

the David &
Lucile Packard
FOUNDATION



PAHEL

WOMEN LEADING CHANGE

EXEMPLARY STORIES OF LEADERSHIP, COURAGE AND CONVICTION

At Centre for Catalyzing Change, formerly CEDPA India, we work with a visionary zeal to enable women and girls to realize their opportunities and rights. At the core of our work and approach is a belief that achieving gender equality is essential for development, democracy and progress. We have been working to improve the lives of girls and women in the country through technical assistance, community based reproductive and child health programs, innovative youth programs and women's leadership programs. We work with women leaders, local partners and national and international organizations to design and implement programs within the community.

We have a longstanding commitment to support women as leaders and change agents in their communities and nations. Since our inception, we have helped women develop the self-confidence and skills to become effective leaders and change agents. Our governance work recognizes that improving the lives of women and their families requires balanced gender representation in government structures. Until women are able to participate fully in decision-making, their interests and basic needs will continue to be marginalized. Increasing the representation and influence of women in government will ensure that government policies, systems and allocated resources represent the diverse needs of the society.

Over the years, we have led a number of efforts to bring women into governance and to make governments more responsive to the needs of women and families. These efforts include strengthening women's leadership. Molded by cultural mores, many women need encouragement to break out of socially prescribed roles and realize their potential to become leaders. Through training and mentoring, we try and imbue women with a stronger sense of purpose and self-efficacy enabling them to apply their new skills effectively. We work with women to hone their skills as articulate and forceful advocates who can draw added public interest to key issues.



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WE THANK THE DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIP ON THE PAHEL JOURNEY

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE SUPPORT OF OUR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS, NIRDESH, DAUDNAGAR ORGANISATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT (DORD) AND INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION (IDF).

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"I have overcome my fears and am not scared of talking to people"

"In the initial days I felt lost without my husband supporting me and representing me in meetings. Now I prefer going alone to the meetings and my husband drops me to the venue"

This book is a compilation of stories of elected women representatives from local governments who have moved out of their homes to play their role as leaders in their communities. These are stories of commitment, courage and a determination to succeed in catalyzing development in their communities, ensuring a fair deal for all, especially the marginalized. Their path has not been easy, but along with their fellow women they have overcome the barriers of patriarchy, illiteracy and poverty, to raise their voice and ensure action in the male dominated arena of politics.

DORD

पहल परियोजना

वर्षाचिंत महिला प्रतिनिधियों व
कल्स्टर बैठक

दाउदनगर प्रखण्ड

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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Gender and Governance

Reservations for women in political bodies are recognition of their right to participate and be heard in governance processes and of the reality that there exist social barriers in the process of exercising this right. However, women's entry into the political arena through reservations does not guarantee gender equitable social transformation or transform them into effective leaders. In the Indian context, where many are surrogates for husbands and fathers who could not contest because of seats reserved for women, substantial investment is needed in their capacity development and this requires continuous mentoring to build their skills and confidence.

Panchayati Raj

Panchayati Raj Institutions, the grassroots units of self-governance, were envisioned as the vehicles of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies depend on active involvement, contribution and participation of citizens both male and female. The aim of every village being a republic has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to enlist people's participation in rural reconstruction.

The Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act passed in 1992 sought to provide constitutional sanction to establish "democracy at the grassroots level as it is at the state level or national level". The Act provides for the Gram Sabha or village assembly to be the foundation of the Panchayati Raj System - a uniform three-tier structure of panchayats at village (Gram Panchayat—GP), intermediate (Panchayat Samiti — PS) and district (Zilla Parishad — ZP) levels. All the seats in a panchayat at every level are filled by elections from respective territorial constituencies with one-third of the total seats to be reserved for women.

The India story

At present, there are about 3 million elected representatives at all levels of the panchayat, one-third of whom are women. These members represent more than 24,00,00 Gram Panchayats, about 6,000 intermediate level tiers and more than 500 district panchayats.

Spread over the length and breadth of the country, the panchayats cover about 96 percent of India's more than 5,80,000 villages and nearly 99.6 percent of the rural population. This is the largest experiment in decentralisation of governance in the world.

The Constitution visualises panchayats as institutions of self-governance. However, giving due consideration to the federal structure of our polity, most of the financial powers and authority vested on panchayats have been left at the discretion of concerned state legislatures. Consequently, the powers and functions vested in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) vary from state to state. These provisions combine representative and direct democracy into a synergy and are expected to result in an extension and deepening of democracy in India. Hence, panchayats have journeyed from an institution within the culture of India to attain constitutional status.

Bihar moves ahead

In May 2006, elections were held in Bihar for all the posts in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. These Panchayat elections were being held in Bihar only for the second time since 1978. Riddled by caste and gender divisions, Bihar is one of the poorest performing states when it comes to human development indicators like health, literacy, per capita income and so on. However, Bihar is also the first state to provide 50 percent reservation for women in Panchayats. Women leaders today constitute about 54.1 percent of the total leaders elected in the PRIs in the state.

Of the 1, 35,805 members across all three tiers of the Panchayati Raj institutions in Bihar, 73,204 are women. Out of this critical mass of women leaders, 4,535 hold the posts of Mukhia (Presidents) in Gram Panchayats.

Pahel makes a difference

For women's issues to be given adequate attention, women must be represented in political bodies. Women candidates for office often face difficult hurdles. Providing them with the necessary information and skills to become effective candidates can help them to build a base of support, especially among women voters. Many barriers can block a woman's political participation throughout her lifetime. Communities may not support women's leadership because of social norms that do not value women's participation in the public sphere. Other barriers include illiteracy, lack of knowledge about institutional structures and the responsibilities of office and the demands of fulfilling work and family obligations. Without a pipeline of women in office and in political parties, newly emerging women leaders often lack the connections to political institutions that provide the backing necessary for a viable candidacy.

To address the above mentioned challenges, Centre for Catalyzing Change, with support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, initiated *Pahel*, a programme aimed at empowering elected women representatives (EWRs) in Bihar by strengthening the voice, participation, leadership and influence of EWRs within the Panchayati Raj system in order to bring about social change on issues that affect women, particularly family planning/reproductive health (FP/RH) and related issues like Girls Education and Age of Marriage. This initiative is based on the belief that enhancing their capacities can pay large dividends and lead to positive changes on the ground. Our aim is to build their confidence to lead and change the social and cultural context that impedes women's opportunities.

Under *Pahel*, the EWRs were trained in the use of checklists to assess health facilities on 6 key indicators leading to effective maternal, family planning and reproductive health services - infrastructure, personnel, community participation, availability of equipment, drugs and other supplies, service provision, and quality of logistical arrangements. The tools were also used to track improvements in outreach as well as access, quality and availability of health services over time.

