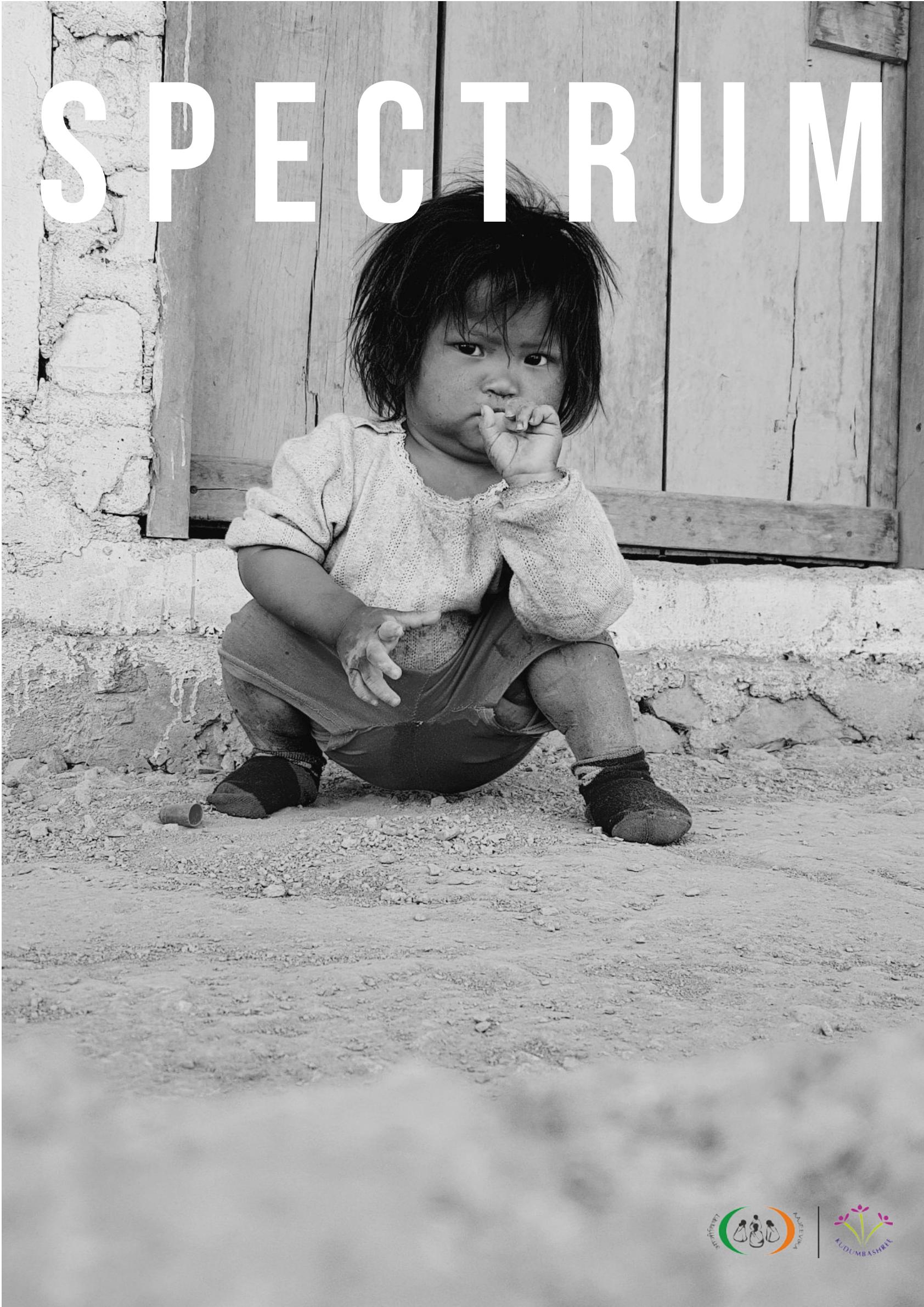


SPECTRUM



Introduction

Background

Since May 2013, Kudumbashree – NRO has been strengthening women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) as part of its community development interventions in different states. The idea of establishing sustainable community based institutions in the form of SHGs for promoting community development has long been seen as an important strategy. Kudumbashree NRO's interventions under the PRI-CBO convergence project engages both the institutions- Panchayati Raj Institutions and Community Based Organisations. The objective of the project is to increase the efficiency and reach of poor centric programmes, improved participatory planning, increased capability of the CBOs to demand entitlements and promote democratically conscious community. Working with the SHG federations is central to the project and Kudumbashree NRO works with them by sensitizing them on their role in the larger development agenda of the village.

