

Samavesh

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE

We Care : Civic Engagement Anthology 2024



EDITOR : MEENA GALLIARA
School of Business Management



SamaveSh: Creating an Inclusive Future

We Care : Civic Engagement Anthology 2024 Volume XI

Editor

Meena Galliara

School of Business Management
SVKM's Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies
(NMIMS) Deemed-to-be-University

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Preface

Historical, cultural, and systemic factors marginalize certain sections of individuals in society. Cultural biases and stereotypes further perpetuate these divisions, and systemic inequalities limit their opportunities, deny equal access to advancement, and reinforce disparities. For a country, marginalization impacts social and economic progress and often leads to social unrest. Therefore, addressing the needs of marginalized groups is not only a moral responsibility but also essential for achieving inclusive growth and development. This book attempts to examine the issue of marginalization in India and attempts made by the government and NGOs to promote social inclusion.

The First Chapter, '*Understanding Exclusion and Initiatives to Create an Inclusive Society*,' delves into the intricate nature of exclusion and the social, cultural, and developmental challenges faced by the excluded communities. It examines the Government of India's approach to addressing the issues of socially excluded communities and discusses approaches to take forward the inclusion agenda.

The Second Chapter, '*Role of NGOs in Empowering Marginalized Communities*,' presents the genesis of NGO's engagement in addressing the needs of socially excluded communities. It traces the evolution of NGOs from service-oriented charitable organizations to strategic partners of the State, highlighting their collaborative efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Chapter Three to Chapter Eleven present case studies based on our MBA's student's '*We Care: Civic Engagement*' internship projects. Students had an opportunity to work with various marginalized communities, gain a deeper understanding of the challenges, and appreciate the role of NGOs in promoting social equity.

The Third Chapter, '*A Call for Change: The Plight of Persons with Disabilities in Western Tripura*,' explores the socio-economic and health disparities faced by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in Western Tripura. A rapid appraisal conducted on behalf of Abhoy Mission revealed limited access to education, healthcare, and government support, compounded by social stigma and inadequate infrastructure. Despite these challenges, individuals and families display remarkable resilience. A

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diversified strategy is essential to address the challenges faced by PwDs and promote their social inclusion.

The Fourth Chapter, *'Transcend Barriers: Stories of Transgender Entrepreneurs,'* presents the experiences of five transgender individuals who have established their micro-enterprises in New Delhi. Despite facing personal and societal challenges, trans-entrepreneurs pursued their dreams of earning their livelihood with dignity. To promote the social inclusion of transgender community, investment in education, skill development, and entrepreneurship education is essential.

Tourism and hospitality are rapidly expanding sectors driving the global economy. Uttar Pradesh, home to iconic sites like Ayodhya and Varanasi, is witnessing a surge in tourist arrivals. In this context, Chapter Five, *'From Faith to Fortune: Exploring Hospitality Careers in Ayodhya,'* highlights the fact that many young people in Ayodhya are unaware of the abundant career opportunities within the hospitality industry. The Chapter emphasizes that raising awareness through community outreach, schools, and internet platforms is essential to maximize the region's potential. Workshops and training courses focused on customer service and communication skills, along with individualized support and job creation, can encourage youth to pursue careers in hospitality.

The Sixth Chapter, *'Micro-Level Analysis of Social Security Schemes: Case of Jamshedpur and Dhanbad,'* examines the social and economic conditions of marginalized communities in Jamshedpur and Dhanbad, focusing on their access to various social security schemes. The Chapter highlights disparities in voter ID card enrolment and the low enrolment of children for Aadhaar cards. Social security schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, Labour Card, and Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana, too, have low penetration, excluding the poor from availing of the benefits. To increase penetration, the Chapter recommends enhancing awareness, simplifying procedures, strengthening infrastructure, improving governance, and facilitating collaboration between government agencies and NGOs.

Economic reasons compel poor people to migrate to urban areas and subject them to various adversities. Chapter Seven, *'Marginalized Lives: A Study of Migrant Communities in Surat,'* sheds light on the socio-economic challenges faced by

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migrants. Lack of education and vocational skills compels them to work at low wages. Financial struggles compel them to borrow money with higher interest. To enhance their quality of life, migrants expect local NGOs to provide vocational training, offer microfinance support, upgrade community infrastructure, and advocate their concerns with government authorities.

Despite the nation's economic progress, villages near industrial cities like Ahmedabad grapple with significant disparities in healthcare, education, potable water supply, and community sanitation. Chapter Eight, '*Development Disconnect: Tale of Two Villages in Gujarat*,' discusses the extent and causes of disparities in two villages that were close to the industrial hub. To bridge the development gap, the Chapter proposes leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives as a catalyst for transformative change.

Plastic pollution has persisted in the environment for a long time, harming ecosystems and endangering life. Even the pristine beaches of the Andaman Islands are now grappling with a silent crisis: plastic pollution. This aspect is covered at length in Chapter Nine, '*Plastic Pollution in Paradise: Case of Andaman and Nicobar Islands*.' The Chapter examines plastic waste in Port Blair, its sources, and its impact on marine life and biodiversity. It analyzes current waste management practices and policies. It recommends addressing the problem through the use of technological advancements, infrastructure development, and community engagement.

Chapter Ten, '*Nature Farming Catalyst for SDGs: Case of Shramik Bharti*,' examines the plight of highly marginalized smallholder farmers. It maps the efforts taken by Shramik Bharti to adopt natural farming methods and improve their economic productivity. By providing support, resources, and market linkage, the organization has contributed to improving soil health, environmental conditions, and farmer's income.

Farm mechanization remains out of reach for many small and marginal farmers due to their limited financial resources. To address this issue, Custom Hiring Centers (CHCs) offer a reliable solution by providing affordable access to farm implements, enabling farmers to increase productivity, reduce costs, and improve their overall livelihoods.

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Chapter Eleven, '*Empowering Farmers through Custom Hiring Centres Case of Ambuja Cement Foundation,*' portrays the performance of Ambuja Cement Foundation's CHCs in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. The findings indicate that the CHCs have significantly impacted small and marginal farmers by providing subsidized access to modern agricultural machinery. However, challenges like limited machine availability, transportation difficulties, and perceived high rental rates persist. To ensure CHCs contribute to rural prosperity, expanding machine range, enhancing accessibility, and encouraging women farmers' participation is crucial.

This book is not merely an academic exercise. It offers social sector practitioners and students a practical guide for examining the approaches, including policy reforms, community-based initiatives, and individual-level interventions for promoting social inclusion. I hope this book inspires readers to contribute to building an inclusive future.

Meena Galliara
Editor

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Understanding Exclusion and Initiatives to Create an Inclusive Society

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Abstract

The inclusive development of society is a cornerstone for national economic and social progress. In India, due to the historically rooted social, cultural, and economic structure and geography, certain communities face social, cultural, and developmental challenges which are further accentuated in the current economic, climate, and other uncertainties the nation faces. Creating an enabling environment for mainstreaming such communities - termed Inclusion is a priority. The Government has undertaken many legislative, policy, and program initiatives to support such communities which are implemented in partnership with community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. This Chapter explores the exclusion challenges and elucidates the initiatives undertaken towards inclusive growth.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Development, Social and Economic Policy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of development is to improve the quality of people's lives (IHDR, 2011). The quality of people's lives can be improved by creating an environment for them to be healthy, knowledgeable, engage in economic activities, and be able to participate in community life (IHDR, 2011), termed as 'basic functionings' by Prof. Amartya Sen (Sen, 1985). Sen (1985) further extends the idea of development to include democracy, participation in local government decision-making, and freedom from fear as 'complex functionings'. "Practically development is about removing obstacles to what a person can do in life. Illiteracy, ill health, lack of access to resources, and lack of social, civil, and political freedoms" (IHDR, 2011) are some of the obstacles to human development.

The concept of "*Inclusive Growth*" furthers the idea of development. Inclusive growth with its

imbibing principles of economic growth, improvements in living conditions, equality, and sustainable growth strives for long-term economic growth and well-being. Over the centuries at every phase of development, society has faced challenges over inclusive growth. While the current phase of rapid economic growth aided by technology and communications innovations has brought economic prosperity to many nations and their citizens, however, newer sets of challenges such as marginalization, equity, and freedom, have emerged. The challenges are accentuated further in the backdrop of geo-political conflicts and the deepening climate change crisis. Many countries are facing conflicts, climate risks, cost-of-living challenges, and economic uncertainties (WEF, 2024). Oxfam (2022) highlights the growing inequality between nations and income inequality among people. Some developmental challenges such as hunger and malnutrition, access to quality healthcare and education, gender-based discrimination, and economic and social exclusion of the poor and marginalized are very stark (Oxfam, 2022). India too faces similar developmental challenges.

The term “*Inclusive Growth*” or “*Social Inclusion*” has now become a common vocabulary of governments across the world. The idea is to engage with communities and people who are being pushed to the margins termed ‘*Marginalization*’ or ‘*Social Exclusion*’ due to the complex interaction of social, cultural, political, and economic processes which is discussed in the Chapter.

2. UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Marginalization or social exclusion is seen as a process by which individuals or groups are pushed beyond the edges of society (Khanday and Akram 2012). Sociologically marginalization is viewed from a societal context in terms of non-participation and non-integration of a group of population from the key activities of the society (Singharoy, 2010). These groups are perceived to be undesirable or without useful functions and are marginalized (Paricha, 2018). Leimgruber (1994) as cited in Chand et, al, 2017 defined marginal regions and used four approaches; (i) *geometrical*-marginal regions in the periphery of a larger area, (ii) *ecological*-challenging regions for human survival, (iii) *economic*- challenges in undertaking productive economic activity, and (iv) *social*-socially marginal groups.

Exclusion from society has adverse effects and extracts significant social, economic, and political costs, and many nations especially in the developing world cannot afford such costs of exclusion. Marginalization has remained in one form or the other for a large section of society despite the fast social and economic transition in society (Singharoy, 2010). The process to overcome the marginalization of such communities is termed social inclusion. “The World Bank defines social inclusion as the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society” (NITI Aayog, 2021). Social inclusion involves enhancing the ability, opportunity, and dignity of the excluded (NITI Aayog, 2021).

3. SOCIALLY EXCLUDED COMMUNITIES AND THEIR CHALLENGES

Socially excluded communities as they are excluded economically, legally & politically, culturally, and socially have to face many developmental challenges (Table 1) and the state and society's apathy towards their dimensions of vulnerability and associated challenges makes the marginalized very vulnerable.

It is well established that social movements and non-government actors such as non-government organizations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in addressing the marginalization and deprivation of excluded communities. Social movements play an important role in empowerment and the process when generated from within the society is more sustainable. NGOs are critical in mainstreaming marginalized groups. They bring innovation in their approach, are participatory, bottom-up, flexible, cost-efficient, and imbibe long-term sustainability (Paricha, 2018).

For nations such as India, which has witnessed rapid economic growth in the last three decades, social inclusion is of utmost importance as marginality continues to persist due to the negative consequences of this growth for those who are excluded and are not direct participants in the growing sectors of the economy (Chatterjee, 2008). Pertinent questions related to marginality such as who is marginal, what are the manifestations of marginality, root causes of marginality, consequences or marginality, and the role of geographical factors in the marginalization process continue to persist (Chand et.al, 2017).

Table 1 : Dimensions of Social Exclusion and Challenges

| Dimension | Challenges |
|----------------------------|--|
| Economical | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Denied equal access to undertake productive economic activities as the marginalized communities might not have access to land and productive assets• Engaged in low-paying menial jobs and struggle to earn enough money to live a decent life• Underemployed or seasonally employed mainly in the informal sector• Limited access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and housing• Migration due to push factors• Exclusion from formal financial systems |
| Legal and Political | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excluded from the decision-making process• Curtailed access to power• Unaware of legal rights• Political apathy |

| Dimension | Challenges |
|-----------------|--|
| Cultural | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered as outsiders • Sometimes outsiders in their geographies • Excluded from the mainstream culture |
| Social | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of opportunities for social development • Lower social status in society • Negative social image and stereotyping |

4. SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Indian society has a historically rooted social exclusion of particular groups primarily based on birth (Oza, 2020). The population who are excluded suffers economic, social, and political impoverishment and finds themselves out of the mainstream (Oza, 2020). Exclusion can be seen in terms of access to healthcare, education, income and livelihoods, and well-being. The form and nature of exclusion depend upon the degree of economic, social, and cultural impoverishment (Oza, 2020) and significant barriers exist to their meaningful participation in economic, social, and political processes. Such excluded populations are termed as the underprivileged sections of society and NITI Aayog considers Scheduled Castes (SCs), Safai Karmacharis (SKs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Economically Backward Classes (EBCs), Religious Minorities, Nomadic, Semi-Nomadic and De-Notified Tribes (NT, SNT & DNTs), Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), Senior Citizens/Aged, Transgender, Victims of Substance Abuse/Drug Addicts, Destitutes and Beggars as the underprivileged or marginalized sections of the society. The above groups suffer deprivations that limit their ability to harvest the benefits arriving from the rapid economic growth of the last three decades and being mainstreamed.

The key demographics of marginalized communities in India are presented in (Table 2). Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) constituting about 8.6 per cent and 16.6 per cent of the population respectively are the main marginalized groups and a higher proportion of them in comparison to other caste groups are below the poverty line. Also, senior citizens (about 10.36 crore) and people with disabilities (about 2.68 crore) are the other important vulnerable groups needing targeted policy intervention. The status of deprivation is presented in Table 3. The Table includes all communities, however, it is in general that the marginalized communities face maximum deprivation.

5. SUPPORTING MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES-GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS

Including these excluded communities is integral to the vision of New India and is a core theme of the Government of India’s developmental agenda (NITI Aayog, 2021). Economic and social policies need to be aligned towards developing human capital amongst the marginalized leading

to sustainable economic and social growth. The main Ministries and Departments working on addressing the Social Inclusion Agenda (Table 4) and important legislation/laws facilitating social inclusion (Table 5) is described in the subsequent section.

The section discusses selected prominent theme-wise exclusion challenges India faces. Key among them include; (i) caste-based exclusion of Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC), (ii) exclusion of persons with disability (PWD), (iii) exclusion based on gender, and (iv) geographical exclusion-residing in rural and remote locations.

Table 2 : Demographics of Marginalized Communities

| Marginalized Communities | |
|--|--|
| Scheduled Tribes | |
| Population | 10.04 Cr persons (8.6% of India's population) |
| | 45.3% (rural), 24.1% (urban) |
| Scheduled Castes | |
| Population | 20.14 Cr persons (16.63 % of India's population) |
| Groups | 1,263 |
| Households engaged in begging, charity, and alms belonging to SC | 19.90% |
| Population of SCs below the poverty line | 31.5% (rural); 21.7% (urban) |
| Other Vulnerable Groups | |
| Other Backward Castes | 41.7% (NSSO 66th Round, 2009-10) |
| De-notified Tribes | Data not available |
| Person with Disabilities | 2.68 Cr persons (2.21%) (Census 2011) |
| Senior Citizens | 10.36 Cr persons [8.56] [MoSJE AR 2019-20) |
| Victims of substance abuse | 6.50 Cr persons (MoSjE AR 2019-20) |
| Beggars/destitute | 3.72 lakh persons (Census 2011) |
| Street Children | about 2 Crore |

Source: NITI Aayog (2021)

Table 3 : Status of Deprivation in India

| S. No. | Category | Year 2005-06 | Year 2015-16 |
|--------|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Deprivation of Nutrition | 44.3 % | 21.2 % |
| 2 | Child Mortality Rate | 4.5 % | 2.2 % |
| 3 | Deprivation of Cooking Fuel | 52.9 % | 26.2 % |
| 4 | Deprivation in Sanitation | 50.4 % | 24.6 % |
| 5 | Deprivation of Safe Drinking Water | 16.6 % | 6.2 % |
| 6 | Deprivation of Electricity | 29.1 % | 8.6 % |
| 7 | Deprivation of Housing | 44.9 % | 23.6 % |
| 8 | Deprivation of Assets | 37.6 % | 9.5 % |

Source: NITI Aayog (2021)

Table 4 : Ministries and Departments Working on Social Inclusion Agenda

| Sr. No | Ministry/Department |
|--------|--|
| 1 | Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment |
| 2 | Ministry of Tribal Affairs |
| 3 | Ministry of Minority Affairs |
| 4 | Department of Social Justice and Empowerment |
| 5 | Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities |

Table 5 : Important Social Legislations

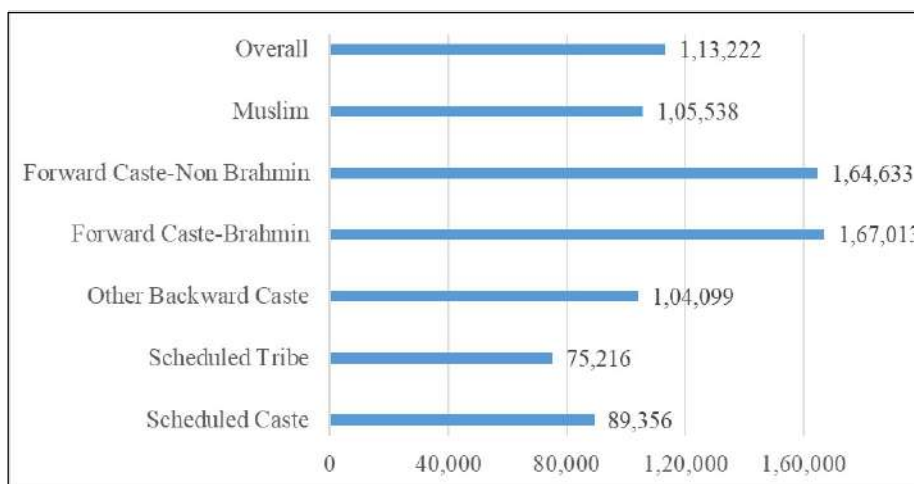
| Sr. No | Social Legislations |
|--------|---|
| 1 | Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, 1955 |
| 2 | SC and ST Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) Act, 1989 |
| 3 | Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 |
| 4 | National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993 |
| 5 | National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993 |
| 6 | Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, 2016 |
| 7 | Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996 |
| 8 | National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act, 1999 |
| 9 | Forest Rights Act, 2006 |
| 10 | Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 |
| 11 | Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 |
| 12 | National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 |
| 13 | Durgah Khawaja Saheb Act, 1955 |
| 14 | Wakf Act, 1995, 2013 |

Source: NITI Aayog, <https://www.niti.gov.in/verticals/social-justice-and-empowerment>

5.1 Caste-Based Exclusion

Caste-based exclusion rooted in India's historical caste system is the most prominent form of exclusion in India. This is a caste-based discrimination leading to the exclusion of these communities. The power struggles of these caste groups who are denied access to resources (Paricha, 2018) are well documented. The excluded social groups have limited access to land and social services, non-participation in certain categories of jobs, discrimination in the use of public services, and exclusion from community activities (Thorat, 2007). Figure 1 highlights the economic exclusion (low annual income) of STs and SCs amongst other social groups.

Fig 1 : Annual Income Across Social Groups



Source: Bharti, Nitin Kumar, (2018) as cited in NITI Aayog (2021)

Singh (2013) has highlighted the extent of exclusion of such groups using the case of the Musahar community whose members live in small hamlets at the edge of villages even distant from other Dalit households and work as bonded labourers to repay the loans taken from the landlord. They are also unable to avail of State entitlements (Singh, 2013).

The government's approach to addressing the marginalization of the STs and SCs is two-fold (i) **protective measures** Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and the Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 preventing untouchability and discrimination, (ii) **developmental and empowerment measures** through the government programs promoting economic, social and educational empowerment (Thorat, 2007). The initiatives undertaken by the Government of India are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 : GOI: Empowerment of SC & STs

| Schemes for Educational Empowerment | |
|---|--|
| Pre-matric scholarship for SC students studying IX and X | National Fellowship for SC students |
| Free coaching for SC and OBC students | Pre-matric scholarship to the children of those engaged in occupations involving cleaning and prone to health hazard |
| Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojna | Pre-matric scholarship scheme for Scheduled Tribe students |
| Scheme for strengthening education among ST Girls in low literacy districts | Scholarship Scheme of top-class education for SC students |

| Schemes for Educational Empowerment | |
|---|---|
| Post matric scholarship for Scheduled Caste students (PMS-SC) | Scheme for Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) |
| National Overseas Scholarship Schemes | Adivasi Shiksha Rinn Yojana (ASRY) |
| Schemes for Economic Development | |
| Stand-up India | Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes (VCF-SC) |
| Special central assistance to Scheduled Caste sub plan (SCA to SCSP) | Credit Enhancement Guarantee Scheme for Scheduled Castes (CEGSSC) |
| PM Daksh Scheme | Special Central Assistance to Tribal sub-scheme (SCA to TSS) |
| Schemes for Social Empowerment | |
| Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana | Grant-in-Aid to Voluntary Organizations Working for Scheduled Castes |
| The Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) | National Toll-Free Helpline for SCs and STs |
| Support to Tribal Research Institutes (TRI) | Scheme of Grant-in-Aid to Voluntary Organizations working for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes |

Source: GoI (2022).

5.2 Exclusion Due to Disability

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) are perceived as “deficient,” “economically unproductive or less productive,” and “dependent or needy” (Sharma and Kumar 2020). Disability is usually defined as a physical or mental health condition that limits a person’s ability to perform normal life activities (Saikia. et.al, 2016). As per the 2011 Census, there were 2.68 crore disabled people, or 2.21 per cent of the total population. However, as per the 2019-2021 NFHS-5 survey, there were 6.32 crore disabled people or 4.52 per cent of the total population. The 2011 Census, provides information on disability as a medical condition (Saikia.et.al, 2016). The 2011 Census has eight categories of disabilities; seeing disability, hearing disability, speech disability, movement disability, mental retardation, mental illness and other disability. (Seven types of disability and one category for multiple disabilities) (Saikia.et.al, 2016). The types of disabilities have now been increased to twenty-one.

PWDs who reside in rural settings or urban slum settings with no access to resources and opportunities are the worst affected (Sharma and Kumar, 2020). Exclusion can be overcome when social institutions, government agencies, and service providers are aware of and sensitive to the basic survival as well as rehabilitation needs of poor PWDs (Sharma and Kumar 2020).

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disability (DEPwD) in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment addresses the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

The Government in 2016 launched the Unique Disability ID creating a national database of people with disabilities to enable easier delivery of State benefits to people with disabilities. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016; The Mental Health Care Act, 2017; The National Trust Act, 1999 and The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 are important legislations that affect people with disabilities. Table 7 provides a brief of the key legal provisions and initiatives taken by the Government of India for the empowerment of the disabled population.

Table 7 : Legal Provisions & Initiatives: Empowerment of the Disabled

| |
|---|
| The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act-2016 |
| This Act makes provision for the protection of rights of persons with disabilities in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. |
| Accessible India Campaign launched in 2015 |
| This campaign aims to create a barrier-free environment for people with disabilities. |
| Reservation in Govt Jobs and Higher Education |
| Disabled people are entitled to 4 per cent reservation in government jobs and 5 per cent reservation in higher education. |

Source: (GoI, 2022)

5.3 Gender-Based Discrimination

Women play a significant role in accelerating India's efforts towards rapid economic growth and they are key to fostering inclusive growth. They play a key role, especially in a few important sectors such as agriculture, education, healthcare, and micro-entrepreneurship. This is in addition to their caregiving responsibilities.

As per the 2011 Census, India's population was 121.1 crore with 48.5 per cent females (GoI, 2023). There has been marginal improvement in the sex ratio over the years (GoI, 2023). India has a robust policy and regulatory framework to support women's empowerment. The constitutional provisions including Article 14, Article 15, Article 15(3), Article 16, Article 39(a), Article 39(b), Article 39(c), and Article 42 support gender equity (Gender Equity Unit, 2023). Further specific acts such as the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961) and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 promote women's empowerment against biases (Gender Equity Unit, 2013). The Ministry of Women and Child Development and the National Commission for Women are the nodal Ministry and Commission safeguarding women from discrimination and promoting women empowerment. Table 8 lists the key initiatives by the

Government of India to promote the well-being of women and children.

Despite the initiatives, the key challenge in terms of equal access to women continues to exist albeit has seen significant improvement over the years. First among them is the education of the girl child. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the Ratio of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of girls to GER of boys and is a measure of progress toward gender parity in education. The Study (GoI, 2023) shows an increasing trend of GPI at the primary level, a declining trend at the upper primary level, and a mixed trend at the secondary and higher education levels (GoI, 2023).

In terms of employment, women end up in insecure low-paying jobs with only a few doing better at employment. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is a key metric to understand the participation of women in productive economic activities. In 2022-23 the male LFPR was 78.5 and the women LFPR was 37 (GoI, 2023). This is mainly attributed to their responsibilities for childcare and managing the home.

Table 8 : Schemes for Empowerment of Women

| Scheme | Brief Description |
|---|--|
| Anganwadi Services | Health and associated care services are provided to pregnant women and lactating mothers and also to their children under the age of 6 years. |
| One Stop Centre and Universalization of Women Helplines | The One Stop Centres (OSCs), popularly known as <i>Sakhi</i> Centres, aim to facilitate women affected by violence, including domestic violence. |
| Swadhar Greh Scheme | Scheme for women who are in need of rehabilitation |
| Ujjwala Scheme | Rescue, rehabilitation, re-integration, and repatriation of victims of trafficking |
| Working Women Hostel | Scheme to provide safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, with daycare facility for their children |
| Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) | Scheme to provide nutritional support to out-of-school girls in the age group of 11-14 years |
| POSHAN Abhiyaan | Scheme to address malnutrition |
| Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) | Scheme to address declining child sex ratio and related issues of empowerment of girls and women |
| Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) | Scheme to empower rural women through community participation |
| Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) | Conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant women |

Source: GoI (2021)

5.4 Urban-Rural Divide

The biggest challenge India has witnessed since independence and accentuated after the economic reforms of 1991 is the growing disparity between urban and rural India. As per 2011 Census about 65 per cent of the country's population resides in rural areas (PIB, 2023), and despite rapid urbanization more than half of the population is projected to be still rural by 2050 (Chand.et.al, 2017 b). While close to 2/3rd of India is rural and predominantly dependent on agriculture the worrying trend is the declining contribution of the rural economy to the country's domestic product. About 89 per cent of the farmers are small and marginal (PIB, 2023, b) and face significant barriers in moving beyond subsistence agriculture to surplus and market-oriented agriculture. Agriculture has disguised employment and low worker productivity. In fact, after 2004-05 rural India witnessed negative employment growth (Chand.et.al, 2017 b) pushing rural youth in search of employment opportunities in cities. Due to limited skills rural youth migrating to cities are unable to find meaningful employment and end up finding refuge in the urban informal sector which can be exploitative as was evident during the Covid crisis. Also, The poor health and educational outcomes in rural India are well documented.

To facilitate balanced economic growth reducing disparities between urban and rural India, the Government of India has taken multiple initiatives to bring dynamism to rural India focusing on basic amenities including infrastructure and housing, social assistance to rural vulnerable populations, skill development, and livelihoods. Key initiatives towards comprehensive rural development are listed in Table 9.

Table 9 : Rural Development Schemes

| Scheme | Brief Description |
|--|---|
| Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) | Scheme providing 100 days guaranteed employment to the rural population |
| Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) | Scheme providing all-weather road connectivity to villages |
| Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) | Skill training program for rural unemployed youth |
| National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) | Social assistance program for the aged and BPL households |
| Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) | Scheme to create model gram panchayats that are clean, healthy, and green |
| Aajeevika - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) | Scheme supporting rural livelihoods |
| Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) | Scheme to provide basic amenities to rural areas |
| Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Gramin - PMAY(G) | Housing for all in rural areas |

Source: GoI (2025).

6. CHALLENGES: SUPPORTING EXCLUDED COMMUNITIES

NITI Aayog, (2022) in its gap analysis of schemes targeting the excluded communities highlights the lack of an integrated approach that is needed for the holistic development of vulnerable groups. There is a lack of convergence in initiatives taken by the Central Government, State Government, Private Sector, and NGOs, and do not address the requirements of excluded communities holistically. The current initiatives appear sporadic and addressing the vulnerability of such communities through a targeted approach based on gap assessments can help address their needs holistically.

NITI Aayog (2022) also highlights the insufficient and inconsistent delivery of essential services to marginalized populations. Some vulnerable groups such as SCs, OBCs, and children have dedicated intervention by the government and other agencies while other vulnerable groups such as beggars, DNTs, transgender, etc have limited focused interventions (NITI Aayog 2022).

Exclusion errors are a commonly observed impediment in the implementation of government programs where the needy population is excluded. Lack of awareness amongst the beneficiaries due to lower education and being out of the mainstream is seen as the main reason for the exclusion. Also, communities are excluded as they are difficult to reach, for example, some groups of Scheduled Tribes and Nomadic Tribes. Exclusion errors also occur when the beneficiary data sets are old and not updated periodically (NITI Aayog, 2022).

7. APPROACHES TO MAINSTREAM EXCLUDED GROUPS

To ensure that the challenges in mainstreaming excluded communities are addressed newer innovative approaches are being tried. NITI Aayog (Viramani, 2023) discusses the concept of “Antyodaya Empowerment” focusing on the lowest rungs of society, social economic development, and income levels. This approach termed “The Bharatiya Approach to Social Welfare” is multi-faceted, including cash transfers, indirect subsidies, and in-kind transfers to the needy (Virmani, 2023).

The Government is gradually moving away from a budget-oriented approach which predominantly relied on the provision of inputs and an expectation of targeted outputs. In this approach, the support to the excluded groups is driven by the budgetary provision rather than the needs of the community. Now the government is moving towards an outcome-oriented approach and is been implemented in a mission mode. In an outcome-oriented approach the needs of the community form the focus and the mission mode ensures that the programs are implemented in a time-bound manner.

The Government now intends to engage community-based organizations (CBOs) and NGOs to supplement the government initiatives. As community organizations and NGOs are rooted in the local community, they are best suited to provide personal, emotional, and social support to marginalized groups (Viramani, 2023). Further, the private sector can also support government initiatives as it brings a streamlined approach and improves efficiency in program implementation.

As discussed in the earlier section, the lack of an integrated approach is a key challenge and to address this the Government has initiated convergence amongst various schemes through the idea of “Mission Antyodaya”. Mission Antyodaya is a convergence and accountability framework designed to consolidate and effectively utilize resources from 26 government ministries and departments. By streamlining the allocation and management of these funds, the mission seeks to accelerate development in targeted regions and uplift marginalized communities.

Further, the Value for Money (VfM) approach which tries to maximize the impact of each rupee spent on excluded communities can be incorporated into project planning and implementation. Projects implemented using the VfM approach are designed using a Logical Framework: Input-Process-Output-Outcome-Impact and incorporate Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Cost-effectiveness (DFID, 2011).

8. CONCLUSION

In the Indian context, exclusion by caste, gender, disability, and geography is a widely observed phenomenon. Rapid economic growth in the last few decades supported by legal safeguards and government policies has brought about markable improvement in the severity of exclusion. With evolving economic and social structures, patterns of exclusion tend to change and can take newer forms. Mainstreaming excluded communities in totality continues to remain a challenge. While legal and policy response has been dynamic and responding to the changing realities, implementation of these policies can be improved for increased impact. Implementing schemes in a mission mode and moving from an input-output to an outcome-oriented approach can be helpful. Further, addressing marginality requires a multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder approach with increasing roles for community-based organizations, non-government organizations, and the private sector. The impact can be manifold and fasten the integration of excluded communities into the mainstream.

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Role of NGOs in Empowering Marginalized Communities

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Abstract

Marginalization is an acute form of inequality, which leads to the exclusion of vulnerable groups. In the context of government's inability and apathy, NGOs have intervened to provide the support to the marginalized populations. The Chapter traces the historical evolution of NGOs in India, examining their role in various development initiatives across different eras. Despite government efforts, India continues to grapple with significant socio-economic disparities. Marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, small farmers, and urban poor, face systemic discrimination and exclusion. The Chapter highlights the work undertaken by a few NGOs that are engaged in empowering marginalized communities through their innovative solutions, advocacy, and direct interventions to create a just and inclusive future.

Keywords: *Marginalized Communities, Five-Year Plans, Vulnerable Groups*

1. INTRODUCTION

Marginalization is a pervasive social issue that refers to the process of excluding or isolating a group or individual from full participation in society (Gregory et al., 2003). This occurs due to unequal power relationships between social groups (Sevelius et al., 2020). Consequentially

marginalized groups face systemic discrimination in economic, social, cultural, and political spheres. The consequences of marginalization are far-reaching, encompassing poverty, inequality, and social injustice. In response to these challenges, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emerged as crucial actors in addressing the needs of marginalized populations.

The term NGO popularly emerged at the end of the Second World War, as the United Nations (UN) in 1945 distinguished between intergovernmental agencies and private organizations. However, the movement's origins are much older. The first international NGO was probably the Anti-Slavery Society, formed in 1839 (Khan & Tasneem, 2022). Other early NGOs that grew out of wars were the Red Cross in the 1850s, Oxfam International in 1942, and CARE International in 1945 (Jones, 2006).

The UN defines an NGO as “A nonprofit organization, group or institution that operates independently from a Government and has humanitarian or development objectives” (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). The World Bank defines “NGOs as private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development” (Duke University Libraries, 2024).

NGOs have historically served as key factors in global development, addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalized communities. Since the mid-20th century, NGOs have evolved to address complex developmental issues, bringing attention to areas where governments or private enterprises fall short (Abiddin et al., 2022).

Initially emerging as charitable and religious entities, NGOs today play a multi-dimensional role in tackling socio-economic disparities. In their early stages, NGOs primarily addressed immediate relief needs, such as food security and healthcare during crises. NGOs have become indispensable partners in the global effort to achieve sustainable development goals, leveraging their unique strengths, networks, and local expertise to address complex challenges (Gretebeck, 2021 & Koshy, 2022).

The NGO sector is now the largest economy in the world, with annual spending of more than 500 billion dollars (Gretebeck, 2021). According to the NGO and Charitable Organization Global Market Report, 2024, the market size of NGOs is expected to increase in the coming years. Asia-Pacific will be the largest region in the NGOs and charitable market in 2023.

2. INDIAN SCENARIO

2.1 Pre-independence era

Literature documents that historically, kings and merchants in India actively extended support to

develop village infrastructure like schools, sanitoriums, and common property resources like the construction of roads/ water reservoirs and providing relief to those affected by natural disasters. These acts of charity, philanthropy, and mutual aid were often rooted in religious and cultural values (Sundar, 2000).

During British rule, hospitals and educational institutions were established in different parts of the country by Christian Churches as welfare activities (Inamdar, 1987). Towards the end of the 18th century, the idea of voluntarism in India changed with the reform movements. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Dayananda Saraswathy, Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar, and others focused on social issues like sati practice, child marriage, widow re-marriage, and caste-directed practice (Rahumath, 2019).

The implementation of the Societies Registration Act of 1860 significantly enhanced the movement towards voluntarism during this historical period. The focus from development activities shifted to economic self-sufficiency in 1916 (Asian Development Bank & Civil Society Center, 2021). Gandhiji identified the root of India's problem as poverty. He also believed that voluntary action, decentralized to gram panchayats (village councils), was the ideal way to support India's development (Maheswari, 2019). Based on Gandhiji's beliefs and principles, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Dr. Spencer Hatch, F.L Brayne, Raja Sir T. Madhav Rao, and various others established several Community Development programs such as The Marthandam Project (1921)¹, Gurgaon Project (1927)², Baroda Rural Development Project (1927)³, etc. for nation-building (Manoranjan & Singh, 2001).