The checklist findings were developed into simple and specific advocacy asks, to help the EWRs gain a better understanding of the issues so that they could advocate for change before relevant government officials.

Piloted in two blocks of Patna district, the activities were upscaled in 2011 to six blocks in three districts of Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi and Aurangabad. Beginning with an initial training of 1200 EWRs from all three tiers of PRI (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat and Zilla Parishad), the EWRs were mentored over a period of three years through regular Mahila Sabhas (women's meetings), exposure visits and skilled to use tools to monitor the health and education services in their constituencies. Growing beyond their role as committed health advocates, the EWRs have taken action in several other critical areas like ensuring that Panchayat level meetings are held as per norms, usage and disbursement of funds, preventing child marriage, schemes like Indira Awaas Yojana, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Public Distribution System, Old Age Pension Scheme, etc. reach the intended beneficiaries

Every woman has leadership qualities but many, especially in resource poor countries, do not have the opportunity to find out what their potential is because of economic and social demands. *Pahel* focuses on expanding women's leadership by helping them to identify and value their own unique leadership skills and styles, honor their strengths and accept their personal potential. Our capacity building efforts focus on helping the EWRs examine, analyze and develop strategies to address the gender inequalities that inhibit or restrict their choices and impact negatively on their self-assurance.

The *Pahel* initiative is an embodiment of our belief that women must become a force at every level to challenge legal, political, cultural and social barriers to increase their access to and control over resources for their needs to be addressed effectively.

DOMAINS OF CHANGE

- **WHAT:** Mobility, Decision making, Confidence, Participation, Attitudes and Beliefs
- **WHY:** Wanted to work for development, Wanted to be valued by family, Wanted respect in the community
- **HOW:** Access to information, Training, Solidarity platform, Exposure to new ideas, new places



TAKING EVERYONE ALONG

As *Pahel* has travelled across the region, it has influenced and brought together a range of actors and stakeholders from the community who now realize its impact.

Husband: "She has begun voicing her opinion on everything and is very well informed."

Male colleagues: "If there were no reservations women would have been invisible in politics, the *Pahel* women actively participate in meetings."

Health workers: "Because of *Pahel*, these women leaders are taking up health issues"

Local Project staff: "It is so different now, earlier we had to persuade the husbands to allow their wives to come for the training."

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ANM: Auxiliary Nurse Midwives
- ASHA: Accredited Social Health Activist
- AWC: Anganwadi Center
- AWW: Anganwadi Worker
- BDO: Block Development officer
- HSC: Health Sub Center
- MLA: Member of Legislative Assembly
- PHC: Primary Health Center
- VHSND: Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day

GLOSSARY

- ANGANWADI CENTRE - a community child development centre set up in each block to cover per 1000 population, run by the Department of Women and Child Development under the aegis of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).
- BLOCK DEVELOPMENT OFFICER - A government functionary responsible for the administrative area of the block, including functioning of PRI, development schemes, services, etc.
- GRAM SABHA - is the constitutionally mandated mechanism by which grassroots people hold panchayat accountable. All voting-age citizens are members. Panchayat priorities are set, budgets are approved, and results are reported to the quarterly Gram Sabha meeting.
- GRAM SEVAK/ PANCHAYAT SEVAK - is a government official working at the panchayat level, to provide help to the elected representative in panchayat works.
- INDIRA AWAS YOJANA - a government scheme under which families living below poverty line get assistance to build their own house.
- MUKHIYA - is the head of the village panchayat elected directly by the people.
- NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME (NREGS) - is a government scheme, which provides 100 days of, guaranteed wage employment for a family.
- PANCHAYAT SAMITI - is a block level panchayat body.
- STRUCTURE OF THE HEALTH DELIVERY SYSTEM - Health Sub-Centres (HSCs) for every 5,000 people; Primary Health Centres (PHCs) for every 30,000;

GLOSSARY

- COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES (CHCs), with 30 beds, for every 120,000; and District Hospitals (DHs), with 100 beds, for every 1,000,000 population
- UNTIED FUNDS - under the National Rural Health Mission are flexible untied funds that are allocated to health centres to manage urgent and important activities that need relatively small amount of money, as against the allocated planned funds. This innovative approach provides funds for undertaking centre-specific, need based activities.
- UP - MUKHIYA - is a ward member, directly elected by people, who can officiate for the Mukhiya in his/her absence. In a first executive meeting of the Panchayat, one of the ward members is elected as Up-Mukhiya.
- VILLAGE HEALTH and NUTRITION DAYS (VHNDs) - are a major initiative under the National Health Mission (NHM) to improve access to maternal, newborn, child health and nutrition (MNCHN) services at the village level.
- VILLAGE PANCHAYAT - is a cluster of 4-5 revenue villages and constituted for a population not less than 5000 and not more than 7000. The term of the panchayat is five years.
- WARD - is a division of the village panchayat. Every village panchayat is divided into wards or smaller areas, constituted for a population of 1000.
- WARD MEMBER - is a representative of the ward, directly elected by the people.
- WIDOW PENSION SCHEME - is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented in the State where the beneficiaries (poor widows) receive pension @ Rs. 300/- per month under the Scheme.



महिला
कलसटर स्तर
स्थान : हसन
दिनांक : 21
आयोजक : इन्व्हीप्रिटेड
संयोजक : सेन्टर फॉर



पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों का  IDF
रीय बैठक (महिला सभा)

ना गायघाट, मुजफ्फरपुर
फरवरी 2015

डिप्लोमैन्ट फाउन्डेशन (IDF), मुजफ्फरपुर
र कीटोलाईजिंग सेन्ज



SAVITRI DEVI

Leading from the Front

Mukhiya takes matters in her own hands
and becomes an enterprising leader

Mukhiya/ Panchayat: Manar/ Block: Daudnagar/ District: Aurangabad

Prior to her association with *Pahel* that began with a residential training followed by monthly meetings, first time elect Savitri Devi was used to accepting her husband's word in all matters, including Panchayat related responsibilities. However, the training sessions inspired Savitri Devi to take matters in her own hands. She now conducts regular bi monthly meetings of the Gram Panchayat Executive and Gram Sabhas. A regular at the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days, she makes sure that ante natal check ups are conducted as per procedure and that the weighing and blood pressure machines are functional. She also interacts with the community members on issues such as women's sexual and reproductive health, immunization and girl's education informing them about the facilities and schemes provided by the government.



