



# LEADING THE TRANSFORMATION

Stories of Change in Nutrition

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# Introduction

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**A**rticle 40 of the Indian Constitution mentions that “the state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and to endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as the units of self government.” This Directive Principle of State Policy paved the way for 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992, resulting at formalization of three-tier panchayati raj system in India. Further in 1996, Parliament passed the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act which empowers the traditional Gram Sabha in the scheduled areas.

Panchayati raj institutions (PRIs), especially the Gram Panchayats and their elected representatives, have specific responsibilities for the development of their own locality. They have significant role in facilitating implementation and monitoring of government services and programmes. Different departments have already devolved power to panchayats for execution of various activities. In terms of food and nutrition programmes, the PRIs have some defined roles and they are also expected to play a vigilant role, as it is a matter of life, and dignity of the people. In Odisha, especially in Kalahandi, Balangir and Koraput regions, Panchayats are responsible for managing Targeted Public Distribution System. They have defined role in monitoring the Supplementary Nutrition Programme and Mid Day Meal scheme run by the Women and Child Development and Mission Shakti and School and Mass Education department respectively. PRI members like ward members and Sarpanchs are part of a number of community monitoring bodies like Jaanch Committees, Mothers’ Committees, PDS Advisory Committees and School Management Committees.

Even though there are instructions and government orders regarding the role of PRIs, especially for different food and nutrition programmes, in many cases, PRIs are not aware of the same. They lack a supportive environment and information to play the role that they are expected to. In this backdrop, the Collective Action for Nutrition (CAN) programme of Society for Promoting Rural Education and Development (SPREAD) implemented in collaboration with Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives is significant. The programme covered 240 Gram Panchayats in six KBK districts that Balangir, Kalahandi, Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur and Nuapada. The programme aims at improving nutrition status of women and children by ensuring access and utilization of food and nutrition entitlements by bringing in transparency, downward accountability and people’s participation through social audits. The PRIs, especially the Sarpanchs and the ward members, played a significant role in the programme. Their capacity has been built on the aspects of nutrition and accountability. Through proper handholding support they organized and owned the social audit process in their respective Panchayats. Regular engagement resulted as many of the Sarpanchs and Ward Members started executing their power and responsibilities. It has been experienced from the programme that PRIs are better placed to further the nutrition discourse and can play an effective role in strengthening local governance.

This booklet contains stories of six such PRIs, out of 240 with whom SPREAD has worked during the last three year; starting from 2016. These are the real life stories of the individuals who are leading their village and panchayats and the stories of their struggle and aspirations.

All of them visualize their Panchayats to be free from malnutrition.



# Padma Sisha

Defying tough terrain and backwardness to serve people



*It was not easy for Padma to manage the GP, on a tough terrain around 40 km away from Khairput. "Dealing with uneducated but simple tribes of Malkangiri district was really a daunting task," says the 34-year-old Sarpanch.*

In 2016, SPREAD under its Collective Action for Nutrition programme started a campaign called people's manifesto on nutrition in the context of scheduled panchayat elections then. The campaign was carried out in 240 Gram Panchayats; one such was Baddural in Khairput block of Malkangiri district.

The election manifesto campaign was meant to place before people various government welfare schemes on nutrition as a major poll issue in the rural election, which was held in Odisha in 2017, and to sensitize the candidates preparing contest as panchayati raj institution (PRI) members on the importance of nutrition in improving people's lives. In the campaign, the candidates were supposed to give assurance to fulfill 29 demands of people consolidated by the SPREAD team.

Padma Sisha, one of the two candidates for the post of Sarpanch, attended the campaign and promised to implement the demands. After the election, Padma was elected as Sarpanch of Baddural GP. One of the most backward GPs in Odisha, Baddural comprises 13 revenue villages with total households of 812 and a population of 2,523. The GP is dominated by Bonda, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).

It was not easy for Padma to manage the GP, on a tough terrain around 40 km away from Khairput. "Dealing with uneducated but simple tribes of Malkangiri district was really a daunting task," says the 34-year-old Sarpanch.

But the young Bonda woman took it up as a challenge to improve the lot of her community. Though she herself had studied up to Class 9, lack of education was never a barrier in her way. Besides, she got the much needed encouragement from her husband Dhanurjaya Khara

To understand the intricacies of managing a panchayat, she underwent training held by the Odisha government. She also took the advice of SPREAD about their role and responsibilities, Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, people's federation, Social Audit, Gram Sabha and schemes under the National Food Security Act.

