

# TRANSFORMING DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

TAKING A GENDER EQUALITY APPROACH TO  
SUPPORT RURAL WOMEN IN ADVANCING THEIR  
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RIGHTS.



PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) is a non-government, non-profit organization that works with India's rural poor. Comprised of university-educated professionals, motivated to use their knowledge and skills to address rural poverty by working with women at the grassroots across seven of the poorest states in the country, PRADAN promotes Self-Help Groups; develops locally suitable economic activities; mobilizes finances; and introduces systems to improve the lives of the rural poor. PRADAN also collaborates extensively with government agencies, banks, market institutions, panchayats, voluntary organizations and research bodies.



Jagori is committed to helping build a just society through feminist values by working to deepen feminist consciousness with diverse partners at local and national levels. Jagori achieves these objectives through feminist research and knowledge. It supports women's leadership and agency, perspective and capacity development based on feminist principles and strategies, provides support services to women survivors of violence and partners to strengthen feminist movement.



UN Women launched the Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) in 2009 to support and advance women's economic and political rights at local, national and regional levels through grant making to government agencies and civil society organizations. FGE grants aim to support initiatives that fast-track international human rights commitments to gender equality articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

# CONTENTS

Summary	I
Acknowledgements	V
List of Abbreviations, Acronyms and Glossary of Terms	VI
Foreword: Stories of Change	VII
Objectives and Methodology	IX
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CHAPTER 1: RESPONDING TO WOMEN'S GRASSROOTS REALITIES	1
CHAPTER 2: BUILDING A VISION OF GENDER EQUALITY	4
PRADAN-Jagori model for collaboration	5
Awakening gender perspectives within PRADAN	8
Awakening gender perspectives among rural women	11
CHAPTER 3: STRATEGIC PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION	14
Communicating gender perspectives	15
Strengthening women's organizations	16
Enhancing women's control over economic decision making and resources	18
Increasing women's ability to effectively participate in governance	21
Addressing and ending all forms of violence against women	23
CHAPTER 4: THE WAY FORWARD	26
Develop gender leadership within PRADAN	27
Invest in rural women's leadership	29
Support strong and sustainable women's institutions	29
Work with men to build gender perspectives	30
Advocate for structural change	31
Evolve evaluation to reward innovation and capture behavioral and structural change	31

# Summary

“Our goal was to make a dent in social and economic gender discrimination—to engage on fundamental issues of injustice, not just their symptoms.”

~PRADAN Programme Director, October 2014

## The Gender Equality Program (GEP)

In July 2010, the UN Fund for Gender Equality awarded an implementation grant for “Facilitating Women in Four Endemic Poverty States of India to Access, Actualize and Sustain Provisions of Women Empowerment.” With this support, PRADAN and Jagori, two leading national civil society organizations in their respective fields of rural development and deepening feminist consciousness through leadership development and training, initiated the Gender Equality Program (GEP). As explained by Jagori’s Director:

“We were both thirty-year old institutions with deep and profound experiences—they on livelihoods and building women’s collectives and us on feminist principles and strategies. We had already begun working together to enhance gender perspectives on PRADAN teams. Now, we had an opportunity to bring the best of our two organizations together to advance human rights.”

The GEP goals aimed to fast-track implementation of India’s domestic and international human rights commitments to gender equality, including those articulated in India’s National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001; the 11th Five Year Plan of the Government of India, Beijing Platform for Action (BPA); and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Blending PRADAN’s expertise on rural livelihood development and building women’s institutions with Jagori’s skills in feminist leadership development, training and identifying and responding to gender-based violence, the GEP set a groundbreaking goal: over a period of four years, PRADAN professionals would work with 75,000 rural women from endemic poverty areas to raise their voices, challenge gender-based violence and access their social, political and economic rights. Over 2/3 of these women would be from Scheduled

Castes and Scheduled Tribes and all women would come from families that earned below two dollars a day. The GEP would unfold in some of India’s most backward districts, within PRADAN sites in the four states of Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal.

Through training and ongoing support, the GEP worked with rural women to transform gender relations as an integral element of poverty reduction and supporting sustainable livelihoods. The GEP also sought to enhance the capacity of 300 women’s collectives at village and sub-block levels—some of which had been built with the support of PRADAN teams over the course of more than twenty years—to address inequality, discrimination and violence within and outside their homes.

The GEP outlined four target outcomes: increasing women’s awareness and participation in local self-governance structures and processes (Panchayati Raj Institutions); enabling Self Help Groups (SHGs) to address issues of gender based inequality within the home and outside; enhancing women’s sense of equality as economic actors in the household; and enhancing responsiveness of duty bearers and Panchayati Raj Institutions to issues raised by the community. These objectives required PRADAN and Jagori to catalyze changes in the ways in which rural women engaged in decision making in their homes, communities and local governance structures.

## Meeting the Needs of Rural Women

Since 1983, PRADAN has worked with marginalized communities in districts across India to help people overcome poverty through sustainable livelihood generation. While PRADAN worked closely with poor rural women for most of its history, their work was in many places circumscribed by a focus on livelihood that measured program achievement by increase in household income. However, since PRADAN encourages teams to base their interventions on local realities, for some teams, perspectives that foregrounded gender equality and women’s rights were integral to the team culture.

PRADAN teams selected for the initial phase of the GEP program were primarily those teams that were already taking a gender equality approach in their work with rural women. They expressed interest in piloting new ways to make women’s needs and

issues central to PRADAN’s rural development work. The UN Fund for Gender Equality grant presented an opportunity for sustained collaboration with Jagori to systematically build upon existing gender equality work within PRADAN with dedicated resources and the legitimate space to support this effort. Accordingly, the GEP represents an important phase in the on-going process within PRADAN of evolving strategies to address the needs of rural women by strengthening their capacity to envision and act on their own behalf.

## Deepening Gender Equality Perspectives

The GEP catalyzed a partnership between a highly skilled group of feminist trainers and front line development workers with decades of experience working with a broad base of women on livelihoods and to develop strong women’s collectives. At its core, this required skilled development professionals to shift their focus from family livelihood enhancement as the primary barometer of change to consider women as independent agents of change capable of transforming patriarchal structures, claiming gender equality while increasing family livelihoods and claiming rights and entitlements.

Employing training materials developed by expert trainers designed for PRADAN teams in 8 sites in 4 states, Jagori trainers and resource people systematically engaged with PRADAN professionals—a majority of whom are men from technical backgrounds—to consider positions of power and build a nuanced perspective on gender to apply in their development practice. They also worked with rural women’s collectives, some mature and others just starting out, to build feminist consciousness, develop strategies to address discrimination and violence in their communities and access their rights.

Jagori training was site specific and ongoing. Based on an initial assessment by Jagori across GEP sites, the program aimed to deepen understanding of how patriarchy undermines women’s agency; approach women’s needs as distinct from the needs of their families; expand concepts of income generation to encompass building women’s control over resources; and address the needs of single and other particularly vulnerable women. Jagori resource people worked with each team in their strategic planning efforts to refine, design and implement gender equality approaches in their rights-based rural livelihood and development programs.

This process required a significant investment among PRADAN professionals and the rural women they work with in deepening their understanding of how gender-based discrimination structures the society where they live and work impedes both economic and social advancements. It also required Jagori trainers to develop new training materials and methodologies and provide anchoring and hand holding support to each PRADAN team in eight remote sites. These highly skilled technical resource people challenged PRADAN professionals and local women leaders at each site to probe gender discrimination, build a common vision of gender equality and design and implement gender equality approaches in their rights-based rural livelihood and development programs.

Jagori resource people worked directly with women leaders from Self Help Groups (SHGs) to build understanding and training capacity. PRADAN team members who were deeply familiar with the cultural context in each location worked alongside Jagori trainers who modeled how feminist training practices. Training for rural women under the GEP followed a cascade model. Rural women leaders trained as Community Resource Persons (CRPs) were the key agents of change in transforming women’s SHGs from resource mobilizing and capital aggregating institutions to community solidarity formations working towards women’s empowerment and citizens rights. Through this process, PRADAN teams and Jagori worked to build a common vision of gender equality among 75,000 rural women. Besides the CRPs, the members of the Federations nurtured by PRADAN teams for decades played a key role in the GEP. In addition to engaging with the ongoing Federation activities, these women leaders served as role models—a source of support and strength for other women as they came to know and demand their rights and entitlements.

The process of engendering development approaches was not linear, neat, static or finite. PRADAN professionals interviewed for this study reported that learning to see through lenses that recognize gender-based violence and inequality is transforming their perspectives—not only on their work, but also on themselves, their relationships, their families, communities and the social and cultural fabric of contemporary India. Many described the transformative impact of recognising previously unexamined structures of privilege. It not only wrought profound change in their personal lives, but changed the way in which they approached their work. This process of

understanding, while catalyzed as part of a collective process, unfolded distinctly for each individual we interviewed. PRADAN professionals and rural women consistently described moments of joy and achievement, but also feelings of self-doubt, pain and frustration as they worked to understand gender-based violence and discrimination and confront these forces head on.

This work at the field level was made possible by PRADAN's commitment at the institutional level to lead and support the GEP process. This required putting in place a Core Committee from PRADAN to lead the process and serve as an intermediary body between PRADAN field teams and Jagori leadership. It required PRADAN as an institution to reconsider longstanding development practices in light of the new dimensions of work charted in the GEP process.

The GEP process—a collection of distinct yet linked personal and professional transformations at the field level—has informed shifts in PRADAN's institutional mission and vision, organizational culture, program priorities and day-to-day policies and practices. It has brought PRADAN in touch with new development partners and new donors. As a result, in a continued partnership with Jagori, PRADAN is working to extend gender equality approaches to all PRADAN sites. Building on the foundation laid in the eight GEP sites—including GEP training materials, approaches, and rich lessons from the field—PRADAN is devoting significant financial and human resources for this next phase of work. Consistent with PRADAN's commitment to building programs that are responsive to the needs of particular communities, the extension of gender equality approaches across PRADAN sites is expected to evolve on parallel tracks and at different paces in order to accommodate the vision of various PRADAN teams.

### **Transforming Development Practice**

The GEP models how feminist perspective building within a well established development organization can mobilize rural women to address their concerns in a holistic manner, going beyond changing the material status of the family to transforming the status of women. During this four year program, PRADAN professionals and Jagori resource people worked side by side with rural women to unleash women's leadership potential, enhance awareness and ability to access their rights, increase political participation and develop women's role as

economic actors and decision-makers within their households and in the community.

Working with rural women's federations and organizations at very varied stages of maturity and across contexts and geographies, PRADAN teams and Jagori trainers had an opportunity to pilot and refine various approaches. Designed across four states and nine districts, each with unique contexts, the GEP unfolded distinctly and at a pace informed by the situation in each location. To address the particular needs of each site on an ongoing basis, Jagori created a pool of experts capable of providing targeted, site-specific guidance to complement foundational orientation workshops on gender and patriarchy. PRADAN and Jagori also activated a cyclical process of needs assessment, site-specific training and ongoing mentoring and evaluation to provide intensive training and support to a network of PRADAN professionals and grassroots women leaders.

The GEP sought to prepare women's leadership bodies, SHGs and collectives, to move beyond functioning as savings and credit institutions and emerge with the confidence and skills to identify and address gender based discrimination and violence. Across the GEP sites, Federations have met this challenge, taking on issues as diverse as alcoholism, dowry related violence, early marriage, food scarcity, gender bias in health and education, trafficking and anti-women cultural practices such as witch-hunting.

The GEP aimed to work with women to enhance their sense of equality as economic actors and decision-makers within their households. For instance, teams worked to enhance women's sense of equality as economic actors by encouraging women to identify as farmers rather than as labourers on family fields. Prior to this innovation, PRADAN tended to engage men on agricultural methods and other technical livelihood skills due to men's receptivity to participating in training programs. Through the GEP process, however, teams came to recognize that failing to actively include women in these skill and capacity building initiatives reduced their chance of becoming informed economic decision-makers, undermined the roles women play as farmers and cut women off from markets. GEP teams thus made concerted efforts to ensure that women were trained in farming techniques and saw themselves as both farmers and economic actors.

