

# Pinky Devi: From Homemaker to Change Agent

“ *Hum mahilaon ki apni pehchaan ban gayi hai. Ab gents kehte hai ke aap aage chalo, hum peechhe challenge.* (We have our own identity now. The men now tell us to lead the way and they will follow.) ”



*Pinky Devi, center, with members from her self-help group who are early adopters of rice cultivation best practices in Nahub village*

Pinky Devi, 30, mother of three, from Nahub village (Rajgir block, Nalanda district, Bihar), was a regular homemaker till 2009, when she came in touch with JEEViKA. JEEViKA, also known as the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS), is a state-level mission of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. that has been working in partnership with Digital Green since 2011 to provide extension services and support local communities across 22 districts of Bihar.

Pinky Devi's association with JEEViKA began when she joined the self-help group (SHG) in her village, which gradually evolved from a 12 member SHG to a village organization (VO), comprising 8-10 SHGs. The VO took concrete steps toward the development of the village, for instance, shutting down alcohol shops. The village *pradhan* (head) and the men in the community were supportive of the women's community-building efforts.

Pinky volunteered to be a Village Resource Person (VRP) in 2010 and was imparted appropriate training by Jeevika, including information on techniques like system of rice intensification (SRI) and its benefits. Having adopted SRI on her own land, she visited and counseled each member of the self-help groups under her VO on SRI and encouraged them to adopt these techniques for improved productivity and reduction in production costs. At the beginning, 20 women farmers adopted SRI under her guidance. Based on her enthusiasm and commitment, she was trained as a Master Resource Person earlier this year and now supervises around 20 VRPs.

Digital Green's participatory local video production and mediated learning approach, introduced in Pinky's area four months ago, has increased the efficacy of her messaging and interpersonal communication. Now, she does not have to visit each villager's house to disseminate information on practices. Instead, the members assemble to view the video at a pre-determined time and venue. Like other farmers in her self-help group and community, Pinky too finds it easier to understand and explain the best practices in the videos, which feature farmers like her. Operating the pico projector has also been a smooth experience, since it is similar to operating a mobile phone.

Around 50 farmers in Pinky's VO have adopted SRI and 35 have kitchen gardens in their homes after attending

the relevant disseminations. The early adopters were also 'rewarded' with a rechargeable torch. Although it has only been a few months since the Digital Green approach was introduced in Pinky Devi's area, the community is extremely responsive. Pinky Devi's aim is to convince 70-80 farmers to adopt SRI by 2014. She is eager to view more such videos on improved agricultural and livelihood practices and implement them with the rest of her community.

With JEEViKA's current focus on nurturing community producer groups, Pinky's VO members have also attended video screenings on mushroom cultivation and poultry farming. There has been a palpable acceptance of the mushroom cultivation technique in Nahub; the villagers find the mushrooms taste good. Poultry on the other hand hasn't had much success yet. A couple of the community members interviewed felt that hens are difficult to let roam and create a mess with their droppings, which are also not reusable, unlike those of cow and buffalos. Despite these faint misgivings, there is overall much receptivity in the community to improved cost-effective techniques to boost productivity.

Pinky Devi attributes her empowerment to JEEViKA. The organization has helped women like her who never left their homes to actually find their voices and speak out against ill practices, mobilizing them as change agents working toward strengthening their community and improving its wellbeing.