On January 8, 2018, Padma chaired the Social Audit Gram Sabha of Baddural GP for the first time. She heard about various problems – regular visits of service providers to the beneficiaries, monitoring of Mid-Day Meal (MDM) and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), drinking water among others issues.

She consulted with the government officials and service providers at the ground to look after the issues. Then she herself followed up the grievances regularly.



As a result, the monitoring of institutions became a regular activity of Jaanch Committee (JC), Mothers' Committee (MC) and PRI members. A lot of work on drinking water facility and construction of road was taken up with the help of these members.



# Dharmananda Nayak

Committed to supporting  
the most marginalized



*“People of Chacharguda GP have not disappointed me because, I believe, I have not disappointed them. I have always tried to take the benefits of different government welfare schemes to the doorsteps of people. People have again reposed faith in me and this time I want to work more for the children in our community to improve the standards of nutrition,” Dharmananda says.”*

In 1997, as a 27-year-old young man, Dharmananda Nayak contested for the post of Sarpanch of the Chacharaguda Gram Panchayat under Dabugaon block of Nabarangpur district for the first time.

Since then, Dharmananda has not lost an election whenever he has contested for the post of Sarpanch. In 2017, he was re-elected for the third time.

What is the secret of Dharmananda's repeated victories?

Chacharaguda comprising nine revenue villages and 10 hamlets has a total of 2,014 households – 1,300 Scheduled Tribes, 178 Scheduled Castes and 536 other communities. The total population is 8,971. Agriculture is the primary occupation of the people, most of whom are poor. Infant mortality rate (IMR) and maternal mortality ratio (MMR) have always been major issues in a backward district like Nabarangpur.

In Dabugaon block, particularly, most of the pregnant women were anaemic due to lack of awareness. For Dharmananda, the main concern was how to reduce malnutrition from Chacharaguda GP. However, the intervention of SPREAD on the issue in the GP has come like a golden opportunity for him.

In 2017, SPREAD started to implement the Collective Action for Nutrition (CAN) project in Chacharaguda GP. As both SPREAD and Dharmananda carried the same objective in mind, he regularly participated in every programme like village meetings, PLA meetings and Social Audit.



He broadly discussed about the malnutrition problem in the area with the SPREAD team and then with ANM, anganwadi workers (AWWs) and ASHA workers. A fairly large GP, Chacharaguda has 19 anganwadi centres and 16 schools.

Dharmananda also urged other panchayati raj institution (PRI) members to take the lead to strengthen the monitoring system and empower the monitoring committees existing in all the food security schemes. Based on the recommendations after their monitoring, proper action was taken to improve the implementation of the programmes/ services.



He also personally followed up the action taken by the officials and service providers in his GP. On his request, the administration provided new PDS cards to 78 eligible left-out households under the State Food Security Scheme (SFSS), pension to 97 eligible beneficiaries and home to 25 needy families

Dharmananda streamlined the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) through regular monitoring of the anganwadi centres. He gave his constant support to organising Social Audit under the National Food Security Act and facilitated the Grama Sabha on it as its president. As a proactive Sarpanch, he even attended several Palli Sabha during the Social Audit process and personally met all beneficiaries to discuss with them regarding their rights.



In 2018, under Dharmananda's stewardship, three new anganwadi buildings have been constructed and two important roads renovated.

"As a PRI member I must ensure that the programmes are implemented and resources mobilized as planned, and services or projects being delivered on time. And everyone should think this is their primary responsibility too," Dharmananda says.

More power to the proactive Sarpanch!





# Mithila Majhi

Two-time Sarpanch sparkles with experience and positivity



*"I have focused on vaccination; Take Home Ration (THR) distribution among women and children, drinking water facility and sanitation. I am also ensuring the quality and quantity of ration under targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). The GP has also accepted my proposal to construct anganwadi centres and repair the school," she says.*

Mithila Majhi, 37, was the Sarpanch of Gudighat Gram Panchayat under Muribahal block of Balangir district when SPREAD started its Collective Action for Nutrition (CAN) project in 2016 there.

Mithila was among the first panchayati raj institution (PRI) members who positively responded to SPREAD's election manifesto campaign, kicked off before the 2017 rural election. The campaign was meant to make various government welfare schemes on nutrition a major poll issue in the election.

