

## Basic Information

Organisation	AHEAD Initiatives
Contact person	Rathnadeep De
Project title	Addressing Food and Livelihood Security through participation of the food insecure poor in the sustainable institutions and processes of Local Self Government – Phase III
Reporting period	1st January 2015 – 30th June 2019

## Background

The third phase of the Food Security Project, better known as FS-3, was launched by AHEAD Initiatives, hereinafter referred to as AHEAD, in 2015. The Overall Objective of the project was “*an inclusive participatory and sustainable Local Self Governance Approach to Poverty Alleviation*”. The three Immediate Objectives defined in the project document and pursued by AHEAD were relating to (i) Advocacy, (ii) Capacity building, and (iii) Strategic deliveries. The latter, in fact, comprise of three sets of sub-objectives. These will be first taken up for evaluation in the later sections and will be followed up by taking up the former. This report period covers the actual time span of the third phase, i.e., 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2015 to 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2019.

In order to evaluate the achievements of the project, the secondary data from the end-of-project survey results were consulted. But what is more important is the extensive field visit to almost all the Panchayat Samities under the project and on-the-spot meetings and/or focus group discussions (FGDs) and attending a few *para* (hamlet-level) meetings with villagers as well as discussions/ interviews with several concerned officials of local administration like BDO/ SDO, and other officers besides the local PRI officials, the concerned local CSO personnel and village-level AHEAD functionaries of the project villages. Besides, a large number of secondary literature, papers and documents and also the visuals and audio-visuals produced by AHEAD were consulted.

In order to evaluate the FS-3 project implementation, the methodology adopted was to assess the extent of achievement of the immediate objectives by the various strategic interventions with

respect to the three aspects mentioned above, namely, Advocacy, Capacity building and Strategic delivery. This was done, first, selecting some appropriate parameters to capture the changes experienced by the target beneficiaries regarding relevant parameters related to the objectives, and then comparing the situation before the intervention and afterwards; i.e., the pre-project projected objectives and actual attainments by the end of the project. This was done mainly with the help of the outcomes of the end-of-project (EoP) randomized Data Set and the other relevant official documents -- printed and visual /audio-visual. The survey results were cross-checked with the beneficiaries through FGD and *para meetings* (hamlet-level discourses) during field visits by the evaluator. 8 of the 13 GPs were visited by the evaluator; these are:

- Udaypur GP of Kushmandi block and Boalder GP of Balurghat block (both from Dakshin Dinajpur district.);
- Salbari-II GP, Magurmari-I GP, Baroghoria GP, Jharalta –II GP (all four in Dhupguri Block of Jalpaiguri district);
- Mendhabari GP of Kalchini block under Alipurduar district;
- Siringsia GP of Tonto block of Singbhum district in Jharkhand state.

AHEAD had carried out a baseline survey at the start of the project where results had only been digitized in 1 GP in each of the 3 States it was to work in. The statistical analysis below (Annexure I) has been provided under my guidance by a Danish postgraduate student of Development Studies at the Copenhagen University who was on a four month long internship with AHEAD. The simple EOP Bengali survey form included in the Annexure was designed in consultation with AHEAD so that Apprentices at the community level could carry out a randomized survey of all the GPs and their 8,139 mobilised families. Though the statistical analysis apart from capturing quantitative outcomes also compares it to the baseline, the latter may not be strictly comparable as the baseline covers only 3 GPs in 3 States which had been digitized, whereas the EOP randomized survey covers all 13 GPs targeted.

The outcomes provided by AHEAD in its Final report as regards its objectives and expected changes are based on its (Management Information System MIS) and have been verified against official records and included in Annexure II for completeness from which some have been highlighted and commented on below.

Annexure III provides a gallery of photographs selected from those with AHEAD so as to tell their own story.

