

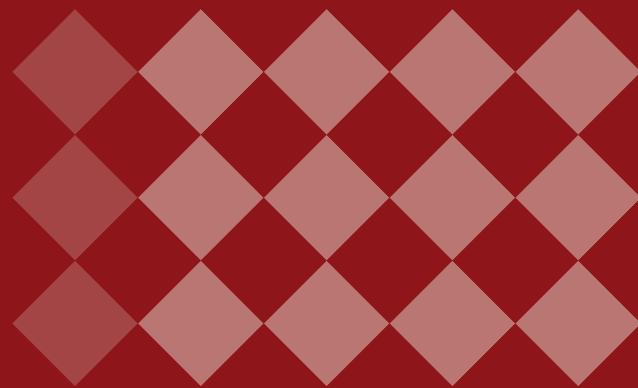


Catalysing Gender Equality through Community Action Labs

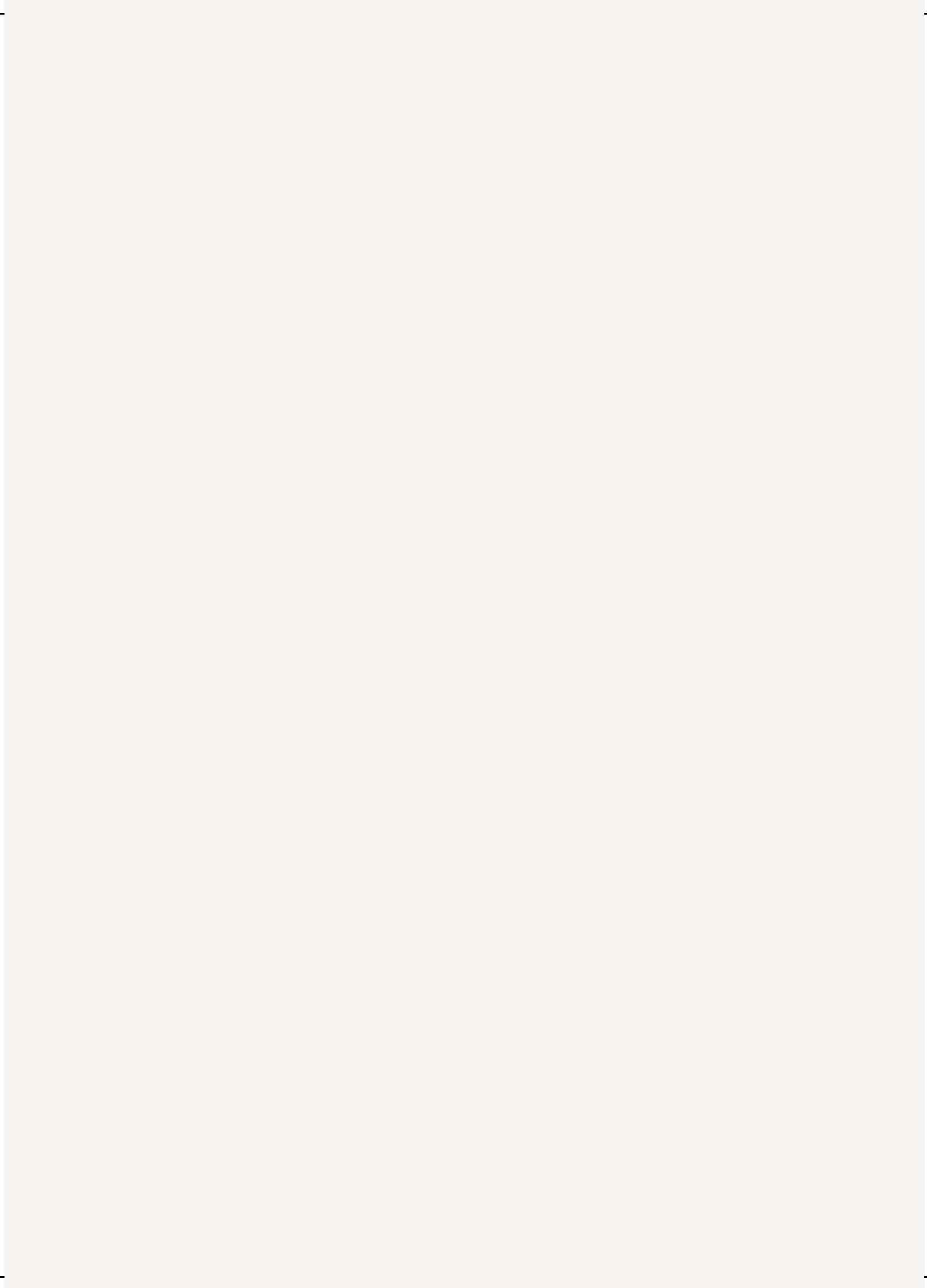


**An Impact Assessment of Transforming Rural India Foundation's
Gender Integration Programme in Madhya Pradesh**

Table of content



1	Introduction	01
2	Technical support to establish and strengthen Gender Resource Centres	03
3	Framework – gender equality	04
4	Levers/ pathways of change	07
5	Methods to Understand Transformation	08
6	Quantitative Data collection	10
7	Findings	10
8	Data Analysis	17
9	Key observations	20
10	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	33
11	Case studies	35
12	Annexure	49





Introduction



Structural barriers continue to hinder women's economic and social empowerment in India despite constitutional guarantees of equality and decades of policy reform. While landmark initiatives such as the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments and the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) have expanded women's participation in local governance and strengthened collective institutions through over 10 crore women organised into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), deeply entrenched patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's access to assets, education, mobility, and decision-making power. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023–24, the female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for women aged 15 years and above stands at 41.7%, compared to 78.8% for men, with a significant proportion of rural women engaged in self-employment and unpaid family work rather than secure, remunerative employment. Women continue to shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, spending approximately 289 minutes per day on unpaid domestic services and 137 minutes on unpaid caregiving, compared to 88 minutes and 75 minutes respectively for men, as reported by the Time Use Survey (2019). The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6, 2023–24) indicates gradual improvements in women's empowerment, although significant structural inequalities persist. Women continue to shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, spending approximately 289 minutes per day on unpaid domestic services and 137 minutes on unpaid caregiving, compared to 88 minutes and 75 minutes respectively for men, as reported by the Time Use Survey (2019). The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6, 2023–24) indicates gradual improvements in women's empowerment, although significant structural inequalities persist. The proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married before the age of 18 declined to 20.1%, compared to 23.3% in NFHS-5 (2019–21), reflecting progress in efforts to prevent child marriage. However, one in five young women continue to marry before reaching the legal age, highlighting the persistence of harmful social norms. Women's ownership of productive assets also remains limited.

Only 18.8% of households reported having any usual female member owning a house and/or land, either alone or jointly, underscoring the continued gender gap in property ownership and economic security. While the survey also points to improvements in women's educational attainment, financial inclusion, and digital access, unequal ownership and control over productive assets continue to constrain women's bargaining power, economic independence, and resilience. These findings reinforce the need for sustained investments in gender-transformative interventions, stronger implementation of women's inheritance and property rights, and community-led efforts to challenge discriminatory social norms.

Gender-based violence remains pervasive, with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2023 reporting over 4.45 lakh crimes against women, including 31,516 cases of rape and over 1.1 lakh cases of cruelty by husbands or relatives, underscoring the persistence of violence within both public and private spheres. Although institutional mechanisms such as One Stop Centres, Women Helplines, and community-based grievance platforms have expanded, barriers related to stigma, accessibility, and institutional responsiveness continue to limit women's access to justice. These structural and normative constraints not only impede economic growth and productivity but also undermine women's dignity, safety, agency, and equal participation in public life.

National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, recognizes poverty as a multidimensional issue and has adopted gender-transformative approaches as a critical strategy for sustainable poverty reduction. Through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Village Organizations (VOs), and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs), NRLM has created community institutions that promote women's social and economic empowerment. To strengthen gender integration, NRLM has established a gender institutional architecture comprising Gender Point Persons at the SHG level, Social Action Committees at VO and CLF levels, Gender Forums at village and block levels, and Gender Resource Centres (GRCs) managed by CLFs at the block level. These institutions aim to address both practical and strategic gender needs by building awareness on gender equality, constitutional rights, legal entitlements, gender-based violence, and access to public services, while also facilitating convergence with various government departments.

Despite the expansion of these institutional mechanisms, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of Gender Resource Centres in addressing structural gender inequalities and contributing to women's empowerment. Rural women continue to face challenges such as domestic violence, child marriage, child labour, restricted mobility, unequal access to resources and services, and exclusion from decision-making processes.

Technical Support to Establish and Strengthen Gender Resource Centres



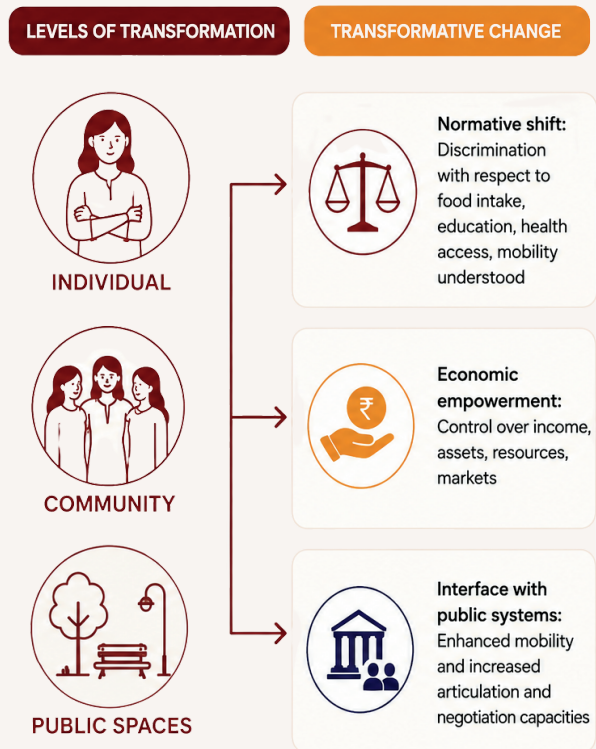
In Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, Transform Rural India has technically supported capacity building on gender concepts, developed institutional architecture and initiated action and intervention on gender intentional issues. Eight community action blocks in MP, two in Jharkhand, ten in Uttar Pradesh, five in Chhattisgarh have been developed as immersion sites with institutional architecture and interventions and convergence at the gram panchayat and block panchayat level for redressal of issues. The major stakeholders are panchayats, women and child development, police, legal services authority, etc. TRI provides technical support to the State Rural Livelihood Missions of UP, MP and Chhattisgarh for capacity building, developing material and curriculum. The institutional architecture of SHGs and its federation has succeeded in raising gender intentional issues and bringing it for resolution at the level of the gender forum at panchayat and block level. Capacity building has enabled in shifting social norms, economic empowerment and linkages with public systems.

Framework– Gender Equality

Gender equality is a critical prerequisite for social and economic development. Recognizing this, TRI has been making concerted efforts to integrate gender perspectives across its various verticals, while also addressing gender-intentional issues through the strengthening of institutional mechanisms. These include the nomination of Gender Point Persons at the SHG level, Sakhi Manch platforms, and Gender Forums at the Panchayat and Block levels. Capacity-building initiatives have been undertaken at multiple levels to enhance awareness, skills, and collective action on gender equality. Simultaneously, efforts are being made to strengthen institutional mechanisms and convergent structures to ensure sustainability and scale. This study is being undertaken to understand and assess the impact of the various gender interventions implemented by TRI, and to draw insights for future programming.



Transformative Pathways to Empowerment



A transformative path to women's empowerment has been developed through a systematic process of capacity building, conceptual understanding, and the internalisation of gender perspectives. This pathway also includes strengthening women's interface with public systems.

The conceptual framework for this study is primarily informed by the **Gender at Work Analytical Framework**, which recognises that sustainable gender transformation requires simultaneous change in individual consciousness, access to resources, informal social norms, and formal institutions. Building on this foundation, the study incorporates a Theory of Change to examine how TRI's gender interventions including capacity building, institutional strengthening, financial inclusion, and convergence with public systems contribute to normative, economic, and political empowerment at the individual, community, and systems levels.

The inputs provided during trainings covered a range of core gender concepts such as gender, sex, patriarchy, gender division of labour, access to resources and assets, and rights and entitlements. In addition, the modules focused on strengthening institutional mechanisms aligned within the NRLM institutional architecture, along with the functioning of key public institutions such as the police, the Women and Child Development Department, the Legal Services Authority, and others.

These trainings have contributed to creating a gender-responsive ecosystem at multiple levels: among officials, cadres, and SHG federations. They have also supported the establishment and strengthening of institutional mechanisms, including Gender Resource Centres (GRCs), and have facilitated meaningful interfaces with various government departments.

The framework studied the impact of these interventions across three spheres- individual, community, and public systems. The changes being examined relate to normative shifts, as well as economic and political empowerment. Normative shifts include changes in household discrimination patterns related to food intake, access to education and healthcare, mobility, and intra-household decision-making. Economic empowerment is seen through improved access to resources and assets, enhanced income opportunities, and women's control over income. Political empowerment refers to increased mobility, participation in public spaces, engagement with public offices, and strengthened capacities for articulation and negotiation.

The study examined the changes that have taken place at the individual, community, and public system levels, including shifts in norms, economic empowerment, and political empowerment. In addition to documenting these changes, the study focussed on understanding the pathways and processes that have led to these outcomes.

These pathways may include capacity-building and training, supportive institutional mechanisms, and financial inclusion interventions under NRLM, which have contributed to improved status and decision-making power within households. The study examined the role of government programmes, including cash transfers, improved access to welfare schemes, enhanced participation and voice in development planning, increased educational attainment among the younger generation, and the expansion of women-focused livelihood initiatives.



