of the gardens, water and electricity were no

longer available to workers residing within the gardens. This resulted in their turning to water from distant and polluted surface sources. Hospitals and health care facilities, too, were withdrawn, resulting in rising sickness and mortality. The children were particularly affected by the lack of health care and adequate nutrition, resulting in deficiency-related diseases.

IGSSS began interventions aimed at promoting and supporting integrated livelihood initiatives through improvement in availability of both food and incomes. IGSSS conducted a baseline study and mobilised the communities through regular field visits.

Awareness sessions on malaria, encephalitis, diarrhoea and tuberculosis were organised. The community was prey to these diseases, impacting its earning potential.

With a view to improving food and nutrition security, farming and animal husbandry

practices were promoted. Training in improved farm and water management practices was carried out. Formation and strengthening of CBOs was undertaken with a view to enhancing people's participation in local governance and enabling people to access social and livelihood security schemes. The malnutrition and starvation-related deaths that have been on the rise in this area, however, remain an emerging issue for advocacy.

Stone Crushers of Barapahari

A third disadvantaged community on the IGSSS radar has been the stone crushers of Barapahari in Birbhum, West Bengal. The people of Barapahari were mostly farmers engaged in mono-cropping of rice for around four to five months a year. During the rest of the year, they gained their livelihood as wage earners in stone-crushing units, many of which were unregistered. The workers were paid abysmal and exploitative wages, well below those stipulated under the Minimum Wages Act. Tuberculosis (TB) and kala-azar are common diseases in the area, followed by Respiratory Tract Infections (RTI). Overall, this remains a region requiring urgent and immediate action on livelihood rights and entitlements.

So far, 67 stone quarry workers have been supported to claim their rights; 45 have received Aadhar cards and labour cards. Apart from this, health trainings were organised for women workers in stone-crushing units.

Salt Pan Workers of Gujarat

The salt pan workers of the Agariya community in Gujarat's western coast were working in conditions approximating that of bonded labour. IGSSS extended its work to this group also. The pilot project began in December 2014 in partnership with the VIKAS Centre for Development in Jhambusar block of Bharuch district, Gujarat. Efforts were made to organise them into collectives and enhance their capability to press for their legally entitled wages, safe and dignified

conditions of work, and access to social security. A group of Agariya women was identified and aggregated in two SHGs. These SHGs were given information about the salt supply chain and the retail market for crushed salt. Women were trained to pack salt in an eco-friendly manner. Almost 3000 containers of eco-friendly, biodegradable cylinders were made ready for the local market.

Scavengers of Gujarat's Valmiki Community

Last but not the least, IGSSS worked for the upliftment of the Valmiki community in Gujarat. People who belonged to this community eked out a living through the inhuman work of manual scavenging. The pattern of their work may have changed in the face of progressive legislation, but discrimination and untouchability still exist in the communities within which they are forced to live and work. This can be seen in the low wages they receive, the lack of facilities they are provided to do unhygienic and hazardous work and, above all, the inhuman treatment meted out to them.



With the support of IGSSS, two organisations – St. Xavier’s Non-Formal Education Society and the Centre for Development – started working with Valmiki women in the district of Ahmedabad. The main objective of the project was to improve the working conditions and standard of life of 1886 households of the highly vulnerable occupational / ethnic groups and urban manual scavengers.

The project worked with Valmiki women in three slum settlements in Ahmedabad city to build awareness of citizenship rights and entitlements and to augment their capacities to organise, demand, make representations, and secure entitlements. Life skills trainings and inputs on reproductive health were facilitated among Valmiki girls in all the settlements. Eleven women’s collectives were formed with 117 women leaders emerging from them.

Youth Development

In Kashmir, youth groups were formed and strengthened in the intervention villages. The youth were trained in the basic concept of democracy by practising it in their groups. Youth groups were in the forefront of rescue and relief operations post the Kashmir floods of September 2014 and have been lauded for their exemplary contribution to rescue and relief efforts. In fact, youth in the SMILE intervention areas reached out to places where the National Disaster Rescue Force (NDRF) could not. The youth group members were organised into teams and they reached out to various agencies to ensure timely coordination.

In Tamil Nadu, Dalit youth were motivated to act on issues related to caste-based discrimination and gender-based violence. They were actively engaged in community action programmes and educated community members on voting rights and the need to choose leaders who can promote the welfare of Dalits and other marginalised communities.

In Madhya Pradesh, youth groups in urban slum clusters undertook surveys on the functioning of ICDS centres and on issues of hygiene and sanitation. Thereafter, the required follow up was undertaken with the Women and Child Department and the municipal authorities. Youth clubs in Bhopal, along with national-level organisations, handed over a youth manifesto to political parties before the election.