## **Objectives, Indicators and Outcomes**

Verified through

- Copies of prints and audio-visuals, interviews, official records and documents of participation in and input to workshops, training sessions, etc
- GP records, documents, annual plans, etc

- Memorandum of understandings
- Field visits and on-the-spot appraisal of activities/ performance
- End project Evaluation

A= Achieved, A+ = Overachieved, A- = Underachieved, U = Grossly Underachieved

### **Immediate Objective -1 (Advocacy):**

*Local Self Government Institutions have adopted a demonstrated approach of institutions and processes to improve food and livelihood security in their respective areas and block actors influenced (Panchayat Samitis, State sectoral Line Departments)*

<b>Indicator for realisation of Immediate objective – 1</b>	
1.1 3 Block level Local Self Government Institutions (Panchayati Samiti - PS) in project blocks are providing responsive technical and financial support to the Gram Panchayats and State level Sectoral line departments (National Administrative Organisations) at Block level are providing technical support to Gram Panchayat plan initiatives and providing state schematic funds to meet project objectives at an estimated level of 100,000 INR per GP.	A+
1.2 3 Gram Panchayats (GPs) in 3 project blocks are allocating an increasing amount of funds to DNRM, exceeding 25% of input costs or an estimated 100,000 INR per GP.	A+
1.3 Model(s) of tested Local Self Governance approach to improvement of food security documented in print and audio-visuals and well-known to Local Self Government institutions in project blocks and other state wide & state level actors.	A+
Overall Grade	A+

This has been fulfilled as highlighted below:

- 13 GPs in 9 Blocks of 7 districts of 3 States have already been covered.
- Advocacy needs were identified in all the cases in consultation with the stakeholders.
- 13 MoUs have been signed among GP and AHEAD regarding implementation of many of the strategies / interventions especially concerning Decentralized Natural Resource Management (DNRM). This is a big achievement considering the criticality and the difficulty of the work involving bureaucrats and political complications of the LSGIs.
- Several of the AHEAD programmes on ground have been successfully converged with several relevant central / state government schemes/ programmes wherever possible, be it MGNREGS

or some other line department schemes. Many of these project interventions are liberally supported, in part, by funds from the government schemes. In fact, many of the core elements of AHEAD's strategies have been coopted by the MGNREGS in consultation with the designated AHEAD personnel.

- During the project period, 11 GPs of 9 Block-level LSGIs of West Bengal , Jharkhand and Odisha have channelized different inputs amounting a total of more than four crore rupees (Rs.4,18,88,471) through GP apprentices, groomed by AHEAD, to the project beneficiaries.

Among the LSGIs Dhupguri block holds workshops with all GPs of the block at regular intervals to replicate throughout the block the core components of AHEAD's DNRM interventions under different mainstream schemes. Another LSGI, Kushmondi block has been using the GP apprentices as the resource trainer of the block to train the target beneficiaries of the Nursery programme taken up by all GPs and implemented through MGNREGS.

- With the exclusive support of AHEAD, Government of West Bengal organized a state-level workshop on the core issues and components of AHEAD's food security initiatives and strategies for replication throughout the State as far as possible.
- Nine GPs together have already spent INR 9,56,144 from their 'own fund' and funds from other related schemes. Besides, 11 of the 13GPs have incorporated some core activities of AHEAD (eg., Nursery, Fruit orchard, Vermicompost, Azola, etc) in the collaborative initiative into their 2018-19 MGNREGS Action Plan.
- Altogether a large number of print materials including 19 booklets, and 14 audiovisual materials (films) and a huge number of photographs have been produced by AHEAD for facilitating advocacy with district level officers and LSGIs, also for appraising/ training the different levels of functionaries and also for readout to the villagers awareness generation and orientation. A couple of the most effective audio-visual outputs are the short films titled "*Mala boudi-r Bagan*" (on Home Garden activity), "*Prakrito*" (Nursery-based), and "*Nabarunoday*" (on *Briksha patta* ). Among the print materials the booklets titled "*Beej-er Kotha*" (on seed preservation), "*Konchi kolom*" (on an innovative method of bamboo propagation), and "*Hansmurgi palon*" (on small livestock rearing) may be mentioned.
- An important outcome of the residential collaborative workshop between Government of West Bengal (Panchayati Raj department) was a rich voluminous publication (in Bengali) on the replicable lessons of AHEAD's core initiatives and innovative approach titled "*Prakritik Sampad-bhittik Jibon-Jeebikar Notun Pother Sandhane*" (In Search of Innovative Ways of Natural Resource-based Livelihood). More than 4000 copies of the book were distributed among the districts by said department.
- A large number of workshops and awareness/ exposure/ orientation as well as training programmes and public meetings were conducted involving various stakeholders for demonstrating the importance and content of the good practices of self-governance approach.