Levers/ Pathways of Change

The study examined the key levers of change that have contributed to transformation at the family, community, and public system levels. At the individual and household level, change has been influenced by women's access to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and their federations, which have strengthened collective identity, confidence, and mutual support. Financial inclusion through savings, credit, and bank linkages has enhanced women's economic security and decision-making power within families. Improved access to government schemes and entitlements, including cash transfers and social protection measures, has further reinforced women's status, while increased educational access for the younger generation has contributed to intergenerational shifts in aspirations and outcomes. Participation and voice in local governance processes, particularly engagement in Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP), have enabled women to articulate priorities and influence development planning.

At the community level, participation in SHGs, Cluster Level Federations, and higher-level federations has expanded women's mobility and visibility in public spaces, facilitating collective action and peer support. Government programmes targeting women's livelihoods, health, nutrition, and social welfare have helped address structural constraints and improved awareness and uptake of services. Together, these processes have contributed to shifts in social norms, greater acceptance of women's leadership, and strengthened community-level agency.

At the system level, change has been enabled through the establishment and strengthening of institutional coordination mechanisms such as Gram Panchayat Coordination Committees and Block Panchayat Coordination Committees, which have improved convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions, NRLM institutions, and line departments. Platforms such as Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSND) have enhanced access to health and nutrition services, while institutionalised spaces for participation have enabled women's collectives to engage with governance structures and hold public systems accountable. The study analysed how these interconnected levers have contributed to economic, social, and political empowerment outcomes, as well as the pathways through which sustainable and scalable change has been achieved.

Overall, the study assessed both the outcomes achieved and the key levers and enabling factors that have driven these outcomes.

Methods to Understand Transformation

1 | Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – Individual and Collective Levels

FGDs can be conducted at the SHG, VO, and CLF levels to understand the conceptual understanding of gender issues among women and cadres. Through structured discussions, facilitators can explore participants' comprehension of core gender concepts such as gender and sex, gender division of labour (GDOL), social construction of gender roles, access and control over resources, power relations, and gender-based violence.

At each institutional level, the discussions help assess how far members and cadres are able to apply these concepts in identifying gender issues within their families, groups, and communities. The FGDs also help in mapping differences in understanding across levels from SHG members to VO leaders and CLF cadres and identifying capacity-building needs.

2 | Internalisation – Reflection on Changes in Lives

The process of internalisation can be studied by examining changes in women's lives and behaviour as a result of their exposure to gender training and collective discussions. This includes:

- ◆ Improved access to entitlements and public services.
- ◆ Efforts to reduce discrimination and unequal practices within the household.
- ◆ The courage to question and resist violence, both individually and collectively.
- ◆ Increased participation in decision-making within SHGs, VOs, and community spaces.

These reflections can be captured through personal narratives, case studies, or outcome tracking to understand how empowerment is being translated into tangible social change.

3 | Community Level — Collective Action and Enhanced Agency

At the community level, collective action strengthens the ability of institutions to raise their voice and enhance women's agency. This is reflected when SHGs, VOs, and CLFs articulate their demands during the Village Poverty Resilience Plan (VPRP) and Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) exercises on issues such as early marriage, child labour, and retention in education. These processes help develop the institutions as gender-sensitive spaces where women can raise concerns and seek collective interventions.

Enhanced mobility and increased system interface are key outcomes of these institutional mechanisms. As members engage more actively in public spaces, their interaction with government systems also deepens. They are able to approach departments related to health, education, and panchayats in their official capacity, thereby strengthening their presence and influence within governance processes.

4 | System Level — Gender-Responsive Systems and Institutional Support

At the system level, gender-responsive mechanisms are established at the panchayat and block levels through structures such as the Gram Panchayat Coordination Committee (GPCC, gender forum) and the Block Level Coordination Committee (BLCC, block level gender forum). These platforms ensure that government departments become more responsive to both the practical and strategic gender needs of women.

Such responsiveness facilitates the actualisation of entitlements, fulfilment of livelihood needs, and effective grievance redressal through coordinated actions involving the police, legal aid systems, and courts. Moreover, there is increased institutional support to community-based organizations, enabling them to register cases, access legal remedies, and promote gender integration in planning and budgeting processes.



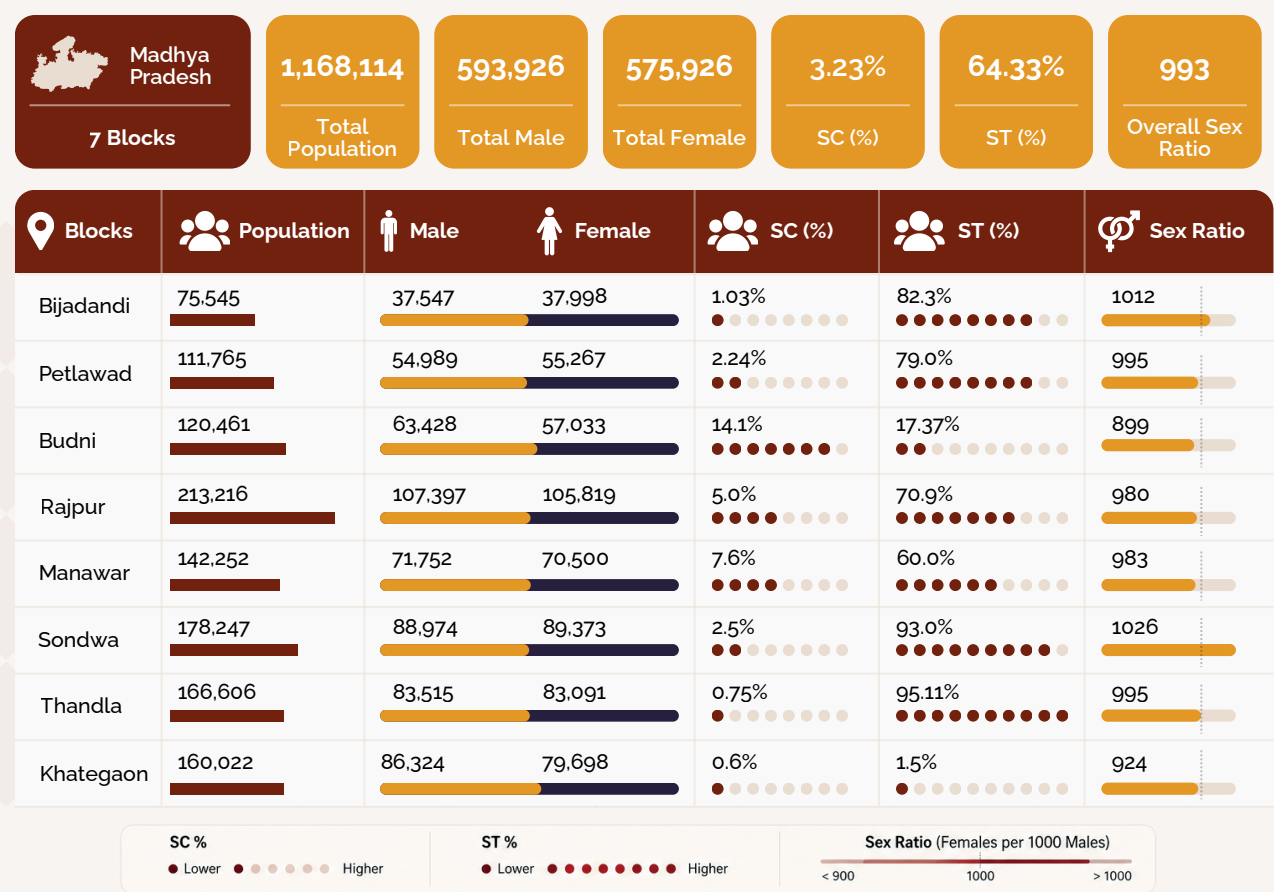


Quantitative Data Collection

The study collected quantitative data to assess key levers of change and their reach and intensity. This will include data on women's inclusion and position within SHGs and federations, levels of financial inclusion such as access to savings, credit, and bank accounts, and the amount of funds received through NRLM and other government programmes. Quantitative information will also be gathered on access to social entitlements, participation in livelihood schemes, and the number and type of cases addressed or resolved through institutional and collective support mechanisms. This data will enable measurement of the extent of programme access and institutional engagement, and help triangulate qualitative findings on pathways and outcomes of change.

Findings

Basic Demography



SC %
● Lower ● ● ● ● ● Higher

ST %
● Lower ● ● ● ● ● Higher

Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 Males)
< 900 1000 > 1000

The intervention blocks are demographically diverse, with populations ranging from 75,545 (Bijadandi) to 213,216 (Rajpur). Most blocks are predominantly tribal, with Scheduled Tribe populations exceeding 60% in six of the eight blocks and reaching 95.1% in Thandla and 93.0% in Sondwa.

The sex ratio is favourable in tribal blocks such as Sondwa (1026) and Bijadandi (1012), while Budni (899) and Khategaon (924) report comparatively lower sex ratios. These variations highlight the need for context-specific, gender-responsive interventions across diverse social and demographic settings.



Governance & Institutional Engagement Denominator

The programme established a strong institutional presence across the eight blocks, engaging 434 Gram Panchayats, 27 CLFs, 809 Village Organizations, and over 10,600 SHGs, creating a robust platform for community mobilisation. It reached 824 revenue villages and facilitated participation through 857 Gram Sabha meetings, strengthening grassroots governance. Engagement with Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) further reflects the programme's emphasis on enhancing women's leadership and participation in local governance.

Block	 GPs engaged	 CLFs	 VOs	 SHGs	 Revenue villages engaged	 Gram Sabha	 EWRs
Bijadandi	42	4	126	1301	122	136	362
Petlawad	29	3	68	956	61	61	769
Budni	48	3	89	780	106	36	442
Rajpur	66	4	98	1662	97	330	669
Manawar	64	3	89	1270	94	49	422
Sondwa	74	4	120	1777	134	134	605
Thandla	67	3	122	2056	111	67	589
Khategaon	44	3	97	815	99	44	582





Education Infrastructure Available in Engagement Area

The intervention blocks have a substantial educational infrastructure, with 1,662 primary schools, 564 middle schools, 110 high schools, and 70 higher secondary schools, ensuring broad access to formal education. The presence of 122 Tribal Hostels/Ashrams, particularly in tribal-dominated blocks such as Sondwa, Thandla, and Khategaon, supports educational access for tribal children. It was realized that in these blocks that girls from tribal communities were gaining access to education due to tribal hostels whereas there was tendency for boys to drop-out and go for work in agricultural fields. The SHG women had high aspirations on education of children.

Block	Primary schools	Middle schools	High schools	Higher secondary	Tribal hostel / Ashram	ECV*
Bijadandi	138	77	8	9	11	112
Petlawad	127	40	8	6	3	142
Budni	67	42	21	20	3	76
Raipur	392	127	18	6	17	171
Manawar	149	72	17	7	6	160
Sondwa	353	74	12	7	24	181
Thandla	336	61	19	9	23	76
Khategaon	100	71	7	6	35	106





Health & Nutrition Infrastructure

The intervention blocks are supported by an extensive public health infrastructure comprising 219 Sub-centres/Arogya Mandirs, 2,224 Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), and 975 Health and Nutrition Day (HCV/VHSND) sites. Rajpur, Sondwa, and Thandla have the largest network of AWCs, reflecting the needs of their large tribal populations. This widespread institutional presence provides a strong platform for delivering integrated health, nutrition, maternal and child health, and gender awareness interventions at the community level.

The FGDs revealed access to various health benefits like immunization, institutional delivery, etc. but levels of anemia persist due to drudgery and burden of work.

 Block	 Sub-centres / Arogya Mandir	 AWC	 HCV
Bijadandi	28	166	108
Petlawad	45	177	118
Budni	16	146	89
Rajpur	47	345	173
Manawar	30	207	127
Sondwa	25	645	190
Thandla	8	411	65
Khategaon	20	127	105





Livelihood, Agriculture & Economy Denominator

The intervention blocks are predominantly agrarian, with over 2.63 lakh farmers and 3.6 lakh youth, providing a strong base for livelihood interventions. Average landholdings vary from 0.75 ha in Sondwa to 3 ha in Budni, reflecting diverse farming contexts, while the presence of 10 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and 207 Producer Groups (PGs) supports collective agriculture and market linkages. The cropping pattern is dominated by maize, soybean, cotton, paddy, wheat, and gram, highlighting opportunities to integrate gender-responsive and climate-resilient agriculture.

 Block	 Farmers	 Youth	 FPO	 PGs	 Avg landholding	 Major Kharif crops	 Major Rabi crops
Bijadandi	10,860	22,663	1	45	2.7 ha	Paddy, kodo-kutki, maize, pigeon pea	Wheat, gram, lentil
Petlawad	64,369	35,200	2	35	1.75 ha	Maize, soybean, cotton	Wheat, gram
Budni	18,022	36,138	1	16	3 ha	Paddy, maize, arhar	Wheat, chana
Raipur	28,785	70,000	1	25	1.8 ha	Chilli, maize, cotton, turmeric, soybean	Wheat, gram, mustard, peas
Manawar	28,819	42,675	1	25	2.16 ha	Soybean, maize, cotton	Wheat, maize, gram
Sondwa	21,251	53,474	1	30	0.75 ha	Maize, jowar, pearl millet	Wheat, bajra, maize
Thandla	48,700	49,981	2	26	2 ha	Cotton, soybean	Wheat, chana, maize
Khategaon	42,461	49,806	1	5	1.7 ha	Soybean, maize	Wheat, gram, mustard, maize





District profile of project intervention areas

Project Block	District	Key Gender and Development Profile
 Bijadandi	Mandla	 Predominantly tribal district with relatively high levels of anaemia, early marriage, and dependence on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods. Women participate actively in SHGs but continue to face constraints in asset ownership, mobility and market access.
 Petlawad	Jhabua	 One of Madhya Pradesh's most socio-economically vulnerable tribal districts, characterised by high child marriage, malnutrition, anaemia and low female literacy. Women's livelihoods are largely informal and agriculture-dependent.
 Budni	Sehore	 Better-performing district compared with the state average, with relatively higher literacy and access to health services, but persistent gender gaps in labour force participation, unpaid care work and property ownership.
 Rajpur	Barwani	 Tribal-dominated district with high poverty, migration and nutritional challenges. Women have limited access to productive assets and formal employment despite strong SHG mobilisation.
 Manawar	Dhar	 Large tribal population with significant dependence on rain-fed agriculture. Child marriage, anaemia and low female workforce participation remain key gender concerns.
 Sondwa	Alirajpur	 One of India's most deprived tribal districts with low literacy, high poverty, high levels of anaemia and child marriage, and poor access to basic services. Women face multiple intersecting vulnerabilities.
 Thandla	Jhabua	 Shares socio-economic characteristics with Petlawad, including high tribal population, persistent malnutrition, early marriage and limited economic opportunities for women.
 Khategaon	Dewas	 Comparatively better infrastructure and agricultural economy, though women remain concentrated in informal work with limited ownership of productive assets and lower participation in decision-making.