The GEP also sought to support women to effectively engage and participate in governance - a new area of work for PRADAN. In particular, PRADAN teams sought to equip women with information about panchayat processes and procedures; and increase claim-making ability under various government schemes. Teams worked with rural women to access the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Right to Education (RTE), Public Distribution System (PDS) and access to pensions.

Approaches included training resource people to conduct systematic outreach at the grassroots level; discussions during group, cluster and federation meetings; and street plays and information dissemination during Adhiveshans and Mahadiveshans. As an integral part of this mission, PRADAN teams also sought to involve women in local decision making processes and increase engagement between women's collectives and Panchayati Raj representatives and other duty bearers. As a result of these initiatives, women's collectives secured work on farm ponds through the MGNREGS and work as MGNREGA worksite mates. They also demanded better functioning Public Distribution Systems (PDS) and opening of new Aanganwadi and Public Health Centers (PHCs). Women reported that their standing within their households and communities was enhanced when they demonstrated they had the capacity to influence duty bearers and access rights and entitlements.

Addressing and ending all forms of violence against women was not a stated objective of the GEP, but nearly all PRADAN GEP sites were drawn to work in this area. The strength and engagement of women's SHGs and Federations with VAW has a profound impact on women's ability to effectively confront violence in their homes and communities. With support from PRADAN, SHGs and Federations from GEP program sites intervened in cases of violence to ensure that charges were filed. Teams also addressed inadequate police responses to cases of violence against women by organizing meetings with local police. GEP teams have also reached out to legal organizations to develop the capacity of PRADAN professionals and women leaders to effectively handle violence against women cases. Teams with greater experience in addressing violence against women have established formal processes to address violence

through Nari Adalats or women's courts.

The learning and strategies that emerged from the GEP have significant implications for feminist action in contemporary rural India. This report documents how deep investments (both financial and human resource based) in learning, material development and training are essential to taking women-centered interventions to scale. It provides a snapshot of the pressing issues that women in some of the most backward regions of India confront and highlights interventions aimed at addressing these challenges.

The GEP also underlines the role that committed men can play in supporting rural women in holistic development processes. PRADAN has an outstanding record of developing gender equality perspectives among professionals and teams. While men and women across the organization are leaders in challenging discrimination and injustice—on gender, caste, class and other lines—PRADAN's work on masculinities is at a nascent stage. Many professionals in PRADAN are keen to start work on masculinities—initiatives with men to address issues of gender justice. PRADAN professionals from GEP sites, a majority of whom are men with skills and commitment to addressing issues of gender justice, have the capacity to make critical contributions to this burgeoning field.

The stories in this report have been selected and recorded to assist development professionals in PRADAN and elsewhere to learn from the experiences of a cadre of highly skilled development professionals and feminists who committed themselves to advancing gender equality. We trust that they will be instructive for organizations, donors and other stakeholders seeking to understand the resources needed to bring feminist interventions to scale, transform development practice and support vulnerable women to be agents of change in their families and communities. They also point to the role that men can play in the struggle to advance gender justice.

While there is much to learn from PRADAN teams engaging with women as citizens and integrating gender perspectives and approaches in rural development work, there is no blueprint to take this work forward. In fact, perhaps the most significant lesson from the GEP is that transforming development practices requires the institutional flexibility to allow community engagement and empowerment processes to unfold at different paces simultaneously, tailored to the site-specific needs of rural women.



## Acknowledgements

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The research for this report was conducted between July 2014 and January 2015 by a team of four independent researchers, Adil Ali, Shikha Silliman Bhattacharjee, Jui Gupta and Jael Silliman. Special thanks to Anubha Singh, Senior Project Associate with Jagori for the insights and materials she provided to make this report possible.

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## Abbreviations, Acronyms & Glossary

### Acronyms

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CRP	Community Resource Person
FGE	UN Women Fund for Gender Equality
GEP	Gender Equality Program
MGNREGA/S	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/Scheme
SHG	Self Help Group
VAW	Violence Against Women

### Glossary of Terms

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<b>Adiveshan</b>	Block-level gathering of women federation members
<b>Cascade Approach</b>	A training methodology which involves a set of experienced trainers who impart knowledge and skills to trainees, who in turn become trainers, going on to training others
<b>Chasi Sathi</b>	Farmer Friend
<b>Gram Sabha</b>	Panchayat-level meeting of the entire electorate
<b>Mahadiveshan</b>	Annual gathering of women federation members in a district
<b>Mahila Sangh</b>	Women's Collective
<b>Panchayat</b>	Elected village council
<b>Panchayati Raj</b>	System of village-level governance

## Foreword: Stories of Change

“A few days ago, one of the women called me to the village. ‘Today we have received two kilos of rice from the Public Distribution System (PDS)’ she told me. Another woman said to me, ‘you have helped us to learn many things, but I do not know how to appreciate you.’ Yet another woman, one of the leaders in the group said: ‘yes, he has helped us, but we have also helped him.’ That was a very sweet moment for me—to know that they too saw that we teach one another.”

~ PRADAN Professional, December 2014

The four-year GEP partnership between PRADAN and Jagori has not only transformed the lives of rural women, but also transformed the professional perspectives and personal lives of PRADAN professionals at the frontlines of this initiative. These personal and professional transformations have, in turn, precipitated shifts in PRADAN’s institutional mission and vision, organizational culture, program priorities and day-to-day policies and practices.

The outcomes of the GEP are staggering and well documented. According to an end line survey of more than 1500 Self Help Group member households engaged in the GEP conducted by the Institute for Human Development in 2015, 69% of the women surveyed recognized themselves as equal actors in contributing to the economic well being of the family and 75% of women surveyed agreed that girls and boys should be given equal employment opportunities outside the home.

The end line survey also found that the GEP was successful in enhancing knowledge of local governance structures and political engagement: 97% of women surveyed reporting voting in local elections, 50% of women respondents attended gram sabha meetings and of those who attended, 31% raised issues in these meetings. Women also reported enhanced knowledge of government schemes and an ability to access these schemes, with almost 99% reporting knowledge of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and 40% of respondents reported benefiting from social security schemes.

Registering social empowerment, women also reported increased mobility with 62% of respondents indicating that they do not take

permission before leaving their homes and villages to go to work, market, their parental home or to engage in civic or democratic processes. Freedom of movement and freedom to study, though improving incrementally, has also been accompanied by increases in age at marriage along with girls having an increasing say in decisions relating to their marriage.

This research, however, is not about outcomes but about process. It seeks to document how PRADAN and Jagori implemented the GEP, the opportunities and challenges they confronted in doing so, and the change that had to occur at personal, professional and institutional levels—including in project implementation, organizational structures, policies, monitoring and evaluation. The experience of PRADAN professionals engaged in the GEP—a majority of whom are men from technical backgrounds—has important lessons for emerging conversations on masculinity and the critical roles men can play in the struggle for gender justice.

The process of engendering development approaches, we found, is not linear, neat, static or finite. PRADAN professionals interviewed for this study reported that learning to see through lenses that recognize gender-based violence and inequality is transforming their perspectives on not only their work, but also on themselves, their relationships, their families, communities and the social and cultural fabric of contemporary India. This process of understanding, while catalyzed as part of a collective process, unfolded distinctly for each person we spoke to. PRADAN professionals and rural women consistently described moments of joy and achievement, but also feelings of self-doubt, pain and frustration as they worked to understand gender-based violence and discrimination and confront these forces head on.

This study is also about partnerships. It is about the partnership between PRADAN, an organization of Indian development professionals, and the UN Women Fund for Gender Equality, an international fund that seeks to strengthen the implementation of domestic and international commitments to gender equality. It is about the partnership between PRADAN and Jagori, a development organization and a feminist organization that journeyed together to build a common vocabulary and perspective between two organizations with distinct approaches to engendering change.



■ Newly literate women updating account books for Self Help Groups in Berada Village, Purulia, West Bengal, 2013.

This partnership was an opportunity for highly skilled feminist trainers to bring a robust feminist perspective and practice to front line development workers with decades of experience working with rural women on livelihoods and to develop strong women’s collectives. The learning and strategies that emerged from collaboration have significant implications for feminist action in contemporary rural India.

This story is also about the partnership between PRADAN professionals from teams located in remote areas in four states who committed to learning from one another as they worked to support women in demanding their political and economic rights and challenging violence, across distinct geographies and contexts. Working with women’s federations and organizations at very varied stages of maturity, PRADAN teams and Jagori trainers had an opportunity to try and share approaches across contexts and geographies.

Finally, and most importantly, this research is about the unique collaboration between PRADAN professionals, men and women, as well as Jagori trainers and rural women who are working together to challenge gender-based violence and discrimination.

This document, therefore, is a document of stories—personal stories, stories of developing prior initiatives and pursuing new strategies, stories of efforts that succeeded and stories of those that stumbled. These narratives have been recounted by PRADAN professionals and state and national leadership; Jagori leaders and trainers; and rural women who engaged with the GEP programs. The women and men who contributed to this collection of stories had the humility and courage to share their greatest successes and challenges, and also their visions for gender equality.

The five chapters that follow build sequentially, examining first, why and how the GEP was initiated in response to grassroots realities; second, how PRADAN and Jagori worked together to build a common vision of gender equality within PRADAN; third, how this vision of gender equality was applied through strategic planning and implementation; fourth, how perspectives on gender were inculcated at the community level; and fifth, how PRADAN can build upon lessons from the GEP as it extends its commitment to working with a gender perspective across the organization at all its sites.

# Objectives and Methodology

## Objectives

The objectives of this research are to capture how PRADAN integrated gender-equality approaches in existing PRADAN work and new initiatives; the changes that occurred among PRADAN approaches, focus areas, capacity building initiatives at the staff and community level and outreach as a function of GEP; and shifts in outreach and messaging that have resulted from it. This report also identifies central lessons learned by Jagori and other trainers and resource developers engaged in the GEP on how to catalyze gender perspectives in existing development programs. It also compiles good practices to sustain and extend gender equality approaches to livelihood and development initiatives within PRADAN that may be instructive for other development practitioners and donors.

Accordingly, this research maps the process of integrating gender-equality approaches by focusing on three domains or levels of action within PRADAN: the institutional level, the team level and the community level. At the institutional level, it captures changes in PRADAN's institutional mission and vision, organizational policies, program priorities, program vision and partnerships with donors and project level and thematic partners that were consolidated or built through the GEP. At the team level, it captures the training received as well as the professional and personal transformation of PRADAN professionals in conceptualizing and acting to address gender discrimination; engaging women as rights bearers and economic actors and decision-makers; and challenging violence against women. The report examines how gender equality approaches impacted the vision, delivery strategies and partnerships, including with women's courts and federations, across all team initiatives. At the community level, it documents the training, professional and personal growth of Community Resource Persons (CRPs) and community leaders within Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Federations who engaged in learning new approaches to identify and challenge gender discrimination in their lives and communities.

At each of these levels of PRADAN's engagement, this research recognizes change as a multi-pronged process that includes changing personal and professional mindsets, and initiating, integrating

and sustaining gender equality approaches. In particular, we consider the following questions: What were key shifts in perspective as a result of the GEP? What resources were required to support these shifts (including funding, staffing, training and technical resources)? What were major obstacles faced in introducing the GEP approach and how were they addressed? What challenges remain? What was the process and timeline for incorporating gender based approaches? Was there a timeline set to achieve GEP objectives? What strategies (successful and unsuccessful), challenges and solutions emerged in initiating, integrating and sustaining gender-based approaches? What new issues emerged as foci of PRADAN work as a result of GEP? How was the process monitored? Were new monitoring and evaluation tools necessary for this effort? If so, were they developed? Are further evaluation tools and mechanisms needed to capture this approach?

These objectives were identified by PRADAN state-level coordinator, Madhu Khetan, and PRADAN Programme Director, Anirban Ghose, in collaboration with GEP program consultant, Nandini Narula, Director of Jagori, Suneeta Dhar, and Shikha Silliman Bhattacharjee and Jael Silliman, independent consultants retained by PRADAN to conduct this process review. They are consistent with the recommendations of the Mid Term Review (June 2013) where detailed sharing of strategies across locations and rigorous documentation and dissemination of GEP interventions was recommended.