- For the purpose of reach out and training of village-level functionaries, AHEAD trains pre-selected women as *Shikshanobish* (apprentice), the bridge between AHEAD and the target project beneficiaries (villagers) on one hand and concerned government officers as well as LSGI officials, on the other. As many as 170 women were groomed as *Shikshanobish* during the project period.

During field visits, the evaluator held a number of meetings with the *Shikshanobish* women in different GPs and found most of them self-confident, critically candid and outspoken about their role and responsibility, aware about the challenges and sincere about their deliverables. Among them were Mira Rani Roy, Alaska Barman, Chandana Basak, Chandana Roy, Mampi Roy and Annabel Roy from different GPs who were very impressive in terms of their performance and their interaction.

- A number of government officials, including BDOs and other officers (Smt. Sushmita Subba, Balurghat Block, Debojit Bose, DNO, MGNREGS, Dakshin Dinajpur, and others), and also some LSGI officials were interviewed by the evaluator all of whom endorsed the relevant aforesaid achievements in their respective areas.

Two other achievements regarding Advocacy deserve special mention:

- Government of West Bengal in collaboration with AHEAD Initiatives hosted a State Level residential workshop on the core issues of AHEAD's initiatives and approach to replicate these components throughout the State. This was attended by relevant senior-most officers of all Districts of West Bengal many of whom made valuable interjections appreciating the innovative approaches and of AHEAD. The success of the workshop was one of the crowning achievements of this phase.
- Blocks workshops, use of the apprentices as trainers in other GPs and use of AHEAD's technical staff in State and District level training programmes and including AHEAD as one of three NGOs nominated by it as part of the National 'Shaksham' (livelihood capacity building programme) demonstrate the State-wide acknowledgement of AHEAD's initiatives and local self governance approach to successful targeting.
- Apart from the above, GPs have already incorporated some core activities (nursery, micro fruit orchards, vermicompost, azolla etc) of the collaborative initiative into their 2018-19 MGNREGS action plan. This has been the result of continuous advocacy of Block, District and State government actors in collaboration with the GP and included advocacy with potential key individuals, opinion makers and senior political functionaries

### **Immediate Objective-2 (Capacity Building) :**

*Gram Panchayats (GPs) and Community level CBOs like Activity Groups /SHGs and the Village Councils have the capacity to improve the food and livelihood security of the poor families through Decentralized Natural Resource Management (DNRM) in a sustainable manner through institutions and processes of Local Self Governance.*

<b>Indicator for realisation of Immediate objective – 2</b>	
2.1 In intensive areas, 3 Gram Panchayats (GPs) in 3 project blocks have the capacity to institutionalize plans to build and strengthen 33 Village Councils/GUSs and 200 Activity groups/SHGs and are supporting them in planning, capacity building and oversight functions in the DNRM programmes through appropriate instruments and mechanisms including the provision of local government (GP) funds.	A+
2.2 In extensive areas, at least 9 more Gram Panchayats (GPs) in other blocks of other districts have undertaken plans to build and strengthen at least 17 Village Councils/GUSs and 100 Activity groups/SHGs and through them initiate the process of DNRM in 1 or more Village Council area in each of the GPs	A+
2.3 Across the project areas: a) 60% of Village Councils/GUSs and 75% of targeted Activity groups / SHGs within GPs are actively designing, planning and successfully implementing DNRM programmes that include the utilization of their own funds also on a continuous and sustainable basis and b) At least 12 AHEAD local members CSOs demonstrate capacity in the field to address Food & livelihood security of poor families through partnership memorandum of understanding with the 12 Gram Panchayat	A
Overall Grade	A+

A quick evaluation of the large number of activities undertaken by AHEAD under this objective vis-à-vis the expected outcomes, brings to the fore the following picture:

