

Linking nutrition-sensitive social protection and community-based women's enterprise for improved livelihoods in Bihar

BACKGROUND

Rates of malnutrition in India remain concerningly high: the country is home to a staggering one-third of stunted children globally¹, and the Government of India's National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS-5) found that **36%** of children under the age five years are stunted, **19%** wasted, and **32%** underweight. Nutrition indicators are also poor among women of reproductive age; for example, **57%** of women (15-49yrs) are considered anemic².

Combatting malnutrition is critical for sustainable development in India, particularly among the most vulnerable populations, which shoulder the heaviest malnutrition burden. Nutrition status in India is inextricably linked to the nutritional empowerment of women, which is influenced by agency, access to resources, and other factors.³ Improving women's agency and access to resources through livelihood opportunities can, therefore, have an impact on nutrition outcomes.

The state of Bihar has historically been among the most impoverished and food insecure states in India, and still harbours concerning rates of poverty and malnutrition. There has been substantial progress toward alleviating poverty in Bihar, and over 2.25 crore people in the state have escaped multidimensional poverty in the last 5 years.⁴ The Government of Bihar is strengthening the implementation of several national-level schemes, including the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), POSHAN Abhiyan, and POSHAN 2.0. The government also runs large livelihoods programmes: Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS-JEEVIKA⁵), National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) Bihar, and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme under which in the year 2022-2023, 2369.14 lakh person-days of employment were generated.⁶

Social safety nets are a powerful tool for alleviating malnutrition in India: millions of the most vulnerable households rely on programmes, such as ICDS, to supplement their food supply and to boost their knowledge of nutrition practices. Safety nets also have much potential to foster livelihood opportunities, though there is still progress to be made in this area.⁷

By reinforcing scalable livelihoods integration in the nutrition-supporting ICDS scheme in three districts of Bihar, GAIN and our partners aim to ensure that social protection systems are able to provide critical nutrition support to the most vulnerable beneficiaries, while also driving sustainable livelihood improvement and community economic development.



A backdrop of significant progress in Bihar

2.25 crore
people escaping
poverty



2369 lakh person-days
employment generated

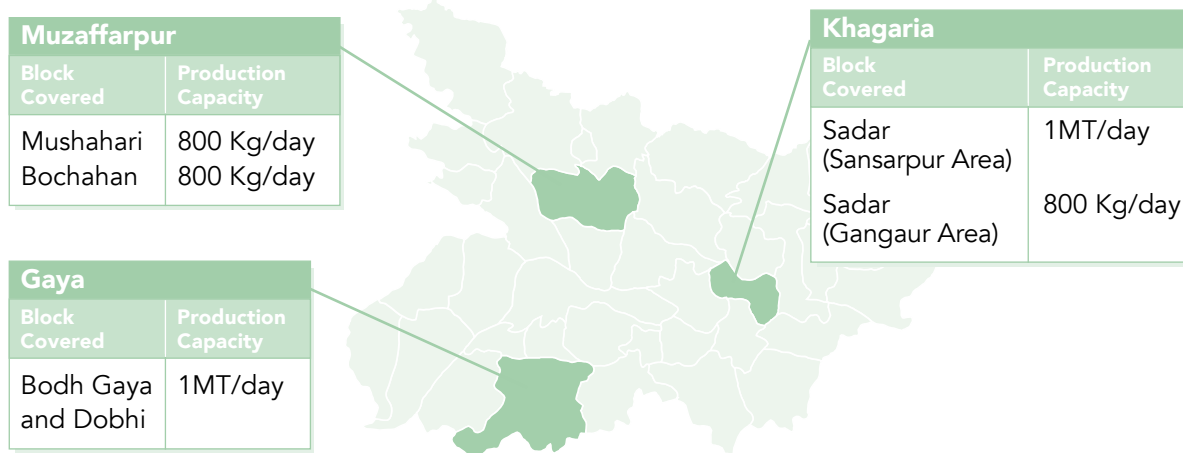


GROWING FROM STRONG ROOTS

From 2013-2018, GAIN partnered with NIDAN and BRLPS-JEEViKA to implement a pilot project to improve maternal and child malnutrition and livelihoods of rural women in Muzaffarpur, Gaya and Khagaria districts of Bihar, which focused on developing SHG-based enterprises for production of nutrient-dense/fortified ready-to-eat food products through Decentralized Production Units (DPUs). The project demonstrated financial viability of the enterprises and reached more than 50,000 beneficiaries. The project secured state government ownership with their commitment to procure entire production for Anganwadi Centres for the respective blocks. The present project is a continuation of this work and reflects GAIN's ongoing commitment to support the Bihar government's vision to strengthen livelihoods for the most vulnerable.

PROJECT GEOGRAPHY

The state of Bihar



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Through reinforcing women SHGs' integration with the ICDS system and improving their business practices and capacities, this project aims to:



1. Empower rural women by enabling regular and sustainable income generation and social support



2. Improve access to highly nutritious products provided to beneficiaries through the ICDS system

APPROACH

Building upon our past pilot, GAIN now aims to extend and strengthen the SHG-based model in partnership with NIDAN and BRLPS-JEEViKA in the three districts of Bihar. In this phase (2023-26), the project aims to further improve livelihood impacts through SHG capacity-building, business model innovations (including diversified products on the open market), and reinforcing ICDS public procurement pipelines. The main goal of the project is to facilitate access to nutritious foods through social protection programs and promote resilient livelihoods for people experiencing poverty, with a focus on empowerment of rural poor women. Our approach encompasses four components that operate in synergy with one another.