## Methodology

This report is based on research conducted by independent consultants Adil Ali, Shikha Silliman Bhattacharjee, Jui Gupta and Jael Silliman between August 2014 and January 2015. This qualitative research used a participatory and consultative approach.

The research team conducted more than 70 individual interviews with PRADAN professionals, PRADAN national and state leadership, Jagori Director, Suneeta Dhar, and Jagori staff engaged with the GEP. The team also conducted a total of 24 group discussions with PRADAN teams at each of the program sites, gender core team members and

management; Jagori resource people; and women engaged with the GEP program at the community level, including Community Resource Persons (CRPs). Interviews and group discussions took place by phone and in person in Delhi, Jharkand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal. Interviews and group discussions were conducted in English, Bengali or Hindi.

All PRADAN professionals who had significantly engaged with the GEP program were invited to participate in this research. All interviewees and discussion participants participated voluntarily and without compensation. In the body of the report, respondent's names have been withheld. CRP participants engaged in focus group discussions. Participants were identified by PRADAN team members in each district.

Confidential interviews with PRADAN professionals were conducted one-on-one and lasted between forty minutes and one hour and forty minutes. They were assured confidentiality to facilitate free and open discussion. The research team conducted group discussions with PRADAN teams as part of a four-module workshop that was designed to elicit strengths and challenges associated with the GEP program, allowing for discussion of both successful and less successful interventions. In Madhya Pradesh, members of the PRADAN Hoshangabad/Betul, Balaghat and Dindori teams participated together in a four-day workshop conducted in Kesla. In Jharkand, the Koderma and Hazaribag teams participated in a two-day workshop conducted in Koderma. In Odisha, the Rayagada and Karanjia teams each participated separately in two-day workshops conducted at each location. In West Bengal, the Purulia team also participated in a two-day workshop conducted on location.

The research team also reviewed relevant program documents (baseline reports, periodic progress reports and monitoring reports, gender training reports, training modules and presentations) and attended the GEP general review meeting, held in Ranchi, Jharkhand on August 6-8, 2014. Research design, interview questions and discussion format were designed by Shikha Silliman Bhattacharjee and Jael Silliman with input from Madhu Khetan, Anirban Ghose, Nandini Narula and Suneeta Dhar.



# 1

## Responding to Women's Grassroots Realities

"Women's issues would surface through the Federations. Working with women we came to know about violence in the home and the community, discrimination and low literacy levels. We saw that women's contributions were rarely recognized."

~ PRADAN professional, September 2014

The GEP emerged from the grassroots experience of PRADAN professionals. Responding to gender-based violence, discrimination and inequality in the areas where they worked, individual teams began pursuing gender equality approaches and were responding to cases of violence against women as early as 2000. Individual teams had already reached out for assistance from gender and legal resource experts and trainers. These initiatives, however, were not systematic. The UN Fund for

Gender Equality grant presented an opportunity for extensive and sustained collaboration with Jagori to systematically build upon and expand existing gender equality work within PRADAN with dedicated resources to support this effort.

Since 1983, PRADAN has worked with marginalized communities in districts across India to help people overcome poverty through sustainable livelihood generation. PRADAN has traditionally followed a four-pronged approach to achieve these goals: promoting and nurturing Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of poor women that are organized to leverage institutional finances to support members' livelihoods; developing locally suitable economic activities to increase productivity and incomes among SHG members; mobilizing resources from government bodies, donors, banks and other financial institutions for livelihood assets and infrastructure development; and setting up mechanisms to sustain livelihood gains.

While PRADAN worked closely with poor rural women for most of its history, their work was in many places circumscribed by a focus on livelihood that measured program achievement by increase in household income. Underlying this approach was an assumption that increasing household income would benefit women in the household. This assumption did not, however, adequately take into account the power differentials between men and women in the arena of control over household resources. As a result, PRADAN found over time that successfully raising household income did not change the condition or status of women. As one PRADAN professional described:

"Initially, we believed that improving the economic situation of the family would facilitate access to health, education and other services. We believed that these changes would in turn change the condition of women. But overtime, we saw that this was not in fact what happened. We started to rethink how we should work."

While focused on livelihood, PRADAN professionals were not insulated from the realities of poor rural women's lives. One PRADAN professional recalled being haunted by the brutal rape of a thirteen year-old girl:

"In a village where I worked, a 13 year old girl old was brutally raped by a chacha [maternal uncle]. I

knew her family. I was very upset but I could not cry since I am a man. We followed up with the SHG [Self Help Group] in the village and we learned that the rape was so brutal that she lost consciousness and by the time she came home she died on her mother's lap. This was my first time witnessing violent inhuman treatment. It still shakes me."

Since PRADAN encourages teams to base their interventions in local realities, for some teams, perspectives that foregrounded gender and women's rights became integral to the team culture. While a few PRADAN teams took initiative in supporting women's federations to address violence against women, others reported feeling that prior to the GEP issues such as violence against women were outside the scope of their work on enhancing livelihood security.

By 2003, professionals within PRADAN who were working to address gender-based discrimination and violence were instrumental in initiating a module on gender in the mandatory first-year Foundation Course for all PRADAN professionals. In 2006, Abha Bhaiya, a gender trainer and founding member of Jagori also conducted a five-day camp focused on gender equality with women leaders from Kesla, Madhya Pradesh and Koderma, Jharkand. A PRADAN state-level coordinator describes the impact of the camp:

"During that camp, some 50 women from each site shared things they had never shared before, even though we had been working with them for so long. We did not realize how much violence they faced. Our notions of their lives began to change and we realized there is an entire world that is not revealed by our agenda. Women's concerns are much broader than just livelihood. We need to let their issues emerge openly."

These early feminist training exercises were the beginnings of a process that empowered rural women and engaged PRADAN professionals in expanding their perspectives on rural development work.

"Women became more active, both in Kesla and in Koderma. We tried to nurture and foster this seed and it kept spreading. Women started addressing violence, access to justice, property disputes. The women did many things on their own. We felt that if we focused on building strong women's federations, they would take up these issues independently."



Hazaribag, Kesla and Koderma were not alone in undertaking initiatives focused on supporting women to access their rights prior to the GEP. For example, the Purulia, Hazaribagh and Koderma teams reached out to MARG (Multiple Action Resource Group) to start legal awareness trainings where women would go from village to village and present small skits to raise awareness on laws and rights. In 2008 they launched an adult functional literacy center that aimed to build leadership and equip women with skills to run their own self-help groups, clusters and federations. Literacy became the instrument through which they engaged with women on a range of issues. For example, women learned about their health while learning to read.

Despite these early initiatives, the focus on raising family income was so thoroughly institutionalized across PRADAN's program, training and evaluation practices, that women's rights initiatives remained, for the most part, at the fringes of PRADAN's core livelihood work. The GEP program grew organically from this early phase of experimentation and years of work with vulnerable rural women. The UN Fund for Gender Equality enabled PRADAN and Jagori to enter into an intensive collaboration to build and expand existing gender equality work within PRADAN. For teams within PRADAN who wanted to take a gender equality approach, the GEP provided the resources, organizational structure, institutional commitment and space to do so.



## Building a Vision of Gender Equality



“Together, we could reach so many women in far flung rural and tribal areas. We could support them to access information on their rights and strengthen their collectives. These women could also address discrimination and violence, understand their rights and dream together about how to transform their lives.”

~ Jagori, Director, October 2014

This chapter considers the process of building conceptual clarity on gender and patriarchy within PRADAN at the individual, team and institutional levels; and within the communities where PRADAN works. First, it explores the collaboration between Jagori and PRADAN in order to understand how these organizations integrated their distinct experiences and perspectives to arrive at a common vision for the GEP. This vision, anchored in the lived experiences of rural women, sought to support

women to develop a heightened sense of identity, personhood and self worth that could transform their lives and communities. PRADAN and Jagori sought to develop a common understanding of patriarchy that could translate into action—unleash women’s leadership potential, enhance awareness and ability to access their rights, increase political participation and develop women’s role as economic actors and decision-makers within their households and in the community.

To implement this vision, PRADAN and Jagori had to find ways to systematically build conceptual clarity on gender and patriarchy among PRADAN professionals and rural women. Jagori worked intensively with PRADAN professionals engaged in the GEP at the individual, team and institutional levels; and within the communities where PRADAN works through training and ongoing support. This process required PRADAN teams and rural women to confront structural gender-based discrimination in their lives and work. Learning to see through gender sensitive lenses had a profound impact on PRADAN professionals, leading to shifts in relationships with their partners, families and team members and the communities where they worked.

This partnership models how feminist perspective building within a well established development organization can mobilize rural women to address their concerns in a holistic manner, going beyond changing the material status of the family to transforming the status of women. This partnership also underlines the role that committed men can play in supporting rural women in holistic development processes.

## PRADAN-Jagori Model for Collaboration

“PRADAN is unique because our leadership is very widespread. We pilot approaches and form views over an extended period. This means, at any given time many different expectations coexist at once. The GEP was an exploratory journey.”

~ PRADAN Programme Director, October 2014

The PRADAN-Jagori partnership was far-reaching

and ambitious. Designed across four states and eight districts, each with unique contexts, the GEP could not be a linear process. Instead, it required the flexibility to unfold at different paces simultaneously, tailored to the site-specific needs of rural women, PRADAN teams and individual professionals. To meet this challenge, PRADAN and Jagori activated a cyclical process of needs assessment, site-specific training and ongoing mentoring and evaluation to provide intensive training and support to a network of PRADAN professionals and grassroots women leaders.

To grasp the varied contexts and exposure levels within the GEP program, Jagori carried out an intensive six-month assessment of gender needs with PRADAN team members and at the PRADAN field sites. The initial Jagori assessment highlighted a need to deepen understanding of how patriarchy undermines women’s agency; approach women’s needs as distinct from the needs of their families; expand concepts of income generation to encompass building women’s control over resources and identities as farmers, producers and workers; and address the needs of single and other particularly vulnerable women.

Due to the uniqueness of each one of PRADAN’s locally driven programs, GEP training had to be systematic and adaptive, building core concepts and competencies while accommodating a range of experience levels among PRADAN professionals and rural women. As described by Jagori’s Director:

“Our challenge was to absorb the visions of each individual field team. Each location had its own particularities. Ultimately, the GEP was actually eight different projects—the process was so decentralized.”

Each GEP site had SHGs and Federations at distinct maturity levels. PRADAN teams were also comprised of professionals ranging from team leaders with more than a decade of experience to apprentices undertaking their first field placements. PRADAN professionals also had various levels of experience with the GEP objectives of advancing gender equality. Some had years of experience working within teams committed to gender equality approaches and others began exploring such initiatives as the GEP unfolded.

The approach evolved by PRADAN and Jagori—including appointing a management team, developing and coordinating ongoing site-specific

training and anchoring the GEP within PRADAN teams—was resource intensive, both financially and in terms of personnel. PRADAN’s Programme Coordinator explained that “the travel required to sustain this process went way over budget, but this did not deter us.” Committed to the process, PRADAN and Jagori allocated personnel resources and raised additional funds to undergird the GEP. “We allocated the resources we needed from core funds,” the PRADAN Programme Coordinator explained. “This shows our level of commitment to this process.”

## Managing the GEP

To steer the GEP, organizational leads from PRADAN and Jagori formed a management team that met regularly in order to facilitate simultaneous innovation, experimentation and scaling and tracking of gender equality approaches. This required alignment of two organizations with very different profiles and styles of operation. PRADAN is a large rural development organization working with over 270,000 families in more than 5,000 villages. Jagori is a comparatively small feminist organization dedicated to feminist research and knowledge building. It supports women’s leadership and agency through one-on-one guided reflection, dialogue, and training. Working from these distinct perspectives, the PRADAN and Jagori management team developed strategies that drew on the strengths of both organizations.

