

# Odyssey



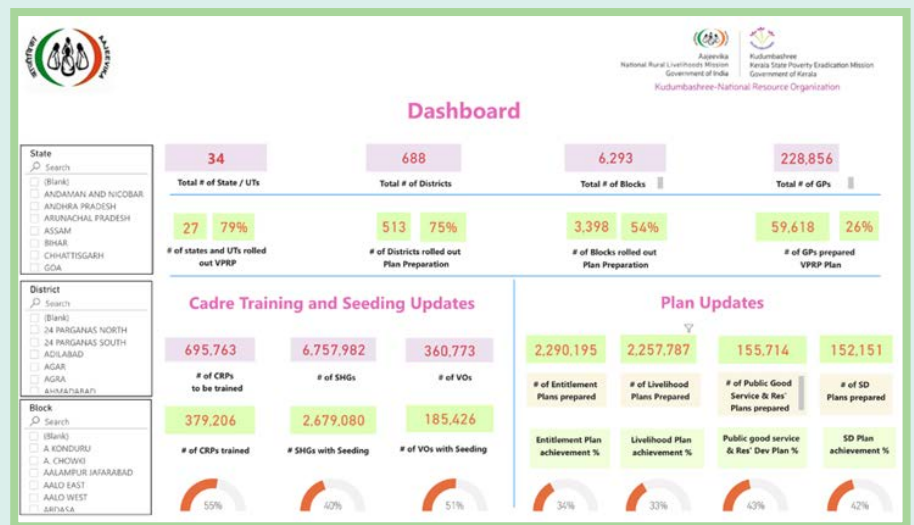
Newsletter of PRI-CBO Convergence Project  
Kudumbashree NRO

## Village Poverty Reduction Plan

Gram Panchayats are the grassroots level institutions promoting democratic decentralization across the country. With the additional transfer of money with the introduction of the 14th Finance Commission, Gram Panchayats were mandated to prepare Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) to address issues regarding local economic development and social justice. The primary objective of GPDP has been to enable and engage the community in participatory planning and decision making. It also aims at intensifying public service delivery mechanisms in local areas.

Placing due importance on the role that the community can play in strengthening the planning process, the PRI – CBO Convergence project devised a tool “Gram Panchayat Poverty Reduction Plan” (GP2RP) in the year 2015. GP2RP is a comprehensive community based demand plan prepared by the SHG network aiming to work toward local development. The major objective was to also integrate the demands under GP2RP with the larger development plan of the Panchayat- GPDP. GP2RP was piloted in the states where the PRI – CBO Convergence project was ongoing. Realising the significance of participation of community in GPDP, Ministry of Panchayati Raj issued letter to states mandating Gram Panchayats to promote participation of SHG network, the largest community network, in preparation of GPDP. Subsequently, a letter was issued on 7th September 2018 by the Ministry of Rural Development mandating the State Rural Livelihood Missions to ensure the SHG demand plans are prepared and presented at the Gram Sabha. Hence, the National Rural Livelihood Mission prepared a Poverty Reduction Plan template referring to the GP2RP format prepared by NRO.

In the year 2019, NRLM institutionalised the role of SHGs in preparing Poverty Reduction Plans and consequently it was named as the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP). The GP2RP plans in states where NRO had intervened, were integrated to the GPDP and were materialised as well. Therefore, in the



As of March 2021, the progress stands as such:

year 2020, NRLM partnered with Kudumbashree NRO to develop a rather intensive and systematic approach to roll out VPRP across 34 State /UTs so that the plans in these many states are also integrated to GPDP. VPRP had components that largely centred around the themes of Entitlement, Livelihood, Public Goods, services and Resource development and Social Development.

During the time period of August to September 2020, NRO trained 12,000 SRLM officials on VPRP through the online platform – Zoom. Each state was given an intensive training of 6 hours that spanned across two days. Compiling the experiences of rolling out GP2RP in nine states across the country, NRO introduced a new set

of formats, training modules, Powerpoint presentations in both Hindi and English as an aid for the states to train their community resource persons. The team also developed a handbook on VPRP and a Training of Trainers

(ToT) module which could be further used to train the resource persons. In order to smoothen the process on field, video tutorials on format filling, graphic illustrations in the form of posters and videos were also prepared and published on YouTube. So as to capture the progress of VPRP on field, the team also conceptualised and launched an application and Dashboard to monitor and visualise the status of activities on field.

# INNOVATIVE ACTIVITIES

As a part of VPRP follow up 2020-21

## 82



### Health Camps

Concerns around Health emerged as a significant issue in this year's VPRP across all the 4 states. In order to address this, a total of 82 health camps were organized in Assam, UP, Manipur and Mizoram in convergence with the Health and Family Welfare Department of the concerned state. The camps majorly dealt with general body check-ups, special eye camps, information and awareness on diseases, menstrual and female health, HIV and COVID-19 awareness etc. In addition to this, treatment was also administered in several cases and Ayushman Bharat Health Cards as well as AAA (Atal Amrit Abhiyan) Health Cards were distributed in few of these camps

## 66



### Job Card Melas

One of the most significant platforms and avenues of convergence for this project is through MGNREGA which has mandated the Gram Panchayats to be the primary implementing agency for the scheme. Recognizing the potential for synergy between Panchayat and the SHG federation when it comes to the implementation of MGNREGA, the project organized 66 Job Card Melas in which job cards were directly distributed to the beneficiaries. This led to a greater involvement of both the Panchayat, and the community in facilitating the generation of rural jobs.

## 161



### Agriculture Camps

Agriculture Camps include Kitchen Garden training, the distribution of seeds, spray machines, fertilizers, solar dryers etc., training on the kind of crops to be grown, the pattern for them to be grown, mushroom cultivation, agriculture awareness sessions etc. These camps in Assam, UP and Manipur have largely been organized as a response to the demands for agriculture training and related services in the Livelihood section of VPRP. The training and distribution of entitlements such as seeds, spray machines etc. have helped women augment their agricultural practices. Agriculture and Horticulture departments have been highly supportive in conducting such camps. Institutes like Krishi Vigyan Kendra and Agricultural Technology Management Agency have also played an important role in facilitating technical training sessions.

## 5001



### Adult Literacy Classes

Literacy is a crucial prerequisite for the independence of women in so far as it reduces both their dependency as well as their helplessness. Recognizing this, the project took on the mandate of organizing adult literacy classes for women. Currently more than 5,000 rural women are enrolled in such classes and are learning how to read and write. The local bodies have been highly appreciative of the efforts taken by the SHG members in enrolling these beneficiaries for such classes. As a result of the efforts, few local bodies have also sponsored books, pencils and slates for motivating the beneficiaries.

## 77



### Veterinary Camps

As part of the follow-up to the Livelihood demands that emerged in the VPRP, 77 veterinary camps were held across all the 4 states. The activities in the camps ranged from the vaccination of goats and cows to the treatment of injured animals, to the training on animal husbandry and rearing, information and awareness camps on Sea Fish Processing, livestock, apiculture etc. Further, these camps also facilitated the insurance of domestic animals. The activities have been conducted in convergence with Animal Husbandry and Veterinary services Department as well as institutes like Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETI) have also provided technical support in facilitating training sessions.

## 80



### Awareness Camps

Dowry, domestic violence, Malnutrition, alcoholism and drug abuse, adolescent girls' health, plastic ban and environmental damage- emerged as some of the many prominent concerns raised by communities in the Social Development Plan component of the VPRP across all the four states. Consequently, several legal awareness and informational camps were organized on the identified issues in convergence with District Legal Service Authority, Local NGOs, Police Department, Health Department, Child welfare Department and Women and Child Development Department. This included immersive experiences like Streetplays, dramas, talks by district lawyers, speeches by representatives from NGOs, rallies, setting up nutri gardens in schools, Kitchen gardens at household level etc.

## 33



### Re Enrolment of School Dropouts

Tens of thousands of children drop out from school every year to help contribute wages to their families and lose their childhood early on. This emerged as a significant issue in Assam, as the VPRP data revealed. If anything, the pandemic and the ensuing lockdown, made the situation worse for these children. In order to tackle this, the project has, with the help of the community, enabled over a 33 children in Assam to rejoin school.