Gender

Gender programming was implemented in the socio-economically marginalised communities of east Uttar Pradesh and the North East, in areas where there are strong cultural norms governing masculinity, customary beliefs about the place of women in relation to men, and socio-economic barriers to women’s autonomy. One of the objectives of the positive fatherhood model was to engage in dialogues on gender equity with the members of groups created for this purpose. Another objective was to create a space for adolescent girls to engage in discussions regarding their sexual and reproductive health. Regular meetings have been held in the target villages four times a month under the purview of the project.

Sessions on sexual and reproductive health rights were carried out by the three partners in the intervention villages with young groups. A partner organisation, Manjul Mahila Kalyan Samiti (MMKS), ran a skill-development programme with groups of girls and women. This has helped these women earn their livelihood – a step towards financial independence.

In Uttar Pradesh, MMKS linked women’s groups to the Rajiv Gandhi Livelihood Scheme and the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana. It also organised events and campaigns on gender issues involving school children. The interventions also extended to community members with respect to various useful schemes and other issues pertaining to





their life and livelihood. The three partners in Uttar Pradesh – MMKS, Gramin Vikas Prayas Samiti (GVPS) and Yuva Vikas Sanstha (YVS) – conducted functional literacy classes for women.

In Manipur, two partner organisations – Integrated Rural Management Association (IRMA) and Integrated Rural Development Service Organisation (IRDSO) – have successfully co-opted groups of men to the Positive Fatherhood Programme. The group members were having regular discussions on gender and gender-based violence. A module and action plan was also developed by IRMA.

Child care, gender and sexuality, domestic violence, child rights and reproductive sexual health are the themes around which IRMA decided to take forward their discussions in the groups. Our implementing partners have shared that they have learned a lot on how to effectively engage with men and boys on gender issues, despite the constraints.

Tribal Development

In India, indigenous peoples, known as tribals, are the poorest, most marginalised and deprived people in the country. Historically, they have faced social and economic deprivation and exploitation. It is only of late that social scientists, journalists and development practitioners have woken up to the need to redress the violation of their rights.

Since time immemorial, tribal people have cultivated land and managed natural resources. Land and forest for them are essentially communal resources to be judiciously used according to their present and future needs. It is an integral part of their way of life.

The tribal people face numerous hurdles in trying to maintain their traditional communal land use and natural resource management practices. Most of the challenges arise from land being taken away by the State for mining, big dam projects or industrial purposes. This leads to the reduction of traditional tribal territories, which in turn makes it difficult for the tribal people to continue shifting cultivation. Often, the forest department also denies the indigenous people their traditional rights. The tribal people are not aware of their rights – to forest land and Minor Forest Produce for instance – and the forest officials exploit their ignorance. It is within this context that we seek to undertake our livelihoods programming with tribal communities, primarily in the central and eastern heartland.

In Gumla, Jharkhand, in order to address the issue of growing youth unemployment in tribal areas, an integrated model of livelihood and youth development was initiated. Under that programme, youth were trained in agri-based techniques so that they could function as community resource persons and share their learnings with other young farmers. The objective was to improve both earnings as well as food and nutrition security status in the community. Also, to institutionalise these

learnings, a community green college was established. Young farmers were taken for a visit to organisation called Kartabya, where they learned various natural processes of sustainable farming.

Other interventions were carried out in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand to ensure improved access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for tribal families, taking into account food preferences. Implementation partners were selected on the basis of their work with the most marginalised of tribal communities.

Trainings for developing nutrition and kitchen gardens were organised for the partners in the project area. Marginalised indigenous tribal communities received this training; the project was their first exposure to such practices. Communities began cultivating crops using organic methods. Youth and progressive young farmers were capacitated with the knowledge of nutritious value of traditional crops, seeds, vegetables and uncultivated forest herbs and roots.

Malnourished children were identified and given complete treatment. The project facilitated access to mid-day meals. Model kitchen gardens were developed in primary schools in order to help children and parents understand the importance of nutrition. CBO members began monitoring Anganwadi centres and PDS in their area.