The GEP organizational partnership was not without its challenges, tensions and resistances. It required a dedicated management team to keep multipronged efforts at diverse sites moving forward. Strategies to resolve tensions, adapt to the varied needs of PRADAN professionals and rural women, and track progress included mediation and feedback mechanisms to ensure that programs ran smoothly. In 2012 PRADAN hired an independent consultant to manage and coordinate this complex process. She was also responsible for biannual reporting, and participating in developing GEP training.

## Site-specific Training and Development

To address the nuanced needs of each site on an ongoing basis, Jagori created a pool of experts capable of providing targeted, site-specific guidance to complement foundational orientation workshops on gender and patriarchy. Resource people were

selected by Jagori’s Director based on “having grounded feminist perspectives on gender and rights, the ability to travel to remote areas and the willingness to be part of an experiment.” This required resource people with a high level of commitment. Jagori’s Director explained: “Our resource people had to be part of a journey that had no terms of reference,” she explained. The resource persons also had to have the sensitivity to work with men from technical background with different levels of exposure to feminist and gender equality approaches.

Resource people reported being drawn to this process by their interest in the gender-mainstreaming goal of this project and their respect for PRADAN. One resource person articulated a commonly held respect among Jagori trainers for PRADAN’s work with rural women:

“I was familiar with PRADAN’s work and impressed with their overall sensitivity to people’s issues, their humility and the commitment by PRADAN male staff to working with women. Our work was to unpack and expand ways to build women’s agency on political and social issues as well.”

This team of resource people was managed and coordinated by Jagori’s Director who was responsible for ensuring collaboration on creative content development and managing the intricate logistics of ongoing multi-site training in remote areas. In order to ensure responsiveness to the needs of particular teams, Jagori assigned a resource person to anchor training and development at each location. The Jagori resource team planned, shared and reviewed the training and progress every six months, highlighting what was working well and identifying problems.

Jagori resource people planned training content jointly but deliberately did not standardize training methods so that each trainer could employ their particular strengths and tailor programming to the particular needs of each site. This ensured that high skill level Jagori resource people, feminists with extensive experience in training and skill development, had the opportunity to contribute personal expertise to training materials and ongoing mentoring. As explained by Jagori’s Senior Project Associate responsible for coordinating technical support: “Resource people had ideas that came from different gender mainstreaming initiatives.” Through collaborative curriculum development,

GEP training materials and methods were enriched by drawing on a range of feminist pedagogies.

Beyond contributing to the collective content development process, Jagori resource persons also shared existing tools from their work and developed new GEP resources—for instance, ANANDI shared tools on governance, rights and entitlements; and National Alliance of Women’s Organizations (NAWO) simplified training content into songs in the local Oriya language. In this way, the GEP generated a range of training materials, including visual resources and tools for PRADAN teams and CRPs. This investment in cross learning ensured that each site benefited from the collective expertise of the Jagori resource team. Cross learning between Jagori resource people was also facilitated by Jagori through submission of session plans, post-training reports and regular analysis of changes in the sites where they worked.

The Jagori resource person designated as anchor for each site was responsible for on-site training and, when appropriate, working with teams to identify resource people and organizations that could address specific on-site challenges. For instance, in Orissa, where language was at times a barrier, the Jagori resource person identified local gender experts to facilitate trainings with rural women. Introducing local partners, had the additional advantage that they were also thoroughly immersed in the cultures and context of the region.

GEP collaborations included local, state, national and even international partners, including Action Aid, Anandi, Center for Social Justice, Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), Multiple Action Resource Group (MARG), the National Alliance of Women’s Organizations (NAWO) and One Billion Rising. Many of the partners identified by Jagori resource people for training exchanges were new actors to PRADAN. PRADAN teams also identified partners within their states. PRADAN teams and Jagori trainers also arranged exposure visits for rural women. For example, 60 rural women leaders from PRADAN GEP sites visited Anandi to see how other women’s collectives operate. PRADAN professionals expressed how engagement with a wide range of partners opened up fresh lines of thinking and ongoing future collaboration.

### **Anchoring the GEP within PRADAN**

Within PRADAN, the GEP was supported through the initiation of a six-member Core Group—a

consultative group and a platform for mobilizing knowledge and ideas relating to gender equality within PRADAN. During the project formulation phase, the Core Group organically emerged as six PRADAN professionals invested in thinking through the content and programmatic dimensions of the GEP. The Core Group served as a bridge between Jagori and the GEP teams. They worked with Jagori resource people to develop modules that met the needs of PRADAN teams and assigned an internal PRADAN anchor to guide and support each team. While voluntary and non-administrative, the Core Group was not an open group.

Each of the eight PRADAN teams involved in the GEP also nominated a GEP anchor from within the team to coordinate with the Jagori technical resource team and reporting on GEP initiatives. “The most essential work of the anchor,” however, one professional emphasized, “is providing hand-holding support for newer team members.” At most sites, the roles of GEP anchor and team leader remained distinct and were held by different people. This loose structure facilitated decentralized rollout of GEP strategies and provided ways for PRADAN professionals to inform the pace of the program based upon site-specific needs assessments.

The Core Group, Jagori resource people, team leaders and GEP anchors met annually for a collective planning and review meeting. Jagori’s Executive Director facilitated these review meetings and undertook necessary conceptual, managerial and technical follow up. The review meeting provided a forum for PRADAN teams to identify capacity building needs, co-lead the process and identify location-specific concerns. For instance, the Kesla team expressed interest in working on trafficking, the Karanjia team sought to initiate dialogues between generations on sexuality and to talk about witch-hunting and the Dindori team identified a need to work on land rights. As the work at each site progressed, review meetings became increasingly sophisticated. Presentations by PRADAN professionals became deeper and more complex.

Reflecting upon the process of anchoring the GEP within PRADAN teams, Core Group members raised some shortcomings of this approach:

“Having a Core Group that formed to implement the program was, in the end, a top-down approach. Maybe our role

was important, but many teams had their own ideas. Our strategies may have been helpful but also limiting. The process needed to be more open to fully include new ideas and contextual needs.”

While teams retained the flexibility to pilot their own approaches—a defining feature of PRADAN’s philosophy—the GEP Management and PRADAN Core Team took responsibility for developing reporting strategies. However, a Core Team member felt that the system of reporting they developed did not entirely accommodate the scope of the interventions taking place across GEP sites. As the GEP was rolled out, it became clear that beyond the six-member Core Group, there were many other PRADAN professionals with much to contribute. Accordingly, ways of opening the group to other staff members is under consideration.

### **Tracking Program Implementation**

Despite the efforts of the management team, the Jagori resource team, the PRADAN Core Group and the GEP anchors at each site, feedback loops to track program implementation remained an ongoing challenge. Although annual review meetings provided a forum to review program implementation, tracking progress between trainings and review meetings remained difficult. Jagori’s Director explained: “Between trainings and review meetings, we were not sure how to best support teams. It took two years to know where we were in the journey.” Looking forward, she highlighted the importance of ongoing feedback structures, including more regular on site reviews to track the impact of training.

### **Awakening gender perspectives within PRADAN**

“We have clearly rearticulated our stance: we work with women, not with women as representatives of the interests of their families.”

~ PRADAN Programme Director, October 2014

The GEP aimed to facilitate a transition among PRADAN professionals from working with women to working with a gender perspective. At its core, this required skilled development professionals to

shift their focus from family livelihood enhancement as the primary barometer of change to consider women as independent agents of change capable of transforming patriarchal structures and claiming gender equality. To make this shift, the GEP called upon PRADAN professionals to question the gender-based division of labour, authority and the control over resources within families that severely disempower women and girls. As explained by Jagori’s Director, “to consider the well-being of women, we have to shake the foundation of how we consider the family.”

The variation in individual responses to trainings and trainers testifies to the deeply personal nature of the process of interrogating gender and patriarchy. Recognizing that the GEP was experienced differently by each PRADAN professional who took part in this effort, the next section attempts to capture a range of experiences that taken together give a sense of the professional and personal growth that teams underwent.

### **GEP Training and Perspective Building**

To support them in achieving GEP objectives, PRADAN professionals had access to a range of training and mentorship opportunities designed and facilitated by the Jagori resource team. These included:

- » Basic gender training for PRADAN professionals.
- » Off-site advanced gender training for PRADAN professionals.
- » On-site handholding support from Jagori resource people.
- » Gender perspective coaching during annual team planning processes.
- » Community-level trainings facilitated by Jagori resource people that modeled feminist practice in engagement, facilitation, ways of listening and raising questions.
- » Site visits to organizations addressing similar issues.
- » Advanced gender trainings on more complex issues of intersectionality, rights and equality for senior PRADAN professionals and GEP anchors.
- » On-site training on sexuality with women from the community.

In addition to these opportunities facilitated by

Jagori resource people, PRADAN independently initiated Theatre of the Oppressed and Results Based Management training.

Many PRADAN professionals described being most impacted by trainings that they attended alongside community women. One PRADAN professional recalled:

“It was the training with the community women that really opened my eyes and heart. The women were very outspoken and their lives were much harsher than I had imagined. As they described the violence they lived with, I was crying inside—and yet day after day, they smile in meetings. 135 women attended that five day meeting, facilitated by 5 resource people. At the end, we made a big *diya* and all promised not to be violent and not to suffer from violence.”

Community trainings co-facilitated by Jagori resource people modeled new ways of training. For instance, one PRADAN professional described realizing the power of songs to communicate:

“In our interventions, if there were ten points for a woman to remember on MGNREGA, we would make sure they knew the ten points. Jagori would develop a song. Our way was linear. I learned how to follow the energy of the women.”

Another professional described learning sensitivity to women’s needs by seeing how a Jagori trainer interacted with local women:

“we talk about sensitivity, but we are not really aware of what sensitivity is. With our resource person, I not only learned it, I saw it in the way she facilitated.”

Learning between PRADAN professionals and Jagori resource people, moreover, was reciprocal. Jagori’s Senior Associate for the GEP states how much they learned from PRADAN in the sphere of livelihood development and building women’s collectives. Jagori is a rights-based organization, focused mostly on violence in domestic and larger public spaces. Livelihoods was a new area of work for Jagori. By working with PRADAN professionals and rural women, Jagori deepened their

understanding of how women’s lives are shaped by different agricultural cycles and practices and how, within this context, women negotiate their daily lives. This vantage also facilitated new perspectives from Jagori. For instance, through this process of mutual exchange, the GEP honed in on drudgery reduction for women through introduction of simple technological innovations as an area for intervention.

PRADAN professionals also described the importance of ongoing mentorship from team leaders and peers, exposure visits to other organizations working on gender issues, and independent research and reading. In particular, professionals underlined the profound growth that took place while reflecting upon and grappling with ideas from trainings and workshops with their team members. As explained by one PRADAN professional, echoing the sentiments of many others: “Training is very helpful, but it has been as important for me to learn to practically apply this training with other gender-sensitive team mates.”

Teams that were able to foster a culture committed to gender equality approaches were better able to integrate gender equality approaches in all facets of their work. Many PRADAN professionals spoke about the importance of analyzing gender-based practices with their teammates. Others spoke about taking conscious, proactive steps to ensure that gender dynamics within the team did not limit the voices of women in the teams. One Core Group member explained her strategies to strengthening gender equality approaches within the team she led:

“We realized that since the GEP was new, we needed to consolidate the efforts of those of us who wanted it to succeed. Within our team we formed a small group that would work to design modules and communication tools for our site and the CRPs [Community Resource Persons] that we worked with. We met once a month, in addition to our team meetings. Within the bigger team, whenever there was a conflict of opinions or views within the team, we took the time to discuss and come to a common understanding. Where there was conflict we dealt with it directly. That is the value of the team—the reason we work together. If we are not convinced of an approach, we have to keep engaging each other.”

Aligning perspectives is critical to successful gender work. For a team to be successful everyone needed to share a basic commitment to gender equality even if their levels of understanding was at various levels.

## Professional Development

“We stopped thinking of women as beneficiaries of our programs and began thinking of them as citizens to support in claiming their rights.”