Why is it important to work with SHGs?

Self Help Groups essentially involves women who come together to do thrift and credit activities. With the help of the small savings collected every week, women undertake income generating activities, helping them to earn additional income. As village-based savings and money lending groups, the SHGs act as financial intermediary between its members and larger financial institutions such as banks for loans to be used in livelihood support. Loans obtained are not only for the individual member's use, but the SHG as a group itself can engage in income generating activities which will equally benefit the members through its profits.

SHGs also addresses the larger goal of empowering women from the rural areas as it helps in building their confidence due to the financial independence that they gain. The informal interactions that they engage in during meetings encourages them to think about their rights/entitlements and their role in developing the village they live in. It builds their capacities and instills leadership skills for addressing larger issues affecting their village. As a collective, these groups play a vital role in eliminating many social issues through the way of group efforts.

Kudumbashree - NRO has the following objectives in promoting SHGs:

- To capacitate women to gain access and control over resources.
- To foster equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes.
- To build capacities of women for self and mutual help, and leadership roles in understanding their entitlements, accessing them, and in enhancing their participation in local governance.

To facilitate the above, Kudumbashree NRO engages mentors who stay with the community in partner states and form an integral part of project interventions. They are instrumental in enhancing the confidence of SHG women members to actively engage in decision-making processes within their villages. Beyond their villages, the SHG members also participate in block and district-wide mobilization processes.

KS-NRO – Guiding Principle

KS-NRO's guiding principle is to create local as well as State-Level capabilities for the implementation of large-scale projects. The NRO works on developing pilots in different states; the partner states are expected to take these forward based on the experiences of the pilots.

Four tenets of NRO's approach to the projects in partner States:

1. Developing proof of concept
2. Building local capacities
3. Mentoring
4. Professional support

Developing Proof of Concept

NRO draws from the Kudumbashree experience to develop suitable approaches for specific contexts in partner States. The context here could be a district, a Block, or a Gram Panchayat. Pilot projects help NRO and the partner-SRLM in contextualizing the content and method.

Building Local Capacities

NRO focuses on building local level resource pools in partner States. The approach is based on the belief that local people know their community the best and that a strong local cadre would ensure sustainability of project activities. The PRI-CBO Convergence Project develops Local Resource Groups (LRGs) and Block Resource Groups (BRGs).

Mentoring

Mentors are select resource persons from the Kudumbashree network placed in partner States. These are people with several years of experience, specially selected and trained for the programmes. These resource persons stay long term in the project areas and work with the local cadre and communities. In the PRI-CBO convergence project, they are called mentor resource persons (Mentor RPs).

Professional Support

Ensuring the back-end support from experienced and trained professionals to mentors and local resource persons is part of the KS-NRO approach. KS-NRO has a team drawn from reputed educational institutions across India and trained in Kudumbashree.

KS-NRO – Accomplishment

Kudumbashree NRO has been implementing the project in partner states with varied presence of structural mechanisms like the existence of SHGs and its federations, staff of the SRLMs, availability of community professionals who can be trained to become reliable service providers and the presence of other key stakeholders. The project has been able to create substantial impact and is executed in such a way that each partner state eventually takes over the implementation of the project from Kudumbashree NRO. Under PRI-CBO convergence, the work is being carried out in 615 panchayats across 6 states with more than 880 community resource persons known as Local Resource Group (LRGs) active on field and around 350 internal mentors have been trained as part of scaling up interventions. Apart from the above, KS NRO has also set up institutional platforms for convergence at the panchayat level like VOCC* and GPCC** ensuring continued collaborations between SHGs and PRIs.

Kudumbashree NRO's work with SHGs has helped in the empowerment of women especially in areas like access to and control over resources, reduced vulnerability and increase in income. Additionally it has helped in their increased political participation (representations of women in Local Self Government Institutions). Under the project, women demanding their rightful entitlements and their participation in village development work are recognized as the way to bringing them to the mainstream.

By systematically investing in human and social capital, especially women, the intention is to help the most needy in improving livelihood opportunities and increasing their access to social security pensions/ schemes meant for them. All these efforts have certainly paved way for a larger acceptance of NRO's work at the national level.