## 16



### Weekly Markets

The lack of access to markets remains commonplace in Uttar Pradesh and was brought to the fore by SHG women, who demanded more of such markets. 16 Weekly Markets have been inaugurated in Uttar Pradesh as part of the project to cater to the demands of the SHG women. For several of these women, the inauguration of the markets has led to an ease in accessing goods, while for others it has become a platform to generate sales and revenue by setting shop.

# Fostering Creative Learning through Collaborative Convergence

- Harshita Jha  
Field Coordinator, Assam

Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) is a community demand plan prepared by the SHG network which can be further integrated into the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). Village Poverty Reduction Plan 2020-21 in the Convergence Gram Panchayats

Disability to be enrolled in either neighbourhood schools or special schools and clearly defines the right to inclusive education. However, when 68 SHG households were identified with children with disability and many among them were not attending regular schools it highlighted the lack of



(GP)s in Assam was focused mainly on basic infrastructure and resource development along with a few Social Development Plan proposals. The process of mapping basic infrastructure and resources took place in all the Village Organizations during the month of October and November in the year 2019. At least two members from each SHG participated in the mapping process.

During the data collection process of school dropout students, the LRGs and Social action Committee members of CLF identified that in Gamerai GP there are 68 SHG households which had persons with disability. Within the various difficulties, access to education was felt like one of the serious problems affecting the children/persons with disability. As part of the infrastructure mapping process in Kankalata Village Organization, the SHG members identified the lack of infrastructure facilities in the school for children with disability.

As per the results of the 76th round of the National Sample Survey 2018, 48.8 percent of persons with disabilities are literate and only 62.9 percent of those aged between 3 to 35 years have ever been enrolled in a regular school. The report also highlighted extremely low retention rates for Children with Disability with only 23.1 percent of enrolled children currently attending schools. The RTE Act provides for the enrollment of Children with Disability in neighbourhood schools and for children with severe disabilities the option of home-based education. The Right to Persons With Disability Act, 2016 on the other hand recognises the choice of Children with

*"I would always blame my fate and thought that I must have done something wrong that my child is being punished with so much difficulties in life. But my fellow SHG members told me it's just not me, and there are so many other families where the children were born with some or the other disability. From that day I decided I would not blame my fate or myself but will work together with the SHG members and LRGs to work towards the realisation of a school. The school has given me hope for a better future for my Child. Meeting with other parents of children with disability also made me realize that I am not alone and now we share our worries with each other"*

-Purnima Khatiora, member of Triveni VO

implementation of the existing policy frameworks in place. Children with Disability for the most part remain excluded from the educational system and rarely progress beyond primary education. Lack of teachers' training on how to support Children with Disabilities, teachers often find themselves unprepared for teaching Children with Disabilities and lack the support and infrastructure for inclusive education. This further marginalises Children with Disabilities from the learning process. Through VPRP, the SHG network put forward the demand of a school accessible to children with different disabilities in Gamerai GP.

During the VPRP training where the LRGs and SHG members were trained on the GPDP process, it was understood that GPDP is a participatory developmental plan made by GPs to cater to the immediate problems of the community. The SHG network decided to conduct a consultative meeting with the panchayat and negotiate for the demand for a creative learning school. The LRGs

tried convincing the GP officials by highlighting the importance of both VPRP being a community led plan and the objectives of making a GPDP. With Various Negotiations with the Gram Panchayat and the management committee of the school, and consistent efforts by PRI-CBO convergence project team in Bishwanath, a school for children with disability has been set up in the Gamerai Panchayat in an old building of the high school which was no longer in use. Based on the BUDS model of Kudumbashree, necessary arrangements are under process to make this learning and recreation centre accessible for children with disability.

On 23rd Feb 2021, the creative learning school/recreation centre was inaugurated by the MLA of Gohpur, Shri. Utpal Borah. He has also committed a financial aid of Rs.25,000 towards the functioning of the school. Parents and relatives of people with disabilities attended the inauguration programme along with SHG members. The school is going to function with the support of the elected representatives of the Gamerai Gram Panchayat and the VOCC members. In the coming days, a teacher cum caretaker will be appointed who will be given an honorarium by the panchayat. Efforts are being put to provide vocational training for people with disability who are above the age of 20 within the school premises.

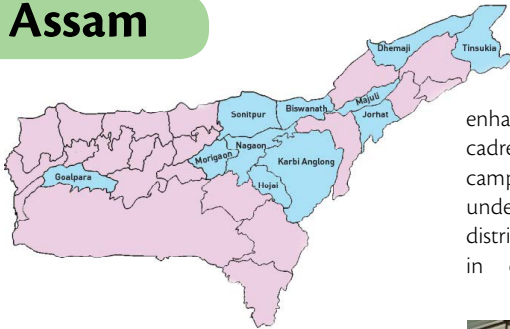
This exemplary initiative at the panchayat level has only been possible because of community participation in the planning process. It is only through participatory planning that we can achieve community felt needs and demands in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

*"In Gamerai GP the number of people with disability is very high compared to the other GPs. I don't know the reason behind it. But I used to always feel that something should be done for them but never knew how any assistance could be provided through the Panchayat. I am really thankful that the VPRP process could bring this demand out. I don't think there is any panchayat in any other part of Assam which has taken up such an initiative. I am very proud that I could be part of this process of inclusive development and it was only possible because of our SHG members"*

- Som Prasad Sarmah (Gamerai GP President)

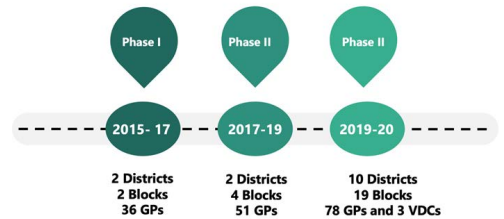
# Updates from the States

## Assam



enhancing the skill set of the local cadre. Agriculture camps, Veterinary camps, enrolment of beneficiaries under Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, distribution of yarn pass book in convergence with Handloom

### ROADMAP OF THE PROJECT IN ASSAM



The partnership between Kudumbashree NRO and Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission can be traced back to 2014 when the MoU was signed for the first phase across two Blocks in two Districts of Assam. Over the years, PRI – CBO Convergence project has flourished and expanded itself to 12 Districts of Assam. The major activities that have been ongoing in the field have been with respect to capacity building of the CBO network through various activities, strengthening the PRI body through constant engagements with the CBO network, converging with various line departments and



department, Labour card in convergence with Labour department are a few noteworthy convergence activities. Apart from the above mentioned activities, preparation of the VPRP in a participatory mode has been the focus of the year 2020. The project will undergo the fourth phase of expansion in the year 2021-22. The expansion is to 15 blocks of 6 Districts and the current 16 blocks will be saturated.



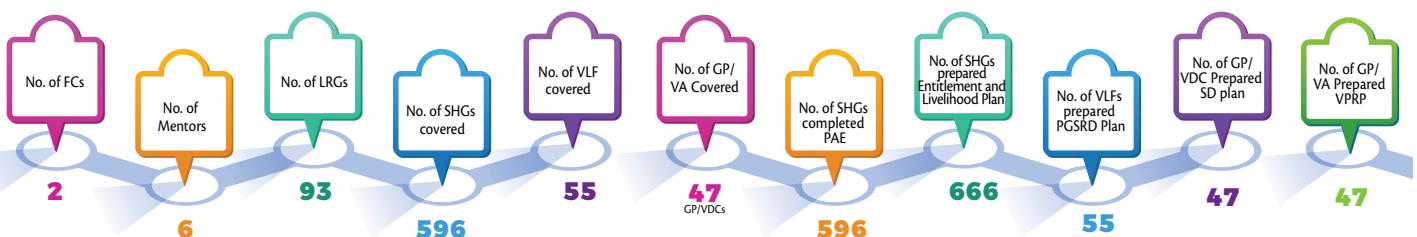
## Manipur



The PRI – CBO convergence project has been ongoing in 2 Blocks of Manipur since February 2018. Post the entry activity of Livelihood mapping and creation of database of the same, the focus of the project has been to converge with various line departments to ensure that the community receives the necessary support. Mushroom cultivation training by KVK, group farming and vegetable cultivation has been the highlight of the same. The project had also taken initiatives to orient the Village Authority members to prepare the first ever Village Development Plan of their village. The preparation of the VPRP and its integration with the GDPD has happened quite actively this year with the support of the VAs after they were oriented. Apart from this, follow up of Social Development Plans such as opening up tuition federation centers under the leadership of Village Level Federation (VLF), collection of plastic waste so as to work towards a plastic free Gram Panchayat has been notable achievements. As a result of all the hard work, Manipur State Rural Livelihood Mission has expanded the project to 38 GPs and 86 VAs of Two Blocks (One valley and