- As many as 13 GPs of 9 blocks in 7 districts in 3 states have signed MoUs with AHEAD and their local CSO partners and have been carrying on with great success, on the whole, the many activities envisaged to ensure food security. The target expectation of 12 GPs to be covered has therefore been over fulfilled.
- GPs have been playing a key role with full ownership after being duly advocated and oriented by AHEAD. With the active cooperation of the GPs, 170 Apprentices/ Paraprofessionals and 13 GP Trainers were trained and groomed to motivate the targeted families and extend the necessary support to them to materialize the Food Security project. Evidently, the minimum target of 50 Para-professionals to be trained and capacitated has been far exceeded.
- As the state government is yet to constitute the Gram Unnayan Sansads (GUS) / Village Councils, training / orientation for them could not be done, but AHEAD has formed 58 informal Village Councils, for now called Village Working Committees, in four GPs headed by the elected representative of the LSGI, who was also to be chairing the respective Village Council.
- In 13 GPs located in 9 blocks of 7 districts in 3 states, 1284 Activity Groups, involving 6,034 families have been actively helping to implement the Food Security project.

- These groups have been trained and oriented by AHEAD and provided with the required resources and linkages. This is four times more than the number of Activity Groups stipulated for training.
- Ten out of 12 AHEAD CSO members have been continually oriented, capacitated and engaged with required resource provisions to facilitate and assist LSGIs in the project areas. The result of the continuous handholding of the CSO members by AHEAD is reflected in the invitation to 7 of the CSOs to attend Block level development meetings and the general body meeting.

### **Immediate objective – 3 (Strategic Deliveries)**

*Poor families have significantly reduced the period of food insecurity through the local self governance approach of decentralized natural resource management*

<b>Indicator for realisation of Immediate objective – 2</b>	
3.1 At least 80% families of the poor in project areas (of targeted 4,000+ families) in approx. 300 Activity groups and SHGs in 12 GPs of 12 districts in which AHEAD CSO members are situated reduce their food insecurity by 35% (equivalent to 1 month of food shortages) by utilizing DNRM livelihood activities and techniques	A+
Overall Grade	A+

- Almost 90% of the food insecure families (8,139 out of 9,079 families) have been mobilized and capacitated to take active part in specific DNRM activities. The target of mobilizing 80% food insecure families has been over satisfied. They are regularly engaged in labor, resource contribution, nurturing, monitoring and supervision of DNRM practices during the project period.
- Out of the 9,079 families, 7,374 families, i.e., more than 81% of the mobilized families, have a round the year homestead nutritional garden therefrom they get at least 4 to 5 varieties of vegetable in their daily meal. The minimum of target in this respect was 75%.
- During the project period, 66% families, comprising more than 6,000 families and more than 1,200 Activity Groups) utilized more than 442 acres of seasonal and permanent fallowsof private landlordsand about 17 kilometers of paddy dykes and pond embankments, i.e., fallow common property resources for producing wheat, lentils and oil seeds. The target in this case was at least 25% of mobilized families (i.e., 1,000 families).
- Out of 9,077 families, 2,037 (i.e., 22.44%) have been involved in different types of nurseries as against the target of at least 10%. Target overfulfilled.
- Some 218 families were engaged in growing multipurpose agro-forestry species, 453 families developed vegetable seedlings of chili, tomato, brinjal and pakchoi whereas 538 families were engaged in nurseries for fruit seedlings of mango, banana, papaya, lemon, jackfruit, gooseberry, guava, etc. Another 828 families are involved in developing diverse varieties of saplings of fruit

and timber under the Government Nursery Scheme with usufruct rights which they will plant it under another Government Scheme called Brikkhapatta. Here, too, achievement has been more than double the minimum target of 10%.

- Under the DNRM activities, fisheries and other small livestock initiatives ( e.g., ducks, chicks, pigs, goats, etc.) were to be covered. During the project period 27.38% families (2,486 out of 9,077 families). Overall achievement under these initiatives clearly surpassed the targeted amount.
- During the project period, approximately, some 81% mobilized food-insecure (i.e., 7,339 nos.) were engaged in at least 2 types of DNRM activities/ interventions. Many of the families, in fact, participated in multiple activities.