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• Steps Towards Building Synergy •

Women participation in strengthening the local governance



Local Governance has been India's heritage and its history dates to more than 2000 years. Since Vedic period, local villagers were actively involved in the process of collective decision making. Sabhas (gatherings) were popular platforms and regularly conducted through which common people voiced their opinion and had control over local affairs. During the colonial period, some initiations were taken on revitalizing the local self-governance system, but it didn't allow common people to participate. During the same period, the concept of "Swaraj" which means "self-rule" was coined by Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati and later propounded by Mahatma Gandhi. It stressed the importance of self governance through individuals and community building. In other words the focus is on decentralization of powers. It was only in the year 1992 the rural local self-government was constitutionally approved by 73rd Amendment. The 73rd constitutional amendment generated great expectations. It was considered fundamental in nature for it assured institutionalization of a third stratum of government at the local level. As the result of 73rd and 74th Amendment, India has about 3.2 million representatives as community leaders in grass root institutions.

However, almost 26 years have passed after the 73rd Amendment, but there are pressing challenges that still need to be addressed. Present Panchayat system is in a vicious circle with series of limitations like lack of democratic practices in the field operations, poor participation in Gram Sabha and limited contribution from weaker sections and women and lack of self-sufficient mechanisms. Although men and women share the same space, they are yet not treated equally in many professional fields. There still exists inequality in women's access to education, health care, physical and financial resources and opportunities in the political, economic, social and cultural field. Even though the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has included a provision for 33% reservation of seats for women politicians in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), women have less awareness about it and do not realize the importance of being part of such platforms. Their participation in Gram Sabha has also been limited which is mainly due to reasons like illiteracy, poverty, traditional family values and male dominance.

The awareness level of Panchayat members is also poor especially on issues relating to the importance of women's reservation in Panchayat Raj Institutions and laws pertaining to women. Monitoring financial aspects of the Panchayat and maintaining transparency are issues yet to be addressed. Manipur State Rural Livelihood Mission and Kudumbashree-NRO through partnership has been involved in strengthening grass roots democracy through the SHG network with the objective of encouraging women to participate in the larger village development issues. Various initiatives are taken towards introducing and practicing of democratic interventions like capacity building initiatives and integrating people institutions with the panchayat institutions. It takes steps for building the capacity of women towards their rightful entitlements. It provides mass scale awareness through various training and mobilization process to the members and leaders of the SHG federation. Such initiatives have enabled them to understand more on the Panchayat systems and Gram Sabha and have enabled both institutions - the CBO network and Panchayat, to get actively involved in the local governance process.

Livelihood Mapping

A Participatory Approach Towards
Improving The Livelihood Of The Community



Livelihood Mapping has been one of the unique initiatives implemented in Manipur.

During the initial stage of the project, it was found that there was a great demand for livelihood opportunities from the community especially in the Hill areas.

There was also the inability of the Panchayat/Village bodies to provide 100 days' work in a year and the lack of interest shown by people to work in MGNREGS because of irregular payment.

Hence, it was decided to work in the area of promoting livelihood as one of the entry level activities.

A participatory livelihood mapping exercise with the objective of analyzing the current livelihood status of the community and to address existing gaps related to it was focused upon.

Key features of the exercise included the analysis of household assets, current livelihoods practices and developing future livelihood goals at micro-level(village level).

The exercise was initially introduced at the pilot blocks of Keirao-Bitra (12 GPs) and Machi (31Villages).

As the first step, a planning meeting with the state and block team was conducted to finalize the module for the activity.

The concerned teams provided necessary inputs based on the livelihood activities (i.e.farm, off-farm and entrepreneurship) undertaken in their respective blocks.

Before rolling out the mapping exercise at the village level, meetings with elected representatives were held to brief them about the objective of the exercise and its benefits towards village development.

VLF meetings were organized, where executive members were briefed about the exercise and clearly informed that no promises would be made to the community such as loan or any financial benefits that they will be eligible to avail after the exercise.

Dates and venue for conducting the activity in SHGs were finalized during the same time.

LRGs had the primary responsibility for conducting the exercise in all the SHGs.

Once the data was collected at the SHG level and consolidated at the VLF level, the executive committee members of the VLF authorized the document by signing and officially sealing it with the stamp.