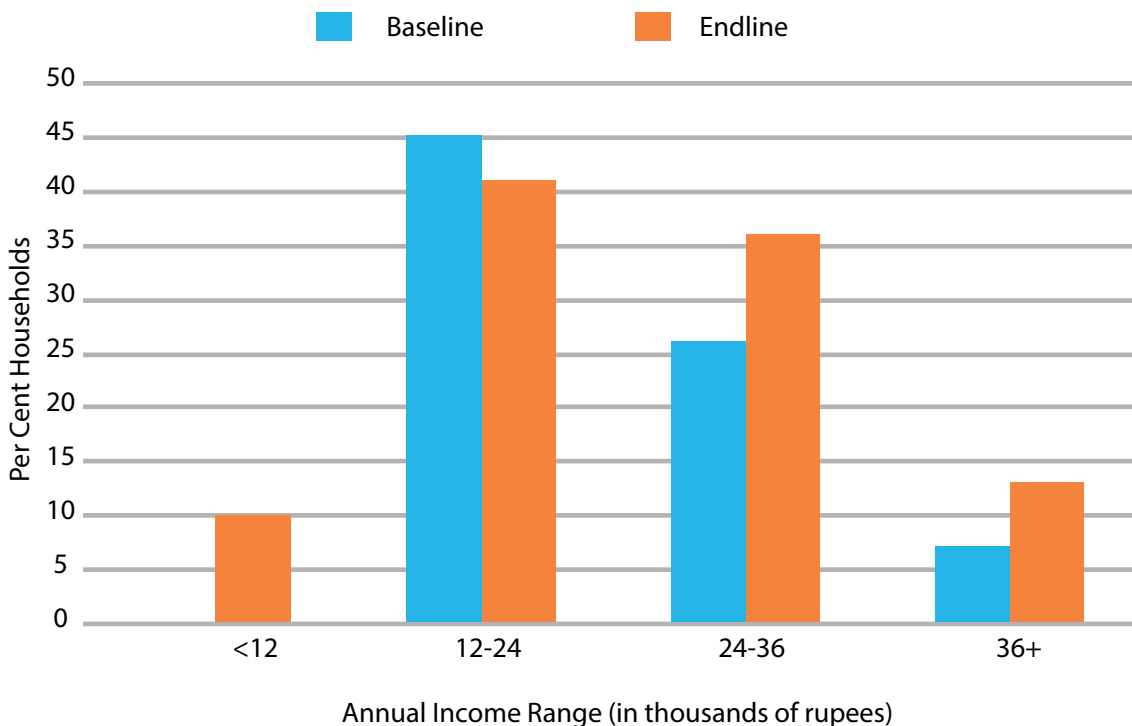
These are small but significant initial steps in unpacking the notion of nutrition and food security in remote tribal communities.

The Impact of SOUL: The Quantitative Data

To gauge the impact of SOUL, baseline and endline surveys were carried out in the project area with respect to income, food security, etc. The baseline data were collected in April 2013 and the endline in July 2015. This section reports on some of the findings from the data.

Chart 5 suggests that there was a clear shift towards higher annual income earnings in the intervention villages. At the start of the project the very poorest (with household

Chart 5: Percentage of households by annual income range, baseline (April 2013) and endline (July 2015)



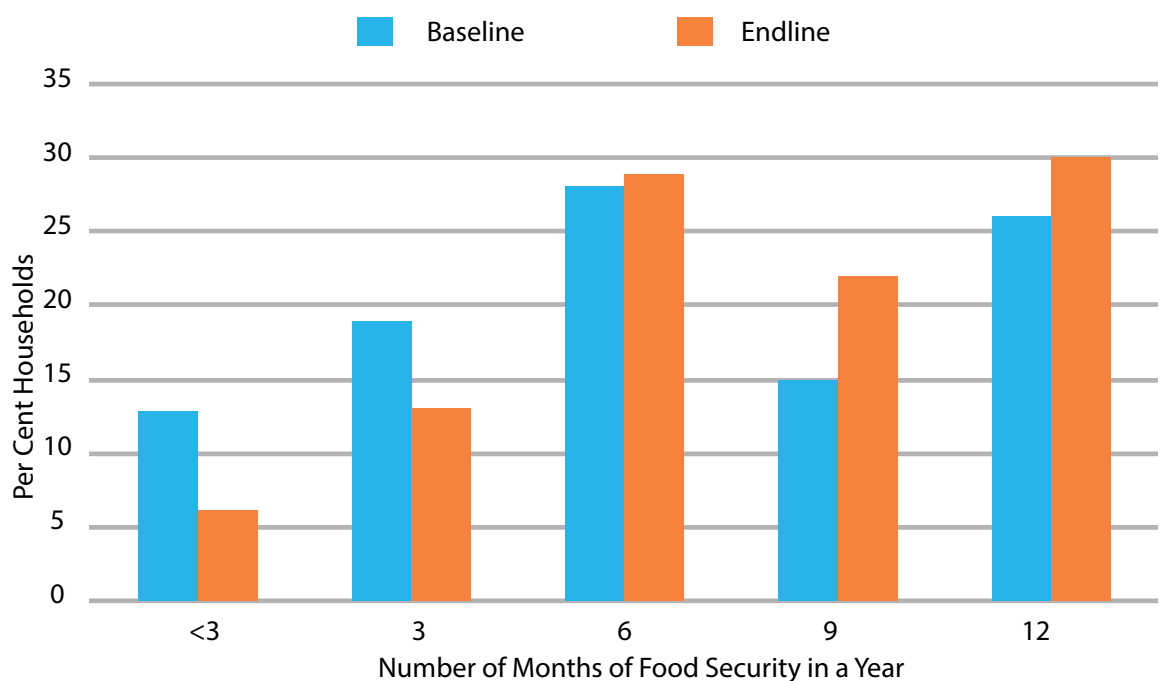


incomes less than Rs.12,000 annually) constituted 20 per cent of all households. By the end of the project, a significant percentage (about half) of the households in this category had moved on. The percentage representation of households in the next annual income range of Rs. 12,000–24,000 did not change very much between project start and end. However, the shift to better incomes was best reflected by the increase in the percentage of households in the two highest income ranges.