2.2 Post-independence era

To address the pressing issues of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion faced by marginalized populations, the Government of India implemented numerous social welfare programs through its Five Year Plans. To expand its reach and impact, the government has consistently sought the support of NGOs across various plan periods. Over time, the role of NGOs has evolved significantly, transitioning from mere service providers to becoming strategic partners of the government in addressing the needs of marginalized populations. After independence, NGOs played a crucial role in nation-building, particularly in rural transformation and development (Nandan & Kushwaha, 2017).

¹ The Marthandam Project, supported by the Young Men's Christian Association focused on the development of physical, spiritual, mental, economic, and social skills.

² Gurgaon Project focused on improving the living conditions in rural areas and village development.

³ Baroda Rural Development Project aimed to increase people's 'desire to live better' and self-sufficiency.

First Five-Year Plan (1951–1956)

During the First Five-Year Plan, the Central Welfare Board was established to provide financial help, coordination, training, technical guidance, and consultancies to the NGOs involved in activities to uplift women and children (Gupta & Sharma, 2018).

Second Five-Year Plan (1956–1961)

To promote integrated development in rural areas, the ‘National Community Development Program’ was launched in 1952. Through this program, NGOs activated people’s participation and undertook economic and social reconstruction projects in the villages (Dube, 1959). To promote agricultural development and rural welfare, the National Extension Service was launched in 1953. Both programs were developed to decentralize development activities. To promote egalitarian Indian society and self-reliance in rural India with minimal dependence on the State, a group of freedom fighters and national leaders in 1958 formed the Association for ‘Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD)’. AVARD was instrumental in promoting cooperation and understanding among voluntary agencies working for the rural communities in India and partnered with the government to address issues of poverty and marginalization (Association for Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development, 2017).

Third Five-Year Plan (1961–1966)

During the Third Plan period, the country faced economic stagnation, severe droughts, and floods, which led to food scarcity in 1960. To cope with the food crisis, India had to rely on international charity (Aiyar, 2012). To carry out relief and rehabilitation work, many foreign NGOs entered India to provide support to local NGOs and the government. By effectively responding to the crisis, NGOs demonstrated their contribution, which led to establishing their credibility in community service (Reddy & Sreenivasareddy, 2023).

During the Plan Holiday period (1966–1969), the ‘National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD)’ was set up in 1966 to provide training, support NGO activities, and promote partnerships between the government and NGOs (Sharma, 2017). It focused on child rights, protection, and development (NIPCCD, 2024).

Fourth Five-Year Plan (1969–1974)

The Fourth Plan mainly focused on growth and self-reliance. This period marked a significant turning point in India’s development strategy, recognizing the potential of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) as valuable partners in achieving national development goals. The plan explicitly acknowledged the limitations of government machinery in reaching the remotest corners of the country and the need for supplementary efforts from the voluntary sector. This recognition led to the increased involvement of NGOs in various development programs, particularly in rural areas. Organizations like the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) emerged in response

to address the economic and social hardships faced by women.

To engage rural youth in community development and nation-building efforts in 1972, GOI launched Nehru Yuva Kendras. NGOs collaborated with these Kendras to amplify their impact on youth development and social causes (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2021). This partnership leveraged the strengths of both organizations, combining NYK's extensive reach and government support with NGOs' specialized expertise and innovative approaches. With the support of the youth, NGOs undertook community-based initiatives with a focus on local issues. Driven by passionate individuals and volunteers, these NGOs worked at grassroots levels, providing essential services and support to marginalized communities. They were seen as catalysts for social change, capable of mobilizing local communities, fostering self-reliance, and promoting innovative approaches to development. The plan emphasized the importance of coordination between government agencies and NGOs to ensure the effective implementation of development programs.

This plan period also gave high priority to the re-organization of cooperatives to make it viable. The National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) was set up to replicate the Anand pattern of cooperatives in milk throughout the country. NGOs like BAIF have played an important role by collaborating with NDDB to empower rural communities and boost the dairy sector to promote sustainable practices and livelihood opportunities for farmers.

Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974–1978)

The Fifth Plan focused on poverty alleviation, justice, and employment. The iconic slogan 'Garibi Hatâo' (Eradicate poverty) encapsulated this era's focus on social justice and equitable development. To address the issue of poverty and improve people's living standards, GOI introduced the 'Minimum Needs Programme (MNP)'. The program focused on the socio-economic development of the community, especially underserved and underprivileged populations. To support the government, NGOs played a key role as mediators by reaching out to the needy, creating awareness of the program, and conducting surveys on behalf of the government (Patel, 2018). The responsibility for development in rural areas rested with the 'Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI)'. However, as the PRIs lacked the capacity and resources to take care of the development of villages, the Asoka Mehta Committee appointed in 1977 proposed that PRIs should be assisted by NGOs in the preparation of area development plans, conduct feasibility studies, cost/benefit analysis and explore ways and means to induce local participation in planning and implementation (Hirway, 1989).

Chipko Movement

The Fifth Plan period also records the genesis of the Chipko movement in the context of the restrictive forest policies adopted by the government since colonial rule, which denied access to

rural communities to seek livelihood support from the forest. Mr. Chandi Prasad Bhatt, a Gandhian social activist, formed the ‘Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangh (DGSM)’ in 1964 to promote small enterprises for rural communities utilizing local resources in the foothills of Himalaya. The increased amount of commercial logging in the region resulted in widespread deforestation, erosion, and increased flooding. This activated DGSM to become a force against the loggers. Under the leadership of Chandi Prasad, residents entered the forest in the Alaknanda Valley of Uttarakhand and embraced the trees to prevent their felling. This was the first Chipko protest in April 1973. Subsequently, under the leadership of Mr. Sunderlal Bahuguna, the Chipko movement became a pan-India movement (Sharma, 2017). The Chipko movement, started by a local NGO, has evolved into a powerful force for environmental justice and community rights. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of ecology and community rights, the Chipko movement has laid the Foundation for modern environmentalism in India (Gawade & Iyer, 2018).

Committee on the Status of Women in India

As the global women’s movement was gaining momentum, the United Nations (UN) requested the Indian Government to review the status of women in India and submit its report. As India lacked comprehensive data on the subject, it appointed the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1971 to understand the systemic barriers hindering women’s progress and to formulate policies and programs to address these issues. “In 1974 the Committee published the report *Towards Equality*, which uncovered significant disparities faced by women in the areas of the declining sex ratio of women, higher female infant mortality, lower life expectancy, the decline of the female labour force, higher illiteracy rates, poor inheritance rights and underrepresentation in politics” (Heuer, 2015). It emphasized the urgent need for deploying comprehensive measures to elevate women’s status across all spheres of life. The Committee’s findings and recommendations have had a significant impact on women’s empowerment in India (Ministry of Education & Social Welfare, 1974). Subsequently, the National Plan of Action for Women, which was formed in 1976, became a guiding document for the development of women (Konwar, 2019). Specifically, based on the Committee’s recommendation, the ‘National Commission for Women’ was set up in 1992, and to increase women’s political participation, the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution were passed by Parliament in 1992. The Amendment mandated the reservation of one-third of seats within local governments for women (National Commission for Women, 2024).

Employment Generation

During the Rolling Plan (1978–1980), the government introduced several self-employment and anti-poverty programs like ‘Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM)’ in 1979 and the ‘Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP)’ in 1980. TRYSEM aimed to provide technical and business expertise to rural youth and enable them to take up income-generating

activities. Unfortunately, both programs failed due to various factors, and minimal participation was sought from the NGOs in implementing them.

Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-1985)

The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-1985) marked a significant shift in India's development strategy. Prioritizing rural development, job creation, family planning, and basic needs provision, the plan aimed to alleviate poverty and stimulate economic growth. The government expanded its role beyond welfare to encompass comprehensive development initiatives. Key areas of focus included the optimal utilization of renewable energy sources, particularly forestry, through the establishment of block-level renewable energy associations. Besides, the plan emphasized human development, prioritizing family welfare, tribal development, health, nutrition, education, related community programs, and universal healthcare access. The government collaborated with NGOs like Professional Assistance for Development Action (Pradan), SEWA, and Development Alternatives to accelerate rural development.

Sustainable Resource Management

Recognizing the importance of sustainable resource management, the plan prioritized water conservation and soil conservation measures. Social welfare programs were implemented to support marginalized sections of society, and the Minimum Needs Program aimed to provide essential services to the underprivileged (Patel, 2018). To promote rural and agricultural development in India, GOI set up 'The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)' in 1982. To accelerate the process of farm and non-farm activities, NABARD collaborates with NGOs to develop the capacities of farmers, artisans, self-help groups, and micro-entrepreneurs and enables their credit linkage with banks (NABARD, 2024). Community participation emerged as a crucial component of various social sector projects, leading to the formal recognition of NGOs as vital partners in the State's development efforts. Consequentially, both welfare and empowerment-oriented NGOs emerged during this period. The government's prioritization of women's education, work, and health significantly contributed to the growth of NGOs dedicated to women's issues (Jain, 2020).

To increase employment and self-employment opportunities, the government introduced the 'National Rural Employment Program' and 'Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)'. The primary objective of DWCRA was to motivate rural women to form groups of 10-15 members and start income-generating activities suited to their skill, aptitude, and local conditions. The role of NGOs was to enable women to form groups, select an economic activity, and motivate them to get training under TRYSEM and start their businesses.

Disaster Management

In the context of droughts, famines, floods, and industrial disasters like the Bhopal Gas Tragedy,

the government planned to invest in disaster preparedness and management strategies. It emphasized on promoting ecology, environmental protection, tribal development, and education.

Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985–1990)

The Seventh Plan focussed on growth in agricultural production, economic productivity, and employment generation. To bring changes at the grassroots level and reach out to marginalized populations, the government devised a strategy for collaborating with NGOs (Sarkar, 2005). In this context, ‘The Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART)’ was established in 1986 under the Ministry of Rural Development to promote voluntary action in rural development. Its goal was to encourage, support, and assist voluntary initiatives aimed at improving rural prosperity. CAPART provided financial support to NGOs working in rural areas and facilitated partnerships between NGOs and the Government of India for sustainable development. It initiated programs in rural development directly through NGOs, such as the popularisation of vermicomposting, rainwater harvesting, low-cost sanitation, rural housing, watershed development, creating potable drinking water facilities, organizing gram shree melas, self-employment training for economic empowerment of tribals, women and youth, etc. (Joshi, 2010). To strengthen research and development, CAPART entered into a MoU with the Center for Sustainable Technologies (CST) of the Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc), Bangalore, for suitable rural technology transfer (PIB, 2007).

The government collaborated with NGOs like PRADAN to implement its welfare schemes. In this period, the government provided funds to NGOs for rural development. NGOs’ focus was more on supporting self-help groups, providing microcredit, and promoting livelihoods. NGO participation was ensured in policy formation and program implementation. They were expected to empower villagers to optimally utilize available resources and local knowledge for village development (Srinivasan, 2016).

To promote the holistic development and advancement of women and children, a separate ‘Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) was established under the Ministry of Human Resource Development’ (Mathew & Narayana, 2024). The plan period also witnessed the establishment of Women’s Development Corporations across various Indian states to promote employment-generating activities for women’s groups and women from marginalized sections. In 1988, GOI issued the ‘National Perspective Plan for Women (NPPW)’ (Sewa, 2023). The plan, inter alia other recommendations to ensure equity and social justice for all women, emphasized the need for women’s reservations in various fields. However, the feminist groups opposed the plan as it was drafted without the consultation of any NGOs or the participation of women (Gupta, 1988).

Narmada Bachao Aandolan

This plan period also witnessed protests from farmers, environmentalists, tribal leaders, and human rights activists against the construction of the ‘Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP)’, a mega hydroelectric and irrigation project on the Narmada River due to its negative environmental and social impacts on the marginalized tribal and rural populations of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat. The ecological movement finally compelled the World Bank to retrieve from the SSP project (Sharma, 2023).

Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992–1997)

The Eighth Plan focused on generating employment, improving agricultural productivity, checking population growth, strengthening infrastructure, and alleviating poverty. As the global trend towards liberalization and privatization influenced India’s economic reforms, the plan sought to engage the expertise of the private sector through public-private partnerships in national development (Kutumbale & Telang, 2014). For instance, to improve the accessibility and availability of healthcare services and education, the plan proposed partnering with NGOs. In 1992, the government established the ‘National Commission for Women (NCW)’. The NCW’s mandate was to review women’s constitutional and legal protections, recommend legislative reforms, facilitate grievance redressal, and advise the government on women’s policy matters (National Commission for Women, 2024).

To financially empower women from rural and informal sectors, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh was established in 1993 to provide affordable, collateral-free microcredit. NGOs, women’s cooperatives, federations, etc., acted as intermediaries to help women avail themselves of loans (PIB, 2021).

Mid-Day Meal Scheme

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme, launched in 1995, aimed to tackle food security, malnutrition, and education access (James, 2013). The involvement of NGOs helped to improve the level of cooperation between public-private partnerships by ensuring the implementation of the scheme, delivery of services, and scheme performance (The Akshaya Patra Foundation, 2010).

Right-Based Movements

For the healthy functioning of democracy and empowering citizens, ‘Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)’ spearheaded the Right to Information movement in the nineties. Subsequently, due to the efforts of various rights-based NGOs, the Right to Information Act was passed in 2005 (Mahawar, 2022). Subsequently, in 1992, the movement for the rights of LGBTQ gained momentum (Ghosh et al., 2022).

Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002)

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) focused on poverty eradication and economic growth. The plan emphasized providing basic services like clean water, healthcare, education, shelter, and connectivity to all within a specific timeframe (Planning Commission, 2024). To address rural poverty and unemployment, ‘Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)’ was launched in 1999 by consolidating IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRA, ‘Supply of Improved Toolkits to Rural Artisans (SITRA)’, ‘Ganga Kalyan Yojana (GKY)’, and ‘Million Wells Scheme (MWS)’. NGOs played a crucial role in implementing SGSY by actively engaging SHGs from marginalized communities in livelihood support activities. Through workshops and training sessions, NGOs built capacities of SHG members with entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy. They also facilitated access to credit and subsidies by connecting SHGs to banks and financial institutions.

Women’s Empowerment

The plan focused on women’s empowerment and emphasized the need for a gender-sensitive approach, including a women’s component plan for every sector to assess the impact on women. Interestingly, the plan also discussed the need for reservations for women in Parliament and state legislatures, a groundbreaking step in Indian development policy (Shah, 2013). Efforts were made to increase women’s participation in education, health, and employment sectors by integrating women-specific components into broader development programs like health and family welfare (PIB, 2023). To highlight the importance of women’s empowerment and to initiate various programs and policies aimed at improving the status of women in the country, 2001 was declared as ‘Women’s Empowerment Year.’

‘The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (NPEW)’, formulated in 2001, aimed to bring about the advancement, development, and empowerment of women. To help marginalized women, schemes like ‘Swayam-Sidha Yojana’ were launched to empower women and make them financially independent. The Swadhar scheme, launched in the same year, provided grants to NGOs to offer comprehensive rehabilitation services for women in difficult circumstances (PIB, 2004). NGOs also received grants to set up Working Women Hostels and Short-Stay Homes.

Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–2007)

The features of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–2007) aligned with the UN’s ‘Millennium Development Goals’ and aimed at promoting inclusive growth and equitable development (Planning Commission, 2002). The plan aimed to reduce poverty, hunger, improve maternal and child health, and promote gender equality. Investments were made in rural infrastructure, agriculture, and allied sectors to boost rural economies and reduce poverty.

Education

To promote quality education to marginalized children and improve their retention in formal education programs like ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)’ and ‘Mid-day Meals’ were launched. NGOs partnered with the government to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, received education in regular schools. To uplift the education of girls, especially those from minority communities and other disadvantaged groups, in 2004, the government set up the ‘Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS)’ (Krishnan, 2020). NGOs were onboarded to manage Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas effectively in various States. To train students for the job market, strengthen the secondary stream, and include vocational education and training, efforts were made to collaborate with NGOs like Pratham and Akanksha Foundation.

Health

To provide quality, affordable, and accessible health care to the rural population, especially for vulnerable groups, the ‘National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)’ was launched in 2005 (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, 2025). NRHM sought NGO support to implement various healthcare schemes and build greater ownership of the community to maintain better public health standards (Sudarshan et al., 2006).

Gender Justice

The Tenth five-year plan made major commitments towards empowering women as agents of socio-economic empowerment and gender justice. The Department of Women and Children was upgraded into a full-fledged Ministry. Through Swavalamban- Women’s Economic Programme, NGOs provided employment-linked training to women in various trades. To address domestic violence, the Protection from Domestic Violence Bill of 2002 was introduced. NGOs like Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Saheli, SEWA, WOTR, and others worked to promote political and economic independence for women by reducing inequality (Jaysawal, 2024).

Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012)

The Eleventh Plan aimed at achieving sustainable and inclusive growth by eradicating poverty, providing employment opportunities, promoting education and health care, and increasing agricultural productivity. The plan focused on the development of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes, minority communities, and women (Planning Commission, 2008). In this context, NGOs partnered with the government to create employment opportunities in rural areas through ‘Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)’. They also worked on microfinance and self-help group initiatives to empower women and promote economic development.

NGOs played a crucial role in community mobilization, health education, and primary healthcare services to improve access to healthcare in rural areas through NRHM. To enhance the quality

of education, especially in marginalized regions, they supported government schools, established non-formal education centers, and provided vocational training to youth. Technical assistance and capacity-building support were offered to the community in executing rural development and environment conservation programs focused on agriculture, water conservation, and sustainable livelihoods (Planning Commission, 2011).

National Skill Development Corporation

In 2008 ‘The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)’ was setup as a Public Private Partnership Company with the primary mandate of catalyzing the skills landscape in India. NSDC operates through partnerships with the private sector, Central Ministers, and State Government to create a skilled workforce that meets the demands of the Indian economy, thereby enhancing employability and fostering economic growth (National Skill Development Corporation, 2022).

Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2013-2017)

“The Twelfth Plan was guided by the vision to ‘ensure a broad-based improvement in the living standards of all sections of the people through a faster growth process’ that is more inclusive and environmentally sustainable” (Planning Commission, 2013). “While drafting the plan, as many as 900 civil society organizations were consulted in various ways” (Planning Commission, 2013).

Inclusive Growth

“To achieve inclusive growth, the plan offered an extensive range of programs, which covered health, education, drinking water, and sanitation, provision of critical infrastructure in rural and urban areas, programs of livelihood support for the weaker sections, and special programs for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, Minorities, and other marginalized groups” (Planning Commission, 2013). Programs like the ‘Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)’, ‘Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA)’, ‘Mid-Day Meals (MDMs)’, ‘Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)’, ‘Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)’, ‘National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)’, and so on offered benefits directly to the poor and the excluded groups, or increased their ability to access employment, education, health and so on (Planning Commission, 2011). The plan proposed adopting Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) within the social sector for leveraging private investment and NGO support to improve access to healthcare, education, and other essential services, particularly in areas like rural development (Wakchaure & Kumar, 2012).

Many welfare schemes were launched in the plan period like ‘Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao (2015)’, ‘Swachh Bharat Mission (2014)’, ‘Atal Pension Yojna (2015)’, ‘Ujjwala Yojana (2016)’ and several others. NGOs collaborated with local governments to raise awareness about the schemes, promote behavioural change in hard-to-reach communities, conduct research, and advocate for better service delivery of the schemes.

Establishment of NITI Aayog

In 2018, GOI established 'National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog' to replace the Planning Commission. "The Aayog has the twin mandate to oversee the adoption and monitoring of the SDGs in the country and promote competitive and cooperative federalism among States and UTs" (PIB, 2021). The Aayog developed the 'New India@75' strategy to outline a roadmap for India to achieve economic and social progress by its 75th year of independence. Key areas of focus besides economic growth included strategy for inclusive growth, infrastructure development, sustainable development, and governance. Areas of social inclusion included prioritizing education, healthcare, housing, skill development, and reducing regional inequalities. Several initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana provide housing for the homeless and economically weaker sections, which were scaled up, and health insurance schemes like Ayushman Bharat were launched in 2018. The 'Garima Gruh' scheme was launched in 2020 to provide shelter equipped with basic facilities to Transgender persons. To attain the goals of sustainable development, the government prioritized investment in clean energy, environmental conservation, and climate action (Saraswat et al., 2018).

Voluntary Action Cell

To promote NGO partnerships, Aayog has set up a 'Voluntary Action Cell'. The primary functions include drafting and executing policy guidelines for the voluntary sector, issuance of a unique ID to all NGOs/ VOs registering on the NGO Darpan Portal, and maintenance of the databases (Voluntary Action Cell, 2024).

The Paradox

"Despite efforts taken by the government to address the issues of marginalization, the pattern of economic growth aggravates issues of regional imbalances, greater inequalities in control over assets and access to incomes, and dispossession and displacement of people from land and livelihood" (Ghosh, 2014). Moreover, the climate change and environmental degradation associated with unchecked development pose significant challenges, particularly for marginalized communities. They face inequalities in income, nutrition, housing, access to healthcare, and education. Besides class, intersecting factors of caste, gender, religion, and location determine these inequalities. Consequentially marginalized groups like poor farmers, women, children, the elderly, PwDs, transgender persons, etc, have faced social exclusion. They are excluded from the benefits of economic growth, education, income-generating opportunities, and control over assets.

Hope: Build an Inclusive World

There is no doubt that India is complex, but there are NGOs formed by compassionate individuals too in this country who have a deep-seated desire to create a better world. The professionals working in these NGOs have tremendous creative energy and aspirations to address the problems

of the marginalized. These individuals give us hope to build an inclusive world. The ensuing paragraphs have brief descriptions of the efforts taken by the NGOs working with the LGBTQ community, Farmers, People with Disability, Vulnerable Villages, and Citizens. These NGOs, through their innovative solutions, are empowering marginalized communities and driving social change.

3. NGOS SUPPORTING LGBTQ+ RIGHTS AND INCLUSION

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQ+) individuals often face significant social exclusion due to societal prejudice and discrimination. This exclusion manifests in various ways, including family rejection, workplace discrimination, limited access to healthcare, and social isolation. Many LGBTQ+ people experience discrimination, harassment, and violence. These experiences lead to mental health issues, substance abuse, and even suicides. To address this issue, NGOs in India have been at the forefront of advocating for the rights and welfare of LGBTQ individuals. They have been working to offer basic services and address issues of societal stigma, discrimination, and violence faced by this marginalized community.

Inclusion through Advocacy

Naz Foundation, a Delhi-based NGO, is dedicated to building a just and equitable society. By empowering individuals from marginalized communities, including transgender persons and homosexual men, they strive to transform them into agents of positive change. “The Foundation challenged Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which criminalized same-sex relations, through a PIL in 2001” (Misra, 2021). In a landmark 2018 verdict, the Supreme Court decriminalized homosexuality in India and apologized to the LGBTQ+ community for the discrimination and persecution they faced due to Section 377. The NGO offers medical services, face-to-face and telephonic counseling, referral services, and legal support, and it advocates for the rights of LGBTQ individuals. Through awareness campaigns, resource mobilization, and policy advocacy, NAZ aspires to create a more inclusive world.

Inclusion through Economic Empowerment

To empower LGBTQ individuals and provide them with opportunities for economic independence, organizations like Alliance India, Born2Win, and Aarohan took the initiative to provide leadership training, capacity-building training, and skill education to mainstream them and enable them to have a life with dignity. It organizes workshops on financial literacy, general awareness, and personality upkeep, as well as skill training in beauty & wellness and therapy, fashion shows, and dance (Aarohan, 2020). Born2win offers education and employment opportunities to empower the transgender community. It works towards creating positive role models from the community to inspire others (Born2Win Social Welfare Trust, 2013). Similarly, Alliance India, through their

SAHAS initiative, provides skill-building, advocacy, and capacity-building (Alliance India, 2024). Tweet Foundation, an NGO based in Mumbai, offers vital crisis support and safe shelter to transgender persons. In collaboration with Ubisoft, Hexaware, Acuity, and EY, the Foundation conducts training programs that focus on skills like interview preparation, resume writing, mentorship, digital literacy, soft skills, ethics, career guidance, networking, and LGBTQ entrepreneurship. Post-training trainees have been placed in companies like Netflix, The Lalit Hotel, Capgemini, Foundever, and Varun Beverages Limited (Tweet Foundation, 2024).

Similarly, PeriFerry Foundation, based in Chennai, through its Trans Inn initiative, provides short-stay homes for homeless, runaway, and distressed trans persons seeking life support and job opportunities. Through its residential corporate training program ‘Revive’ in association with ANZ Bank, it offers support to prepare for interviews, improve communication, develop soft skills, and get employment opportunities in the mainstream job market. To celebrate transgender talent, the ThiruVizha cultural festival is organized to showcase the diverse artistic abilities of the transgender community through dance, theatre, singing, painting, and allied activities (PeriFerry Foundation, 2022).

To promote entrepreneurship, the Sahodari Foundation, based in Coimbatore, offers an Entrepreneurship Program. Through its food festivals, it has developed entrepreneurial skills and helped the transgender community to build their confidence to set up small businesses. Through its Thoorikai Project, it encourages them to use art as a channel to share their experiences in tangible forms of work. The Red Wall Project of the Foundation aims to sensitize people about the injustice and discrimination done to the transgender community. Sahodari’s youth mentorship and transgender education program supports youth by inspiring and motivating them to take action for a better life (Sahodari Foundation, 2024).

HealthCare

Humsafar Trust, based in Mumbai and Delhi, provides counseling, advocacy, and healthcare to LGBTQ communities (The Humsafar Trust, 2024). To cater to the needs of LGBTQ across urban India, it works with regional partners in 27 states. Through programs like ‘Aarambh’, ‘Dostana’, ‘Yaraana’, the Trust offers services for the prevention, treatment, and management of HIV/AIDS and STIs. Through the SAKSHAM program, efforts are made to facilitate Equal Employment Opportunities for the LGBTQ + community in mainstream workplaces. In other projects like the Pechan project, the Trust strengthens the capacities of institutions working for LGBTQ communities. Projects like ‘Yaariyan’ (Friendship) and ‘Umang’ (Joy) enable LGBTQ communities to share strong peer support and organize various events and campaigns to facilitate social inclusion.

4. NGOS CHAMPIONING INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR PWDS

People with disabilities (PwDs) in India face significant social exclusion due to societal stigma, lack of accessibility, and limited opportunities. They are often discriminated against in education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, due to which they experience social isolation and rejection. Physical barriers in public spaces and transportation further limit their mobility and participation in society. These challenges contribute to poverty, dependence, and poor quality of life for individuals with disabilities. To cater to the varied needs of PwDs, NGOs in India have played a crucial role in supporting disabled populations by providing essential services and constantly advocating for their rights.

Education of Special Children

Montfort Care is a Mumbai-based organization that helps children with hearing loss by identifying the problem early and providing therapy to improve their communication skills. They offer hearing tests, speech therapy, and counseling for parents. The center also provides affordable hearing aids and supports children with advanced treatments like cochlear implants if needed. To make therapy accessible, they have a free app that parents can use at home, removing barriers like cost and travel (Montfort Care, 2024). Similarly, Sol's ARC, a Mumbai-based NGO, provides educational and vocational training to children and young adults with special needs. The organization's innovative RedFlag app has revolutionized the identification of support required for children with special needs. "The app consists of seven risk areas, namely Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Abuse, Intellectual Deficits, Mental health challenges, specific learning disorders, and visual deficit" (Coutinho et al., 2021). This app has helped both teachers and parents recognize early signs of developmental or mental health issues, track the progress of the child, and design support interventions (Sol's ARC, 2022). To promote employment, they provide certification courses through Sector Councils and have partnered with Lemon Tree Hotels and Amazon for on-the-job training. This arrangement has helped the beneficiaries to seek employment in various job roles like scanning, sorting, and packing in delivery and service centers (Balakrishnan, 2023).

Economic Empowerment: PwDs

Samarthanam Trust, based in Bengaluru, besides educational services, also offers technical and sector-based skill training in areas of tele-calling, communication skills, accent training, customer service, soft skills, client relations, and conflict management to youth. Employment support is offered via job fairs and workshops. Likewise, Sarthak India, based in Haryana, provides skills in digital literacy and entrepreneurship through its 'Job Entrepreneurship and Empowerment Training (JEET)' program. Specialized software training in NVDA and Jawas is offered to the visually impaired. Efforts are also made to find suitable employment opportunities for the disabled.

Through media advocacy, the organization promotes disability inclusion among corporations and the larger society (Sarthak Educational Trust, 2024). To promote social inclusion, Youth4Jobs (Y4J) from Mumbai empowers young PwDs by providing essential job skills training, such as IT, business, and communication skills. Through their College Connect program, they collaborate with the industry and facilitate the creation of inclusive workplaces and job placements. Due to their efforts, thousands of disabled youth have secured good jobs in different fields (Youth4Jobs Foundation, 2024).

5. EMPOWERING SMALL FARMERS

According to the 2015-16 Agriculture Census, 86.1 per cent of Indian farmers are small and marginal. They own less than 2 hectares of land and rely on traditional and less efficient farming methods. Over half of these farmers reside in five states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh (Saini & Chowdhury, 2023). They find it difficult to achieve economies of scale and compete in the market. Dependence on monsoon-based agriculture and climate change-induced extreme weather events pose significant risks to agricultural production. Many farmers are trapped in a cycle of debt due to high input costs and limited market access. The absence of social security nets leaves them vulnerable during crises (Sengupta, 2018). The introduction of laws like the 'Farm Produce Trade (APMC Bypass) Act (2020)' and the Farmer Empowerment or 'Contract Farming Act (2020)' has further impacted the livelihoods of small farmers. To improve agricultural productivity, NGOs in rural areas provide farmers with essential knowledge, resources, and support, which is elucidated in the ensuing paragraphs.

Promotion of Sustainable Farming

Maharashtra Prabodhan Seva Mandal (MPSM) from Nashik works with marginalized farming communities in Maharashtra, focusing on agroecological development. They promote organic farming, soil and water conservation, and agroforestry while addressing challenges like food security and rural unemployment. MPSM particularly supports women through capacity-building programs and grassroots efforts. Leveraging the support of SHGs, activities in the areas of enterprise development and income generation are undertaken (Maharashtra Prabodhan Seva Mandal, 2020). Likewise, to improve agricultural practices and protect natural resources, The Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) from Gujarat works closely with farmers. Their approach is to connect people to common lands, educate them on the relationships between diverse living beings, and teach them to appreciate natural systems. FES works to recreate and preserve forests, pastures, and water bodies. They focus on sustainable farming methods such as soil and water conservation, agroforestry, and better land management. By encouraging farmers to adopt eco-friendly practices, they aim to improve farmers' productivity and livelihoods. Their efforts also include strengthening local governance and involving communities, particularly women farmers,

in decision-making. These initiatives have positively impacted farmers' lives and supported environmental sustainability (Foundation for Ecological Security, 2024).

Climate Smart Agriculture

To enhance rural livelihoods and promote environmental sustainability in rural development, Ahmednagar-based Watershed Organization Trust (WOTR) utilizes the Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) approach. This approach incorporates the restoration and conservation of ecosystems, such as watersheds, forests, and grasslands, to provide long-term benefits for agriculture and livelihoods. By promoting water conservation, biodiversity enhancement, and soil health, the organization ensures that farming systems are better prepared to adapt to changing climate conditions. Through capacity building and inputs in climate-smart agriculture, efforts are made to improve agricultural productivity. Through the establishment of Farmer Producer Companies and the provision of digital tools like FarmPrecise, WOTR helps farmers connect to markets and make informed decisions (Watershed Organization Trust, 2024).

6. RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

There are around 649,481 villages in India, according to 2011 Census of these, 593,615 are inhabited (Ganesan, 2017). Problems and challenges are a part of life for both individuals and communities. In rural areas, people face many issues that make it difficult for them to find good livelihood opportunities (Kapur, 2019). These problems include poverty, lack of education, unemployment, migration, health care, social security, infrastructure, agricultural productivity, and violence. To tackle these problems, NGOs in India are supporting rural development by making them self-sufficient and improving their living conditions. The subsequent paragraphs describe the work of three major NGOs in India that have contributed significantly to the area of rural development.

Inclusive Development

'Planning Rural-Urban Integrated Development through Education (PRIDE India)', a Mumbai-based NGO, is committed to uplifting underprivileged communities both in rural and urban areas. The organization's initiatives, spread across Eight Districts of Maharashtra and Two Districts of Karnataka, focus on improving living conditions, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable development. To nurture young minds, the organization's 'Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)' program has made a distinct mark. The organization has set up Balwadis in Six blocks of Raigad district and Navi Mumbai slums and has offered training to ICDS workers. To enhance education quality, the organization has implemented Model School Programs and residential schooling for tribal girls through Jeevanshala. Programs like the 'School-Based Quality Improvement Program (SQUIP)' and 'Reading Improvement Program (RIP)' have improved

learning environments and helped children develop reading habits. PRIDE's Child Resource Centers offer weekend activities to engage children in arts, sports, and culture.

PRIDE's 'Sastur Project of Action Research Services through Hospital (SPARSH)', a public-private partnership that operates in Osmanabad and Latur districts, enhances healthcare accessibility in rural areas by operating mobile medical units, training community health workers, and conducting health awareness campaigns (CSR Box, 2019).

The Shashwat Gram (Ideal Village), a concept designed by the organization, aims to create self-sufficient rural communities by providing them access to healthcare, education, sanitation, and livelihood support. The 'Focused Rural Development Project (FRDP)' focuses on empowering rural communities by establishing 'Village Development Committees (VDCs)', 'Farmers Producer Groups (FPGs)', and 'Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)'. These initiatives provide capacity building, training, and support to strengthen farmers' collectives and improve agricultural practices. The organization's Youth empowerment initiative- Lakshya, offers education, financial literacy, digital literacy, vocational skills, and entrepreneurship development to young individuals.

Promoting Self Reliance

The Swades Foundation, based in Mumbai, Maharashtra, has a mission to uplift one million rural residents through a comprehensive approach that addresses various aspects of rural life, including health, education, water and sanitation, and economic development (The Economic Times, 2016). The Foundation's unique 'Engage'-'Execute'-'Empower'-'Exit' strategy involves actively engaging with rural communities, executing sustainable projects, empowering them to take ownership of their development, and eventually exiting to facilitate self-reliance (Bhardwaj, 2022). By collaborating with local communities and leveraging a network of village volunteers, the Foundation has implemented projects like constructing water sources, renovating schools, providing healthcare services, and promoting sustainable livelihoods. The Foundation has collaborated with Udyogwardhini and Learnet Skills to offer market-oriented skilling programs to youth (Kumar, 2023). These efforts have improved the quality of life and developed self-reliance among the villagers.

Likewise, Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), based in Delhi, works in rural India to empower communities to become self-reliant by fostering better livelihoods, empowering women, and improving access to education, healthcare, and potable drinking water. To create sustainable change in tribal and rural areas, the organization works with self-help groups, FPOs, government bodies, and other organizations. In partnership with RBL Bank, PRADAN has started the 'Stimulating Tribal and Rural Transformation (START)' project to develop women-centric socio-technical-institutional models for agriculture development and farm-allied activities (Pradan, 2021). This project has helped improve the knowledge and skill sets of

women farmers so that they can adopt integrated farming to ensure food and nutrition security for their families and sustainable incomes. Going ahead, the organization plans to set up women-managed and owned FPOs (Pradan, 2024).

7. URBAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

According to Kuddus et al. (2020), urbanization has long been associated with human development and progress. Cities are at the center of countries' economic and technical advancements, but they also act as a ground for poverty, inequality, environmental risks, and infectious diseases. The life of the urban poor is a growing concern as they are forced to live in inhuman conditions (Ratan, 2024). This impacts their health, education, and overall quality of life. To respond to the needs of the economically constrained communities in urban India, NGOs have designed various interventions.

Improving Quality of Life

Apnalaya works to improve the quality of life of the marginalized communities living in the slums of Mumbai. The organization's integrated development model empowers urban poor communities through three important pillars: 'Jeevan', 'Samarth', and 'Udaan'. Jeevan focuses on helping people get access to health, education, vocational training, and livelihood support. Samarth focuses on building local leadership, promoting self-reliance, and encouraging collective action to solve community problems. Udaan fosters partnerships to empower communities, advocate for policy change, and address interconnected issues like education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (Apnalaya, 2024). Likewise, Asha India works with Delhi's slum communities. They provide services for education, financial inclusion, land rights, environment, skill development, and job placements. Through their empowerment program, women and children are encouraged to become community leaders and change-makers. The organization provides financial education to slum dwellers and enables them to avail small loans from nationalized banks. Through Asha resources centers, children and young adolescents are provided with academic support to complete their formal education and develop computer literacy (Martin, 2023).

Addressing Unmet Needs

Saath Charitable Trust, a Gujarat-based organization, focuses on providing education, health skill development, financial literacy, livelihood support, and promoting urban governance. To promote formal education among small children, the organization has developed Balghar for the urban poor children and Child-Friendly Spaces for children of construction workers. Pragati scholarship and 'Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)' programs are offered to girls to enable them to continue their formal education and reduce the dropout rate (Saath Charitable Trust, 2024). Workshops and counseling to parents and students are offered to ensure that students

complete their formal school education.

To cater to the health needs of the population, Saath has developed models for ‘Reproductive and Child Health (RCH)’, ‘Maternal and Child Health (MCH)’, vaccination programs, and health resource centers. To promote livelihood, Saath provides skill development and training to women and youth in retail management, machine operation, beauty and wellness, micro-entrepreneurship, and chef training. To promote self-employment, Saath has launched the Business GYM app to upskill entrepreneurial abilities and mentor micro-entrepreneurs for business processes and increase their incomes. Through its one-stop centers, slum dwellers can obtain information on applying for Aadhar cards, health cards, public benefit schemes, microfinance, skill development programs, and other related schemes (Saath Charitable Trust, 2023).

8. CHALLENGES FACED BY NGOS

Marginalization happens when certain groups are systematically excluded from the social fabric. Kabeer (2000, p. 84) emphasizes that this exclusion results in a feeling of being ‘set apart’ or ‘locked out’ of social life. Consequentially, people are excluded from economic, social, political, and cultural spheres, and thereby, they suffer deprivation in areas such as employment, housing, healthcare, education, and social relationships. Though NGOs are making efforts to address the unmet needs of marginalized groups, they face various challenges. NGOs working with farmers may struggle with issues like land rights, access to markets, and climate change. Those working with disabled individuals may face systemic barriers in accessing healthcare, education, and employment. Those working with LGBTQ+ individuals experience discrimination in societal acceptance.

After the COVID-19 epidemic, NGOs have increasingly been under pressure to meet regulatory requirements. For instance, the amendments outlined in the ‘Prevention of Money-laundering (Maintenance of Records) Amendment Rules, 2023’, and KYC requirements for the ‘Foreign Contributions Regulation Act, 2010 (FCRA)’ impose submission of various documents by NGOs to facilitate their identity verification and beneficial ownership. Besides various other regulatory changes for tax benefits, securing foreign grants and other related areas has reshaped the legal landscape governing NGOs in India. Navigating complex legal and regulatory frameworks can be time-consuming and resource-intensive (Pawar, 2024).

Securing adequate funding is often a major hurdle, as sustainable funding models are essential for long-term operations. Due to resource constraints, constantly addressing the evolving needs of marginalized communities and leveraging emerging technologies can be challenging. Overcoming these obstacles requires innovative strategies, strong partnerships, and a deep commitment to social justice.

9. CONCLUSION

Despite significant government efforts, marginalization and social exclusion remain persistent challenges in India. Vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQ+ individuals, PwDs, small farmers, and people with low incomes, continue to face systemic discrimination and limited access to resources. NGOs, as catalysts for social change, have been instrumental in addressing the specific needs of marginalized communities and advocating for their rights. The transformative power of NGOs, from their philanthropic roots to their present status as social change agents, is evident through their interventions to empower marginalized groups. The brief case studies presented in the Chapter demonstrate how NGOs have tried to tailor their interventions to the specific needs of each group, build strong relationships with community members, and advocate for policy changes to promote inclusivity and equity.

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A Call for Change: The Plight of Persons with Disabilities in Western Tripura

Abstract

A rapid appraisal conducted by Abhoy Mission revealed significant challenges faced by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in Western Tripura. These challenges include limited access to education, healthcare, and government support, exacerbated by widespread social stigma and inadequate infrastructure. Despite these adversities, the study highlights the remarkable resilience and determination of individuals and their families to cope with various challenges of life. To address the challenges faced by PwDs, a comprehensive approach involving community awareness, effective collaboration between NGOs and government entities, and the implementation of accessibility measures to foster social inclusion for the disabled is essential. (This Chapter is based on Mr. Gairik Chakraborty's experiential learning through the 'We Care: Civic Engagement' internship with Abhoy Mission in February 2024.)

Keywords: PwDs, Skill Development, Social Inclusion, NGO and Government Collaboration

1. INTRODUCTION

Disability is a human condition caused by health conditions and societal factors (WHO, 2022). To protect the rights of PwDs, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability in 2006, which was ratified by India in 2007 (United Nations, 2006). Subsequently, to empower the PwDs, India has created various legal provisions like 'The Mental Health Act (1987)', 'The Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992)', 'The Person with Disability Act (1995)', 'National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act (1999)', and, 'the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016)'. Under these legal provisions, the State promotes education, employment and vocational training, job reservation, research and manpower development, creation of a barrier-free environment, and rehabilitation of persons with a disability, also creating institutional infrastructure to support the needs of the PwDs.

To empower PwDs, the Government of India has developed vocational training and livelihood support schemes. For instance, the Ministry of Labour and Employment provides vocational rehabilitation services to PwDs through 24 National Career Service Centres across the country. Employment generation and improving employability are priorities of the State. The government

has implemented a number of initiatives like ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY)’, ‘Prime Minister Street Vendor’s Atma Nirbhar Nidhi Scheme (PM SVANidhi Scheme)’, ‘Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)’, ‘Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)’, ‘Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)’ and ‘Deen Dayal Antodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM)’, etc. (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2023).

1.1 Extent of Disabled Population

India has 26.8 million disabled people, constituting 2.21 per cent of the total population. From these, 54 per cent are male, and 44 per cent are women. The data shows that 69 per cent of disabled live in rural areas (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2021). According to the 2011 Census, 45 per cent of disabled are literate, and 36 per cent are working, out of which 47 per cent are male, and 23 per cent are female workers. The highest number of disabled persons are from Uttar Pradesh. (15.5 per cent), Maharashtra (11.05 per cent), Bihar (8.69 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (8.45 per cent), and West Bengal (7.52 per cent) (Status of Disabled Persons in States / UTs, 2016). According to the 2011 Census, 1.65 per cent of the disabled population resides in North East India (See Table 1).

Table 1 Persons with Disabilities in North East India

| State | Total PwDs (% of the Total Population) | Men with Disabilities | Women with Disabilities | Children Below 18 Years |
|-------------------|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 27,634 (1.93%) | 14,245 | 12,489 | 8,438 |
| Assam | 480,065 (1.54%) | 257,385 | 222,680 | 134,479 |
| Manipur | 54,110 (2.11%) | 28,783 | 20,991 | 17,413 |
| Meghalaya | 44,317 (1.49%) | 23,326 | 20,991 | 17,413 |
| Mizoram | 15,160 (1.38%) | 8,198 | 6,962 | 3,748 |
| Sikkim | 18,187 (2.98%) | NA | NA | NA |
| Tripura | 64,346 (1.75%) | 25,482 | 28,864 | 16,509 |

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2016

“The northeast region has one of the highest levels of age-standardized disability prevalence in the country. PwDs continue to remain one of the most excluded and marginalized groups” (Bureaucrats India, 2023). Along with government initiatives, non-governmental organizations also support the PwDs through their work. According to NGO Darpan, 1222 organizations are working with PwDs in various states in the North East. Abhoy Mission is one of the organizations working with them in Tripura.

2. ABOUT ABHOY MISSION

Abhoy Mission is a non-profit organization established in 1988 in Tripura with the vision to stand by the people in distress, especially vulnerable senior citizens, children, and PwDs. To cater to senior citizens, the organization has set up ‘Abhoy Ashram’, a rehabilitation center, and initiated community-based rehabilitation activities. For PwDs, Abhoy Mission has set up Swabalamban Rehabilitation Centre for Children with Special Needs, Swabalamban Special School for Children with Multiple and Intellectual Disabilities, Vocational training community-based rehabilitation for people with special needs, and vocational training in association with National Institutes. In recognition of its efforts, the organization has received various awards, like the ‘Best SAMARTH Project’ Award for 2006-07, Manovikas Purashkar, 2014, and Best Institution for providing ‘Holistic & Comprehensive Service towards PwDs in 2018’ (Abhoy Mission, 2023).

3. PROJECT ALLOCATED

As Abhoy Mission did not undertake any prior survey or audit of the disabled population in Sepahijala and old Agartala District, the intern was requested to conduct a Rapid Appraisal survey in Nabinagar, Champamura, and East and West Gakulnagar villages in these blocks.

The objectives of the survey were:

- To examine the family background and type of disability faced by the PwDs from the sampled villages.
- To investigate the needs, challenges, and expectations of the PwDs.
- To study the type of government assistance received by PwDs.
- To review support extended by Gram Panchayats and Abhoy Mission.

Besides the survey, the intern was requested to review and revise their social media strategy and improvise their website. This would help the organization improve its visibility and credibility among various stakeholders.

4. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The rapid appraisal survey was conducted in Gram Panchayats of Nabinagar, Champamura, East and West Gakulnagar blocks of Sepahijala and old Agartala districts (See Table 2). These Gram Panchayats were chosen due to their proximity to the Swabalamban Rehabilitation Center operated by Abhoy Mission. Data was collected through personal interviews with 12 disabled respondents using the convenient sampling method, as well as their family members and Gram Panchayat officials.

Table 2 Locations: Survey Data

| Name of The Gram Panchayat | Name of The Block | Number of Respondents |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Gakulnagar (West) | Bishalgarh | 3 |
| East Gakulnagar | Bishalgarh | 6 |
| Champamura | Old Agartala | 2 |
| Nabinagar | Bishalgarh | 1 |

Source : <https://panchayat.tripura.gov.in/gram-panchayats>

The key data points of the appraisal during the interaction were 1) Family background and type of disability of the PwDs, 2) Needs, challenges, and expectations of the PwDs, 3) Type of government assistance received by PwDs, and 4) Support expected from Abhoy Mission.

To review and revise the digital presence of Abhoy Mission, the existing social media handles and website were studied. Changes were incorporated after discussing with the organizational mentor.

5. FINDINGS

The Gakulnagar, Nabinagar, Champamura, and Purba Gakulnagar Gram Panchayats are in the western part of Tripura. According to the 2011 Census, Gakulnagar’s population was 11,369, Nabinagar’s population was 5,384, Champamura’s population was 11,359, and Purba Gakulnagar’s population was 5897 (Population Census 2011| Tripura, 2022). During the rapid appraisal survey, the intern observed the following facilities in the villages (See Table 3).

Table 3 Facilities in the Villages

| Name of the Gram Panchayat | Facilities in Village | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| | Number of Schools (Primary) | Number of Schools (Secondary) | Number of Schools (Higher Secondary) | Health Centers | Number of Anganwadi |
| Gakulnagar | - | - | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| Nabinagar | - | - | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Champamura | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| Purba (East) Gakulnagar | 1 | - | - | - | 5 |

5.1 Education

Education is the foundation on which we build the future generation. It can be inferred from Table 3 that small children in Champapura, Gakulnagar, and Nabinagar do not have access to primary schools in their villages. Lack of secondary schools in three out of the four villages displayed in the Table indicates that either children have to drop out due to lack of schools or travel long distances to attend schools in neighbouring villages.

5.2 Health Facilities

Health facilities are a lifeline for PwDs as the lack of accessible healthcare exacerbates their vulnerabilities. The absence of specialized care and rehabilitation services further hinders their ability to live independently and participate fully in community life. Accessible and inclusive health facilities are crucial for ensuring the rights, dignity, and well-being of PwDs. There is a potential disparity evident from Table 3 in healthcare access between Purba (East) Gakulnagar and the other three villages.

5.3 Respondents' Profile

To study the family background, type of disability, and challenges faced by PwDs, data was collected from the 12 respondents. From these, 11 were male, and one was female. With regard to age, the youngest respondent was 14 years old, and the oldest was 47 years old. In terms of disability, it was found that the respondents mostly had either an Intellectual or a Locomotor Disability. The extent of disability is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Type & Extent of Disability

| Type of Disability | Extent of Disability | | | | |
|---|----------------------|-------|-------|----|-------|
| | 100% | ≥ 75% | ≥ 50% | NR | Total |
| Intellectual Disability | 2 | 1 | - | 3 | 6 |
| Locomotor Disability | - | 3 | 2 | - | 5 |
| Both Intellectual and Locomotor Disability (Cerebral Palsy) | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |

5.4 Education

Education is important for PwDs. It gives them the knowledge and skills to live independently. Inclusive and accessible education is essential for the overall development and well-being of PwDs. Data highlights that only four PwDs had educational qualifications. From these, one had completed his graduation, two had attended secondary school, and one was currently pursuing primary school. Discussing the importance of education, Prabir mentioned, *“Despite facing a locomotor disability (temporary) in my right leg (60%), I completed my BA degree. My father toils tirelessly as a daily wage worker to provide for the family’s income. Despite our modest*

means and the absence of government support, my family prioritized my education, recognizing it as a pathway to a better future.” Sayan’s family shared, *“Though Sayan has only completed VII grade due to his health issues, we, despite our limited education, understand the importance of education and have supported our son’s academic journey as much as we could.”* Interaction with Ruma revealed that despite her locomotor disability, she pursued her education with grit and determination, completing her studies up to class XI. However, due to a lack of accessibility and support, her educational journey was cut short, leaving her to navigate life’s challenges with limited formal qualifications.

5.5 Family Background

Disabled members resided with family members. Household sizes varied, with five families consisting of fewer than four members and six households comprising more than five individuals. The primary income earners were engaged in manual labor, including construction, daily wage work, auto-rickshaw driving, vegetable vending, and tea stall operation. Monthly household income ranged from a low of Rs. 2,000 to a high of Rs. 15,000.

5.6 Important Documents

Government documents like PwD status certificates and UDID cards enable PwDs to access benefits, support services, and financial aid. From the 12 respondents, it was observed that only Shayan Debnath, Rasal Das, Apu Bhaumik, Sushil Debnath, Joydeep Debnath, Prabir Banik, Uday Dutta, Ruma Shukla Das, and Vittu Sharma have a PwD certificate, and only two have a Unique Disability ID (UDID). Discussion with respondents revealed that only two respondents are the recipients of government assistance of Rs. 2000/-. The intern advised respondents and their families to consult Abhoy Mission’s headquarters to understand the steps and documentation required for obtaining a Legal Guardianship Certificate and to learn about the official procedures for applying for government assistance. They were encouraged to seek support from Abhoy Mission for the government assistance process.

Respondents, Rasal Das, Shayan Debnath, Prabir Banik, Ruma Shukla Das, and Joydeep Debnath experienced locomotor disabilities. Meanwhile, Mr. Apu Bhaumik, Sushil Debnath, Maran Debnath, Pranoy Deb, Priya Ranjan Chakraborty, and Vittu Sharma were affected by intellectual disabilities. Additionally, the respondent, Uday Dutta, had cerebral palsy. All of them belonged to lower-income backgrounds and faced tremendous financial challenges. Explaining the challenges of life, Pranab’s family confessed, *“Pranab’s life has been overshadowed by intellectual disability and the absence of educational opportunities. His father, Falu Deb, once a mud trader, succumbed to liver dysfunction, leaving behind a void in the family’s structure. Pranab’s mother, Dulan Deb, a housewife, found herself grappling with the responsibility of caring for her disabled son amidst financial strain and emotional turmoil”.*

It was sad to see that, except for Mr. Apu Bhaumik and Mr. Vittu Sharma, none of them received any government assistance or medical treatment. Unfortunately, except for Shayan Debnath and Ruma Shukla Das, none of them had Unique Disability Identity (UDID) cards. Shayan's parents made a great effort to procure the card as they knew that it was important for PwDs to have a UDID card. This card easily identifies the PwD and ensures that they receive the right kind of assistance and support.

Respondents reported facing documentation-related challenges for applying for PwD certificate and UDID cards. They looked forward to receiving support in this regard from Abhoy Mission. Also, they expected the NGO to help them avail of a Legal Guardian Certificate.

6. UNMET NEEDS

Respondents and their families expressed a critical need for improved access to healthcare, economic support, education, and social inclusion for PwDs. The preceding discussion elucidates the same.

6.1 Health

Beyond reported disabilities, respondents also mentioned suffering from high blood pressure, diabetes, and neurological issues. Two individuals disclosed experiencing mental health problems characterized by violent and abusive behaviour toward family members. One reported receiving treatment for recurrent mental breakdowns. The family members reported that disabled people in villages have limited access to specialized medical care, such as psychiatrists and orthopedic specialists, significantly impacting diagnosis and treatment. Respondents highlighted the urgent need for financial assistance through programs like Niramaya Health Insurance.

6.2 Economic

Obtaining essential documents like disability certificates and UDID cards proved to be a significant hurdle in accessing necessary benefits and schemes. Insufficient financial support, coupled with difficulties in accessing government aid and job opportunities, posed substantial economic challenges. Respondents requested direct monetary aid, as well as support from organizations like Abhoy Mission.

6.3 Education

A shortage of specially trained teachers and resources for children with special needs, along with limited inclusive education programs, has created substantial educational barriers. The importance of special education programs and trained educators, as well as opportunities for inclusive schooling, was emphasized.

6.4 Social

Inadequate rehabilitation programs and a lack of community awareness contributed to social exclusion. Respondents stressed the need for rehabilitation services focused on integrating individuals with disabilities into mainstream society through comprehensive support and training.

7. SUPPORT: GRAM PANCHAYAT & ABHOY MISSION

To meet the unmet needs of PwDs, families have to depend on the local government that is Gram Panchayat and NGOs like Abhoy Mission. Gram Panchayats, as the frontline of rural governance, hold immense potential to address the needs of PwDs. By acting as a bridge between the community and government, they can identify and prioritize the specific challenges faced by disabled individuals. In Sepahijala district, Gram Panchayats served as crucial intermediaries by referring residents to NGOs like Abhoy Mission for essential support, where Abhoy Mission navigates processes for obtaining UDID cards, PwD certifications, and accessing benefits under the Niramaya Health Insurance scheme. The Gram Panchayats also played a vital role in conducting surveys to determine eligibility for government aid.

Through a strong partnership with Abhoy Mission, the Gram Panchayats have implemented several initiatives to support PwDs. These include the Niramaya Health Insurance Scheme for comprehensive healthcare coverage, the Swabalamban Rehabilitation Centre for children with special needs, and the Self-Employment Training Program to empower PwDs economically. Additionally, the Gram Panchayats also undertake awareness campaigns such as ‘Training on Care & Service for PwDs and Curricular Adaptation Training for Teachers’ to foster a more inclusive community.

Abhoy Mission complements the efforts of the Gram Panchayats by providing essential support to vulnerable populations. ‘The Astitva project’, formerly known as ‘Sponsor a Grandparent’, offers financial assistance of Rs. 500 to elderly individuals without support. The organization also distributes essential food items like rice, lentils, oil, and soybeans every six months to alleviate financial burdens. By offering financial aid, essential supplies, and skill development opportunities, Abhoy Mission significantly contributes to the well-being and empowerment of PwDs and the elderly in the community.

8. DISCUSSION

The rapid appraisal conducted in the villages underscored the critical gaps in healthcare, economic opportunities, education, and social integration experienced by individuals with disabilities. Families have been the primary caregivers for disabled individuals due to inadequate government support.

Interactions with the respondents and their families have been influential and inspiring with their

resilience and determination. It showcases the transformative power of self-determination and family support for individuals with disabilities. In the case of Sayan, his unwavering spirit that conquers physical limitations and fuels his pursuit of education is truly inspiring. Similarly, Rasal's perseverance thrives on the unwavering love and solidarity of his family, propelling him towards success. These stories go beyond mere inspiration; they challenge the very definition of disability. Prabir's focus on strengths reminds us that limitations don't dictate dreams, and Ruma's quiet determination exemplifies the human spirit's ability not just to endure but inspire in the face of adversity. The collective strength of these individuals paints a moving portrait of resilience and hope, a testament to the profound impact self-belief and family support can have on overcoming challenges.

Life in Tripura's villages presents unique challenges for those who have an intellectual disability. One major hurdle is the limited access to specialized education. Schools in these areas do not have the resources or trained professionals to cater to their specific learning needs. This can hinder their development of communication skills, daily living activities, vocational training, and employment opportunities. Another significant challenge observed was the social stigma.

However, despite various challenges, their families always ensured they provided all types of support. For instance, Pranoy Deb's story is a heartbreaking example of the challenges faced by families with disabled individuals. Born with intellectual disability, Pranoy's life has been limited by a lack of educational opportunities and government support due to missing paperwork. The loss of his father and the emotional strain on his mother has only worsened the situation. Pranoy's aggressive behaviour has driven his brothers away, leaving his mother torn between love and despair. Despite the tragic circumstances, the story also highlights the enduring power of familial love, with Pranoy's mother's unwavering devotion offering a glimmer of hope amidst the hardship.

In Apu Bhaumik's case, despite his severe mental retardation, his family is his pillar of support. Though their financial situation is difficult, they navigate the complexities of his disability with remarkable resilience. Apu's mother provides unwavering care, while his brother works tirelessly to support them. Vittu Sharma's case is no different. Though their income falls below the poverty line, the family faces challenges with resilience. Vittu's parents, along with his siblings Rahul and Pooja, create a strong support system. Despite lacking a UDID card that could grant government aid, their love for each other serves as a source of strength in overcoming hardship.

Despite facing intellectual disabilities and the loss of both parents, Sushil finds solace in the unwavering support of his remaining family. His brother-in-law Ripan, burdened with his own family, exemplifies the strength of familial bonds by providing Sushil with emotional and financial stability. However, the family's financial limitations are further strained by Sushil's medical needs, highlighting the crucial need for external support to ensure his well-being.

It can be surmised from the above discussion that despite strides made towards inclusion, physically and intellectually disabled individuals in Tripura often face significant challenges. In the case of the physically disabled, they have limited accessibility in public spaces, which restricts their mobility. Public transportation is not equipped for wheelchairs or other assistive devices, hindering their independence. Educational opportunities are limited due to the paucity of adaptive classrooms and learning materials. Employment opportunities are scarce due to non-inclusive workplaces.

In contrast, intellectually disabled individuals struggle with social stigma, limited access to specialized education, and a lack of understanding of their needs within the community. They face challenges communicating effectively or integrating into daily village life. These obstacles can lead to social isolation and economic hardship. Social stigma and a lack of awareness about disability rights have created barriers to employment and education, limiting their financial and social opportunities.

To overcome these challenges and broaden Abhoy Mission's community impact, there is a need to engage with a broader audience through digital mechanisms and maintain meaningful connections with stakeholders. To attain this, the intern helped the organization redesign its website and develop social media accounts to promote inclusivity and support. The goal was also to amplify mission-driven content, attract diverse supporters, and share impactful narratives to raise awareness. The website redesign included a comprehensive overview of activities, seamless integration of social media links, and a modern UI/UX design. It also featured inclusive visuals, regular content updates, prominent calls-to-action for donations, transparent partner showcases, user/subscriber accounts, KPIs, and curated impactful stories. Consequentially, this digital transformation revitalized Abhoy Mission's social media presence, particularly on Instagram and Facebook. These efforts aimed to overcome previous outreach limitations and enhance visibility. The initial launch of Abhoy Mission's Instagram account was successful and reached over 20 followers within two days. The link to the website was added to the social media accounts. This helped followers and viewers to engage with the organization directly.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

To enable PwDs to lead a life of dignity requires a multi-pronged approach that tackles social barriers alongside practical solutions. Firstly, raising awareness within communities is crucial. Educational workshops and community outreach programs can help dispel myths and misconceptions about disabilities. Increasing access to mental health professionals and creating dedicated care facilities within a reasonable distance can provide much-needed diagnosis, treatment, and counseling services is crucial. This fosters a more inclusive environment where people with disabilities are seen as valued members of the community, not burdens.

Secondly, collaboration between local NGOs, government bodies, and social workers is essential. This collaboration can ensure these individuals have access to essential services like healthcare, education, and, most importantly, skills training tailored to their specific needs. It is important to note that mentally challenged individuals often possess hidden talents. Providing skill development programs tailored to their capabilities and potential, followed by supported employment opportunities in sheltered workshops, can boost their confidence, independence, and sense of purpose. Equipping PwDs with relevant skills empowers them to become financially independent and contribute to their households and the village economy. Many government schemes exist to support PwDs, but navigating the application process can be challenging. NGOs like Abhoy Mission can act as liaisons, helping individuals access these benefits and ensuring they reach the intended beneficiaries. Also, there is a lack of reliable data on the types and prevalence of disabilities in the region. The government can partner with NGOs for data collection and research initiatives to better understand the specific challenges faced by different disability groups.

Finally, promoting accessibility adjustments is key. Local government has to execute legislation mandating accessibility standards in public spaces and transportation, quotas for the employment of Divyangjans, and financial assistance for families caring for the same. To facilitate access, there is a need to build ramps in public buildings, ensure wider doorways, providing assistive devices like wheelchairs, crutches, hearing aids, etc, to improve their mobility, communication, and overall well-being. By creating a more accessible environment, we can empower people with disabilities to participate more actively in village life, fostering a sense of belonging and dignity.

10. CONCLUSION

It can be surmised from the above discussion that the PwDs in villages of Western Tripura face significant challenges due to limited accessibility and resources. Despite adversities, the resilience and determination exhibited by respondents like Sayan, Pranab, and others highlight the transformative impact of self-belief and family support in overcoming these challenges. To promote the social inclusion of PwDs, there is a need to create an effective support system for people with disabilities in Western Tripura by developing collaboration between the government and NGOs. The government, with its wider reach and resource allocation power, can mandate accessibility standards in public spaces and transportation. NGOs like Abhoy Mission can leverage the power of digital tools like social media and websites to address the needs of PwDs. Digital tools can also be used for fundraising campaigns, raising awareness about disability rights, and advocating for policy changes on a larger scale.

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Transcend Barriers: Stories of Transgender Entrepreneurs

Abstract

The Chapter examines the experiences of five transgender individuals who have established their own micro-enterprises in New Delhi. Despite facing significant personal and societal challenges, these entrepreneurs chased their dream of earning a dignified livelihood. The Chapter highlights the critical role of mentorship in supporting trans-entrepreneurs, providing them with guidance, resources, and encouragement to overcome business-related obstacles. The importance of equipping entrepreneurs with digital marketing skills and creating a supportive ecosystem to foster the growth of micro-enterprises is specifically emphasized. By prioritizing investments in education, skill development, and digital platforms, we can empower the transgender community and drive progress towards sustainable development goals. (This Chapter is based on Mr Harsh Bharadwaj, Ms. Himanshi Nasa, and Ms.Siya Paliwal's experiential learning through 'We Care: Civic Engagement' internship with Connecting Dreams Foundation in February 2024)

Keywords: *Transgender, Entrepreneurs, Digital Marketing, Sustainable Development Goals*

1. INTRODUCTION

Transgender individuals can be found in diverse cultures and societies worldwide, challenging traditional gender norms and expectations. Determining the exact number of transgender individuals worldwide is challenging due to varying legal definitions, social stigma, and underreporting in many regions. According to World Population Review, Germany and Sweden have the highest transgender populations (World Population Review, 2024). While some countries have made significant strides in legal recognition and protection for transgender rights, others continue to grapple with discrimination and violence against this community. The transgender experience is multifaceted, shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors, highlighting the need for greater understanding, acceptance, and equality on a global scale. Though Trans people have existed across all classes, races, and castes their recognition has always come at a cost (Outlook India, 2022). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aspire to create a just and equitable world for everyone. However, transgender individuals frequently encounter substantial obstacles that hinder their ability to lead a normal life (Rodrigues, 2023). From access to social equality, social rights, education, jobs, and so on, the trans community has been victim to the dichotomous attitude of society exhibited towards them (Divan et.al., 2016).

1.1 Indian Scenario

Accurately determining the number of transgender individuals in India remains a significant challenge. While the 2011 Census introduced a third gender category, its implementation was inconsistent, and many transgender people likely opted not to disclose their identity due to fear of discrimination. As a result, the official figure of 4,87,803 is widely considered to be a substantial undercount (PIB, 2019). Experts and activists believe the actual number of transgender people in India is considerably higher, emphasizing the need for more comprehensive and inclusive data collection methods. In India, transgender individuals have historically faced immense challenges. Excluded from mainstream society, they endure systemic discrimination in areas such as healthcare, education, employment, and housing. Stigma, violence, and social ostracism have forced many to live on the margins. Their voices have often been silenced, with limited representation in public discourse and decision-making processes.

According to Bhargava et al. (2024), “The progress of transgender rights in India has seen significant strides with milestones such as the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) judgment and the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2019.” The Act encompasses provisions for healthcare, education, skill development, housing, and other essential areas, aiming to improve the lives of the transgender community (Centre for Law & Policy Research, 2024). The NALSA judgment paved the way for the official recognition of a ‘third gender,’ catalyzing legislative and social reforms. To create a more equitable and accepting world for the transgender community, NGOs like Connecting Dreams play a pivotal role (NALSA V/S Union of India, 2014).

2. ABOUT CONNECTING DREAMS FOUNDATION

Connecting Dreams Foundation (CDF) is an organization dedicated to empowering youth to drive sustainable change. Founded in 2013, CDF focuses on advancing the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through entrepreneurial initiatives and youth engagement. With a reach of over 10 million students and 32,000 communities worldwide, CDF has significantly impacted the lives of 100 million people.

CDF’s core programs include the ‘Changemakers Lab’, ‘Global Changemaker Fellowship’, ‘Change Advocacy’, and ‘Changemakers Academy’. CDF has been a vocal advocate for marginalized communities, including transgender individuals. By addressing issues such as discrimination, lack of access to education, and economic inequality faced by the transgender community, CDF empowers individuals to overcome challenges and reach their full potential. Through initiatives like skill development workshops, mentorship programs, and awareness campaigns, CDF is working towards a society where transgender individuals are accepted, respected, and have equal opportunities (Connecting Dreams Foundation, 2021).

3. PROJECT ALLOCATED

Each We Care intern was responsible for mentoring and supporting two to three trans-entrepreneurs. They were expected to examine various business challenges faced by the entrepreneurs, including financial planning, branding, marketing, and operations. Based on these insights, they were expected to offer practical guidance to enable the entrepreneurs to overcome the same.

4. PROJECT EXECUTION

The We Care interns had two to three meetings with their assigned trans-entrepreneurs throughout the internship. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the entrepreneurs' challenges, interns conducted site visits to their workplace. Additionally, interns reviewed case studies and CDF's past magazines and records to gain a basic understanding of the business performance of the mentees allocated to them.

4.1 Piya Sharma

Entrepreneurial Journey

Piya's entrepreneurial journey began with her tailoring venture, specializing in women's suits and garments. However, her vision extended far beyond business. Through her NSD program, she created an empathetic environment for an education and skills training center, empowering marginalized communities with computer literacy and English language skills. Piya's aspirations went beyond clothing. She was sowing seeds of hope and opportunity for a better future.

Challenges Faced

Piya's path was fraught with challenges. While her business showed promise and growth, financial management, particularly pricing, proved to be a formidable hurdle. Balancing fair wages for employees with business sustainability was a delicate tightrope walk. Securing a steady stream of orders at reasonable prices was crucial for the survival and growth of her project.

Impact and Outcomes

Piya's business has had a profound impact, extending beyond financial success. By providing employment to four individuals in a safe and inclusive environment, she has empowered them to embrace their true selves. Her venture has become an educational platform, challenging stereotypes and addressing job discrimination within the transgender community. Piya's leadership has created a ripple effect, fostering social acceptance and breaking down biases.

Addressing the Digital Divide

Recognizing the importance of online visibility in today's world, the intern developed a website for Piya's business. A well-designed website is essential for expanding market reach, engaging customers, and driving business growth. By creating a visually appealing and informative platform,

interns aim to showcase Piya's offerings, build trust, and establish a strong brand identity.

The website will also serve as a storytelling tool, highlighting Piya's values and unique selling propositions. Additionally, e-commerce functionality, customer support channels, and data analytics will optimize business operations, enhance customer experience, and inform strategic decision-making.

4.2 Priyanka Sharma

Priyanka's journey

Priyanka Sharma, a trans women entrepreneur from Assam, has defied societal norms and established her tea-blending firm. Her journey began in Garima Greh, a shelter for the transgender community, where she nurtured her childhood passion for tea blending. Hailing from Assam, India's renowned tea-growing region, Priyanka, from a young age, was exposed to the art of tea blending. Through her meticulous experimentation, she cultivated an extraordinary repertoire of 250 unique tea blends.

Challenges Faced

Despite her talent, Priyanka encountered significant hurdles due to her gender identity and financial constraints. Even the simple act of registering her business proved challenging. She had limited funds to start and operate her business. Creating a successful brand was tough. Even with her efforts to make her brand appealing, 'Connecting Mitr' failed. Designing good packaging and managing logistics for 250 tea types was hard, too. She did not have much business knowledge, which made it more difficult to run her business.

Inputs Provided

After identifying the issues in branding, packaging, marketing, and product quality, the intern came up with a business plan for Priyanka. He suggested reducing the number of products from 250 to 50 to provide a stable and uniform product experience. He also proposed designing packaging that would be more visually appealing to Priyanka's brand. He also offered a digital marketing platform where Priyanka could showcase and sell her products online. He developed Instagram and social media handles to establish a strong social media presence.

Resolving the gaps

Priyanka recognized the power of digital marketing and leveraged platforms like Instagram to engage with customers and created compelling content. By developing a user-friendly website showcasing her products and enabling online purchases, she expanded her reach and unlocked new business opportunities. This digital-first approach allowed Priyanka to connect with a broader audience and fuel her business growth.

Future Aspirations

Priyanka envisions expanding her enterprise through a chain of tea and coffee shops and create employment opportunities for the transgender community. She wants to help her community on a larger scale by demonstrating a profound commitment to social entrepreneurship. Priyanka's story exemplifies how resilience and support can empower marginalized individuals to achieve their dreams.