*Based on NFHS-6 district factsheets, Census, district profiles and state statistical publications. ([Madhya Pradesh District Portal](#))





Key indicators for proposal justification

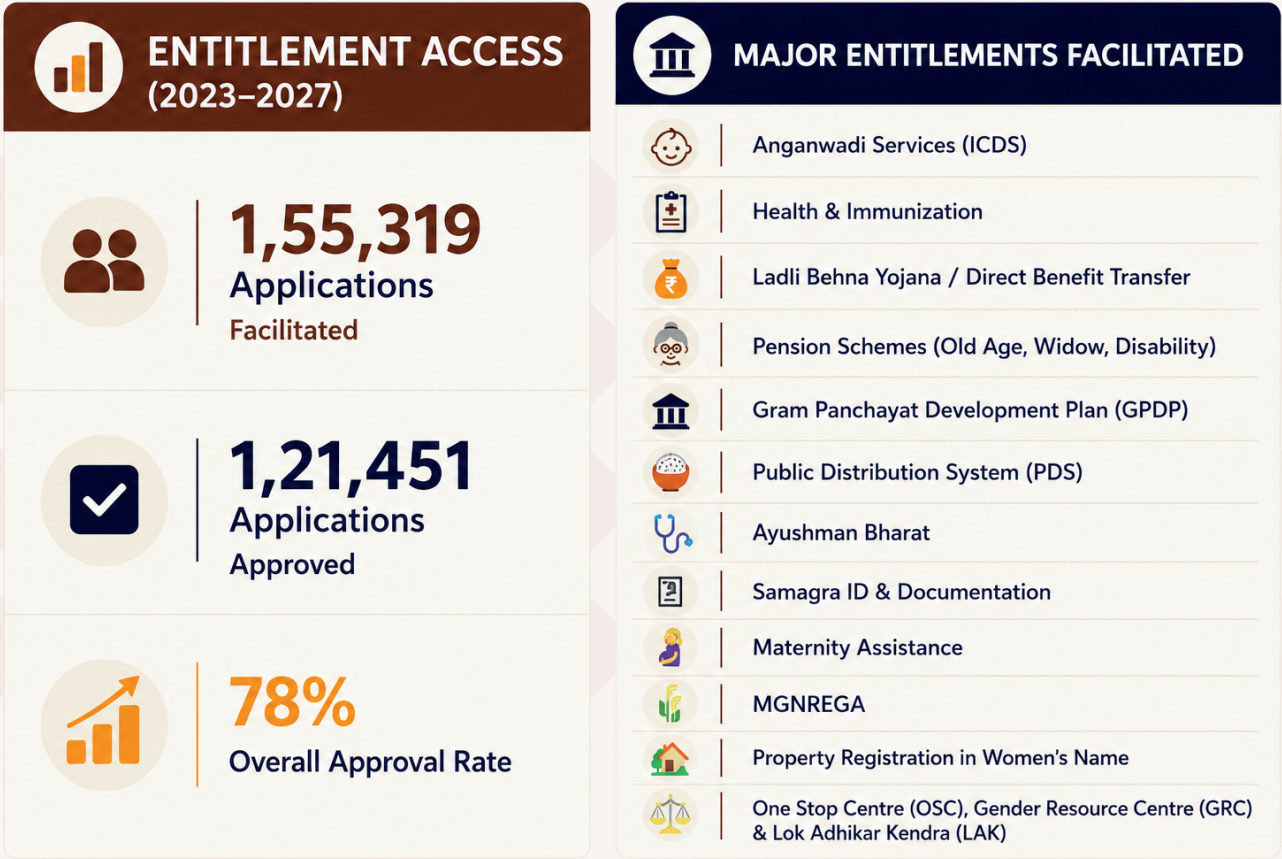
The intervention covers eight development blocks across Mandla, Jhabua, Sehore, Barwani, Dhar, Alirajpur and Dewas districts of Madhya Pradesh, several of which are predominantly tribal and rank among the state's most socio-economically vulnerable regions. These districts continue to experience persistent gender disparities characterised by early marriage, widespread anaemia among women, limited ownership of productive assets, low economic participation in formal employment, and a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. Tribal districts such as Jhabua, Alirajpur, Barwani, Dhar and Mandla face compounded vulnerabilities arising from poverty, remoteness, limited access to public services and dependence on subsistence agriculture. Although institutional deliveries and women's participation in Self-Help Groups have improved, women's agency over household decisions, livelihoods, land ownership and access to justice remains constrained by entrenched patriarchal norms. Madhya Pradesh also continues to report one of the highest incidences of crimes against women in the country, underscoring the need for integrated community-based systems that simultaneously strengthen women's economic empowerment, leadership, gender-responsive governance and access to support services. (CBHI)

 Indicator	 Madhya Pradesh / Intervention Districts
 Female Labour Force Participation Rate (PLFS 2023–24)	41.9% (women aged 15 years and above; state estimate)
 Women married before 18 years (NFHS-5)	Approximately 20% in Madhya Pradesh, with substantially higher prevalence in tribal districts such as Jhabua, Alirajpur, Barwani and Dhar .
 Women with anaemia (15–49 years)	More than half of women remain anaemic across most intervention districts.
 Institutional deliveries	Above 90% in most districts, though quality and continuity of maternal care remain uneven.
 Women's ownership of house/land	Limited; women continue to have significantly lower ownership of productive assets than men.
 Crimes against women (NCRB 2023)	Madhya Pradesh continues to report among the highest numbers of crimes against women nationally, including domestic violence, rape and child marriage-related offences.
 Infant Mortality Rate (SRS)	43 per 1,000 live births (state estimate).
 Maternal Mortality Ratio (SRS Sample Registration System)	159 per 100,000 live births (latest SRS estimate for Madhya Pradesh).
 Total Fertility Rate (SRS)	Approximately 2.0 children per woman.



Data Analysis

This consolidation incorporates data from all eight study locations (Bijadandi, Budni, Khategaon, Manawar, Petlawad, Rajpur, Sondwa, and Thandla), categorized by the level of organization - SHG, VO, and CLF.



Access to Government Entitlements through Nari Adhikar Kendras/Nari Shakti Kendras

A significant achievement of the programme has been the strengthening of community-based institutional mechanisms to improve women's access to government entitlements and public services. During the initial phase of the intervention, Nari Adhikar Kendras (NAKs) were established and managed by Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) as community-based Gender Resource Centres, providing women with information, counselling, documentation support, and referral services. Building on this experience, the programme has transitioned towards establishing Nari Shakti Kendras (NSKs) at the Gram Panchayat level, bringing gender-responsive services closer to communities while strengthening convergence with Panchayats and line departments. This institutional shift has enhanced both the accessibility and sustainability of gender support systems by embedding them within local governance structures.

Between 2023 and 2027, these community institutions facilitated 1,55,319 applications for government schemes and public services, of which 1,21,451 applications were successfully approved, representing an overall approval rate of 78 percent. Community cadres associated with SHGs, Village Organisations (VOs), CLFs, NAKs, and NSKs supported women in identifying eligible schemes, completing documentation, liaising with government departments, and following up on applications until benefits were received. Their role has been particularly important for poor, tribal, and vulnerable households that often face administrative barriers in accessing welfare programmes.

The institutional platforms have enabled women and their families to access a wide range of entitlements, including Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Anganwadi services, immunisation and maternal health services, Ladli Behna Yojana and other Direct



Benefit Transfer schemes, old-age, widow and disability pensions, Ayushman Bharat health insurance, Public Distribution System (PDS), Samagra ID and other identity documentation, maternity assistance, MGNREGA employment, and participation in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). The centres have also facilitated property registration in women's names, thereby encouraging greater economic security and asset ownership, while providing referral support through One Stop Centres (OSC), Gender Resource Centres (Lok Adhikar Kendras LAKs) for women facing violence, legal disputes, or other rights-related issues.

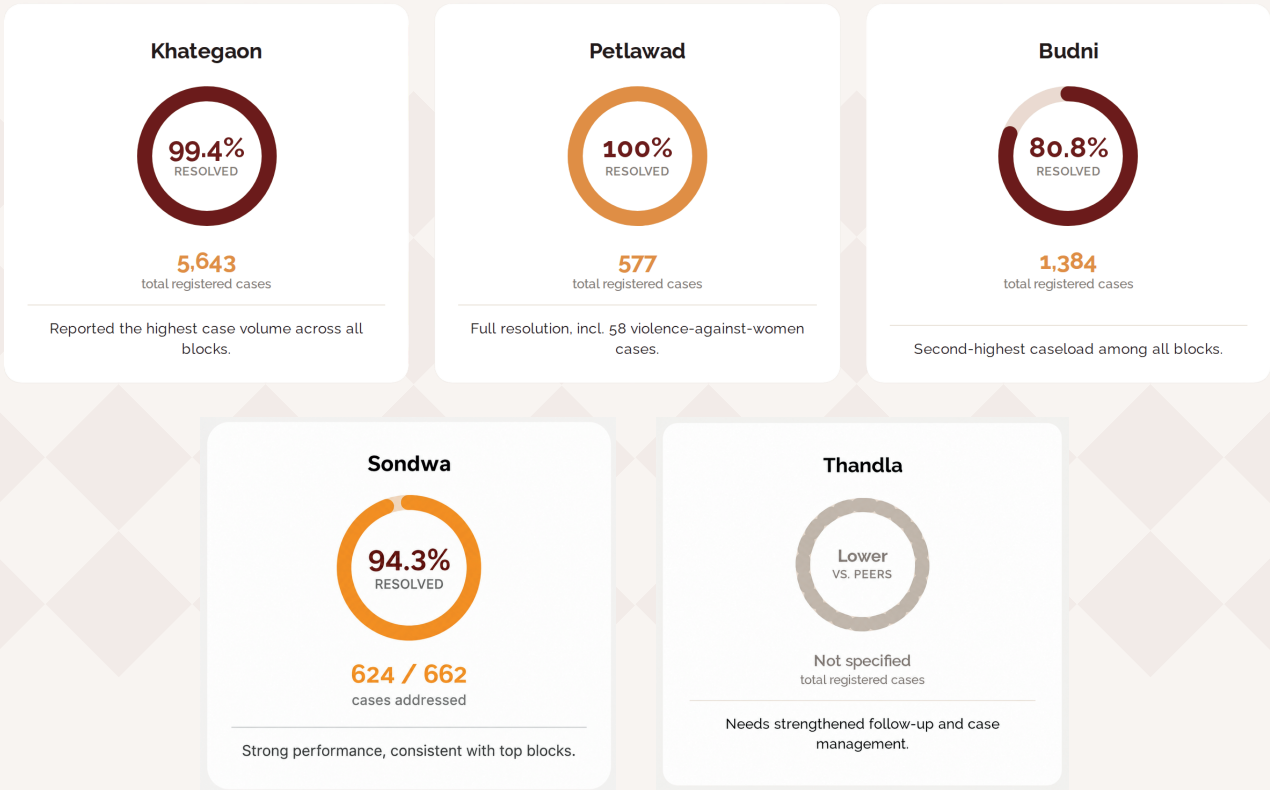
Beyond facilitating access to individual schemes, the NAKs and NSKs have functioned as last-mile governance institutions, linking women with public systems, improving awareness of rights and entitlements, strengthening accountability of service providers, and ensuring that vulnerable households are not excluded because of documentation gaps or lack of information. By integrating entitlement facilitation with community mobilisation, gender awareness, financial inclusion, and grievance redressal, these centres have transformed SHG federations and Panchayats into effective platforms for gender-responsive governance. The transition from CLF-managed Nari Adhikar Kendras to Panchayat-based Nari Shakti Kendras further strengthens institutional sustainability by embedding gender support mechanisms within the local governance architecture, creating a scalable model for improving women's access to social protection, public services, and justice.

Case Registration and Resolution through Lok Adhikar Kendras

 District	 Block	 Rights & Entitlement Cases		 Women Violence Cases		 Total Cases		 Overall Resolution Rate
		Cases Registered	Cases Resolved	Cases Registered	Cases Resolved	Cases Registered	Cases Resolved	
Alirajpur	Sondwa	645	612	17	12	662	624	94.3%
Barwani	Rajpur	156	124	0	0	156	124	79.5%
Dewas	Khategaon	5,616	5,583	27	26	5,643	5,609	99.4%
Dhar	Manawar	121	118	5	5	126	123	97.6%
Jhabua	Petlawad	519	519	58	58	577	577	100%
Jhabua	Thandla	322	222	35	21	357	243	68.1%
Mandla	Bijadandi	13	8	3	3	16	11	68.8%
Sehore	Budni	1,360	1,098	24	20	1,384	1,118	80.8%
Total	8 Blocks	8,752	8,284	169	145	8,921	8,429	94.5%

Key observations

Resolution rate and total registered cases by block



Across all eight Lok Adhikar Kendras, 8,921 cases were registered and 8,429 cases (94.5%) were addressed demonstrating the effectiveness of community-based legal aid and entitlement facilitation mechanisms.

Analysis of Lok Adhikar Kendra Performance

The performance of the eight Lok Adhikar Kendras (LAKs) demonstrates the effectiveness of community-managed institutional mechanisms in improving access to rights, entitlements, and justice for rural women. Across the intervention blocks, the centres collectively registered 8,921 cases, of which 8,429 cases were successfully resolved, achieving an impressive overall resolution rate of 94.5 percent. The majority of the cases related to facilitating access to government rights and entitlements, while a smaller but significant proportion involved cases of violence against women, highlighting the dual role of the centres in both social protection and gender justice.