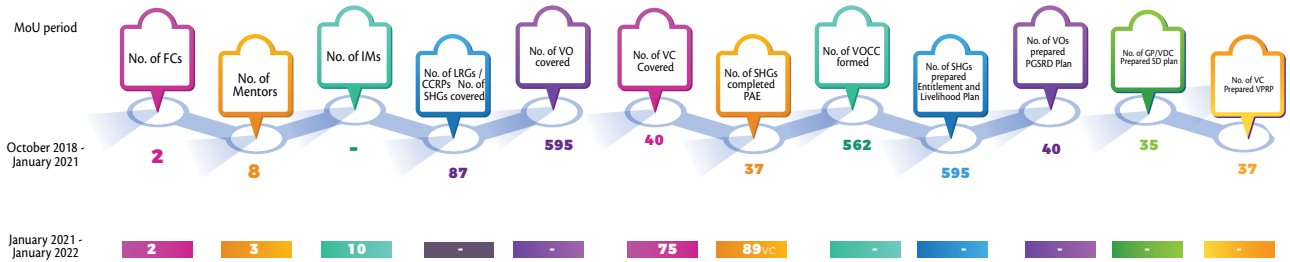
one hill block) across two Districts in addition to the saturation of current Two Blocks. The second phase of the project will also have the Internal Mentors playing the lead role in expansion. 18 Internal Mentors have been selected for the same.



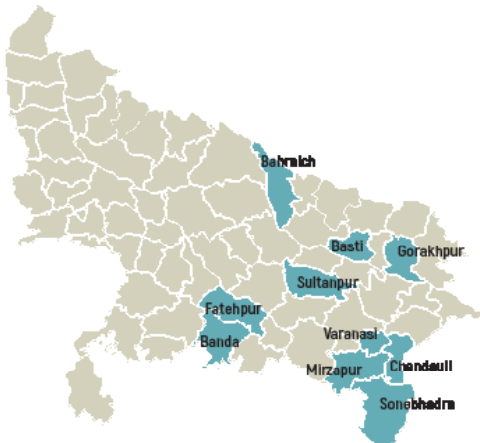
# Mizoram



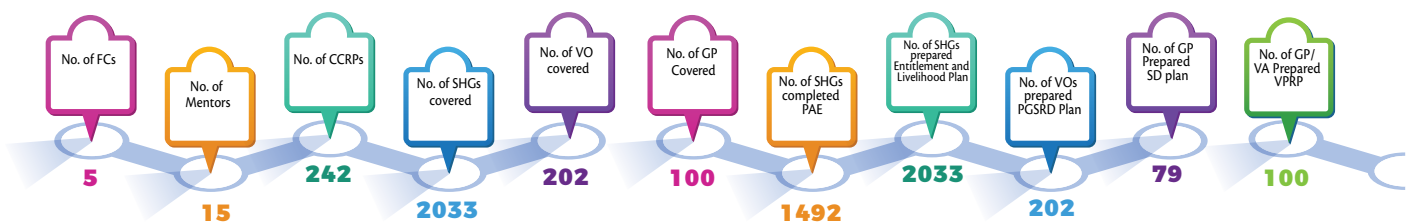
Mizoram State Rural Livelihood Mission (MzSRLM) entered into a partnership with Kudumbashree NRO in October 2018. The major activities that have been carried out in the state are the capacity building of the CBO network, orienting Village Council Presidents, converging with line departments and liaising with Civil Society Organisations. Golden Card camp and follow up of social development plans such as Alcoholism and Drug abuse have been significant achievements. The preparation, presentation and submission of VPRP has been duly conducted in Mizoram with the unwavering support of Village Councils. The project will also ensure the creation of Village Organisation Coordination Committees in Mizoram to carry forward the convergence activities in the current villages. MzSRLM will scale up to 89 Villages of three blocks in Mamit District in addition to saturation of villages in the current Blocks. The scale up workshop and BMM orientation for the new phase has been completed. 10 Internal Mentors have been selected and trained to carry out the activities in the new Blocks.



# Uttar Pradesh



Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission (UPSRLM) has been in partnership with Kudumbashree NRO since September 2018 and has implemented the project in 10 Blocks of 10 Districts in Uttar Pradesh. The initial period of this project focused on strengthening the CBO network in the form of Empowerment festivals, identification and training of local cadre and orienting PRI members. The participatory activities of PAE and EAP have been conducted in UP. The focus area currently has been regarding achievement of entitlements by conducting Job Card Melas, Ayushman Bharat card mela, distribution of disability certificates and the inauguration and conduct of literacy classes. In addition to these, the project has majorly focused on setting up weekly markets by the SHG network as a way to enhance their livelihood activities. Preparation of VPRP and follow up activities have been ongoing, creating avenues for convergence with various line departments like the health department and agriculture department. UPSRLM has decided to expand the project to 400 GPs across 30 Blocks in 20 Districts of Uttar Pradesh.



## Mentors' Memoir

### - Mini Varghese, Mentor East Lungdar, Serchhip, Mizoram

Mizoram winter is very beautiful - blue hills fully covered with white clouds and snow. I could experience the cold, quiet and calm mornings while looking at these beautiful scenes through my window. It was in February - the project was going on smoothly in all 12 villages of Mizoram when we heard of the outbreak of Corona (the new virus in China). The thing I understood is that it's a virus, not bacteria, hence, we have to approach it very carefully as it doesn't have medicine. It could be easily spread in Mizoram as two of our villages share the border with Burma and there is a lot of movement across the border owing to people using Chinese products, coming through Burma, especially electronics, textiles and toys. Just after hearing the outbreak of the virus, the villages closed their borders and arranged check posts to ensure that there is no movement across the border.

Amidst all this tension, we scheduled our travel to Kerala via a flight on 26th March. Overhearing



the news of the possibility of lockdown, we rebooked our tickets to 24th March. All of us reached Serchhip on 22nd March itself. With the special permission of the deputy commissioner, we arranged a vehicle to reach the airport on 24th March. We planned to start from Serchhip at around 3.30 am. Unfortunately, we got the message from airlines just before starting from

Serchhip that all the flights have been cancelled. Thus we were really locked and shocked.

We, five mentors and one girl from Bikaner were locked in one house at Serchhip, where we were not familiar with the neighbourhood which looked at us suspiciously. Thankfully, the Village level Task Force (VLTF) came to rescue in every village with the leadership of the Village Council/Court. BDO made sure that we were getting essential groceries through VLTF. It was difficult to get vegetables so we were bound to learn how to make sambar only with papaya. It goes well with rice and pickle! The First 3-4 days were difficult - We couldn't adjust to each other, we 6 have 7 habits and it automatically created some issues. Sometimes the noise inside the house used to be heard beyond the walls. At that moment I felt that Corona was not a challenge but making compromises and adjusting with my friends was the real challenge. NRO created one WhatsApp group - "21 days challenge" for Mizoram and Manipur team. They used to share some videos and quiz programs which motivated us and lightened our mood. After some days, all of us were convinced that we have to adjust and compromise with the situation.

We started the countdown for 21 days but it got extended before getting over. According to Modiji, we were really in "Jaha ho, Vahi raho" situation. There was a time when we lost the hope to meet our family. To make the situation and days more humorous and funny, we started following Cookery shows which helped us cook with available ingredients, dancing to Bipasha's dance routine in the morning, increasing beauty, making parody songs, singing and recording funny videos and playing exciting games. We used to engage ourselves in different activities every day to overcome the situation. Our Program Manager helped us in this critical situation by transferring some money to our accounts. We celebrated



Vishu with the Vishukkani feast, and Easter by making Kannur biryani. We even celebrated the birthdays of our family members. We stayed in Serchhip for 42 days.

When local travel was resumed, we reached our respective villages. I felt alone after reaching East Lungdar. I missed those lockdown days at Serchhip when we were staying together. I couldn't go out of the room. It used to rain - nice and calm rain just like white threads which touch our hearts. I have always found Mizoram rains more attractive. I couldn't see my surroundings because of fog. I felt depressed and alone in this world. I felt dull since there wasn't much work to engage myself with. I lost interest in cooking food, eating, bathing and using the phone. I understood that I was going into depression. Then I sought help from the doctor and shared my problems. I regained my confidence and gradually overcame the situation. During this period, we booked our tickets thrice but always got cancelled. Finally, on the 4th of June, we reached our home after the 72 days challenge! We were again in quarantine for 14 days.

