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COMPENDIUM
OF

**AGRO
ECOLOGICAL
BEST
PRACTICES**

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana



Integrated Livelihood Approach for Landless & Marginal Farmers through Convergence by LKP in West Bengal

Background

Lok Kalyan Parishad (LKP) has been working in the backyard districts of West Bengal and is working with about 60,000 *Mahila Kisans* spread over 11 blocks of 5 districts. It has been partnering with WBSRLM (West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission) to implement its MKSP project since 2013 in the Labpur block of Birbhum district. Around 60% of the population belongs to the SC, ST and OBC community. Agriculture and wage labor are the major sources of livelihood in the area.

Contextual Issues, Problems & Challenges

With very high population density, the average landholding of the farmers is less than 1 acre and this is decreasing gradually. About 51.56% families are considered to be landless. Agriculture is mostly rain-fed and the average food security from owned land is about 3-5 months only. The landless families mostly take land on lease from individuals as well as from the *Gram Panchayat*. However, the leased land is also very small. The issue of land availability results in decreasing livestock rearing due to less availability of grazing lands for animals, which is affecting the availability of compost. Gradually, most of the male members of the families are migrating to other districts and states in search of opportunities, while women mostly carry on the agricultural activities along with household work. The nutrition status of women is very poor, where more than 70% of the women and children of the targeted population are anaemic.

Core Idea

With very high degree of landlessness, nutritional security has become a huge issue in the area. The idea was to ensure access to land individually or collectively through leasing land from individual land owners with surplus land or from common *Panchayat* land with the involvement of SHGs and PRIs. The SHG members are trained to utilize these small land areas to produce nutritious food round the year by adopting available inputs and organic practices. This is supplemented with strengthening of small livestock like BYPs, goats, etc., to further add to family nutrition and income in the hands of women. Collaboration with *Panchayat* bodies and various line departments strengthens the overall livelihoods scenario of women farmers, enhances self-confidence, and contributes towards empowerment in general.





Key Interventions

- Promotion of individual and community nutritional gardens in small, unutilized land areas.
- Ensuring sustainable practices like the preservation and use of local seeds, seed treatment, application of organic manure (compost, Azolla, *Amritjal* and *Jeevamrit*) and organic medicines (*Neemastra*, *Brahmastra* and *Agneyastra*) in kitchen garden
- Ensuring improved rearing practices for goats and backyard poultry

Strategies

The key strategies followed by LKP while grounding the above interventions can be listed as below:

- Strengthening the relationship of SHGs and the community with PRIs
- Ensuring convergence with the bottom-up planning process
- Triggering convergence for landless community to get leased land
- Designing interventions that the community can do easily with available local resources
- Nesting of local para-professionals and CRPs
- Intensive training of SHG members by the local para-professionals and CRPs around interventions

Results

The followings are the distinct outcomes observed in the project area of LKP while making the field visits.

Outreach: The project is running in 11 GPs covering 14,489 *Mahila Kisans* belonging to 1,660 SHGs. The study team had visited Indus and Labpur GPs of the block. In these two *Panchayats*, about 90% of the members have adopted different activities promoted by LKP. 2190 SHG members have opted for individual kitchen gardens, 1,900 families have been covered under the livestock program, 1,920 farmers are producing vermi-compost, and 660 farmers are practicing non-chemical farming practices completely.

SHGs and PRIs on a single platform: A smooth and healthy relationship between the SHG and PRI systems has been established. The development work is being carried on via a participatory approach. The members of MKSHGs (*Mahila Kisan* SHGs) prepare their livelihood plans, which are consolidated at the village/sub-cluster level. After being approved in the *Gram Sansad Sabha*, the consolidated plans are incorporated into the annual GP plan.

Capacity building of CRPs and SHG members: The CRPs under MKSP have been developed mostly around agriculture and animal rearing. They have also gained

expertise to extend help in other areas like fisheries and some off-farm and non-farm activities, including the livelihoods planning process. Experts from reputed institutions like BCKV, KVKs CADC, NIRD, SIPRD, and from Government line departments have trained CRPs. They are also supported by field-level handholding by LKP experts.

Approach to landlessness issue: The private land and public land that remain fallow after harvesting of *Aman* rice are taken on seasonal lease in private-private and public-private mode from season to season for a short period. The MKs are growing *Rabi* pulses, oil seeds, etc., and if reliable irrigation is available, they are opting for wheat cultivation. Similarly, on common land, the public-private partnership mode is adopted by the landless SHGs where they take up agro-forestry plantation for fruit, fodder, fuel and timber. Ponds and other water bodies are also taken on lease for integrated farming. This leasing of land to individual landless and landless groups is finalised with the involvement of SHGs and PRIs.

Preparation and use of organic nutrients: The women farmers here prepare vermi-compost and follow the *Nadep* pit method to prepare compost with the support of CRPs. Members are preparing and using organic nutrients and pesticides extensively. *Bijambrit* is being used for seed and seedling treatment, *Amritjal* and *Ghana-Jeebambrit* as nutrients, and *Brahmastra*, *Neemastra* and *Agneyastra* as organic pesticides.

Quality traditional seeds through seed banks: The preservation of seeds has been given utmost importance in the visited project villages. It has been a group-based activity operating in a village with 2-3



SHGs selecting one member to take charge. This model provides assured quality seeds in time at a fair price. Nowadays, they are also selling surplus seeds when the market price is high.