A copy of the document was then handed over to the Panchayat. At each step the concerned block team, LRGs and mentors worked together.

The response from community and PRI/VA bodies has been very positive and they have been participating actively in the exercise. The data of Machi Block has already been shared with MSRLM/District Authority and training by the District administration will be commencing soon.

MSRLM is now keen to extend the activity in the newly formed SHGs in other two resource blocks of the state.

The livelihood mapping exercise will help the SHG groups to think beyond thrift and credit activities and will also help in devising their Micro Credit Plans (MCP). Based on the information collected through the exercise, the MSRLM team at state and block can help the SHG network in providing and supporting alternative sources of livelihood to the community.

Power of The Collective

Women from Thyamkongin working towards sustainable food security



Thyamkongin is among one of the villages in Chanam Sandrok Gram Panchayat, Keirao Block, where the PRI-CBO Convergence Project has been undertaken since February 2018. Like most of the villages in the Block, it has the Meitei community as a dominant population and is majorly dependent on agriculture as their livelihood. Thyamkongin village has been unique in comparison with others mainly because of the active involvement of the Village Level Federation (VLF) which has been engaging in many social development activities in the village, setting a good example for other federation. The Laisembi Ema, VLF with 22 SHGs was formed in December 2016 and the members have been regularly attending meetings since the very beginning. Even before the implementation of the PRI-CBO convergence project, the VLF has been taking initiatives like cleanliness drive and providing amenities like the playground for children in the village.

The convergence project has given more momentum to their efforts specially after the selection of Local Resource Group (LRG) from their VLF. Individually poor people can be weak as they lack resources to solve their problems. As a collective, it becomes easier for them to face the difficulties and come up with solutions. It is with this thought the VLF initiated Joint Paddy Cultivation. The main objective of the initiative was to help landless SHG members get rice at a lower price and earn some additional income. The mentors shared the concept of Joint Liability Group, an initiative widely practiced in Kerala, with the group which encouraged them to take up the initiative. Traditionally, in most of the Meitei villages, the village property will be under the name of Village God and a certain village committee looks after the property and gives the land in a lease for a one-year agreement.

The LRGs and the VLF office bearers took the responsibility to get 3 plots of land, for a period of one year on an agreement. They also approached the Agriculture Department for availing free seeds but since it was low quality they bought it in limited quantity. They utilized their VLF savings and pooled the funds for buying seeds, fertilizers, and a tractor. The cultivation took only four days through the collective efforts of all the SHG members. One of the members shared, "We had a great time working together as a big group and now we are just waiting for the harvest to yield". The VLF has now decided to cultivate vegetables for the remaining months in the contract.

My Hopes for Bright Future

The SHG women working towards
creating a better future



The recent work of the VLF in the Thyamkongin has been the opening of a Tuition center for poor students who cannot afford to pay high tuition fees. The need to start such a center was felt like most of the parents failed to help their children with studies as either both the parents will be working or unable to support due to lack of education.

As the issue was faced by many SHG members, the VLF and LRGs after discussing with the Pradhan, Cluster Coordinator and Mentors, decided to start the center. It was inaugurated early October with 40 students from classes 1 to 5. Two school teachers, belonging to local SHGs, were hired and the VLF has been bearing their cost. Initially, the VLF did face obstacles as the Principal of the Primary School where they had planned to start their tuitions were reluctant in giving school space to the VLF.

But the LRGs took the support of Pradhan and Youth Club and convinced them to give space. The VLF says that they have received immense support from the community, the Pradhan and local groups like Youth Club and Meira Paibi. The support has motivated them to work more for the betterment of their village.

LRG Corner

A problem shared is a
problem solved



Pramila Ningthoujam a native of Kheirao Khunou village coming under Kheirao Gram Panchayat of Imphal-West block, in Manipur, this cheerful & outgoing lady doesn't believe in harping over her misery & believes in facing challenges. She got a chance to be a part of her self-help group & find friends for life. Some ten years ago, Pramila Ningthoujam was a shy-women. The now confident 35-year-old came to the village of Kheirao-Khunou as a young bride at the age of 25. Her husband was a marginal farmer, with small grocery store as the only source of income generation. Since her marriage Pramila Ningthoujam has witnessed dark street in her village. Though all 24 houses in her village have electricity but still street light connection is nowhere to be seen. As a member of the Local Resource Group (LRG) formed. She raised the issue to address this situation within her group.