Another devastating dimension of poverty that the PEARL and SOUL projects have sought to address is the lack of food security, defined in terms of two square meals per day. Chart 6 shows the percentage concentration of households in different food security categories (in terms of months of food security per year) as found in the baseline and endline surveys.

Highly food-insecure (food secure for three months or less a year) households in the

Chart 6: Percentage of households by number of months of food security in a year, baseline (April 2013) and endline (July 2015)



baseline survey results reduced to half. Households with higher-level food security – six, nine and 12 months – have substantially increased. Households with year-round food security rose from about a quarter to roughly one-third.

Accessing employment under NREGS was one of the key interventions of the programming under PEARL and SOUL. Contrary to what was expected, the data show that work under NREGS had actually declined in the baseline–endline intervention period (Table 1), i.e., fewer households availed of the benefits of NREGS by the end of the intervention. This could be because families were getting higher or more regular income from self-employment and farm-based or non-farm-based activities than from NREGS, and therefore moved

TABLE 1: Percentage of households by number of days of work under NREGS, baseline (April 2013) and endline (July 2015)

| Days of Work under NREGS | % Baseline | % Endline |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 1-25 | 18 | 21 |
| 26-50 | 14 | 19 |
| 51-75 | 10 | 12 |
| 76-100 | 10 | 4 |
| 100+ | 03 | 2 |
| Nil | 17 | 31 |
| NA | 28 | 11 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Note: Baseline total = 32,838 households; endline total = 57,264

NA refers to 'not applicable because not interested'



Non-farm activities, by diversifying sources of household income, can contribute to income and food security. Households that did not have any non-farm-based activities dropped with a corresponding rise in the incidence of households practising non-farm activities (Table 2).

TABLE 2: Households by type of non-farm-based activity, baseline (April 2013) and endline (July 2015)

| Type of Non-Farm Activity | % Baseline Households | % Endline Households |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Poultry | 9 | 31 |
| Bee-keeping | 0 | 0 |
| Piggery | 10 | 8 |
| Fishery | 1 | 4 |
| Dairy | 5 | 11 |
| Other | 8 | 16 |
| Multiple | 7 | 20 |
| Nil | 60 | 9 |
| Total | 100 | 99 |

Note: Baseline total = 32,838 households; endline total = 57,264
NA refers to 'not applicable because not interested'

Tables 3, 4 and 5 show the sources of credit and access to them. The number of households that did not have access to credit dropped significantly (Table 3). Though reliance on moneylenders increased marginally, credit from banks and SHGs increased phenomenally (Table 4). Households that did not avail of credit fell dramatically (Table 5). Agriculture was the single largest reason for taking a loan.

TABLE 3: Percentage of households by access to credit, baseline (April 2013) and endline (July 2015)

| Access to Credit | % Baseline Households | % Endline Households |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Yes | 25 | 38 |
| No | 75 | 55 |
| NA | 0 | 7 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Note: Baseline total = 32,838 households; endline total = 57,264
NA refers to 'not applicable because not interested'



TABLE 4: Percentage of households by source of credit, baseline (April 2013) and endline (July 2015)

| Source of Credit | % Baseline Households | % Endline Households |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Bank | 7 | 28 |
| SHGs | 6 | 18 |
| Moneylenders | 10 | 12 |
| Multiple sources | 3 | 23 |
| NA | 75 | 18 |
| Total | 101 | 99 |

Note: Baseline total = 32838 households; endline total = 57264
 NA refers to households that did not have access to credit¹²

TABLE 5: Percentage of households by purpose of loans, baseline (April 2013) and endline (July 2015)

| Purpose of Loans | % Baseline Households | % Endline Households |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Health | 4 | 13 |
| Festival | 0 | 1 |
| Agriculture | 12 | 24 |
| Shop | 0 | 1 |
| Livestock | 3 | 11 |
| Marriage | 1 | 10 |
| Multiple | 6 | 14 |
| Other | 6 | 24 |
| NA | 67 | 4 |
| Total | 99 | 102 |

Note: Baseline total = 32,838 households; endline total = 57264
 NA refers to households that did not avail of credit

Overall, the quantitative data show that households came of extreme poverty and food insecurity. In the course of a mere two years, non-farm activities took off in a big way and access to credit from banks and SHGs shot up.



¹² Table 4 shows that 75 per cent of the households did not have access to credit. Table 5 shows households that did not avail of credit – 67 per cent of baseline households did not avail of credit. This accounts for the difference in the category 'NA'.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

The qualitative data from PEARL and SOUL give us a glimpse of how the lives of ordinary people have been impacted as a result of interventions by IGSSS and its implementing partners. The data throw light on the following themes: (i) facilitating grassroots entrepreneurship, (ii) leveraging benefits from government schemes like PDS and ICDS, (iii) enhancing livelihoods through suitable agricultural practices, (iv) gender-just programming, (v) mobilising people to claim benefits under the Forest Rights Act, and (vi) disaster relief.