Now we are ready to celebrate the 1st anniversary of the Serchhip lockdown! It feels like a dream even though we haven't moved past the pandemic yet. I always remember to thank the NRO team, Serchhip BDO, VLTF, colleagues, doctor and family who helped to overcome the critical situation.

### - Ambili Babu, Mentor Baktawng, Serchhip, Mizoram

I am currently working as a Kudumbashree NRO mentor in the beautiful hill state of Mizoram. On Wednesday morning, the small hill state of Mizoram reported its first Covid'19 case - 50 years old pastor who recently came back from Assam had tested positive. It was then that I got to know about the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world. Sensing the uncertainty and chaos, we all wanted to hurry home as soon as possible. The first ticket was booked for 24th March 2020 and everyone in the block gathered the day before that. We got



the news around 12am that the airport had been closed. We were tensed and in distress over the spread of the Covid-19 virus. With the permission of BDO, 5 mentors stayed in the SVEP project mentor's room. Meanwhile, all the help was provided by BDO and SPC as we didn't have permission to go out of the room. So we were in lockdown for two months in Serchhip! A girl who came from Rajasthan for a Handloom visit, stayed with us till we went back to Kerala. To us, she was like Elizabeth, SPC Assam. We also made a photo comparison of both of them for the 21 days challenge!

During the 21 days lockdown announced by Hon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the powerful local community organizations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA) stepped in with their members to help in the time of crisis. There were also District wise task forces headed by the District's Deputy Commissioner. There were volunteers

from different NGOs, who were involved in checking the Inner line permit to single out undocumented outsiders in the state. They used to provide us with information some times and shared that “the pandemic is very dangerous; if we are not involved, nobody can control the people.”



Both Manipur and Mizoram teams were locked down in the State. At that time NRO started a WhatsApp group for us. The group proved to be quite useful and funny! Everybody used to share their daily activities in the group, including new recipes, programs, songs, ‘Thiruvathira’, calendar making, beauty techniques, morning exercise routine and fun games for children. NRO also organized a competition program between the two states and both the times our state team won, which was an inspiration to us, it also helped to change the tension of the mind.

At that time, we celebrated the Vishu festival with BDO, SPC and FC. We prepared Vishukanni feast from locally available fruits, vegetables and Mizoram flowers. We shared sweets with everyone and talked about the importance of Vishu festival. We also celebrated Easter after that. On May 5th, everyone went back to their villages, a month later we all arrived in Kerala on June 3rd. The lockdown time gave me so many unforgettable



memories. We are grateful to have got all the help we needed from MZSRLM and BMMU.

## A trip down the lane “VPRP Virtual Training”

- Benazir Navaz

Thematic Anchor, Capacity Building

As I catch yet another flight today, I take a look at my phone gallery and tell myself that I have almost 13000 photos in my “WhatsApp photos” section of the gallery and a good 3 hours to delete most of it. Looking back at the year 2020, a lot of memories flash by. It has definitely been a roller coaster ride. Beginning from the CAA protests to the roll out of the VPRP in the field, it has been one interesting journey.

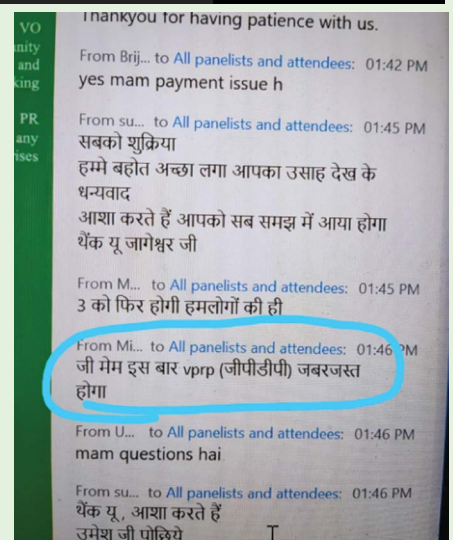
As I scroll down, looking at one photo after the other, I come across the photos of online meetings from the time that the 10 of us had worked on, for the VPRP National level training phase. “VPRP Virtual Training” was the name of our WhatsApp group. We had spent hours discussing various things on this group. But, the highlight would always be how the ten of us racked our brains to come up with names of SHG members belonging to five different SHGs in order to prepare the prototype of a VPRP plan. Anoocha had just asked suggestions for a few names and the name of a Gram Panchayat. Mala, Radha, Parboti, Champa, Chameli, Gudia and all the generic names had come from all of us. We soon realised that we were not diverse enough with our suggestions and then Sohini researched quite a lot to create a list of names- starting from Seema Biswas to Parmina Begum to Shilpi Das to Sindhu John to Charulata



Hansda. We adopted the name “Fulera” to be our Gram Panchayat and all of these Didi’s were our SHG members.

We used to meet on a daily basis and each of us became so accustomed to the other person’s routine and background. We all felt odd whenever we couldn’t see the heart shaped strings behind Elizabeth or the book rack behind Deepshika during video calls. We knew that evening teas for Akanksha meant an accompaniment of Singra or churra. Simi had to row on a small boat to catch the network to attend the meetings.

In a span of one and a half months, we became this close knit family who would come together under the same roof as and when the PM called for the meeting. Being located in various parts of the country, it was not easy preparing the materials. Manu Sir had to manage this diverse group sitting in the capital of Kerala. Akanksha being in Bihar had to coordinate with Madhulika and Subha who were in UP and Mussoorie respectively to receive the format to record voice over videos to be published on YouTube. Jhanvi, Harshita and Raj had to write literal Hindi translations of the format. Benazir, being in Kerala had to coordinate with Anoocha, based at the other



extreme of Kerala and with Deepshika, who was in Assam, to prepare the Handbook and ToT module for the training. At the end of one and half months, we had our final set of formats, Voice over videos, Handbook (in both English and Hindi), stakeholders’ experience sharing videos, ToT module, responsibility matrix and an MIS application. Gargi and Madhulika went

the extra mile to coordinate with “Momotai”, a budding illustrator to recreate Roshni Didi (an SHG member), who’d give tips and tricks to prepare a comprehensive VPRP.

We never knew that Online training could be so much fun until it happened. And, it was not a small task managing a crowd of 800-900 participants online with all the queries that they had. On the one hand, we had people like Shankar Ojha ji from Jharkhand who never knew how to unmute himself, but had concrete questions to put forth. On the other hand, we had people like OPPO A3s who were only concerned about knowing our native place. Subha, being Subha took charge and started responding to all the queries and it was duly followed by all the people responsible for handling the chat box. Subha received compliments from 500fe7fa and Vivo 1606 whom she lovingly addressed as 500 jee and Vivo jee. While brainstorming about ideas

to make the training more interactive, we came across the concept of “Polls” in zoom. As soon as we posed the first poll question, it was amazing. We started receiving responses at the pace of 100 kmph. We had to teach a few of them how to answer on the poll and tell them not to write answers in the chat box.

The best part about the training was the multilingual set up that we had created. Kajal aced the session for Maharashtra and Goa with her Marathi, Gargi and Deepshika with their Assameese, Sohini with her Bangla, Himanshu with his Odiya. Madhulika, Harshita, Priyanka, Anoosha and Akanksha were in their top form with their mesmerising Hindi. While Elizabeth, Manu Sir and Simi handled the Kerala team with their Shuddh Desi Malayalam, Benazir and Anoosha had absolute fun in the Tamil Nadu Session with their broken Tamil.

Even though the sessions were slated to begin at

only 10:00 a.m and end by 5:00 p.m., we had to open up the zoom platform by 9:00 a.m. The late evening feedback sessions with NMMU would go on till 9:00 p.m. In this 12 – hour cycle, all of us were in a danger of being disowned by our own family as we never made it in time for family dinners!

So looking back at all these memories, I am extremely glad that we came together and created a safe space for ourselves where we debated for hours on topics such as prioritisation of beneficiaries, composition of a group in case of a livelihood plan and should PMAY - G be taken up in the format or not. We also went to extreme limits in annoying Travelling Tripod and Augmented Understanding - our designers and tech team respectively. I can’t wait to do it all over again!

