Baradrone Social Welfare Institution (BSWI)

Reaching the Unreached

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

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FROM THE DESK OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY & DIRECTOR

Greetings from BSWI.

My heart fills with sorrow when at least one in every five households in West Bengal faced some food crisis during the lockdown period in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the situation could have been worse had the state government not come up with free distribution of food grainsthrough an augmented PDS mechanism, according to a report released by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen-led Pratichi (India) Trust. As I am also proud and have confidence that you all have looks on the contents of this humble presentation in the amid the life-taking pandemic. This is an effort to make all of you updated about the work carried out by our organization during the whole of the year

We are driven by our commitment to equity and dignity for all.

Being located in some of West Bengal's remotest pockets, we had first-hand knowledge of how bad the situation was in terms of health facilities, and awareness levels of the communities about safeguards against the rapidly spreading infection. Medicines, hospital beds, oxygen, and awareness on getting vaccinated, all required additional support from non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) like ours. We worked in close collaboration with the district administration and local Panchayats (PRIs) partners to reach out to all our community members with essential aids and awareness drives. The response to the COVID-19 crisis reiterated our faith in the 'collaborative approach' for development work. Even the union and the state governments, in several forums, acknowledged the collaborative role played by several NGOs in providing support at the last mile at the time of this unprecedented crisis. Besides the unprecedented national and global health emergency, the pandemic continued to create economic difficulties for a majority of the rural poor.

The massive setback the Indian economy received during 2020-21 resulted in weakened prices of kharif crops and loss of jobs for migrant laborers in urban areas, besides other debilitating effects on the rural economy. We continued to focus our efforts on revitalizing the rural economy in partnership with the local administration, various government departments, our donor partners and community members. We strengthened our efforts to infuse cash in the hands of households through an integrated approach of promoting farming of high-value crops and kitchen gardens. We facilitated initiation of wage income works under Government of West Bengal schemes for the rural communities' access to various scheme entitlements, and generation of private asset creation activities on scale such as horticulture, farm forestry, lift irrigation, farm ponds creation, and small ruminants / livestock rearing.

We also helped link young women and men to skilling and employment opportunities as well as enterprise opportunities in the allied and non-farm sectors. Our Commitment to a collaborative approach for development has resulted in burgeoning partnerships – existing and new - with government departments, private philanthropies, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). We work in partnership

with the Department of Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Agriculture, and Horticulture at the state level in West Bengal and Jharkhand. CSO collaborations are being formed in Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Rajasthan, building on our efforts in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh where similar coalitions have already been formed in the past.

New strategic relationships with philanthropies such as the Asia Pacific Fidelity Foundation were also built for organizational renewal and perspective building. We worked with 1,94 lakhs total outreach in four districts in West Bengal and Jharkhand states through partnership engagement, across 6 districts, 12 Community Development (CD) blocks, touching approximately 1.26 lakh individuals. Our target groups wholeheartedly welcomed our efforts for the wellbeing of the general mass with special emphasis on children, pregnant and caring women, aged persons and the people who live from hand to mouth.

We sincerely thank everyone who has joined hands with the BSWI's activities and goals to make our dreams realities in spite of the critical situations. We convey our gratitude to all those funders, donors and all empathetic persons and associations, our staff members and volunteers who worked hard in serving the common people. We are proud of you – our well-wishers and brave soldiers for development.

With kind regards,

Sanjib Bhattacharya
General Secretary,
Director & Trustee.

Baradrone, June 10, 2021

BSWI Governing Body

Sachita Sarkar
President & Trustee

Mrs Sarkar is a veteran rural development activist with special focus on women's empowerment and collectivities for the cause of societal development. She is a graduate from the Calcutta University and has participated in many development training and orientation programs in this state and outside. Mrs. Sarkar was indirectly associated with our organization for more than fifteen years and now as the President of our organization for last five years. She heads the Governing Body and actively assists all of its activities with her experiences and contributions for the social well-beings.

Anadi Naskar
Vice-President & Trustee

Mr. Naskar is associated with BSWI for more than three decades as a volunteer, staff and active development activist. He has grassroots experience and knowledge about livelihood development, games and sports and SHG motivation and activation. Mr. Naskar is a graduate from the Calcutta University. His contribution to this organization is unparallel and precious. He assists not only the President but also the whole of our Governing Body members with his long-standing education, experience and social understanding.

Sanjib Bhattacharya
Secretary-Director & Trustee

Mr. Bhattacharya has been one of the founder members of BSWI since the year of 1976 when the earlier "Library" was transformed to the present organization – BSWI. He has been carrying the legacy of his parents who were the main founders of the organization. Having been graduated from the Calcutta university in Pol. Sc. and Sociology (Hons), Shri Bhattacharya made him over to the development fields without going in for any traditional jobs. Later on, he received the MAP (Management Appreciation Program) from IRMA (Institute of Rural management Anand), Gujarat; MMFP (Management Micro Finance Program) from the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh and from ActionAid India; and then MRDP (Management Rural Development Program) from the Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad Narendrapur. He started his career from this organization from the year of 1981 as a Project Coordinator (and Founder Member). Mr. Bhattacharya is a highly devoted personality with long-standing experiences in all series of development aspects. He has worked with the Ministry of Rural Development as a Facilitator-cum-Evaluator for about a decade and trained many a NGOs in the districts of South 24 Parganas, East Medinipur, Darjeeling, Malda, Murshidabad, North Dinajpur and Silchar (Assam).al understanding.