During the meetings of the election manifesto campaign, the aspiring candidates were supposed to assure to work on 26 points relating to nutrition after getting elected as PRI members. Mithila not only promised to work on the points but also went ahead with implementing them after getting elected as Sarpanch for a second time.

Gudighat GP, 8 km away from Muribahal block, has six revenue and seven hamlet villages. There are 1,783 households – 801 Scheduled Tribe and 301 Schedule Caste – with a total population of 7,336. The GP has nine anganwadi centres and eight schools.

Belonging to a tribal family staying in Gudighat village, Mithila had fought with the village traditions and studied up to matriculation. She however got elected as Sarpanch for the first time in 2012 with her husband Chikeman Majhi's support. Due to her first five years of hard work, people in Gudighat GP voted her again to be their Sarpanch in 2017.

With the experience of the first five years and getting CAN team as her ally, Mithila set out to take her development works further in the GP. She made it a point to regularly attend all the programmes at the panchayat level, discussing the issues of the area with other PRI members and government officials.

Mithila took the initiative of arranging Gram Sabha, where she actively participated and raised issues relating to implementation and delivery of government welfare schemes. She also encouraged fellow women members to participate in ward sabha meetings and succeeded in sharply increasing the attendance.



She has been organizing a health check up camp for the people of the GP every year. If any disadvantage group or person fails to take the ration, she ensures that it is delivered at their doorstep. Observing her dedication to her work, the villagers too have come forward to lend their support to her in the development of the GP. Mithila's contribution to CAN programme is considerable. She has extended her wholehearted support to the programme – from the preparation of election manifesto to Social Audit and Gram Sabha and post-Gram Sabha action. It has resulted in finding solution to the issues raised in a short period.

In last year's Gram Sabha, there were 173 grievances on National Food Security Act, including old age pension, and Mithila fought for every case and ensured that all right holders got their benefits, which was a huge achievement for the Sarpanch and CAN team. This year too, Mithila has continued her developmental works.



"I have focused on vaccination; Take Home Ration (THR) distribution among women and children, drinking water facility and sanitation. I am also ensuring the quality and quantity of ration under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). The GP has also accepted my proposal to construct anganwadi centres and repair the school," she says.

In February 2018, she had raised the problems afflicting Gudighat anganwadi centre including those in distribution of THR due to absence of weighing machine, irregularities in serving hot cooked meal and in instalments under Mamata scheme. She got the problems fixed after following them up with the Block Development Officer and Child Development Protection Officer.

Recently she has introduced a solar system light in the GP with the help of the district administration. "I want to make Gudighat a model GP," Mithila says.





# Minati Kand

A vision for transforming  
Rokal Gram Panchayat



*“The women not only attend, but also participate in Gram Sabha or any meeting. They come to the Village Health and Nutrition Day (VHND) to raise voice for their rights. I want to build a hunger free society and active participation of women is my ultimate satisfaction,” Minati says.*

A woman can do what a man can do for society. A woman can do even better as it has often been seen that women are more sensitive towards society.

And Minati Kand proves this beyond doubt?

Minati, 32, is the Sarpanch of Rokal Gram Panchayat under Boden block of Nuapada district. Since becoming the Sarpanch in 2017, she has tried her best to empower women and make them economically stronger. Hailing from a middle class family of Tarapur village under the GP, Minati had always been inclined towards social activities since she was a student of Bhawanipatna Junior College.

After completing Plus Two, she got married to Dhananjaya Kand, a high school clerk, and had settled in family life.

When the panchayat elections were held in Odisha in 2017, Minati evinced interest to contest as Sarpanch of Rokal GP. Her in-laws were sceptical about the uncertainties involved in the election, but she went ahead to successfully contest it with the family's backing.

From the day one after becoming Sarpanch, Minati got seriously involved in the developmental activities taken up in the GP. “I started attending all the government and non-government training programmes to understand the government schemes meant to benefit the poor,” says Minati, a mother of two sons.

In the last two years, Minati has involved herself in activities like environment, tree plantation in schools, monitoring anganwadi centres, school meals and MGNREGA works. She has helped facilitating drinking water supply and communication facilities to all villages.

She is also connected with the local NGOs in Nuapada district, which are working for the betterment for underprivileged people in the district. One of them is SPREAD, which is working towards reducing malnutrition and to ensure food security of the vulnerable people.