Until we meet next time, which is soon enough, signing off!

## PM ki kahaani, Ex – TA ki Zubaani

- From the diaries of Simi Susan Moncy  
Asst. Program Manager, Capacities Development

When the morning rays disturbed his peaceful sleep, Manu Sankar slowly opened his eyes and searched for his ‘jeevansaathi’. Looking at the time, he murmured to himself ‘these days the sun shine is also not as beautiful as it used to be. Why is there a complete lock down? Is Corona that powerful to completely shut down a nation? Isn’t Corona waging a war against democracy? Bheekaran ann avan, kodumbheekaran!’ (Dangerous it is. Highly dangerous!).



He then thought about his team, ‘I have some lazy butts in my team. Being their programme manager I have to find some work for them. All my team members are chilling at their home, watching TV, eating home cooked

food while I am feeling extremely suffocated inside these four walls!. Nowadays, the NRO Convergence group is also dead silent.’ He felt irritated and annoyed about the fact that he is locked inside.

Manu Sankar, being a responsible citizen, never thought about spending a cellular life. He always had so many young and beautiful fan followers, a number of Kudumbashree chechis praying for him and doing vazhipad for his ayurargya samridhi

(offering prayers for his well-being). ‘Malikamukaleriya mannante tholil marapp kettunathum bhawan’, the keerthana from the nearby temple pierced his ears. He closed his ears and murmured, ‘Why do these Sanghis play such irrelevant songs in the morning, idiots!’

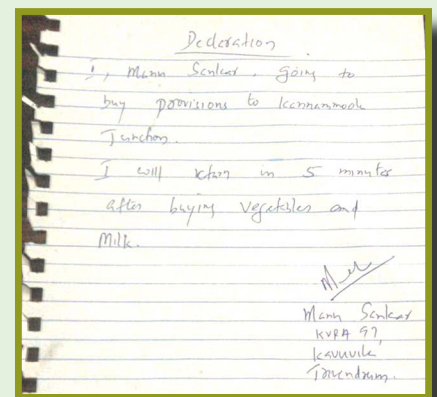
Thinking about the glitch that happened in normal life, he went to make a concoction for

himself. Pouring the honey into the concoction he made, he reminisced about visiting “Wellgate Organics”. He remembered the beautiful life he had enjoyed till date. He began sobbing when he thought about the freedom he used to enjoy in his life. He felt empathetic to all the prisoners in the world and started chanting the Azadi song.

His Jeevansaathi chirped twice, it was none other than his “Appachi” (Paternal Aunt). Appachi called him to know his preferences about having Kadala curry or Payaru curry with Puttu for breakfast. ‘This is the second day in the same week, she is making Puttu, she is also thekkaling me!’ . Manu Sankar realised the fact and it went like a spear inside his heart. ‘My two kurupp (clever) TAs are the reasons for everything. They kannuvakal (cast an evil eye) on my appachi and the hotel like menu I usually get from Appachi, Ammachi and Kunjammachi. He took a deep breath thinking about the good old days he had with his Cohort-1 TAs.

‘Sun is becoming harsh, I should take my clothes from the terrace’. He sprinted towards his terrace without realising that he has a broken ankle. It started hurting and he regretted for all the time he teased Prashant sir when he tested the Haritha Kerala Mission soil. Suddenly he wondered about the fact that his Godfather had not contacted him for some time. ‘JJ is not interested in NRO’s work these days. I should not have taken his words lightly, I should have sent pure Malayalam genes for his workshop’. He made a promise to himself that the first thing he will do after the lock down period is, pressurising Mineesh into processing JJ’s File’. His thoughts once again slipped into the Convergence project.

He was extremely happy about the progress of the Convergence project. ‘What would have the poor women from Assam, UP, Manipur and Mizoram done if there was no such project?’ He could not even imagine such a scenario. Breaking his chain of thoughts, Appachi called him again



to remind him that the breakfast is packed and has been kept in their car porch. Manu Sankar neither felt excited nor hungry. Still he drove towards Appachi’s house to collect his breakfast. Appachi was watching him from the terrace and asked him not to touch anywhere and to use the hand sanitiser before touching the parcel. Like a child, he obeyed everything and waved at Appachi to express his thanks. While driving back home, two police officers stopped him and asked him about the reason for wandering through the empty roads. When he produced the declaration that he had written, he was allowed to drive back.

‘Though Puttu has become frequent in the menu, today’s Puttu is tasty’, he clicked a picture of the Puttu and chakkappazham (Jackfruit) he got from Appachi and updated it in the ‘Convergence core’ group. As he expected, both the kurupp TAs replied to his message. He grinned inside ‘I knew you lazy butts pretend to avoid my work related messages. This is the ‘choonda’ (bait) my dears...’

After getting his two TAs on board, he rang up Elizabeth. Though he didn’t have any concrete plan, an idea flashed in his mind while talking to Elizabeth. Moments later, Programme Manager - Manu Sankar dropped a message in the group asking everyone to join a ‘workathon’ he designed for the Convergence team. Hail #WFH! Manu Sankar, Singham daa!!!

#We shall overcome!



## Roshni: A Ray of Hope

- Subha Kawatra

State Project Coordinator, Uttar Pradesh

It's 5 PM. A young woman stands waiting outside the bank in searing heat to get an Aadhar Card made for the two children of a Self Help Group (SHG) member. The Aadhar Card is needed for the children to avail the benefits of a scholarship. The sun has begun to set and the woman hurriedly glances at her watch. She requests the bank staff to fasten the process so as to reach home on time and avoid the ensuing and almost inevitable drama that would unfold if she were to reach late.

This young woman is Roshni Devi, 23, from the Bundelkhand region in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. She got married while completing her B.A second year. For at least 2-3 years after her marriage, Roshni's in-laws didn't allow her to go outside the boundaries of her house and didn't give her any money- not even for essentials. Her mobility restricted, shackled, she remained within the confines of her house. All this invariably put a stop to her education.

It was during this time that Roshni got acquainted with the concept of SHGs. It came to her notice that several such SHGs were getting formed by the National Rural Livelihood Mission in her Panchayat. Almost naturally, these women led groups became her excuse to start getting out of her house. The process of unshackling had begun and now there was no looking back. Owing to her education, Roshni was asked by the Village Organization (VO) -the second tier of the SHG federation- to become the VO accountant. However, the payment was inconsistent, due to which she was asked by her husband to leave everything and sit at home.

But when one door closes, another opens. A new project called the Panchayati Raj Institutions-Community Based Organization (PRI-CBO) Convergence project came in the village. Under this project, Roshni got the chance to work as a convergence- community resource person (CCRP) and acted as a link between the Gram Panchayat and SHG members of her village. The work entailed bringing the two institutions together for the development of the village by involving the SHGs in helping the Gram Panchayat implement schemes and other development works. Through the

project, Roshni also assisted the SHG members in accessing their entitlements like Pension, Ration cards, Job cards etc. For this, Roshni was required to coordinate and liaison with the Panchayat President (Pradhan), Book-Keeper (Lekhpal), Secretary (Sachiv) and other village elders.

But the journey of bringing change in her village hasn't been an easy one and has been fraught with challenges at every step- both personal and professional. In addition to work, Roshni has had to deal with the conservative mindset of the village orthodoxy, unable to digest the success and independence of a woman.

This one incident is the testimony of her struggle and challenges.

"Just a few days back, I was applying for an old age pension for an old lady with no children. The newly appointed lekhpal made an income certificate of Rs 50,000 for the lady even though the lady's income was way lesser than that. For one to be eligible for the pension scheme, the income has to be Rs 46,000 or lesser. Hence, I met the lekhpal a couple of times requesting him to make changes in the income certificate of the lady. This clearly irked him. While visiting the Panchayat, the lekhpal asked for my whereabouts from a few village elders. Within a day, my father-in-law was informed by the village elders and Kotedar that the lekhpal was on the lookout for his daughter-in-law. Spice was added and this became a source of gossip for everyone. My father-in-law passed this information on to my husband, and my husband asked me to remain homebound. Further, he started getting suspicious of my work and started thinking that I was involved with other men. Why else would I go out every day, he asked me," said Roshni, narrating her ordeal patiently.