From one-to-one conversation with all the AHEAD staff in three blocks visited, it was felt that almost without exception, their capacity building has been sound and comprehensive regarding institutions and processes as well as interpersonal communication. Communication skill for interaction with larger audiences of all of them is quite good. What is most impressive is the penetration skill of all the AHEAD staff in reaching out to the villagers and building rapport with them.

Their skill of presentation is very good. However, their conception regarding field survey methodology including sample design and questionnaire framing has a lot of room for improvement.

‘Capacity building’ initiatives may also be viewed from the perspective of food/ nutrition security, nutrition and livelihoods of by taking into account the changes in post-project scenario and the pre-project scenario focusing on the relevant major parameters, as mentioned below.

Regarding – the most important issues of the overall objective of Poverty alleviation – parameters like Sources of Income (i.e., types of income generating activities actually available), Work days available as daily labourer, Work days under MGNREGA, Household food shortage, and Household consumption pattern) have been considered. Relevant data have been garnered from the EoP survey of AHEAD.

This is based on a statistical comparative analysis of AHEAD’s Baseline Survey and the EoP survey. [However, the former has been calculated on the basis of only 3 GPs and the latter on the basis of 13 GPs from different blocks of different districts. Though the comparison may be questionable from a comprehensive perspective, the relevant figures, when averaged and compared, may throw some precious little light.

Sources of income: the share of people engaged primarily in cultivation has increased substantially (by more than double) from 14% in January 2018 to 33% in April 2019 whereas the number of those working as cultivators-cum-daily laborers has declined from 35% to 23% during the same period. In the absence of any other significant intervention by any other entity, this must have been achieved by the effective intervention by AHEAD. The argument is strengthened by the statistics from the said survey that the project population has shifted from work as daily labourer for more days of the year



(as prospects of cultivating own/ leased/ commons land has increased by virtue of project interventions by AHEAD.

By facilitating effective advocacy between the villagers and the GPs, convergence of some of AHEAD's project intervention programmes with the Government's flagship project, MGNREGA, could be ensured. As a result, share of people getting work for 51 to 100 days per year has doubled.

Many of the villagers have also engaged themselves in various DNRM activities initiated by AHEAD under the Food Security project.

AHEAD's strategy of encouraging homestead cultivation of multiple vegetables have been very successful. Between January to April, 2019, total number of households engaged in Home Garden activities were 7,374 (more than 81% of the total number of families), and total quantity of their vegetable production during the same period was 2,386 quintals. More than 34% of the families have been continuing the initiative round the year. In fact, one or more than one type of vegetable is grown by a staggering 94% of the involved village families in their home gardens. Among them about 40% families cultivate 3 to 5 types of vegetables, and even more than 8 types of vegetables are grown by a significant 13.20% of the involved village families. The vegetables are significantly and firstly meant for home consumption; the residual surplus is for sale in the market. Thus household vegetable consumption has increased not only in quantity but also in variety, and thus contribute to enhanced food/nutrition security. Furthermore, as agriculturists opine, diversity of crops/vegetables, rather than monoculture, also enriches soil nutrition.

Vegetables are known as major natural sources of vitamins. What is noticeable in the AHEAD initiatives for food and nutrition security of the poor villagers is the wider introduction of the nutrition-rich pigeon pea which hitherto was not much in vogue in the project areas. Near about 50% of the families have been growing perennial crops in their home gardens; AHEAD has already introduced 31 types of perennial crops.

To sustain this important initiative and ensure uninterrupted food security, AHEAD imparted training in seed preservation to the villagers. During the project period, village families preserving their own seeds increased from 30% to 88%, which goes on to show that the efforts have taken root successfully. This has been strengthened by the fact that AHEAD has been successful in involving the local PRI in their seeds programme. In fact, PRIs/ Line departments seeds contributed Rs.6,62,109 during the project period while the during only one year (January '18 to April '19), the corresponding figure was Rs.4,11,000. The AHEAD strategy has therefore been sustained and will lead not only to food security but also to self-sufficiency of the villagers.