Arati Sarkar
Asstt. Secretary & Trustee

Mrs. Arati Sarkar is a high school qualified woman. She is an entrepreneur for more than thirty years and a dynamic personality for managing and guiding the self-help groups (SHGs). She has been an example of enterprise development for being economically successful. She guides and teaches the several SHGs being run under the aegis of our organization. Mrs. Sarkar is a dynamic and smart women who is a pride to our society.

Haran Chandra Paik
Treasurer & Trustee

Mr. Paik is a veteran development worker and has served our organization since his student life. By profession he was the head teacher of a high school and academically he is a commerce graduate from the Calcutta University. He has vast knowledge in accounts procedures and is certified by the Ramkrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad Narendrapur. He has devoted himself in the cause of the society's welfare and he is vegetarian. He has contributed many significant things into the organization's working pattern.

Swapan Bikash Naskar
Member & Trustee

Mr Swapan is representing the staffs and volunteers of the organization and encouraging them to follow the path of courage, peace and love to the human beings. He presents all information and reports to the Board of Members effectively and arranges all cultural programs, games & sports competition.

BSWI Advisory Body

Mr. Rangan Datta
Chief Advisor, BSWI

Mr Datta is a very respected and creative person who has contributed many great things to the government departments and to our organization. Mr. Datta has provided his expertise in various government departments, agencies and foundations led by the Government of India. He has great contributions to the growth of BSWI in many folds for the last two decades. He retired as a Secretary to the Government of India in the position of Senior IAS Officer on Ministry of Rural Development as Director General as well as the DG of Ministry of Home Affairs Government of India. After his retirement, Mr Datta has worked as an Advisor to the Planning Commission of India; Advisor of the Department of Science & Technology GoI; Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Foundation GoI and many other reputed government organizations.

Dr Kanchan Bhowmik
Advisor, BSWI

Dr. Bhowmick is a young man with progressive ideas for agriculture-based livelihood development. As a meritorious student, Dr. Bhowmick is an IIT fellow of Kharagpur IIT. He provides project planning and monitoring support to BSWI and helps the organization in decision making and exposure to new technologies in the agriculture sector.

Aditi Ray
Advisor, BSWI

Ms. Aditi is supporting BSWI in the field of making people learn; designing, preparing and delivering training course targeted for adult learners; Creating post curriculum evaluation and feedback forms; Conducting workshops for formulating intervention in the realm of social work development practice; Writing project proposals, log Frame, documentation reports; Conducting creative writing and storytelling workshops for adults and young adults; Imparting leadership training; Facilitating workshops for community organization and development practice; Developing adequate contents and modules for academic research; Preparing teaching learning materials; Conducting training sessions to impart knowledge based training on Rights and entitlements of women, Gender mainstreaming and empowerment, Child rights; Devising training program to facilitate skill development of organizational staff in terms of documentation, communication and interpersonal skills.

Aditi Ray
Advisor, BSWI

Dr. Das is a qualified medical doctor with more than four decades involvement in social development sector. He was involved with a world-famous development charity and then established his organization ASHA that works in health related programs in many districts of India. He is associated with BSWI as an advisor in its health sector activities. With his support BSWI has made advancement in its functioning in the health sector.

Mr. Saikat Pal

Mr. Paul was associated with PRADAN, a pioneer national level rural development organization. He is also a Fellow of the IIT Kharagpur in Soil & Water Management. A young person with genuine zeal to induce sustainable rural development in the remote rural areas, Mr. Paul has been running an NGO and working closely with the government departments in varied development paradigms. Mr. Paul helps BSWI in devising project proposals and monitoring its activities of the sector. His contributions to BSWI have been outstanding and great and helped BSWI achieve many a great things in the field.

OPERATIONAL SECTORS OF BSWI

EDUCATION & LIFE DETERMINATION

HEALTH & WELL BEING

RELLIEF & REHABILITATION

ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT & BASIC NECESSITIES

ORGANIZATION BUILDING & EMPOWERMENT

OBJECTIVES OF BSWI

- To liberate the people from the bondage of illiteracy
- To strengthen the target groups attain sound mental and physical health
- To improve the status of the women – socially, economically ad organizationally
- To ensure food and income security for the people living below the poverty line
- To encourage the rural youths participate in rural development process
- To achieve an exploitation-free and oppression-free living environment ensuring harmony and co-existence.