As Minati is focused on improving the women and child health in Rokal GP, she has been involved in all the activities and programs done by Collective Action for Nutrition (CAN) project of SPREAD and is one of the most active PRI members of Nuapada working immensely on food and nutrition security. For her extraordinary work, she received the Nutrition Champion award from the Odisha's Food Security and Consumer Welfare Minister at a function organized by SPREAD in 2018.

In the last three years of CAN programme, Minati has convened Social Audit Gram Sabha thrice on the schemes under National Food Security Act 2013 (NFSA) in her GP, going through all grievances personally. She always tell the GP officials to prepare daily visit diaries relating to Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal (MDM), Mamata and Public Distribution System (PDS), and report to her in the monthly meetings.



The first phase of Social Audit post pilot was started from January 2018. During that period she focused her efforts to find out the different type of problems. She also visited 70% households with the SPREAD team to know their situation. She visited all the school, AWC and fair price shops for monitoring the activities.

The SPREAD team also brought different cases to her notice and she tried to resolve those issues as soon as possible with the help of the Block Development Officer (BDO). She even moved to the District Collector in case some problem was not solved at the GP and block level.

Due to her proactive efforts, many deserving people left out of PDS, pension and other schemes have been included in the list of beneficiaries.

Due to her power of persuasion in getting things done and amicable relationship with officials at the GP and block levels, Minati has become an inspiration for hundreds of women in Rokal GP. Her presence has led to larger participation of women in meetings convened by her.

“The women not only attend, but also participate in Gram Sabha or any meeting. They come to the Village Health and Nutrition Day (VHND) to raise voice for their rights. I want to build a hunger free society and active participation of women is my ultimate satisfaction,” Minati says.



The energetic Sarpanch says that she will continue with her work to make women aware of different social security schemes meant for them and help them build their capacity so that they all can earn and manage their family. “I want to see Rokal as a developed GP in term of health, education and nutrition and for that development of women is a must,” Minati says.





# Padmabati Majhi

Involving community for transparency in system



*“I realized that people had reposed immense faith in me and I could not fail them. I felt that the monitoring system had to be strengthened if the benefits of various government schemes were to reach to the people who needed it the most,” says Padmabati.*

Once a demure homemaker, Padmabati Majhi had never reckoned that one day she would be making plans to solve some critical livelihood issues of people.

But today such activities are a part of 31-year-old Padmabati's daily life.

Padmabati is the Naib Sarpanch of Ampani Gram Panchayat under Koksara block in Kalahandi district. Despite opposition from family and prevalent patriarchal norms, she not only contested in the rural elections in 2017 but also ended up becoming the first female head of Ampani GP.

A resident of Patrabasa village under the GP, Padmabati is a mother of a five-year-old child. She has studied up to class 8. Her husband's family has a patch of 2.5 acres of land and they are completely dependent on farming.

Before becoming Naib Sarpanch, Padmabati had come in contact with the team of Collective Action for Nutrition (CAN), a programme launched by SPREAD to create awareness about the importance of nutrition and health among the people. She had also participated in several meetings organized by SPREAD team on Social Audit.

After the rural election, SPREAD tried to create awareness among the panchayati raj institution (PRI) members of its programme area and Padmabati was one of the first to join in. During the training, the PRI members were given a crash course on how the panchayati raj system, Gaon Kalyan Samiti management, National Food Security Act and other issues directly affecting people's lives in villages.

When Padmabati participated in the Social Audit process organized by SPREAD and chaired the Palli Sabha for the first time, she felt empowered as an elected representative. It inculcated in her a sense of duty and obligation towards the people who had elected her.

“I realized that people had reposed immense faith in me and I could not fail them. I felt that the monitoring system had to be strengthened if the benefits of various government schemes were to reach to the people who needed it the most,” says Padmabati.

Chalking out an action plan with SPREAD team's suggestions, she began her work in Patrabasa, her own village where people understood her better.

She started convening meetings with Jaanch Committee (JC) and Mothers' Committee (MC), School Management Committee (SMC). In the meetings, a sense of ownership and responsibility was created not only among the committee members but also the beneficiaries towards the anganwadi in Patrabasa.