Facilitating Grassroots Entrepreneurship

Micro-credit from their SHGs helped women to start small enterprises and brought about significant improvements in their standards of living. In another case, a village community improved its livelihood and also lobbied for its rights.

Sarita Devi's Story

Sarita Devi Prajapati, 24, lived with her husband and three children in Binda, Bihar. She had dropped out of school in class 5. Her husband, a daily labourer, earned very little money. Sarita got associated with an SHG formed by IGSSS. A series of trainings and exposure visits motivated her to explore sewing as a livelihood option. She took a loan of Rs. 1500 from the SHG to start sewing and is now earning Rs. 1000 per month. She motivates other women to join the SHG and avail of income generating options. She urges parents to send their children to school and especially emphasises girl child education.

A Sewing Machine and a Bicycle

Rashmita had always wanted to do something of her own, but her family was very poor and she was forced to give up school. Post marriage and children, she thought she would never realise her dreams.

'But life always gives you a second chance,' she says. 'I joined an SHG that was formed in our slum, and took a loan from it to buy a sewing machine and a bicycle. I now cycle from door to door to get orders. My customers treat me with respect. I am also giving sewing lessons to three girls from our locality. I earn Rs. 2000 a month, which is a big help for our family. Every night, before I go to sleep, I hug my bicycle; it is a symbol of my dreams.'

Mogi's Flour Mill

Mogi, a 45-year-old woman, lived with her husband and two sons in Ambada village in a hilly area of the Dungarpur district of Rajasthan. The land there was monsoon-dependent and infertile. Consequently, people were forced to migrate to neighbouring states in search of livelihoods, as did Mogi's husband. Mogi learnt about PEARL through a partner organisation of IGSSS called PEDO (People's Education and Development Organisation). In a community meeting in her village, she was encouraged to join an SHG. She did so and went on to actively participate in various SHG capacity-building programmes. Mogi received Rs. 30,000 as a loan from her Self Help Group to run a flour mill in her own house. The mill helped her earn enough for her family's needs. Mogi's husband could now come home, as they now had a secondary income source to fall back on.

Marketing Tamarind in Agmpad Village

Agmpad village, Bheeram Panchayat, Vishakhapatnam, had approximately 350 people living in 52 households. The Scheduled Caste community here was very disadvantaged. They worked as agricultural

wage labourers and the women collected wood and tamarind from nearby forests.

These women came together and formed a Self Help Group with the help of ORRC (Organisation for Rural Reconstruction), an IGSSS implementing partner. The SHG received three days' training on deseeding and packing tamarind. This, combined with better marketing of the product, proved to be highly remunerative. The collectivised tamarind business enterprise sells it at 20 times the old price.

Efforts by ORRC have also helped the families of the SHG to better understand wages and other provisions of NREGS. The village committee and the SHG successfully interacted with the administration to improve their access to work under NREGS. Ganderi, the president of the SHG Group, said, 'PEARL has made us smart.'

Leveraging Benefits from Government Schemes

Some of the qualitative data show that it was necessary to pressurise public bodies in order to avail of rights under government programmes such as PDS and NREGS. The



story of Gita, a doughty woman who fought for her right to foodgrains from the PDS, is a case in point. Similarly, a village demanded better quality mid-day meals in the village school. Notably, once the villagers tasted success, they were motivated to demand more of their rights. It was the case of the Agmpad villagers too; success in their tamarind business led to demands for entitlements under NREGS. These are indications that bode well for sustainability: once people taste success, they will continue to act collectively in the public sphere.

Geeta versus the Status Quo

In 2007, the government introduced and issued red cards to BPL (Below Poverty Line) households, by which poor families could procure foodgrains at subsidised prices from the ration shop. However, the intended beneficiaries in Geeta Devi's area were refused rations by the shop owner. Geeta, an active community member, joined forces with SSK (Samagra Seva Kendra, Bihar), an IGSSS partner under PEARL.

Geeta mobilised women of 19 villages into

pressure groups. She organised a series of small meetings and motivated women to come together for a common cause. As a result, there was a mass representation in the form of a 'dharna' (protest) in front of government offices at the local level, followed by constant follow up visits to government offices at the block level. Finally the BDO (Block Development Officer) visited the village and initiated an enquiry into the distribution of grains under the red card scheme. This led to the commencement of distribution of rations to red card holders.

Social Change in Bindichak Village, Bihar

Bindichak village, Jamui District, Bihar had a mixed population, with a majority from the Yadav (OBC) and Musahar (SC) communities, both of which had low education levels. There were 275 students and only two teachers in the village school, and the quality of the food served under the mid-day meal scheme was very poor. But the winds of change had begun to blow. Through meetings organised by Lok Prabhat, IGSSS's partner organisation under PEARL, the villagers learnt about the many schemes they were entitled to and the specific provisions under those schemes.