MEENA DEVI

Demanding Accountability

Being a first time elect and illiterate does not stop this Ward Member from fighting for what is right

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Tarari/ Block: Daudnagar/ District: Aurangabad

Though illiterate and poor, Meena Devi is determined to make a difference. As a first time elect, she had never been to any kind of training nor did she have access to information about her new role after she won the elections. So, she assumed that things were running the way they should be – till she began to participate in the activities under *Pahel*, where she saw there was so much she could do for her ward! She has now learnt to use a checklist to monitor services at the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days and the local Health Sub Centre and does not hesitate to demand action on gaps in services before health department officials.

On one occasion, when she heard that the Anganwadi worker (AWW) at the Anganwadi center in her ward had been distributing take home rations to only four women, she rushed to the Anganwadi center and had a long and heated argument with the AWW. She convinced the AWW to distribute take home rations (2 kg rice and 1 kg pulse) to 28 lactating mothers and 2 pregnant women. She continues to monitor the center's functioning and in the process has garnered the respect of the community.



SHIVKUMARI DEVI

It's never too late to Begin

Ward Member proves that when it comes to making an impact, what matters is intent and not age

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Bedwas/ Block: Dumra/ District: Sitamarhi

Following her engagement with *Pahel* through its Mahila Sabhas, administration of checklists at Health Centres and inspection visits to the local schools, sixty-year-old Shivkumari Devi has mobilized local women on issues like women's health, the importance of girl's education and immunization. She started visiting the local Anganwadi Center and the Health Sub Center on a regular basis where she noted the availability and the quality of services provided. She noticed that the quality of food provided was poor and she warned the Anganwadi worker (AWW) that she would take it up with higher authorities if things did not change.

At the VHSND the situation was similar - she found out that the participation of women and children was very low. Taking matters into her own hand, she started mobilizing local pregnant and lactating women to visit the VHSNDs. Her sincere and continuous efforts have brought about a positive change in the attendance and quality of services at both the VHSND and the Anganwadi Centre. Her many accomplishments as a Ward Member include her helping elders secure old age pension, job cards for labourers enrolled in MGNREGA and Indira Awas Yojana allocations for the poor.



TOGETHER, we can!

EWRs take matters into their own hands when the Mukhiya refuses to fulfil his duties

This is a story of the collective efforts of elected women representatives of Mahsaal West Panchayat in Dumra block of Sitamarhi district, against the existing malpractices at the Panchayat level.

On 26th January 2013, ward members Rajkumari Devi, Hena Jha, Geeta Devi, and Savitri Devi met with the Mukhiya to request him to hold a Gram Sabha but they were turned away.

The ward members decided to take the matter in their own hands and went to the Block Development Officer (BDO) to discuss the issue. They were shocked when the BDO informed them that as per records the bi monthly meetings had been held regularly.

The BDO even informed them about the records showing their participation in the meetings and their signatures on the minutes of the meeting.

The women protested and asked the BDO to take action, as the records that had been provided to him, were fake. They warned him if he did not enquire into the matter, they would take it up to higher authorities. The BDO assured them that he would look into the matter and take action accordingly.







SUNITA DEVI

From shy housewife to Vocal Leader

Ward Member succeeds in getting her village
a concrete road

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Ubb/ Block: Obra/ District: Aurangabad

Sunita Devi belongs to a poor family but has completed her education till tenth standard. As a first time elect, she had never stepped out of her house to attend Panchayat meetings. Her husband participated in the meetings on her behalf and she was happy looking after the home. Initially when the *Pahel* project team approached the couple, the husband was not keen on letting them meet Sunita Devi. After several visits, the team finally met Sunita Devi, and persuaded her to joining the three day residential training.



Inspired by the information about her own powers, Sunita Devi decided to work actively as a Ward Member and started mobilizing the community on social issues such as the importance of girls' education, women's health and hygiene, legal age marriage etc.

She pressurized the Mukhiya into holding regular bi-monthly Panchayat and Gram Sabha meetings. In one such meeting, she raised her concern about the lack of a concrete road in the village and persuaded the Mukhiya to sanction the required funds. The road construction was finally completed under her supervision.

Amongst her other duties, Sunita Devi monitors the VHSNDs and visits the local school regularly. She is also lobbying with the Panchayat for the construction of toilets for girls in the school and hopes to see results soon.