Nutrition garden: Most of the families in the visited villages have adopted the nutrition garden model in small plots of about 2-10 decimals as per the availability of land near their houses. Crops are grown throughout the year. Nutritious fruit plants like drumsticks, papaya, citrus, guava, etc. are also an integral part of the kitchen garden, which ensures the availability of chemical-free and nutritious food to the families round the year. The women are enthusiastic about this activity and their gardens are being promoted in an integrated manner by using available local resources. The traditional seeds, the vermi-compost, *Azolla* and *Nadep* are integrated with kitchen garden, and the models promoted are low-cost and easily managed by them. Four different models were observed during the visit:

- Community nutrition garden in leased land taken up by a group of landless SHG members
- Individual members doing it on their own land or on land leased from other farmers
- Some are doing it around small farm ponds close to their house along with fish farming
- In schools also SHGs are promoting nutrition gardens in schools, which help children in getting chemical-free nutritious mid-day meals



The following is a case study of a successful, typical member of the visited project villages.

CASE STUDY

Case of Asrufa Didi

Asrufa Begum is a member in Nabisaheb Swanirbhar Dol SHG in Dakshin Durgapur village situated in Indus GP of Labpur block. She has 5 decimals of homestead land and is growing a nutrition garden after receiving training on this from LKP. She grows multiple crops in 3 seasons, i.e. pre-Kharif, Kharif and Rabi. She grows leafy vegetables, cucurbits, Cole crops, Solanaceous crops, papaya and drumstick. She has adopted vermi-compost, *Amritjal* and *Azolla*, using traditional seeds, application of organic medicines and fencing using plastic nets. She is able to earn about Rs 15,000 from this small patch of land after fulfilling the consumption needs of her family for the whole year.

Return vs Investment (2017)		
Season	Investment (Rs)	Income from selling (Rs)
Pre-Kharif	650	4,650
Kharif	550	3,445
Rabi	755	8,600
Total	1,955	16,695
Profit	14,740	

Livestock: Integrated livestock has been one of the major interventions promoted by LKP. The families prefer chickens and ducks to other small and large ruminants, as with low landholding, grazing is a challenge here. Around 10% of families are keeping 2-3 goats and 40 to 50% members are keeping poultry. These birds are providing meat and eggs. The whole program is run in close collaboration with the Animal Husbandry Department of the local Government. The major interventions being carried out are ensuring deworming, vaccinations, medications and breed improvements. A group of women service providers have been trained under MKSP by the department

experts. It has been observed during the field visit that members keeping 8-10 birds are able to get Rs 6,000 to Rs 8,000, after fulfilling their own consumption needs.

Overall outcomes: The overall interventions around kitchen gardens and the livestock, especially poultry, are making the family self-sufficient around nutrition, along with ensuring additional income for women. Women highlighted the quality of produce from their kitchen garden and are enjoying this income-generating activity. The linkage between SHGs and PRIs is very vibrant. During interactions it was evident that the women are having increased say in their villages and *Gram Sabha*. They have developed much confidence to deal with other stakeholders and are now also taking decisions in their villages and *Panchayats*.

Key Learnings and Best Practices

- The round-the-year kitchen garden model with a mix of vegetables and fruit trees in small plots, following locally prepared organic inputs, including local seeds, is a promising activity.
- Further ideas of using plastic nets along the fencing, which not only protects the crops, but also creates opportunity to keep small livestock like poultry and goats, are worth replicating. Both these activities, especially BYP, can be very well managed by women, and bring nutritional security and addition income.
- CBO and PRI convergence for addressing livelihood issues, especially related to landlessness: The coming together of SHGs and PRIs for overall development of the area is quite visible, especially to help the landless families in getting private and public land on lease. This is a great respite for the landless and marginal farmers of the area, especially women.
- Livelihood plan of SHGs and linking it to *Gram Sabha*: This has truly built the confidence of the SHG members and equipped them much to clearly take decisions on delegation of responsibility. They have also realized the importance of *Gram Sabha*'s role in strengthening their livelihoods and accessing the provisions under various Government programs meant for them.
- Converging with line departments for capacity building of members and community: The strategy of leveraging opportunities of training from various departments is also worth adopting. This facilitates a collaborative atmosphere for women farmers to

participate in and influence various interventions run by Government departments. After all the goal of DAY-NRLM is to build the capacity of SHG members and their collectives to effectively collaborate with various stakeholders to improve their livelihoods.

- Focusing on livestock as a whole with poultry for marginal communities: The whole livestock intervention is being done purely through convergence. The crux is that all the livestock reared in the area is targeted. The introduction of poultry is giving good results and is well-accepted in the area.

Way Forward

All the best practices around sustainable agricultural practices are largely confined to homestead kitchen gardens. Efforts need to be taken to replicate this into their main field crops. The much-promising system of land leasing can be expanded to other potential domains like leasing of *Panchayat* water bodies for fish farming, large waste-land for orchards development, etc. Livestock intervention is also carried out very sub-optimally. Other avenues should be explored to add intensity to this activity. The practice of conserving local seeds through SHG collectives should be further explored. For example, it can be done through an entrepreneurship model for better sustainability.