Another very important source of nutrition is fruits. AHEAD encouraged fruit orchards in the project villages, and involved 1,333 families during the project period. During January '18 to April '19 alone, 671 families were involved. Altogether 929 families (10.23% of the total families) have been continuing. This programme has been dovetailed with the MGNREGA programme . During the entire project period (2015-'19) 410 families were involved in the combined initiative, and a substantial

amount of Rs.17,997,844 was contributed through the MGNREA. Another initiative called the 5-fruit programme has also successfully involved as many as 7,384 families (81.35% of total families involved in the entire FS-III project). This also has good potential to address the nutrition security issue.

### **Overall Objective:**

As even most of the sub-objectives under the Immediate Objectives have been overfulfilled , as observed in the evaluation exercise, the Overall Objectives have obviously been largely fulfilled.

It is evident from the elaborate point-by-point evaluation of the Immediate Objectives narrated in the above sections that at every stage of implementation of the project all concerned stakeholders have been taken on board, and their participation most often has exceeded the target expectations, be it the involvement of villagers or engagement of apprentices or village level functionaries, or even the LSGI/ government personnel, and the like. The gender aspect has also been given extreme importance by envisaging all apprentices to be constituted by women only. Thus the aspects of inclusivity and participatory nature have been duly addressed.

The enormous achievement of having the MoU signed by the authorized signatory of the GP and AHEAD, involving the GPs in subsequent stages as well as involving the different government departments particularly by dovetailing various activities of FS project with the ongoing government schemes ensures a sustainable local self-governance approach.

Finally, the great achievements of the Immediate Objectives in respect of almost all the components as measured quantitatively and presented in the EoP data set and the evaluation on the basis of field visits, interactions and rapid assessment of the veracity and validity of the statistical observations ascertains that significant success has been achieved in alleviating poverty in the project areas with some local variations.

### **Importance of After-School Programme:**

AHEAD has introduced After-School programme in many of the GPs under the FS Project. Apparently, it may seem to be inconsistent with the FS project but in reality this is a brilliant concept. At least that is what this evaluator felt visiting a couple of the After School activities. As under this programme, a host of income generating skills are imparted to the villagers, many of whom are school dropouts of various ages, they feel left out. But they get enthused with the hands-on simple but meticulous skill-based agriculture-related activities like cutting-grafting, Koichi-kolom, various types of nursery, etc. The variety of the activities can be increased. The After-school has high potential to open up livelihood opportunities besides facilitating attainment of food security for the poorest of the poor.

### **A few special points:**

- The most striking point about the FS project is that it addresses the dire problem of hunger of especially the landless. Almost all the interventions hitherto fore by the government and the

NGOs have been to start from the small landholders, assuming that nothing can be done for those villagers dependent on agriculture but not having any land. The concept of using the commons land, the fallows (of different kinds) and the leased in land and getting the landless to get a user right on that land, even if for the short term.

- The idea of getting the LSGIs on board is extremely important to legitimize the unprecedented arrangement and continue with that, i.e., the MoU. Because the LSGIs in the State are more often than not politicized. At times, within the same GP or PS the office bearers are from opposing parties and are at loggerheads with each other. The LSGI office bearers also change by election and a new incumbent may undo all good work done by his predecessor especially regarding projects like the FS. Considering all these, AHEAD has been successful in creating and continuing the very meaningful interventions in a sustained manner.
- Secondly, the task of motivating a villager, especially, the women (often housewives) of Bengal to shun all age-old inhibitions
- In fine, it needs to be clarified how almost all the targets set out in the objectives of the FS-FS-III Project could be overfulfilled by AHEAD within the mutually agreed time frame. The cut and dry data can only indicate the achievements in figures but can hardly provide any intelligible explanation. It is only from the extensive critical discourses with the different stakeholders, especially the villagers, and seeing the activities on the spot that the evaluator could somewhat comprehend the underlying invisible dynamics of cognitive and perceptual changes. It is the sheer planning and modus operandi of the AHEAD think tanks, executives and functionaries that focused most appropriately on (i) all-stakeholder participatory approach including the LSGIs (most often left out in NGO-led projects or given a domineering overburdened position, and not as a facilitator) , (ii) women as the crucial drivers of the project as the critical link between the GP on one hand and the villagers on the other, with the support of AHEAD, (iii) involving a select local AHEAD CSO as partner thus maintaining their presence all through the year within elbow range besides the frequent visits by AHEAD's dedicated field directors/ project director themselves, and (iv) keeping AHEAD in the background for rear guard action and support from beginning to end, from initiating advocacy dialogue with the appropriate LSGI/ government officials to selecting, grooming, training the Shikshanobis and other personnel to monitoring the progress of activities continuously and doing crisis management as and when needed, but most often involving the Shikshanobis, and the beneficiary villagers, as required.
- This cohesive, comprehensive and inclusive framework makes the big friendly team that inspires the all the different players yield the best possible deliverable results, not keeping themselves confined to fixed targets, not going by mere clock hours, but walking the extra mile by mutual handholding. This synergy is well thought out and equally well executed. For the apprentices, the beneficiary villagers, the local AHEAD CSO functionaries as well as AHEAD's direct functionaries alike, the end results (successes) beget bigger results (greater successes). At each