BSWI'S OPERATIONAL AREAS

Coverage of Rural Population

Sl.No	State / Districts	Blocks & villages	Target populations reached
01	W.B. South 24 Parganas	Diamond Harbour I, Magrahat, Kulpi & Namkhana (40 villages)	242,000
02	W.B. Malda	Gajole (35 villages)	37,000
03	W.B. North Dinajpur	Kaliaganj (30 villages)	34,000
04	W.B. Murshidabad	Kandi Samsi (25 villages)	26,600
05	Jharkhand – Rajmahal District	Taljhari Block (21 villages)	11345

OTHER INFORMATION

Salary & Benefits

Position	Amount per month	Highest paid staff (CEO)	Lowest paid staff Night Guard)
Secretary & Director	Rs. 50,000/-	Rs. 26,500/-	Rs. 7000/-

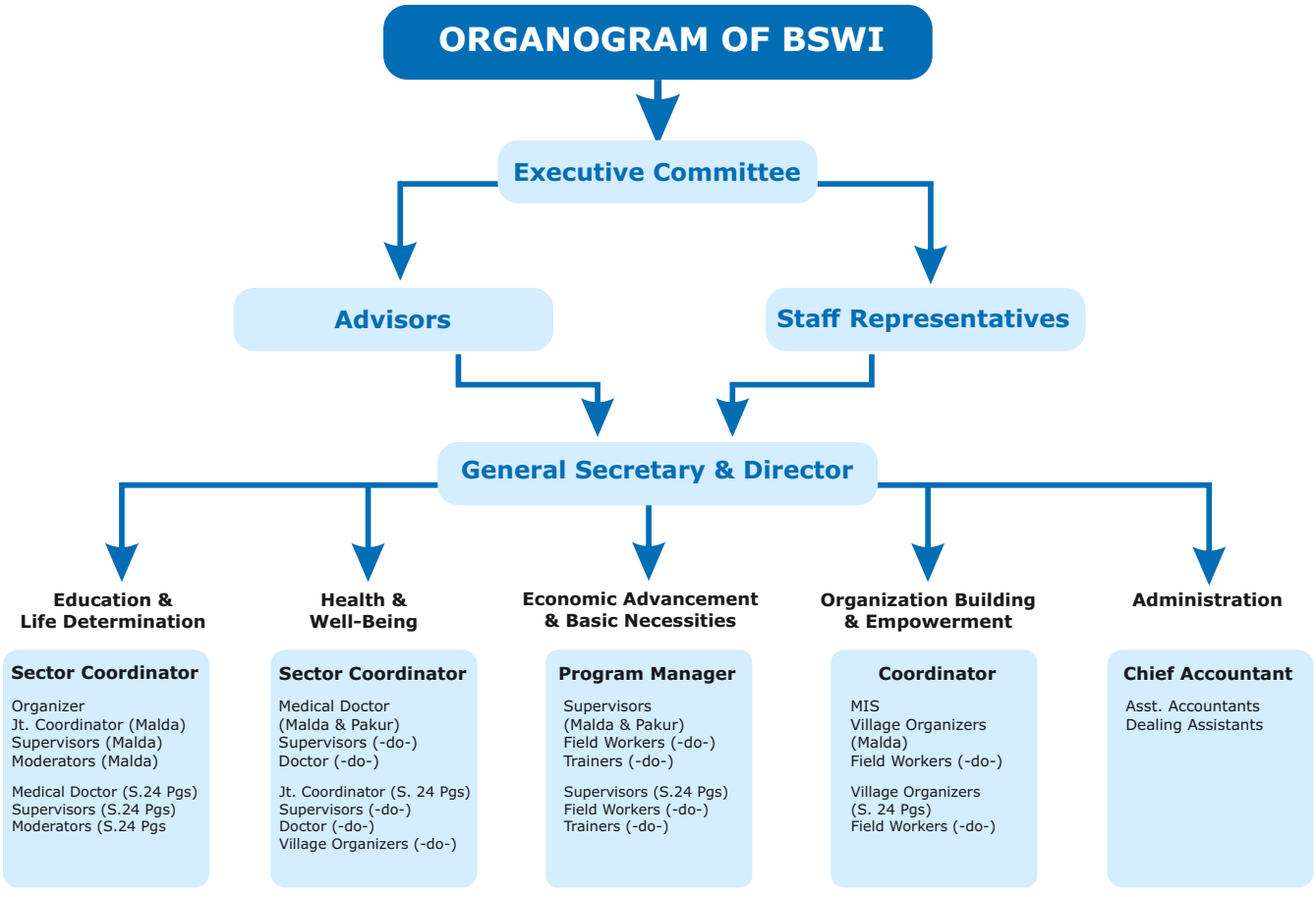
OUR DONORS – PAST & PRESENT

Name of Donors & Year	Projects Supported
PAST SUPPORTERS: Till 2019-2020	
ICCO Netherlands (1978-1984)	Agriculture Development & Irrigation Support
CRS India (1978-1981)	Nutritious Food Distribution for Women & Children
Mennonite Central Committee (1981-1089)	Food-For-Work through Pond Excavation, Fish Cultivation, and Vegetable Cultivation
Khadi & Village Industries Commission (1981-1988)	Spinning and Handloom Works Training & Production Project
Khadi & Village Industries Commission (1982-1987)	Bakery for the Poor & Needy People
Government of West Bengal (Village Road Making) {1980-1983}	Village Road Making
OXFAM India Trust UK (1982 - 1985)	Rehabilitation of Village Robbers
OXFAM India Trust UK (1984 - 1986)	Reinstatement of Potters
Action Aid India (1985-1999)	Integrated Rural Development Project Through Child Sponsorship in 35 Villages
OXFAM India Trust (1986-1999)	Community Health Project in 25 Villages
Ministry of Rural Development, GoI (1992-2010)	Ten projects for sustainable rural development and Livelihood Projects
FORRAD GERMANY (1996-1998)	Installation of Hand pumps and Irrigation Improvement Project
Embassy of Ireland (2013-2017)	Enterprise Development Project For Women

Canadian Embassy (1994-1997)	Training in Hand Gloves and Woolen Products for the Self-Help Group Women
Consulate General of Japan (2009-2011)	Construction of Livelihood Trg-Cum-Production Center for the Villagers
Tata Trusts (2008-2012)	Integrated Livelihood Development Project in North Bengal
JRD Tata Trust (2012-2017)	Integrated Livelihood Development Project in North Bengal
Tata Global Beverages Ltd (2014-2019)	"Gaon Chalo" (meaning LETS GO TO VILLAGES) For Youth Employment
TechMahindra ESRO (2012-present)	Health, Hygiene and Nutrition Development of the Poor and needy women, children and adolescents.
PRESENT SUPPORTERS: 2020-2021	
MPLAD – GoI (2020-2021)	COVID Rehab & Relief Support Scheme
District Rural Development Office Malda (2020-2021)	-do-
Dept of Health, GoWB (2020-2021)	Medicine Supplies and food distribution
Volkart Foundation Indian Trust (2020-2021)	COVID Rehab & Relief Support Scheme
Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama Belur (2020-2021)	COVID Rehab & Relief Support Scheme
S.J.Jindal Foundation (2020-2021	Medicine and Curative Care for the Poor & Needy
Rotary Trust (2020-2021)	COVID Rehab & Relief Support Scheme
Ambuja Trust (2020-2021)	COVID Medical & Relief Support
Consulate of Denmark	COVID Rehab & Relief Support Scheme