~ PRADAN Professional, December 2014

During interviews and group discussions, professionals demonstrated an ability to recognize subtle forms of gender-based discrimination. They could link incidents of discrimination and violence to broader structural inequalities rooted in patriarchal norms. One gave the following example of coming to recognize and remedy subtle discrimination in his own behavior:

“My colleague and I went to a village where there were both boys and girls on one football ground. We gave the ball to the boys. We didn’t pass to the girls. Then, I wondered, why didn’t we give the ball to the girls? Now, when I go to playgrounds I notice if women are there. I call them to play equally. They do as well as the boys.”

Nearly all PRADAN professionals interviewed described their commitment to working to advance gender equality, whether longstanding or newfound. They also discussed having learned to raise sensitive issues among community members and the processes of identifying and testing potential interventions.

Evolving perspectives on gender among PRADAN professionals, moreover, deeply influenced the way many professionals came to view the rural women they worked with in the field. “I used to think that women could not do extension and technical work,” one professional explained, “but now, I not only think that women are as capable as men of doing this work, but I also encourage them to do it.” As a result of these shifts in perspective, PRADAN teams are now engaging women in farming, ploughing, vehicle operation and other “heavy work” that they previously reserved for men.

While PRADAN professionals described the

considerable impact GEP had on a professional, team and personal level, a number of professionals also described initial hesitation about the program. One professional described feeling that the GEP was unnecessary:

“I had just joined PRADAN to do income generation work when the GEP launched. There was a lot of discussion in the team about the need for this program, but I did not initially see the need. After my gender training, I saw the need everywhere. Even then, it took time for me to feel comfortable addressing gender issues.”

Other professionals expressed concern that a gender equality approach would hamper existing livelihood generation and infrastructure development initiatives. However, over time GEP teams were able to get more clarity on how to integrate this approach in their on-going work. Although evolving a gender perspective and approach took time, most professionals described undergoing a fundamental shift in the way that they viewed everyday life. As one professional described: “Now, I observe gender issues all the time. I don’t always react. Reaction is not always appropriate. If I can do something, I do. But often, I just observe.”

PRADAN professionals who were already engaged in promoting gender equality, became involved with the GEP when it started and participated in the full range of training opportunities offered, were most successful in applying gender approaches in their work. Those who were able to stay and work consistently within one community felt they made the greatest impact. Others, due to team reassignment and placement were not able to benefit from the full array of trainings. These shifts in personnel took a toll on fledgling GEP pilot initiatives. A PRADAN Programme Director described the impact as follows: “As people shifted and team leaders changed in GEP sites, it felt like snakes and ladders. Without continuity, we were sometimes back to square one.”

## Personal Transformation

“Individuals in the teams took ownership over the GEP process. It became organic. That was the beauty. They challenged themselves and they challenged custom. They saw this as a process of personal change.”

~ Jagori resource person, October 2014

Interrogating gender and patriarchy required PRADAN professionals to examine these forces in their personal and family lives. Many described the effect of recognizing previously unexamined structures of privilege. Many spoke of feeling reluctant to raise gender discrimination in the communities where they worked until they had the clarity that came from understanding how these forces shaped their lives and families.

Some PRADAN professionals, especially those who described themselves as coming from conservative backgrounds faced difficulty in resolving their emerging perspectives on gender with their upbringing. Some described how their exposure through PRADAN to community-level work had challenged previously held notions around class and caste. Through the GEP, they described, experiencing a similar confrontation around gender.

Many were troubled by their inability to communicate these ideas to their own families. Others persisted in confronting these issues within their homes despite resistance. For example, one professional described how he had to first address property rights in his own family before he could train women on land rights:

“When I started land rights work from a gender perspective, I understood the importance of a woman having property rights. I asked my parents about my sister’s property rights. I explained that if my sister is ever unhappy with her marital family she will need to have property. My parents partitioned the inheritance in three parts to include my sister. Before this, it was difficult for me to train on land rights because in my own home I was not practicing gender equity.”

Other PRADAN team members described taking steps in their daily interactions to challenge discrimination

“I am from a patriarchal family in Odisha. The GEP changed the way I behave at home. Initially, I never carried water. Now when I am home I carry the water for my mother’s bath. People do comment. They call me maichiya [boy with a girl’s nature] but I do this anyway.”

## Impact on PRADAN beyond the GEP sites

While the GEP sought to develop gender approaches across eight sites, the program had implications that reverberated across the organization. PRADAN Core Group members involved in teaching the gender module in PRADAN’s Foundation Course for new professionals (FC1) expanded this initial training module. In preparation for integrating gender equality approaches across the organization, in 2014 West Bengal conducted a statewide gender-training program for all West Bengal teams, a decision taken by the state management committee.

Professionals from GEP sites also brought new approaches to the broader group through General Council meetings and other forums. For instance, Theater of the Oppressed techniques were introduced as a central part of the Development Apprenticeship Programme in order to give space to gender equality approaches within PRADAN.

## Awakening Gender Perspectives Among Rural Women

“Change begins with the self.”  
~ Community Service Provider, September 2014

The GEP aimed to understand from rural women how they wanted to take action to improve their lives and communities. It sought to support women to make their leadership visible within their families, communities and civic spaces. Training for rural women under the GEP followed a cascade model. Rural women leaders trained as Community Resource Persons (CRPs) were key agents of change. Guided by PRADAN and Jagori, they worked to transform women’s Self Help Groups (SHGs) from resource mobilizing and capital aggregating institutions to community solidarity formations working towards women’s empowerment and citizens rights.

A key PRADAN strategy has been to train CRPs, women from the community who played a leadership role, to provide community support. Traditionally CRPs focused on agriculture and other technical areas. The GEP, however, trained CRPs to be key actors in building perspectives on gender,



Women attend a cluster-level adhivesan in Mukundpur, Rayagada, Orissa, 2013.

patriarchy, rights and entitlements by training SHGs in their local areas on these issues. A CRP would be responsible for support and training in a cluster of 2-3 gram panchayats. At some GEP sites, CRP roles were thematically delineated as gender sathis [partners], adhikar sathis [rights partners] and ajeevika sathis [livelihood partners].

Jagori resource people worked directly with CRPs to build understanding and training capacity. Training for CRPs focused on developing understanding on gender-based violence, women’s entitlements and citizen rights. Workshops on leadership and training of trainers prepared these women to effectively bring this information to a larger group. Some women leaders also visited other locations for exposure visits. Training inputs varied according to particular contextual needs. Across locations, trainings emphasized the importance of discussions within the household on issues of gender discrimination, power dynamics and violence against women.

There was a broad consensus among CRPs trained under the GEP across all the sites that trainings transformed their perspectives, exposing them to completely new concepts and skills. Use of

personal narratives and games, they reported, were particularly useful in helping to realize that they were part of a patriarchal social structure. Many women described going through the process of accepting how gender-based discrimination impacts their lives, overcoming initial resistance and then building the confidence of raising these issues at home with their families. Despite reporting initial hesitation in challenging themselves, women reported finding new ways to effect change within themselves, their families and their communities.

One CRP described how she challenged the property inheritance structure within her family:

“I am the eldest child. I have two sisters and a brother. In my home, I brought up the discussion that girls should also be able to inherit property. In the end, my father decided to share his property equally among all four of us. My mother refused this arrangement regarding her own personal property. She thought it was only appropriate for this to go to my brother. I persisted with this discussion until my mother decided that we will all get an equal share.”

Women also reported raising issues of discrimination and privilege such as limitations during menstruation and differences in food intake based on gender. While some women reported facing physical and verbal assault for raising these issues, many also reported positive changes within their homes when they persisted in exposing these issues.

Even when there was backlash, many of the women trained described persisting in their pursuit of gender equality initiatives. Many women spoke of growth in their self-confidence and ability to negotiate their roles within their households. One CRP recounted finally overcoming her husband's resistance to allowing her to attend trainings and workshops:

"I was selected for a paralegal training for 14 days at Saharanpur. My husband refused to let me go. He told me, 'your place is in the house and you are not to step outside.' To make my point, I refused to leave the four walls of the house, even to go to the bathroom or to fetch water. By the third day, my husband understood my point of view."

Jagori resource people and PRADAN professionals also described how working with CRPs enhanced their understanding. As one professional explained:

"We were able to learn directly from women's experiences. They were most able to identify the issues we should work on. It was through understanding their priorities, learning their idioms that we were able to evolve communication tools and strategies that could really speak to rural women."

First accompanied by Jagori resource people and PRADAN professionals and then independently, rural women trainers brought gender perspectives to women leaders through training and leadership development camps. They used training modules and materials—including songs and posters—developed by Jagori and supplemented by local PRADAN teams who developed songs and exercises in local languages. Some CRPs had access to handholding support and ongoing mentorship either from Jagori resource people or PRADAN professionals.

Initial accounts of resistance from others in their communities gave way to women reporting that they felt a rise in their status within the community. Training they received around the Right To Information Act, 2005 (RTI), paralegal skills and

rights and entitlements raised their profile as community assets. One woman recalled: "At first, people would call after me mockingly—'Look, she is walking around like a neta [leader]'. Now, they respectfully call me 'netaji [leader]' or 'ma'am.'"

CRPs reported that women's collectives were a major support during their training and in supporting one another's personal transformation. As one woman attests: "The presence of a group in solidarity and the knowledge that there are other women who are going through a similar transformation gave me the support to go forward." In some areas, a woman leader fulfilled multiple roles—she was a CRP, Nari Adalat member, SHG member, cluster leader and trainer at once. Other teams pursued a strategy of spreading leadership amongst a larger pool of women by allowing each woman to play only one role. Both approaches had their respective strengths and weaknesses. For instance, those who held more than one role often emerged as stronger leaders due to their access to multiple training and development opportunities. Where roles were distributed, however, a larger pool of women built their leadership capacity. The presence of a larger leadership pool was especially helpful in maintaining leadership as women, and especially young women, recede and reenter leadership roles when they have children and due to other evolving family responsibilities.

While the cascade model successfully extended the outreach of the GEP program, this approach made it difficult to ensure that all CRPs delivered training of an adequate standard. Although the GEP worked to balance extensive and intensive training approaches, women's leadership developed at varying paces. One PRADAN professional said: "The CRPs were not all equipped to impart training to SHG members. I tried to support and accompany them initially but couldn't provide all the support that was required." Women leaders recommended regular follow up and repetition of key trainings to ensure that all CRPs have access to training even if they take on this role after training has already been given in their area.

Another professional suggested that SHG members also receive training. "CRPs and women leaders are being sought after to solve problems," he explained. "SHGs need training directly so they can internalize their own strength and capacity." While it may not be possible to train all SHG members directly in all areas, extending access to leadership camps and visioning exercises may help to build broader leadership bases and democratic engagement.



## Strategic Planning and Implementation

# 3

During the GEP, PRADAN professionals and rural women, with an evolved understanding of gender-based discrimination and patriarchy, took action to challenge these forces. By documenting more successful approaches as well as challenges teams faced in implementing gender equality approaches, this chapter compiles strategies to facilitate cross-learning between GEP teams and PRADAN sites at different stages in developing gender equality initiatives.

An ability to recognize subtle forms of gender-based discrimination and violence was common among those interviewed. However, professionals reported a wide range of experiences in applying these perspectives in programs that impacted women's lives. While some reported finding ways to inculcate gender equality approaches in all facets of their work, others felt that due to time and target pressure, transfers and other disruptive team dynamics, integration of gender empowerment

approaches remained compartmentalized.

This chapter reviews strategies teams used to communicate gender perspectives, build solidarity and forge collective identities. Then, it considers how team members worked with women to strengthen women’s organizations; develop livelihood options that enhance women’s control over economic resources; effectively participate in local governance systems; and address and end all forms of violence against women. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of how PRADAN teams evaluated their impact—the challenges they faced and the strategies they devised.

## Communicating Gender Perspectives

Working alongside Jagori resource people, PRADAN professionals used a range of creative approaches including raising questions, games, songs and theatre performances to build awareness and expose gender based discrimination.