The villagers repeatedly approached the Village Education Committee to request improvement in the quality of food served in the school. Nothing came of it. Finally, the villagers met the Block Development Officer (BDO). After verification of the villagers' complaints, the BDO dissolved the Village Education Committee and asked the villagers to form an ad hoc committee for running the mid-day meal scheme and other activities in the school.

They immediately appointed new cooks and functionaries to run the mid-day meal scheme. This success motivated the villagers to further collective action. They appointed another teacher, whose salary was paid from the village fund.

One of the members of the Village





Committee proudly said: 'Our village school has become a model school in our block ... Even people from the neighbouring villages talk about these changes.'

Enhancing Livelihoods through Suitable Agricultural Practices

Adoption of suitable agricultural practices can have a huge impact on livelihoods, as the stories of Navin Mandal, Pusparani, Surgun Ram, and Barsing Nayak show. All four were able to improve their life circumstances through adopting suitable agricultural practices on their land.

Navin Mandal's Story

Navin Mandal, a farmer from Tetaria village, Bihar, and his family spent most of the day working on their half-bigha field, but they

were unable to produce a yield adequate for their sustenance. Insufficient rain was a frequent hazard, making their situation even more precarious.

In August 2012, a one-day training programme was organised under PEARL by Parivar Vikas, a local partner of IGSSS. Agricultural scientists from Krishi Vigyan Kendra¹³ interacted with farmers on issues related to coping with and reducing the adverse effects of unpredictable climate. The scientists shared information about several varieties of crops and vegetables which required less irrigation.

Navin and his family were motivated to try alternatives and diversify their agricultural practices. They utilised 3 kattas of land to grow vegetables. This proved to be a turning point in Navin's life. He and his family

13. T'Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) are agricultural extension centres created by ICAR (Indian Council for Agricultural Research) and its affiliated institutions at the district level to provide various types of farm support to the agricultural sector'. <http://www.indianeconomy.net/splclassroom/213/what-is-krishi-vigyan-kendra/> accessed 11 November 2017.

managed to get good returns from selling their vegetables in the nearby Guguldih market and also reduced their dependence on the paddy crop.

Pusparani Sana, Expert Kitchen Gardener

Pusparani Sana was a resident of Kachdaha village, North 24 Parganas district, West Bengal. She and her family were dependent on agriculture from which they eked out a monthly income of Rs. 4000. They had 10 kathas (approximately 0.3 acres) of land and were keen to develop a kitchen garden.

After receiving training from Swanirvar in November 2015, Pusparani started her organic nutrition garden. She began using the techniques she learned and made her own organic fertiliser and pesticides as well. Her kitchen garden was in conformity with all the 11 criteria that a nutrition garden should ideally have, and grew 14-15 different vegetables. Pusparani was able to diversify her family's diet, protecting them from nutrition-related problems. Some surplus vegetables were gifted to others and the remainder sold in the market. Pushparani's success was one that had a ripple effect. She had become an expert gardener who went on to mentor her neighbours in kitchen gardening.

Bansing Nayak's Story

Bansing Nayak, a member of the tribal Bhumia community of southern Orissa, had a farm in the Tentuliguma village of Koraput district. The family was crippled by poverty and could not afford to use modern technology on the family farm.

Bansing's circumstances changed for the better following a training programme on the SRI technique of cultivation. The training was carried out in by Organisation for Development Coordination (ODC), an IGSSS partner under PEARL. The aim of the training was to provide better knowledge of traditional sustainable practices in cultivation.



Bansing put into practice what he had learned from the training. He started preparing magic compost and organic pesticide as he had been taught. His crops improved. The technique is slowly gaining favour among poor farmers who can ill afford investment in modern technology and chemical fertilisers.

Surgun Ram Buys Two Buffaloes

Surgun Ram had a difficult life – he was only eight when his father passed away and the entire responsibility for the family fell on his shoulders. He somehow survived through depression, alcoholism, and mounting debt.

Training by SAMERTH on SRI and kitchen gardening turned his life round. His kitchen garden, in which he sowed chilli and tomato seeds, was a huge success. 'I was astonished when this initiative yielded 15 quintals of tomato and 5 quintals of chilli,' he says. 'I kept aside some of the output for home consumption and sold the rest, making a profit of Rs. 25,000.' Surgun diversified further by purchasing two buffaloes. 'I no longer need

to migrate for work nor do I borrow; I now till my own land,' he says.

Gender Issues

As a result of participating in the public space through SHGs, women of West Singhbhum, Jharkhand, gained the confidence to fight and win elections to local self-governance bodies. Two other stories show how IGSSS's sensitisation workshops were able to inculcate gender-just values.