BINITA DEVI

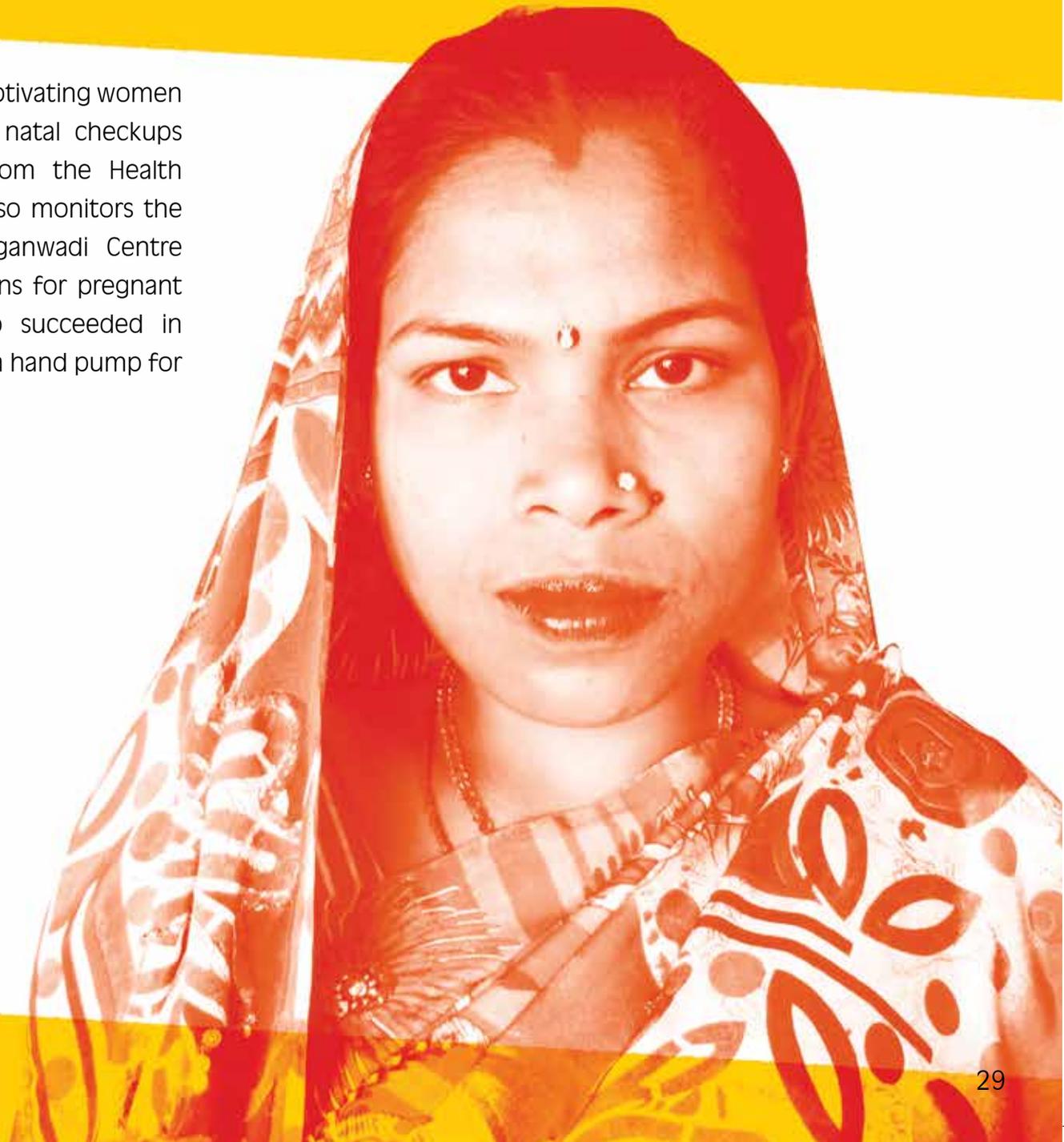
Leading by Example

Ward Member works on local priorities and gets
a hand pump for the community center

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Runnisaidpur north/ Block: Runnisaidpur/ District: Sitamarhi

Mother of four daughters and a son, Binita Devi's poor financial condition does not deter her from working for the welfare of the people in the village. Through Ward Sabhas, she connects with the community to identify priorities which she presents at the Panchayat meetings. Monitoring of health services by elected women representatives is a key activity under the project.

Binita Devi plays her role by also motivating women to avail immunization, pre ante natal checkups and family planning services from the Health Sub Center and the ASHA. She also monitors the smooth functioning of the Anganwadi Centre and disbursal of take home rations for pregnant and lactating women. She also succeeded in influencing the Mukhiya to install a hand pump for the community.



RADHA DEVI

Making change Possible

People's representative makes sure benefits reach those who are entitled

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Devnabujurg/ Block: Runnisaidpur/ District: Sitamarhi

Radha Devi was married immediately after she completed her primary education. But her limited education has not deterred her from educating herself about government schemes and entitlements. She organizes Ward Sabhas to share information and identify local development needs.

On one occasion, she discovered that the second installment of Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) had not been disbursed among the beneficiaries. She immediately approached the Block Development Officer (BDO) and ensured that the beneficiaries received the second installment.



As part of her work, Radha Devi also visits the Anganwadi Centre on take home ration day and ensures the appropriate distribution of ration to the beneficiaries. She monitors the VNSHD site and keeps a strict eye on the quality of services provided to the beneficiaries.

Today, Radha Devi is a respected leader in her community and attributes her success and the respect she has earned, to the *Pahel* project.

MEERA DEVI

Mobilizing her Peers

Ward Member's active participation leads to significant improvements in the Health Sub Centre through use of Untied Funds

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Loma/ Block: Gaighat/ District: Muzaffarpur

Meera Devi's flood prone village is inhabited mainly by Scheduled Caste (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). It faces many development challenges – and now in Meera Devi it has a determined leader who persuades her colleagues to participate actively in Gram Panchayat meetings.



On 1st April 2013, she attended a special meeting called by the Mukhiya that focused on the health programmes provided by the government. At this meeting Meera Devi spoke about the gaps that she found in the village's Health Sub Center (HSC) during her visit to administer the checklist. She shared details about how the HSC lacked basic equipment like an examination table, blood pressure measuring machine and even a weighing machine. She suggested that the Panchayat use the untied flexi fund, about which she had learned at the district level Convergence Meeting organized under *Pahel*. Her proposal was accepted and today HSC at Loma has all the basic equipment and provides improved services to the local people.



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SITA DEVI

Leading from the Front

Ward Member comes up with quick, pragmatic solutions

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Koili/ Block: Minapur/ District: Muzaffarpur

At Koili Panchayat, basic infrastructure facilities are far from adequate. A regular participant at the Mahila Sabhas organized as part of the project activities, Sita Devi learnt about the minimum standards for services at the VHSND, HSC and PHC. She also heard how other elected women representatives were not afraid to demand action from officials.

Today, Sita Devi is an active ward member and is very prompt in attending any meeting called by the Panchayat or any other department meetings. She encourages other women members others to do the same.

In May 2013, she visited the Health Sub Centre (HSC) in Gandhi Nagar, Koili. She was surprised to find that the doors, windows and other basic facilities were missing. She went to visit both the Mukhiya (who is also a woman) and the ANM to request them to get the door and the windows repaired. When the ANM rejected her plea saying that she had no money to fund the repair, Sita Devi advised them to utilize the untied fund. Her efforts did not go waste and soon repair works were undertaken. The community members now do not have to travel far for basic medical facilities.



BASANTI DEVI

An inspiring Role Model

Ensuring fair disbursement of entitlements

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Ekauna Bigha/ Block: Obra/ District: Aurangabad

First time elect, Basanti Devi, was hesitant about speaking to outsiders and never went for meetings, till the time she participated at the *Pahel* training programme where she learnt about her role and responsibilities as a ward member. This gave her the confidence to attend meetings where she succeeded in pressurizing the Mukhiya to call for the larger Gram Sabha, which is the larger meeting of all voters of the village. At the Gram Sabha meeting, she spoke about the deplorable condition of the local Health Sub Center.

She then took up the issue of local infra-structure and was instrumental in the construction of a 200 feet road and installation of solar lights in her village by availing of the Panchayat fund. Basanti Devi works hard to help the marginalized and ensures that they are able to access their entitlements under the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) and old age pension scheme.