One PRADAN professional explained how he raised simple questions with SHGs that brought about changes in women’s perspectives:

“In simple discussions I have found ways to make change. For example, one day I asked, ‘how many women here have been beaten even once by your spouse?’ 99% of the women raised their hands. My second question was, ‘how many women have slapped or beaten their spouse?’ No one raised a hand. Then I said, ‘you have all been beaten. Close your eyes and think about your mother. What was her situation? Was she beaten? Now think about your grandmother. Now tell me, I asked, how many people want to see this behavior with their girls?’ No hand was raised. ‘You see, I said, there is a hill with a big stone rolling down and people are crushed under the stone. The stone will roll forever unless it is stopped.’ I used these questions to show them a mirror of what was going on, to open questions in their minds.”

Raising thought provoking questions among a group of women, he explained, made a tremendous change:

“After a few open questions like this, I found that they had started holding monthly meetings to discuss these issues. They asked the Sarpanch to come to the meeting and they solved three domestic violence cases. They sent a powerful message to the village—‘in our village no woman will be beaten by her husband, whether she is a member of an SHG or not.’”

Another professional described the questions she raised to raise women’s awareness about the discrimination they faced during menstruation:

“I was talking to women about their health during the menstrual cycle so I used this opportunity to raise questions about discrimination during menstruation. I asked, ‘what is this? Isn’t it the blood that fed your child in your stomach?’ They agreed. Then I asked, ‘but if this blood is the blood that feeds your children, how can it make you dirty so that you must remain separate from everyone else?’”

“Raising questions and then listening,” one PRADAN professional explained, is about “changing where conversations start so women have the space to express their needs.”

This type of probing questioning, pointing out everyday forms of discrimination, was modeled and encouraged by Jagori resource people. One resource person explained:

“My contribution was to help the team be at ease while addressing gender, discrimination and violence. This way, they could open up the space to understand women in ways that were probing but not threatening. I tried to build these skills by facilitating team discussions this way. This process of experiencing new ways of engaging helped the teams to go beyond the formal training they received.”

Their in-depth understanding of the communities they work with prepared PRADAN professionals to raise gender perspectives and assist Jagori trainers working with CRPs and Federation leaders.



Community theatre against domestic violence performed by women’s Self Help Group. Dinatola Village, Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh, 2013.

PRADAN teams also devised other creative approaches to challenge gender discrimination. For instance, teams held football tournaments for girls that challenged gender boundaries in areas where sporting events were traditionally an exclusively male domain.

They also utilized existing PRADAN structures to build solidarity and forge collective identities. While Adhiveshans and Mahadiveshans—large gatherings of women’s federation members—were a part of PRADAN’s work with women’s collectives prior to the GEP program, the GEP brought new energy to these gatherings. Women leaders were increasingly active in planning these events. Jagori resource people also participated in them. A Federation member from Purulia described her experience:

“It is an opportunity for us to come out of our village and meet other women from different villages and clusters to share our ideas and experiences. We get very emotional watching theatre on issues that are very close to our hearts.”

Other organizing vehicles, like the Purulia literacy school became a hub for gender equality training

across programs, including agriculture, nutrition and governance. Women published newspapers in the literacy centers, wrote their own stories, and circulated them among SHGs. In Kesla, PRADAN supported women federation leaders to engage local political party representatives. These and other approaches were integral to strengthening women’s organizations incorporating gender approaches across all areas of GEP work.

## Strengthening women’s organizations

The GEP sought to prepare women’s leadership bodies, SHGs and collectives, to move beyond functioning as savings and credit institutions and emerge with the confidence and skills to identify and address gender based discrimination and violence. Across the GEP sites, Federations have met this challenge, taking on issues as diverse as alcoholism, dowry related violence, early marriage, food scarcity, gender bias in health and education, trafficking and anti-women cultural practices such as witch-hunting.



Newly literate women reading newspapers at literacy center, Tilabani Village, Purulia, West Bengal, 2013.



Sheela Didi standing amidst creeper vegetables that she cultivated organically on her land. Kochewada Village, Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh, 2015.

**Target Outcome:**

Associative tiers of SHGs (village level committees, cluster committees and SHG Federations) support women in expressing gender based inequality and taking steps to address the same in their homes and outside.

- » Enhanced understanding of women about patriarchy and its manifestations in their own lives and other societal structures.
- » Enhanced ability of women leaders of associative tiers of SHGs to support members in facilitating expression and/or addressing gender based inequality.

At its core, the PRADAN teams were engaged in a process of leadership transition. A Jagori resource person describes the change in role that PRADAN teams sought to precipitate:

“GEP teams now see development as a process

that has to be led by women. In order to achieve this shift, women’s collectives cannot be PRADAN-led. They need to be equipped with the skills and confidence to take the lead. This changes the role of PRADAN teams. They must learn to become facilitators of this process.”

This has challenged PRADAN professionals to transform their roles in the communities where they work.

Vision-building meetings, strengthening governing boards and conducting leadership training to build second and third-line leadership were used to strengthen women’s collectives. Equipped with awareness on gender, patriarchy, rights and entitlements, in some areas women leaders began to bring their understanding and perspectives to the Federations. For example, the PRADAN Kesla team reported taking action to make block level Federations self-standing, registered institutions and attaining legal compliances. The Federation now has a management committee and a governing board. These formal structures all serve to enhance the capacity and efficacy of the Federations.

While taking steps to make Federations increasingly

independent, professionals also remained attuned to issues related to the sustainability of independent Federations. “In order to take their ideas forward independently,” one professional explained, “Federations will need to find ways to build ongoing expertise. For instance, to pursue rights and entitlements, they will need access to usable, up to date information.”

PRADAN professionals in Kesla are beginning to address this challenge by linking Federations to a broader network of women’s groups. One professional explained:

“We are working to help the Federations build links with a broad network, including the State Women’s Commission, the anti-trafficking of women cell and NGOs working on health issues. We are also trying to build links between Federations to encourage sharing and cross-learning.”

A profound transition in leadership, where PRADAN teams will step back and support women leaders to become the principle force in identifying issues and initiating action to transform

their lives and communities, is underway. As this process unfolds, PRADAN will need to continue to understand what input and support federations will need from PRADAN in order to emerge as completely self-standing institutions.

**Enhancing Women’s Control over Economic Decision Making and Resources**

“I use a scale and ask women to put weights on one side for the work they do and weights on the other for the work their husbands do. Then, I say: ‘See how much greater your part is? When I think of a farmer, I think of you.’”

~ PRADAN professional, September 2014

The GEP aimed to work with women to enhance their sense of equality as economic actors and decision-makers within their households. Despite PRADAN’s decades of experience in rural livelihood development and asset generation, many professionals considered this goal to be one of





■ Agricultural trainer conducting a demonstration on seed bed preparation from agricultural handbook. Chirugora Village, Purulia, West Bengal, 2013.

the most challenging dimensions of the GEP. The difficulty of integrating new approaches in existing programs and less expertise in this area among Jagori resource people may have contributed significantly to these challenges.

**Target Outcome:**

Women SHG members from tribal, Dalit and backward communities in endemic poverty pockets display enhanced sense of equality as economic actors in the household.

- » Increased awareness of women SHG members about constitutional guarantees related to livelihood opportunities.
- » Enhanced awareness of women SHG members about new livelihood technologies and skills.
- » Enhanced confidence and abilities of women SHG members to manage input mobilization and output disposal of livelihood options.

Teams worked to enhance women’s sense of equality as economic actors in the household by working with women to identify as farmers rather than as labourers on family fields. Prior to this innovation, PRADAN tended to engage men on agricultural methods and other technical livelihood skills due to men’s receptivity to participating in training programs. Through the GEP process, however, teams came to recognize that failing to actively include women in these skill and capacity building initiatives reduced their chance of becoming informed economic decision-makers, undermined the roles women play as farmers and cut women off from markets. GEP teams thus made concerted efforts to ensure that women were trained in farming techniques.

In Purulia, women who underwent farmers’ school training were known as ‘chasi sathis’ [farmer friends]. Chasi sathis worked with women farmers to make plans related to their agricultural practices. This model was based on a learning cycle that combined technical information, practical demonstration and ongoing input to help women make and execute agricultural plans. During the planning process, women made changes from the traditional one-time use of land to two times, and

also made more informed decisions about better crop choice based on training on nutrition and health. A professional from Purulia explained how this process drew on the strengths of the Purulia literacy center:

“We began with training trainers on technical crop planning, drudgery reduction techniques and nutrition. We had a chapter dedicated to these ideas as part of the literacy center curriculum. In this area, 81% of women are below 45 kilos. They are all anemic. Women learn how nutrition affects their physical and mental health. As part of the syllabus, they learn to calculate their Body Mass Index (BMI). We encourage women to choose crops that will meet their nutritional needs. Once they have gone through this training, trainers work with women in the villages. In farmer-field schools, they demonstrate crops on their own fields. They teach crop selection, nutrition, sowing, pre-harvesting, harvesting and drudgery-reduction techniques.”

The purpose of this initiative was not only to train women in better agricultural practices, but also to establish women’s identities as farmers. The Purulia team made women’s roles visible by putting up a blackboard with the names of women and their crops in a very visible place in the village. Teams also set up Farmer-Producer organizations to facilitate women’s control over selling produce. A PRADAN professional described the impact of this approach:

“For women, recognizing themselves as farmers was a major change in perception. They knew they carried the agricultural work of the family on their shoulders, but saw themselves as labourers. We worked with them to influence decision-making in the family by providing agricultural training and access to markets. They were able to assert their identity as productive members of the household.”

In Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh, women learned organic farming techniques for vegetable cultivation. A Federation leader from Balaghat who attended agricultural training recounted how her enhanced knowledge impacted her standing within her household:

“I was inspired to attend the agricultural training for women. At first, I could not convince my father to try out the strategies I learned but after some time, he did agree. We went by these methods and we got a better yield. This was encouraging to me and also to my family.”

Recognizing that women perform some of the most labor intensive farming work, teams also introduced tools to minimize drudgery. A professional from Balaghat explained that since migration patterns create additional burdens for the women who stay at home, they attempted to counteract this additional weight by introducing tools to minimize drudgery—for instance, a tool that helps to churn the soil.

While these initiatives made inroads into transforming women’s identities as producers, economic actors and decision makers, it did not, in and of itself, give women control of productive assets. A PRADAN’s Program Director explained: “Beyond identifying as economic actors, women need to have access to personal savings, bank accounts and land as a productive assets.”

The Kesla team described using a variety of strategies to recognize women’s identity as productive members of their households. Women took part in Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) planning, identified planned assets in women’s names and submitted Below Poverty Line (BPL) lists identifying women as heads of households. Women have also opened bank accounts in their names at many GEP sites. One woman described this process as one that, “gave her a sense of power and respect.”

Pursuing a similar approach, the Rayagada and Koderma teams worked with women to apply for agricultural subsidies in their names even though land was held in the names of male family members. A PRADAN professional from Koderma explained this process:

“We had to invest time in influencing block and district level government officials. Then, for the first time, the Agricultural Department recognized 2,465 women farmers and granted them subsidies. Women gained lots of recognition. Now, men within the village refer to plots and say, ‘this plot belongs to this Didi.’”



Gender equality training with women Federation leaders from Hazaribagh and Koderma, Jharkhand, 2014.

Following a similar process, the Rayagada team supported 120 women to claim the forest land they were cultivating under the Odisha Forest Rights Act, 2006. While most pattas [land plots] were given jointly in the names of husbands and wives, widows were able to secure pattas in their own names. The Rayagada team also supported women to gain access to information on available schemes to develop waste land.

### Increasing Women's Ability to Effectively Participate in Governance

The GEP objective of supporting women to effectively engage and participate in governance was a new area of work for PRADAN. In particular, PRADAN teams sought to equip women with information about Panchayat processes and procedures and raise women's awareness and increase claim-making ability under various government schemes.

The program proposed that women participate in

#### Target Outcome:

75,000 rural women from marginalized communities increasingly exercise their right to participate in local governance institutions and processes.

- » Increased claim making abilities of marginalized women to claim entitlements
- » Pool of leaders associated with women's collectives able to support women to access their rights and entitlements and raise issues in local governance

the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Right to Education (RTE), Public Distribution System (PDS) and access to pensions. A variety of approaches were employed to generate awareness about schemes and entitlements. These included training resource people to conduct systematic outreach

at the grassroots level, discussions during group, cluster and federation meetings, street plays and information dissemination during Adhiveshans and Mahadiveshans. As an integral part of this mission, PRADAN teams also sought to increase engagement between women's collectives and Panchayati Raj representatives and other duty bearers and to increase participation in democratic processes.