From SHGs to PRIs

West Singhbhum, a tribal district in Kolhan Division, Jharkhand, is populated mainly by the Ho tribe, which is one of the most impoverished communities in the area. Men were the primary bread earners of the family and the community was dependent on agriculture as the primary source of income. Women had a negligible role in community affairs. Their activities were restricted to household work.

Under the PEARL project, initiatives were taken up by Karra Society for Rural Action to organise the women of the community into SHGs. Frequent awareness programmes

were organised to sensitise them on various community-level issues. This experience of functioning in public spaces gave them confidence, and 13 women from these groups contested village- and block-level PRL elections. Nine were declared successful – a remarkable achievement. It opened the doors to women's participation in the process of development and was likely to bring changes in the social status of women in the community.

Letkhogin Has a Change of Heart

Letkhogin of Twichin village is newly married and the father of an infant son. Confessing that he never involved himself in household chores or helped his wife in carrying them out, Letkhogin said that this reflected the kinds of inherent biases with which boys grow up. He never realised that these biases could be questioned or changed until he participated in awareness-raising workshops and got a chance to engage in discussions on gender and stereotypes. Before that, he believed that activities and responsibilities of men and women were different; men were seen as protectors and providers, while domestic activities were the realm of the women of the



family.

Lekhogin gradually realised that his norms and beliefs needed to be changed. He is now a strong believer in the idea that the traditional forms of discrimination and stereotypes need to be broken. He also believes that the present generation is willing to change for the better if properly guided. Adding that he is now an active participant in child-rearing in his home, he says that he would make sure his children are raised without these messages of discrimination and stereotypes.

Shanti Leima Reforms her Husband

Khumukcham Shanti Leima, aged about 50, is from Umathel Mathak Leikai village, Thoubal district. She lives with her husband, Khumukcham Suben Meitei, and their two children. Her daughter got married at the age of 20 and her son is now studying in class 6. Earlier, Shanti was a teacher in a school. She discontinued her teaching career to attend to household chores and look after her children. No one valued her contributions. Her husband used to say that it was all unproductive work.

On joining the women's support group of

Umathel village (formed on the initiative of IRDSO – Integrated Rural Development Service Organisation), Shanti attended a series of gender awareness programmes. She then convinced her husband that women and men have equal rights. She argued that women too have the right to mobility and to do professional work, etc. Shanti was able to change her husband's perceptions of gender stereotypes, as a result of which he began to take part in every type of household work. Shanti is now one of the active members of the women's support group in Umathel. She has also started attending district-level awareness programmes organised by IRDSO.

Mobilising People to Claim Benefits under the Forest Rights Act

People were mobilised for their rights to land under the Forest Rights Act.

Rights to Forest Land in Village Karkuli

Karkuli is one among many of remote forest villages in Kalahandi district, Orissa. The majority of the inhabitants of the village had been in the BPL (Below Poverty Line) category for 40 years. The total land area of the village



comprised 185 acres. Though it had been almost four years since the Forest Rights Act was passed, pattas had not been allotted to the villagers so far. The Forest Rights Committee, which is mandatory, had been formed in Karkuli in 2008 with 12 members, including four women.

The PEARL project, initiated in the village in 2009, began with meetings, group discussions, and collection of baseline data. Crucial issues related to land entitlements were identified and steps were taken to empower the Forest Rights Committee through skill trainings. Processions and rallies were held at the gram panchayat and block levels. A village cadre of barefoot lawyers was created. The issue of mahila adhikar (women's rights) to joint entitlement of land was raised. The Bhumihin Mahasabha (Landless People Association) was established.

Before the PEARL project, no meetings on the land entitlement issue had ever been held in Karkuli. The IGSSS activities were organised at the block level and attracted a huge participation and representation from

forest committee members and villagers. This led to an aware and alert village population fighting for the right to forest land. Families have applied for pattas and started receiving them in the joint names of husband and wife; women thus have an entitlement to family assets.

Disaster Relief

Providing relief to victims of natural disasters is a key facet of IGSSS programming.

Floods in Assam

'I waited for a miracle and I constantly prayed to God. It appears that God listened to my prayers and sent me help.' says Dipali Chitney of Borgonya village in Lakhimpur, Assam.

On 14 August, 2014, Dipali's house had been destroyed and washed away by floods. A house and toilet were built for her and her young daughters under the project Restoration and Reconstruction. Dipali also received materials such as clothes, mugs, buckets and hygiene kits to meet their immediate household needs.

CONCLUSIONS

PEARL (People's Empowerment for Accessing Rights to Livelihood) and SOUL (Sustainable Options for Uplifting Livelihood) were IGSSS projects that were implemented in the most backward states of India. The overarching objective of these programmes was to promote livelihood security among poverty-stricken people. PEARL was carried on in phases between 2008 and 2013. It was followed by SOUL, which took off from where PEARL ended. SOUL is nearing completion at the time of writing (January 2018). Both PEARL and SOUL were supported by MISERIOR.

