

Socio- Economic Role of JEEViKA in Rural Bihar: Women Empowerment through Self- Help Groups

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ABSTRACT

Bihar has historically been one of India's most backward states due to various endemic factors which lie within it like population density, systemic poverty, low level of literacy, lack of durable infrastructure, prone to natural calamities like droughts and floods, and lack of will power on the part of the government. For many decades now, on almost all indicators of development be it economic growth or human development index, the performance of Bihar has been disappointing. The poverty headcount for Bihar was 53.5 % in 2009- 10, almost double that of the national index of 29.8%¹. Similarly, in 2007- 08, Bihar ranked 21st amongst 23 Indian states on the Human Development Index (HDI), with a value of 0.367, significantly below the national value of 0.467². Nearly 85% of Bihar's total population live and work in rural areas and most among them as subsistence cultivators with fragmented landholdings. In the said context, Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (BRLP/ JEEViKA) has proved to be one of the most ambitious policy decisions of the Bihar government in recent time which intends to empower socio- economic status of rural women. JEEViKA has provided a launchpad to rural women by creating a robust platform of series of Self- Help Groups (SHG) which is enabling women to bring in at the centerstage of entrepreneurship in rural Bihar. JEEViKA has greatly improved women's mobility, participation in decision making and propensity to engage in community based collective action³. JEEViKA has not only been promoting the socio- economic inclusion of rural women, but also combating the gendered division of labor. This paper is intended to highlight some of the moot aspects like the role of JEEViKA in social and economic empowerment of rural poor women. Further, how the project of JEEViKA helps Women to become Entrepreneurs and does it really provide assistance to the most poor, unskilled and uneducated and non-earning women. And finally, why is the platform of JEEViKA not thinking about poor spinster skill training activity, so that they can also begin a startup and contribute towards economic development?

Key Words : Socio-Economic Role, JEEViKA, Women empowerment, Self-Help Groups

INTRODUCTION

The Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project or JEEViKA, is one of the ambitious flagship projects on poverty

reduction capitalized by the World Bank group in South Asia. JEEViKA is implemented by an autonomous body of the Government of Bihar known as Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project which reaches out to nearly 1.8 million

1. U. Dutta. Socio- Economic Impacts of JEEViKA: A Large- Scale Self- Help Group Project in Bihar. *South Asia Agriculture and Rural Growth Impact Note Series*. Measuring Empowerment, January 2020. World Bank Group
2. Ibid., pp. 1
3. Ibid., pp. 1

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people. The project works by building a network of federated institutions of rural women, which then manage and channel various benefits such as credit, livelihood options, entitlements and safety nets⁴. Arranged progressively in order of funding, responsibilities and number of women reached, these institutions are Self Help Groups (SHGs with 10–15 women), Village Organisations (VOs with 10–15 SHGs) and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs with 30–45 VOs)⁵. The first phase of JEEViKA was launched by the Government of India and the state of Bihar to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target and Eleventh Five Year Plan strategy which emphasized investment in women's socio-economic empowerment and also the objective of reducing the Below Poverty Line (BPL) population by 2015. The second phase of JEEViKA was launched by the Government of Bihar in collaboration with the World Bank in 2016 with the expectation of making one out of every 2 rural households a member of JEEViKA from the entire 12 million poor households in Bihar by 2022. It now works in 38 districts and 534 blocks of the state⁶.

There were many challenges in expanding this project like the most challenging part is creating awareness especially among rural poor and uneducated people of the village and generating a new idea of becoming independent women through Self Help Groups. JEEViKA is playing a vital role in the rural and economic development of the state. In 2022, JEEViKA has also entered into the manufacturing sector where Department of Industries has given financial support of 5 Lakh rupees and 5 lakhs interest free loans to 39 women entrepreneurs (all SHG members) under the Bihar Government's Scheme- Mukhyamantri Udyami Yojana. JEEViKA has been able to reach out to nearly 1.29 Crore rural poor households by organizing them into 10.46 lakh women SHGs under 68650 Village Organizations and 1455 Cluster Level Federations. They have funded more than 10750 Crores and also provided loans of more than Rs. 29838 Crores from the Banks⁷. The core strategy of the

Bihar Research Livelihoods Promotion programme is to build women self dependent and financially strong in the form of SHGs, who through member savings, internal loaning and regular repayment become self sustaining organizations.

