

LEADERSHIP



A DAY

in the Life of a

SAC MEMBER

Change is an organic process. It doesn't come overnight, rather it permeates very slowly & deeply. But when it does, it stays forever. We bring you the story of Jharna Das and her journey from being a homemaker to a social activist

It is 2 in the afternoon. There is an aura of post-lunch sluggishness in Kundangal village, Jamtara, as most women get free from their chores by this hour, children return from schools and people prefer to take nap or rest for some time. On the contrary, Jharna Das is in great rush. She is multitasking - winding up her kitchen, making some early preparations for dinner and getting ready for work. It is the day for her field visit. Today she is planning to cover two villages – Dumariya & Kunjbona – which are 4 km and 6 km away from Kundangal respectively. These villages are part of her Cluster Level Federation (CLF) – Kundangal Ajeevika Mahila Sankul Sangathan – in Jamtara district, Jharkhand.

In the rush of things since morning, she could only prepare daal bhaat (lentil and rice) for lunch today. Hurriedly, she keeps a bottle of water, her mobile, diary & pen in her bag. Before stepping out she instructs her younger daughter, Suman Das (grade 11th student), to study well at home, prepare evening tea for father and do saanjh pooja (a ritual of lighting diya for deities in evening) as she will be returning home late.

Village Visits

Her brown TVS XL 100 is waiting outside. She kick starts her moped and sets off for her field visit. For the last nine months, 35-year-old Jharna has been following this schedule 5 days a week since starting her duties as a Social Action Committee (SAC) member of her CLF under Project Umang.

Project Umang is being implemented by JSLPS in partnership with PCI India at Jamtara & Godda districts of Jharkhand since October 2019. It has been working towards improving the lives of adolescent girls by capacitating Self-Help Group (SHG) members, many of whom are also mothers of teen daughters and reducing the prevalence of child/early/forced marriages (CEFM) in these districts. It is layered on the three-tier SHG structure comprising SHGs, Village Organisations (VOs) and CLFs. Jharna Das has been associated with Project Umang almost since its beginning. The last three years have witnessed her gradual progress under the project – from SHG to VO, and now to CLF as a SAC member.

Jharna's role as a SAC member primarily focuses on addressing social issues such as prevalence of child marriage, promotion of girls' education, incidences of domestic & gender-based violence, etc. To facilitate this, she is mostly on the move, making visits to 10 VOs and around 100 SHGs in 16 villages that come under her CLF. "During every field visit, I try to cover at least two villages and two SHGs," informs Jharna Das.

While making the rounds, she spreads awareness on the ill-effects of CEFM. "I counsel mother-daughter duos on the significance of education as a sustainable alternative to early marriage & on the power of their bond in breaking gender &

Jharna ensures that all 100 SHGs and 10 VO's under her CLF meet regularly & that Umang sessions are transacted in those meetings, with active participation from members



social norms,” says Jharna who herself is a mother of two daughters (aged 20 and 17) and has prevented their early marriage to prioritise education. During her home visits, she also enquires about cases of school dropout girls and ensures that active women (JSLPS cadre of frontline workers) from respective SHGs provide adequate support for their re-enrolment.

Winning Accolades

Moreover, Jharna ensures that all SHGs and VO's under her CLF meet regularly and that Umang sessions are transacted in those meetings, with active participation from members. She also supervises MIS entries by Active Women to check if they are being made correctly without any errors. She has a track record of efficiently organising Maa-Beti Sammelans (a significant and regular activity under Project Umang).

Her sustained efforts have paid off. On International Women's Day this year, she was felicitated for her exemplary performance at an event jointly held by JSLPS and PCI India at Morbasa CLF office in Nala block, Jamtara. Citation was handed over in the esteemed presence of Sri Abhinav, Secretary DLSA, Jamtara; Sunita Kisku, Zonal Officer, Nala; Ujjwal Bhattacharya, President, Nala; Rani Suren, Chief, Nala; Savitri Kisku, Demo Koda, Dilip Tudu and DLSA's advocate Suman Kumar, Uttam Kumar and Sarita Verma.

“It's a big honour for me. I am grateful to Project Umang for acknowledging my efforts. I feel proud of myself every time I watch the event video,” says Jharna. This has also motivated her to continue her work.

A Look into the Past

However, her life was going through a tough phase when Umang came in. “My husband had decided to marry off our eldest daughter, Sweetie, who was 17 years old then,” recalls Jharna. “Despite knowing that Sweetie was a bright student and wanted to study further, I couldn't speak up against my in-laws. With the knowledge & communication skills acquired from Umang, Jharna was able to avert Sweetie's early marriage and send her away to pursue studies. This was also triggering moment for the mother who set on a path of her own liberation.

Today Sweetie is working with an IT company in Ranchi. “People in Kundangal treat her as a role model,” says Jharna. This has also paved way for her younger daughter to choose education over early marriage. With her constant efforts, not only did she bring a change within her family, but also started spreading awareness at community level. It is her zeal that has lifted her up from a homemaker to a social activist. “I was a teen bride and I have suffered a lot owing to that. I feel compelled to protect the aspirations of adolescent girls,” she adds.

With these thoughts, Jharna rides back home on her moped. It's twilight by the time she enters home. Suman offers her a cup of tea following which Jharna gets into preparing dinner. Once her household chores are done, she sits back to file her day's report.

It has been a tiring day for Jharna, but she feels passionate about her work and how she has become a changemaker. As she retires to bed, she taps on her phone to listen to *satsang pravachan* that gives her peace. Tomorrow is going to be another promising day!

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