4.3 Nazia

Journey of Nazia

Nazia, a transwoman from Samastipur District, Bihar, faced significant hardships due to her gender identity and societal rejection. Undeterred by adversity, Nazia relocated to Delhi during her seventh grade to reside with relatives and pursue her education. With the support of an NGO, she secured admission to Shaheed Rajguru College of Applied Sciences for Women, University of Delhi, where she earned a certification in Food Technology. Her coursework equipped her with the skills to produce jams and cookies. Seizing entrepreneurial opportunities, she began selling her homemade treats at college festivals, exhibitions, and market stalls. To ensure product quality and safety, she meticulously prepared her goods within the college's facilities, adhering to stringent laboratory testing standards.

Challenges Faced in Business

Due to Nazia's previous identity in her legal documents, she was unable to get 'Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)' registration. This limitation restricted her business expansion beyond exhibitions and college fests, significantly curtailing her growth potential.

Despite crafting high-quality products, Nazia encountered persistent challenges in generating a stable income. Inconsistent sales and a lack of robust financial tracking hampered her progress. Moreover, the absence of a strong brand identity hindered business growth. Her unique cookies, combining 30 per cent all-purpose flour and 70 per cent Bajra while adhering to stringent hygiene and quality protocols, were undoubtedly exceptional. However, these strengths alone proved insufficient to surmount the obstacles hindering her business.

Inputs Provided

The intern proposed Nazia to register her name under the sub-scheme of 'Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise (SMILE)', an initiative by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. This would provide her with a legal identity and facilitate obtaining the necessary FSSAI registration.

To maintain a systematic record of costs and revenues, the intern introduced Nazia to the 'Bhaikhata app', which has a simple interface for recording payables and receivables. To expand her market

presence, a comprehensive rebranding strategy was implemented, encompassing logo design, tagline creation, packaging enhancements, and business card development. Strategies were developed to boost her business growth, such as offering her products as gift hampers and charging a premium price. With these changes, Nazia set up a stall and earned over INR 3000 in revenue. Subsequently, she set up another stall and earned INR 20,000. The combination of financial discipline and a strong brand identity has instilled in Nazia the confidence to build a sustainable and thriving business.

Use of Social Media

Recognizing the power of digital platforms, a social media account and website were established for Nazia to expand her customer reach. This online presence served as a virtual storefront, showcasing her products to a wider audience. By effectively utilizing social media and creating a user-friendly website, Nazia bridged the digital divide, unlocking new business opportunities and driving growth.

4.3 Chitvan

Chitvan's Journey

As a transwoman, Himanshi, alias Chitvan, navigated a path fraught with challenges, including self-acceptance, health struggles, and the scars of past trauma. Fueled by these experiences, she embarked on a mission to empower marginalized communities, with a particular focus on menstrual health and LGBTQ+ rights. Partnering with Niveda Vidya Mandir, she established the 'Queer Education Initiative' to champion these critical causes. Despite initial hurdles, her organization gained traction with the support of HSBC and the Connecting Dreams Foundation. Expanding her impact, Chitvan conducted Gender Sensitization workshops for leading corporations such as Bain and Co., fostering a culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Through her powerful social media presence, she amplified her message on a global scale. Although Chitvan and her team were getting good engagement through their social media and college fests, it was still difficult for them to get sponsorship for their training events or workshops, which could generate some income.

Problems Faced by Chitvan

Chitvan faced several challenges in her mission. Securing sponsorships was difficult, and expanding her organization's reach required persistent effort.

Inputs Provided

To amplify Chitvan's impact and secure sponsorships, a strategic approach to outreach and partnerships was implemented. The intern developed a targeted email campaign to engage potential corporate sponsors, resulting in increased interest and support for Chitvan's initiatives. By

optimizing Chitvan's LinkedIn profile, the intern expanded her professional network and connected with DEI leaders across diverse industries. A comprehensive Pitch Plan and Introduction Deck were created to effectively communicate Chitvan's message for gender sensitization. To ensure the project's financial stability, detailed financial projections were developed. These strategic initiatives collectively propelled Chitvan's work to new heights.

Use of Digital Media

By effectively bridging the digital divide, Chitvan expanded her reach, amplifying her advocacy for inclusivity and equity. Her tireless efforts continue to inspire positive change and shape a more equitable society.

4.5 Rohan

Rohan is a 20-year-old artist who has always believed that life is a canvas meant to be filled with vibrant colours. His passion for painting ignited at a young age. However, Rohan's journey was marked by challenges, particularly as he came to terms with his LGBTQIA+ identity at 14. The loss of parental support during this time was a significant setback. He came to Delhi to pursue his undergraduate studies at the University of Delhi. Undeterred by adversity, Rohan's love for art remained steadfast. Through perseverance and raw talent, he eventually found a supportive community (Connecting Dreams Foundation) that recognized his potential, empowering him to pursue his artistic dreams.

Rohan's Journey

Rohan's artistic journey took a turn when he transformed his passion into a business venture. After facing financial challenges due to a loss of parental support, he continued his education through open board education and enrolled at Shankyart Art Studio in Delhi. Recognizing Rohan's dedication, mentor Mr. Shashank provided a tuition concession, fostering his artistic growth. In 2021, Rohan enhanced his communication skills through spoken English classes at the Nazariya Foundation and subsequently joined the Connecting Dreams Foundation's Business Adda Fellowship.

With a seed capital of Rs 50,000, Rohan established Artist Abode, his micro-enterprise, to sell his paintings. Besides, he showcases his paintings at various offline exhibitions/stalls and takes orders via social media such as Instagram and WhatsApp.

Rohan was the sole artist at Artist Abode. His charcoal paintings received praise and appreciation from buyers and the public. His participation in exhibitions hosted by major organizations like Microsoft, Sunlife, HSBC, and IWEI across India further elevated his profile. As his business expanded, Rohan recognized the value of collaboration and partnered with Rupesh, another LGBTQIA+ artist.

Challenges Faced in Business

Rohan's business faced multiple challenges. His brand struggled with low visibility and engagement on social media, which hindered his ability to reach potential customers. High costs of exhibition booth space and shipping issues like damaged frames and delayed deliveries tarnished the brand's reputation, reduced customer satisfaction, and increased his financial difficulties.

Inputs Provided

A comprehensive social media plan was developed. The WhatsApp channel and website were created to enhance Rohan's direct communication with potential customers, display his art, and take orders. A list of events and festivals in Delhi was developed so Rohan could set up his stalls. Through diligent cold calls and email outreach, Rohan secured two stalls at a college festival and another at Connaught Place.

Future Opportunities

Recognizing the digital age's impact on the art world, the intern spearheaded the development of a robust online platform for Artists Abode. A captivating website was created to display Rohan and Rupesh's art to a global audience, expanding their reach beyond traditional exhibitions. This digital strategy proved instrumental in cultivating a broader customer base and unlocking new growth opportunities. By bridging the digital divide, Artists Abode can connect with art enthusiasts globally, enhance their visibility, and secure a promising future for the business.

5. DISCUSSION

The case studies of Piya, Priyanka, Nazia, Chitvan, and Rohan offer compelling narratives of transgender individuals who have successfully navigated significant personal and societal challenges to establish thriving businesses. These entrepreneurs exemplify resilience, determination, and a strong entrepreneurial spirit.

The cases underscore the importance of education and skill development in fostering entrepreneurship. Priyanka's knowledge of tea blending, Nazia's food technology certification, and Rohan's artistic talent provided them with a strong foundation for their businesses. Access to quality education and vocational training can be instrumental in empowering transgender individuals to become economically independent and contribute to the workforce. Chitvan's work in menstrual health and LGBTQ+ rights demonstrates the power of business as a force for good. Priyanka's aspiration to create employment opportunities for the transgender community reflects a similar commitment to social change.

A common thread among these individuals is the adversity they faced due to their gender identity. From societal discrimination to financial constraints, they encountered numerous obstacles. However, their passion and drive propelled them forward, demonstrating the power of the human

spirit in overcoming adversity. These case studies highlight the critical role of support systems, such as NGOs like CDF and mentors, in empowering marginalized individuals to achieve their goals.

5.1 Mentorship

The involvement of mentors played a crucial role in the success of these micro-entrepreneurs. By providing business guidance, financial management support, and digital marketing expertise, mentors helped these individuals overcome challenges and achieve their goals. By involving students in real-world business projects, universities can provide valuable learning experiences while supporting the growth of social enterprises.

5.2 Digital Platforms

The case studies demonstrate that the adoption of digital technologies was instrumental in the growth of these micro-enterprises. Digital marketing enabled these micro-entrepreneurs to reach a wider audience, build customer relationships, and enhance their brand. This underscores the critical role of digital literacy and technology access in empowering marginalized entrepreneurs. Integrating digital tools like online booking systems and e-commerce platforms is essential for the sustained growth and competitiveness of small businesses.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, recommendations were provided;

The transgender community faces challenges because of their gender identity. Support can be provided to address this challenge. ‘The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment’ provides a platform to apply for transgender certificates and identity cards, which helps to avail mandatory documents and welfare provided under ‘Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise (SMILE)’ Scheme.

LGBTQ+ face challenges, including discrimination, limited education, limited opportunities, stigma, etc. Access to quality education and skill development training is important. Assisting them in enrolling in skill development and educational programs such as SMILE and Prayatna would help them improve their skills, enable them to achieve financial independence, and create new opportunities. Continuous support and mentorship in designing business plans, financial management, and marketing would benefit trans entrepreneurs to come up with new ideas, sustain their businesses, and address the limitations they are facing.

An active social media presence plays an important role in the entrepreneurial journey. Digital literacy and technical skills will enable these entrepreneurs to increase their online presence to improve networking, brand building, customer relationships, generating revenue, and marketing.

7. CONCLUSION

Piya, Priyanka, Nazia, Chitvan, and Rohan are praiseworthy transgender micro-entrepreneurs who, despite facing significant challenges related to their gender identity, are trying to sustain themselves. Their ventures have not only contributed to the transgender community but have also demonstrated the potential for trans-entrepreneurs to thrive. The cases illustrate the power of providing mentorship and ecosystem support in strengthening the entrepreneurial capacities of the trans-entrepreneurs. By investing in education, skill development, and digital platforms, we can empower more transgender individuals to become entrepreneurs, foster inclusion, and create a just and equitable world for everyone.

By providing education, skill development, and digital platforms, we can empower more transgender individuals to start their own businesses, fostering social change and contributing to decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and reducing inequalities (SDG 10). Organizations like Connecting Dreams Foundation, which offer support, guidance, and leadership training, play a crucial role in helping trans-entrepreneurs achieve their goals.

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From Faith to Fortune: Exploring Hospitality Careers in Ayodhya

Abstract

Tourism and hospitality are rapidly expanding sectors driving the global economy. India, with its rich cultural tapestry and diverse landscapes, is a prime beneficiary. Uttar Pradesh, home to iconic sites like Ayodhya and Varanasi, is witnessing a surge in tourist arrivals. However, despite growing interest, many young people in Ayodhya remain unaware of the abundant career opportunities within the hospitality industry.

A survey conducted on behalf of the Pakka Foundation underscores this knowledge gap. To harness the region's potential, it is imperative to enhance awareness through digital platforms, schools, and community outreach. Skill-based workshops, seminars, and training programs in areas like communication and customer service too are essential. Providing personalized support and fostering local job creation can further incentivize youth to pursue hospitality careers. (This Chapter is based on Ms. Vaishnavi Agrawal's experiential learning through the 'We Care: Civic Engagement' internship with Pakka Foundation in February 2024.)

Keywords: Hospitality, Employment, Youth, Skill Development

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Sudha et al. (2023), tourism and hospitality are interdependent and the world's fastest and largest-growing industries. Tourism involves traveling for leisure, business, or other purposes, including sightseeing, cultural events, and recreational activities. It significantly contributes to the global economy by creating jobs, fostering cultural exchange, and generating revenue for destinations. Meanwhile, hospitality provides services like accommodations, food, and beverages. It emphasizes creating a welcoming and comfortable environment for guests (Chechi, 2023). Kumar (2020), states that tourism is an important economic factor for many countries across the world. Tourism is a source of revenue and foreign exchange, and tourism contributes significantly to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Tourism has contributed six per cent of world output, one in 15 jobs, and seven per cent of capital investment in the last two decades. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicts that tourism can double its contribution, increase job numbers by 33 per cent, and boost capital investment by 80 per cent. India's unique culture and diverse state-specific niches make

it an attractive industry. The government has established ‘Institutes of Hospitality Management (IHMs)’ and ‘Institutes of Tourism Management (ITTMs)’ to address manpower demands in catering and hotels. These institutions instill values and culture in Indian hospitality graduates, providing a broader horizon for global employment. However, there is a need for educational and administrative reforms in hospitality institutes, teaching, and research (Kumar, 2018).

Consumer demands, competition, and smaller management teams have made hospitality professionals find new ways to handle these issues. Despite the recession, the hospitality industry has grown because of strong local demand. Cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Delhi have bounced back, with hotel rates staying high. If this trend continues, demand might exceed supply, making hotel rooms more expensive for consumers. Jaideep Dang from JLL says that with strong domestic demand and the possible return of international travelers, demand will likely outpace supply, especially in Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad, where new hotels should be easily filled over the next five years (Khosla, 2022).

1.1 Scenario in India

India’s tourism industry is a bustling giant with a rich history and a promising future. While boasting the 8th highest number of visitors in Asia and the Pacific, the massive domestic travel market forms the backbone of Indian tourism. The rich cultural and historical legacy, diverse ecology, varied terrains, and beautiful natural landscapes have made India a highly sought-after travel destination worldwide. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) Economic Impact 2023 report, India’s Travel and Tourism GDP contribution grew by 5.9 per cent. In 2024, India was ranked 39th out of 117 countries by the World Economic Forum’s Travel & Tourism Development Index. There is no doubt that the Indian tourism and hospitality industry is emerging as one of the key drivers of growth among the services sector in India (The Indian Express, 2024). The sector is expected to record an annual growth of seven per cent per annum. The government has taken steps to boost investments in facilitating spiritual tourism, with states like Uttarakhand, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh developing tourist circuits and enhancing infrastructure for pilgrims (IBEF, 2024).

However, the tourism sector still faces numerous external challenges. These include rising macroeconomic, geopolitical, and environmental risks. Additionally, ongoing labour shortages, inadequate air route capacity, capital investment, productivity, and other supply factors have not kept pace with growing demand (Jain, 2024).

1.2 Scenario in Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh’s tourism industry is experiencing a positive surge. The state government actively promotes various sectors, aiming to attract a wider range of domestic and international tourists. This focus, coupled with Uttar Pradesh’s inherent appeal, has led to a significant rise in visitor

numbers. In 2023, Uttar Pradesh recorded strong tourism activities with 63.01 million visitors. Ayodhya and Varanasi were major attractions, drawing 129.4 million and 53.94 million tourists, respectively. Most tourists were domestic, with international visitors primarily in Ayodhya and Gorakhpur. This data highlights Uttar Pradesh's status as a leading tourist destination in India, with seasonal peaks in Varanasi in August and Prayagraj in January (Department of Tourism, Uttar Pradesh, 2024). This growth is expected to continue as the government invests in infrastructure and promotes Uttar Pradesh's unique blend of historical wonders, spiritual significance, and natural beauty. Specifically, Ayodhya is witnessing a meteoric rise as a major tourist center. The grand opening of the Ram Mandir has ignited a surge in religious tourism, with estimates predicting over 50 million visitors annually. This influx is transforming the city. This development, coupled with the ongoing beautification efforts, is creating a boom in hospitality services, with new hotels and tourist facilities catering to the growing demand. With its spiritual significance, cultural vibrancy, and ongoing development, Ayodhya is poised to become a premier tourist destination in India. As Ayodhya soars as a major tourist hub, skill development becomes crucial for its workforce to cater to the influx of visitors. In this context, NGOs like the Pakka Foundation play a crucial role.

2. ABOUT PAKKA FOUNDATION

Pakka Foundation, founded in 2006, is the CSR arm of Pakka Limited. The Foundation works towards a vision of a better India by fostering a skilled workforce, environmental responsibility, and a path to a better life for all. Their focus areas encompass education, skill development, employment, and environmental projects. Pakka Foundation's Pakka Skills program is a beacon of hope for young people in Ayodhya, India, transforming lives by providing transformative skill development opportunities. The skill program is managed by a dedicated team of 35 teaching staff and five non-teaching staff. With over 240 students enrolled in 2023, including 18 girls, the program boasts a remarkable 100 per cent placement rate, empowering graduates to secure fulfilling careers. Pakka Skills goes beyond traditional classroom learning, immersing students in practical experiences through workshops, industry visits, and guest lectures. Collaborations with industry leaders like Key Bouvet, Khanna Paper Mill, and Volvo Trucks provide invaluable exposure to real-world scenarios and potential employers. This comprehensive approach ensures graduates are equipped with not just technical skills but also industry knowledge and professional soft skills (Pakka Foundation, 2024).

3. PROJECT ALLOCATED

Pakka Foundation launched programs focused on providing essential job training in the hospitality sector to support the local community in tapping into these opportunities. These programs aimed to equip individuals with the skills needed to excel in various roles within the industry. The intern

was asked to conduct a ‘Skill Need-Gap Analysis for Hospitality among the Youth of Ayodhya’ by using a survey method to assess the needs, demands, and skill gaps of local youth regarding Ayodhya’s booming hospitality industry.

4. OBJECTIVE OF THE SURVEY

- To analyze the awareness level of hospitality and job opportunities among Ayodhya’s youth.
- To identify the career aspirations and preferred work styles of young people interested in the hospitality sector.
- To assess the current skill levels of youth compared to the demands of hospitality jobs.
- To identify specific skill gaps in communication, customer service, housekeeping, food & beverage, and other relevant areas.
- To recommend strategies for addressing the identified skill gaps and preparing youth for successful careers in hospitality.

5. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study involved surveys and focus group discussions to understand the skill gaps and career goals of young people in Ayodhya interested in hospitality. The survey targeted youth aged 18-25 and collected 126 responses through random sampling to ensure diverse representation. Data was gathered using online surveys and paper surveys in colleges and community centers. Assistance was taken from trained enumerators to provide accurate responses. The structured questionnaire was developed based on awareness of hospitality careers, career goals, education levels, skill gaps, and training needs. Focus group discussions with smaller groups allowed for deeper exploration of themes from the survey. Quantitative data was analyzed with JMP statistical software, while qualitative data was reviewed for key themes. Combining data from various sources ensured a thorough and accurate analysis.

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Respondents Profile

Data from 126 respondents showed there were 113 males and 13 females. All respondents had completed their XII grade and enrolled in Trade-Based Courses, such as electrician, welder, and Engineering - Technology-Based Courses, such as solar power engineer and turbine operator.

Fig 1 Familiarity: The Hospitality Sector

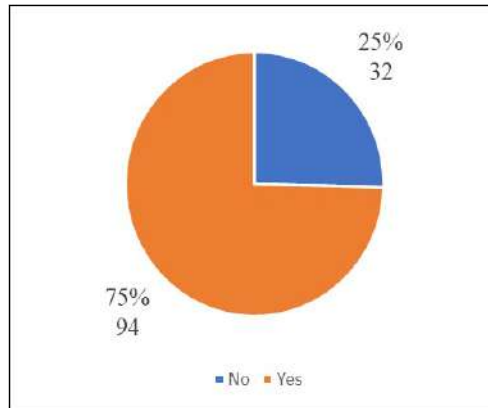
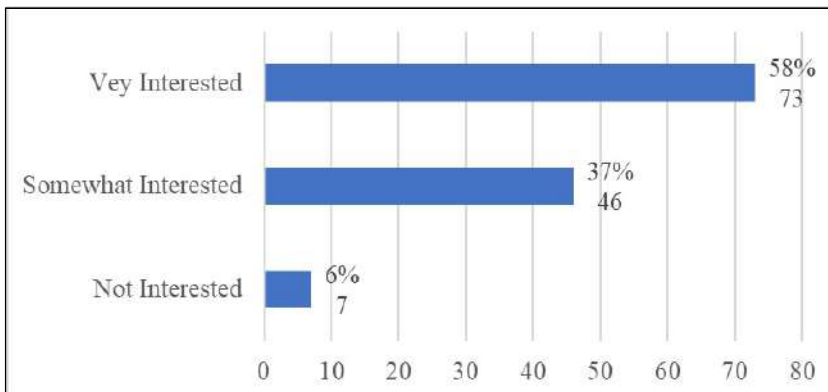


Fig 1 indicates that 25 per cent of respondents lacked familiarity with the hospitality sector. Respondents were unaware of the various career paths and job opportunities available in the hospitality industry. Seventy-five per cent were familiar with the sector but expressed a lack of information regarding skills required to work in the hospitality sector. Besides, a few were not interested in pursuing a career in hospitality.

6.2 Careers and Work Preferences

Fig. 2 shows that 58 per cent of the respondents were interested in careers related to hotels, travel, or customer service.

Fig. 2 Interest in Hospitality Sector

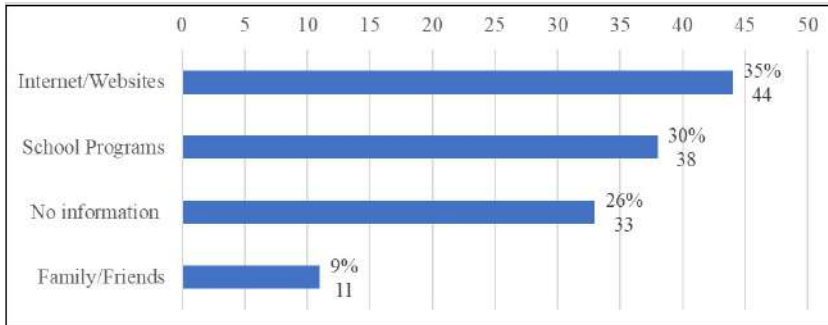


The survey and FGD indicated that the respondents had a moderate interest in hospitality careers; they were influenced by awareness of the booming industry. Although they were aware of the industry, they did not understand the career options and potential within its various segments.

6.3 Information Sources

The data from Fig 3 reveals that the primary source of information about the hospitality sector for respondents was through the internet, accounting for 35 per cent of responses. School programs followed closely at 30 per cent, indicating the importance of educational institutions in informing students about the industry.

Fig 3 Information Sources

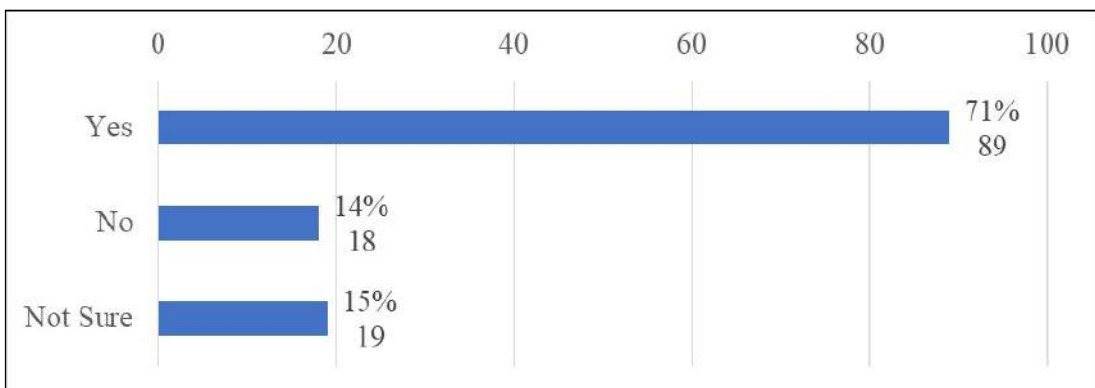


Interestingly, only nine per cent of respondents sought information from family or friends, suggesting a limited role for social networks in this context. A concerning 26 per cent of respondents reported having no information about the hospitality sector, highlighting a gap in awareness and outreach efforts.

6.4 Awareness: Potential Job Opportunities

Data presented in Fig 4 reveals a generally optimistic outlook on potential job opportunities in Ayodhya, with 71 per cent of respondents expressing belief in their existence. However, a significant minority of 14 per cent hold a contrary view, suggesting a disparity in perceptions.

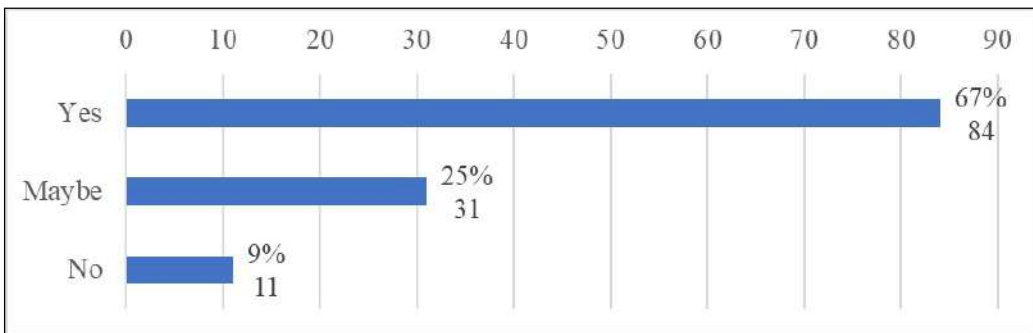
Fig 4 Awareness of Potential Job Opportunities in Ayodhya



The remaining 15 per cent expressing uncertainty indicates a need for further exploration of factors influencing these varying perspectives. Respondents were aware of the various jobs in the hospitality sector. They mentioned receptionists, security personnel, managers, event managers, green housekeeping staff, chefs, waiters, kitchen assistants, multilingual tour guides, sustainable travel coordinators, hybrid vehicle technicians, chefs, waiters, kitchen assistants, drivers, and tour operators as potential jobs in the hospitality sector.

6.5 Need Information: Career Opportunities

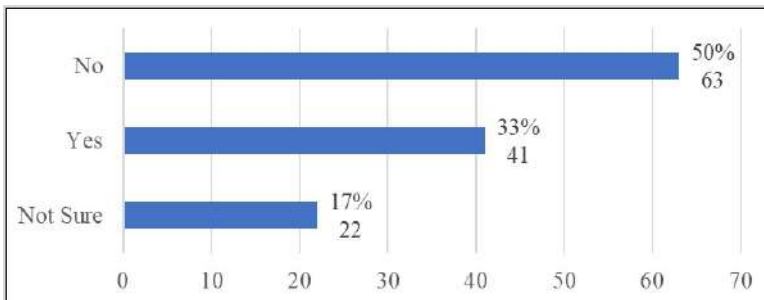
Fig 5 Need for More Information



As per information displayed in Fig 5, 67 per cent of respondents expressed a strong desire for more information about the hospitality sector. While 25 per cent were uncertain, only nine per cent explicitly stated they did not need additional information. These findings suggest a significant opportunity to provide further insights into the hospitality industry, potentially through educational programs, workshops, or online resources. Addressing the needs of the 25 per cent who are unsure may require more targeted communication to clarify the benefits of additional information.

6.6 Initiative Support

Fig 6 Initiative Support in the Hospitality Industry



The data reveals a significant level of uncertainty regarding the implementation of initiatives, with 50 per cent of respondents indicating ‘no’ and 17 per cent expressing uncertainty. While 33 per cent support the idea of initiatives, the overall picture suggests a considerable challenge in gaining widespread acceptance or understanding of their necessity. This indicates a need for more comprehensive communication and potentially targeted campaigns to address the concerns and doubts raised by respondents.

6.7 Demands and Skills of the Hospitality Sector

Discussions with respondents demonstrated a basic understanding of the hospitality industry’s skill requirements, citing technical proficiencies in housekeeping, food preparation, and software applications, alongside soft skills like customer service and adaptability. Despite expressed interest in hospitality careers, a significant skills gap was evident. A prevalent misconception equated hospitality primarily with waitressing and cooking, while many exhibited an inclination towards technical fields like electric vehicle repair or solar power installation. While most possessed basic digital literacy, they recognized the need for specialized training to align their skill sets with the industry’s demands.

6.8 Gaps: Opportunities and Skills

Interactions further revealed respondents growing interest in exploring alternative career paths due to perceived saturation in their current fields. Skill gaps in essential areas like communication, customer service, and hospitality operations were evident. Additionally, a lack of familiarity with specific role demands, such as language proficiency and management responsibilities, hindered career aspirations. External factors, including limited family support and reluctance to relocate, further impact potential employment in the hospitality sector. Despite awareness of industry growth, the respondents voiced concerns about job availability, salary levels, and career advancement prospects. Incentives and precise career trajectories were identified as crucial factors in attracting and retaining talent within the hospitality industry.

7. DISCUSSION

Youth in Ayodhya exhibit limited understanding of the hospitality industry despite its growth potential. The findings from this study illuminate a significant disconnect between the potential of the youth and the opportunities offered by the hospitality sector. While there is a general awareness of the industry’s growth, a substantial knowledge gap persists regarding its diverse career paths, requisite skills, and potential rewards. Many respondents expressed a keen interest in hospitality, yet this enthusiasm is often tempered by a lack of clarity about the industry’s inner workings. This suggests a critical need to enhance information dissemination and career guidance.

A deeper analysis reveals that the youth’s perception of hospitality is often limited to stereotypical

roles. There's a misconception that the sector primarily comprises entry-level positions with restricted growth prospects. This narrow viewpoint was due to a lack of local role models and success stories within the local community. There is a need to highlight diverse career paths in the hospitality industry, ranging from culinary arts and event management to hotel administration and tourism development.

Skill development emerges as another crucial area of focus. The mismatch between the youth's skill set and the industry's demands is evident. While foundational skills like communication and interpersonal abilities are valued, specialized training in areas such as hospitality operations, customer service, and food and beverage management is essential. To bridge this gap, vocational training programs, apprenticeships, and industry certifications can be instrumental.

Leveraging local skills and resources can create unique hospitality niches. To effectively address these challenges, accurate information dissemination is paramount. The internet, being the primary information source, must be utilized to provide comprehensive details about the industry, career paths, and skill requirements. Additionally, schools and educational institutions should integrate hospitality education into their curriculum. The significant number of respondents lacking knowledge about the sector highlights the urgent need for increased outreach efforts through these channels.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of creating a supportive ecosystem for young people entering the hospitality industry. This involves fostering a positive image of the sector, addressing concerns about work-life balance, and providing opportunities for career advancement. By creating a conducive environment, it is possible to attract and retain talent within the industry.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

A multi-pronged strategy is essential to effectively address the identified knowledge gap and skill mismatch among the youth in Ayodhya. Increasing awareness about the hospitality industry's diverse career paths and growth potential is paramount. Leveraging online platforms, schools, and community events can significantly enhance knowledge dissemination. By providing detailed information about job roles, skill requirements, and career progression, it's possible to dispel misconceptions and generate genuine interest in the sector.

Skill development is equally crucial. Targeted training programs focusing on communication, customer service, and industry-specific skills can empower youth to excel in hospitality roles. Moreover, creating clear pathways for career advancement, coupled with mentorship and personalized support, can foster a sense of optimism among those considering a career in the industry.

Strategic collaborations are vital to maximize the impact of these initiatives. Partnering with the Uttar Pradesh Skill Development Mission can leverage existing resources and expertise. The anticipated surge in job opportunities in Ayodhya and neighbouring cities presents a unique opportunity to align training programs with industry demands. By creating local job opportunities and emphasizing the potential for career growth within the region, it's possible to inspire young people to explore hospitality as a viable career path.

While the Pakka Foundation may not have a direct presence in the hospitality sector, its role in creating awareness and facilitating skill development can be instrumental in supporting the region's economic growth. By working closely with government agencies, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions, a comprehensive ecosystem can be developed to nurture hospitality talent in Ayodhya.

9. CONCLUSION

It can be surmised from the above discussion that there is significant potential for youth employment in the hospitality sector in Ayodhya. However, the current landscape is characterized by a knowledge gap, skill mismatch, and limited career guidance. To capitalize on this opportunity, a multifaceted approach is essential. Addressing the youth's perceptions and aspirations requires a comprehensive strategy that combines education, training, and mentorship. By showcasing the diverse and rewarding career paths within the hospitality industry and by providing the necessary skills and support, Ayodhya can cultivate a skilled and motivated workforce. Ultimately, this investment in the youth will not only benefit the hospitality sector but also contribute to the overall economic growth of the region.

While challenges persist, the potential for transformation is evident. With focused efforts and strategic partnerships, Ayodhya can position itself as a hub for hospitality excellence and youth employment.

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Micro-Level Analysis of Social Security Schemes: Case of Jamshedpur and Dhanbad

Abstract

This Chapter investigates the socioeconomic circumstances of marginalized groups in Jamshedpur and Dhanbad, with a particular emphasis on their access to social security programs. Data collected from nine bastis in Jamshedpur and five in Dhanbad reveals significant challenges, including poverty, child labour, and limited education. Despite widespread coverage of some schemes like Aadhaar and Voter ID, disparities persist in crucial areas such as healthcare, labour welfare, and education-related programs. The Chapter reveals low penetration of schemes like Ayushman Bharat, Labour Card, and Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana, highlighting the need for specific interventions to improve its accessibility. Recommendations for improving the same include enhancing awareness, simplifying procedures, strengthening infrastructure, improving governance, and facilitating collaborative efforts between government agencies and NGOs. (This Chapter is based on Mr. Akash Kumar, Mr. Aman Kedia, Mr. Atul Singh, Mr. Harsh Prateek, Ms. Harshita Agarwal, and Mr. Naman Kumar Thakur's experiential learning through 'We Care: Civic Engagement' internship with Adarsh Seva Sansthan in February 2024.)

Keywords: Social Security Schemes, Marginalized Communities, NGO- Government Partnership

1. INTRODUCTION

India is a country with a population of 1.45 billion people. According to the World Bank Group, the international poverty line is being updated from \$1.90 to \$2.15 per person per day (World Bank, 2022). In India, 54.88 per cent of the population is below the poverty line (Central Bureau of Health Intelligence, 2024). Wealth inequality continues to plague India. According to the Constitution of India, it is the State's responsibility to address the needs of the poor, disabled, women, children, elderly, etc through various social security schemes. There are a range of social security schemes that address needs from pension provision to healthcare, such as 'Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana' for life insurance or the 'Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme' for senior citizens. Other schemes, like the 'National Health Insurance Scheme',

provide health coverage. The ‘National Social Assistance Programme’, targeted at low-income families, offers pensions for widows, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

According to ‘The World Social Protection Report 2020-22 published by ILO, only 24.4 per cent of Indians receive some sort of social protection benefit. This implies that national social security programs might not perfectly address the specific needs of every community. Hence, there is a need to carry out a local analysis to identify gaps in coverage, specific vulnerabilities in the local population (e.g., high informal sector employment), and areas where existing schemes fall short. NGOs like Adarsh Seva Sansthan are uniquely positioned to conduct comprehensive analyses of social security schemes at the grassroots level. Unlike governments, NGOs often have closer ties to communities, which allows them to gather in-depth information on how schemes function in practice.

2. ABOUT ADARSH SEVA SANSTHAN

Adarsh Seva Sansthan (ASES), founded in 1987 in Jamshedpur’s brick kiln communities, is dedicated to uplifting marginalized children. Initially focusing on education, nutrition, and healthcare for slum dwellers, ASES established a ‘Non-Formal Education School (NFES)’ in ‘Nursery Teaching Training (NTT)’ and expanded its reach to neighbouring areas. To foster community empowerment Bal Sangathan, Joint Basti Committees, and Mahila Mandals are set up through which interventions for women’s empowerment, environmental sustainability and education are implemented (Adarsh Seva Sansthan, 2023).