Considerable variation was observed across the intervention blocks. Khategaon recorded the highest case volume, registering 5,643 cases, of which 5,609 (99.4%) were resolved, indicating a highly institutionalised and well-functioning service delivery mechanism with strong community outreach. Budni registered the second-highest caseload (1,384 cases), resolving over 80 percent of the cases, suggesting a substantial demand for entitlement facilitation while also indicating the need to strengthen follow-up and case management. Sondwa also demonstrated strong performance, resolving 624 out of 662 cases (94.3%), reflecting the effectiveness of the Lok Adhikar Kendra in reaching remote tribal communities.

Among the centres, Petlawad emerged as a notable best practice, achieving a 100 percent resolution rate, successfully resolving all 577 registered cases, including 58 cases of violence against women. This reflects strong institutional coordination, effective case follow-up, and close collaboration with community institutions and service providers. Similarly, Manawar resolved 123 of its 126 cases (97.6%), demonstrating consistently effective service delivery despite handling a smaller case load. Rajpur resolved nearly four-fifths of its registered cases, while Thandla and Bijadandi, both relatively newer centres, recorded comparatively lower resolution rates, suggesting that additional institutional strengthening, capacity building, and convergence with line departments may be required to improve their performance.

The data also underscores the growing role of Lok Adhikar Kendras in addressing gender-based violence. Across all intervention blocks, 169 cases of violence against women were registered, of which 145 cases (85.8%) were resolved through counselling, mediation, referrals to appropriate institutions, and legal support where necessary. Petlawad achieved complete resolution of all reported violence cases, while Khategaon and Manawar also demonstrated very high-resolution rates. The comparatively lower resolution rates in Thandla and Sondwa highlight the complex nature of gender-based violence cases, which often require sustained engagement with families, police, legal institutions, and social support services.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Lok Adhikar Kendras have evolved into effective community-based governance institutions that extend beyond entitlement facilitation to provide legal aid, grievance redressal, referral services, and support for survivors of violence. Their high overall case resolution rate illustrates the value of locally managed, women-led institutional platforms in improving access to public services, strengthening accountability of government systems, and ensuring that vulnerable households can effectively claim their rights and entitlements. Continued investments in capacity building, inter-departmental convergence, and systematic case management will further strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of these institutions, particularly in newly established and lower-performing blocks.



Analysis of FGDs across SHG, VO and CLF Levels in the blocks

Drawing on evidence from all study locations, the narratives illustrate a gradual progression of women's empowerment from individual transformation at the SHG level, to collective institutional action at the VO level, and finally to strategic leadership and systems engagement at the CLF level. While empowerment expands across these institutional layers, persistent structural inequalities continue to shape women's experiences.

SHG Discussions: Consolidated Analysis Across Blocks

The SHG discussions demonstrate that women's collectivisation has emerged as the primary catalyst for gender transformation across all seven blocks Bijadandi, Budni, Khategaon, Manawar, Petlawad, Sondwa, and Thandla although the pace and depth of change vary considerably. Across the intervention areas, women consistently described Self-Help Groups (SHGs) as spaces that have strengthened confidence, solidarity, leadership, and collective voice, enabling them to engage with institutions and negotiate for their rights. Nevertheless, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms continue to shape gender relations, particularly regarding inheritance, asset ownership, unpaid care work, and decision-making within households.

Gender awareness has improved across all blocks, with women increasingly recognising that unequal gender roles are socially constructed rather than biologically determined. This understanding was particularly evident in **Bijadandi, Budni, and Manawar, Petlawad, Sondwa, and Thandla** where participants explicitly articulated the distinction between sex and gender and questioned traditional norms. Despite these gains, son preference, inheritance favouring men, and perceptions of daughters as economic liabilities continue to coexist alongside changing attitudes.

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Household norms emerged as the most dominant theme across every block, reflecting both continuity and gradual transformation. Respondents from **Budni** highlighted remarkable improvements in girls' education, including women pursuing MBA and PhD programmes, while participants across **Bijadandi, Khategaon, Manawar, Petlawad, Sondwa, and Thandla** reported greater acceptance of girls' education and increasing involvement of younger men in household tasks such as childcare, cooking, and fetching water. However, unpaid domestic work and caregiving continue to be regarded primarily as women's responsibility, and traditional practices such as ghoonghat remain prevalent in several communities, indicating that changes in attitudes have not yet translated into an equitable division of labour.

Economic empowerment was consistently identified as one of the strongest outcomes of SHG participation. Women across all blocks reported enhanced financial independence through savings, access to bank accounts, and credit, with Budni recording loans of up to ₹6 lakh accessed through SHGs. Participants described greater autonomy over routine household expenditures and small financial decisions. However, ownership of productive assets including land, housing, and agricultural equipment continues to remain overwhelmingly in men's names across all locations. Women also reported persistent wage discrimination in agricultural labour, demonstrating that while financial inclusion has improved, structural inequalities in ownership and economic power remain largely unchanged.





Political empowerment presents a more mixed picture. Women from Bijadandi reported the strongest participation in Gram Sabha meetings, village planning, and local governance, often using collective action to demand infrastructure such as drinking water facilities, drainage systems, and school sanitation. Moderate participation was observed in Khategaon, Manawar, Petlawad, and Thandla, whereas women in Budni and Sondwa reported relatively limited engagement beyond SHG meetings. Across several blocks, restrictions imposed by male family members continue to limit women's participation in public decision-making despite increasing confidence.

The discussions also revealed varying experiences with institutional support and public services. Awareness of Gender Resource Centres and women's support mechanisms remains inconsistent across the intervention area. Manawar, Bijadandi, Budni, and Khategaon demonstrated relatively higher awareness and utilisation of institutional services, while respondents from Sondwa and Thandla reported limited familiarity with these mechanisms. Participants generally expressed satisfaction with Anganwadi and health services; however, police and legal institutions were frequently viewed as intimidating, with women preferring community mediation through SHGs before approaching formal systems. Administrative barriers, documentation delays, and procedural complexities continue to limit access to government entitlements.

Across all blocks, SHGs have evolved beyond financial collectives into important social institutions that facilitate leadership, mutual support, conflict resolution, and community mobilisation. This transformation was particularly evident in Bijadandi, Khategaon, and Manawar, where SHGs actively intervened in cases of domestic violence, alcoholism, and community disputes while negotiating with local authorities for improved public services. Although similar roles were reported in Petlawad and Sondwa, these functions appeared less institutionalised, while Thandla reported comparatively fewer examples of SHG-led collective action.

Evidence of broader social norm change was also apparent. Women reported increased mobility, greater confidence in travelling independently, improved willingness to challenge discrimination, and greater readiness to speak against domestic violence. These changes were particularly prominent in Bijadandi, Budni, and Manawar, while more gradual progress was observed in Khategaon and Sondwa. In Budni, participants perceived a decline in domestic violence, although they acknowledged that under-reporting remains common due to social stigma. Across all blocks, restrictive practices during menstruation, concerns regarding girls' safety, and limitations on women's mobility continue to reflect persistent patriarchal norms.

Despite these positive transformations, significant challenges remain. Alcoholism emerged as the most frequently cited issue across nearly every block and was consistently identified as the principal driver of domestic violence, financial insecurity, and family conflict. Respondents also highlighted women's heavy unpaid work burden, unequal ownership of assets, limited livelihood opportunities, water scarcity, and continuing patriarchal attitudes. Block-specific concerns further illustrate contextual differences: Budni reported that agricultural mechanisation has reduced women's access to wage employment, while Sondwa highlighted the practice of women returning to strenuous agricultural work soon after childbirth. These findings indicate that while SHGs have strengthened women's agency, broader structural constraints continue to limit the pace of transformative change.



A consistent finding across all SHGs was the substantial improvement in access to government schemes and social protection programmes. Women reported that SHG membership and the support of Village Organisations (VOs), Cluster Level Federations (CLFs), and community cadres have enabled households to obtain essential entitlements such as Ladli Laxmi Yojana, ration cards under the Public Distribution System (PDS), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Nal Jal Yojana, institutional delivery services, routine immunisation, Take Home Ration (THR) through Anganwadi centres, and bank linkages facilitated under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).

Women consistently acknowledged that SHGs play a critical role in helping them understand eligibility criteria, complete documentation, access government offices, and follow up on applications. Among all the schemes discussed, Ladli Laxmi Yojana was perceived as particularly transformative, as it has enhanced the value accorded to daughters, encouraged investment in girls' education, and contributed to changing community attitudes towards the girl child. Equally, women expressed strong appreciation for SHGs and their federations, not only for facilitating financial inclusion through savings, credit, and bank linkages but also for serving as trusted community institutions that connect vulnerable households to government welfare programmes. The findings indicate that SHGs have evolved beyond financial collectives to become effective last-mile institutions for improving social protection coverage, financial inclusion, and access to public services.

Finally, participants recommended strengthening basic infrastructure, particularly drinking water, sanitation, LPG access, and livelihood opportunities. Respondents also emphasised the need to expand higher education opportunities for girls, improve implementation of government schemes, strengthen institutional convergence, and increase awareness of women's legal rights and entitlements. Overall, the findings demonstrate that SHGs have become powerful platforms for economic and social empowerment; however, sustained investment in gender-transformative programming, institutional strengthening, and engagement with men and boys will be essential to address the structural barriers that continue to impede gender equality.

Village Organisation (VO) Discussions: Consolidated Analysis Across Blocks

The Village Organisation (VO) discussions reveal that VOs have emerged as an important institutional platform for strengthening women's collective agency, leadership, and access to public services across the intervention blocks of Rajpur, Manawar, Khategaon, Sondwa, Budni, Thandla, and Petlawad. Building upon the foundation created by SHGs, VOs have expanded women's engagement from household-level financial inclusion to collective action, local governance, and community problem-solving. While participants reported significant improvements in women's confidence, mobility, and participation in public institutions, deeply embedded patriarchal norms continue to limit women's control over productive assets, household decision-making, and leadership positions.

Gender awareness has steadily increased across the intervention areas, with women attributing these changes largely to gender training and discussions conducted through SHGs, VOs, and community institutions. The strongest evidence of changing attitudes was reported from Rajpur, where women increasingly recognised the importance of equal opportunities for girls in education and employment. Moderate improvements were also reported in Khategaon and Sondwa, while discussions from Budni and Thandla reflected comparatively lower levels of engagement with gender concepts. Nevertheless, participants across all blocks acknowledged that traditional beliefs—including son preference, daughters being viewed as financial liabilities, and unequal inheritance practice remain deeply entrenched and continue to shape family decisions.

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Household norms emerged as the most dominant theme across all Village Organisations. Women from Rajpur, Manawar, Sondwa, Khategaon, Budni, and Thandla consistently reported substantial progress in girls' education, with several examples of girls pursuing higher education, including postgraduate and MBBS courses. Families increasingly reported eating meals together, reflecting gradual shifts in household relationships. However, the discussions also revealed that domestic responsibilities—including cooking, cleaning, childcare, livestock management, and care work—continue to rest almost entirely with women. Major household decisions relating to land purchases, housing, agricultural investments, and other productive assets remain largely controlled by men, indicating that changes in educational aspirations have not yet translated into equal household power.

Economic empowerment was one of the strongest and most consistent outcomes emerging from the VO discussions. Across Rajpur, Manawar, Khategaon, Sondwa, Budni, and Thandla, women described improved financial inclusion through savings, bank accounts, Community Investment Fund (CIF) support, cash credit limit or bank linkages, which enabled them to establish grocery shops, poultry enterprises, tailoring units, and other small businesses. Despite these gains, ownership of productive assets such as land and houses continue to remain overwhelmingly in men's names. Participants reported that digital banking transactions are often managed by husbands, and women continue to face social pressure to relinquish inheritance rights to preserve family relationships. These findings indicate that while women's access to finance has expanded considerably, control over wealth and productive resources remains highly unequal.





Political empowerment has also shown encouraging progress. Women across Rajpur, Manawar, Khategaon, and Sondwa reported increased participation in Gram Sabha meetings, Panchayat discussions, and Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) processes. Participants described greater confidence in raising community concerns related to pensions, drinking water, roads, sanitation, and public infrastructure. However, women also acknowledged that implementation of their demands remains inconsistent, and leadership positions continue to be dominated by men. Participation in Thandla was comparatively lower, suggesting that strengthening women's political leadership remains an important priority.

The discussions further demonstrated that women increasingly recognise the value of public services and government welfare programmes. Respondents from Rajpur, Manawar, Budni, and Thandla reported improved access to maternity benefits, pensions, Ayushman Bharat cards, and other social protection schemes. However, participants across all blocks highlighted bureaucratic delays, documentation challenges, and procedural complexities that often delay access to entitlements. These findings reinforce the important role played by VOs in facilitating last-mile access to government programmes while also highlighting the need for stronger institutional convergence and simplified administrative procedures.

Participants consistently described SHGs and VOs as transformative community institutions that extend far beyond financial inclusion. Women from Rajpur, Manawar, Sondwa, and Khategaon explained that these institutions have strengthened collective solidarity, enhanced self-confidence, enabled independent mobility, and created safe spaces for discussing domestic violence and other social issues. Through collective action, women reported greater confidence in negotiating with Panchayats, government officials, and service providers. Although similar experiences were reported in Budni, the institutional role of VOs appeared comparatively weaker in Thandla, where fewer examples of collective mobilisation emerged.

The VO discussions also provide evidence of gradual social norm change. Women across Rajpur, Manawar, Sondwa, Khategaon, and Thandla described increased mobility, greater acceptance of delayed marriage, and improved willingness to report violence and discrimination. Nevertheless, restrictive practices such as purdah (veiling) continue in several communities, particularly in Chaktala under Rajpur block, while concerns regarding girls' safety continue to influence educational and mobility decisions. Fear of girls "eloping" remains an important factor contributing to early withdrawal from education in several communities.