Italian Development Corporation	COVID Rehab & Relief Support Scheme
Embassy of Georgia	COVID Rehab & Relief Support Scheme
Embassy of Malayasia	COVID Medical & Relief Support
Consulate of Singapore	COVID Rehab & Relief Support Scheme

BSWI TEAM

- PROJECT DIRECTOR: One.
- EDUCATION SECTOR: One Sector Coordinator; Two Joint Coordinators; Twenty-Two Moderators.
- HEALTH SECTOR: One Sector Coordinator; One Doctor; 12 VHWs; 2 Supervisors.
- LIVELIHOOD SECTOR: One Sector Coordinator; Two Joint Coordinators; Six Field Staff.
- ORGANIZATION BUILDING: One Sector Coordinator; Two Organizers; Two Field Staff.
- ACCOUNTANTS: One Chief Accountant; Three Assistant Accountants.
- OFFICE ASSISTANTS: Three Staffs.
- BSWI FARMHOUSE & CAMPUS: Two Caretakers; Two Watchmen.



ABOUT BSWI

Introduction

Baradrone Social Welfare Institution (BSWI) is a pioneer organization in West Bengal that originated in the year of 1961 as a village level textbook library and free coaching centre. Gradually, BSWI stepped forward by partnering with the government and non-government charities in India and abroad and over the years it has played a major role in developing many governments and international agency funded projects and National Rural Development Programs. BSWI is continuing to work for change that is sustainable and self-perpetuating, bringing skills and systems that help women, families and communities gain confidence and take charge of their own lives. The opportunities and the association over the years have helped create learning/lessons for BSWI and gain organizational experience. BSWI catalyzes change in thousands of lives by implementing innovative efforts.

Vision

- To contribute to building a society where all people can gain access to education, health care, and employment opportunities and where people can realize their full potential;
- To build a trusted bridge between the dreams and aspirations of individuals who care about suffering people and their realization;
- To build a professional organization that is secular, transparent, credible and accountable for all of its activities.

Mission: To empower individuals, families, communities and society by helping ensure their rights to live and help them come out from the barriers of poverty, illiteracy and well-being.

Our Dreams:

- A society where all people can gain access to education, health care, and employment opportunities and where people can realize their full potential;
- Establishment of a trusted bridge between the dreams and aspirations of individuals who care about suffering people and their realization; and
- Transforming to a professional and devoted organization that is secular, translucent, credible and accountable for all of its activities

Our Values:

- Respect – Believing in and appreciating the dignity and potential of all human beings;
- Integrity – Maintaining social, ethical and organizational norms and adhering to the code of conduct;
- Commitment – Fulfilling organizational goals with full commitment towards our duties and responsibilities; and
- Excellence – Setting high performance standards and being accountable for and responsible towards our work.