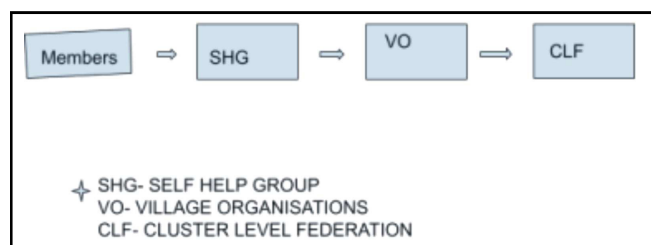
The main objective of JEEViKA, is to reduce gender discrimination through empowering women. As We know that in every society, there is gender discrimination in all spheres of our life right from childhood and there is gendered division of labor which puts limitations on the socio- economic mobility of women. There are systemic and structural reasons behind such types of discrimination which originates from our socio- psychological understanding of the very concept of gender which is more social than biological. The patriarchal socio cultural norms create multiple levels of structures of domination and portray women as their cultural border guards thereby limiting the mobility of women in economic spheres of our lives. JEEViKA provides an opportunity to women to enable themselves to utilize their potential to the fullest in the domain of entrepreneurship. With the help of JEEViKA even unskilled and semi- skilled women in rural areas can earn their livelihood and become financially independent by joining SHGs and can avail government benefits like easy loans and skill training for their own startups.

Operational Structure and Institutional Hierarchy of JEEViKA in Bihar:

In terms of operational structure of the JEEViKA, there are 534 blocks where the project of JEEViKA has been implemented. Its headquarters, State Programme Management Unit (SPMU) designs the policies, the district offices (DPCU) coordinate the rollout of interventions in all 38 districts, and the block offices (BPIU) implements the project in all 534 blocks of rural Bihar. Through this project women transform into new Self Help Groups (SHG). Firstly, they select the members of the JEEViKA, then they make it a group which is

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4. Upamanyu Datta, Ajit Ranjan, Samrat K Ghosh, and Prabhat Ranjan. Lessons From a Decade of Rural Transformation in Bihar: Management Information System As Decision Support System. *JEEViKA Learning Note Series*, No. 10
 5. Ibid., pp.1
 6. Shobha Shetty, Vinay Vutukuru, Mohini Kak, Mrinalini Penumaka and Mio Takada. A Way Forward: Lessons on Moving Forward from the Bihar Rural Livelihood Project to the Bihar Transformative Development Project. *JEEViKA Learning Note Series*, No. 11
 7. Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society State Rural Livelihoods Mission, Bihar

known as Self Help Group after that they make organizations which are known as Village Organisation and then finally formed The Cluster Level Federation. Arranged progressively in order of funding, responsibilities and number of women reached, these institutions are Self Help Groups (SHGs with 10–15 women), Village Organisations (VOs with 10–15 SHGs) and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs with 30–45 VOs).



One of the primary benefits of JEEViKA is Initial Capitalisation Fund (ICF), which is a pot of money that is provided for every SHG once it attains maturity in 4 to 6 months. It is the key apparatus which builds financial assets. It also gives impetus for community institutions and their members to learn about managing finances, and building a credit track record. Members of the SHG take turns to borrow out of the ICF pot for a variety of reasons, such as consumption smoothing, debt reduction and productive investments⁸. In a mature block, this pot for every SHG is housed at the CLF; when a member requests a loan, it is forwarded to the CLF via her SHG and the relevant VO⁹. The CLF in turn opens up a fresh credit line with the VO, which repeats the process with the SHG¹⁰. Finally the SHG avails the money to the member, who has to repay with a 2% monthly interest payment. This interest payment is divided among the institutions which constitutes the primary source of institutional income. Once the member starts repaying, the ICF pot gets recharged and is used to sanction fresh loans.

Thus, the benefits of ICF will be realized universally

and invariably if the fund is rotated repeatedly through this system. Members will be able to avail multiple credit infusions, while SHGs and VOs would prove their credit-worthiness to formal credit institutions, such as rural commercial banks and microfinance institutions, for further funding¹¹. To do this, every level, or ‘valve’, in this credit pipeline should know amounts disbursed, repaid and outstanding from every downstream valve; and be able to take corrective actions when the flow is not moving¹². The sustainability and further growth of the assets are disparagingly dependent upon continuing loans and repayments. At any moment in a mature block, about 1 million USD of ICF are flowing through 3 CLFs, 100 odd VOs, about 1,300 SHGs and 15,000 members¹³.

JEEViKA: A Platform for Empowerment of Rural Women in Bihar:

It is imperative to inquire about some pertinent issues around the workings of JEEViKA in transforming the lives of rural women in Bihar. What role JEEViKA play in socio- economic empowerment of rural women? How the project of JEEViKA helps women to become entrepreneurs? How does JEEViKA provide assistance to the most poor, unskilled, and non-earning women? How JEEViKA is providing skill training to SHGs, so that they can also begin their startups and help women in economic participation in rural development?