level, the collective sincerity and dedication, as well as the individual ownership of the project, albeit with some variations, delivers the magic.

### **Limitations and Suggestions :**

- Monitoring of the Apprentices' performance needs to be done and recorded regularly, particularly in reference to their confidence and ability to do policy advocacy with the concerned government officials and LSGI personnel in the absence of AHEAD functionaries in order to understand how prepared they are to handle the FS programme on their own in the long run.
- The AHEAD personnel need to develop their capacity further regarding field-based research methodology and especially sample design as well as questionnaire framing particularly regarding qualitative data.
- The data set needs to be maintained in a modular fashion and more streamlined.
- The 'After School' programme needs to be taken up more seriously and formally combined with the FS project in future for not only engaging those poor adult people able and willing to work to earn their bread but not having any livelihood option but also for preserving and sustaining the centuries old scientific traditional knowledge of farming and experimenting with some new methods, innovating in some cases and contributing to the nutrition security of the village.

### **Efficiency of the intervention:**

With overall Project costs over the 4 year period of about 5 million DKK what is notable is that a simple 'back of the envelop' calculation (see Annexure II) shows that just in the last year of the intervention, even by very conservative estimates, the value of just the additional food and nutrition in the hands of poor targeted families has been almost as much as the entire project cost.

### **Some Case Studies of Success :**

#### **Bandini Bhakat**

An unassuming woman from Dakshin Khattimari village of Jharalta-II GP of Jalpaiguri district of north Bengal, Bandini Bhakat looks like anything but an entrepreneur. Now maybe in her thirties, she was a housewife from an ordinary poor family of six members, she was, till the other day, a non-earning housewife just like many others in her village in the Dhupguri block.

In 2016, when an initiative was taken by their GP to launch a joint initiative with the poor villagers to raise the standard of living and livelihood by improving the nutrition standard of the poor and backward families, Bandini responded to the call. She took advice from Pratima Bhakat, the Shikshanobish of their Gram Sansad and applied for developing a small piggery in her homestead land. Shortly, in March that year, she got three piglets. Almost like a fairy tale, Bandana turned her fortune as she earned Rs.70,000 within three years. As per the contract with the GP, she gave back 9 piglets to the GP by the third year which were distributed among nine poor families. By the end of 2018, one male pig, two female pigs and 11 piglets, worth altogether Rd. 65,000. With further advice

and practical lesson from her Shikshanobis Bandana has been growing Azola in a pit made within her premises besides a small nutrition garden and a small reservoir for captive fish cultivation.

Wearing a broad smile, Bandana looks forward with dreams in her eyes for an even brighter tomorrow. Behind this miracle in my life are the Shikshanobis and our GP, says she.

### **Mira Rani Roy.**

Slim with a simple, sylvan smartness, Mira Rani Roy is one of the most familiar and popular person in Kandha village of Udaypur GP of Kushmandi block in Dashing Dinajpur district, a resident for last 25 years. But she is no political leader, nor a village school teacher or a doctor. But, for as many as 51 needy families of her village, she is a friend, philosopher and guide. She advises them how to rear small livestock like duck, chick or goat, or even cultivate fish (like tilapia) within the domestic premises.