Despite these positive transformations, participants consistently identified structural barriers that continue to constrain women's empowerment. Across all blocks, women highlighted heavy unpaid domestic labour, male dominance in household decision-making, unequal inheritance practices, domestic violence, alcoholism, and lack of ownership over land and productive assets as the most persistent challenges. These issues were particularly prominent in Rajpur, Manawar, Khategaon, and Sondwa, indicating that economic participation alone has not substantially altered underlying gender power relations.

The discussions from Petlawad further reinforce these findings by illustrating the pathways through which VOs contribute to empowerment. Participants identified gender training as an important driver of changing attitudes, while SHGs and VOs were viewed as the primary institutions for building confidence, collective solidarity, and women's leadership. Government welfare schemes improved household income security and access to essential services despite administrative barriers, and collective action transformed individual problems into community concerns that could be addressed through negotiations with public institutions. Together, these findings demonstrate that Village Organisations have become critical intermediaries between rural women and government systems, strengthening women's agency, improving access to public services, and fostering collective action. However, achieving transformative gender equality will require continued efforts to address entrenched patriarchal norms, expand women's ownership of productive assets, and strengthen women's leadership in local governance alongside sustained livelihood and social protection interventions.



Cluster Level Federation (CLF) Discussions: Consolidated Analysis Across Blocks

The discussions with Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) demonstrate that federated women's institutions have evolved beyond financial collectives to become powerful community platforms for leadership, collective bargaining, institutional convergence, and social transformation. The findings from Manawar CLF, Swaragini CLF (Bijadandi), and Nari Shakti CLF (Petlawad) indicate that Nari Shakti CLFs have significantly strengthened women's agency by enhancing financial inclusion, facilitating access to government institutions, and enabling women to collectively address social issues. While substantial progress has been achieved in women's confidence, leadership, and public participation, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms continue to constrain women's ownership of productive assets, equitable division of domestic labour, and access to economic opportunities.

Gender awareness has increased steadily across the CLFs, largely as a result of continuous gender training and collective learning processes. Women from Manawar CLF and Bijadandi CLF described a growing recognition of women's rights, including the importance of girls' education, women's consent in marriage, and greater autonomy in household decision-making. Participants increasingly recognised gender as a socially constructed system rather than a biological difference. The discussions also revealed examples of profound normative change, such as daughters performing funeral rites traditionally considered an exclusively male responsibility reflecting gradual shifts in long-standing patriarchal customs. However, these changes remain uneven and coexist with traditional beliefs that continue to privilege sons and reinforce gender hierarchies.

Household norms remained the most dominant area of discussion across the CLFs. Participants from Manawar and Bijadandi reported significant improvements in girls' education, with increasing numbers of young women pursuing professional education, including MBBS and other higher education courses. Women also described greater cooperation from husbands in certain household responsibilities compared to previous generations. Nevertheless, domestic work continues to remain overwhelmingly feminised, with women describing workdays extending to 16–17 hours as they combine household responsibilities, caregiving, livestock management, and agricultural labour. Early marriage and school dropout continue to persist in some communities, demonstrating that improvements in educational aspirations have yet to fully transform gendered expectations within households.

Economic empowerment emerged as one of the strongest outcomes of CLF participation. Across Manawar CLF, Bijadandi CLF, and Nari Shakti CLF (Petlawad), women reported improved financial literacy, enhanced savings behaviour, greater confidence in managing credit, and increased control over personal income. Participants described CLFs managing substantial community financial resources, with Nari Shakti CLF overseeing collective funds exceeding ₹1 crore and Navshakti CLF managing nearly ₹3 crore. Women reported using loans for housing, enterprise development, vehicles, agriculture, and livelihood diversification, with some families registering newly acquired assets in women's names to benefit from government incentives. Despite these advances, ownership of agricultural land and major productive assets continues to remain predominantly with men, limiting women's long-term economic security and bargaining power.

The CLFs have also strengthened women's participation in local governance and collective advocacy. Women from Manawar and Bijadandi reported increased participation in Gram Sabha meetings, Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) processes, and community monitoring of development programmes. Collective action enabled women to advocate successfully for public infrastructure, including resolving disputes over school land through coordinated engagement with local authorities. Participants described increased confidence in interacting directly with Panchayat representatives, government officials, and service providers, reflecting growing political agency. However, women also acknowledged that representation in formal leadership positions remains limited and that implementation of community demands continues to vary across locations.

Another important contribution of the CLFs has been strengthening institutional convergence and access to public services. Participants described active engagement with Anganwadi centres, health facilities, schools, and government departments to improve service delivery within their communities. Swaragini CLF and Nari Shakti CLF reported stronger linkages with formal institutions such as One Stop Centres, enabling women experiencing domestic violence to access counselling, mediation, and referral services. These institutional partnerships have expanded the role of CLFs from financial institutions to community-based mechanisms that facilitate access to justice, health, education, and social protection services.





The discussions also provide evidence of gradual but important shifts in social norms. Women across Manawar, Bijadandi and Petlawad reported increased mobility, greater confidence in travelling independently, learning to ride scooters, and actively participating in public meetings. Women's visibility within community decision-making spaces has increased considerably, and issues such as domestic violence are increasingly viewed as collective community concerns rather than private family matters. Participants from Nari Shakti CLF emphasised that SHGs and CLFs have created safe spaces where women collectively intervene in domestic violence cases and negotiate solutions with families and institutions, demonstrating an important shift from individual silence to collective action.

Despite these achievements, the CLF discussions also highlighted several persistent and emerging challenges. Unequal ownership of land and property, patriarchal norms, and women continued economic insecurity remain widespread across all locations. Participants from Manawar further identified emerging social concerns, including child labour through seasonal pick up large land owners increasing substance abuse among adolescents, and limited employment opportunities for educated rural youth. These challenges suggest that while women's collective institutions have substantially expanded agency and financial inclusion, broader structural barriers continue to restrict transformative gender equality.

The discussions from Nari Shakti CLF in Petlawad further illustrate the pathways through which federated institutions contribute to women's empowerment. Participants attributed improved gender awareness and confidence to regular training programmes, while SHGs and CLFs were recognised as the primary platforms for developing leadership, collective agency, and managing large community funds. Financial inclusion has translated into greater financial literacy, with participants reporting that nearly 60% of women now exercise control over household finances. Government incentives encouraging asset registration in women's names have contributed to improved ownership opportunities, while institutional partnerships with One Stop Centres have strengthened women's access to counselling and legal support. Most importantly, collective community support has transformed domestic violence from an individual household issue into a community concern that women address collectively through their federated institutions.

Overall, the CLF discussions demonstrate that federated women's institutions have become the highest level of community-based empowerment architecture, enabling women to move beyond savings and credit towards leadership, governance, institutional accountability, and collective social action. However, sustained progress will require continued efforts to address unequal asset ownership, redistribute unpaid care work, expand livelihood opportunities for women and youth, and strengthen gender-transformative engagement with men, families, and public institutions to ensure that improvements in women's agency translate into lasting structural change.



Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted across the eight intervention blocks with officials and frontline functionaries from departments including National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), Women and Child Development, Health, Education, Police, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and other relevant stakeholders. The interviews explored institutional responses to gender issues, service delivery, convergence mechanisms, and emerging social challenges. Across all blocks, respondents consistently acknowledged that women's collectivisation through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Village Organizations (VOs), Cluster Level Federations (CLFs), and Gender Resource Centres (GRCs) has significantly enhanced women's confidence, leadership, participation in Gram Sabhas, and accountability of local institutions. Alcohol abuse was unanimously identified as the principal trigger for domestic violence, family disputes, and economic insecurity. Most respondents also reported that institutional deliveries have become almost universal due to the combined efforts of ASHA workers, Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), and the availability of 108 ambulance services, although isolated challenges relating to referral delays and informal payments persist.

The interviews further revealed that while Block Gender Forums and inter-departmental convergence mechanisms have been established in most locations, their effectiveness varies considerably across blocks. Innovative convergence initiatives such as the 12-day Joint Service Camp in Sondwa demonstrated the potential of coordinated service delivery to address documentation gaps and improve access to welfare schemes. Schools and residential hostels have increasingly emerged as important platforms for adolescent gender education, particularly on menstrual hygiene, life skills, and Good Touch–Bad Touch awareness. However, educational retention continues to be affected by poverty, seasonal migration, long travel distances, and early marriage, particularly after Class VIII. Documentation barriers, including Aadhaar and Samagra registration issues, continue to restrict access to education and health services among migrant and tribal households.

Health-related concerns remain prominent despite improvements in maternal health services. High levels of anaemia among women and adolescents continue to be reported across several blocks, with poor compliance to iron supplementation attributed to side effects and limited awareness. Specialist shortages, particularly of gynaecologists and paediatricians at block health facilities, remain a significant challenge in Mandla and Manawar. Geographic isolation further constrains access to services in remote tribal areas such as Sondwa, where some villages continue to depend on boat transport during the monsoon. In Khategaon, traditional beliefs and superstition were reported to delay timely healthcare seeking, particularly during pregnancy and illness.

The KIIs also highlighted several noteworthy innovations and emerging concerns. Mandla's Automatic Transfer Certificate (TC) system has reduced school dropouts by facilitating seamless student transfers, while Sondwa and Mandla have produced notable examples of educational mobility, with students entering medical education, police services, and state-level sports. Respondents also observed that increasing women's economic participation has, in some instances, generated resistance from men, underscoring the need for gender-transformative approaches that actively engage men and boys alongside women's empowerment efforts. Overall, the findings suggest that women's collectives have become the primary drivers of social change and institutional accountability. However, persistent structural barriers including alcoholism, poverty, migration, patriarchal norms, documentation gaps, and health system constraints continue to limit the full realization of gender equality, indicating the need for stronger inter-departmental convergence, sustained behaviour change initiatives, and institutional strengthening.



Case studies

1 | Rebuilding Life Through Community Institutions – Anita Charel, Mandan Village, Petlawad Block, Madhya Pradesh

Background

Anita Charel, a resident of Mandan village in Petlawad block of Madhya Pradesh, grew up in a family of seven siblings where financial constraints limited educational opportunities. She discontinued her education after Class 8 but remained determined to continue learning. By enrolling as a private candidate, she completed her Class 10 and later Class 12 after marriage, while simultaneously managing household responsibilities and contributing to the family's income through tailoring and agriculture.

Gender Challenge

In 2020, Anita's husband, who had migrated for wage labour, entered into another marriage without informing her and began living separately with his second wife. Anita was left to care for her three children alone, with no emotional or financial support from her husband. Besides the economic hardship, she experienced social stigma, emotional distress, and uncertainty about her future. The burden of managing the household, raising children, and earning an income fell entirely on her.

Like many rural women, Anita initially lacked awareness of her legal rights and had limited access to formal support systems. The experience exposed the vulnerabilities faced by women when marital abandonment intersects with economic dependence and prevailing patriarchal norms.

Programme Intervention

At the time of the crisis, Anita was an active member and bookkeeper of her Self-Help Group (SHG). The SHG provided an immediate platform where she could openly discuss her situation and receive emotional support from fellow members. The Village Organization (VO) reinforced this support by encouraging her to remain engaged with community institutions rather than withdrawing from public life.

Through the gender interventions facilitated under the programme, Anita participated in awareness sessions on women's rights, gender equality, leadership, and institutional entitlements. These interventions strengthened her confidence, increased her awareness of available support mechanisms, and encouraged her to pursue economic independence.

Recognising her commitment and leadership potential, the programme engaged Anita as a Community Resource Person (CRP) with the Nari Adhikar Kendra (NAK). This role equipped her with knowledge on gender-based violence, legal rights, referral mechanisms, and community mobilisation. More importantly, it transformed her lived experience into a source of strength for supporting other women facing similar challenges.

Outcomes

The intervention contributed to significant changes in Anita's personal, social, and economic life.

Economically, she diversified her livelihood through tailoring, agriculture, dairy farming, and other income-generating activities. She established a Sanchi Dairy enterprise, cultivated her own agricultural land, and generated a stable source of income. Her increased earnings enabled her to purchase a plot of land and construct a house, improving her family's long-term economic security.

Socially, Anita experienced a marked increase in self-confidence and decision-making power. She became an active community leader and currently serves as an NSK Prerak, supporting women in understanding their rights, accessing government services, and addressing gender-related concerns. Her own experience has made her an empathetic and trusted resource within the community.

At the family level, Anita's economic independence and leadership altered household dynamics. Following the departure of his second wife, her husband returned home. Anita attributes this reconciliation partly to the confidence, stability, and independent life she had built during his absence. Today, while they are rebuilding their family, Anita continues to play an equal role in household decision-making and manages multiple livelihood activities alongside caring for four children, including the child of her husband's second wife.

Anita's experience illustrates how community-based institutions under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission can enable women to move from vulnerability to empowerment. The Self-Help Group provided emotional solidarity, while the Village Organization and Nari Adhikar Kendra created pathways for leadership, rights awareness, and economic empowerment.

The case demonstrates that gender-responsive institutional mechanisms are most effective when they combine psychosocial support, livelihood promotion, leadership opportunities, and access to community-based referral systems. Anita's transformation from an abandoned spouse struggling to survive into a financially independent community leader highlights the potential of women's collectives to build resilience, strengthen agency, and promote sustainable empowerment.

Today, Anita not only supports her own family through diversified livelihoods but also serves as a role model for other rural women, proving that community institutions can create lasting changes in women's confidence, economic security, and social leadership.

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2 | From Personal Tragedy to Community Leadership – Manu Dawar's Journey of Empowerment

Background

Manu Dawar, a resident of Mandvi village in Manawar block, comes from a tribal farming family with limited educational opportunities. Like many women of her generation, she was unable to complete her schooling due to poverty and prevailing social norms. Her family depended primarily on agricultural labour and livestock rearing for survival. Although economic resources were limited, Manu remained actively involved in supporting her family and participating in community life.

Gender Challenge

Manu's life changed dramatically following the untimely death of her husband nearly two decades ago. Widowed at a young age, she suddenly became solely responsible for raising her children and securing the family's livelihood. Alongside the emotional trauma of losing her husband, she faced social isolation, financial insecurity, and the burden of pursuing a lengthy legal case related to his death. With little institutional support available at the time, she struggled to balance childcare, wage labour, agriculture, and legal proceedings.