Unfortunately, Roshni is not the first woman facing this. There are thousands of women struggling to carve a space for themselves in their respective homes and society. Like in Roshni's case, a woman's 'chastity' and 'morality' often become a source of societal gossip and questions are raised on her character if she is seen to be too forthcoming and independent. Patriarchal values continue to remain deeply embedded and for several people, women are perceived to be inferior to men and aren't permitted to have dreams or



aspirations- they are seen to be fit as just good mothers and wives.

Rakesh Mishra, the National Rural Livelihood Mission- Block Mission Manager, Badokhar Khurd Block, Banda District shares his experience, "I have tried to give a chance to young women to come forward and become a community resource person. However, the people in the village don't let them come forward. The constant taunts and gossip really affects the women's morale; "Phalane ki bahu phone pe baat karti rehti hain, sara time gaon mein ghoomti hai," are the commonly heard refrains. Listening to all this really impacts the woman and her family, which results in them dropping out of the fold of NRLM. There are so many educated and talented women in rural areas who are sitting at home because of societal fear. We need to change the perception so that more young women come forward."

Women like Roshni who try to push themselves to achieve their dreams are often ridiculed and reduced to mere gossip. Fearing such humiliation and insult many women tend to leave their dreams and get stuck within the confines of their four walled homes. But with the constant encouragement from the mentor (Sangeeta) and the exposure visit to Kerala (for which Roshni had fought and gone), Roshni has been able to come out of this labyrinth and has promised herself to keep dreaming and helping the people of her village, to try and bring a change in the attitude of the people within the village towards women. It is young women like Roshni who are relentlessly pushing their boundaries and realising their potential. Hence, Roshni, is indeed, a ray of hope- for tens of thousands of women across the country.

## Village Authority in Naga Village - A story of transition

- Himanshu Behera

Field Coordinator, Manipur

Among the Naga tribes of Manipur, the Village Authority system is still in practice. This system is subject to highly unequal land and power relations, where village development is the exclusive right and prerogative of the Village Chairman and Authority members.

Astonishingly, women have no rights over any village development decision whatsoever. Despite this, there have been significant changes and an evolution of women participation in village development, particularly in Meipou Village. Meipou village, situated in the northwest part of

Tengnoupal District, is an intervention village of the PRI-CBO Convergence Project.

One of great changes due to the implementation of the PRI-CBO Convergence project has been that of increased information of women with respect to government entitlements and



schemes. Through activities like the PAE, EAP and VPRP, various discussions and suggestions have been carried out during the VLF meeting with the help of the LRGs on the improvement of entitlements and rights system in their respective villages.

There has been a massive increase in the knowledge and understanding within the CBO community with regard to the entitlements and the process involved for availing them. During 2019-20, the concept of Gram Sabha and GPDP were introduced for the first time in Machi Block, consequently more than 50% of

the village women participated during the Gram Sabha proceedings. The village authority chairman and members had little to no knowledge on the process and the objective. The Chairman of Meipou village said that “we don't understand the concept and the process to carry out GPDP in our village as it is an alien concept and no proper training nor financial power has been vested on us to carry out such development planning activity in the ambit of our village”. The Chairman showed grave concern towards the negligence of the state towards the Hill districts on such an important development. The SIRD of Manipur doesn't hold

expertise on the functioning of the VA nor has the financial commitment been vested upon them.

In the year 2020-21, Gram Sabha and GPDP has been mandated by the State Government across all 16 districts in Manipur. However, in Machi block, the Village Authority Chairman and members continued to lack conceptual clarity on the process and outcome. One of the great changes and impact in our project village, Meipou village, is mentioned below.

The Meipou Village Authority Chairman and Village Youth club approached the LRG and VLF (Village Level and Fedcuation) members to train them on government entitlements and the VPRP/GPDP process. This has further intensified the relationship between VLF and the Village Authority. Such a platform has helped both the Village Authority and the VLF to collectively work towards the goal of local development. This major transformation of not just initiating dialogue with the women, but also involving them in decision making has been exceptional.

Now, the only thing that remains, is the process of availing these rights by way of transparency and accountability to the villagers by the Chairman. The Chairman governing system has taken a democratic approach by providing CBO members a platform to participate and initiate a dialogue with village leaders. Thus, the community stakeholders are becoming more aware of the democratic system of preparing development plans in the present scenario and hopefully it will get better with the passage of time.

## 'Contagious Courage, Relentless Efforts, Impactful Results'

A Journey of a Convergence Community Resource Person (CCRP) under PRI-CBO Convergence Project in Uttar Pradesh

- Raj Singh

Field Coordinator, Uttar Pradesh and

- Nabeel Thalakat

Field Coordinator

Like many other girl students in her village, Kiran Didi also dropped out of school after completing basic formal education. She had just completed eighth standard, when her family decided to discontinue her from school. Her elder brother who was in charge of the family did not want her to go out of the household and this restricted her movement to within the family and the immediate neighborhood after her school days. She began to get used to the daily routine of the household, taking care of the family and cooking for them. In a few years, she was married off to Mainpur, a village 5-6 kms from her native village. She was only 17 when she was married off.

Her routine remained almost the same in her new home, where she spent most of the day within the household, like the other women in her husband's family. But her husband was supportive enough and even encouraged her to join SHG when she had heard of it. Around

five years ago, SHGs were being formed in her panchayat and Kiran Didi also registered one in her own name joining the women from her neighborhood. She had the basic knowledge to maintain the books as she could read and write. But she says that the working of SHGs were limited to thrift and credit in the initial years. Though her husband did not restrict her from going out, she was hesitant to do anything beyond what other women in the household did.

When the PRI – CBO Convergence project started two years back, she heard that there are vacancies for Convergence-Community Resource Persons from the mentors and with much hesitation, she signed up for it. She believes that this decision was life changing for her. The major difference has been in terms of mobility. From someone who used to spend most of the time within the household, today she is familiar with most of the roads in her block and has even travelled to Kerala as a part of her training. She still cherishes her time in Kerala and the

सबका साथ सबका विकास

समस्त ग्रामवासियों को महाशिवरात्रि, होली, चैत नवरात्रि एवं अम्बेडकर जयंती की हार्दिक शुभकामनायें-

## ग्राम सभा मैनपुर से

प्रधान

पद हेतु

कर्मठ, ईमानदार एवं सघर्षशील महिला प्रत्याशी

# पत्नी किरन सिंह

सुखन सिंह

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निवेदक-समस्त सम्मानित ग्रामवासी एवं मतदातागण ।

चन्द्रना आर्ट पब्लिशिंग मिन्टस 8318003199

exposure she had there in terms of witnessing the infrastructure as well as the activities of Panchayats and SHG women. Coming back to her village, she was keen on working on different rights and entitlements for her people and has been successful in some. Through her efforts along with the other CCRPs, she claims to have facilitated access to 100 new ration cards. There were also incidents when they made the Civil Supplies department cancel some of the BPL ration cards as they were with the rich and influential from her village, while the poor did not even have a ration card. To do this, she even called the media to build pressure on the authorities to take action on the issue. She thinks that the system in her state is corrupt and understands that it is her responsibility to correct it in ways she can.

Her journey with the SHG as well as PRI CBO has been socially empowering for her. She is so happy that people in Tehsil recognize her. But this is not the whole story. Her involvement in the SHG and the project has provided her with a stable income and an accessible credit source. With loans from the SHG, she was able

to purchase an auto rickshaw for her husband in Mumbai, who runs the family now, with this income. When the first loan was repaid, she took another loan and purchased a second vehicle which provides an additional income to the family. Moreover, during the lockdown, it was her income that sustained the family.

There have been difficulties in working with the panchayat and other government departments. Kiran Didi recalls a day when in a conflict with the Pradhan of the Panchayat, a police FIR was codged against her and her husband along with other CCRPs, "We (CCRP) are working towards making an effective and efficient mechanism for the people of our village, have helped people avail services i.e., pension, Job Card, Ration Card etc, who were never even considered potential beneficiaries. But some people don't like this. The Pradhan, in particular, thinks that the work he had been unable to do in the past 4-5 years of his tenure, we could get done in just a few months. There have been incidents in which men of the Pradhan have pelted stones at our houses, we were threatened, taunted while walking through the village streets in daylight. However, since

that day the fear that was instilled in us from childhood has disappeared. I don't think that now anyone can make me fearful of what I am doing. The good thing that has happened since then is that now women of my village look up to me and my fellow CCRPs, they come to us for anything -be it personal or social. Now other women too approach the Pradhan to talk bluntly about anything and everything". Although Kiran Didi and other CCRPs are well aware that this is just a start and that there is a long road of struggle ahead, they are ready to face the music.