MEENA DEVI

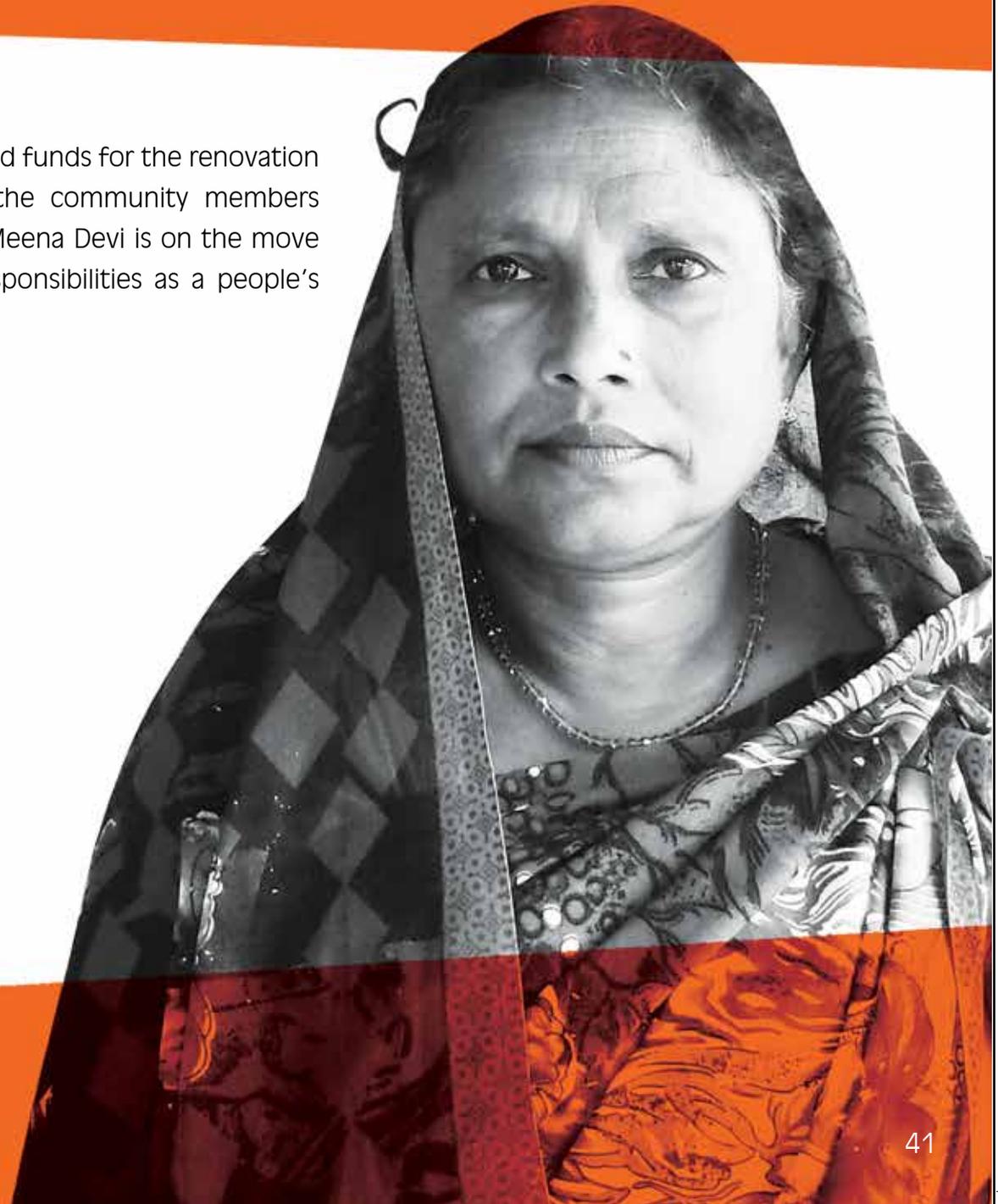
A true Leader

Ward Member shows natural leadership qualities,
encourages others to speak up

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Rasulpur/ Block: Dumra/ District: Sitamarhi

Prior to her association with *Pahel*, Meena Devi's husband represented at all her Panchayat meetings. She had no knowledge of the systems and her responsibilities as a ward member. The *Pahel* residential training was a window of opportunity and Meena Devi was a keen learner. She now disseminates information on reproductive health to all pregnant women of her ward. Meeting the Mukhiya, teachers, ASHAs, AWWs, ANM, and BDO on a regular basis, she shares with them about the problems encountered by the people of her ward and works jointly to find solutions.

From convincing the ANM to utilize the untied funds for the renovation of the Health Sub Center, to informing the community members through Ward Sabhas about entitlements, Meena Devi is on the move and always finds time to complete her responsibilities as a people's representative.