As a single woman heading a household, Manu also encountered discrimination and criticism from members of the community. Managing her family while navigating social stigma required extraordinary resilience and determination.

Finding Strength Through Community Institutions

A turning point came when women from the National Rural Livelihoods Mission mobilised Self-Help Groups in her village. Although initially hesitant to join, Manu gradually became involved in the SHG movement and soon emerged as an active leader. Her commitment and ability to mobilise others led to her election as the President of the Gram Sangathan (Village Organization).

Through the SHG and Village Organization, Manu gained confidence, leadership skills, and financial literacy. Access to community-managed savings and bank-linked credit reduced her dependence on informal lenders and enabled her to improve her family's economic condition. More importantly, the collective platform gave her the confidence to engage with Panchayats, banks, police, and government departments on behalf of vulnerable women.

Participation in gender awareness programmes further strengthened her understanding of women's rights, legal provisions, and collective action. Equipped with this knowledge, Manu evolved from a beneficiary into a community leader advocating for the rights of women and children.

Building Community Leadership and Social Action

Today, Manu is recognised as one of the most respected women leaders in her village. She plays an active role in resolving community disputes, supporting women experiencing domestic violence, counselling families to educate their daughters, facilitating access to government schemes, and promoting health and nutrition services.

She has successfully intervened in cases of child marriage by verifying the age of adolescent girls through Aadhaar records, counselling parents, mobilising Panchayat representatives, and, when necessary, involving the police to prevent illegal marriages. She also motivates families to ensure children's immunisation, enrolment in Anganwadi centres, and continued schooling, particularly for girls.

Beyond individual cases, Manu has helped mobilise women to collectively address village issues, including access to pensions, housing, vaccination, drinking water, and other public services. Her leadership has transformed the Village Organization into a platform for collective problem-solving rather than merely a savings institution.

Economic Empowerment

The SHG movement also strengthened Manu's economic resilience. Through savings and access to institutional credit, she was able to repay debts, improve her house, purchase household assets, and reduce dependence on exploitative moneylenders. She encouraged many other women to access SHG loans to free themselves from bonded labour arrangements that had tied families to landlords for generations.

Her leadership contributed to improving women's bargaining power and expanding their livelihood opportunities, demonstrating how financial inclusion can promote both economic and social empowerment.

Continuing Challenges

Despite significant progress, Manu recognises that many structural challenges persist. Landlessness, irregular wage employment, seasonal migration, inadequate access to government schemes, and poverty continue to affect many families in her village. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms still influence girls' education, women's workload, and decision-making within households.

Nevertheless, Manu continues to mobilise women through SHGs and the Village Organization, believing that collective action remains the most effective way to address these challenges.

Transformation and Impact

Manu's journey reflects the transformative potential of women's collective institutions under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. The Self-Help Group provided the first platform for her to build confidence, while the Village Organization enabled her to emerge as a recognised community leader.

Today, she is widely respected for mediating village disputes, promoting girls' education, preventing child marriage, facilitating access to government services, and supporting vulnerable women. Community members now seek her guidance whenever conflicts arise or families require support.

Her story demonstrates how gender-responsive community institutions can transform personal adversity into community leadership. By combining financial inclusion, collective solidarity, leadership development, and gender awareness, the programme has enabled Manu not only to rebuild her own life but also to become an agent of social change, strengthening the resilience, voice, and rights of women across her village.

3 | Challenging Menstrual Taboos Through Community Leadership – Revati Didi's Journey

Background

Revati Didi is an active member of the Self-Help Group (SHG) and a community leader who has been closely involved in promoting women's rights and gender equality within her village. Through her engagement with community institutions and gender awareness programmes, she has worked to address harmful social norms that disproportionately affect women and adolescent girls.

Gender Challenge

One of the most deeply rooted practices in Revati's community related to menstruation. Women and adolescent girls were considered "impure" during their menstrual period and were subjected to multiple restrictions that affected their dignity, mobility, nutrition, and participation in social and economic life.

Women were prohibited from entering kitchens, temples, and prayer spaces, touching food, or participating in religious ceremonies. In households engaged in preparing papad as a livelihood activity, menstruating women or even women visiting from outside the household were not allowed near the work area because it was believed that their presence would spoil the papad. Families often cancelled training sessions or asked trainers to leave, fearing that the products would become impure.

During menstruation, women were made to stay separately, eat alone, and often hesitated to ask for food more than once. They continued to perform physically demanding household tasks such as washing clothes, fetching water, and cleaning, despite being excluded from cooking and other household spaces. Girls were also discouraged from consuming certain foods and were prevented from participating in religious gatherings or meeting spiritual leaders. These practices reinforced discrimination, isolation, and unequal treatment within households.

Programme Intervention

Through the gender integration programme, Revati participated in gender sensitisation sessions facilitated by community institutions. Discussions on gender equality, dignity, health, and menstrual hygiene encouraged women to critically examine long-held beliefs and distinguish cultural practices from discriminatory norms.

The Self-Help Group became a safe space where women openly discussed menstruation an issue that had previously remained hidden and surrounded by silence. Exposure visits, community meetings, and collective dialogue gradually increased awareness that menstruation is a natural biological process rather than a source of impurity.

As a community leader, Revati began initiating conversations with families, encouraging them to question harmful practices and treat adolescent girls with greater dignity during menstruation.



Changes Observed

The programme has contributed to gradual but significant changes in community attitudes. Families have become more willing to discuss menstruation openly, and some restrictions that were previously considered unquestionable are beginning to be challenged.

Women increasingly recognise that menstruation should not prevent girls from participating in education, livelihood activities, or community life. Community members have also started questioning the belief that menstruating women spoil food products such as papad, creating greater acceptance of women's participation in livelihood activities throughout the month.

Revati observes that adolescent girls are now more aware of menstrual hygiene and are beginning to express their needs and concerns more confidently within their families. Mothers, too, are becoming more supportive and are encouraging their daughters to continue their education and daily activities during menstruation.

Continuing Challenges

Despite these positive changes, deeply embedded cultural beliefs continue to influence community behaviour. Restrictions related to religious practices, food preparation, and participation in rituals remain common in many households, particularly among older generations. Fear of social criticism often discourages families from abandoning traditional practices altogether.

Changing attitudes requires sustained dialogue and continuous engagement with both women and men, as social norms are reinforced across generations.

Impact

Revati's experience demonstrates that gender-transformative change extends beyond economic empowerment to challenging deeply entrenched social norms. Through collective learning and community dialogue facilitated by SHGs and gender interventions, menstruation has begun to shift from being a subject of silence and discrimination to one of discussion, awareness, and dignity.

The case highlights how community institutions can create safe spaces for women to question discriminatory practices, support one another, and gradually transform social norms that limit women's participation and well-being. While the change remains incremental, it represents an important step towards greater gender equality, dignity, and inclusion for women and adolescent girls.

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4 | From Gender Awareness to Community Leadership – Prabha Didi's Journey

Background

Prabha Didi was raised in a farming family where education was valued, but like many girls in rural Madhya Pradesh, she grew up within a society shaped by patriarchal norms. Although her father and uncles encouraged her education, girls' mobility was restricted, and they were expected to conform to social expectations that did not apply to boys. She excelled in school, taught younger girls from an early age, assisted villagers in obtaining official documents, and was recognised as a Child Champion for her leadership and academic achievements. Her education laid the foundation for confidence, public engagement, and a desire to contribute to her community.

Gender Challenge

While Prabha's family supported her education, she experienced subtle but pervasive gender discrimination throughout her childhood. Girls were expected to remain within the home, had limited freedom of movement, and were discouraged from participating in recreational activities enjoyed by boys. Watching films, travelling independently, and participating freely in public life were privileges largely reserved for boys. Even basic facilities such as the absence of household toilets disproportionately affected girls, restricting their mobility and privacy.

After marriage, Prabha moved to a village where traditional practices such as wearing a long veil (ghoonghat) were common. Although her marital family did not impose these restrictions, the prevailing social norms highlighted the continuing influence of gender expectations within the community. These experiences enabled her to recognise that discrimination is often embedded in everyday practices rather than only in overt acts of inequality.

Programme Intervention

Prabha's participation in gender awareness programmes helped her understand and articulate the gender inequalities she had experienced throughout her life. Rather than introducing entirely new ideas, the training provided her with a framework to critically analyse social norms and consciously promote gender equality within her family and community.

Her educational background, leadership skills, and community credibility led to her election as a Panchayat representative at the age of 21 and later as Sarpanch. Through these leadership roles and continued engagement with community institutions, she became an advocate for women's participation in governance, education, and decision-making. The programme strengthened her confidence to challenge discriminatory practices and encouraged her to become a role model for other women.

Building Leadership and Gender-Equitable Practices

Prabha's leadership extends beyond public office into her own household. She and her husband make family and financial decisions jointly, based on mutual respect and dialogue. Household responsibilities are shared, and her husband has consistently supported her public role, including during pregnancy and childcare.

Determined to challenge traditional gender roles, Prabha has consciously raised her sons to participate in domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, and household chores. She believes that caregiving and household responsibilities should not be viewed as women's work alone and that gender equality begins within the family.

Alongside her public responsibilities, Prabha manages agriculture, livestock, household responsibilities, and a small enterprise, demonstrating that women can successfully combine leadership with economic participation when supported by their families.

Continuing Challenges

Despite her achievements, Prabha recognises that structural inequalities continue to affect women. Although she contributes significantly to agriculture and household enterprises, productive assets remain largely registered in her husband's name, reflecting the wider challenge of women's limited ownership of land and property.

She also observes that gender norms differ considerably across communities. While women in her marital village enjoy greater mobility and participation in public life, stricter restrictions continue to exist in her natal village, demonstrating that social change remains uneven across rural communities.

Transformation and Impact

Prabha's journey illustrates how education, supportive family relationships, and community institutions together create pathways for women's empowerment. Gender awareness programmes strengthened her understanding of equality, while opportunities for local leadership enabled her to translate those values into action.

Today, Prabha is recognised as a respected community leader who promotes girls' education, shared household responsibilities, women's leadership, and equitable decision-making. She has demonstrated that women can successfully lead public institutions while maintaining strong family relationships and diversified livelihoods.

Her story highlights that gender-transformative change is achieved not only by increasing women's participation in public life but also by changing relationships within households and communities. By promoting shared decision-making, gender-equitable parenting, and women's leadership, Prabha continues to inspire other women to challenge traditional norms and build more inclusive and equitable communities.

5 | Securing Justice and Land Rights Through Community Institutions – Shanti Didi's Journey

Background

Shanti Didi, a 25-year-old woman from Kalsadiya village in Petlawad block, is the mother of three daughters. Like many rural women, she faced multiple forms of gender discrimination within her marital home. Despite carrying the responsibility of caring for her family, she had little control over decisions affecting her health, livelihood, and future. Her journey illustrates how community-based gender institutions can enable women to access justice, secure their rights, and rebuild their lives after severe adversity.

Gender Challenge

Shanti's married life was marked by domestic violence and neglect. Her husband was addicted to alcohol and frequently subjected her to physical and verbal abuse. Following the birth of her third daughter, she developed serious menstrual health complications. Despite her deteriorating condition, her in-laws refused to support her in seeking medical treatment. Left with no option, she returned to her maternal home, where her brother arranged for her medical care.

During this period, her husband was also staying at her maternal home. While travelling back to his village, he died due to complications related to alcohol addiction. Instead of supporting Shanti during this traumatic period, her in-laws accused her of causing his death and subjected her to continuous harassment. They attempted to evict her from her marital home and deny her rights, leaving her vulnerable as a young widow with three daughters.

Finding Strength Through Community Institutions

For nearly six months, Shanti sought justice through formal channels. She lodged complaints at the Sarangi and Bamniya Police Chaukis, but no action was taken. Feeling helpless, she attended a Village Organization (VO) meeting where Community Resource Persons from the Nari Adhikar Kendra (NAK) conducted a gender awareness session. For the first time, she learned about women's rights, legal entitlements, and the institutional mechanisms available to support women facing violence and discrimination.

Encouraged by the discussions, Shanti shared her experience with the NAK team. The NAK Community Resource Persons took up her case and initiated counselling sessions with both Shanti and her in-laws. They conducted repeated follow-ups and attempted to resolve the dispute through dialogue and mediation.

When the issue could not be resolved at the community level, the case was referred to the Lok Adhikar Kendra (LAK). The LAK Coordinator and Samta Sakhi continued counselling and mediation efforts while helping Shanti navigate the legal process. As the dispute remained unresolved, the case was further escalated to the One Stop Centre (OSC) in Jhabua, where both parties were called for structured counselling and facilitated negotiations.



The coordinated efforts of the Village Organization, Nari Adhikar Kendra, Lok Adhikar Kendra, and One Stop Centre ultimately resulted in a successful resolution. Through sustained institutional support, Shanti's legal rights were recognised, and her rightful share of the family land was transferred in her name, providing both economic security and social recognition.

Building Confidence and Economic Security

Securing ownership of land marked a turning point in Shanti's life. The resolution not only protected her and her daughters from displacement but also gave her an independent livelihood asset.

Alongside farming on her land, she continues to undertake seasonal wage labour to support her family.

Her participation in the Self-Help Group has further strengthened her confidence and encouraged her to become more actively involved in community activities. She now understands her legal rights, participates in community meetings, and is better equipped to make decisions affecting her own life and the future of her daughters.

Continuing Challenges

Although Shanti has secured her rights, significant challenges remain. As the sole caregiver of three daughters, she continues to shoulder the responsibility of ensuring their education, health, and future. Farming and seasonal migration provide only limited and uncertain income, making economic security an ongoing concern. She also continues to face social stigma associated with widowhood, reflecting the persistent gender norms that disadvantage women after the death of their husbands.

Transformation and Impact

Shanti's journey demonstrates the critical role of community-based institutional mechanisms in enabling women to access justice and protect their rights. The Village Organization created the first opportunity for her to learn about gender equality and available support systems. The Nari Adhikar Kendra provided immediate counselling and case management, while the Lok Adhikar Kendra and One Stop Centre ensured that the case progressed through appropriate legal and counselling mechanisms until a just resolution was achieved.