This had a magical effect as, after a time, the beneficiaries themselves started monitoring the affairs in the anganwadi on a regular basis. The same plan worked for the mid-day meal (MDM) in the primary school as the food quality as well as education improved due to frequent visits by Padmabati, SMC members and even parents.

After her action plan succeeded in Patrabasa, Padmabati started monitoring all the villages and their institutions under Ampani GP for effective and transparent implementation of food and nutrition security services and entitlements. The people in other villages too extended her full support as they had seen the transformation in Patrabasa.

She is now well versed with the different social security and food security benefits given for the people. Making these services accessible to maximum number of people is her main objective and she is trying her best for this endeavor.



Her perseverance over the last two years has led to the community being aware of growth monitoring and asking about the child growth. Even the pregnant women readily come to the anganwadi centre for registering their names in first trimester.

Also, the pregnant and lactating mothers have started enquiring about their health issues during and after pregnancy from the anganwadi worker and ANM. The adolescent girls are being given Iron-Folic Acid tablets. Interestingly the mothers are sending their children for pre-school education and the community people are taking supplementary food from the anganwadi centre.

“I frequently interact with the members of all committees like JC, MC and SMC, and parents of children going to anganwadi centres and schools. My main objective is to involve the whole community in every activity to bring transparency in execution and delivery of the welfare programmes,” she says.





# Sanjukta Dash

The real power of a ward member



*“I have been elected by people as a PRI member. So my primary responsibility is to think and work for the people and if I am not standing up to their needs, then I should not be in power,” she says modestly.*

Sanjukta Dash never imagined that a panchayati raj institution (PRI) member had the power to transform an area. But that was before she came into contact with SPREAD's activities.

In 2016, Sanjukta, who hails from a poor family, got involved with the SPREAD team, spreading awareness on different schemes, services and programme in her village, Semilput (DP Camp) in Kulabir Gram Panchayat under Nandapur block of Koraput district.

“By the time I was elected as the ward member of Semilput in 2017, I had been well aware about my strength as a PRI member,” says Sanjukta, who took all the responsibility to transform her village.

Semilput is comparatively small having 138 households with a population of 462. After becoming the ward member, Sanjukta has been supervising all welfare schemes to ensure they reach to the needy. She has been part of the Social Audit Gram Sabha under Collective Action for Nutrition (CAN) programme of SPREAD, actively looking at the grievances that came from her area.

She has always participated in the village/ ward/ gram panchayat level meetings and training programmes. She visits households to enquire about people's wellbeing. She has a bigger contribution in strengthening of different committees, which is an example for other PRI members

The Semilput anganwadi centre comes under Sanjukta's direct supervision. Before she became the ward member, there were several problems in the centre. The monitoring committees like Jaanch Committee (JC) and Mothers' Committee (MC) existed only on paper.

Sanjukta took the initiative to resolve the problem because she understood the importance of JC, MC and anganwadi centre. She convened a meeting of all the committee members with the help of SPREAD team to apprise them about their role and responsibilities. As a result, the monitoring system was strengthened and Integrated Child Development Services were streamlined with the help of the then supervisor Manjubala Naik.

Now not only the JC and MC members are active but also the list of the members has been displayed hanging on the anganwadi centre's wall for others' knowledge. Every service under ICDS is showing improvement. Mamata beneficiaries are being counselled for taking care of them and their children. The morning snacks and Take Home Ration (THR) are given regularly as per the menu of ICDS.

Not only did Sanjukta start checking the growth monitoring of all children with the help of the anganwadi worker, but also, through monthly meetings at the anganwadi centre, she started spreading awareness among the lactating and pregnant women regarding exclusive



breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and ante-natal check-ups. All the records of the centre are checked by committee members along with the ward member.

Sanjukta is thankful to the people in her community, especially the committee members, because, she says, without their help it would not have been possible on her part to serve Semilput. She adds that she has also received all cooperation from government officials like Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) and supervisor in her efforts to make things better in the village.

“I have been elected by people as a PRI member. So my primary responsibility is to think and work for the people and if I am not standing up to their needs, then I should not be in power,” she says modestly.

Sanjukta has been able to bring about many positive changes in just two years because of her desire to work for the development of society. The next challenge for her is to improve the infrastructure in her village.

She has the dream of making her ward as an example for the entire region to follow.





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*Dedicated to*

*All those elected panchyati raj institution members  
who are visualising for a malnutrition free Gram Panchayat*

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