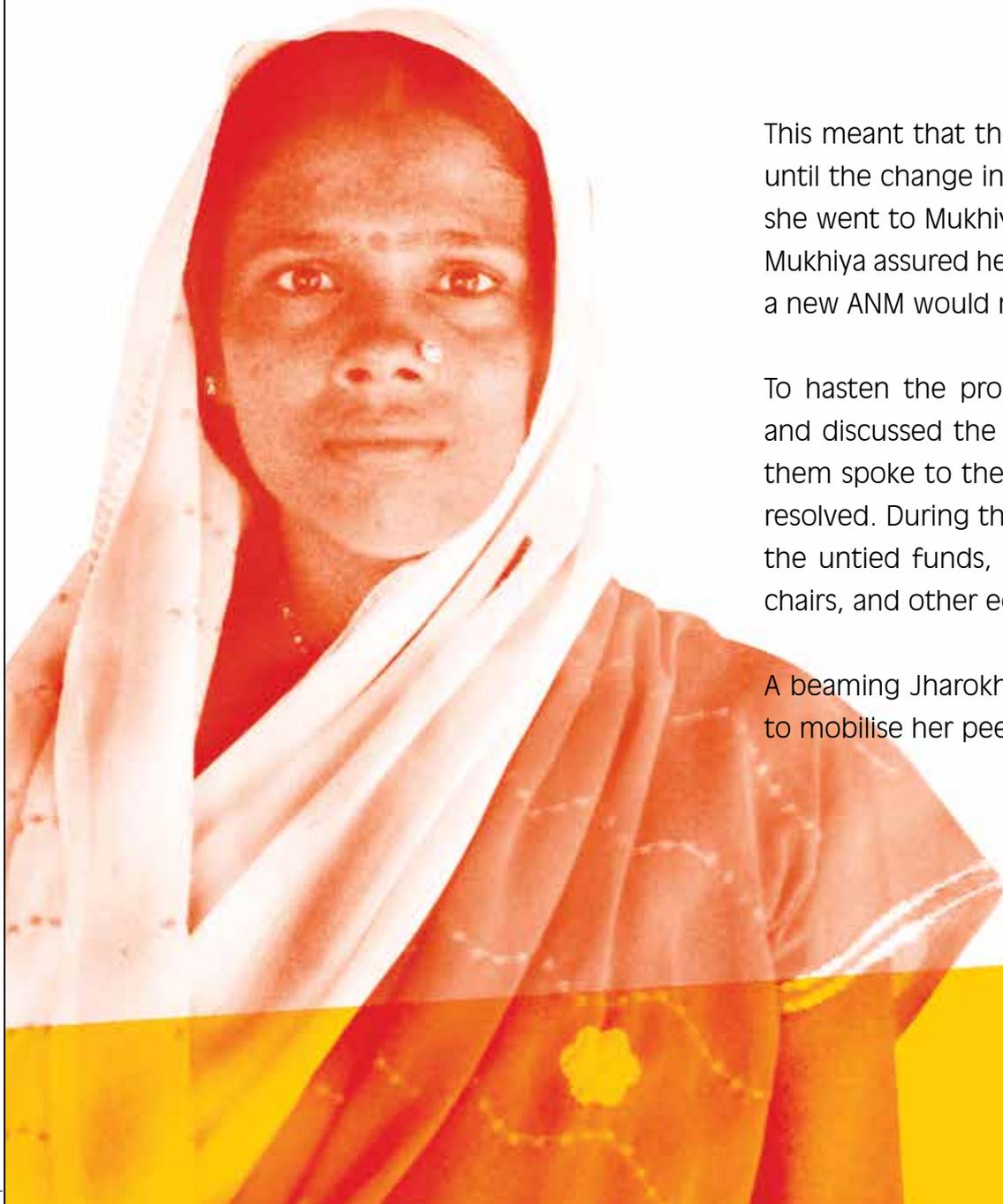
JHAROKHA DEVI

A true Icon

Ward Member makes sure that the untied fund does not go waste

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Jamin Mathia/ Block: Minapur/ District: Muzaffarpur

At the district level convergence meeting of Health Department officials where the Elected Women Representatives associated with *Pahel* shared the finding from their monitoring of their respective VHSNDs, HSCs, PHCs and District Hospital, Jahroka Devi learnt of the availability of untied fund at the levels of the Health Sub Centre that could be utilised for immediate corrective measures to improve facilities. In July 2013, she visited the Health Sub Center for her village and met with the ANM to enquire about the status of the expenditure of the untied fund. She found that the present account of the fund was still in the name of the previous ANM who had been transferred somewhere else.



This meant that the fund was still unspent and could not be used until the change in the account was made. To rectify the problem, she went to Mukhiya, along with the ANM to discuss the issue. The Mukhiya assured her that the signatory would be changed, and that a new ANM would replace the old one.

To hasten the process, Jharokha Devi met with the other EWRs and discussed the same issue during the monthly meeting. All of them spoke to the Mukhiya, and were finally able to get the issue resolved. During the meeting, they also discussed the utilization of the untied funds, and placed an order for an examination table, chairs, and other equipment for the Health Sub Center.

A beaming Jharokha Devi shares that she now has the confidence to mobilise her peers to take collective action.





SANGITA DEVI

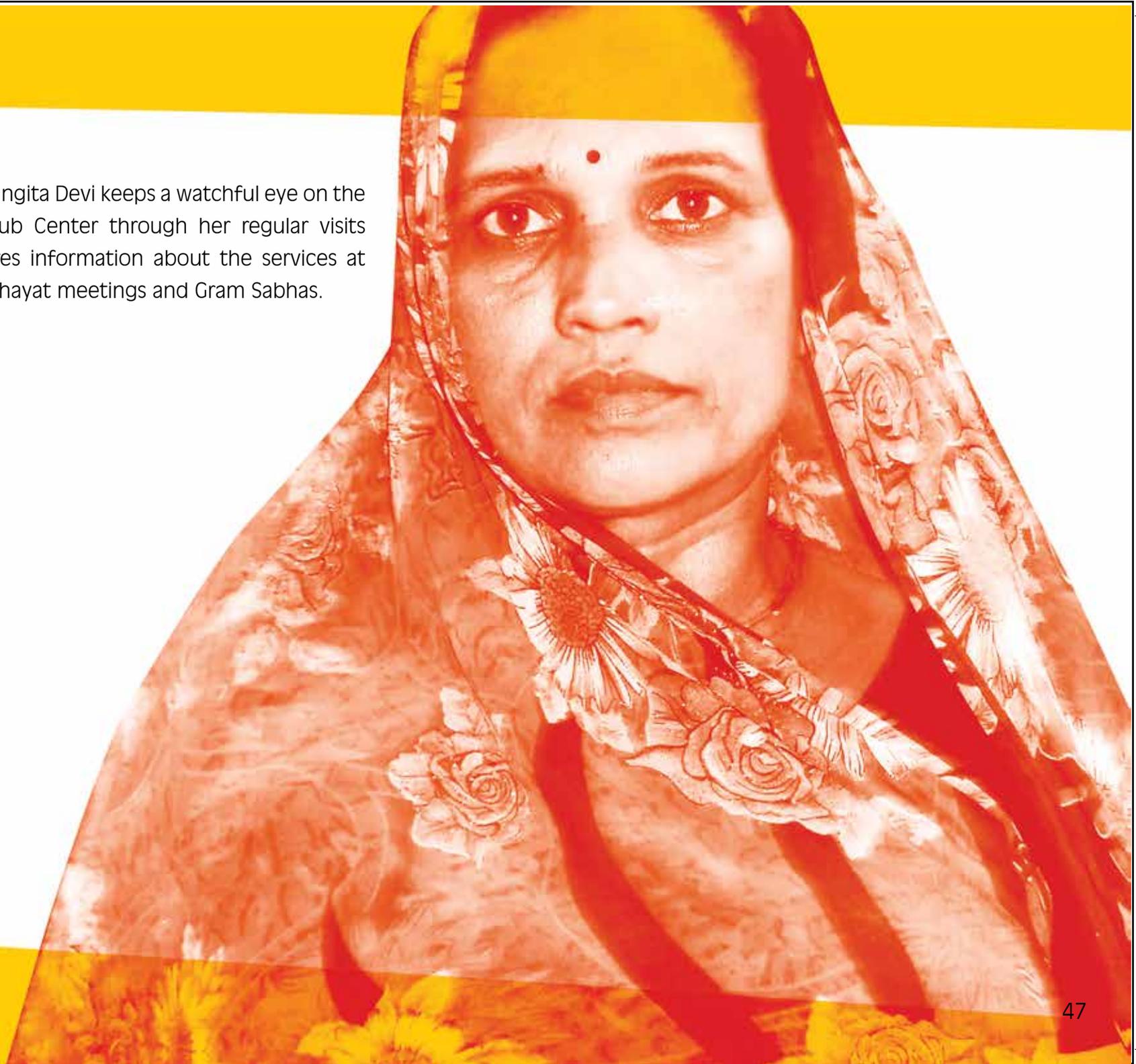
Lending a Helping Hand

A dedicated campaigner for promoting girls' education

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Rasulpur/ Block: Dumra/ District: Sitamarhi

Elected for the first time at the age of fifty five, Sangita Devi knew little about her own potential. The first thing that she did upon completing her training, was to help thirteen people in securing Indira Awaas Yojana benefits, 35 people for old age pensions and two women for widow pension. Later, she has also helped several women in securing reproductive health services at the primary health center. She has also raised awareness about girls' education and delaying age of marriage through her Ward Sabhas.