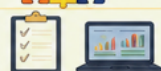
Today, Shanti is a more confident and empowered woman who is aware of her rights and capable of making decisions independently. By securing her land rights, the intervention not only protected her livelihood but also safeguarded the future of her three daughters. Her journey demonstrates that when community institutions work together through a coordinated referral system, they can transform the lives of women facing violence, discrimination, and property-related injustice, enabling them to rebuild their lives with dignity and security.



LEARNINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender Integration through Community Action Labs, Madhya Pradesh



KEY LEARNINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
 1. COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS DRIVE CHANGE SHGs, VOs and CLFs have evolved beyond savings groups into platforms for leadership, collective action and gender justice.	 1. INSTITUTIONALISE GENDER FORUMS Strengthen GPCCs and BLCCs through regular meetings, defined roles and accountability mechanisms.
 2. GENDER AWARENESS SHIFTS SOCIAL NORMS Women increasingly challenge child marriage, domestic violence, discrimination and unequal gender roles, although change remains uneven.	 2. ENGAGE MEN & BOYS Expand programmes addressing masculinities, shared care work, violence prevention and equitable household decision-making.
 3. FINANCIAL INCLUSION BUILDS CONFIDENCE Savings, credit and livelihoods improved women's confidence, mobility and decision-making, but ownership of productive assets remains limited.	 3. PROMOTE WOMEN'S ASSET OWNERSHIP Scale incentives for registering land and housing in women's names and strengthen awareness of inheritance rights.
 4. IMPROVED ACCESS TO ENTITLEMENTS Community institutions successfully linked women to health, pensions, MGNREGA, Ayushman Bharat, ICDS and social protection schemes.	 4. STRENGTHEN CONVERGENCE Institutionalise coordination among NRLM, Panchayats, WCD, Police, Health and Legal Services for integrated service delivery.
 5. LOK ADHIKAR KENDRAS ARE EFFECTIVE Over 94% case resolution demonstrates that community-managed legal aid and entitlement centres improve access to justice.	 5. STANDARDISE CASE MANAGEMENT Introduce digital MIS, referral protocols, follow-up systems and quality assurance for Gender Resource Centres and Lok Adhikar Kendras.
 6. LEADERSHIP HAS EXPANDED Women's participation in Gram Sabhas, GPDPs and public institutions has increased significantly.	 6. INVEST IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT Provide advanced mentoring for Elected Women Representatives, SHG leaders and CLF office bearers.
 7. COMMUNITY MEDIATION IS TRUSTED Women prefer resolving disputes through community institutions before approaching formal systems.	 7. STRENGTHEN REFERRAL SYSTEMS Improve linkages with One Stop Centres, Police, Legal Services Authority and Protection Officers for complex GBV cases.
 8. STRUCTURAL BARRIERS PERSIST Alcoholism, unpaid care work, patriarchal norms, limited livelihoods, migration and documentation gaps continue to constrain empowerment.	 8. EXPAND GENDER-RESPONSIVE LIVELIHOODS Promote enterprise development, climate-resilient agriculture, digital literacy and market access for women.
 9. POSITIVE CHANGE FOR GIRLS Improved educational aspirations and declining acceptance of child marriage indicate inter-generational transformation.	 9. INVEST IN ADOLESCENTS Strengthen life-skills education, menstrual health, secondary education retention and career guidance for girls.
 10. SUSTAINABILITY IS EMERGING The transition from CLF-managed NAKs to Panchayat-based Nari Shakti Kendras strengthens long-term institutional sustainability.	 10. SCALE THE MODEL STATEWIDE Embed Gender Resource Centres within NRLM and Panchayat systems with dedicated budgets, monitoring and capacity building for replication.
Towards sustainable, community-led, gender-responsive governance through NRLM institutions.	
EQUALITY JUSTICE EMPOWERMENT COLLECTIVE ACTION	

Conclusion

The thematic analysis demonstrates that women's collectivization constitutes the central pathway through which gender-responsive governance is being strengthened across the study areas. Self-Help Groups have significantly enhanced women's confidence, participation in decision-making, and engagement with public institutions, enabling greater accountability in education, health, and local governance.

At the same time, persistent structural challenges including alcoholism, poverty, seasonal migration, inadequate documentation, geographic isolation, specialist staff shortages, and entrenched socio-cultural norms continue to constrain equitable access to public services. Innovative practices such as the Joint Camp model in Sondwa and the Automatic Transfer Certificate system in Mandla illustrate how local administrative solutions can address systemic barriers effectively. However, the emergence of male resentment towards women's increasing economic and social agency, particularly in Budni, suggests that future interventions should move beyond women-centric programming and incorporate men and boys as active participants in advancing gender equality.

Annexure

1 | SHG Document: Consolidated Findings

THEME	TYPES OF RESPONSES RECEIVED	FREQUENCY / PATTERN
 Gender Awareness	Participants across all regions demonstrate an increasing awareness of gender equality and women's rights, particularly regarding equal treatment and education for daughters. In Bijadandi, gender is increasingly recognized as a socially constructed system. However, traditional patriarchal beliefs—such as son preference for lineage, inheritance rights, work for men, and viewing girls as financial burdens—continue to coexist alongside these changing perceptions.	 Moderate Frequency. Reported as moderate in Bijadandi (14 refs), Budni (6 refs), Khategaon (7 refs), Manawar (6 refs). Reported as Low Frequency in Petlawad (4 refs), Sondwa (3 refs), and Thandla (4 refs).
 Household Norms	This is a dominant theme across all locations. There are significant improvements in girls' education (including MBA/PhD levels in Budni) and shared household decision-making. While younger men are increasingly helping with chores like fetching water, cooking, or childcare (especially during women's menstruation or in the absence of female siblings), domestic responsibilities and caregiving remain primarily viewed as women's work. Traditional practices like 'veiling' (ghoonghat) remain common in some areas.	 High/Very High Frequency. Dominant in all regions: Bijadandi (49 refs), Budni (23 refs), Khategaon (24 refs), Manawar (22 refs), Petlawad (13 refs), Sondwa (11 refs), and Thandla (12 refs).
 Economic Empowerment	SHGs have significantly improved financial independence through savings, bank accounts, and access to credit (loans up to INR 600,000 reported in Budni). Women report greater control over routine expenditures and small purchases. However, ownership of major productive assets like land and housing remains concentrated in men's names, with rare exceptions of land registered in women's names to secure their future or due to government incentives. Persistent wage discrimination in agricultural labor is a major concern.	 High Frequency. Consistently reported as a strong positive development in: Bijadandi (43 refs), Budni (42 refs), Khategaon (23 refs), Manawar (16 refs), Petlawad (10 refs), Sondwa (13 refs), and Thandla (10 refs).
 Political Empowerment	Women report increased participation in Gram Sabha meetings, village planning (GPDP), and local governance. Collective action has enabled women to demand infrastructure like water tanks, drains, and school toilets. However, in some regions like Budni, participation in formal governance remains low, with activity largely limited to SHG meetings. Male family members still restrict participation in some cases.	 Moderate Frequency. High in Bijadandi (31 refs), moderate in Khategaon (9 refs), Manawar (8 refs), Petlawad (6 refs), and Thandla (8 refs). Low Frequency in Budni (3 refs) and Sondwa (4 refs).
 Institutional Support / Public Services	Awareness of institutional mechanisms like Gender Resource Centres and Women's Rights Centres is emerging but inconsistent. Access to Anganwadi and health services is generally satisfactory. However, formal legal and police services are often viewed with distrust, fear, or stigma, and are usually approached only as a last resort or through collective mediation. Administrative barriers and documentation delays hinder service delivery.	 Moderate to Low Frequency. Moderate in Bijadandi (22 refs), Budni (15 refs), and Khategaon (12 refs). Low in Petlawad (4 refs), Sondwa (4–5 refs), and Thandla (1–5 refs).
 SHG Impact	SHGs are consistently described as the primary source of confidence, leadership development, and collective action. They function beyond savings groups, acting as platforms for social support, resolving domestic violence, campaigning against alcoholism, and negotiating with local authorities.	 High Frequency. 21 refs in Bijadandi, 18 in Khategaon, 14 in Manawar. Reported as Moderate in Budni, Sondwa, and Petlawad, and Low in Thandla (3 refs).
 Social Norm Change	Noticeable improvements in mobility, independent travel, and willingness to challenge discrimination and domestic violence. In Budni, participants perceive a decline in domestic violence, though reporting remains difficult due to social stigma. Restrictive practices during menstruation and safety concerns for girls still exist.	 High to Moderate Frequency. High in Bijadandi (26 refs), Budni (18 refs), and Manawar (12 refs). Moderate in Khategaon (10 refs) and Sondwa (7 refs). Low in Petlawad (4 refs) and Thandla (3 refs).
 Challenges	Persistent challenges include alcoholism (a major trigger for violence), domestic violence, water scarcity, unequal asset ownership, heavy domestic workloads (drudgery), and patriarchal norms. Agricultural mechanization is noted in Budni as reducing women's productive farm work. Returning to heavy field work shortly after childbirth is a concern in Sondwa.	 High Frequency. The most frequently discussed theme in many regions: Bijadandi (51 refs), Khategaon (23 refs), Manawar (18 refs), Thandla (10 refs), Budni (18 refs), Petlawad (13 refs), and Sondwa (8 refs). Moderate in Budni (14 refs), Petlawad (5 refs), and Sondwa (8 refs).
 Recommendations	Focus on improving water/sanitation infrastructure (LPG, toilets), expanding livelihood/employment opportunities, strengthening higher education support, and ensuring better implementation of government schemes.	 Low Frequency. 13 refs in Bijadandi, 7 in Budni, 6 in Manawar, 2 in Petlawad, 1 in Sondwa, 3 in Thandla.

VO Document: Consolidated Findings

THEME	TYPES OF RESPONSES RECEIVED	FREQUENCY / PATTERN
 Gender Awareness	Emerging understanding of gender equality through training, though changing attitudes have not yet translated into equal household rights or asset ownership. Traditional patriarchal beliefs remain widespread, including son preference and viewing daughters as financial burdens. In Raipur, there is growing acceptance of equal treatment in education and employment.	 Moderate Frequency. (22 refs in Raipur, 12 in Khategaon, 10 in Sondwa).  Low Frequency in Budni (4 refs) and Thandla (2 refs).
 Household Norms	Most dominant VO theme. Substantial progress in girls' education (up to postgraduate/MBBS levels) and families eating together. However, domestic work (cooking, cleaning, childcare, livestock) remains almost exclusively a female responsibility. Major household decisions, such as asset purchases, continue to be made by men.	 Very High/High Frequency. Dominant in all VOs: Raipur (85 refs), Khategaon (28 refs), Manawar (35 refs), Sondwa (35 refs), Budni (18 refs), and Thandla (8 refs).
 Economic Empowerment	Improved financial inclusion through bank accounts, savings, and SHG/CIF/CCL loans for micro-businesses (grocery shops, poultry, tailoring). Despite these gains, ownership of major productive assets (land, houses) remains overwhelmingly in men's names, leaving women economically vulnerable. Digital banking is often managed by husbands. Social pressure exists to waive land inheritance rights to maintain family ties.	 High/Very High Frequency. (65 refs in Raipur, 28 in Manawar, 22 in Sondwa, 20 in Khategaon, 12 in Budni, 12 in Thandla).
 Political Empowerment	Increasing participation in Gram Sabha, Panchayat meetings, and GPDP planning. Women are more confident in raising community issues (pensions, water pipelines, infrastructure) and interacting with public officials. However, independent leadership remains limited, and implementation of demands is inconsistent.	 Moderate Frequency. (25 refs in Raipur, 14 in Manawar, 12 in Sondwa, 10 in Khategaon).  Low Frequency in Thandla (3 refs).
 Public Services	Recognition of benefits from welfare schemes (maternity benefits, pensions, Ayushman cards). However, access is often constrained by bureaucratic delays, documentation requirements, and implementation gaps.	 Moderate Frequency. (40 refs in Raipur, 12 in Manawar, 6 in Budni, 7 in Thandla).  Low Frequency in Sondwa (6 refs).
 SHG Impact	VOs and SHGs are viewed as transformative platforms for collective solidarity, confidence-building, and social mobilization. They enable women to overcome shyness, travel independently, address domestic violence collectively, and negotiate with community institutions.	 High Frequency. (55 refs in Raipur, 20 in Manawar, 18 in Sondwa, 15 in Khategaon).  Moderate in Budni (5 refs) and  Low in Thandla (2 refs).
 Social Norm Change	Gradual improvements in mobility, acceptance of delayed marriage, and willingness to report violence. Traditional practices like purdah (veiling) remain rigid in some areas (e.g., Chaktala). Restrictions on girls' autonomy and safety concerns still influence family decisions.	 Moderate Frequency. (40 refs in Raipur, 15 in Manawar, 14 in Sondwa, 12 in Khategaon, 6 in Thandla).
 Challenges	Structural barriers include unpaid labor/drudgery, male dominance in decision-making, patriarchal inheritance practices, domestic violence, alcoholism, and lack of property ownership. Fear of girls "eloping" leads to truncated education.	 High/Very High Frequency. (50 refs in Raipur, 32 in Manawar, 30 in Khategaon, 25 in Sondwa, 15 in Budni, 10 in Thandla).

Additional VO Consolidated Pathway Analysis (from Petlawad):

- ◆ **Training:** Moderate to High Frequency (8 refs). Contributes to changing mindsets and gender awareness.
- ◆ **Village Organizations (VOs)/SHGs:** Very High Frequency (20+ refs). Primary platform for collective empowerment.
- ◆ **Government Schemes:** High Frequency (10 refs). Improves income security, despite administrative barriers.
- ◆ **Community Support & Collective Action:** Very High Frequency (15+ refs). Transforms personal problems into collective concerns.