3. PROJECT ALLOCATED

To assess the efficacy of existing social security schemes in meeting the needs of the local communities, Adarsh Seva Sansthan collected data through a survey from nine bastis of Jamshedpur and five from Dhanbad (See Table 1).

Table 1 Bastis

| Sr. No. | Jamshedpur | Dhanbad |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Harijan Basti (Dhatkidhi) | Sabji Bagan Basti |
| 2. | Medical Basti | Bagdigi Basti |
| 3. | Baldev Basti -1 | Jealgora No-2 |
| 4. | Baldev Basti -2 | Khilan Dhouda |
| 5. | Parvati Ghat (Kalyan Basti) | Budhibandh |
| 6. | Parvati Ghat (Ashram Basti) | Sabji Bagan Basti |
| 7. | Harjan Basti, Burma Mines | |
| 8. | Hadia Basti, Burma Mines | |
| 9. | Beldigram-2 (Upar and Niche Tola) | |

Executives of Adarsh Seva Samiti collected data with regard to the possession of ‘Aadhaar Card’, ‘Ayushman Card PM Jan Arogya Yojana’, ‘Voter Card’, ‘Labour Card’, and enrolment in ‘Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana (SBPKSY)’, ‘Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana’, and ‘Public Distribution System (PDS)’. The We Care interns were requested to analyze the survey data and present the findings. The findings would be used to design interventions for better implementation of various social security schemes.

4. METHODOLOGY

The data from the survey forms was entered into Excel software, and descriptive statistics were used to describe the pattern of data spread. Field visits by the interns were conducted in the bastis of Jharkhand and Dhanbad to collect qualitative data.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Profile of the Bastis

Jamshedpur

Field visits and interactions with residents revealed that the nine bastis in Jamshedpur faced several common challenges, including child marriage, child labour, school dropouts, lack of parental education, and low awareness of child rights (See Table 2).

Table 2 Jamshedpur Bastis

| Basti | Community | Specific Problems |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Harijan Basti (Dhatkidhi) | Scheduled Caste | Poor financial management leads to debt Domestic violence due to addiction |
| Medical Basti | Scheduled Caste | Socioeconomic and educational conditions similar to Harijan Basti |
| Baldev Basti - 1 | Vaishnav, Muslim, Dalit | Addiction among parents Children unsupervised due to working parents |
| Baldev Basti - 2 | Vaishnav, Muslim, Lohra | Child addiction Elopement Most children unsupervised Below Poverty Line (BPL) families |
| Parvati Ghat (Kalyan Basti) | Dom | Lack of quality education Children working in nearby malls and market |
| Parvati Ghat (Ashram Basti) | Dalit or Adivasi | High illiteracy rate among elders Children victims of intoxication Lack of quality education and private tuition |

| Basti | Community | Specific Problems |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|--|
| Harjan Basti, Burma Mines | Mukhi, Dom | Gambling and intoxication are prevalent Socio-cultural norms promoting child marriage |
| Hadia Basti, Burma Mines | Scheduled Caste | Addiction to ganja and dendrite among youth and children Elopement |
| Beldigram-2 (Upar and Niche Tola) | Tribal | Distant high school affecting education Children working in garages, malls, and shops |

Source: Interns gathered the data.

Dhanbad

The five bastis in Dhanbad, too, indicated several common challenges similar to bastis in Jamshedpur (See Table 3).

Table 3 Dhanbad Bastis

| Dhanbad Basti | Community | Specific Problems |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Sabji Bagan Basti | Scheduled tribes and Muslim | Water scarcity impacting education Girls dropped out of school to take care of household duties. |
| Bagdigi Basti | Bhunia and Bauri communities | Low prioritization of education Boys working in coal mines due to limited income opportunities |
| Jealgora No-2 | Dalit and Muslim | Financial constraints limiting education beyond Xth grade Boys working in garages or repair shops |
| Khilan Dhouda | Muslim | Financial issues causing school dropout |
| Budhibandh | Muslim | Older children caring for siblings, affecting education Youth selling coal for income |

Source: Interns discussion with locals.

The discussions revealed that underprivileged communities in Jamshedpur and Dhanbad grapple with a multitude of social and economic issues. Addressing these challenges would require a comprehensive approach that prioritizes education, healthcare, and economic empowerment for the residents.

5.2 Social Security Schemes

Social security schemes are essential tools for uplifting the lives of the poor and marginalized sections of society. They provide a safety net, ensuring access to basic necessities and opportunities.

In the current study, social security schemes like Aadhaar Card, Ayushman Card PM Jan Arogya Yojana, Voter Card, Labour Card, Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana (SBPKSY), Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana, and Public Distribution System (PDS) were analyzed within the sampled bastis to prioritize education, healthcare, and economic empowerment.

5.3 Aadhaar Card

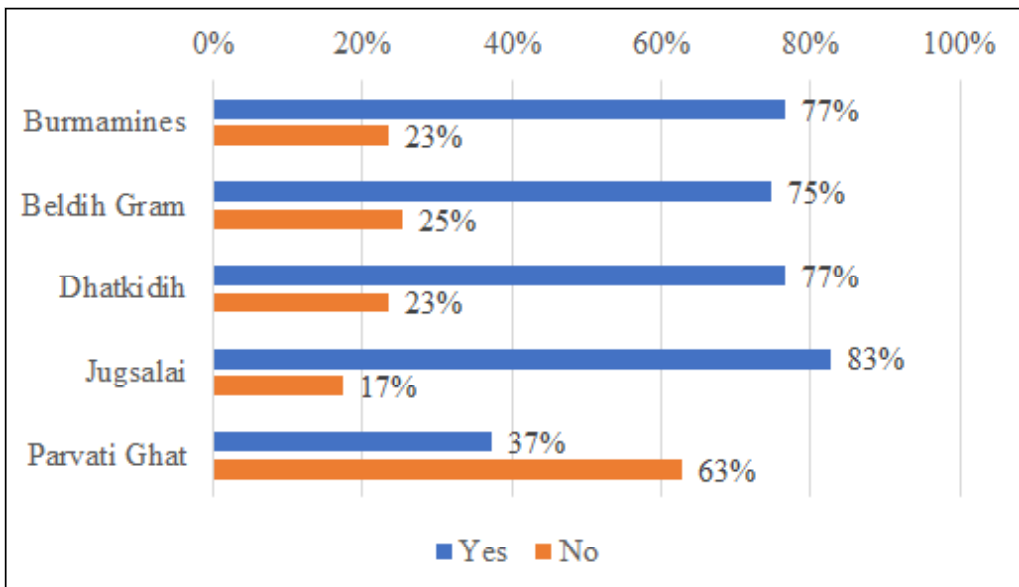
The Aadhaar card is a 12-digit individual identification number issued by the ‘Unique Identification Authority of India’ on behalf of the Government of India. The number serves as proof of identity for Indian citizens (Unique Identification Authority of India, 2024).

Aadhaar Card: Children

An Aadhaar card is crucial for children as it serves as their primary identity proof and is essential for school admissions, passports, and other official documents. It ensures access to government benefits like scholarships and healthcare and facilitates direct transfer of subsidies. In emergencies, Aadhaar aids in child identification and reunification. Additionally, it enables early financial inclusion through bank accounts, fostering savings habits.

To examine the number of children having Aadhaar Cards, data was collected from Burmamines, Beldih Gram, Dhatkidih, Jugsalai, and Parvati Ghat of the bastis in Jamshedpur.

Fig 1 Aadhaar Card for Children (Jamshedpur)



It can be inferred from Fig 1 that from 1757 children from the five Jamshedpur bastis, 72 per cent of children had Aadhaar cards. The presence of Aadhaar cards among children varies across different areas in Jamshedpur. There is a need to focus on increasing Aadhaar card coverage in areas like Parvati Ghat and Beldih Gram to ensure better access to government schemes and services for children. A parent of a 5-year-old from Parvati Ghat shared, “We don’t have time on weekdays due to work, and the Aadhaar Enrollment centers are closed on Sundays. We will get the Aadhaar when he needs it.”

In Dhanbad, data was collected from Bagdighi, Budhiband, Jealgoda, Khellon Dhoda, and Sabzi Bagan Jharia bastis (See Fig 2).

Fig 2 Aadhaar Card for Children (Dhanbad)

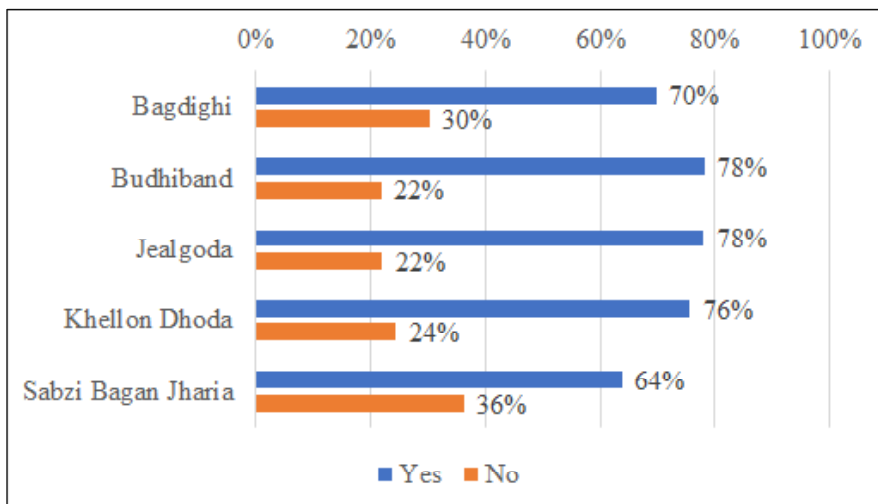
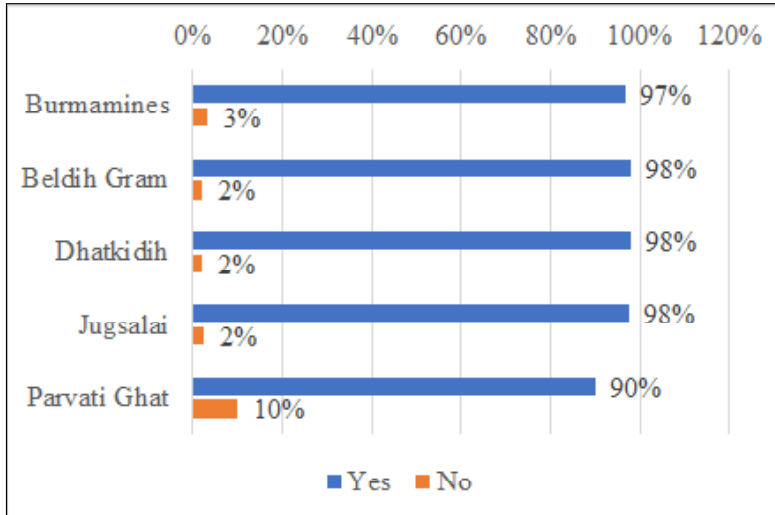


Fig 2 shows that of the 792 children across the five bastis of Dhanbad, 76 per cent had Aadhaar Cards. However, there is a noticeable variation in Aadhaar card possession across bastis. Interactions with the Anganwadi sevika revealed that parents were negligent to secure an Aadhaar Card for their children as they did not consider it as important. Many of them shared that they did not have sufficient documents to apply for an Aadhaar Card.

Aadhaar Card: Adults

Aadhaar has played a crucial role in financial inclusion, enabling millions of poor to access banking services and government welfare schemes. The card’s biometric data ensures secure identification, reducing fraudulent activities. Data was collected from 4130 adults from the five Jamshedpur bastis. As displayed in Fig 3, 97 per cent of the adults had Aadhaar Cards.

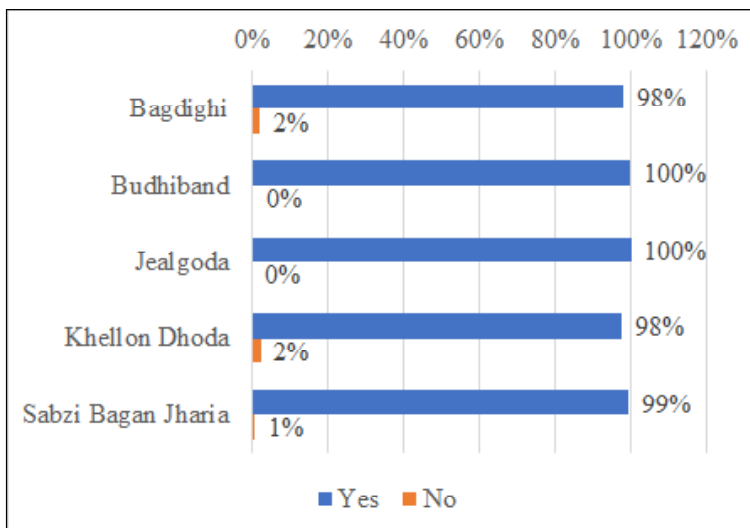
Fig 3 Aadhaar Card for Adults (Jamshedpur)



As listed in Fig 3, Dhatkidih, Beldih Gram, Jugsalai, and Burmamines have higher penetration rates compared to Parvati Ghat.

In the sampled Dhanbad bastis, data was collected from 1470 adults; these 99 per cent had Aadhaar cards. As shown in Fig 4, the overall Aadhaar coverage in the bastis is high, with minimal instances of residents lacking the card.

Fig 4 Aadhaar Card for Adults (Dhanbad)



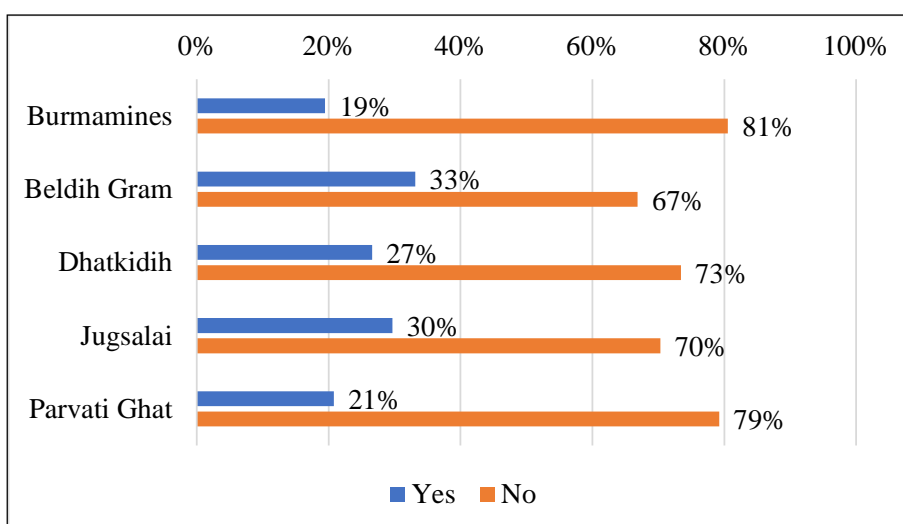
As presented in Fig 4, all respondents from Budhiband and Jealgoda reported having Aadhaar cards. In comparison, Khellon Dhoda and Sabzi Bagan Jharia exhibit slightly lower penetration.

5.4 Ayushman Bharat Card

Launched in 2018, ‘Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)’ is the Government of India’s flagship health insurance scheme. Central to this initiative is the Ayushman Bharat Card, serving as a digital identity granting beneficiaries cashless access to up to INR. 5 lakh in annual healthcare coverage. By shielding the most vulnerable from catastrophic medical expenses, AB-PMJAY has significantly reduced out-of-pocket costs, improved access to quality healthcare, and enhanced the overall well-being of India’s poorest citizens (National Health Authority, 2019).

Data was collected from 4130 residents in sampled Jamshedpur slums to assess the availability of Ayushman Bharat Card. Among them, 27 per cent reported possessing Ayushman Bharat Card.

Fig 5 Ayushman Bharat Card (Jamshedpur)



As shown in Fig 5, Burmamines has the highest percentage of receiving Ayushman Bharat Cards compared to Beldih Gram. The possession of the Ayushman Bharat Card across sampled bastis is uneven, suggesting disparities in accessing the card. An elderly couple from Parvati Ghat basti shared, “*The process seemed overwhelming, but I am deeply grateful to the NGO that assisted me in obtaining the Ayushman Bharat Card and accessing health benefits*”.

In the case of Dhanbad, data was collected from 1470 respondents; From these, 35 per cent of the respondents reported receiving Ayushman Bharat Card.

Fig 6 Ayushman Bharat Card (Dhanbad)

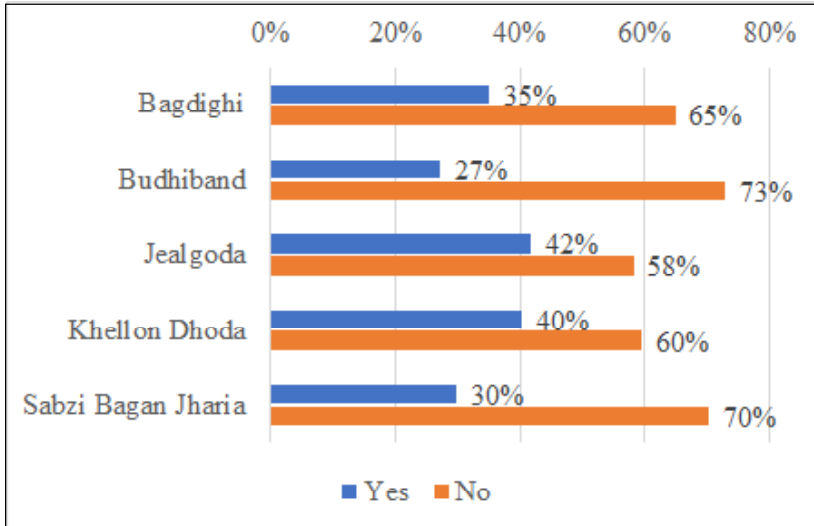


Fig 6 indicates Jealgoda has the highest penetration, with 42 per cent of respondents receiving the cards, while Budhiband shows only 27 per cent. The remaining bastis exhibit moderate penetration rates, ranging from 30 per cent to 40 per cent. This suggests varying levels of accessibility of Ayushman Bharat cards across different bastis of Dhanbad.

5.5 Voter Card

The Voter ID Card is mainly used as a form of identification for Indian citizens when voting in municipal, State, and national elections. It is provided to eligible citizens aged 18 and above and residing in the respective constituency. Additionally, it is used as a means of proving identity, address, and age for various other purposes, such as purchasing a SIM card for a mobile phone (Saumya, 2024).

Data was collected from 4130 respondents from the sampled bastis of Janshedpur to examine the possession of voter cards. It was interesting to note that 79 per cent have Voter Cards.

Fig 7 indicates that Jugsalai has the highest percentage of Voter Card holders. In comparison, Dhatkidih, followed by Parvati Ghat, had a lower percentage of Voter Card holders.

From the 1470 respondents in Dhanbad, 80 per cent had Voter Cards.

Fig 7 Voter Card (Jamshedpur)

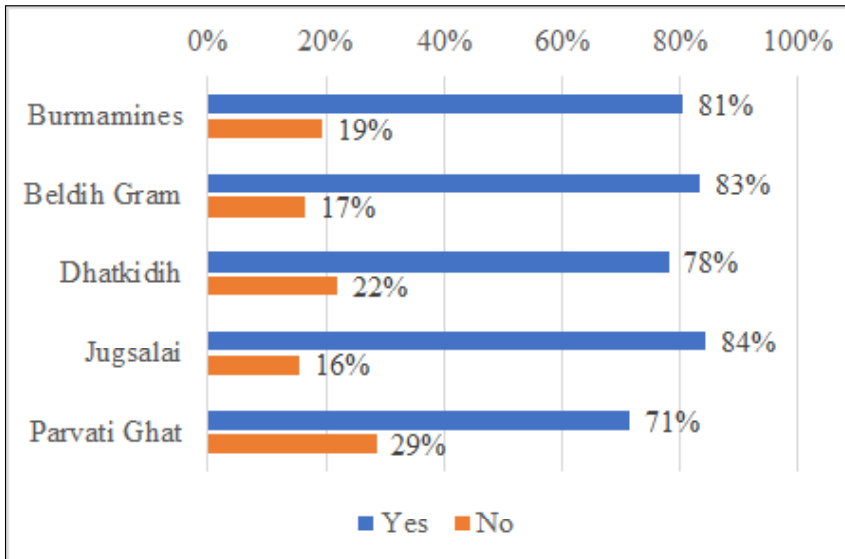


Fig 8 Voter Card (Dhanbad)

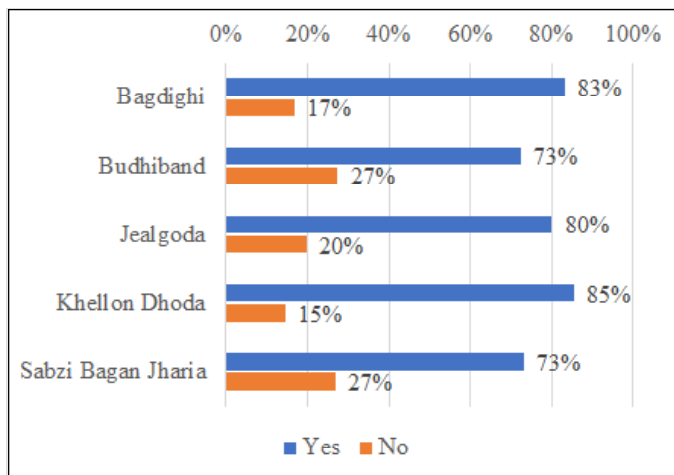


Fig 8 highlights that there is a high level of possession of Voter Cards in the Khellon Dhoda and Begdighi areas. But bastis like Bagdighi, Jealgoda, in Dhanbad, and Beldih Gram, Jugsalai in Jamshedpur require awareness campaigns and more facilities to facilitate voter card enrollment.

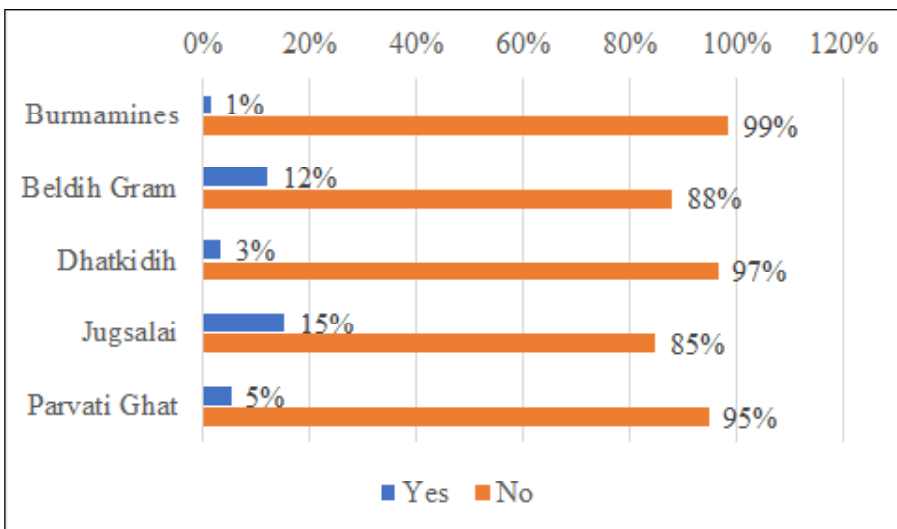
5.6 Labour Card

A Labour Card is an important identification document for workers. With this card, they get access to social welfare schemes, legal protection, and other benefits. The following Labour Cards were identified in the analysis. For those working in the unorganized sector, Labour Cards offers a crucial safety net. There are various types of Labour Cards, such as ‘Building and Other Construction Worker (BOCW) Card’, ‘Unorganized Worker Identification (UW-ID) Card’, ‘Mine Welfare Card’, ‘Migrant Worker Card’, and ‘Skill Card’.

Labour Cards serve as an identity and grant access to essential government welfare programs such as healthcare, insurance, and financial aid. By formalizing the workforce and establishing a comprehensive database, the Labour Cards empower workers, safeguarding their rights and paving the way for a more secure and dignified livelihood (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2024).

To determine the prevalence of Labour Cards among residents in the sampled bastis, data from 4130 respondents were analyzed. Figure 9 indicates that a mere six per cent of respondents in sampled bastis of Jamshedpur possessed a Labour Card.

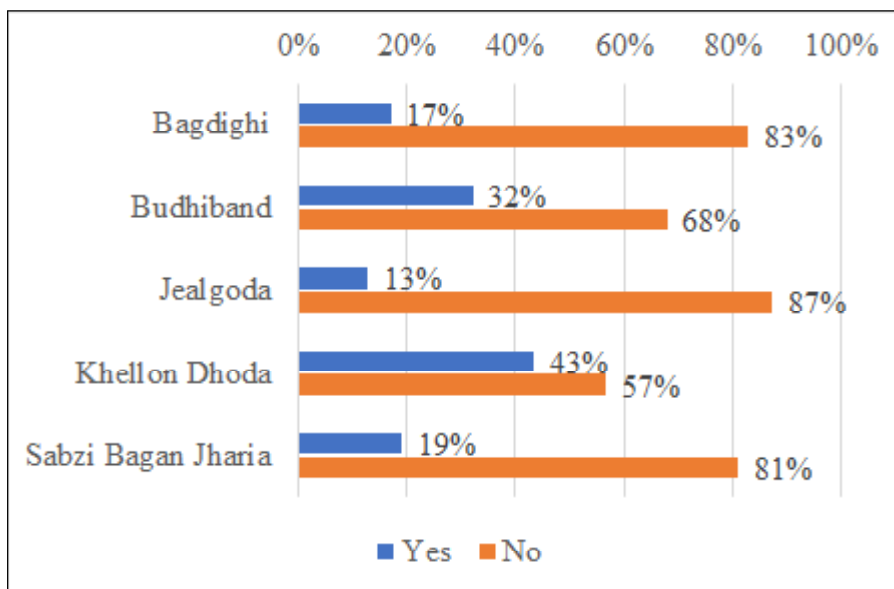
Fig 9 Labour Card (Jamshedpur)



Burmamines, Dhatkidih, and Parvati Ghat, had a higher percentage of people who did not have access to Labour Cards and their benefits. It can be inferred that there is not enough awareness of the Labour Cards, documentation, and knowledge of registration procedures in the sampled bastis of Jamshedpur. A 36-year-old working woman from Dhatkidih Basti stated, “No, I do not have a Labour Card. No one has asked for it, so why would I make one?”

Data examined from the sampled bastis Dhanbad of 1470 respondents indicates that 25 per cent of the respondents were Labour Cards holders in Dhanbad.

Fig 10 Labour Card (Dhanbad)



Jealgoda, Bagidighi, and Sabzi Bagan Jharia have a lower percentage of Labour card holders. It can be inferred from the data that 75 per cent of the respondents did not have Labour Cards; hence, they were unable to get facilities and were deprived of the services.

5.7 Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana (SBPKSY)

Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana is especially important for empowering girls from low-income homes. The program encourages parents to invest in their daughters' future by giving them financial support at various levels of schooling, from classes VIII to XII, and a sizable lump sum amount of INR. 20,000/- at turning 18. This lowers dropout rates and encourages girls to pursue higher education or vocational training. This not only breaks the cycle of poverty but also promotes women's empowerment and economic independence (Sharma, 2024).

Among 140 respondents from sampled Jamshedpur bastis, 11 per cent reported their daughters as SBPKSY beneficiaries. A family in the Burmamines basti revealed, *"We made our elder daughter drop out of school when she reached Class VIII, but now we want our youngest daughter to finish high school. We realized the importance of education and also learned about the Savitribai Yojna."*

Fig 11 Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana (Jamshedpur)

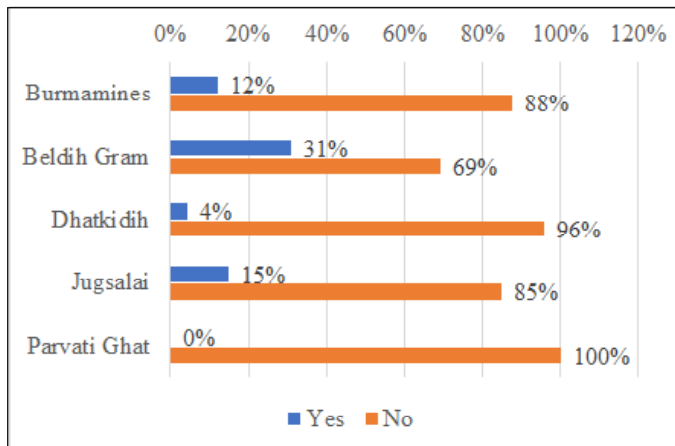


Fig 11 indicates that from the selected communities, only 31 per cent of the respondents shared that their daughters in Beldih Gram enrolled in Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana; however, no one from Parvati Ghat was enrolled in scheme SBPKSY. Overall, the prevalence of lower enrolment across all areas suggests prevailing challenges or concerns regarding the SBPKSY scheme in Jamshedpur.

To assess Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana, access data was collected from 104 residents in sampled communities in Dhanbad.

Fig 12 Savitribai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojana (Dhanbad)

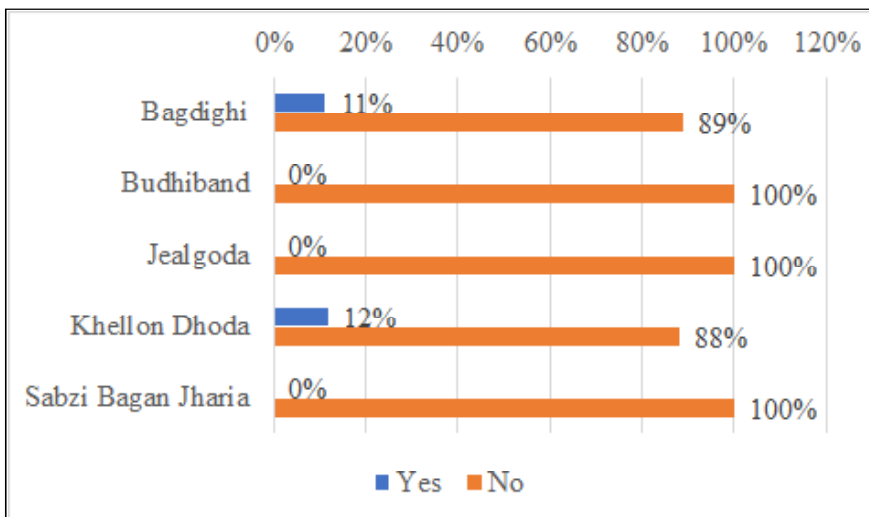


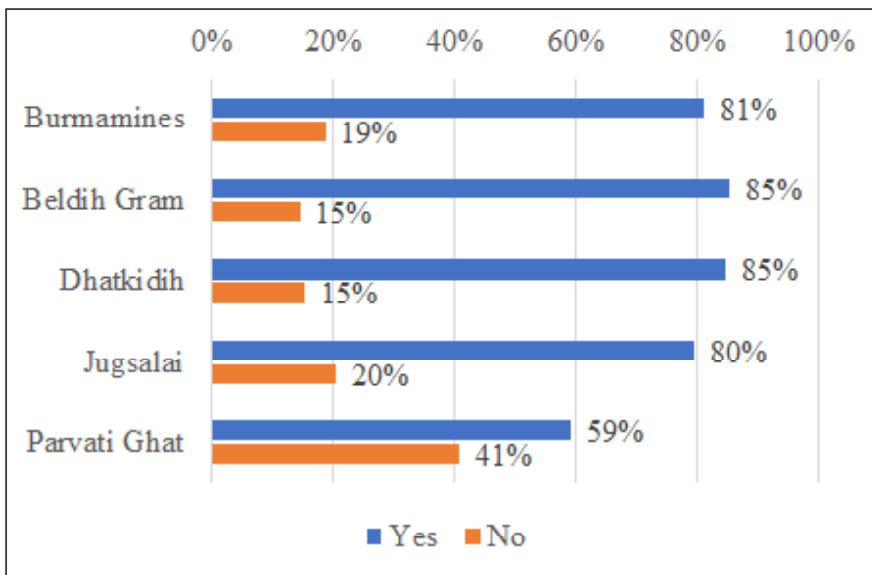
Fig 12 indicates only five per cent of the respondents shared that their daughters were aware and enrolled for SBPKSY, and Budhiband, Jealgoda, and Sabzi Began Jharia were unaware of SBPKSY and did not enroll. Overall, Fig 12 suggests that a low percentage of girls who are eligible for the SBPKSY scheme are enrolled in sampled bastis in Dhanbad.

5.8 Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)

‘Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana’ was launched on August 28, 2014. PMJDY has been a game-changer for India’s poor. Offering zero-balance bank accounts has brought formal banking into the reach of millions previously excluded from the financial system. This has enabled them to save their earnings, receive government subsidies directly, access affordable credit, and avail of insurance and pension schemes, thereby enhancing their financial inclusion and overall well-being (Ministry of Finance, 2024).

Data collected from 4127 of the respondents of selected bastis from Jamshedpur reveals that 81 per cent of the respondents from Jamshedpur have bank accounts under PMJDY.

Fig 13 Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (Jamshedpur)



As presented in Fig 13, Parvati Ghat needs awareness campaigns to enroll residents PMJDY compared to other bastis in Jamshedpur.

Data analyzed for 1470 respondents across five Dhanbad bastis revealed a 79 per cent enrollment rate in the PMJDY.

Fig 14 Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (Dhanbad)

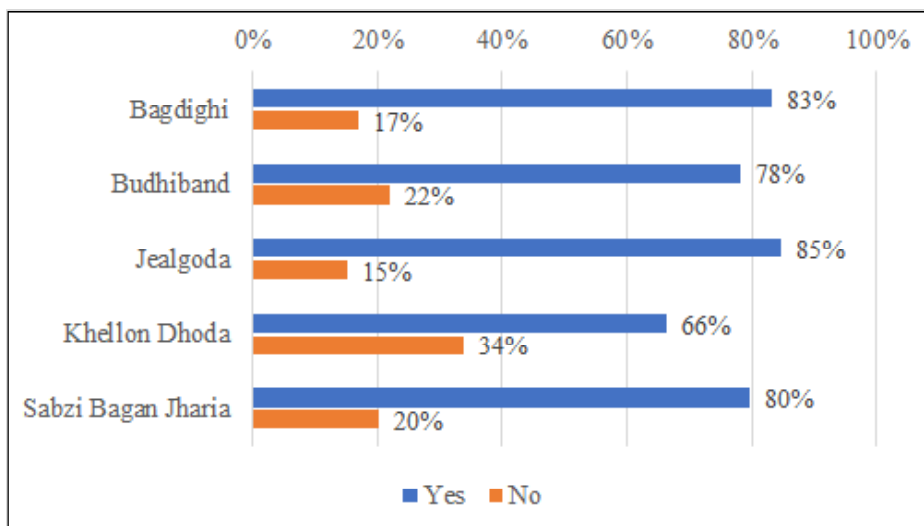


Fig 14 illustrates the penetration of the PMJDY across sampled bastis of Dhanbad. Jealgoda and Bagdighi exhibit the highest penetration rates, with over 80 per cent of respondents affirming their access to the scheme. However, Khellon Dhoda and Budiband exhibited significantly lower PMJDY penetration.