Upamanya Datta in “*Socio- Economic Effects of a Self- Help Group Intervention: Evidence from Bihar*” highlights certain key features of JEEViKA, which includes;

- (a) Focusing on the poor and vulnerable members of the community, particularly women.
- (b) Building and empowering pro- poor institutions and organizations.
- (c) Emphasis on stimulating productivity growth in key livelihood sectors and employment generation in the project area.
- (d) Positioning project investments to be catalytic in

8. Upamanyu Datta, Ajit Ranjan, Samrat K Ghosh, and Prabhat Ranjan. Lessons From a Decade of Rural Transformation in Bihar: Management Information System As Decision Support System. JEEViKA Learning Note Series, No. 10

9. Ibid., pp.1

10. Ibid., pp.1

11. Ibid., pp.2

13. Ibid., pp.2

13. Ibid., pp.2

nature to spur public and private investment in the livelihood areas/ sector of poor households.

(e) Identification of existing innovations in various areas and help in developing processes, systems and institutions for scaling up of these innovations.

JEEViKA plays a vital economic role in empowering women, it makes them financially independent. The Government of Bihar with the help of the World bank, the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (BRLP), also known as JEEViKA has been started with the aim of empowering economically and socially the rural poor. To that end, the central scheme of Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana has been restructured into National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) by the Government of India under Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). The Government of Bihar has designated BRLPS as the State Rural Livelihoods Mission for implementing the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. For guiding the implementation of NRLM in the state, The State Perspective and Implementation Plan has been prepared.

JEEViKA provides a platform to mobilize women from impoverished groups into various SHGs, and provides them low cost credit to start their businesses. It encourages women entrepreneurs by giving them loan and microfinance and technical assistance. It also gives them a platform to share their socio economic problems that they are facing. JEEViKA gives them the best possible all round assistance in an integrated manner. In Bihar, women are unaware about the startup and innovative ideas of business, so there is a need of creating awareness among them about starting their own business. Under JEEViKA, the Government is providing loans at very low cost as compared to local loans which they borrow from moneylenders. Hailing from Bihar, we have observed that due to lack of awareness, many women who took loans under JEEViKA, instead of investing that money for the said purpose, they use the fund in their daughters' marriage, or building homes etc.

JEEViKA plays a vital role in empowering women, it makes women financially strong and independent. The Government of Bihar with the help of the World bank, the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project, also known as JEEViKA has been started with the aim of empowering economically and socially the rural poor. The Central Scheme Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana has been restructured into National Rural Livelihoods Mission by the Government of India under Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). The Government of Bihar has

designated BRLPS as the State Rural Livelihoods Mission for implementing the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. For guiding the implementation of NRLM in the state, The State Perspective and Implementation Plan has been prepared. JEEViKA gives a platform to mobilise women from impoverished into SHG, it provides low cost credit to do business, it encourage women entrepreneur by giving them loan and microfinance and technical assistance and also gives them a platform to share their socio economic problems that they are facing and JEEViKA gives the best possible assistance to them.

Unlike the foreign countries, We have seen very few women who are doing their own business. In Bihar womens are unaware about the startup and innovative ideas of business, so there should be a requirement of creating awareness in their mind about starting their own business. Government of Bihar is providing loan at very low cost as compared to local loan which are available at there nearby village or in their own village to empower women but as I am from Bihar I have seen some women who took loan but instead of investing it in some business so that it can make her financially strong, they use the fund in their daughters marriage, building home etc. The Government is doing a good job but they should be assured that the fund should be utilised only for business or agriculture purposes, so it can also make it possible to repay the loan within a limited time.

Well we know that JEEViKA is really doing a good job in providing assistance to the rural poor but the most needy people are still not getting any assistance from anywhere because of lack of education, lack of awareness and lack of skill, so there is a requirement of training and providing basic education. JEEViKA should also provide basic education and various types of skill development classes to make them self reliant, they should encourage them towards startup or small business which they can start with their home like handmade flowers and showpiece, lots of handicrafts which they can sell through online. It can make them socially and economically strong and if each and every one becomes self dependent it can contribute to the economic development of our country.

Conclusion: Road Towards Empowerment of Rural Women:

Although JEEViKA is substantively transforming the lives of rural poor, particularly women, still the most needy people are not getting benefits due to lack of awareness and requisite skills, so there is need of outreach to them

and avail requisite training and skills. JEEViKA should also provide basic education and various types of skill development training to make them self reliant. They should encourage them to start small businesses with their family labor like handmade household and consumer goods such as handicrafts, showpieces etc.

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