CLF Document: Consolidated Findings

THEME	TYPES OF RESPONSES RECEIVED	FREQUENCY / PATTERN
 Gender Awareness	Recognition of women's rights (education, consent in marriage, autonomy) is increasing. Unique breakthroughs noted, such as daughters performing funeral rites (traditionally a male role). Training has strengthened the understanding of gender as a social construct.	 Moderate to  Low Frequency. (10 refs in Manawar CLF, 2 refs in Swarajni CLF).
 Household Norms	Significant progress in girls' education (MBBS, professional degrees) and improved cooperation from husbands. However, domestic labour remains highly gendered and physically demanding (16–17 hour days). Traditional practices like early marriage and school dropout remain concerns in some communities.	 Very High/High Frequency. (22 refs in Manawar CLF, 12 refs in Swarajni CLF).
 Economic Empowerment	Participation in SHGs/CLFs has improved financial literacy, savings, and control over personal income. CLFs manage large collective funds (over ₹1 crore in Nari Shakti; nearly ₹3 crore in Navshakti). Women take loans for houses, businesses, and vehicles, sometimes registering assets in their own names. However, macro-level ownership of land and productive assets still predominantly rests with men.	 High Frequency. (15 refs in both Swarajni and Manawar CLFs).
 Political Empowerment	Increased participation in Gram Sabha, village planning, and collective advocacy for community infrastructure (e.g., clearing school land with a JCB). Women are confidently presenting community issues and monitoring development programs.	 Moderate Frequency. (7–8 refs in Swarajni and Manawar CLFs).
 SHG / CLF Impact	CLFs serve as the primary catalyst for financial inclusion, leadership, and collective bargaining. They enable women to negotiate with officials, advocate for local development, and resolve social issues collectively.	 High Frequency. (18 refs in Swarajni, 12 in Manawar).
 Public Services / Institutional Support	Collective engagement with Anganwadis, health services, and schools. CLFs have strengthened links with formal institutions like One Stop Centres for legal mediation in domestic violence cases.	 Moderate to  Low Frequency. (9 refs in Swarajni, 3 in Nari Shakti).
 Social Norm Change	Improvements in mobility (riding scooters, independent travel), confidence, and public visibility. Changing gender roles are evident but uneven.	 Moderate–High Frequency. (10 refs in Swarajni, 9 in Manawar).
 Challenges	Persistent challenges include unequal property ownership, patriarchal norms, and economic insecurity. New vulnerabilities identified include child labor ("pick-up parties"), adolescent addiction, and limited employment for educated youth.	 Very High/High Frequency. (25 refs in Manawar CLF, 4 refs in Swarajni CLF).

Nari Shakti CLF Specific Pathway Outcomes (from Petlawad):

- ◆ **Training (3 mentions):** Outcome: Improved gender awareness and confidence to challenge discrimination.
- ◆ **SHG/CLF Platform (4 mentions):** Outcome: Leadership and collective agency; management of large funds.
- ◆ **Financial Inclusion (4 mentions):** Outcome: Improved financial literacy; 60% of women control household money.
- ◆ **Government Schemes (2 mentions):** Outcome: Asset ownership incentives (reduced registration fees for women).
- ◆ **Institutional Support (3 mentions):** Outcome: Access to One Stop Centres for counseling/mediation.
- ◆ **Community Support (5 mentions):** Outcome: Collective social action; domestic violence transformed from a private to a community issue.

2 | Key Informants interviews

Table 1. Common Themes

Theme	Key Finding	Coverage	Important Block-wise Differences
Women's Collectivization	SHGs have improved women's confidence, participation in Gram Sabha, leadership and institutional accountability.	8/8 (100%)	Bijadandi: SHGs monitor schools; Khategaon: men still dominate household finances.
Alcoholism & Domestic Violence	Alcohol abuse is the principal trigger of domestic violence and family conflict.	8/8 (100%)	Thandla reported alcohol consumption among both men and women before conflicts.
Institutional Deliveries	Institutional delivery has become nearly universal through 108 ambulance services, JSY and ASHA workers.	7/8 (87.5%)	Bijadandi reported zero maternal deaths; Khategaon reported delays from private hospitals.
Inter-departmental Convergence	Block Gender Forums exist but implementation is inconsistent.	6/8 (75%)	Sondwa organised a 12-day Joint Camp; meetings were irregular in Thandla .
Adolescent Gender Awareness	Schools and hostels have become the major platforms for Good Touch-Bad Touch, menstrual hygiene and life skills education.	6/8 (75%)	Khategaon uses peer educators; Petlawad conducts fortnightly counselling sessions.

Table 2. Emerging Themes

Theme	Key Finding	Coverage	Important Block-wise Differences
Educational Retention	Dropout increases after Class VIII due to poverty, migration, early marriage and distance.	5/8 (62.5%)	Mandla uses Automatic TC Transfer; Khategaon reports school consolidation as a barrier.
Identity Documentation	Aadhaar and Samagra documentation continue to restrict access to health and education services.	4/8 (50%)	Sondwa reports migration-related documentation gaps.
Anaemia & Malnutrition	High anaemia persists despite supplementation programmes.	5/8 (62.5%)	Budni reports poor compliance due to side effects; Manawar recorded high NRC admissions.
Police Response	Police generally prioritize counselling before filing FIRs.	4/8 (50%)	Petlawad combines counselling with short-term detention to deter repeat offenders.

Table 3. Unique Findings

 Theme	 Block(s)	 Significance
Educational Success & Social Mobility	Mandla, Sondwa	Students have entered medical services, police services and state-level sports.
Informal Payments in Maternal Care	Petlawad	Reports of unofficial payments during institutional deliveries.
Geographic Isolation	Sondwa	Remote villages require boat transport for access to schools and health facilities.
Specialist Staff Shortages	Manawar, Mandla	Lack of gynaecologists and paediatricians at block facilities.
Superstition	Khategaon	Belief in witchcraft and supernatural causes delays institutional healthcare.

Table 4. Cross-cutting Insights

 Dimension	 Key Observation	 Policy Implication
Primary Driver of Change	Women's collectives have strengthened institutional accountability and women's agency.	Continue strengthening SHGs and federations as governance institutions.
Major Structural Barrier	Alcoholism, poverty, migration, and socio-cultural norms continue to undermine service outcomes.	Integrate social behaviour change and livelihood interventions with existing schemes.
Best Practice	Sondwa's 12-day Joint Camp effectively addressed documentation and service delivery gaps.	Replicate integrated convergence camps in other blocks.
Administrative Innovation	Automatic TC Transfer in Mandla reduced school dropouts.	Scale the system across districts.

3 | The methodologies for tracking of changes can be through focussed group discussions and individual case studies.

Focussed Group Discussions

1) Discussions can be held with-

- ◆ Cadres
- ◆ CLF OB and SAC
- ◆ VO OB and SAC
- ◆ GPPs
- ◆ SHG members
- ◆ Anganwadi workers, school principal, ANM at panchayat level

2) Key Informants interviews

- ◆ BDO
- ◆ CEO – Block Parishad
- ◆ Police
- ◆ WCD official, education official, health official

3) Interviews

- ◆ Women leaders



1 | Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

Assessment of Gender Understanding, Internalisation, and Institutional Responsiveness

Participants:

- ◆ Cadres (GPPs, Community Resource Persons)
- ◆ CLF Office Bearers (OB) and Social Action Committee (SAC) Members
- ◆ VO Office Bearers (OB) and SAC Members
- ◆ SHG Members

Section 1: Conceptual Understanding of Gender Issues

1. What do you understand by the term gender discrimination?
 - How does it reflect in different spaces of our lives (home, work, community, institutions)?
2. Do you think there are gender inequalities in the socialisation process?
 - Can you give examples from family, school, or community?
3. Are there gender inequalities in access to resources, assets, and opportunities (education, income, land, employment)?
 - How do these affect women and men differently?

Section 2: Internalisation – Improved Access to Entitlements and Resources

1. Have you or your group members been able to access entitlements and schemes more effectively after gender training?
 - How did gender training help build confidence to approach public systems and institutions?
2. Has your access to livelihood opportunities and income improved?
 - Are you able to negotiate within families for control over income?
 - Have you accessed any improved livelihood options or tools that reduce drudgery?
3. Has gender training helped you gain resources within families or community resources (like water, land, or forest)?
 - Can you share any examples of such access?

Section 3: Addressing Discrimination and Violence

1. Have the trainings helped you to understand Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and its different forms (physical, emotional, economic, sexual)?
2. How does violence impact women and girls in your community?
3. What are the legal redressal mechanisms you are aware of (Protection Officer, One Stop Centre, Police, DLSA, etc.)?
4. Do women in your area seek legal redressal?
 - What strategies or support systems help them do so?
 - What challenges do they face in the process?

Section 4: Community Level – Collective Action and Enhanced Agency

1. Do you feel confident to raise your voice and engage with public systems for your rights and entitlements?
2. Has gender training equipped you to participate actively in Gram Sabha, Village Poverty Reduction Planning, and GPDP processes?
3. Do you feel confident to discuss gender issues within SHG, VO, and CLF meetings?
4. Has your decision-making ability increased in claiming entitlements, services, and schemes?

Section 5: Enhanced Mobility and System Interface

1. Has your mobility increased after training?
 - Are you able to visit public places and government offices?
2. Can you travel and make decisions independently?
3. Are you able to interact with officials and negotiate for your requirements?
4. Do you visit panchayat offices or other institutions to demand entitlements and services?



Section 6: System Level – Gender Responsive Systems

A. Panchayat and Block Level Systems

1. Have the Gender Forum / Gender Panchayat Coordination Committee been responsive to the needs of SHGs, VOs, and CLFs?
 - Have they helped in resolving gender-related issues?
2. Are you treated in a gender-sensitive manner by frontline workers and stakeholders?
3. Are there regularity and ease in accessing schemes and entitlements at the panchayat or block level?

Section 7: Core Levers of Change

Family / Individual Level

1. What were the most important factors that enabled women to gain greater voice and decision-making power within the family?
2. How did SHG membership and financial inclusion (savings, credit, bank linkage) act as levers in shifting household attitudes and practices?
3. What role did training, exposure, or NRLM support play in building women's confidence and family acceptance of their public roles?
4. How did access to government schemes or cash transfers strengthen women's position within the household?

Community Level

1. How did SHGs, CLFs, and federations function as levers to increase women's mobility, visibility, and collective agency in the community?
2. What role did collective platforms and peer support play in enabling women to challenge social norms and act together?
3. How did women's collectives facilitate improved access to government programmes and services at the community level?
4. Which community-level factors most enabled the transition from individual empowerment to collective and normative change?

System / Institutional Level

1. How did institutional coordination mechanisms (Gram Panchayat and Block Panchayat Coordination Committees, VHND, etc.) act as levers for convergence and improved service delivery?
2. In what ways did women's collectives gain recognition and legitimacy within local governance systems?
3. How did women's participation in GPDP processes serve as a lever to influence planning priorities and resource allocation?
4. What system-level enablers were most critical in moving from participation to influence and accountability?

B. Departmental Support to Community-Based Institutions

1. Are departments supporting CBOs in accessing services and entitlements?
2. Do departments or officials provide legal or hand-holding support for grievance redressal?
3. Are cases being registered and are women provided with free legal aid when required?
4. What are the challenges faced in redressal of gender-based issues at the system level?

Key Informants interviews

- ◆ BDO
- ◆ CEO – Block Parishad
- ◆ Police
- ◆ WCD official, education official, health official

Key Informant Interview Guide

Respondents:

- ◆ Block Development Officer (BDO)
- ◆ Chief Executive Officer, Block Parishad
- ◆ Police Representative (preferably Women's Cell or Community Policing Unit)
- ◆ Women & Child Development (WCD) Official
- ◆ Education Department Official
- ◆ Health Department Official

Section 1: Awareness and Understanding

1. Are you aware of the institutional mechanisms created under NRLM for addressing gender issues (such as Gender Forums, Gender Points Persons, SHG/VO/CLF Social Action Committees)?
 - If yes, how do these mechanisms function in your block?
 - What kind of cases or gender-related issues have been reported or discussed through these platforms?

Section 2: Coordination and Support

2. What kinds of gender issues have been identified and resolved with the help of NRLM structures or community institutions?
 - Can you share examples of cases where convergence between your department and NRLM/CLF/VOs helped resolve gender-related problems?
 - What types of support or linkages are extended from your department or the Panchayat/block administration to these mechanisms?

Section 3: Existing Gender Issues and Redressal Mechanisms

3. What are the major gender issues faced by women and girls in this block (e.g., domestic violence, mobility restrictions, access to education, early marriage, workplace discrimination, access to entitlements)?

- What are the available redressal mechanisms at block and panchayat levels (such as One Stop Centres, Police Helpline, Mahila Thana, Women's Helpline, Social Action Committees, etc.)?
- How effective are these mechanisms in ensuring justice and support?

Section 4: Challenges and Recommendations

4. What are the challenges in addressing gender issues through the present mechanisms?

- Are there gaps in coordination, capacity, or awareness among community institutions and departments?
- What kind of additional measures or support would help improve gender issue redressal and inter-departmental convergence?

Interviews

Personal Experience with Gender Issues

1. What were the gender issues you have faced in your life?

(Probe for: discrimination at home, workplace, community; mobility restrictions; violence; access to education, health, or property.)

2. How was the issue resolved?

(Probe for: personal efforts, family or community intervention, SHG/VO/CLF involvement, formal complaint, etc.)

Institutional Support and Mechanisms

3. Which institutional mechanisms supported you in addressing these issues?

Examples: SHG, VO, CLF, Gender Point Person, SAC, Panchayat, police, One Stop Centre, helplines, etc.)

4. In what ways did these institutions or mechanisms support you?

(Probe for: counselling, mediation, financial or legal assistance, access to entitlements, social support, awareness building.)

Section: Continuing Challenges and Changes

5. What challenges are you still experiencing now?

(Probe for: continued discrimination, lack of livelihood, stigma, weak institutional response, etc.)

6. What major changes have you experienced as a result of these interventions or your own efforts?

(Probe for: normative changes—attitude shifts; access and control over resources; participation in decision-making; confidence and mobility.)