#### Target Outcome:

Enhanced responsiveness of duty bearers and PRI representatives to issues faced by the community.

- » Enhanced engagement of duty bearers with women's collectives on addressing community issues
- » Enhanced engagement of PRI representatives with women's collectives on addressing community issues
- » Enhanced engagement of SHG associative tiers on advocacy to influence systems to respond to community issues

In Rayagada, the district engaged the PRADAN team as a core partner for systematic voting awareness. Nearly 500 women attended an awareness camp facilitated by the Block Development Officer (BDO) and Social Extension Office (SEO), which included demonstrating the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM). Following this initial meeting, the BDO and SEO trained 50 women leaders on voting rights and use of the EVM. As a result of these initiatives, Rayagada's polling percentage increased from 67% to 84.5%.

Teams also worked to involve women in local decision-making processes. For instance, the Rayagada team worked with women from six villages to influence the Sikharpai Panchayat to initiate a palli sabha meeting to facilitate participation of 250 women in village-level planning. Through this process, 301 women applied for new job cards under MGNREGA and made job demands. In Balaghat, PRADAN supported women to not only secure work on farm ponds through the MGNREGS, but to increase the productivity on their land. In Karanjia, PRADAN teams worked with women to secure jobs as MGNREGA worksite 'mates' [site supervisors].

One PRADAN professional discussed involving SHG members in watershed management:

"Before the GEP we did not involve SHGs in water management meetings. Now we involve them in the planning process. They have brought new ideas to this conversation. For instance, women suggested that we place a small shed near the water bodies for privacy. We had not thought of this before."

Similarly, the Rayagada team supported women from Ridgekana village to secure safe drinking water through negotiations with the District Collector. Nineteen women from the village met with the District Collector and ultimately secured approval for flow-based drinking and irrigation water from the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Department.

Women's collectives also demanded better functioning Public Distribution Systems (PDS) (Dindori, Hazaribag, Mayurbhanj), the opening of new Aanganwadi centers (Hazaribag, Mayurbhanj), the opening of a new Public Health Center (PHC) (Balaghat). A rural woman from Hazaribag recounted her experience with the Block Development Officer (BDO) when she and a group of women filed Right to Information (RTI) application demanding information about the allocation of rations under PDS:

"We filed an RTI to get information about the allocation of rations. Then we spoke to the BDO. When she realized that we knew how to use RTI, she invited us to act as RTI trainers. We are given honorariums to serve as resource persons—Rs. 500 each day that we work."

In Purulia team worked with women's collectives to conduct Citizens Reports evaluating the quality of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Public Distribution Systems (PDS). A professional from Purulia explained ongoing challenges associated with these processes:

"Women have very little awareness about ICDS, PDS and other services so this process remains driven by PRADAN and women trainers. This expectation is hard for us to meet because we don't yet have experience in this area. We are still learning."

Despite these challenges, these strategies have had impact. A CRP from Dindori explained how Federation members influenced the Health Department to improve health facilities:

“The Federation had been raising the issue of poor health services. Working with PRADAN and the District Collector, we collected information for a Citizens Report on the state of health facilities in the district. Then, we used this information to influence the Health Department. The Health Department improved health facilities and made health workers undergo additional training on working with communities.”

A professional from Rayagada recounted working with a group of women at the cluster level to secure access to pension schemes for 120 elderly, widowed, handicapped and deserted women.

“The women leaders visited the Sarpanch to collect forms and apply for pension, but initially the panchayat refused. They appealed to another panchayat and took forms for the Madhu Babu Pension Yojana [scheme]. The women worked with PRADAN to hire an accountant to fill the forms. Then, they returned to the sarpanch who had initially refused to give them the forms and secured his signature. They took the forms directly to the Block Development Officer who agreed to sanction pensions.”

Through these processes, PRADAN professionals and women leaders built relationships with particular functionaries but did not necessarily establish institutional channels to access rights and entitlements. Thus when a particular functionary was transferred, professionals and women leaders had to reestablish relationships. In response to this challenge, Federations in Kesla developed a mechanism to institutionalize public grievance redress mechanisms. The Narmada Mahila Sangh [Narmada Women’s Collective], the women’s Federation in Kesla, established a Vishesh Mahila Jan Sunwai [Special Women’s Public Hearing]—a space to regularly engage governance processes and address grievances. The first Mahila Jan Sunwai was held in October 2012 with regular hearings scheduled each month.

Women reported that their standing within their households and communities was enhanced when they demonstrated they had the capacity to influence duty bearers and access rights and entitlements. For instance, SHG women in Purulia recounted that their success in getting roads sanctioned in their village earned them recognition as a group with the skill and ability to bring development to the village.

## Addressing and Ending All Forms of Violence Against Women

Teams had a wide range of experience working to address violence against women. The teams from Koderma and Hazaribag in Jharkhand had nearly twenty years of experience addressing violence against women prior to the start of the GEP. The Kesla team had some experience. Balagat, Dindori, Karanjia and Purulia were much newer to this work.

Whereas addressing and ending all forms of violence against women was not a stated objective of the GEP, nearly all PRADAN GEP sites were drawn to work in this area. One professional described being called on by women to assist in cases of violence:

“I work on cases of domestic violence because women seek our support. When cases arise, we go to Federation leaders to discuss the case. The Federations are becoming increasingly familiar with legal processes and how to manage cases.”

The teams with greater experience in addressing violence against women have established formal processes to address violence through Nari Adalats or women’s courts. They also work with other organizations in the area with expertise on addressing violence against women. When cases of violence arise, they are brought to women’s collectives. Women CRPs and paralegals, trained on legal processes, take up cases with the support of PRADAN professionals who have developed the capacity to handle this work. If the collective cannot effectively deal with the case, they are referred to Nari Adalats. In Koderma, women also approach Nari Adalats directly.



■ Mahadhivesan. Kesla, Madhya Pradesh, 2012.

The strength and engagement of women’s SHGs and Federations with VAW has a profound impact on women’s ability to effectively confront violence in their homes and communities. A CRP in Dindori recounted a case in which Federation members intervened to ensure that police filed charges:

“The husband used to drink and assault his wife. Once, he tied the mobile charger around her neck and tried to strangle her. She managed to get away and told her sister who is a member of an SHG. The woman brought her to the PRADAN office. PRADAN team members asked her what she wanted. She wanted to file an FIR so a member of the team took her to the police station. The police refused to register the complaint. A large group of women then went to the station and put pressure on the police to file the FIR.”

In Koderma, Nari Adalat members also took action to ensure that an FIR was filed—this time in an alleged dowry murder. A CRP from Koderma recounted:

“A woman was murdered. It was reported that it was for dowry. The Nari Adalat supported her family to file an FIR but the police did not cooperate. They decided to block the road and would not allow the body to be cremated until an FIR was registered and a proper post-mortem undertaken. The Nari Adalat members met the SP and DSP at district headquarters to ensure that a proper investigation was undertaken.”

The Balaghat team and women collectives addressed inadequate police responses to cases of violence against women by organizing a meeting with the local police. During this meeting, women shared the difficulties women faced in taking up cases of violence. This dialogue has helped SHG members file FIRs. Taking similar approaches, the Dindori team held a workshop with government officials to sensitize them to issues of VAW.

GEP teams have also reached out to legal organizations to develop the capacity of PRADAN professionals and women leaders to effectively handle VAW cases. An SHG member from

Hazaribag explained the impact of her training with MARG:

“I used to be afraid of the police. Now, because of my training with MARG I know all the charges and how to lodge an FIR. I have a relationship now with the SP [Superintendent of Police] and DSP [District Superintendent of Police]. Now, I don't hide from the police. I fight for justice.”

While some PRADAN professionals have worked with women to intervene in cases of violence, others described feeling powerless when confronted with violence. One PRADAN professional recounted feeling deeply disturbed by his inability to intervene to alleviate the violence faced by an agricultural CRP he worked closely with:

“There is an agricultural CRP that I work with. She is a very nice lady, very intelligent. She has the most agricultural understanding in 100 villages. She knows pesticides at the molecular level. I know her spouse personally and still I don't know how to stop the violence she faces. After her husband drinks, he turns into the devil. One day the violence was so bad that she had to leave the village and go to her Nani's village. She is a woman with huge potential and she had to flee her home. I am not able to do anything. I want to initiate a discussion with the villagers, but this village doesn't come together to take on these issues. Now she is not working with us. I see her rising sun going back down.”

At this stage, the capacity to address VAW is uneven among PRADAN professionals and local women's collectives. Given the grassroots imperative to work on these issues, PRADAN should invest in building the capacity of teams to establish systematic mechanisms to address VAW.

Finally, challenging deeply entrenched gender norms—especially those that authorize violence against women—has the potential to trigger backlash against women in the community as well as PRADAN professionals. One professional explained, “I have seen backlash against women who challenge gender discrimination. The stronger women become, initially, the stronger the backlash will be. I think this is because we have not initiated

conversations with men.”

A CRP from Balaghat shared how women's collectives had supported her to leave an abusive relationship, there were incidents of physical violence from her husband as well as the women leaders from the village:

“I faced abuse from my husband on almost a daily basis. Leaders from four villages came together to support me. Thirty women came to my house at night to talk to my husband. He abused them so they beat him up and threatened him that if he assaulted me they would intervene. He stopped the violence for some time, but then he began again. The group helped me to separate from him and settle in another village with my children.”

In order to respond most effectively in this and other such situations that may escalate to violence, one PRADAN professional suggested that the organization establish a clear policy on action that will be taken to protect CRPs in case of incidents of backlash. While such a policy may be helpful in setting forth clear procedures following instances of backlash, it would be advisable for PRADAN professionals to work with women to establish clear, context-specific safety plans prior to initiating interventions with the potential to trigger backlash.

Many professionals in PRADAN are keen to start work on masculinities—initiatives with men to address issues of gender justice. Some PRADAN professionals have initiated this work by seeking out training in this area. PRADAN professionals from GEP sites, a majority of whom are men with skills and commitment to addressing issues of gender justice, have the capacity to make critical contributions to this burgeoning field.



## The Way Forward

# 4

The GEP exploratory journey has had a profound impact on PRADAN. A PRADAN Programme Director explained:

“We are now going through a restructuring process across the organization. At the same time, people are coming together around the idea that we can inform cultural shifts by working with women and women's

collectives. These perspectives are being clearly articulated at the General Council meeting. Our prior focus on techno-managerial work is evolving to focus on human processes and engagement with communities. We are looking to shift culture, values and norms around gender which can only happen when women take the lead in making change.”

As PRADAN teams across the organization engage women as citizens and integrate gender perspectives and approaches in rural development work, there is much to learn from the GEP.

This final chapter highlights key areas where PRADAN can meet the challenges brought forward by rural women. These areas for continued growth were identified by those who experienced the GEP first-hand. There is much to learn from PRADAN teams engaging women as citizens and integrating gender perspectives and approaches in rural development work. A PRADAN Programme Director, however, articulated a cautionary lesson:

“A new team cannot cut and paste from the GEP. The challenge in up-scaling this approach is to create the space for teams to evolve their own perspectives, work with women to identify their own issues and find the most suitable approach.”

While there is a great deal to learn from the GEP, there is no blueprint to take this work forward. As the GEP is rolled out across PRADAN sites, PRADAN and Jagori will continue working together to integrate gender approaches in all aspects of programming and outreach.

PRADAN management expressed a clear understanding that teams and professionals with distinct strength, expertise and gender perspectives would require site-specific support and timelines to integrate a gender equality approach in their work. Engaging and incorporating gender equality approaches may be particularly challenging for professionals who have spent years building expertise and working in a technical assistance mode.

In this next stage of expanding gender equality approaches across PRADAN, initiatives are again expected to evolve on parallel tracks, at different paces, to accommodate the vision of various PRADAN teams. As PRADAN professionals across the organization are called upon to take gender equality approaches in their work, the experience of GEP teams should be leveraged to overcome resistance and hesitation. In particular, training materials generated, tried and tested during the GEP and significantly enhanced gender expertise in PRADAN should be very beneficial in this next phase.