BSWI Team of Staffs

Adolescents Volunteers Team

Kishore Kishori Bahini

OUR ACTIVITIES DURING THE YEAR 2020-2021

As no other regular program was possible during this year as a result of the COVID19 Pandemic, we concentrated to work only in programs attached to or related to the Pandemic. The programs carried out are as below:

TACKLING THE PANDEMIC: STEPS TAKEN

Food supply in progress

Nutritious food supply for mothers and children BSWI

BSWI's first response to the COVID-19 pandemic was two-pronged: mitigating the immediate crises post-lockdown and designing interventions to address long-term social and economic impact. Second, BSWI kept the overall programmatic contours intact, that is, women collectives, livelihoods, asset creation, nutrition and governance. There were no major shifts from the original plan (pre-COVID outbreak), with respect to the overall outreach or coverage of households under livelihood interventions. The teams were aware that, amid these major disruptions, holding on to the original plan would be the big challenge they would face. Third, there were significant changes observed vis-à-vis the approach, the engagement methodology and the strategies in response to the evolving scenario for enhanced and effective interventions. The following strategic interventions were made for gaining further traction with the communities and fast-tracking work for revival of the rural economy.

Collaborating with partners

We started investing in building partnerships with other smaller NGOs and government departments. Through partnership action with government agencies, we expanded to 2 districts in West Bengal and 2 districts (3 blocks) in Jharkhand, touching 11,415 households. The emerging methodology was to take direct action where BSWI has its presence.

Generating Awareness in the local dialect by displaying wall paintings, posters and flex boards at the more frequented spots in the village, preparing songs in local languages, announcing important information periodically through loudspeakers, to educate rural communities on various aspects. These facilitated community members' access to knowledge and information at their doorsteps.

In order to tackle the immense poverty of the COVID-affected remote villages of North Bengal (Malda), we have provided seed money for household small poultry rearing units to 165 Self-Help Group members. By this they are earning palpable incomes on recurring basis that have been highly beneficial for maintaining their families' crisis.

During the year, BSWI has provided Training in Scientific Poultry Rearing for the SHG members managed by BSWI. 345 women have been trained and BSWI has provided corpus fund to set up the commercial poultry farms. Supporting and encouraging the public systems so that the slew of relief measures announced by the government reaches the neediest and the deserving. This entailed mapping all families that did not have ration cards, opening Jan Dhan accounts, issuing MGNREGS job cards and other such documentation, to avail of state benefits.

During the year, BSWI has provided Training in Scientific Poultry Rearing for the SHG members managed by BSWI. 345 women have been trained and BSWI has provided corpus fund to Creating a volunteer pool (of over 2,000 rural youth) for responding to people's diverse requirements, ranging from attending health emergencies, generating awareness and tracking migrants/vulnerable populace requiring special support. These volunteers were also engaged in various aspects such as supporting households in accessing government schemes, forming linkages with financial institutions and providing healthcare services.

USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

In anticipation of reduced face-to-face contact with the villagers (for training, planning, on-field support), colleagues across the field areas explored innovative ways of reaching out to communities using digital technology. A number of training modules were developed using digital platforms. Audio-visual tools were extensively used to impart knowledge and skills. Local cadres were acquainted with digital platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. We modified our content to provide digital training, using audio-visual aids, PPTs, information-education-communication (IEC) material that could be circulated through WhatsApp. Over 2,000 community cadres were trained in this, to support households in planning, conducting agronomic training and offering crop advisory. In the Santhal Pargana Development Cluster (SPDC) in Jharkhand, the KOBO-based online app was adopted for individual, household-level, comprehensive livelihoods planning.

NUTRITION GARDENS

Nutrition Gardens have been done in backyards of the rural communities

Creating a nutrition garden in the backyard aimed at promoting health and nutrition through utilizing small homestead land parcels that families own. It was widely scaled out with the support of Nutrition Mentors and Change Vectors. Garden layouts and crop selection were done, based on the availability of land in the backyard, food practices and local crop varieties. We influenced policy makers in West Bengal and Jharkhand and got nutrition gardens included in the 'Shelf of Activities' under MGNREGS through administrative orders, thus ensuring cash income and availability of nutritious food for participating households across many project blocks and beyond.

COMPREHENSIVE LIVELIHOODS

We piloted a comprehensive livelihoods approach in 50 villages, with the focus on the centrality of women, inclusion, nutrition, agro-climatic sustainable practices and sustainable incomes. This involved the perspective and capacity building of women collectives and facilitating the collectives to develop a village-level comprehensive livelihoods plan.