Today, Sangita Devi keeps a watchful eye on the Health Sub Center through her regular visits and shares information about the services at the Panchayat meetings and Gram Sabhas.



RAMDULARI DEVI

A wise Leader

Up-Mukhiya steps up and takes control when the Mukhiya refuses to fulfill her duties

Up-Mukhiya/ Panchayat: Kanta Piraucha South/ Block: Gaighat / District: Muzaffarpur

Prior to the inception of *Pahel* project activities in her block, Ramdulari Devi, was unaware about the PRI system, even though she was the Up-Mukhiya or the second-in-command.

The training provided by *Pahel* helped her gain knowledge on the various aspects of the Panchayat and acquainted her about the government schemes, available health services and important social issues that needed to be tackled. She also learnt how unequal gender relations are responsible for the low status of women, which manifests itself in family, community, society, including the Panchayats where women are rarely seen, let alone heard. In the Mahila Sabha and the monthly meeting of the EWRs, she came to know about her role as an Up-Mukhiya.



She realized that when the Mukhiya in her village was a rubber stamp and in reality, her husband was running the show; as Up Mukhiya, she had the power to intervene. Ramdulari Devi then firmly asked the husband of the Mukhiya not to organize the Executive Committee and the Gram Sabha meetings.

To rectify the problem, Ramdulari Devi organized an emergency meeting with the ward members to discuss the issue with them. They prepared a petition, which stated that as per the PRI rules, since the Mukhiya was not interested in fulfilling her responsibilities, Ramdulari being the Up-Mukhiya, would instead perform all the duties in her place. The petition was signed by two thirds of the members present and given to the BDO for action.

Taking matters into her own hands, Ramdulari Devi is happy about the petition being accepted and expressed *“Ab mera panchayat bhi aage badhe ga. Hum se jahan tak ho ga achha karne ka koshish karenge”* (Now our Panchayat will also make progress. We’ll try to do the best we can for the Panchayat)

GEETA DEVI

Challenging Traditional Norms

Ward Member steps up and stops child marriage.

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Ghosaut/ Block: Minapur/ District: Muzaffarpur

Promoting action on preventing child marriage and promoting girls education are a part of the focus areas of *Pahel*.

Inspired by the orientation on gender discrimination and women's equal rights, Geeta Devi began mobilizing the community on different issues regarding health and hygiene, immunization, importance of girls' education and legal age of marriage, through regular meetings.

During one of these meetings she was confronted with a situation where a thirteen-year-old girl Urmila Kumari was going to be married. She immediately visited the family and argued that it was not right for them to get her married, when she was studying in sixth grade. She informed them about the legal age of marriage (18 years), and how getting their daughter married at such an early age would adversely affect the girls' health and also hinder her educational prospects. After several rounds of counselling, the family was convinced to call off the wedding – but Geeta Devi is not complacent, she is always alert to any such developments in her village.



SHANTI DEVI

Lending a Helping Hand

Ward Member makes efforts to dispel myths and ensures that a child gets timely polio vaccine despite resistance from parents

Ward Member/ Panchayat: Raghapur/ Block: Minapur/ District: Muzzafarpur

As a child Shanti Devi never went to school, so when she was elected for the first time, she was content to stay at home and obey orders from the male members of her household. Her involvement in the *PaheI* Mahila Sabhas armed her with information and confidence to mobilize the community members, especially women to raise their awareness about health and hygiene, the importance of timely immunization and girls' education.



It is during these interactions that she came to know about a family that was refusing the administration of polio vaccine to their child. The family argued that once the child had fainted while he was being given the vaccine. Shanti Devi called the Medical Officer in charge and also the Block Health Manager of Minapur PHC to allay the fears of families that were under such false beliefs. Both officials jointly spoke to the family and finally the child was given the vaccine. Shanti Devi is proud of her achievement "*Jan Partinidhi hone ke nate mera kartaya banta hai ki apne ward ke logon ko accha or kharab ke bare main batlaiyen our unke behtar ke liye kaam karen*" (Being a public representative, it is my duty to work for the betterment of people living in my ward and also make them aware on good and bad things)





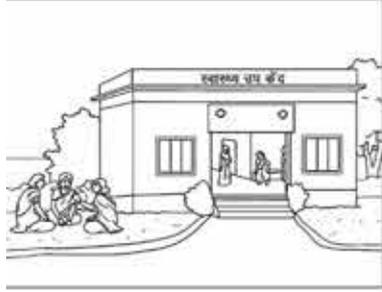
A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY ACTION ON HEALTH

Using Checklists to Ensure Quality and Accessibility of Reproductive and Family Planning Services

Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) both at Gram Panchayat (GP), Panchayat Samiti (PS) as well as Zilla Parishad (ZP) level were supported to monitor and act as health advocates in their respective areas and to develop an understanding in the progress made so far in the accessibility and quality of family planning and reproductive health services.

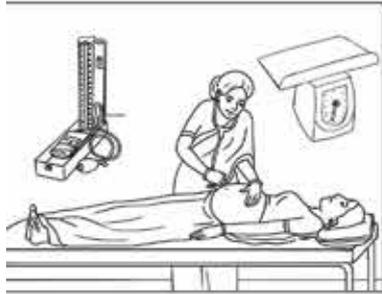
Four checklists were developed – Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSND) checklist, Health Sub-Centre (HSC) checklist, Primary Health Centre (PHC) checklist and District Hospital (DH) checklist. The checklist use aims at identifying systemic gaps that hinders delivery of quality maternal health services particularly services related to family planning and reproductive health. Necessary orientation and training was provided to elected women representatives on different components of checklists, service provision at various levels, women's entitlements and the role of stakeholders. After training, the elected women representatives administered the checklists with facilitation from the local partners of Centre for Catalyzing Change (formerly CEDPA India).

उप-स्वास्थ्य केंद्र जाँच सूची प्रपत्र



1. क्या उप-स्वास्थ्य केंद्र नियमित रूप से खुलता है?