5.9 Public Distribution System (PDS)

India's 'Public Distribution System (PDS)' is a vital safety net aimed at ensuring food security for its vast population. Operated jointly by the central and State governments, it involves procuring, storing, and distributing essential commodities like wheat, rice, sugar, kerosene, and other items at subsidized rates through a network of fair-price shops. A prerequisite for purchasing items from these shops is the possession of a ration card. While the goods offered at these shops are notably more affordable, their quality is considered average. Ration shops can be found in various localities, villages, towns, and cities across the country (National Food Security, 2024). One of the Adarsh Seva Sansthan staff members mentioned, *"It is difficult to get PDS cards for the community member as it requires an Aadhaar Card, which many people do not have."*

Data was collected from 4130 respondents of 5 bastis in Jamshedpur, out of which 74 per cent of the respondents reported having access to PDS.

Fig 15 Public Distribution System (Jamshedpur)

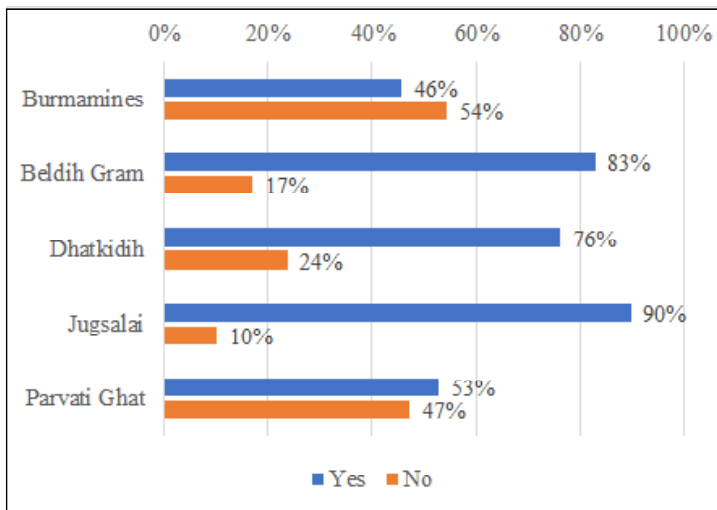


Figure 15 highlights a stark contrast in PDS access. In Jugsalai, 90 per cent of respondents reported utilizing PDS, whereas Burmamines and Parvati Ghat exhibit significantly lower access to PDS.

Data examined from the sampled bastis Dhanbad of 1470 respondents indicates that 73 per cent of the respondents were enrolled under PDS.

Fig 16 Public Distribution System (Dhanbad)

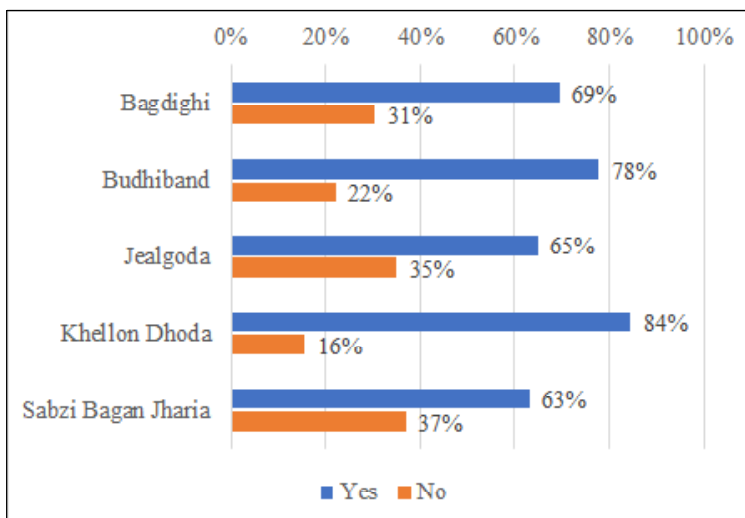


Figure 16 presents the reach of the Public Distribution System (PDS) across various communities. The data reveals significant disparities in PDS coverage. Khellon Dhoda exhibits the highest penetration, with 84 per cent of residents accessing PDS, followed by Budhiband. In comparison, Bagdighi and Sabzi Bagan Jharia demonstrated lower coverage rates. This disparity requires immediate attention to enable communities to meet their basic food requirements.

6. DISCUSSION

It can be inferred from the discussion with the residents of the sampled bastis that various factors have been responsible for the low penetration of social security schemes coverage. First and foremost there is limited awareness about the schemes due to their social exclusion on the grounds of low literacy rates, exposure to media and ineffective government communication. There are accessibility barriers like complex application processes, lack of required documentation, location of enrolment centers, inadequacy of manpower poor and internet connectivity at the enrolment centres. Instances of corruption and inefficiencies within the government system also limits the penetration of the schemes.

Consequentially, the disparities in social security scheme coverage have far-reaching consequences on the well-being of the economically constrained communities. For instance there is limited access to quality healthcare, primarily due to low Ayushman Bharat Card penetration. The limited penetration of labour cards indicates that a significant portion of the workforce operates in the informal sector without adequate social protection. Improving Aadhaar coverage among children is necessary for their access to education, healthcare, and government benefits.

Though PMJDY has shown significant progress in financial inclusion, disparities persist across different bastis. Efforts should be made to reach out to unbanked populations and promote financial literacy to maximize the benefits of this scheme. The disparities in the SBPKSY scholarship program has contributed to higher dropout rates among girls and thereby limiting their access to educational and economic opportunities.

The SDGs 2030 calls for leaving no one behind. If the poor are unable to avail and access social security schemes, then it will hinder their ability to escape poverty and improve their quality of life. Meeting this challenge calls for improving local and regional governance and designing pro-poor interventions to promote inclusion.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure equitable access to social security schemes, several strategic interventions are necessary. It is important to work with community leaders, government agencies, NGOs, and the beneficiaries. Consistent awareness campaigns are essential to educate residents about the benefits of social

security schemes and their application procedures. Community leaders and the utilization of local folk media can help in disseminating information effectively.

There is a need to improve the organization and execution of government-led enrollment drives. Simplifying the application process and documentation will also help beneficiaries enroll in these schemes. In this regard, investments should be made in setting up community centers with good internet connectivity, is essential to enhance enrolment. Educated youth can be trained to assist with application procedures to facilitate and strengthen the process of enrolment.

8. CONCLUSION

Access to social protection by availing of social security schemes is essential for the poor to escape poverty. However, there are significant challenges that hinder economically constrained communities from availing of it. To address the penetration barriers and promote inclusion, there is a need to consistently organize awareness campaigns, expand registration and enrolment, bridge the digital divide, and improve governance. To attain this, the government can partner with NGOs like Adarsh Seva Sansthan.

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Marginalized Lives: A Study of Migrant Communities in Surat

Abstract

The Chapter, based on a rapid appraisal survey, discusses the deplorable living conditions of migrants in five slum communities of Surat. The data reveals that due to limited education and low income levels, families are facing financial struggles and, hence, are compelled to take loans from formal and informal sources. As residents lack health insurance, they are forced to get medical treatment from government hospitals, which were found to be time-consuming and sub-standard. Despite NAVSARJAN Xavier's Cell for Human Development's (NXCHD) efforts to implement various community development programs in the sampled slums, the awareness and utilization of its programs were found to be low. Residents expect NXCHD to significantly improve their quality of life by enhancing program awareness, launching vocational training initiatives, offering microfinance support, upgrading community infrastructure, and advocating for their concerns with local and state governments. (This Chapter is based on Ms. Yukta Desai, Mr. Palash Dalal, Mr. Vishrut Joshi, Mr. Tanmay Pandey, and Mr. Feny Bhutwala's experiential learning through 'We Care: Civic Engagement' internship with Navsarjan Xavier's Cell for Human Development in February 2024.)

Keywords: *Migrants, Vocational Training, Community Development*

1. INTRODUCTION

India has witnessed a significant surge in internal migration over the past few decades, driven primarily by economic disparities and the search for better opportunities. This movement of people within the country has had profound implications for its demographics, urbanization, and socioeconomic landscape. The 2011 Census report estimates the internal (both short and long-term) migrant numbers to be 450 million (Census Digital Library, 2011). The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy reports that in 2020 alone, there were 120 million seasonal migrants (Ratnaker Singh & Sharma, 2021). The migration of workers from one state to another state is a continuous and dynamic process (Bisily, 2023). The report published by the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) on migration in India estimated that the total migration rate in India was 28.9 per cent (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2022).

The allure of higher wages and better job prospects in urban areas has led millions of people, particularly from rural regions, to migrate to cities. Regions with limited economic opportunities

and infrastructure often experience out-migration as people seek to improve their living standards. Out of the total migrant persons, around 10.8 per cent of them migrated due to employment-related reasons (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2022). Natural calamities such as floods, droughts, and cyclones can also force people to relocate to safer areas. Social unrest, discrimination, and conflicts can also drive people to migrate. Interstate migration is prominent, with people moving from underdeveloped states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha to more developed states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu (Iyer, 2020). In developed states, migrants are forced to work in the informal sector, characterized by low wages, precarious working conditions, and limited access to social security (Cattaneo et al., 2022).

The Government of India has implemented various initiatives to assist internal migrants like creating jobs at a local level, providing access to social security and skill development, and supporting migrants through schemes like ‘Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana’, ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat Yojana’ and ‘Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyaan’ (Rao et al., 2020).

To complement government initiatives, NGOs play a pivotal role in providing social support, vocational training, legal assistance, and advocating for policies that protect the rights of migrants. Navsarjan Xavier’s Cell for Human Development (NXCHD) in Gujarat is one of the organizations that works towards improving the lives of migrants who have left their homes in search of better opportunities.

2. ABOUT NAVSARJAN XAVIER’S CELL FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

NXCHD is a prominent grassroots organization in Gujarat, founded in 1986. It works towards inclusive development through programs focused on women’s empowerment, child and youth development, human rights, and community-based initiatives. By addressing issues such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to education and healthcare, Navsarjan strives to create a more equitable and just society for all (Navsarjan Surat, 2024). It works with migrants by providing essential services like temporary shelter, legal aid, healthcare, and education programs to navigate their challenges and rebuild their lives (Navsarjan Surat, 2024).

3. PROJECT ALLOCATED

To mitigate the challenges faced by marginalized communities in Rasulabad, Bhatena, Kamru Nagar, Anand Nagar, and Nagsen Nagar, Navsarjan Xavier’s Cell for Human Development has implemented various projects focused on health, education, finance, and access to government facilities. We Care interns were requested to conduct a social impact assessment of the projects implemented in the above communities with the following objectives:

- To study the demographic profile of Rasulabad, Bhatena, Kamru Nagar, Anand Nagar, and Nagsen Nagar.

- To study facilities available in the community
- To study the challenges of the community
- To assess the impact of NXCHD’s activities on the target respondents.
- To provide recommendations based on the findings

4. METHODOLOGY

NXCHD has implemented vocational programs, an education support program, set up a migrant help desk, and a women’s association at Rasulabad, Bhatena, Kamru Nagar, Anand Nagar, and Nagsen Nagar. Data from 354 respondents was collected randomly from all the sampled areas, and a cluster sampling method was adopted. Respondents’ profiles, housing, health, community engagement, and feedback on NXCHD activities and their impact were collected through Google Forms. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data.

5. FINDINGS

The profile of respondents is listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Profile of Respondent

| Name of the Community | Gender | | Total | Number of Migrants | Migrated From | Religion | Occupational Status | |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|-------|--------------------|--|------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Male | Female | | | | | Working | Non-Working |
| Rasulabad | 59 | 23 | 82 | 32 | Uttar Pradesh Maharashtra Bihar Madhya Pradesh Rajasthan | Hindu and Muslim | 20 | 62 |
| Bhatena | 15 | 42 | 57 | 15 | Maharashtra Madhya Pradesh Uttar Pradesh Haryana | Muslim and Hindu | 30 | 20 |
| Kamru Nagar | 9 | 65 | 74 | 51 | Rajasthan Maharashtra | Muslim | 42 | 32 |
| Anand Nagar | 21 | 49 | 70 | 27 | Maharashtra Uttar Pradesh Bihar | Muslim and Hindu | 64 | 27 |
| Nagsen Nagar | 13 | 56 | 69 | 18 | Madhya Pradesh Odisha Chhattisgarh | Hindu | 18 | 38 |

5.1 Profile Rasulabad

Education

Of the 82 respondents, 35 did not provide any information about their educational status. From the remaining 47 respondents, 27 students had completed their education up to graduation and 20 had never attended school. Thirty-nine respondents stated that their children attended government schools (19 respondents) and private schools (20 respondents). As the income levels of the families were low, children were forced to drop out of school due to a lack of finances or were forced to take up jobs. In the case of girls, early marriage compelled them to be out of school.

Housing and Other Facilities

Twelve respondents reported that they lived in rented homes and paid an average rent of INR.3,000. The Surat Municipal Corporation provided essential services like water and sanitation to all residents. However, only 77 residents had access to electricity, and 40 could afford LPG connections.

Health

Regarding healthcare facilities, respondents shared that there were both government and private hospitals within a radius of two kilometers. Overall, they expressed satisfaction with the services provided by these institutions. Pregnant women could access pre and post-natal care from government hospitals.

Finance

The respondents reported a monthly income of approximately INR. 24,000 – INR. 25,000. Around 23 respondents had obtained loans for various purposes, including their daughter's marriage, purchasing items like televisions and bicycles, constructing or renovating homes, and covering medical expenses. Respondents primarily sought loans from 'Ujjivan', 'Jaylaxmi', or 'Bhagyalaxmi Credit Cooperative Society', with loan tenures typically between 1 and 3 years.

Government schemes

Only 12 respondents were aware of 'Mukhyamantri Amrutum Yojana (MAA)', and only two had MAA cards. Five respondents were aware of the 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana'. Forty-four respondents procured groceries from local stores. These respondents lack awareness of the application process required to obtain a ration card. In this context, Leelavati Sharma mentioned, *"We are facing financial difficulties due to limited access to essential resources. My husband was the only earning member. I struggled to get a ration card because I didn't know the application process; hence, I was forced to buy food from the market, which added to my financial burden."*

5.2 Profile of Bhatena

Data was collected from 57 respondents in this locality.

Education

From 57 respondents, only 23 shared their educational status. From these, twenty-two respondents studied till class XI, and one was pursuing a BBA degree. Respondents mentioned they were forced to drop out due to early marriage, a loss of interest in studies, financial constraints, or the need to support their families. In the context of children's education, 25 respondents shared that their children went to government schools, and 10 shared that their children were enrolled in private schools. The respondents showed dissatisfaction with the quality or availability of schools in their neighbourhood. Three respondents mentioned that their children were school dropouts.

Housing and Other Facilities

With regard to housing, data was shared by 55 respondents. From these, 38 respondents had their own homes. Of these, nine resided in kachcha makaan (temporary structures), and others had permanent housing. Those living in rental homes paid monthly rents ranging from INR. 3,000 to INR. 5,500. During the monsoon season, 36 respondents reported facing challenges due to waterlogging on streets and water leaks in their homes. Consequentially, respondents had to use plastic covers on their roofs to prevent leaks or seek alternative shelter during heavy rains.

All the respondents had access to electricity, but ten lacked proper waste disposal systems in their residences. LPG was used for cooking, and tap water was the primary source of drinking water. While all homes had their bathrooms, common restrooms were also available in the neighbourhood. Approximately 41 respondents believed their homes were adequate for their family needs, while nine felt otherwise.

Residents in this locality feared demolition. In this context, 20 respondents' homes were situated near the canal and faced the risk of demolition by the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) due to planned road construction. Portions of some homes had already been demolished, and no compensation or alternative housing had been provided. The respondents recalled that in the past, NXCHD's Mahila Mandal helped to delay house demolitions by organizing rallies and protesting at the SMC Zone Office. But, the fear of demolition was still evident among some respondents. Sharing his distress, Yakub mentioned, *“Along with nine members, I moved to Surat from Uttar Pradesh for better opportunities. We live in a rental house and are in constant financial stress as I am the only breadwinner. Due to SMC's road expansion project, I fear that our house is at risk of demolition and that we will soon be homeless. My family is already vulnerable due to the financial stress, and the risk of being homeless makes the family's situation even worse.”*

Regarding community sanitation, it was found that Surat Municipal Corporation's garbage trucks collected waste from the community, but some residents disposed of the waste in the canal.

Twenty-seven felt safe living in the neighbourhood, although others expressed concerns about theft and local disputes. Respondents reported that the local police were generally responsive to such incidents.

Health

Fifty respondents shared the data regarding healthcare facilities available in the vicinity. They mentioned that there was one government hospital and private clinic available in the vicinity, which was located at a distance of five kilometers. Twenty-five respondents sought medical care at the government hospital as it was free, and eighteen opted for private clinics as the charges were affordable. Fourteen respondents shared they had either Mukhyamantri Amrutum Yojana (MAA) or 'Ayushman Bharat Cards'. A few respondents reported facing challenges in availing of MAA and Ayushman Bharat Cards.

Finance

Thirty respondents shared they were earning approximately INR.15,000. To finance expenses such as housing repairs, setting up small-scale businesses, purchasing two-wheelers, and covering marriage costs, 16 respondents reported securing short-term loans from banks like Bhagyalaxmi and Ujjivan.

Government schemes

In regard to awareness about government schemes, the discussion revealed that 50 respondents were familiar with the ration scheme, fourteen were aware of Mukhyamantri Amrutum Yojana (MAA) and Ayushman Bharat Cards, and three respondents were aware of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. In terms of utilization, only 24 exclusively relied on using their ration cards to acquire necessities.

5.3 Profile of Kamru Nagar

Education

Thirty-one respondents shared information about their education status. From these, 30 were Marticultates, and one had acquired a Higher Secondary Certificate. In terms of children's education, 37 respondents mentioned that their children went to government schools, and the remaining ten shared that their children went to private schools.

Housing and Other Facilities

Seventy-four respondents shared data regarding housing. Of these, 61 stayed in houses provided by the Gujarat Government, and 13 lived in rented homes and paid monthly rents ranging from INR. 2,000 to INR.5,000. All of them had access to LPG connection, electricity, and potable drinking water from common taps provided by SMC. Regarding community hygiene, 39 reported water clogging and leakage as common issues during monsoon.

Health

From 74 respondents, forty-eight respondents shared information on the availability of hospitals around the community. From these, 36 reported availing medical treatment at government hospitals but had concerns about the quality of treatment and long waiting hours. Twelve respondents opted for private clinics or took treatment from government-operated mobile health vans. With regard to health insurance, 16 respondents were aware of medical cards, and only three had Ayushman Bharat Cards. Thirty-three were unaware of the application process for government health schemes, and some described it as tedious and time-consuming.

Finance

From 74 respondents, 46 mentioned they had two or more earning members. Twenty-seven reported having only one earning member. The average monthly income reported by respondents was around INR. 15,000.

Discussions revealed various types of financial struggles faced by the slum residents. Voicing her plight, Sultana, a 45-year-old housewife, shared, *“I migrated to this slum 14 years ago. My family’s monthly income is INR. 18,000. We had taken a loan as we were unable to meet our requirements. The loan repayment and lack of access to government schemes has put a lot of financial strain on us.”* To meet various family-related expenses thirty-one respondents took loans from Bachat Mandal.

Government schemes

Discussions with respondents revealed that 60 were aware of ration cards, and 24 respondents had applied for ration cards. Only one respondent was aware of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

5.4 Profile of Anand Nagar

Education

Data was collected from 64 respondents, from which 28 provided information on their education status. 27 respondents completed XII std., and only one completed graduation. With regard to children’s education, 31 mentioned their children went to government schools, and 11 respondents admitted their children to private schools.

Housing and Other Facilities

From 62 respondents, 49 had their own homes, whereas one resided in temporary structures (Kachcha makaan). Those who lived in rented homes amounted to 12 and reported paying rents ranging from INR. 3000 to 5000. All respondents had access to electricity, and 61 had access to tap water. In the context of cooking facilities, 37 used LPG, and five respondents had to use kerosene.

Around 23 respondents were dissatisfied with the community sanitation due to issues of mixed-up sewage with drinking water pipelines, waterlogging and leaks during monsoons, and vector-borne diseases. Despite facing challenges, 39 respondents believed that their homes were sufficient for their family needs, while 12 felt otherwise. They also mentioned that, as of now, there is no risk of demolition by SMC.

Health

Fifty-four reported having one government and three private hospitals accessible within a distance of three-four kilometers. While government hospitals were the most popular choice for medical care, with 44 respondents utilizing them, ten respondents opted for private clinics. Despite the availability of 24/7 medical staff in most government hospitals, five respondents experienced delays in treatment and unreliability of ambulance services. Only ten found government clinics to be affordable. Due to a lack of awareness and the time-consuming application process, 23 respondents did not have Mukhyamantri Amrutum Yojana (MAA) and Ayushman Bharat Cards.

Finance

From 64 respondents, 46 shared that they have two or more earning members, and 16 mentioned having one earning member in the family. The average monthly family income was reported to be INR. 23,000. Expressing her financial constraints, Sangeeta Thakre, a thread cutter, stated, *“My family’s monthly income is INR. 30,000. Despite hard work, we are constantly facing financial difficulties.”*

Further discussion revealed that 12 respondents took loans ranging from INR. 25,000 to 9 lakhs for marriage, buying bicycles, home renovation, and setting up small businesses. Four respondents borrowed money from banks, while others borrowed money from private lenders, friends, and relatives.

Government schemes

Data revealed that 53 respondents were aware of ration cards, and 28 had ration cards. Due to documentation issues, nine respondents reported challenges to procuring ration cards. Consequently, they had to buy groceries at high cost from local stores. Twenty-one respondents reported being aware of health cards. Of these, only five respondents had Ayushman Bharat Cards. No one was aware of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

5.5 Profile of Nagsen Nagar

Education

From 69 respondents, 30 respondents shared their education status. From these, 29 had completed their Higher Secondary exam, and one had completed graduation. Due to factors such as marriage, loss of interest in studies, and financial constraints, respondents dropped out of school. Twenty-

seven respondents shared that their children went to government schools, and 12 respondents' children went to private schools.

Housing and Other Facilities

Out of 69 respondents, 51 were living in their own homes. Eighteen stayed in rental houses and paid a monthly rent ranging between INR. 2,000 to INR. 4,000. All respondents had LPG connections for cooking and water facilities, 67 had access to electricity, and 62 had private washrooms. A few reported purchasing potable drinking water cans. The community had separate toilets for women and males in public places.

Respondents reported that during monsoon season, there was waterlogging on the streets, and few also reported theft risk. Despite the inconvenience faced by the residents, 56 felt safe in their neighbourhood. According to them, in case of any community dispute, local police responded within 30-40 minutes.

Health

From 69 respondents, 45 shared that healthcare facilities were available within a radius of five kilometres. From the total respondents, 41 stated doctors or nursing staff were available 24/7 in government hospitals. Seven respondents reported concerns about unsatisfactory treatment and long waiting hours at government hospitals. Highlighting the need for awareness about serious illnesses and inadequate access to medical facilities in slum areas like Nagsen Nagar. Sumanben Dhole shared her experience with a government hospital, *“After several consultations, my daughter-in-law Pujaben was diagnosed with cancer in her gallbladder. Our efforts to explore different healthcare options were unsuccessful, and Pujaben’s condition progressed to a critical stage.”*

Regarding accessing health schemes, 26 reported being aware of Mukhyamantri Amrutum Yojana (MAA) and Ayushman Bharat Cards, and only four possessed these cards. The rest faced challenges in accessing the schemes due to a lack of awareness.

Finance

Of the 69 respondents, 45 mentioned having two or more earning members, and 20 mentioned having one earning member in the family. The average monthly income was around INR. 21,350. Twenty-nine took short-term loans at the rate of two to three per cent per annum for 1 to 3 years. The loans were taken from Ujjivan Small Finance Bank and Bachat Mandal to meet personal needs and pay old debts.

Government schemes

From 69 respondents, 57 were aware of the ration scheme, of which only 38 had ration cards. Those who lacked ration cards had to buy extra rations from nearby shops. Only seven respondents reported being aware of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

6. ORGANIZATION'S IMPACT

It was found that from 354 respondents, only 210 (59 per cent) respondents were aware of NXCHD's programs. Out of 210 respondents, 132 (63 per cent) utilized the services provided by the NGO. In descending order, higher satisfaction with NXCHD's programs was seen in Rasulabad slum (32 per cent), Kamru Nagar (26 per cent), Bhatena (11 per cent), Anand Nagar, and Nagsen Nagar (5 per cent), respectively.

With regard to utilization of services, Bachat Mandal/ Mahila Madal was the most utilized program by female respondents, followed by balwadi/ tuition and tailoring classes. Services like computer classes and other activities were used minimally.

7. DISCUSSION

Rapid urbanization of Surat has led to the growth of slum communities, which comprise of migrants who have migrated from their hometowns in search of better economic opportunities. Discussions with NXCHD highlighted the structural inequalities that marginalize slum communities, leading to social exclusion and limited opportunities. To assess the impact of NXCHD's programs and identify areas for improvement, a rapid appraisal survey was carried out by interns in the slums of Rasulabad, Bhatena, Kamru Nagar, Anand Nagar, and Nagsen Nagar in Surat.

It is evident from the findings that the majority of the respondents had migrated to Surat in search of better economic opportunities. Their educational attainment was limited, as they were compelled to discontinue their studies due to financial constraints, familial responsibilities, or early marriage. This has limited their employment opportunities. Due to the low-income levels of the slum, residents faced a lot of financial struggles. On numerous occasions, they were compelled to obtain loans to finance expenditures related to consumption, children's education, family functions, purchase of two-wheelers, healthcare, etc. Limited access to formal credit forced people to turn to moneylenders, trapping them in a cycle of poverty due to exorbitant interest rates. To address this issue, it is important to invest in quality education and skills development programs. Such investments will help in attaining the goals of 'SDG 1 (End Poverty)' and 'SDG 8 (Decent Economic Growth)'.

Slum communities often lack basic community infrastructure and services, making it difficult for residents to improve their living conditions. Housing conditions in these slums were found to be grossly inadequate, with many residents living in rented homes or temporary structures. Access to basic amenities like electricity, water, and sanitation was limited, which led to various health and hygiene issues. To address this deplorable condition in alignment with SDG 11, affordable housing initiatives and slum redevelopment programs are essential to improve living conditions in slums and provide them with a sense of security.

Expanding access to affordable healthcare is listed in target 3.8 of ‘SDG 3 (Good Health & Wellbeing)’. Unfortunately, the survey highlighted that government healthcare facilities in these slums were often overcrowded, resulting in long waiting times and inadequate treatment. Many residents lacked health insurance and hence had to meet high amounts of out-of-pocket expenses. In this context, it is essential to provide doorstep healthcare and preventive health education in these communities.

While government schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Ayushman Bharat, and Mukhyamantri Amrutum Yojana (MAA) are available, many residents are unaware of these schemes or face difficulties in accessing them. Lack of awareness and bureaucratic hurdles hinder their ability to benefit from these initiatives. To ensure residents avail the benefits of these schemes, it is crucial to enhance awareness and simplify the application process.

Organizations like NXCHD make efforts to offer need-based services to the slum residents to improve their quality of life. Despite NXCHD’s efforts, awareness and utilization of their programs vary across the sampled slums. While the Bachat Mandal/Mahila Mandal is popular, other services are less utilized. Due to various constraints faced by the residents, the respondents expressed a strong need for financial assistance, vocational training, and community development support. To enhance its impact, NXCHD should study the recommendations given by the respondents and redesign its intervention accordingly. This can help NXCHD to address the felt needs of the communities and contribute to their development.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Respondents sought support from NXCHD to avail loans, vocational training, reopening pre-schools (balwadi), community development, and other related areas. Subsequent paragraphs provide further details on these recommendations.

8.1 Financial Support

Respondents stressed the need for financial assistance from the organization. They specifically requested support in securing loans and acquiring the necessary documentation to apply for government programs.

8.2 Vocational Training

Respondents understand the importance of vocational training. They requested that computer classes and tuition for children be reopened, which would help to improve their education development. They suggested introducing demand-based courses, such as beauty parlour and mehendi courses. Respondents indicated that with affordable course fees, many people would enroll in the course. Respondents enrolled in tailoring requested sewing machines at affordable prices.

8.3 Reopening Pre-Schools (Balwadi)

Respondents proposed reopening balwadis and other educational programs. They emphasized the critical role of balwadis in providing childcare and expressed a strong desire for their continued operation.

8.4 Community Development

Respondents reported deficiencies in the community pertaining to the availability of water, sanitation, and safety. Respondents from Anand Nagar Bhatena slums, in particular, faced the threat of demolition. They felt that NXCHD staff should advocate their case with the local government for their protection. In general, there was a feeling across the community that NXCHD should collaborate with SMC to address their community issues.

Respondents shared that due to a lack of awareness, there is less participation in the activities conducted by NXCHD. Conducting impact surveys and awareness would help the organization increase its reach in the communities.

9 CONCLUSION

Surat, a major commercial hub in Gujarat, has experienced rapid urbanization in recent decades. This growth has led to a significant influx of migrants from various parts of the country. Many of these migrants have settled in informal settlements or slums. The survey conducted presents substantial challenges faced by the migrants, such as limited education, low income, inadequate housing, limited access to basic amenities and healthcare. Despite NXCHD's various community development programs, less than 60 per cent of respondents were aware of them, limiting the utilization of the welfare services. In Bhatena, Anand Nagar, and Nagsen Nagar, the level of satisfaction with NXCHD's activities was found to be marginal.

To address the felt needs of the communities, the study recommends NXCHD to enhance its efforts in increasing awareness of its programs, expand vocational training initiatives, reopen pre-schools, provide microfinance support, and collaborate with Local and State Government to address the problems of the slum dwellers.

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Development Disconnect: Tale of Two Villages in Gujarat

Abstract

The Chapter examines the living conditions of Bhetwada and Transad villages in Dholka taluka in Ahmedabad District. Despite the nation's economic progress, these villages grapple with significant disparities in healthcare, education, potable water supply, and community sanitation. Moreover, underdeveloped infrastructure and limited public services exacerbate these challenges. To bridge this development gap, the Chapter proposes leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives as a catalyst for transformative change. By investing in these villages, corporations can significantly enhance the quality of life and foster sustainable development within the community. (This Chapter is based on Mr.Hem Shah, Ms.Aashka Thakker, Mr. Shaivalkumar Thakkar, Mr. Shouvik Goswami, Mr.Yog Mehta, Mr.Meet Shah, and Mr.Adit Vora's experiential learning through 'We Care: Civic Engagement' internship with Ahmedabad Management Association in February 2024.)

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Need Assessment, Village Facilities, Pollution

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the 2011 Census, 833 million Indians live in rural areas, which is more than two-thirds of the total population. The distribution of the rural population is 68.8 per cent, and the urban population is 31.2 per cent (Chandramouli, 2022). Despite India becoming the fifth largest economy, a vast population still lives without basic amenities. India ranked 134 out of 193 countries on the Human Development Index, 108 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII), and 111 out of 125 countries in the Global Hunger Index (UNDP, 2024). The country has the world's highest youth unemployment rates. The paper on Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj published, highlights that 22.6 per cent of the national income of India in 2022-23 went to the top one per cent, which is the highest in the last 100 years. India's income inequality is amongst the highest in the world, and it has also become one of the most unequal countries on this planet. On various social indicators, India ranks lower than emerging economies, and its economic growth has not translated into the lives of the poor (Bharti et al., 2024).

To promote inclusive growth and address the issues of poverty, unemployment, agriculture backwardness, regional disparities, etc., 'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)' was envisaged as a mechanism to address social, environmental, and human development concerns and play a

role in accelerating social development (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2015). Accordingly, under Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013, businesses having turnover of INR 1,000 crores or more, or net worth of INR 500 crores or more, or net profit of INR 5 crores or more during the financial year have to allocate two per cent of their average net profits to CSR activities.

To reduce inequalities and promote living standards, corporations can invest in various activities such as education, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and social welfare. By mandating and regulating CSR, the Act ensures that economic growth benefits all sections of society (Thadikaran et al., 2021).

As per CSR Rules 2014, before designing CSR initiatives, companies are expected to identify community needs by undertaking a needs assessment study.

1.1 Why Need Assessment?

A needs assessment study is a strategic planning process that identifies gaps between current and desired outcomes, identifying opportunities for improvement within a process or system (Asana, 2024 & Kardash, 2024). This assessment helps the CSR department to plan and execute need-based CSR activities and contribute to societal well-being (Singh, 2023). To gather information about the felt needs of the communities, corporations often partner with NGOs/ academic institutions and organizations like the Ahmedabad Management Association (AMA) to conduct need assessment surveys. The findings of such surveys help corporations to design targeted CSR programs that can have a positive and sustainable impact on the communities.

2. ABOUT AHMEDABAD MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (AMA)

Ahmedabad Management Association (AMA) empowers individuals and organizations through management education training programs and hosts programs on various social issues (Ahmedabad Management Association, 2023). It leverages its expertise in management and training to empower rural progress by hosting conferences on agriculture and food processing. Additionally, AMA's association with the All-India Management Association allows for wider collaboration and resource sharing, potentially benefiting rural development projects across the country (Ahmedabad Management Association, 2024).

3. PROJECT ALLOCATED

AMA aims to support private and public companies in implementing CSR projects more effectively, ensuring these initiatives have maximum impact and benefit for the community. In this context, AMA is in partnership with the Government of Gujrat Centre For Rural Development. One of the objectives of this partnership is to assist the corporations in selecting villages to undertake suitable development activities as a part of their CSR obligation. In this context, the MBA interns were asked to survey the Bhetawada and Transad villages of Dholka taluka, District Ahmedabad. These villages were selected as they had less than 700 households comprising a

population of less than 3,000 individuals. These villages had a deprivation rate of over 30 per cent based on factors like housing, infrastructure, electricity, labor-oriented households, literacy rates, absence of adults between 18-59 and had SC/ST households.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEY

- To study the demographic profile of Bhetawada and Transad villages.
- To examine the village's healthcare, education, water and sanitation infrastructure, and other essential facilities.
- To provide suggestions and recommendations for undertaking village development activities.

5. METHODOLOGY

The rapid appraisal survey was conducted to gather data on demographics, healthcare, education, water and sanitation, infrastructure, and public utilities. A convenient sampling method was adopted to select the Respondents. Data was collected through the use of an Interview Schedule. Village data was gathered from sarpanch and panchayat members.