Despite daily struggle and hurdles while working in Panchayat, she is happy that she receives the respect that she never used to. More than supporting her family, she is happy that her work is making an impact in others' lives as well. From someone who had to drop out of high school and was restricted to the household, Kiran Didi now has higher hopes of going places and even being the Pradhan of her own village. She is contesting for the post of the Pradhan in the Gram Panchayat elections this time.

## Embracing the everydayness

Field notes and more

### One Day of a Field-Coordinator at a Remote Location

- Akanksha Mishra

Field Coordinator, Assam

Assam mornings mostly start with hens and roosters crowing 4 AM onwards. Sometimes you are so alone that you know the hours at which the neighbours' hens and roosters start crowing. It's 1 AM sharp. I just got up and saw the moon passing by my window. It's strange how living by oneself makes you observe weird things. Anyway, my day generally starts with a big mug of warm water, lemon and ginger. Now that I have no one to share this morning beverage with, podcasts have become a great friend. Meanwhile I put the tea on boil and start preparing the breakfast. Parallely, I keep gazing into the phone and check morning updates from the Mentor and field cadres with a passing thought of how work has engulfed my entire existence.

Quickly, post breakfast, I take a shower and head to the field, making calls to the mentor and field cadres about the day's plan. The sky outside is generally pretty clear and bright with a cool breeze and sometimes the non existence of face masks among people everywhere, makes you forget your own. I rush back home cursing my feeble memory. After a long and arduous distance covered in the local bus- with a lot of sneezing, coughing and people falling on each other, I reach the point from where the journey to the interiors of the village starts.

This point on, the view is beautiful with a sprawling, green countryside, far off hills and the rice fields, making the journey an experience

in itself. I reach the Cluster Level Federation office and meet the cadre. We sit together and ask each other's whereabouts and then, directly get into business. Plans are made over endless cups of tea and ideas are shared. The day starts getting warmer and with it the discussions get more intense. Sometimes, I am forced to reprimand the dedicated women. That's how responsibilities are- a constant tussle of managing time, resources and skill sets. In the interim, a thousand calls and some 100 messages are shared and new plans keep coming up -making the process nerve wrecking. It doesn't stop here. There are multiple responsibilities beyond the field, that you have to constantly juggle. As the sun starts to set, the



Happy Filed Morning



Home from a distance

journey back home has to be started. I head back, dreading another two hours of travel in the bus. This time it feels longer than it actually is. I plan to pick up a few vegetables from the market and piping hot samosas also make it to my bag. Strangely enough, the evenings back home and the purchase of veggies have become my favourite chore.

I reach home, prepare myself a cup of ginger tea and warm water for shower. The evening starts feeling better. I make a few work calls to the Mentor, family and friends and start thinking of what should be cooked for dinner. It's usually simple dal roti sabzi, and on better days, something fancier. I try doing some yoga/ exercise, after which I have dinner, Netflix gives



me company. The day almost comes to an end by this time. I head to my laptop with some work, plan for the day ahead and discuss it with my team. There is so much going on and it starts making me feel stressed. I switch my brain and shift to doing some house chores like cleaning or ironing clothes. I feel better. I also try reading a book or just scroll through my phone.

Instagram, sometimes, makes you feel wary about your social life but I ignore it and post a picture with the women I work with, feeling an immediate sense of satisfaction, making Zuckerberg a bit happier. By then, sleep creeps in. I complete my night routine of brushing, applying night creams, taking supplements and finally doze off.

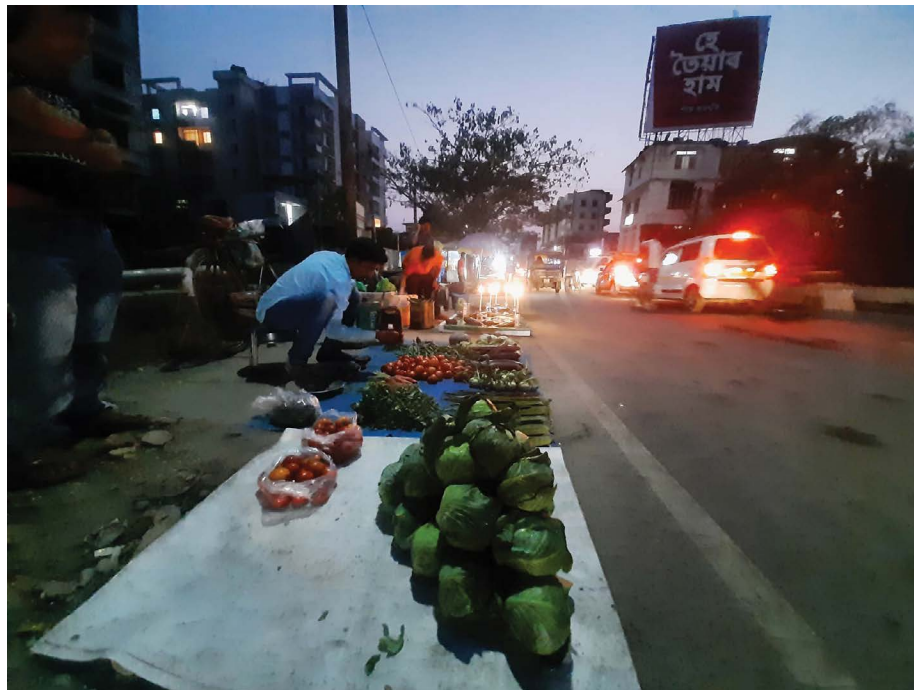
Living alone in the remotest parts of the country has its own high and low moments. Slowly, I have started enjoying the mundanity of the process and the art of being self-reliant and disciplined. There are, of course, a few days when I miss people the most. What has been the deepest realisation personally is that there is nothing more important than "Social Capital."

## An Ode to the Road (From Barua Sariali to Sonarigaon, Jorhat)

- Padmini Ramesh  
Field Coordinator

I still can't believe that I am leaving Jorhat. As I have said enough, this town has my heart—simply because I find that it's growing along with me, trying to reconstruct itself after collapsing every day, trying to hold on to its roots even as it looks out for the enormous possibilities that lie in front of it. A posh Westside showroom has been coming up in the stretch between Barua Sariali to Sonarigaon (my place of residence), but vendors continue to stubbornly set shop every evening just outside it and, in its periphery, selling river water fish, chicken, vegetables, not willing to accept the showroom, refusing to budge or to set shop anywhere else. That's their silent resistance, perhaps.

The walk on this road back to my house is my favourite part of the day and the town. It's when the sun has just set and the sky has turned a brilliant shade of blue, the vendors light candles around the fish and vegetables they are selling, for the customers to be able to see the colour and the texture and the whole scene from afar looks like a stretch of floating lights. It's surreal, to say the least. A couple of Cafes have begun to mushroom alongside the road now (including my go-to place—Café Beans— a book café where I have spent several hours), but the local tea shops have stayed put in every nook and cranny— serving hot, sweet Lal Sa with Pitha. These tea shops aren't going anywhere either. The entire stretch is full of contradictions and possibilities. There are no mistakes, only new paths to be explored (stealing from Shantaram here).



I have often wondered why I like this road so much. Is it because it has acted as a much-needed respite after a long, tiring day in the field? Or is that I like being a passive observer to the hustle-bustle that the road entails? Or, maybe that it is while walking back to my place, on this road, that I have felt an entire gamut of emotions—from love to happiness to hopelessness to disappointment to longing to frustration? I think it's all of the

forementioned reasons; I think this road has made me feel alive and grateful for everything, in a way nothing else has, in a long time. And to my surprise, I must admit that this will perhaps be the thing that I miss the most about Jorhat. This will stay with me forever, I guess. It's weird and endearing how spaces can come to mean so much to you when all you have for company, is yourself!