हाँ नहीं



2. क्या बी.पी मशीन, बजन मापने वाला मशीन एवं जाँच करने वाला टेबल उप-स्वास्थ्य केंद्र पर उपलब्ध है और क्या इनका इस्तेमाल होता है ?

हाँ नहीं



3. क्या छोटी-मोटी बीमारियों का इलाज ए.एन.एम करती है? जरूरत पड़ने पर क्या ए.एन.एम मरीज को रेफर करती है।

हाँ नहीं



4. क्या ए.एन.एम नवजात अथवा बीमार बच्चों के इलाज के लिए गृह-भ्रमण करती है?

हाँ नहीं

ग्राम स्वास्थ्य स्वच्छता एवं पोषण दिवस जाँच सूची प्रपत्र



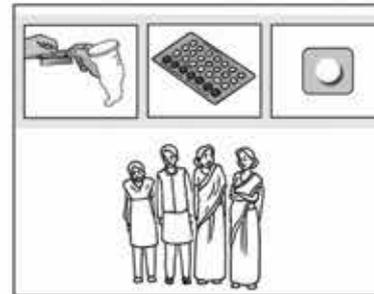
1. क्या ग्राम स्वास्थ्य स्वच्छता एवं पोषण दिवस माह की तय तिथि पर आयोजित की जा रही

हाँ नहीं



2. कितने लोग ग्राम स्वास्थ्य स्वच्छता एवं पोषण भाग ले रहे हैं ?

10 से अधिक 20 से अधिक



3. क्या उपस्थित पुरुषों, महिलाओं एवं दाम्पत्य गर्भनिरोधक गोलियों या कंडोम उपलब्ध करा

हाँ नहीं



4. क्या गर्भवती महिलाओं, स्तनपान कराने वाले एवं किशोरियों को पोषाहार उपलब्ध कराया

हाँ नहीं

COMMUNITY ACTION ON HEALTH LED BY ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

Experience of the *Pahel* initiative indicates that EWRs/PRI members have the potential to become effective leaders of community based monitoring as envisaged in the National Health Mission. One of the key activities undertaken in the project were district and block level convergence meetings, where the EWRs presented their findings before the senior officials, that led to quick action on part of the Department in terms of filling gaps and setting up of protocols to improve quality and access. The project learning recommends that government monitoring systems would benefit immensely from 'on ground' reports from elected leaders who have the legitimacy to enquire and monitor the quality of services.

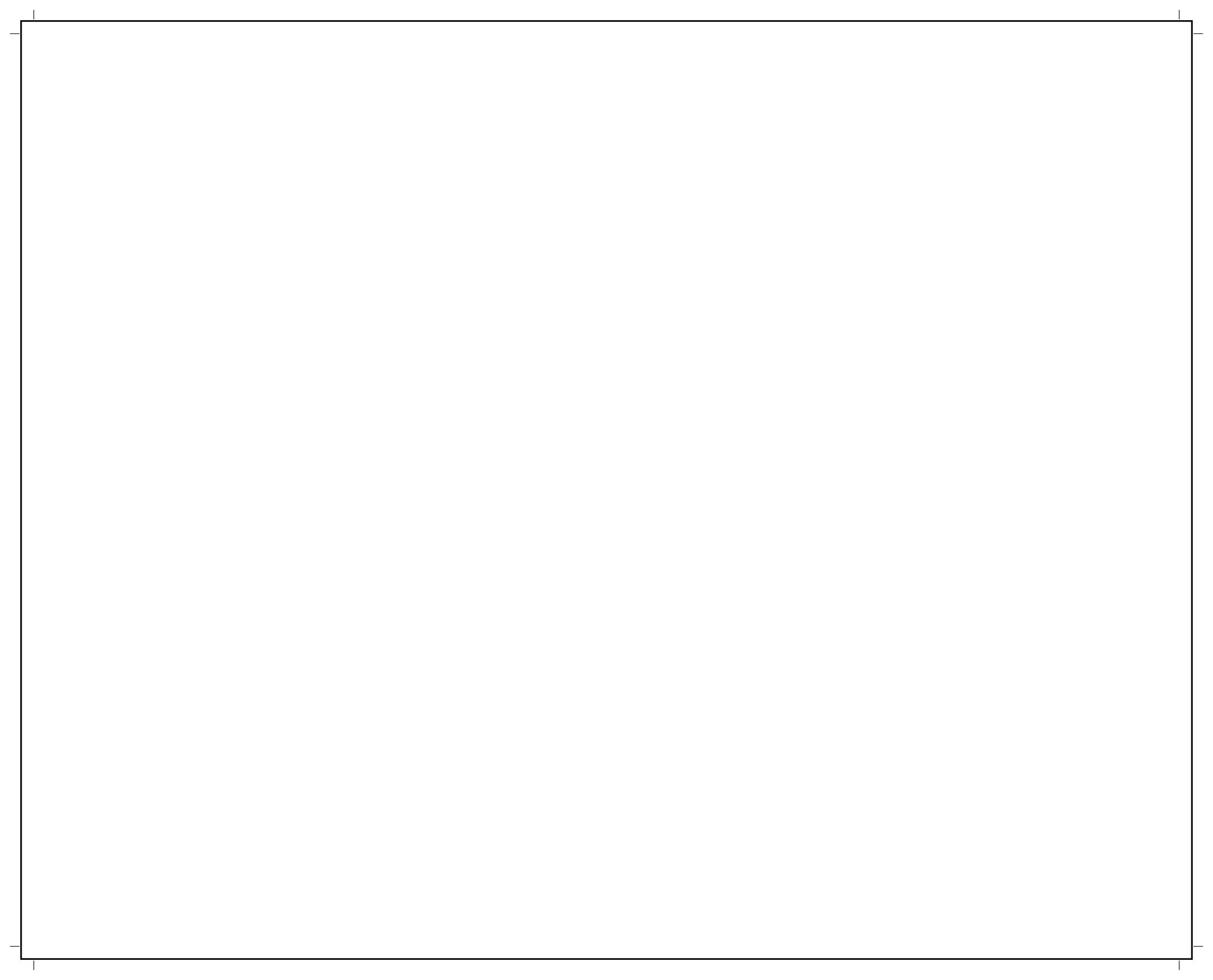
Elected Women Representatives have ensured:

- Regular and proper conduct of VHSNDs .
- Timely and appropriate usage of untied funds.
- Coordination and cooperation between frontline health workers and people's representatives to raise awareness, access and usage of services.
- Gaps in health services are raised as issues for action at Panchayat meetings and solutions possible at the local level are implemented.













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