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Location of Villages

Bhetawada and Transad villages are located in the Dholka taluka of Ahmedabad district in Gujarat. Transad, the nearest town for major economic activities, lies approximately five kilometers from Bhetawada. Dholka, the closest city to both Transad and Bhetawada, lies ten kilometers away. It is one of the most highly industrialized cities in Gujarat. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the villages.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Villages

| Indicators | Villages | |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------|
| | Bhetawada | Transad |
| Total Population | 2496 | 2724 |
| Male Population | 1315 | 1419 |
| Female Population | 1181 | 1305 |
| Literacy Ratio | 64.38% | 78.83% |
| Sex Ratio | 917 | 920 |
| No. of Houses | 400-500 | 563 |
| Primary School | 1 | 1 |
| Secondary School | - | - |
| Higher Secondary School | - | 1 |
| Health Centre | - | 1 |

Source- Gram Panchayat Documents

6.2 Respondents' Profile Age & Gender

Fig 1 Age

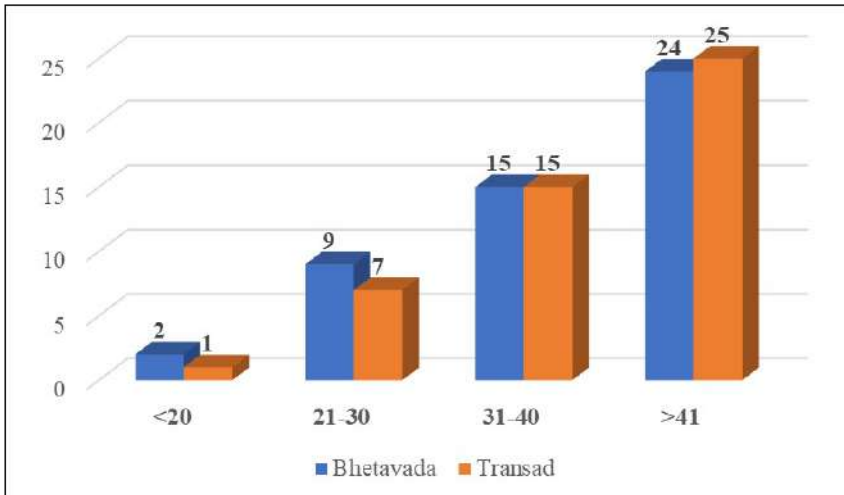
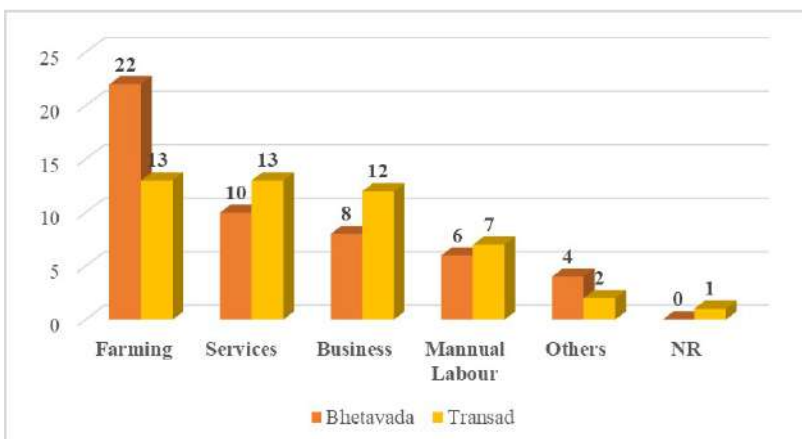


Fig 1 presents the age distribution of respondents across both villages. The figure indicates that the majority of participants were over 41 years old. In terms of gender, Bhetawada had 14 women and 36 men respondents, while Transad had 12 women and 36 men.

Occupation

As displayed in Fig 2, respondents were engaged in various occupations. Farming emerged as the primary occupation, followed by services and business.

Fig 2 Occupation



6.3 Status: Essential Facilities & Infrastructure

The preceding discussion provides insights into the availability and condition of essential facilities and infrastructure within the sampled villages.

Education Facilities: During the field visit, it was observed that Bhetawada has a primary school that lacked appropriate toilet facilities. Discussions with villagers also revealed that the public transport facilities required for children are not available. Most children walk to school, while a few travel by auto-rickshaw or rely on rides from acquaintances. To pursue secondary and higher secondary education, children travel to neighbouring villages. Consequentially, girls drop out of school after class VIII.

In comparison, Transad village had a primary and higher secondary school but lacked infrastructure like washrooms, potable drinking water supply, benches, and computer labs. Additionally, the number of teachers was inadequate. Interactions with villagers revealed that the quality of mid-day meals provided by the school is an area of concern that needs immediate attention. Respondents also reported that due to inconsistencies in school and bus timings, children are unable to use the available services.

6.4 Health Facilities

From the total sample, only 52 respondents shared information about health issues faced by children in both villages. Data indicates that both Bhetawad and Transad suffered from skin diseases, cheek infections, infectious diseases such as TB, and other diseases like malnutrition see Fig 3.

Fig 3 Children: Major Diseases

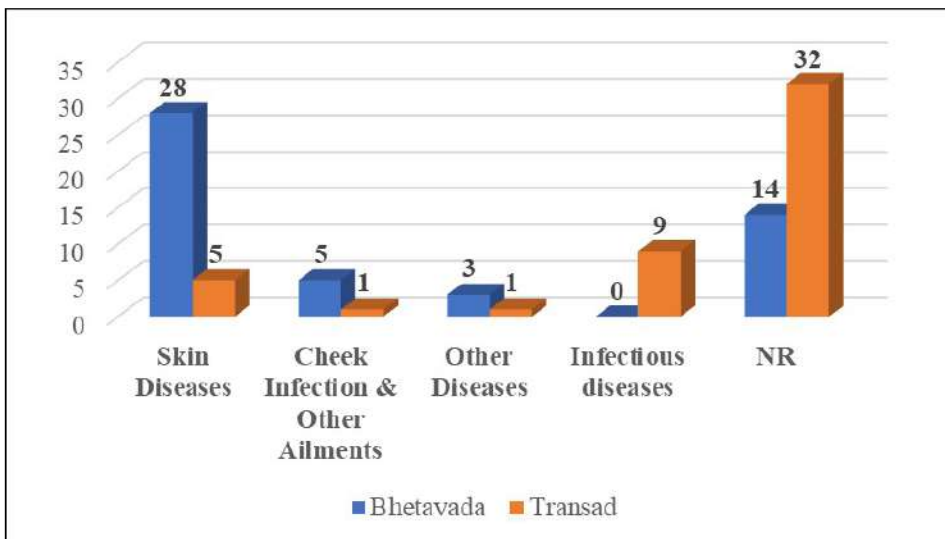


Fig 4 Adults: Major Diseases

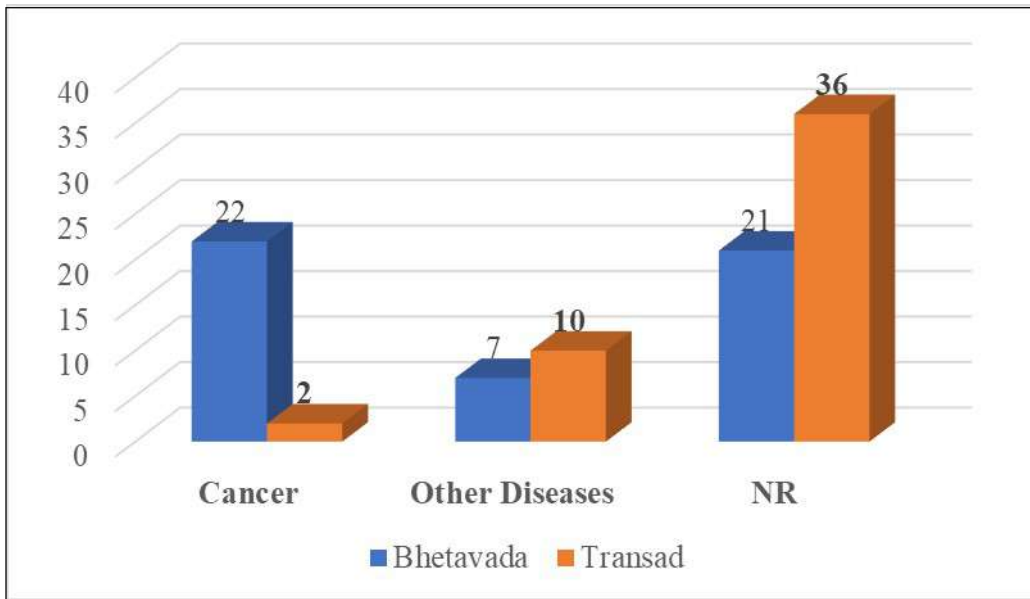


Fig 4 indicates the major diseases among adults. Discussions with respondents revealed that they suffered from cancer because of the polluted water in Bhetawada village. Meanwhile, in transad, diseases such as cold and fever, cold, influenza, mosquito bites, TB, heart diseases, and blood pressure were commonly seen.

Current Healthcare Facilities

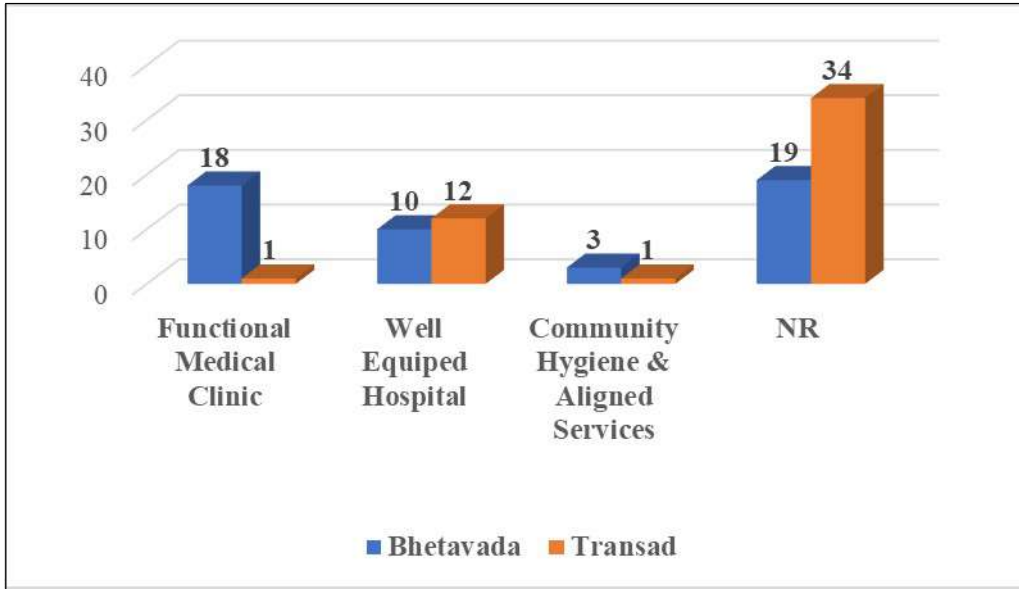
To address the health issues in both villages, the villagers highlighted the current healthcare facilities. Bhetawada faces significant healthcare challenges due to the absence of medical facilities, requiring villagers to travel to Transad for emergencies and checkups. A government healthcare team visits Bhetawada weekly, but more people are getting cancer and skin problems because of polluted water, particularly affecting children, women, and adult males. Transad's Public Health Centre offers basic health services and maternal health care assistance, referring major cases to hospitals in Dholka. Although equipped, the clinic's ambulance needs repairs, and doctors often commute from Ahmedabad, leaving villagers underserved. Additionally, Transad's veterinary clinic remains closed due to a lack of staff and facilities, impacting the local cattle-rearing livelihood.

Expected Healthcare Facilities

Villagers from both villages expect better infrastructure with well-equipped clinics and hospitals, as well as a consistent supply of essential medicines and the recruitment of qualified healthcare

professionals to improve their health status. (See Fig 5)

Fig 5 Requirments: Health Care Facilities



6.5 Water & Sanitation Facilities

Discussions with Bhetavada villagers revealed the borewell was the only source of water. The Nesda lake water in the vicinity has been contaminated by untreated sewage water from Dholka Nagarpalika’s Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) and chemical waste from Pharmaceutical Industries (The Times Of India, 2021). In the absence of an alternative source of water, they were forced to use contaminated borewell water daily. This resulted in widespread health problems such as skin cancer, Gaalpachola infections, kidney diseases, and other illnesses. Although a pharmaceutical company had installed an RO plant, concerns about water quality and affordability persisted, underscoring the urgent need for a solution to this critical issue.

Similarly, in Transad, residents mainly relied on borewells for water, but diminishing groundwater levels led to water scarcity and unsafe drinking water. Even though there was an RO plant nearby, because it was far from the villages, many residents still had to use polluted borewell water. The inadequate sanitation facilities in both villages exacerbated health risks, with insufficient waste management contributing to environmental pollution and hygiene concerns among residents. Poor waste management systems were observed in both villages. Villagers reported due to a lack of sanitation workers and irregular waste collection systems, community hygiene and the health of the residents were affected.

6.6 Infrastructure Facilities

In Bhetawada, the roads were maintained poorly, which made commuting risky. Since public transport is absent, villagers are forced to use private vehicles, which increases their cost of living.

Most residents had access to domestic electricity for 24 hours. However, there was inadequate street lighting at the village entrance and in the village. In Transad, despite having public streetlights and continuous electricity, some residents experienced low voltage and poor road conditions led to waterlogging during monsoons. Consequentially, it breeds mosquitoes, and villagers become susceptible to diseases like malaria and dengue.

The villagers reported that public toilets had been constructed in both Transad and Bhetawada, with the former located near the bus stop and the latter near the school. While the facilities were segregated for men and women, they were seldom used due to poor maintenance and lack of cleaning.

7. DISCUSSION

The growth and development of rural villages are greatly affected by their natural environment and available resources. In Bhetawada, the lake water is polluted by waste from nearby pharmaceutical companies, causing severe health problems like cancer and skin diseases. This shows the importance of a clean environment for the health and productivity of villagers. Transad, although better in infrastructure and other facilities, still faces health issues like colds, TB, and heart problems. These differences show the challenges rural areas face when they lack infrastructure, health, education, and other essential services.

Proper infrastructure and economic opportunities are key to improving rural villages. Bhetawada had poor roads, limited job opportunities, and inadequate school facilities, leading to higher dropout rates among girls. Transad, despite having a higher secondary school and some health facilities, also had problems with unreliable transport and poorly maintained public services. These issues affect the quality of life and development of the villagers, highlighting the need for better infrastructure to support growth.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs can help speed up development in rural areas. Companies can invest in building essential infrastructure like clean water, good roads, and sanitation systems, as well as improve education and healthcare services. CSR programs can also provide training to villagers, helping them gain new skills and start businesses. By investing in village infrastructure, companies can improve the lives of villagers. While working with the government and communities, CSR initiatives can help improve living standards and the well-being of rural populations.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the interactions with Bhetawada and Transad villagers, the following needs were identified, and recommendations have been made accordingly.

8.1 Health Care

Due to the paucity of healthcare facilities, both villages require improved health infrastructure and access to healthcare to address their acute and chronic diseases. This includes constructing hospitals, providing ambulance services, conducting frequent health checkups, and community hygiene.

8.2 Education

Educational facilities in both villages required significant improvements. Transad specifically necessitates upgraded school infrastructure, including benches, fans, blackboards, clean drinking water, and computer labs, in addition to having adequate teaching staff. To enhance accessibility, Bhetawada residents have emphasized the need for secondary and higher secondary schools closer to the village. They believe that proximity will encourage regular school attendance, particularly among girls, and help reduce dropout rates.

8.3 Water & Sanitation

Both villages face a critical need for potable water supplies and effective water treatment solutions. To complement these efforts, enhancing community hygiene through the installation of public sanitation infrastructure, including restrooms, waste bins, and comprehensive waste management systems, is essential.

8.4 Infrastructure

Bhetawada and Transad necessitate well-maintained roads for safe and convenient transportation. To enhance safety, particularly during emergencies and nighttime hours, both villages have requested the installation of adequate street lighting. Furthermore, Transad residents have expressed a critical need for increased electricity voltage, which requires immediate attention to ensure sufficient power supply for the community.

9. CONCLUSION

The survey underscores the stark disparities in Bhetawada and Transad villages, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive development interventions. Critical gaps in healthcare, education, water and sanitation, and infrastructure impede the overall well-being of the community. To bridge this divide, targeted CSR initiatives are essential. By investing in these areas, corporations can significantly improve the lives of villagers, fostering sustainable development and creating a positive social impact. A collaborative approach involving government, NGOs, and the private

sector is crucial to maximize the benefits of such initiatives and ensure long-term sustainability.

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Plastic Pollution in Paradise: Case of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Abstract

This Chapter exposes the alarming crisis of plastic pollution threatening the ecosystems of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. With a specific focus on Port Blair, it examines the extent of plastic waste, its sources, and its detrimental impact on marine ecosystems and biodiversity. The Chapter explores the existing waste collection and disposal systems implemented by local authorities and critically analyzes the current policy framework governing waste management in the region. To mitigate the plastic crisis, the Chapter proposes to promote sustainable waste management practices through the adoption of technological solutions, infrastructure development, and community engagement. (This Chapter is based on Ms. Manya Maneel's experiential learning through the 'We Care: Civic Engagement' internship with Navodhaya Foundation in February 2024.)

Keywords: Waste Management, Behaviour Change, Environment, Community Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

The word 'waste management' refers to different procedures and strategies implemented to deal with garbage, ranging from recycling or composting current waste to reducing the amount of waste produced in the first place. Globally, about two billion metric tons of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) are produced yearly. By 2050, this amount is predicted to increase by almost 70 per cent (Monaghan, 2024). According to Alves 2024, plastic production worldwide is 400.3 metric tons, and global plastic waste generation is 353.3 mt. Asia is the world's top manufacturer of plastics. In 2022, China manufactured six to twelve million metric tons of plastic items per month in the past few years. North America is the world's second-largest plastic producer, accounting for 17 per cent of output in 2022 (Garside, 2024). Discarded plastic is also known as plastic waste, which never degrades and remains on the landscape for several years, causing damage to the environment. Plastic waste collected for recycling is merely around 15 per cent and hence is a significant issue in the world (Alves 2024).

Though plastic waste is primarily recyclable, recycled products are more harmful to the environment as they contain additives and colours (Central Pollution Control Board, 2013).

1.1 Scenario in India

India is among 12 nations responsible for 60 percent of the world's mismanaged plastic waste. Plastic waste generation is estimated at 9.4 million mt annually, with only 50 per cent of it being collected and processed via recycling primarily by a hybrid arrangement of formal and informal networks (PTI, 2024). At the same time, the rest lies unaccounted for and is often dumped in landfills and water streams or incinerated, which leads to ecological degradation, health and safety risks for informal workers, and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions (Greene & Mishra, 2023).

According to the CPCB 2020-21 Annual Report, plastic waste has increased in the last few years. States like Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Delhi NCR generated more plastic waste during 2016 -2021(PIB, 2023). Compared to other states /UTs, the plastic waste generated in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was approximately 492.32 tons per annum.

1.2 About Andaman and Nicobar Islands

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a union territory of India, is a tropical paradise nestled in the Bay of Bengal. This archipelago consists of over 800 islands, each boasting pristine beaches, vibrant coral reefs, and lush rainforests. Tourism is a major driver of the economy, attracting visitors with its pristine beaches and natural beauty.

As per 2019, the total population of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was 4,34,192 (Andaman UT Administration, 2023). Port Blair serves as the capital city of these islands, having a population of approximately 152,000 (Population Census, 2011). Port Blair, despite its pristine surroundings, grapples with a significant waste management challenge. Tourist influx generates a large portion of this waste. 'The Central Pollution Control Board' (CPCB) estimates that Port Blair generates 76 tonnes per day, of which ten per cent is estimated to be plastic waste (Dutta & Bhaskar, 2017). This surge in plastic is attributed to packaged goods brought in from the mainland and disposable items used by tourists. The challenge is further compounded by underdeveloped infrastructure for waste segregation and processing, leading to potential environmental and health hazards. NGOs like Navodhaya Foundation are working with Port Blair Municipal Corporation to address the environmental issues.

2. ABOUT NAVODHAYA FOUNDATION

Navodhaya Foundation was registered in 2021 as a not-for-profit organization. The vision is to reach the maximum number of deprived children through Navodhaya and bring about sustainable life changes through education in Andaman. Navodhaya Foundation works on Civic Issues, Disaster Management, Education & Literacy, Human Rights, Labour & Employment, Rural

Development & Poverty Alleviation, Sports, Urban Development & Poverty Alleviation, Women's Development & Empowerment, Youth Affairs, Skill Development, and Environment & Forests (NGO Darpan, 2024).

3. PROJECT ALLOCATED

Navodhaya Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to environmental conservation, has partnered with Port Blair Municipal Corporation (PBMC) to revitalize a derelict garbage dump into a thriving nature park. This innovative project, aptly named 'Waste to Wonders Park', showcases the transformative power of waste management and sustainable practices. The intern was requested to study the patterns of plastic trash across the archipelago with the following objectives:

- To investigate the sources, types, and quantities of plastic consumed.
- To examine the mechanisms of generation, collection, and disposal of plastic waste.
- To assess the ecological consequences of plastic pollution on marine life and biodiversity.
- To evaluate existing policies, regulations, and institutional frameworks related to plastic waste management and identify gaps and barriers hindering effective implementation.
- To provide recommendations and strategies encompassing policy reforms, community engagement, infrastructure development, and public awareness campaigns.

4. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The study, being exploratory in nature, collected data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through field visits to identify pollution hotspots and interact with citizens to understand their attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions about single-use plastics. Secondary data was collected from existing policies, pollution control board records, and government regulations governing plastic waste management.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Plastic Waste: Source, Type and Quantity

The issue of plastic waste and its disposal has been a pressing concern in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Being a tourist destination, there is a significant influx of visitors, which substantially increases the waste generation. According to Das et al. (2024), plastic waste, organic waste, e-waste, medical waste, construction and demolition waste are major environmental concerns in the islands. Krishnakumar et al. (2020), highlight that waste left in the ocean by people has found its way around the island and onto the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago shore. According to Dutta & Bhaskar (2017), around 76,000 kgs of waste is generated daily in Port Blair. From this, 7,600 kgs consist only of plastic waste. According to Mohan et al. (2022), the plastic waste found in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands was microplastics, which included fibers, lines, fragments,

foam, and pellets. High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE), Polystyrene (PS), Polypropylene (PP), and Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) were also found in further analysis.

5.2 Collection and Disposal

The door-to-door collection is carried out from 46,456 domestic houses and 54,653 rural houses. Eleven thousand three hundred thirty-one hotels and other industrial units are classified as commercial establishments. In 2023, PBMC collected 682 tons of plastic waste, of which 578.64 tons were sent to the mainland for recycling and 23.22 tons were used for road construction. It is mandatory to use eight to ten per cent of the plastic waste for road construction. To date, 146.603 metric tons of shredded plastic waste have been used to construct 158.2033 kilometers of roads (Andaman and Nicobar Administration, 2023).

Every day at 6 AM, the workers at private segregation units commence sorting waste from PBMC. With precision, materials are segregated based on their composition, subsequently categorized by size, and compacted into uniform squares using hydraulic presses, facilitating streamlined shipping and storage. On average, 600 to 700 kilograms of waste is sorted daily, with peak volumes reaching 1000 kilograms. Predominantly composed of FMCG packaging, the segregated waste is bundled into approximately 87 compact bundles per shipping container, collectively weighing around nine tons.

An average of three shipping containers ferry the materials to Chennai monthly, marking the culmination of a strategic collaboration between PBMC and private entities. This symbiotic venture alleviates freight expenses for private companies and expedites loading processes at dockyards, owing to government-managed shipping arrangements. Each kilogram of recycled bundle yields a profit of Rs.100 for private enterprises. By 2 PM, the compaction process concludes for the day, marking the completion of another productive cycle.

Waste segregation is an important procedure in 24 wards and 70 Gram Panchayats of Andaman. Biodegradable food waste is separated from recyclable items such as plastic, tin, bottles, and cardboard through a segregation process that was started post-collection and was run by PBMC. The transportation of recyclable materials to Chennai has been made possible by a network of more than 15 private segregation units strategically coordinated with PBMC through tender agreements, as the Andaman Islands lacked adequate recycling infrastructure.

Kurtkoti (2023), states that The Port Blair Municipal Council (PBMC) manages solid waste from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. PBMC ensures door-to-door waste collection from all households but no sewage treatment plants, leading to untreated liquid and solid waste being dumped into drains (Andaman and Nicobar Administration, 2023). The PBMC claims all plastic is segregated for recycling, but multi-layered plastic is not accounted for.

5.3 Ecological Consequences: Marine Life and Biodiversity

Plastic waste threatens marine and terrestrial ecosystems, including single-use plastics, bottles, and packaging materials. The Andaman & Nicobar Islands serve as crucial habitats for a diverse array of species, like whales, dolphins, the globally endangered dugong, saltwater crocodiles, hornbills, and turtles, which face severe threats due to overexploitation by illegal foreign fishing boats and poachers. This illicit activity places significant pressure on the delicate marine ecosystem, jeopardizing these vulnerable species' survival and undermining conservation and biodiversity preservation efforts (Sekar, 2018).

The dependence on tourism amplifies concerns about improper waste disposal, exacerbating environmental degradation and endangering coral reefs and wildlife.

5.4 Government Initiatives

Based on secondary research, it was found that the ban on plastic bags, enforced since August 2, 2010, showcased the region's commitment to reducing plastic usage and environmental degradation (PIB, 2022). Additionally, the innovative scheme mandating eight to ten per cent of plastic waste for road construction yielded tangible benefits, with over 148.6075 mt of shredded plastic waste utilized for constructing 162.1487 kilometers of roads. Furthermore, comprehensive door-to-door collection initiatives were implemented across all 24 wards of the municipal area and 70 Gram Panchayats in rural areas to ensure the scientific disposal of waste (Central Pollution Control Board, 2019).

Initiatives such as the 100 per cent exemption of freight charges for transporting plastic for recycling on the mainland demonstrated a proactive approach to sustainable waste management practices, with approximately 1530 tonnes of waste transported for recycling, contributing to environmental conservation efforts (Central Pollution Control Board, 2021). The formation of the Special Task Force for eliminating Single-Use Plastic in 2021 was authorized by Order No. 22 under the Chairmanship of the Chief Secretary, A&N Administration. According to A&N Gazette Notification No. 225 dated 24.09.2019, a Tehsil Level Task Force was established to enforce the ban on the use, storage, import, manufacture, transportation, distribution, sale, and disposal of plastic carry bags, regardless of their thickness, size, color, and nature, in the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Andaman and Nicobar Administration, 2023). These policy interventions highlighted collaborative efforts between stakeholders and underscored the pivotal role of policy frameworks in driving sustainable change.

6. DISCUSSION

Improperly disposed waste pollutes soil and waterways and harms ecosystems. Fundamental changes are needed to create an effective waste management system, such as new waste management systems and regulations. But, individual behavior does matter. Segregation of waste

and recycling practices are not merely technical matters but require behavioural and social changes. To promote behavioral change, Navodhaya Foundation organizes a variety of programs like door-to-door awareness programs, school programs, quiz/poster-making competitions, beach cleanups, radio interviews, local TV shows, etc.

During the internship, a walkathon was organized to promote the segregation of plastic, the cessation of littering, the discontinuation of single-use plastics, and the protection of marine life. Such walkathons can serve as powerful platforms for disseminating key messages through slogans and posters, urging participants and onlookers to take proactive steps toward mitigating plastic pollution and preserving fragile ecosystems. By mobilizing communities and igniting a collective sense of responsibility, these awareness programs strove to instigate tangible change and cultivate a culture of environmental consciousness for future generations.

During fieldwork and beach cleanups, participants were confronted with the stark realities of environmental degradation, witnessing unsightly scenes of plastic waste littering the landscape. The lack of waste management monitoring has worsened the plastic pollution problem. These sights underscored the urgent need for collective action to combat plastic pollution and preserve natural ecosystems.

Insights from the waste segregation process revealed significant findings from field visits to over 15 private segregation units. During these visits, data collected from manual workers provided insights, highlighting waste management practices not being systematically recorded in Andaman. In lieu of manual segregation of waste, the government could install automated segregation belts to increase efficiency. However, the deployment of such technology calls for a sizeable amount of resource investment.

It was also noted that incentives like the 100 per cent exemption of freight charges for transporting plastic for recycling on the mainland had demonstrated a proactive approach to sustainable waste management practices, with approximately 1530 tonnes of waste transported for recycling, contributing to environmental conservation efforts.

The subsequent recommendations can be deployed to address the issue of waste management:

- A. Use of Technology:** - Installing smart waste bins equipped with sensors can alert waste management authorities about overflowing bins and arrange for prompt collection of waste. Constructing Recycling Stations fitted with compactors and sorting mechanisms can enable visitors to deposit recyclable materials like plastic bottles, aluminum cans, and glass containers. Similarly, installing Water Quality Monitoring Sensors at beaches can continuously assess parameters such as pH levels, temperature, and pollution indicators. Including Magnetic and Density Separators could streamline manual workers' tasks, enhancing their effi-

ciency. This real-time data can aid in identifying pollution sources and safeguarding public health.

- B. Community Engagement:** Engaging the community in waste segregation initiatives can significantly reduce waste in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This involves implementing comprehensive segregation guidelines at the household level, expanding door-to-door collection services, and facilitating community involvement through awareness campaigns and cleanup events. Local leaders should engage the community in complying with waste management rules. Resources must be allocated to develop the necessary infrastructure, such as recycling centers and composting units.

7. CONCLUSION

Plastic pollution in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is an outcome of urbanization, tourism, economic expansion, and public apathy. Ineffective waste management has caused has threatened biodiversity, public health, and the region's economy. To address this challenge, there is a need to strengthen and execute waste management regulations. Investment in advanced technologies, such as smart waste bins and water quality sensors, can significantly optimize waste management operations. Equally important is facilitating behavioral change through public awareness campaigns and efficient waste collection systems. To attain this partnerships between governments, communities, and organizations like the Navodhaya Foundation can be institutionalized.

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Abstract

The Chapter describes the crisis faced by underprivileged smallholder farmers due to environmental degradation caused by the overuse of chemical fertilizers. To address this issue, Shramik Bharti has helped over 1,500 farmers from Punjab and Uttar Pradesh to switch from chemical farming to nature farming. By providing support, resources, and market linkage, the organization has improved farmer's income and sustained their interest in agriculture. The shift has made a positive impact and contributed to the region's Sustainable Development Goals. (This Chapter is based on Mr. Kartik Uttam, Mr. Kunal Dhupar, Mr. Kunal Singh, Mr. Naman Samtani, Mr. Shasvat Tyagi, and Ms. Somya Jaiswal's experiential learning through 'We Care: Civic Engagement' internship with Shramik Bharti in February 2024)

Keywords: Agriculture, Nature Farming, Sustainable Development Goals, Environment

1. INTRODUCTION

India's agricultural sector is in crisis, with smallholder farmers bearing the brunt of poverty and environmental degradation (World Bank, 2023). Our diverse ecosystems face mounting challenges, including soil erosion, water scarcity, and the impacts of climate change (Weiskopf et al., 2020). To address this challenge, 'Nature Farming' offers a sustainable and resilient alternative (Gamage et al., 2023). Its emphasis on biodiversity and climate-adaptive practices positions it as a transformative solution for sustainable agriculture (Friedrichsen et al., 2021). As India seeks a more equitable and environmentally sound future, nature farming emerges as an alternative that aligns with the nation's cultural heritage and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To promote Nature Farming, the Indian Government, through the 'Natural Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF)' and the 'Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati (BPKP)' schemes, provides financial incentives, research, and extension services to farmers (Rakshitha, 2023). Simultaneously, NGOs have been instrumental in providing training, resources, and market linkages to farmers (Dhingra et al., 2018). Shramik Bharti is one of the NGOs that has been successful in enabling farmers in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab to shift from chemical to natural farming.

2. ABOUT SHRAMIK BHARTI

Shramik Bharti, established in 1986, is a Kanpur-based development organization that focuses on ‘Sustainable Development with equal opportunities for all’ in the communities of North India (Shramik Bharti, 2024). The organization addresses issues of education, health, livelihood, food security, and conservation of natural resources. Besides, the organization also has developed interventions in wasteland development, water security, renewable energy, and microfinance. Since 2015, the organization has promoted nature farming as a viable and sustainable agricultural practice among 1500 farmers across Uttar Pradesh and Punjab and has enabled the restoration of over 1,000 acres of degraded land, which has contributed to vital carbon sequestration efforts (Shramik Bharti, 2024). By providing comprehensive support, including training, resource mobilization, and market linkages, the organization has elevated farmers’ livelihoods (Shramik Bharti, 2024).

3. PROJECT ALLOCATED

The We Care interns were asked to evaluate the impact of Shramik Bharti’s nature farming initiatives with the following objectives:

- To examine the effectiveness of initiatives in promoting sustainable and natural farming practices.
- To study the organization’s initiatives and their contribution to achieving sustainable development goals.
- To conduct a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the economic viability of organic farming initiatives.

4. METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study investigated the effectiveness of sustainable farming initiatives implemented by Shramik Bharti in the Shivrajpur region of Kanpur and assessed the organization’s contribution to achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Secondary data on regional climatic conditions was collected from government publications, and Shramik Bharti’s Annual Reports and publications provided data on the organization’s initiatives. Primary data was collected through a structured Likert scale questionnaire, which was administered to 149 farmers across 16 villages. The questionnaire focused on socioeconomic, environmental, and economic indicators related to nature farming initiatives.

Five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in various villages to evaluate the financial impact of Shramik Bharti’s agricultural interventions. Each FGD included approximately six

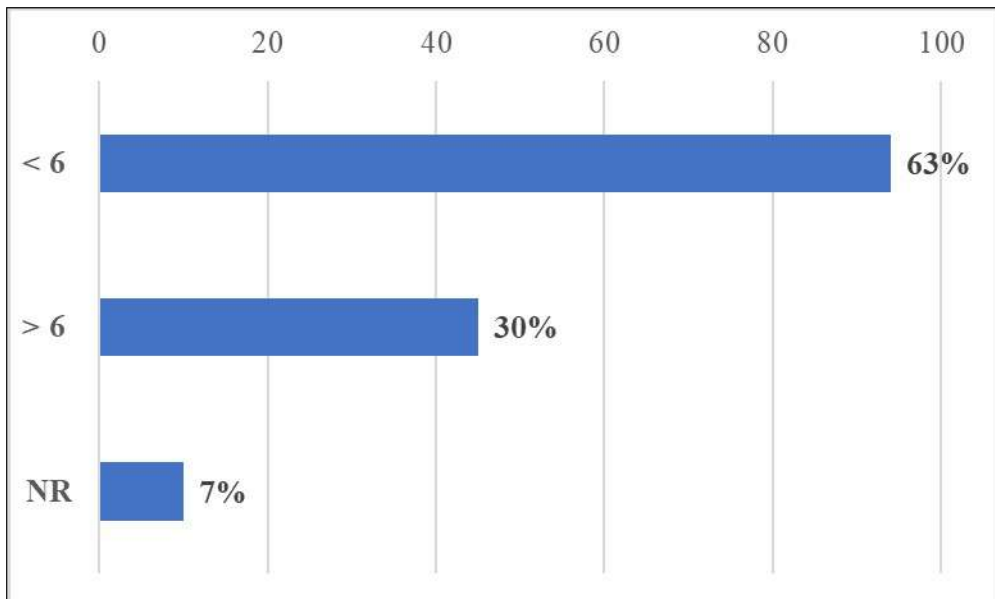
members from Ekta Self Help Group, Ekta Mahila Nature Farming Producer Company Limited, or Hariya Nature Farming Producer Company Limited. Respondents were asked to provide estimated information on input and labour costs before and after adopting nature farming practices. Qualitative data from five focus group discussions was analyzed thematically, identifying recurring themes and patterns related to the respondent’s experiences with sustainable farming initiatives and their perceptions of the benefits, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. These themes were then coded and categorized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative data. The FGD insights were used to conduct a cost-benefit analysis and assess the economic feasibility of organic farming initiatives. Quantitative data was analyzed using JMP statistical software. To examine the interdependencies between SDGs and the associations between villages and SDG attainment, the likelihood ratio and Pearson’s Chi-Square tests were conducted.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Respondents profile

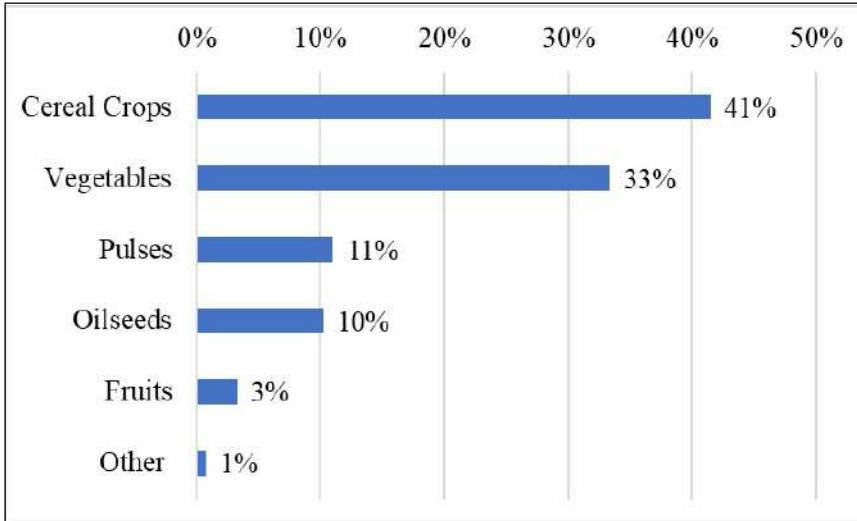
The data was collected from 149 respondents across 16 villages belonging to Shivrajpur in Kanpur. In terms of family size, data indicates that 63 per cent of the respondents had a family size of six members (See Fig 1).