# Women at leisure



*CCRPs typing their name on the laptop for the first time*



*Mentor enjoying a bonfire get-together during chilly winter evenings in Gorakhpur*



*Of smiles and laughter while bursting balloons*



*I am going to win this game!*

## Fun while winning back VO's

- Aishwarya

Field Coordinator

When Nina Simone said, 'I will tell you what freedom is to me - No fear!', she might not have thought of the idea of being free at the moment, not being worried about the endless tasks which you are supposed to perform. But she knew what freedom is and so do these women - one can see it when they talk in groups about the problems which women face (because of men!), what they can do as a collective, realizing the power of CBOs which they thought was lost somewhere. Fun while winning back VO's -

How rare is it a sight to see a woman reading the newspaper before the man of the house wakes up? Or a bunch of women letting go of their ghunghat/pallu while playing games at a house, or to the astonishment of the men of the village, in a school playground!

In the interior villages of Uttar Pradesh, late mornings would start only after one gets a peek of sunlight, with women coming for monthly VO meeting (which have become a thing of the past, owing to COVID19 and cold waves in UP of course)! They would tend to household work, thinking of tasks to be completed after attending a long meeting called by the CCRPs. As tired they may come, will they go back determined, feeling confident about themselves and the SHGs and VO's they are a part of?

The meetings would start with women moving across the playground, hopping on one leg while greeting each other with folded hands. They would be then divided into groups (by enacting voices of different animals) to talk about problems of village, panchayat, women, SHG and VO respectively. Through an engaging



activity, they would then be introduced to the power and role of SHG in overcoming these problems and the strong foundation it lays for VO's to function properly. Role and responsibility of office bearers and different subcommittees, maintaining books of record, sitting arrangement etc would be talked about.

Just so they would start feeling overburdened with information, all women would be asked to share what all they do/are supposed to do at home. One woman would balance physical objects which symbolize the workload at home. They would laugh and say 'Iske baad pati ki zimedari bhi hamari', 'Saas se sunna bhi toh padta hai khana banane ke bad'. With every passing minute, they would realize the burden of work which they carry all alone and draw comparisons to what happens in SHG or VO.

The ease of letting go of that burden doesn't need to be introduced to the women who have lived, hoping to share not only the physical workload but also the mental and emotional burden they carry with each act of pretence. The afternoon would see passer-bys stopping in the shade of the largest tree or leaning to their bikes, while the women continue to run, shake a leg, adjust their saris (which have gone out of place, just like these women), laugh and mock each other, much to the pleasure of their fellow SHG women.

Filled with joy and child-like excitement, the women would then play the game of tiger, villagers and goat. Honestly, I have never met such determined and competitive women when it comes to winning these games!



Feeling more engaged with what is happening they would patiently listen and participate in discussions on VPRP, following up and tracking. This would be done through activities of 'Web of poverty and Haq ka Dibba'.

A few men, owning up to the manly obligation of knowing about worldly affairs of a village would often stop, stare and hesitantly yet assuredly ask 'Kya karna chahi h yeh mahilaye?' To which the facilitator would simply smile and say 'Kuch nahi

bhaiya, bas kuch khel hai aur roz marra ki batein jo ghar ke bahar dhup me kar rahe hai kyuki kya hai ki thand bht hai' and would slide away from the sight of men, picking up stones for the next game.

Maybe these men might have forgotten what weekly/monthly CBO meetings were, but one can never underestimate the power of women collectives! Nonetheless, they are the most competitive and an enthusiastic group when it comes to proving whose VO is the best.

The mere sight of women enjoying, talking, playing is a beautiful sight of women at leisure. Meanwhile, it is those very voices reclaiming the public spaces and filling it with thoughts of what can be done for alcoholism and domestic violence. It offers a harmless sight, quite unaware of the challenge they pose to the status-quo.

## Eco Friendly Panchayat

- Ming Ma

State Project Coordinator, Manipur

Keirao Bitra Block being an intervention block under MSRLM, the village level federations (VLF) here are about 3 years old. With the PRI-CBO convergence project being implemented in the intervention block since 2018, there have been many village development activities undertaken by the VLFs with the PRIs throughout the different Gram Panchayats. One such example is "Eco Friendly Panchayat or Go green Campaign". In 2019-20, when the preparation of the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) was rolled out in Keirao Bitra under PRI-CBO convergence project, there were many demands that came up from the SHGs and federation. Plastic pollution and waste management was one of the common issues identified under SDP. The VLF in different GPs like Top Chingtha, Thongju Part II, Angtha took the SDP ahead along with the Panchayat in organizing mass rallies, poster campaigns and waste collection. But due to the pandemic, like everything else, the "Eco Friendly Panchayat or Go green Campaign" was put on hold.

During this year, the preparation of VPRP revived the campaign again in Top Chingtha and Tuliha GP. The Manipur Pollution Control Board (MPCB) was approached and the plan of monthly plastic collection at SHGs and federation was discussed. The plan was highly appreciated by the department and decided to take it forward.



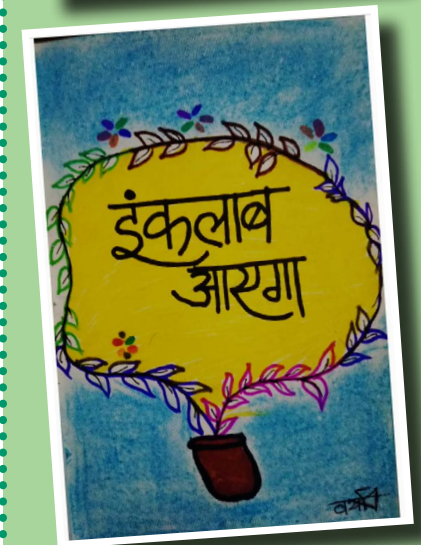
An initial joint meeting with the PRI, Youth Club and the VLF took place to materialise the SDP. 11 SHGs from Tengbang Piba VLF and 10 SHGs from Mangal Piba VLF collected plastic waste from their respective locality at the SHG level during their first weekly SHG meeting. On 3rd March, 2021 a special meeting was called where leaders of each SHG brought their sack of collected plastic waste with their SHG's name and weight written on it at a designated point which was the community ground. The Youth Club members did an announcement at the village, requesting people to bring out their respective plastic waste to the same community ground. The two VLFs arranged a vehicle to pick up the plastic waste from the community market, shops and public spaces.

The Panchayat Pradhan inaugurated the campaign. On 4th March, a vehicle was sent from the Pollution Control Board on the demand of VLF to collect the plastic waste.

In Top Chingtha GP, the two VLFs were able to collect 416 kgs of Plastic in total and sold to the Department for Rs 2400. The amount was distributed to the SHG leaders as per the weight of the plastic they had submitted. In each VLF, a register is maintained to keep track of the waste collected by the SHG and the SHG with the highest weight will be announced as "Star SHG of the month". This amount was distributed to each SHG as per the weight. The future plan is to collect waste on the 5th of every month at the VLFs and send it to the department the next day.



## Doodling Away



©Aishwarya

# From the field of Assam



Women from Karbi, Dima Hasao, Nepali and Assamese community



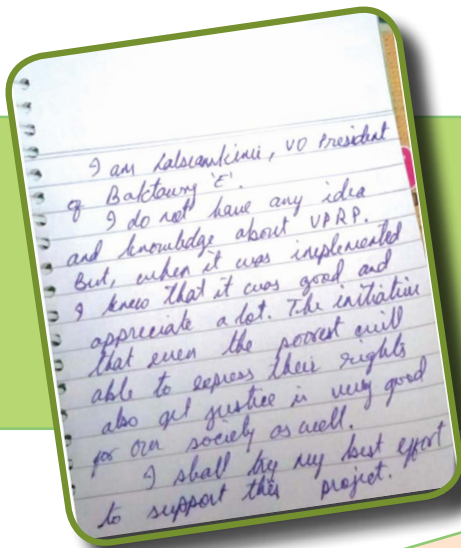
Women from Assamese community



Women from Hajong community



Women from Mising community



## Testimonial from VO leader



(English version of Assamese poem)

My name is Rita Moran. I am working in Titabor block as LRG  
I have written a poem named - "Samanwaya" (Coordination/Harmonisation) and I am now reciting the poem.....

I was born in the womb of VOCC.....

Since the moment of my birth, I have been drawing the picture of village development.

The plans and programs of SRLM are the key contributors behind such developments. The Panchayats of Assam would be glittering by removing illiteracy, poverty and making the women economically independent. All women would be self - dependent and work - worthy with creation of casteless and classless society. My journey is being continued by dragging the edge of "Kudumbashree"

Many thanks to SRLM.

Let Kudumbashree be celebrated....

# Convergence Team



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Government of India



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