COMPONENT 1 IMPROVED NUTRITIONAL QUALITY OF ICDS OFFERINGS

Under the project, we will work closely with JEEViKA (the Bihar Rural Livelihood Mission) and the Women and Child Development (W&CD) department in Bihar to review and improve the existing Take Home Ration (THR) – 'Wheatamix' recipe. 'Wheatamix' is produced through SHG-run production units (managed by JEEViKA). A team of external experts will guide the recipe review and improvement process.

COMPONENT 2 EXPANDED LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

We will work to identify the skill building needs of SHG members and JEEViKA Saheli engaged via various components of the project using a human-centred participatory approach. A comprehensive skill building program focused on the identified needs of SHG members and JEEViKA sahelis to expand their livelihood opportunities will be developed and implemented.

COMPONENT 3 ENHANCED BUSINESS MODELS

A major area of work to be undertaken involves activities to enhance the production capacities and to diversify the product range manufactured by SHG run production units. New nutritious snack food items will be introduced to expand the business in the open market. Need-based upgradation of production units will be carried out to enhance the production capacities and to support business expansion, with a focus on long-term sustainability.

COMPONENT 4 IMPROVED ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

As part of our work, a business plan (focusing on infrastructure utilization, raw material sourcing & management, and production efficiency) to support enhancement of operations for scaling up production in open market will be developed. Based on the business plan, skill building support would be provided to SHG members to run the plant effectively.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Improve nutrition outcomes for vulnerable beneficiaries, especially women and girls

- The project will support the government and other system actors to prioritize nutrition-sensitive social protection programs
- There will be greater awareness around the use and value of nutritionally-enhanced products among the community, and meaningful incentives to adopt such products
- The project will facilitate improved availability of high-quality nutrient-dense food products to the most vulnerable community members through the ICDS system



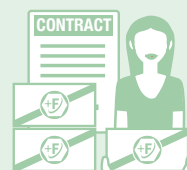
Facilitate vulnerable women's empowerment

- Stable and regular Income: Instead of irregular nature of income from agriculture and wage labour, the project will facilitate regular and stable income for rural women
- Skill Development: With training and employment of women SHG members in the DPUs, they will gain technical skills and knowledge that are essential for sustained livelihood improvements.
- Development of agency among vulnerable women: Gainful employment of poor rural women with increased mobility, knowledge and skills will boost their confidence, agency, and self-efficacy.



Sustainability and profitability of women's SHGs' business operations

- The project will facilitate increased demand for nutritious and fortified foods produced by women SHGs in the local community
- More district governments in Bihar, and elsewhere in India, will be made aware of the livelihoods and nutrition impacts of linking women's SHGs to the ICDS programme
- Improved business models and SHG organisational capacity will potentiate longer-term sustainability and scalability of the nutritious food enterprises, and will bolster resilience against system shocks for vulnerable women.



PROJECT PARTNERS



GAIN: Driven by a vision of healthier diets for all, especially the most vulnerable, from more sustainable food systems, GAIN was created in 2002 at a Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly on Children. Working with governments, businesses and civil society, we aim to transform food systems so that they deliver more nutritious foods for all people, especially the most vulnerable.



Nidan: Established in 1996, NIDAN is an Indian nonprofit dedicated to the empowerment of the poor and marginalized sectors through community services and pro-poor participative interventions. NIDAN specialises in addressing the problems in the unorganized and informal sector ecosystem and workers. NIDAN has a longstanding working relationship with BRLPS, and hands-on experience in executing the pilot phase of this project in Bihar with support from GAIN.



Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS)/ JEEViKA: The Bihar State Government has set up the BRLPS with support from the World Bank with an objective to improve rural livelihood options and work towards social and economic empowerment of rural poor and women, in particular those that are below the poverty line.



1 <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/india.html#:~:text=In%20the%202022%20Global%20Hunger,of%20hunger%20that%20is%20serious>

2 NFHS-5

3 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306919219306025>

4 https://nreganarep.nic.in/netnrega/all_lvl_details_dashboard_new.aspx?Fin_Year=2023-2024&Digest=WJEEpOm1k0Ptz2KJJGSoqA

5 (The Government of Bihar (GoB), through the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS), an autonomous body under the Department of Rural Development, is spearheading the World Bank aided Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (BRLP), locally known as JEEViKA with the objective of social & economic empowerment of the rural poor. Subsequently, the Livelihoods Restoration and Enhancement component of Bihar Kosi Flood Recovery Project (BKFRP) was also taken into the fold of JEEViKA.) For more information, refer to <https://brlps.in/>

6 https://nreganarep.nic.in/netnrega/all_lvl_details_dashboard_new.aspx?Fin_Year=2023-2024&Digest=WJEEpOm1k0Ptz2KJJGSoqA

7 <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/110121/>

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Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

www.gainhealth.org