She not only received support from her group members soon her husband joined forces with her. This brought a much positive change in her personality & made her come out of her more confident. Unlike many other cadres of MSRLM, becoming an LRG have brought in new thrust of confident among the women in the area, Pramila's group continued to stride to bring in electricity to her village streets. The members of her group had realized the importance of being united. The women had now found their voice & footing. Even the simple act of listening to different women movements from the experienced Kudumbashree mentors had boosted their confidence immensely. Pramila herself acknowledges that after joining the LRG, her group perception about her changed. Through continuous efforts from visiting electricity department office to drafting a letter addressing about the issue to the manager of the department with the help of her husband friend, Pramila and her group was able to get electricity to the streets of their village.

Each of the members (10 members) have contributed 300 per head and collected a sum of Rs.3000/- for the payment of meter box and bulbs. Seeing this commendable work from the SHG group another 2000/- was contributed by the villagers for the arrangement of switch and recharge. She believes that this would not have been possible without Kudumbashree help & intervention. With a determined look in her eyes she vows to take her group from strength to strength. Finally, to bring in holistic change, she is now motivating villagers to adopt alternate livelihood practices and make women think beyond thrift and credit. Interestingly, none of her suggestions are opposed as the village has full confidence on her as she goes about trying to better their lives. She has shown that stimulating change is easy. All it requires is good institutional support and her will to empower others in rising to a better future.

A Perfect Partnership

Village authority chairman K.Kothel on creating synergy between the Village Authority and the SHGs



In KS-NRO, a special emphasis is put on the processes and methods as to how a project is taken up. In this process, it is imperative that various stakeholders are introduced to the concept of PRI-CBO Convergence, its key areas, and the sought outcomes. Therefore, in an attempt to present before the VA (village authority) members of Machi block (one of the two blocks in Manipur project) the ideals of PRI-CBO, we had held an orientation for all of our 38 village's Chairman and Secretaries. The orientation was specifically designed to be balanced and talk about the aid that VAs would get by encouraging partnership with SHGs.

Among them was one such Chairman of Tabhikithel village, Mr. K. Kothel. He was elected to the position of Chairman in 2009 and then later in 2014. He has from the beginning shown interest in supporting the 2 SHGs in his village, which has around 30 households. When the exercise of Livelihood mapping was conducted over there, the low levels of economic and social development was seen, and that is where the Chairman believed that SHGs can foster. During our brief interaction with him, he believes "SHG is just like a tree which needs strong roots, a village too needs strong platform and to me SHGs are like roots to development which will create better leaves for the trees".

He also took keen interest in the working of SHGs and thereby trying to know what their grievances are, at the same time sharing the committee's decisions with the SHG. This enables better working of the two groups and a non-institutionalized framework has already been established. The mere acceptance to work together on the issues of village's development is a welcoming step and should be sustained with the same levels of energy and participation.

Redefining Generosity

SHG Women in Naharup village
runs a free dental camp



Naharup Gram Panchayat is situated 15 kms away from the District Head Quarters. The village is equally represented by Metei Community, having its main source of livelihood as agriculture. Since past many years people in the Panchayat specially the adults have been facing serious dental problem due to the habit of chewing bettle. On the launch of PRI-CBO Convergence Project in the district in 2018, SHG groups along with the LRGs and Kerala mentors came together including ward level representatives to start a free dental camp.

In order to sensitize general public about the necessity of dental care. Through medium of door to door campaign and through the help of village youth club awareness amongst general public on dental issue were imparted. The Village Level Federation (VLF) at Naharup village in Imphal East on 9th September 2018 organized a dental camp for the community in partnership with a local clinic for which more than hundred people turned up.

The camp was organized based on the demand from the community. Also, since launch of the project the participation amongst community-based organizations such as SHG's, youth clubs and Panchayat have increased. The members of the Naharup VLF strongly believes that change which they have come across is not overnight, it has come a long way and with the helping hands from Kerala mentors.

Where There is a Will There is a Way

Khoijam Women SHGs spearhead fight against drug abuse and alcohol



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The Shembang Village Level Federation is active in the Khoijam village of Tengnoupal district. Women members of 72 households are associated with this village organization. Like many other villages of Manipur, this village too deeply suffered due to the menace of alcoholics and drug abuse. All women members unanimously took a decision in their monthly meeting to stop villagers from entering the village who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. They had numerous times approached the local police station in writing how drugs and liquor is polluting their village environment.