West Bengal Department of Micro Small & Medium Enterprises and Textiles, has patronized the wonderful craft heritage of West Bengal, not only to sustain it but to develop it further, keeping pace with new demand pattern, new designs. Having joined hands with our organization, the Government has continuously encouraged and supported enhancement of skills for quality creations in the Handicraft sector which has reaped benefits for the craftsmen and we together have created a growing number of craft-admirers both in the country and abroad even in the midst of this pandemic keeping in view the norms.

Self Help Group members have been self-employed through skill development

The Handicraft products of the state are available at different emporiums and showrooms (of Biswabangla, Manjusha, Bangasree etc.) spread over at various locations of West Bengal and outside. In addition to the District-level Handicraft Fair, the State Handicraft Expo is held in Kolkata where our organization collaborated. In every winter where Buyer-Seller Meet is regularly organised for direct market exposure of the handicraft artisans. Participations are also made at various fairs and craft bazaars at state and national level and in various Indian festivals.

A Producers' Group making handicrafts items

Women collectives developed an integrated natural resource management (INRM) plan for approval in Gram Sabhas, in order to leverage funds from different schemes. The villages selected were ultra-poor and covered the most deprived families. We also planned the promotion of economic collectives such as Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) so as to unleash growth in the agriculture sector that would be synergized by building robust value chains of vegetables, cereals, horticulture crops and livestock. This involved not only bringing changes in agricultural practices but also the institutional development aspects.

Traditional Goddess Images bringing good income for the trained women

NEW PARTNERSHIP IN 2020 - 2021

Sustainable Livelihoods Carbon Project: Jharkhand and West Bengal:

The 'Sustainable Livelihoods Carbon Project', in partnership with the Livelihoods Carbon Fund (LCF), is meant to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in selected project areas of Jharkhand and Northern West Bengal by helping small-holders create durable natural resource assets. These land and water assets will not only strengthen their livelihoods but also address climate change issues by coupling carbon sequestration with strong social, environmental and economic value added for the communities involved in the project.

Seepage Ponds, 5% Models and Drought & Water Management Ponds have been created for scientific agriculture

Empowering Women through Direct Seeded Rice Cultivation (DSR):

This project aimed at improving the food security of marginal farmers through the use of modern tools, to develop sustainable rice production clusters with the enabling community in Taljhari and Rajmahal blocks of Jharkhand by creating the required ecosystem to facilitate Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) cultivation. Rice-based farming can greatly benefit small-scale farmers, especially women, and help end hunger in these areas. The productivity of the blocks is far below 50% of the national average and needs a jump start. The project worked with about 6,000 marginalized farmers that converge on 40 villages. The goal was to ensure that, by the end of the project, 60% of them adopt DSR practices. Six thousand farmers have adopted DSR practices and 10,000 farmers have become aware about DSR so far.

SRI (System of Rice Intensification) and SCI (System of Crop Intensification) have been grand success in North Bengal & Jharkhand through increased staple food (rice)

Resurgence of Rural Economy-based Livelihoods to Tackle Covid-19 Crisis (REFRESH)

The project has facilitated 1400 women farmers associated with 65 SHGs to overcome the distress resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic through Fish Cultivation that provided short term fish for selling. It is a three-year project that covers eight blocks of four extremely backward districts in the states of Jharkhand and West Bengal.

BSWI is helping rural women members of self-help groups (SHGs) earn good income through inland fisheries

Agriculture & Small Enterprises are going together for poverty alleviation

Skill Building in Rural Women can go a long way to poverty alleviation

Assured Income Enhancement through Model Goat Farming

This three-year project aspired to enhance the capabilities of 120 poor-rearers in the districts of Malda and Taljhari block in Jharkhand to ensure an additional annual income of Rs 30,000 per rearer (from the current average income of Rs 5,000). Rearers have been collectivized into 10 Producers Groups (PGs) in 25 villages, and these PGs have been federated into three block-level Producers' Collectives (BPCs), to support and sustain their rearing business.

Women SHG members earning good income through Black Bengal Goat keeping

COVID-19 Pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a widespread slowdown in economic activity across the country. After learning from its partners promoting rural livelihoods (in the agri-allied sectors and in facilitation of MNREGA/entitlements) that the situation is quite dire, we wanted to support the local PRI's efforts in addressing a few of the urgent issues such as agricultural inputs (seeds/fertilizers), scientific mango cultivation in North Bengal and facilitation of employment under MGNREGS for the very poor and support to well-performing SHGs. BSWI applied for the extended support for mitigating the impact of pandemic.

North Bengal women prospering economically through Scientific Mango Cultivation

Strengthening livelihoods and doubling farmers' income:

The project supported families in Gajole block (Gazole Block of Malda district), Kaliaganj Block of North Dinajpur district and Taljhari Block of Jharkhand, to enhance their food security and income by strengthening their agriculture production system with streamlined market linkages, and by augmenting livestock rearing practices, with the required vaccinations and other required services. Further, the idea is to facilitate community institutions such as Federations and VOs for improving the nutritional status of women and children through better access to public services such as PDS, ICDS and other relevant health services, and demonstrating how to cultivate nutri-gardens, thereby supporting beneficiaries (including pregnant women, lactating mothers and children below three years along with vulnerable households). Additionally, the focus is to create a suitable environment to contain the pandemic through having strong surveillance systems, creating awareness of safety measures and supporting migrants and other households impacted by the lockdown.