Fig 1 Family Size



5.2 Agricultural Produce

Fig 2 Farm Cultivation



Multiple Responses ≠ 100

Fig 2 illustrates the agricultural produce in Shivrajpur block Kanpur. Respondents reported cultivating cereals like Wheat and Paddy. They also cultivated pulses (Moong, Urad) and a variety of vegetables (Potatoes, Coriander, Tomatoes, etc). Further discussions revealed that a large number were involved in Mustard cultivation.

5.3 Farming Experience

Fig 3 Nature Farming Experience

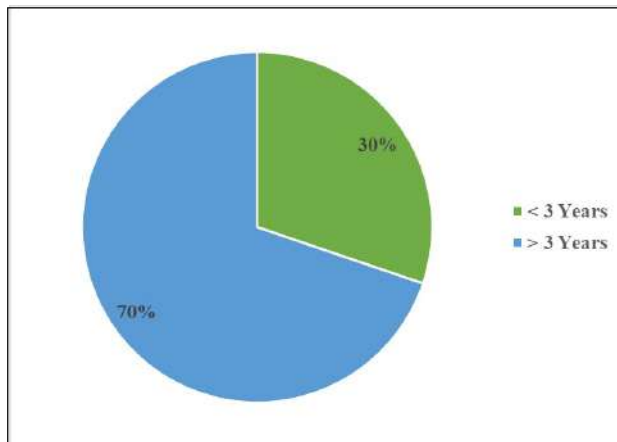


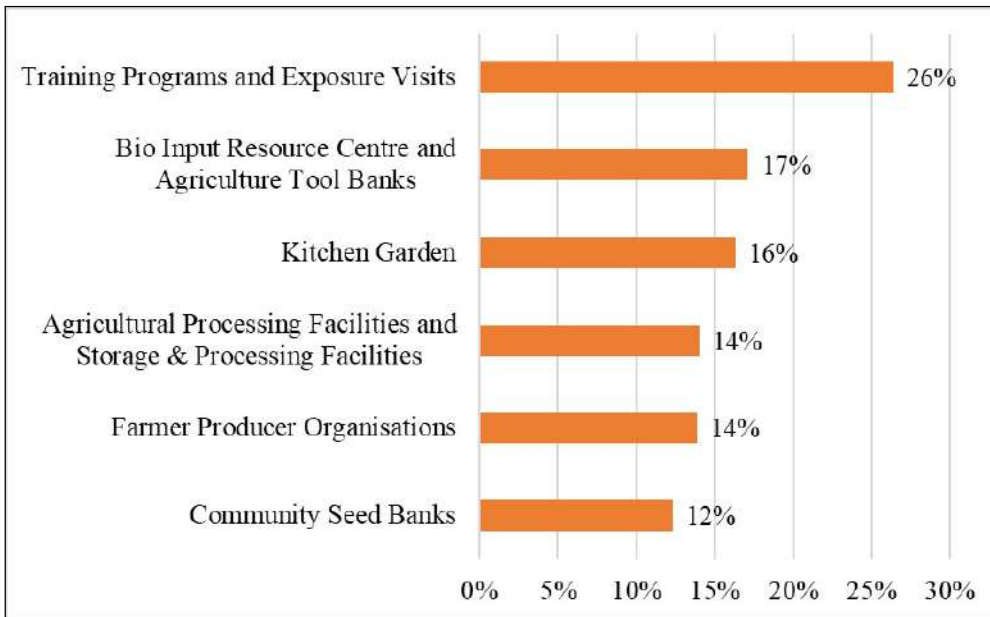
Fig 3 shows the experience levels of farmers engaged in natural farming practices. Among the respondents, 70 per cent reported having over three years of experience in natural farming, whereas 30 per cent were new to natural farming methods.

5.4 Effectiveness: Natural farming initiatives

Initiative of Organization

Shramik Bharti implemented various interventions in the Shivrajpur block. Interventions such as Training Programs, Exposure Visits, Bio Input Resource Centres, Agriculture Tool Banks, Kitchen Garden, Agricultural Cleaning, Grading, Storage & Processing Facilities, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and Community Seed Banks.

Fig 4 Participation in Interventions



Multiple Responses ≠ 100

Data presented in Fig 4 indicates that knowledge development through training programs and exposure visits was found to be highly effective. Agri support services received from the Bio Input Resource Center and agriculture tool banks were considered to be beneficial to the farmers. In cascading order, farmers felt that initiatives like kitchen gardens, agricultural cleaning, grading, storage and processing facilities, FPOs, and community seed banks were effective.

Discussions with the respondents revealed satisfaction with various natural farming initiatives implemented by the organization.

5.5 Alignment: Natural Farming Initiative and SDGs

To examine the alignment between initiatives and SDGs, the respondents were asked to rate the improvement of their socioeconomic performance and quality of life by adopting natural farming initiatives. These were further aligned with various SDGs, as displayed in Table 1. The raking was based on a scale of 1-5 (1 lowest- 5 highest).

Table 1 Organization’s Contribution Towards Sustainable Development Goals

| Rating | Increase in Income (SDG 1) | Food Security (SDG 2) | Improvement in Health (SDG 3) | Women's Participation (SDG 5) | Clean Energy (SDG 7) | Livelihood Opportunities (SDG 8) | Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9) | Reduce Inequalities (SDG 10) | Responsible Consumption (SDG 12) | Climate Action (SDG 13) | Life on Land (SDG 15) |
|--------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 3 | 10% | 7% | 12% | 11% | 11% | 11% | 7% | 7% | 11% | 13% | 11% |
| 4 | 36% | 40% | 44% | 44% | 36% | 36% | 48% | 41% | 44% | 42% | 37% |
| 5 | 54% | 53% | 44% | 46% | 53% | 52% | 46% | 52% | 45% | 45% | 52% |

As displayed in Table 1, data shows that multiple SDGs were attained through the adoption of natural farming practices. Qualitative discussion with the respondents revealed that besides an increase in income, farmers have adopted innovative farming techniques to increase their productivity and have learned to adapt to climate variability. Reduction in the use of chemical fertilizers has helped improve soil health and preserve biodiversity. This has led to responsible production.

5.6 Cost Benefit Analysis: Economic Viability

To evaluate the economic viability of adopting natural farming was assessed with the help of five focus group discussions (FGD) with the following entities: Ekta Self Help Group, Ekta Mahila Nature Farming Producer Company Limited, and Hariya Nature Farming Producer Company Limited.

Discussions focused on the cost implications of transitioning from conventional chemical farming to nature farming, analyzing expenses for ploughing, field preparation, seeds, sowing, fertilizers (urea, DAP, zinc), pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, irrigation, weeding, hoeing, and transportation. The FGD revealed financial implications for farm inputs prior to and after the adoption of natural farming (See Table 2).

Table 2 Cost Benefit Analysis: Ekta Self-Help Group

| Ekta Self-Help Group | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------------|--------------|--|-------------|--------------|
| Farming Inputs | Pre-Intervention (Chemical Farming) | | | Post-Intervention (Natural Farming) | | |
| | Input Cost(Rs.) | No. | Unit | Total (pre) | No. | Unit |
| Ploughing | 3 | 700 | 2100 | 3 | 350 | 1050 |
| Seed | 50 | 65 | 3250 | - | - | - |
| Sowing | 2 | 225 | 450 | 2 | 145 | 290 |
| Urea/Tonic | 4 | 250 | 1000 | - | - | - |
| DAP/Organic Manure | 2 | 1400 | 2800 | - | - | - |
| Zinc | 4 | 60 | 240 | - | - | - |
| Weedicide | 1 | 700 | 700 | - | - | - |
| Pesticides | 1 | 750 | 750 | - | - | - |
| Irrigation | 4 | 300 | 1200 | 3 | 300 | 900 |
| Transportation | 2 | 700 | 1400 | - | - | - |
| Total Input Cost | - | - | 13890 | - | - | 2240 |
| Total Income | 18 | 1500 | 27000 | 18 | 2200 | 39600 |
| Profit | | | 13110 | | | 37360 |

It can be observed from Table 2 above that each farmer had an additional income of Rs. 24,250 after adopting natural farming.

Table 3 Cost Benefit Analysis: Ekta Mahila Nature Farming Producer Company Limited

| Ekta Mahila Nature Farming Producer Company Limited | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------------|--------------|--|-------------|--------------|
| Farming Inputs | Pre-intervention (Chemical farming) | | | Post-intervention (Natural farming) | | |
| | Input Cost(Rs.) | No. | Unit | Total (pre) | No. | Unit |
| Ploughing | 3 | 675 | 2025 | 3 | 330 | 990 |
| Seed | 50 | 70 | 3500 | - | - | - |
| Sowing | 2 | 220 | 440 | 2 | 150 | 300 |
| Urea/Tonic | 4 | 250 | 1000 | - | - | - |
| DAP/Organic Manure | 2 | 1400 | 2800 | - | - | - |
| Zinc | 4 | 60 | 240 | - | - | - |
| Weedicide | 1 | 700 | 700 | - | - | - |
| Pesticides | 1 | 750 | 750 | - | - | - |
| Irrigation | 4 | 320 | 1280 | 3 | 315 | 945 |
| Transportation | 2 | 750 | 1500 | - | - | - |
| Total Input Cost | - | - | 14235 | - | - | 2235 |
| Total Income | 18 | 1500 | 27000 | 18 | 2200 | 39600 |
| Profit | | | 12765 | | | 37365 |

It can be seen from Table 3 that each farmer received an additional income of Rs. 24,600 after practicing natural farming.

Table 4 Cost Benefit Analysis: Hariya Nature Farming Producer Company Limited

| Hariya Nature Farming Producer Company Limited | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------------|--------------------|--|-------------|---------------------|
| Farming Inputs | Pre-intervention (Chemical farming) | | | Post-intervention (Natural farming) | | |
| Input Cost(Rs.) | No. | Unit | Total (pre) | No. | Unit | Total (post) |
| Ploughing | 3 | 675 | 2025 | 3 | 340 | 1020 |
| Seed | 50 | 70 | 3500 | - | - | - |
| Sowing | 2 | 225 | 450 | 2 | 160 | 320 |
| Urea/Tonic | 4 | 250 | 1000 | - | - | - |
| DAP/Organic Manure | 2 | 1400 | 2800 | - | - | - |
| Zinc | 4 | 60 | 240 | - | - | - |
| Weedicide | 1 | 700 | 700 | - | - | - |
| Pesticides | 1 | 750 | 750 | - | - | - |
| Irrigation | 4 | 330 | 1320 | 3 | 325 | 975 |
| Transportation | 2 | 775 | 1550 | - | - | - |
| Total Input Cost | - | - | 14335 | - | - | 2315 |
| Total Income | 18 | 1500 | 27000 | 18 | 2200 | 39600 |
| Profit | | | 12665 | | | 37285 |

Table 4 shows that each farmer earned Rs. 24,620 as additional income after adopting natural farming practices.

The respondents mentioned a high level of positivity and progress. Ease and convenience in cultivating, consuming, and exchanging produce locally and reducing transportation costs were reported by farmers. It was observed that seeds stored in local seed banks and natural remedies replaced chemical input.

The growth in women's empowerment was observed; they were taking the lead in nature farming initiatives, advocating for its benefits in neighbouring villages and urban areas. Additionally, they highlighted the health benefits of consuming organic products. They shared the improvements in soil quality and water retention, making ploughing easier and irrigation more efficient.

6. DISCUSSION

Shramik Bharti's efforts to transition small and marginal farmers from chemical to natural farming practices have demonstrated an impact on improving farm productivity. This is evident from the

fact that 70 per cent of respondents have adopted natural farming for more than three years, and the remaining have adopted it in the last three years. The organization's interventions, including training programs, exposure visits, bio-input resource centers, and farmer-producer organizations, have been highly effective in promoting sustainable farming practices. Shramik's initiatives have empowered women, who have become active participants in natural farming practices and have benefited from increased economic independence. Farmers reported increased knowledge of natural farming techniques, improved soil health through the use of organic inputs, and reduced reliance on harmful chemicals. It can be inferred from the qualitative data that Shramik Bharti's initiatives have benefitted the farmers in the following manner:

6.1 Increased productivity and reduced input cost: The cost-benefit analysis revealed that nature farming practices are economically viable because farmers reported increased incomes and reduced input costs. The input cost was reduced because farmers did not invest in purchasing chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

6.2 Improved livelihoods: Natural farming has provided farmers with a more sustainable and profitable source of income. The increase in income was attributed to good-quality crop yields and improved market access for organic produce.

6.3 Environmental benefits: The organization's initiatives have contributed to the restoration of degraded lands, improved water quality, reduced pollution, and contributed towards environmental sustainability. These outcomes have contributed to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including poverty reduction and gender equality. It can be inferred from Shramik Bharti's approach that by prioritizing soil health, biodiversity, and climate resilience, natural farming offers a sustainable and equitable alternative to conventional chemical-intensive agriculture.

To ensure environmental sustainability and human health, Shramik Bharti's model can be replicated and scaled up to reach a larger number of farmers across India. Government policies should support the expansion of nature farming initiatives by providing financial incentives, research, and extension services. Partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and private sector organizations can scale the adoption of Natural Farming across the country.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To scale up the adoption of natural farming in India, it is important to implement multiple strategies. First and foremost, awareness campaigns and training programs should be conducted to inform farmers, consumers, and policymakers about the benefits of natural farming. Community-based initiatives, such as visits to farmer-producer organizations, bioresource centers, seed banks, etc, can inspire farmers and promote knowledge sharing.

Secondly, market development initiatives, including organic certification and improved market access, are essential to ensure the economic viability of natural farming practices. It is equally important to educate consumers about the benefits of organic and natural products and encourage their consumption to preserve good health.

To validate the benefits of natural farming, address specific challenges, and strengthen extension services, the government should provide financial assistance to conduct research. Partnerships with NGOs and corporations can help to bring transformation to the agriculture sector.

8. CONCLUSION

Shramik Bharti's work in promoting natural farming is a valuable contribution to sustainable agriculture and rural development in India. By transitioning small and marginal farmers to sustainable practices, the organization has contributed to enhancing farm productivity, improving livelihoods, and promoting environmental sustainability. The outcomes of these initiatives have aligned with multiple Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the potential of natural farming as a sustainable and equitable alternative to conventional agriculture.

To scale up the adoption of natural farming in India, there is a need to raise awareness among farmers, design community-based initiatives, promote market development, and educate consumers. Governments and corporations should play a key role in strengthening research in natural farming, promoting extension services, and facilitating partnerships with NGOs to bring attitudinal change among farmers. By implementing these recommendations, India can harness the power of natural farming to address agricultural challenges, improve food security, and create a more sustainable and resilient future for its farmers.

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Abstract

The Chapter is based on the evaluation of the effectiveness of Ambuja Cement Foundation's (ACF) Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) in Patiala and Ropar in Punjab and Solan district in Himachal Pradesh. The evaluation was based on a survey and focused group discussion with 63 farmers. The findings indicate that the CHCs have significantly impacted small and marginal farmers. By providing subsidized access to modern agricultural machinery, these centers have empowered farmers to increase their productivity, cultivate more land, and reduce their reliance on manual labour. While CHCs have demonstrated their potential to improve agricultural outcomes, several challenges persist. Farmers voiced their concerns about the limited availability of farm machines during peak seasons, high rental rates, and transportation-related challenges. To maximize CHCs' impact on rural prosperity, the Chapter recommends broadening the range of machinery available, improving accessibility to CHC services, and actively promoting their use, especially among women farmers. (The Chapter is based on Mr. Pratik Tukaram Bhangare and Mr. Yash Ajit Gadgil's experiential learning through the 'We Care: Civic Engagement' internship with Ambuja Cement Foundation in February 2024).

Keywords: Custom Hiring Centers, Agricultural Productivity, Marginalized Farmers, Agriculture Equipments

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is important in sustaining human populations and providing food, raw materials, and employment opportunities worldwide. In India, agriculture is vital, contributing around 17-18 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing over half of the workforce (PIB, 2023). According to the 2011 Census, 54.6 per cent of the total workforce is engaged in agriculture and allied sector activities.

According to India's Agriculture Census 2015-16, 86.1 per cent of Indian farmers are small and marginal farmers who hold less than two hectares of land (Saini & Chowdhury, 2023). These farmers grapple with a multitude of challenges. Fragmented landholdings, overreliance on the

monsoon, inadequate irrigation, limited access to modern technology and quality inputs, poor infrastructure, and weak market linkages have exacerbated their plight. To address these issues and improve farm productivity there is a need to educate the farmers to use modern technology and adopt sustainable practices (World Bank, 2020).

Government of India has implemented various schemes of providing financial assistance and subsidies for improving irrigation infrastructure, and establishing better market linkages. To complement the efforts of the government, NGOs like Ambuja Cement Foundation have been instrumental in providing knowledge, technical expertise, and promoting sustainable farming practices.

2. ABOUT AMBUJA CEMENT FOUNDATION

Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF), the CSR arm of Ambuja Cements, is engaged in rural development since 1993. It offers support in areas of education, health, women's empowerment, skill development and agriculture across 2,800 villages spread across 11 States. To sustain interest of farmers in agriculture and prevent migration ACF provides knowledge and material support for soil conservation, irrigation, and access to modern agriculture equipments. This has enhanced economic productivity of farmers and enhanced food security (CSR Box, 2019).

2.1 Custom Hiring Centres

Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF) has established 'Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs)' to bridge the gap between small-scale farmers and modern agricultural technology (Agriculture Farmer Collectives, 2020). By providing access to a variety of mechanized equipment at subsidized rents, these centers enable farmers to enhance their agriculture and economic productivity. As of 2023-24, Ambuja Foundation facilitated the setup of 51 Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) (Ambuja Cement Foundation, 2024).

ACF is the CSR implementing partner for HDFC Bank's CSR initiative 'Parivartan'. Through this partnership, the 'Holistic Rural Development Program (HRDP)' in Patiala District, Punjab, is being implemented. The program aims to improve agro-based livelihoods by providing knowledge inputs in areas of utilization of modern technology, water conservation, market linkages, formation of farmer's clubs, and empowering women farmers.

3. PROJECT ALLOCATED

To assess the efficacy of Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) in Patiala and Ropar in Punjab and Solan District in Himachal Pradesh, the We Care interns were assigned with the task of conducting primary research.

4. OBJECTIVES

- To examine the level of satisfaction of farmers in utilizing custom hiring services.
- To identify the issues faced by farmers while adopting farm mechanization services provided by the CHCs.
- To suggest recommendations for improving the functioning of CHCs.

5. METHODOLOGY

The exploratory study was conducted with a sample size of 63 farmers who had utilized the services of CHCs across the Patiala, Ropar, and Solan districts. Data regarding benefits received from CHCs, constraints faced in accessing various types of farm machinery, CHC rental charges, and transparency of CHC operations were collected through personal interviews with farmers. A five-point Likert Scale was used to measure the respondents' level of satisfaction with CHCs.

Focus group discussions were conducted online with farmers in Una (Himachal Pradesh), Varanasi & Agra in Uttar Pradesh, and Bhatapara & Korba in Chhattisgarh. To examine the functioning of the eight CHCs (see Table 1) and assess their efficacy and impact, qualitative data was gathered using hybrid focus group discussions involving two groups. The first group consisted of respondents who managed and utilized CHC services. Data regarding the membership count, equipment rental options, and the influence of CHCs were gathered from the respondents.

The second group of respondents were service users of CHCs who were not engaged with its management. The discussion with this group focussed on utilization of CHC services, level of satisfaction, challenges faced in accessing various types of farm machinery, rental charges of CHC, transparency of CHC operations, and unmet needs. The respondents were asked to rank their challenges in ascending order. Data regarding the functioning of the CHCs was also collected from the ACF field team.

Table 1 Custom Hiring Centres

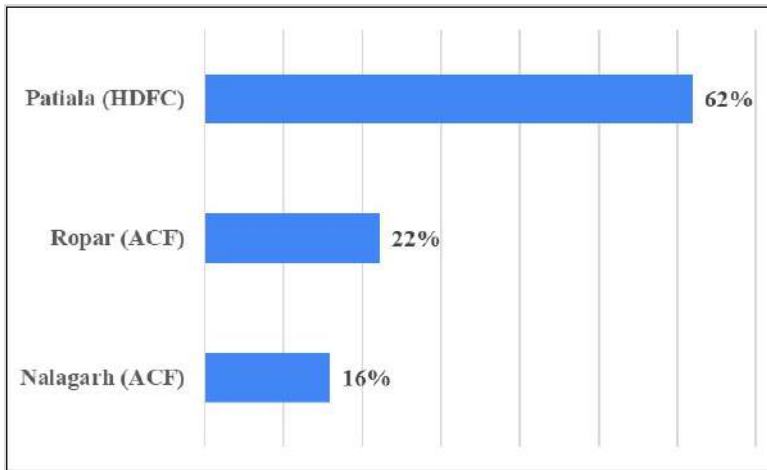
| Sr No | Name of CHC | District | State | Number of Members Interviewed |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Rupnagar Producer Company Limited | Ropar | Punjab | 14 |
| 2 | Maharana Pratap Farmers Club | Patiala | Punjab | 10 |
| 3 | Shaheed Bhagat Singh Club | Patiala | Punjab | 7 |
| 4 | Baba Deep Singh Farmers Club | Patiala | Punjab | 7 |
| 5 | Sant Baba Buta Singh Farmers Club | Patiala | Punjab | 6 |
| 6 | Surajgarh Farmers Club | Patiala | Punjab | 5 |
| 7 | Jalalpur Farmers Club | Patiala | Punjab | 4 |
| 8 | Shivam Milk Producer Cooperative | Nalagarh (Solan) | Himachal Pradesh | 10 |

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Respondents Profile

All respondents were male, and among them, 92 per cent (58) were members of CHC. Patiala, with six CHCs, had more members, whereas Ropar and Nalagarh had only one CHC (See Fig 1).

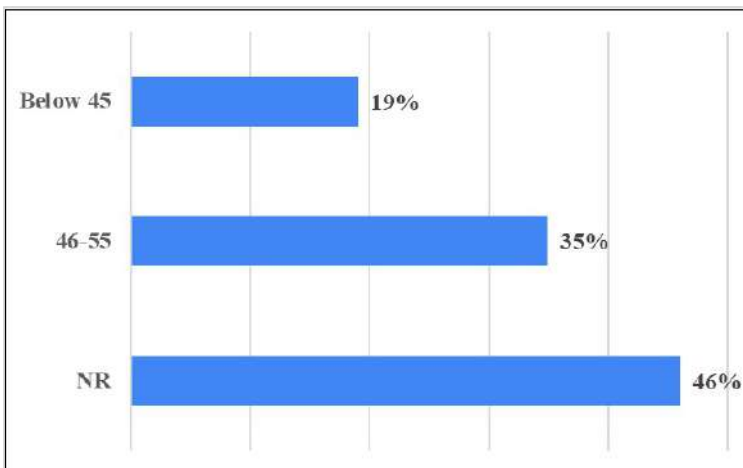
Fig 1 CHC-Wise Respondents



Age

From the total respondents, only 54 per cent shared information about their age (See Fig 2).

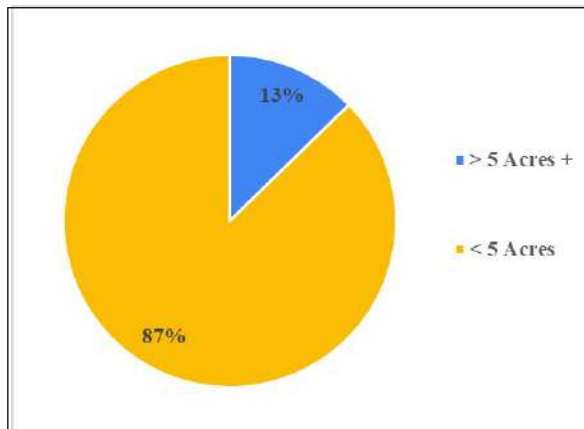
Fig 2 Respondent's Age



6.2. Farm Size

Only 13 per cent of the respondents had more than 5 acres of land, indicating the majority were small and marginal farmers (See Fig 3).

Fig 3 Farm Size



6.3 Association with ACF and CHC

The CHCs offer training, equipment, and guidance to farmers, with the primary goal of providing subsidized rental rates on essential farm machinery. These include Rotavators, Disks (Tavia), Laser Levelers, Super Seeders, Tractors, and Corn Sowers, specifically aimed at supporting small and marginal farmers. As depicted in Figure 4, ACF and CHC had a significant reach, especially among individuals with less than five years of involvement.

Fig 4 Association with ACF and CHC

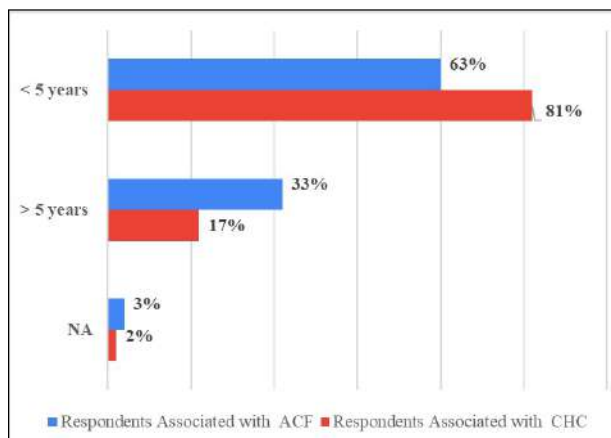


Fig 5 CHC Association & Cultivation Seasons

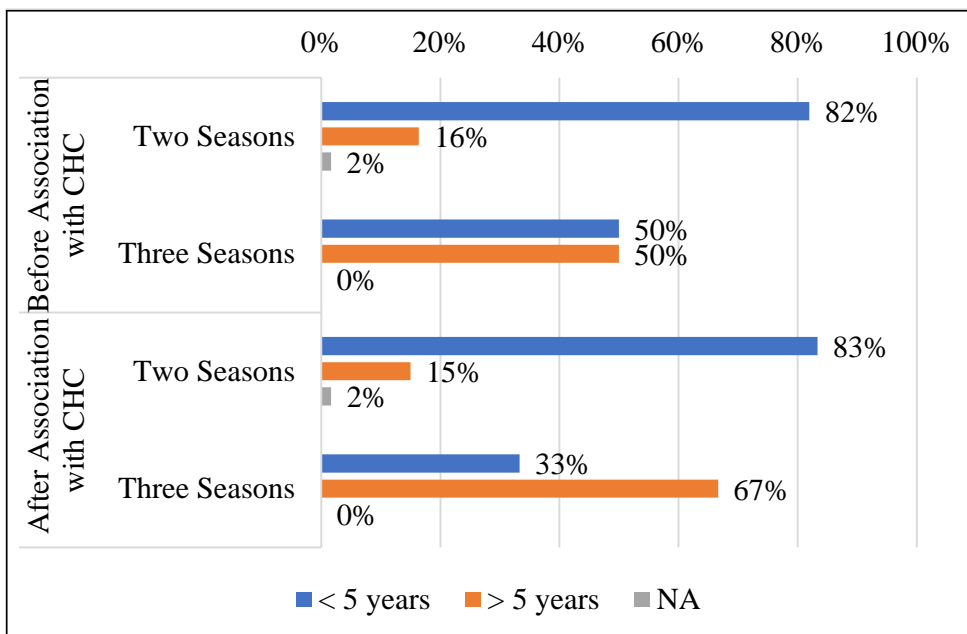


Fig 5 shows a correlation between CHC membership and increased agricultural productivity. Respondents with longer membership durations reported a shift from two-season to three-season cultivation despite minor fluctuations. In contrast, those with shorter memberships typically cultivate their land twice annually. These observations suggest that CHC involvement positively influences land cultivation practices. Respondents reported cultivating wheat (29 per cent), potatoes (22 per cent), paddy (19 per cent), and maize (16 per cent).

6.4 Level of satisfaction

Respondents were probed to assess their level of satisfaction with the services offered by the CHCs. A five-point Likert Scale was used to examine the satisfaction levels of the respondents in the following areas.

1. Availability of machinery
2. Rental rates of farm machinery at the CHC
3. Range and types of machinery available
4. The condition of the farm machinery
5. Transparency of CHC operations

The findings indicate that at Ropar and Nalagarh, where ACF operated the CHCs, the level of

satisfaction with regard to the condition of farm machinery and transparency was found to be the highest. Sharing the experience of the use of farm machinery, Harman Singh from Ropar said, *“The machines saved my time. Earlier, I needed labour to work on the farm. It was time-consuming to do things manually. With the machines at hand and the knowledge gained, now I can cultivate one extra crop in a year.”* However, farmers from Ropar and Nalagarh opined that machinery rental rates should be more affordable. Farmers from Nalagarh reported that they were moderately satisfied with the range and type of machinery available to them.

In comparison to Ropar and Nalagarh, farmers from Patiala reported a higher level of satisfaction with all aspects of CHC except the payment method. In this context, Nain Singh from Patiala shared, *“Our village has small farmers with a maximum farm size of around 2 acres. They cannot afford to buy big machines themselves; hence, they rent the machines at Rs.100, Rs.150, or Rs.200 and make use of them.”*

6.5 Constraints Faced

Respondents ranked the challenges and constraints they faced in their respective CHCs in ascending order (See Table 2).

Table 2 Ranking: Constraints

| Geography | Availability of Skilled Labour to Operate Machines | Availability of Machines During Peak Season | Availability of Good Conditioned Machinery | Affordable Rental Charges | Difficulty in Transportation of Agricultural Machinery & Equipment | Payment Methods Are Not Suitable |
|----------------|--|---|--|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Ropar (ACF) | 5 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Nalagarh (ACF) | 6 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Patiala (HDFC) | 3 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 1 |

It can be inferred from Table 2 that difficulty in the transportation of machinery was the most common constraint found across all CHCs, indicating a need for improvement in transportation infrastructure followed by the availability of suitable machinery, especially during peak seasons. Further, it can be observed from Table 2 that the specific priorities for constraints to be addressed differed among the CHCs. Ropar and Nalagarh prioritized affordable rental charges for transportation, while Patiala CHCs felt that their constraints regarding payment methods, transportation, and skilled labour availability need to be addressed.

Beyond machinery-related issues, respondents also highlighted power dynamics within villages, lack of resources, traditional farming practices, and lack of women's participation in utilizing farm equipment as constraints. Respondents expressed a desire to equip CHCs with new farm machinery and good fertilizers to enhance their agricultural output.

7. DISCUSSION

It can be surmised from the findings that the Ambuja Cement Foundation's Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) have significantly impacted small and marginal farmers in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. To improve farming production and practices, the CHCs have helped in addressing some of the challenges faced by small and marginal farmers. The findings highlight that by providing access to modern technology, 87 per cent of small and marginalized farmers, these centers have increased farm production. Farmers who have been associated with CHC for more than five years now cultivate their land thrice a year. In the Patiala region, where the Parivartan program is implemented, farmers are satisfied with the ease of access to subsidized machinery, which has proven to be a game-changer for many farmers.

CHCs operated by ACF in Ropar and Nalagarh, the farmers reported that CHCs have empowered small and marginal farmers to expand their crop production capabilities, helped them to diversify their agricultural activities, and reduced their dependence on labor-intensive manual farming practices. It has contributed to increased yields and better economic outcomes for farmers.

7.1 Challenges faced

Discussions with the farmers revealed that during peak seasons, there is limited availability of machinery, which leads to delays in planting and harvesting and consequentially impacts crop quality and profitability. Farmers from Nalagarh felt that the farm machinery available at CHC is currently limited and cannot take care of their diverse agricultural needs, and the rental rates are excessive. Transportation challenges are mainly present in regions like Ropar and Nalagarh, where access to CHCs is hindered by poor road infrastructure.

7.2 Skill Shortages and Traditional Farming Practices

Another critical concern raised by farmers from the Patiala region was the shortage of skilled labour capable of operating the machinery effectively. The persistence of traditional farming methods and deep-rooted local power dynamics within communities hinder the optimal utilization of CHC services. Women farmers are reluctant to use agricultural machinery because of a lack of awareness, resources, and prevailing social norms.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion with the farmers, the subsequent recommendations were proposed:

8.1 Expanding Machinery and Accessibility

One of the primary steps in improving the effectiveness of CHCs is to expand the range of machinery and make it available at convenient locations to meet the varied needs of the agricultural community. Training farmers to use different equipment will result in scaling up farm production and income.

8.2 Promoting Inclusivity and Empowering Women

To promote ownership of CHCs, there is a need to encourage participation from a diverse range of social groups of farmers and form committees that include members with limited political influence. Since fewer women farmers are using CHC services, there is a need to improve their knowledge and access to modern machinery. This will help to break down traditional gender roles, empower women, and promote an inclusive environment.

8.3 Leadership Development and Innovation

Developing leadership skills within the community is essential for sustainable growth. In managing CHCs, leadership positions can be rotated during meetings, allowing different individuals to take on leadership roles. This practice will facilitate a sense of ownership among community members and generate a new generation of responsible community leaders.

In addition to leadership development, organizing training sessions to encourage farmers to develop innovative farm practices is vital. Farmers can be exposed to adopt sustainable farming practices and cultivate high-value crops. By sharing this knowledge, CHCs can promote community resilience.

9. CONCLUSION

The Ambuja Cement Foundation's Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) have been a game-changer for small and marginal farmers. By providing access to modern agricultural equipment, these centers have significantly increased the productivity and incomes of farmers. Despite farmers' satisfaction with the transparency and quality of CHC services, challenges such as power dynamics, resource constraints, machinery-related issues, and limited female participation hinder the optimal utilization of CHCs and impede farm productivity. The success of ACF's mission to promote sustainable agriculture and uplift rural communities depends on its ability to overcome these obstacles.

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