But they got nothing but a hollow promise. In their monthly meeting, they all decided to put 11 SHG members each on a rotational basis to participate in keeping a check on villagers under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the entrance of the village. They impose fine of Rs. 1000/- and keep a record for the first-time offenders. Repeated offenders are charged double and their hairs are shaved off. Even outsiders are being thoroughly checked before entering the village.

Also, the Village Authorities and Youth Club have been actively supporting the movement by the women members. Every evening announcement of the volunteer's names are made by the VLF leaders for the next day. Any SHG members failing to do join will be fined Rs. 300/-.

Swami Vivekananda has rightly said, "There is no chance for welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing"

Story of Naobi as a LRG



Naobi, 39 years old, from Naharup Panchayat has been working as Local Resource Group (LRG) since seven months. Naobi came to this village after her marriage 15 years ago and is well familiar with the problems they face in their day to day life. When the PRI CBO Convergence Project started in their Panchayat, as a member of VLF she attended the orientation and she thought that, this could be an opportunity to bring change in her village that she has hardly seen in her past years. She always had the urge to do something for her village but with the status of mere housewife she had no idea about how she would do. The Project gave her a platform to learn about things that would not only help in her family but also many other families.

Naobi with 12 passed qualification had very little knowledge about the existing Panchayati institution, Line Departments and their roles. She would meet the Pradhan and ward member only when there was MGNREGA work. After the orientation and constant training she received under the project, she gradually started understanding how the system functions. Now there has been better communication between the Panchayats and the CBOs, specially LRGs are always informed about important things if related to the village. She has also been constantly interacting with the Pradhan for various work.

After the training undertaken, Naobi has been able to impart awareness about various schemes. Now in her village, if she knows anyone who she thinks is eligible for any entitlements she ensures that she helps them with whatever she knows. Naobi says through the help of the project a sense of collectivism has been developed among the CBOs. As a LRG, she and her group members take the responsibility to disseminate all the knowledge they receive but without the support of CBOs they wouldn't be able to achieve much. The teamwork between LRG also plays an important role. As an individual, she would feel very scared to approach any person of the higher level, but now being in a team with the support of each other they do not hesitate to speak up. Naobi says that "The Project has provided us with so much knowledge now all I wish is to utilise it for the betterment of my village "

□ CLICKS □



Block Level LRG orientation on GPDP & Gram Sabha
in Keirao-Bitra Block



Orientation on GPDP at VLF level
in Top Naoria G.P, Keirao-Bitra Block



Demand consolidation at VLF



Data collection at SHG level by LRG
in Top Dusara G.P, Keirao-Bitra Block



Meeting with the Youth Club and Meira Paibi conducted by VLF



Meeting with the AAW, ASHA conducted by VLF
about GPDP & Gram Sabha

□ CLICKS □



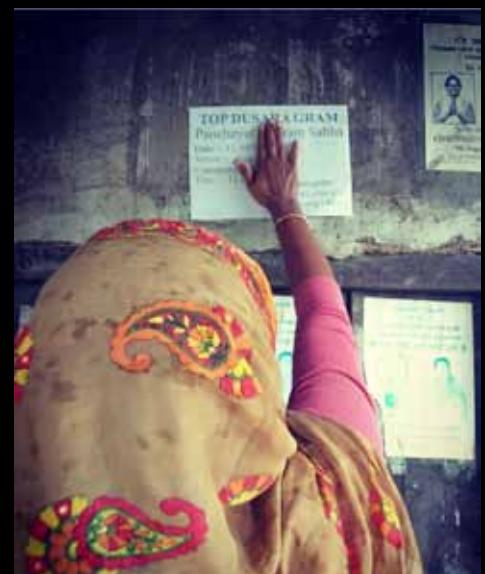
Free Dental Camp organised by Lamjing Nagpal VLF at PYDA ground, Naharup Pangong



VLF submitting the Demand proposal to the Pradhan in Top Dusara G.P, Keirao-Bitra Block



Special Gram Sabha Mass Rally at Top Chingtha G.P



Mobilization through posters



Panchayat Pradhan's participation during Gram Sabha mobilization in Chanam Sandrok G.P



Cleanliness Drive