In the poverty-stricken areas of our interventions, people were under-served in terms of public services and development. Some were not even aware of their rights under government programmes like NREGS, PDS, etc. Poverty had diminished their capacity, capability and self confidence. The challenge was to overcome these drawbacks and bring social, economic and political emancipation so that the poorest could have both a livelihood and a life of dignity.

The need of the hour was to make people aware of their rights and entitlements under various government schemes and to then motivate them to secure these. In this rights-based approach, creating awareness of rights and entitlements was the easy part. Extracting benefits from officialdom, on the other hand, was no easy matter. In order to get the benefits they were entitled to, people had to pressurise the concerned authorities. On a positive note, they were able to rise to the occasion. For instance, SHG members demanded and get timely and adequate supply of PDS foodstuffs. Also, regular monitoring of the way the various welfare schemes were being executed forced government functionaries to regularly distribute nutritive food through the ICDS and mid-day meal programmes. Success in availing of rights and entitlements through collective leveraging has helped people understand the importance of being organised. Indeed, disadvantaged people's awareness of the potential for collective action has been a key achievement of IGSSS programming. That this could be achieved within a relatively short span of time is a major learning.

Leveraging public bodies for benefits was one major prong of programming by IGSSS. Another was that people were helped to improve their incomes and food security by way of sustainable agricultural practises. Guidance and inputs for vegetable growing in kitchen gardens was a key facet of our interventions. Vegetables that were grown on kitchen gardens improved the nutritional status of households. Part of the produce was sold in the market. A two-pronged strategy was followed, in which: (i) linkages were established with the agriculture department for supply of input materials and (ii) households were linked to the market for the purpose of selling the produce.

As in the case of PEARL, programming under SOUL, too, was geared to tapping of resources and entitlements from the government.

Importantly, climate-resilient farming to address situations like droughts and floods was also developed. Several adaptation and mitigation models and measures were implemented. These were important for ensuring sustainable agriculture.

IGSSS has endeavoured to keep material support and handholding to a minimum so as not to induce dependency. Expenses were to be made on a least-cost basis without compromising on quality. Low-cost meetings, workshops, exposures, conventions, etc., were to be organised so that these could be continued even after project period with minimal external financial support.

In the IGSSS programming on gender, there have been encouraging signs. Anecdotal evidence from the positive fatherhood programme in Uttar Pradesh shows how



people's outlooks changed for the better as a result of the gender-sensitisation workshops that were carried out. This then triggered men's participation in household maintenance and child-care activities, which were thought to be the exclusive preserve of women. The qualitative data also showed that women were becoming active in the public sphere and went on to fight local elections. Thus, while men became active in the domestic sphere, which was thought to be the traditional preserve of women, women became active in public sphere, which was thought to be the traditional preserve of men. It is notable that such changes could come about relatively soon and with minimal inputs in areas with deeply entrenched traditional stereotypes. This is a key learning. Notably also, women farmers have played a role in facilitating food and nutrition security through kitchen gardening. This has helped diversify their household's income sources and augment food and nutrition security.

In urban areas, IGSSS has been working with informal sector workers – rickshaw pullers and labourers in Lucknow and Kanpur. The workers were organised so as to enable them to collectively agitate for basic amenities and better wage rates.

Youth development programming within a sustainable livelihoods framework has been a challenge to negotiate, particularly in contexts of conflict in Manipur and Kashmir. The effort has been to build a sense of active citizenship in young people and empower them to claim what is rightfully theirs. There have been reports of a strong linkage between youth groups / federations and institutions like Nehru Yuva Kendra, MSME (Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises), and Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE). This bodes well for sustainability.

Quantitative data from the SOUL project for two points of time – April 2013 and July 2015 – show that in a relatively short timeframe, the targeted households were coming out of extreme income-poverty and extreme food insecurity. They were also diversifying their sources of sustenance by engaging in non-farm activities like poultry keeping. Finally, they were able to access credit from sources like banks and SHGs.

Another learning from IGSSS's experiences in the field is that caution needs to be exercised while choosing areas for direct implementation (as opposed to working with implementation partners). The experience with political volatility has been that direct implementation teams have struggled to cope with the challenge of internecine conflicts in the field areas. This has been true of Balasore (Odisha), Purulia (West Bengal), North Bengal and Jharkhand, where the implementation had to be either short closed (Balasore and Purulia) or converted into strategic partnerships (North Bengal and Jharkhand). The number of partnerships under SOUL has been increased to 45 from the initial 30. This increase in partnership load has been the result of a consistent effort to select strong partners (through a stringent due diligence process), weeding out of non-performing partners (lagging in achievement of results and/or utilisation of resources) and a strategic expansion (geographical and thematic). IGSSS will look at continuing with those whom it has worked with or recently initiated work with. This is in line with the thinking that sustainable programming on livelihoods needs to be persisted with over a period of three to five years and be gradually spread over contiguous district clusters for the demonstration of significant impact.

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