This process of up-scaling gender approaches across PRADAN sites will also require the Jagori technical resource team to develop training and support that can reach a more expansive network of PRADAN professionals and rural women while remaining intensive, nuanced and flexible. Core training to build a gender perspective across PRADAN will have to be achieved with fewer human resources invested in each team than during the GEP. Conscious of these challenges, PRADAN and Jagori are committed to investing the necessary resources to bring gender equality approaches to all PRADAN sites.

With these challenges in mind, this chapter highlights key areas in which PRADAN can grow as an institution to meet the challenges brought forward by the rural women they work with. These areas for continued growth and expansion were identified by those who experienced the GEP first-hand.

## Develop gender leadership within PRADAN

“We need to build gender leadership instead of expertise. People have different backgrounds, mind frames and perspectives. Everyone has a view. We are all evolving in our understanding. A gender leader does not have all the answers but can recognize and acknowledge all efforts made toward gender equality.”

~ PRADAN professional, December 2014

The GEP deepened PRADAN’s internal capacity to pursue gender equality approaches. Professionals across GEP sites emerged as highly motivated and skilled leaders, actively engaged in building gender perspectives among their teammates and the rural women they work with. They have taken initiative to design, pilot and evolve new initiatives. As PRADAN extends the organization’s commitment to gender equality perspectives and approaches to all sites, this cadre is an invaluable asset.

In addition to the support of Jagori resource persons, PRADAN teams embarking on building gender equality perspectives and approaches should draw upon the experiences of GEP teams as they undertake strategic planning. Professionals



Communicating and networking to expand gender equality.

engaged in the GEP can also model engagement and training practices. One professional suggested that guidance from those with some experience with gender equality approaches should be extended to others as they undertake the challenge of engaging this perspective:

“There should be people within PRADAN who can support professionals in clarifying their challenges and dilemmas. This person should be approachable—someone from PRADAN that others feel comfortable speaking to when they are having difficulties.”

One way to establish this support network could be to establish informal gender-mentoring relationships for those who seek this support. As noted by members of the initial gender Core Team, organizational-level planning will also benefit from expanding the range of voices that contribute to gender equality planning.

As suggested by numerous PRADAN professionals, gender training in this next phase should be intensive, systematic and far-reaching. All PRADAN members, including those working at

the managerial level, should build a foundational gender equality perspective and seek exposure to the GEP work. This level of engagement across the organization is important to demonstrate commitment to this challenging work. While PRADAN’s senior management interviewed for this process report expressed support for the GEP and its objectives, some teams reported that they did not feel that their gender equality work is adequately recognized within the organization.

To ensure that all team members have access to gender training within the first six months of joining PRADAN, Basic and Advanced Gender Training should be offered on a rolling basis so all members of PRADAN can access timely and sequential training opportunities. As one PRADAN professional explained: “Clear gender perspective must be shared across the team. New team members should have access to training on this before they share responsibility for programs.” Another professional echoed this sentiment: “Gender approaches need anchoring. New members of our team were not attached to these approaches due to lack of a shared understanding.”

All efforts should be taken to document GEP

pilot initiatives to facilitate opportunities for cross learning and reflection between teams. It is our hope that this process document will contribute to this objective. GEP review meetings should continue and include teams at all stages of their journey of evolving gender equality approaches.

Finally, PRADAN professionals expressed concern that they had so few women colleagues. As an institution that promotes gender equality it is essential to provide opportunities and a working environment that is conducive to recruiting and retaining women colleagues.

### Invest in rural women's leadership

“Our team alone is working with 10,000 women. How many get the opportunity to attend leadership camp? We can't expect one woman to make large level community change. More people need intensive exposure and training to identify and respond to all forms of gender-based discrimination. If 10-15 women within a village all receive intensive support, then as a group they may have the ability to raise their voices.”

~PRADAN professional, September 2014

To continue to support women and their collectives and federations to be at the forefront of the struggle for gender justice, PRADAN must make ongoing investments in training and development of grassroots women. This requires even greater training opportunities for rural women across PRADAN. Furthermore, PRADAN professionals noted the importance of not only expanding reach but addressing the concerns of adolescent girls and empowering them as agents of change.

While PRADAN has been successful in building women's leadership, a principal setback has been that due to personal transitions and family-related constraints, engagement by women leaders in GEP is often disrupted. PRADAN teams should invest time to understand the personal constraints of the women leaders in order to anticipate situations where women may have to step back. For instance, younger women, due to child care and household

responsibilities, did not have the mobility that PRADAN professionals hoped would allow them to raise awareness and organize other women across a wide geographic reach. Open dialogue about such constraints may enhance the likelihood that women are able to step forward into leadership roles again as circumstances allow. To compensate for disruptions that women face in being actively engaged, PRADAN should continue to invest in broadening the leadership base among rural women to increase the likelihood that a cohort of women remains active in community organizing initiatives.

### Support strong and sustainable women's institutions

“We need to continue to learn how to develop and nurture women's collectives with the vision and capacity to make the changes they seek in their lives, families and communities.”

~PRADAN professional, December 2014

While PRADAN has invested in supporting the growth of strong women's SHGs and Federations, these are long-term processes. The process for these women's collectives to emerge as entirely autonomous, self-sustaining institutions will take considerably longer to achieve and be distinct across sites.

PRADAN should support staff in developing the required skills to both build women's collectives and their leadership. In some contexts, this will require building staff capacity in organizational development. PRADAN professionals may also want to convene an independent working group to share strategies for building strong women's collectives and women's leadership.

PRADAN professionals and women leaders recounted the benefits of exposure visits to learn how other collectives operate. These opportunities should continue. Teams that are initiating gender equality work would also benefit and be motivated by visiting GEP sites where these processes are underway.

To operate as autonomously as possible, women's collectives benefit from being linked to a broader



Sheela Didi standing with her husband Tej Lal amidst turmeric that she cultivated organically on her land. Kochewada Village, Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh, 2015.

network of feminist organizations to decrease dependency upon PRADAN leadership and gain exposure to new ideas, training and approaches and become part of broader social movements for change.

### Work with men to build gender perspectives

“We need to redesign and strategize so that men can participate. Otherwise, we build the wall between men and women instead of tearing it down.”

~PRADAN professional, December 2014

PRADAN's has an outstanding record of developing gender equality perspectives among professionals and teams—a cohort that is predominantly men from technical backgrounds. While men and women across the organization are leaders in challenging discrimination and injustice—on gender, caste, class and other lines —PRADAN's work on masculinities is at a nascent stage.

Some PRADAN staff expressed an instinctive understanding that masculinity is not only a privilege but also a system of onerous demands. This work on understanding and unpacking masculinity is just beginning. As called for by numerous professionals, PRADAN should support perspective building on masculinities. This will not only be enormously beneficial to PRADAN staff but would equip them to expand gender equality work to include work with men. As one professional explained:

“Right now, our engagement is purely with women. I feel that there must be gender sensitive men as well, or men who can become gender sensitive. Right now, SHGs are united, but if we take men into account they can become more sensitive towards these issues. Within a village as a whole, women and men need to take up these issues together.”

Discussion, reading and training on masculinities will enhance the capacity of PRADAN teams to address gender-based privileges, exclusions and various forms of injustice at both the personal

and community level. While some PRADAN professionals attended a masculinities workshop, most are at a very early phase of exploring this dimension of their work. As PRADAN invests in building the capacity of teams to raise awareness on gender and patriarchy with women, the organization should also invest in equipping teams to work with men to advance gender equality.

## Advocate for structural change

“We are a resource for the NRLM (the National Rural Livelihood Mission) and we can reduce that to impacting livelihood development or we can use our experience to shape priorities. Our national engagements can be transformative and contribute to creating gender-just villages.”

~PRADAN Programme Director, October 2014

PRADAN has the capacity to convert field-level experience into policy-level engagement. PRADAN and Jagori have already been invited by India’s National Rural Livelihood Mission to present the GEP initiative, met with members of the former Planning Commission and showcased good practices at a various international forums.

Building upon these advocacy initiatives, PRADAN’s extensive network of teams and women’s collectives can contribute evidence-based perspectives to challenge gender based discrimination and violence at the policy level. As one Jagori resource person explained:

“PRADAN has transformative potential. They are working with women to build power and advance their rights. Now, to work as an organization to challenge systemic barriers to gender-justice, PRADAN must move beyond working as an implementing agency and find opportunities to make structural change.”

In designing documentation, PRADAN can consider how to link and magnify the impact of existing initiatives by systematically documenting gaps in legal protections and policy implementation. For instance, existing citizens’ reporting strategies pioneered during the GEP

revealed gaps in implementation of public services. By systematizing citizens reporting formats and aggregating this information across the organization, PRADAN teams and women’s collectives can contribute valuable information on where and how government programs are falling short of meeting their objectives. In this way, PRADAN has the potential to lend critical, gender-focused insight into why gaps in policy and practice persist. This information can be used in grassroots, state and national advocacy. PRADAN’s standing in the development field, links to academic institutions, rigorous understanding of government programs and schemes and experience working with duty bearers lend authority to PRADAN’s voice in the public policy arena.

## Evolve evaluation to reward innovation and capture behavioral and structural change

“Evaluation requires you to be clear on what you want to evaluate and how you define your work in relationship to your vision. The GEP called on us to think about bringing about changes in perception and facilitating large scale changes in power—economic, physical, psychological, social and political. This requires us to measure impact differently than we ever did before.”

~PRADAN West Bengal State Director, January 2015

PRADAN’s previous evaluation structure has foregrounded targets on livelihood and asset generation. These changes in assets are quantitative and lend themselves more easily to measurement. Nearly all PRADAN professionals interviewed described challenges in documenting and communicating the enhanced capacity of women and their collectives within existing reporting structures that focused on numerical outputs rather than changes in mindsets and power differentials. As one PRADAN professional explained: “When outcomes measure numbers, they don’t capture the effect of our programs—least of all the ripple effect.” To capture changes

in perception, power dynamics, ability to access rights and increased capacity of SHGs, collectives and federations requires different reporting tools, many of which are qualitative in nature.

In particular, professionals highlighted the challenges their team faced in capturing the impact of gender equality approaches to livelihood initiatives:

“In our gender focused agriculture program, it was difficult to define output indicators that met production benchmarks. The impact of our livelihood work was not visible in production numbers. It was visible in changed expenditure patterns within the household and improved food security among women.”

Professionals also reflected understanding that while not conducive to recognition within traditional PRADAN frameworks, with time, the strength of their approaches would become more apparent. As articulated by one professional: “We were the ugly duckling in state review meetings, but in time we knew we would be recognized as swans.”

In order to capture this process of transformation, PRADAN should develop evaluation tools that capture attitude, behavioral and structural change. Documentation of attitude, behavioral change and perspective shifts can also provide insight into the impact of field-level training for CRPs and women leaders.

As PRADAN teams increasingly build the capacity of women’s collectives to identify and act upon the issues that impact their lives, families and communities, teams should be supported to document these processes. For example, teams may document new issues being addressed, organizing efforts to address these issues, campaigns and initiatives launched and entitlements won.

To encourage innovation and experimentation in pursuing gender equality approaches, evaluation and documentation should not only recognize these efforts but create incentives for teams to try new approaches. A PRADAN professional explained: “With gender equality approaches, the outcome is not the only goal. The process may be the most important goal.” Accordingly, PRADAN should

continue to collect and compile qualitative data in the form of stories of change to systematically track change processes.

PRADAN and Jagori jointly embarked on a transformative journey. As they chart their next steps, both organizations should continue to build upon their strengths. The core competencies of PRADAN professionals—open management style, flexibility to evolve programs to address community contexts, and commitment to partnership will continue to bring energy, dynamism and creativity to the entire field of development. There is also much to learn from Jagori’s pioneering approach to feminist leadership, including their ability to conceptualize gender injustices, develop curriculum, train professionals and rural women with a wide range of experience and link development initiatives to women’s movements.