SHG Collectives–PRI Collaboration toward Better Social Protection:

The goal of this short-term project is to build the concept of SHGs as actors in facilitating access to social protection programs by rural communities. The proposed intervention is focused on creating a ground-up action to involve community collectives in feedback mechanisms to the state, to improve the functioning of key social protection programs.

Revitalizing the Rural Economy as a Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic:

The project shifting the focus to creating small local growth clusters, say, two to three contiguous Gram-Panchayats forming such a cluster. Each such cluster created more self-reliant systems of production, processing and marketing, to increase livelihoods/ employment for 2000 to 2500 households. A multi-pronged approach was used to create such growth clusters across the rural areas.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Our COVID-19 response began on 15 March 2020, four days after WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Between March and December 2020, we worked with our village community partners, resource support organizations, local governments and the State administrations to reduce the negative effects of the lockdown and the continuing effects of the pandemic.

Our response evolved to meet the requirements from the ground. Our abilities were bolstered by moral, technical, and financial support from organizations, civil society groups and individuals. Panchayati Raj Institutions, feld-level functionaries of line departments and Block and District level administration guided and supported us through this period.

Creating awareness

Through our own campaigns and by supporting outreach efforts of the local governments and frontline workers, we ensured that village communities were screened for the disease, got accurate and reliable information about the coronavirus, and took measures to stay safe. We supported the enumeration of individuals returning to the villages and setting up quarantine centers. We harnessed village institutions to make masks and sanitizers, set up community kitchens, and organized relief distribution to get vital health services and material support to vulnerable families.

Enabling income earning opportunities

With markets closed and job losses mounting, MGNREGS offered a much-needed livelihood safety net for the poor. Gram Vikas, along with the Village Development Committees, worked closely with the local governments to identify and generate work under the scheme. The types of work initiated were geared to improve water security, help in soil conservation, improve land productivity; and create durable assets such as household toilets and community playgrounds. Our team helped people get job cards and mobilized women and men including the returning migrants to take up the work to cope with the job and income I nsecurities.

Securing social entitlements

The Government of India's emergency relief measures to augment social protection to ensure food and cash support were particularly significant for the ones severely affected by the pandemic. BSWI developed a cadre of community mobilisers to identify vulnerable populations and share with them information on State and Union Government schemes and programs. We supported rural households to fill applications, assisted Panchayati Raj Institutions and Gram Panchayats and liaised with district and block administrations to enable linkages.

Mitigating food insecurity

While most families received their Public Distribution Service (PDS) food grains, food insecurity continued to plague the most vulnerable as the continued crisis of no work left them with little income to buy essentials or save for the monsoon. Moreover, the quantity of food received through the PDS was insufficient, and many did not have ration cards. We launched the Food Support Program, a collective effort with the Village Development Committees (VDCs). The VDCs identified the vulnerable households and finalized the list of those in need of extra support. Women-headed households, families without PDS entitlement, with only senior citizens, and households having people with disabilities or prolonged illnesses were prioritized.

The VDCs led the process of vendor selection, procurement, packaging and distribution. Local procurement, instead of from the city, not only ensured reduced costs with transparency but also gave business to local suppliers. Food kits were customized as per the local needs and food preferences. In some districts, for instance, in Kalahandi, soybean chunks, dried red chilies, and turmeric powder were preferred while replaced milk powder was preferred in some others. Families collected food kits from the distribution centers set up in the village. Each of them committed to contributing 10 days of their labour for any upcoming village development work.

Providing access to education

We set up technology-equipped Learning Centres (LC) that took the classrooms to the children. We set up a total of 20 Centres in villages across Gazole, Bamungola, Habibpur (Malda district); Taljhari and Rajmahal Blocks in Jharkhand; Diamond Harbour and Namkhana Blocks in South 24 Parganas districts. Each LC catered to students of Class 10 from villages within three to five kilometers. Community buildings or private houses that could accommodate 15 students at a time were chosen as learning centres. The team ensured that the space was sufficient for children to be seated while maintaining the required physical distancing per Covid safety norms.

Local volunteers, who were either Class 12 graduates or pursuing college education or with teaching experience, became para teachers. Thirty-three such men and women provided learning support in the Centres. Teachers from four BSWI schools supported them in weekly and monthly sessions, planning and clearing student doubts in addition to ensuring teaching quality. The para teachers underwent training on the subjects they were responsible for teaching.

Students attended classes for three hours every day for seven days a week. While they learnt different subjects from Monday to Saturday, on Sundays, the teachers cleared their doubts from the week that had just passed. Students appeared for tests twice a month to assess their own progress and identify areas of improvement. With the Government of West Bengal resuming schools for Class 10 in early January, the Centers stopped functioning. In a few cases, the village community has taken the lead to continue the learning centers to cater to the needs of children in Classes 8 and 9.