Roy, a Shikshanobish groomed by AHEAD, shares her knowledge obtained from the organization with her fellow villagers as and when required with her understanding of what would be optimum for them, and she also acts as a liaison between the GP and the poor families regarding food security strategies and livelihood opportunities. She imparts the training to them.

One of the most successful 7 or 8 families assisted by Mira Rani is headed by Surendranath Roy. From 2016 he has been getting different kinds of seeds from the GP thanks to Mir Rani who helps him in matters of cultivation in many ways with timely proper advice. Now he is much better off thanks to her assistance. Mira Rani herself has benefitted a lot from her association with AHEAD, not only growing some vegetables and crops but mainly from the practice of vermicompost. Because of being AHEAD's Shikshanobish, she has become more than self-sufficient, so much so that she has closed down the small shop she used to run till a couple of years ago.

### **Tulsi Sarkar**

Tulsi happens to be the Shikshanobish of Shalbari-2 GP of Dhupguri block in Jalpaiguri district. Herself a woman from a poor household, Tulsi has a small homestead land. Till the other day she was like any other shy, inhibited, homebound woman. She would take direct and dominant part in any agricultural activity but now thanks to the training received from the AHEAD trainers she has not only become confident but has learnt to take decisions on her own regarding small farming on her homestead. Moreover, when the external evaluator of AHEAD's FS-III project went to visit her field activities, Tulsi had already brought along the Upa-Pradhan of the local GP, Ms. Shilpi Mandal, also a former GP member, Ms. Chameli Mandala and a noted social worker Shyamal Mandal. It was amazing to see Tulsi enthusiastically and smartly demonstrating the success of her multi-vegetable garden as the three others were interjecting with many compliments about her ascension as a sincere enterprising apprentice.

Tulsi also introduced her beneficiary villagers, Tetra Oraon, Jagannath Das, Nagen Sarkar, Prasenjit Sarkar, Renu Barui, and a couple of others -- all of them hailing from very poor families but gradually earning a livelihood and somewhat mitigating their left-behind days of extreme hunger. Two more

of her beneficiary villagers are Ms. Fulmoni Mundy and Jagannath Das. While Fulmoni impressed the evaluator with enthusiastic showing of her Spice Garden, Banana plantation, and Azola chamber (made with MKobita GNREGS support), Jagannath demonstrated how sheep rearing has made a difference in his life in a short period; all under FS-III project.

### **Kobita Shil**

Right through the Barghoria GP of Jalpaiguri district passes the mighty Jaldhaka river. There in this Gram Sansad lives a number of extremely poor families. The Shikshanobish of the area Ms. Kobita Shia, trained by AHEAD, advised 3 women from the poorest landless households to plant papaya saplings along a stretch of the river bank (bund) as a joint initiative. Due permission from appropriate authorities, i.e., the GP, had already been taken by Kobita to use the hitherto unused 'common land' for the livelihood of the poorest of the poor. In the very first year the three women, in their collective effort, Rs. 4,000 worth of produce. In the second year they earned Rs. 3,000. Enthused by the consecutive successes, they have now (at the time of field visit by the external evaluator during mid-2019) planted 40 more saplings along the embankment.

Over and above this, they have engaged themselves in goat rearing as part of FS-III project activities besides doing nutrition garden and planted five fruit trees in their small homestead land. Under the MGNREGS, they have been doing a nursery, and in their own homestead they have been producing in their small vermi-compost pit the organic manure in high demand and growing nutritious animal feed in their tiny azola tank. Today these simple humble women wear a winner's smile as they show how apprentice Kobita's advice, AHEAD's sound training, GP's cooperation (by providing papaya seeds and baby goats, etc.) together with their own hard work has worked wonders. They profusely thank the apprentice, the GP and the AHEAD trainers.

This real story of a turnaround is testimony to what judicious planning, dedicated governance and sincere application can do in an otherwise hapless situation and how it can empower the poorest of the poor without any asset but their hands to address the formidable challenge of food insecurity.

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