Capacity-building of village communities and institutions ensured water quality monitoring, waste management, and behaviour change towards better health

Women-led drinking water management – A Case Study

Twenty-two women from Hatuganj village partnered with BSWI to get piped water supply, toilets, and bathing rooms and lead on water quality management in the community.

Kanpur, a village in Diamond Harbour block in South 24 Parganas District, suffered from a lack of water and power supply. Twenty-two women from the village came together and partnered with BSWI to get piped water supply, toilets, and bathing rooms. These women also became leaders of water quality management in the community.

Kumkum Mondal, President of Kanpur Village Development Committee (VDC), looks back on the struggle for water by the women of her village. “We held awareness meetings in the village for putting a piped water and sanitation system in place. None of the men supported us at that time.” When women of all 22 households agreed to own a sanitation system and piped water at any cost, BSWI agreed to set up the system in the village.

Little by little, these women saved money. They collected palm leaves from the localities and made hats, seats and other handicrafts to sell in the village market, worked as daily wagers during road construction in Hatuganj village at the time or as labourers at construction sites earning up to ₹90 per day. The women could save enough within one year to make the initial contribution of ₹100000 for the corpus fund kept in a bank on a fixed deposit. The Village Development Committee will use the interest to provide financial assistance to new families in the village to build toilets and bathing rooms.

SHG members takes decision for village level development

Their problems did not end there. In 2020, the village had a severe incidence of diarrhoea, scabies, and flu. Women and children faced the brunt and fell ill regularly. In December 2020, the BSWI team tested water from household tap connections and found it contaminated. Later, the team found cracked pipes in two places, and the valves had sprung up leaks. Water was tested from these two points and found contaminated with bacteria causing diarrhoea and scabies.

In January 2021, Anjani Jani became a trained Water Quality Management cadre in the BSWI program to ensure access to safe water free from bacteria and other particulate matter. She talks about the collective strength of women in making safe water a reality for every home in the village, “Unlike other villages, our village is in darkness, but we have ensured piped water supply to every household. The water supplied is safe for drinking now. I got training and have learned the water testing protocols. We do not have any cases of diarrhoea or itching anymore.” Anjali is one of the 22 community-level water quality cadres in the South 24 Parganas district of Odisha.

Women's collective decision and involvement has made village pipe water supply a reality

Adolescent girls lead health conversations and actions in villages – A Case Study

An adolescent girls' group in Nudia village meets weekly, discusses sanitation and hygiene issues, and promotes appropriate WASH and nutrition behaviour. “We don't talk about issues we face during menstrual days; we find it hard to dispose of used sanitary napkins. We use sanitary pads as we know this, but not sure if all the girls of our region are using and safely disposing of them”, says Sabina Khatun of the village in Diamond Harbour block, South 24 Parganas district. She is one among the 16 girls in the adolescent peer group.

Kalyani adds, “We learnt from the sessions we attended that we should eat healthy food during this adolescent period as this happens to be the age where significant changes happen in our bodies. We need adequate iron supplements to replenish the blood loss due to monthly menstrual cycles”.

The adolescent group meets weekly, discusses sanitation and hygiene issues, and promotes appropriate WASH and nutrition behaviour. The group support children in the village with creative learning. Women in the community celebrate Nutrition Week at the Anganwadi Centres Nurjahan Bibi, the Anganwadi worker in Sultanpur, shares, “We observe the Nutrition Education events, especially the Nutrition Week. It is an appropriate space to discuss the 1000-day nutrition concept. BSWI shares the importance of eating a balanced diet, water quality and the relevance of WASH behaviour in nutrition through the women and adolescent groups”.

“WASH interventions such as availability of safe water for drinking, use and maintenance of toilets and the water supply systems, solid waste and grey water management are some critical components of the program. These simple yet important behaviors and practices help keep the infectious diseases especially diarrhoea at bay”, adds Halima, SHG member from Sultanbagh village.

Networking and sectoral contributions bolstered the impact of our efforts

The National Jal Jeevan Mission of the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India, recognized BSWI'S experience in the community-owned and managed rural water and sanitation sector as a best practice. It selected BSWI as a Key Resource Centre to provide capacity-building support to community-level stakeholders in Jal Jeevan Mission. We are part of several advisory and technical platforms at the national and State levels.

The Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water Department of the Government of West Bengal appointed BSWI as an Implementation Support Agency to support the preparation of Village Action Plans and the formation of Village Water and Sanitation Committees.

BSWI joined the Rapid Community Response to COVID (RCRC) coalition. We participated in extensive research on the effects of COVID-19 among rural communities to advocate for changes in national-level policies.

TRAINING PROGRAM IN THE VILLAGES ON COVID19 ISSUES

Agriculture & Household Enterprises saved the target group populations during COVID19

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