

SUMMARY

The Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (henceforth “Jeevika”) conducted interventions within the framework of two national welfare schemes: the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the Public Distribution System (PDS). The following document describes Jeevika’s efforts, as well as the performances of Jeevika-targeted villages and non-Jeevika villages (control group).

MGNREGA

Seeking to provide livelihood support to poor rural households, MGNREGA legally enshrines the “right to work” and guarantees at least 100 days of employment in unskilled labor each year. Due to low community participation in Bihar, Jeevika launched an intervention that covers 4 blocks; within this area, 20 villages were each designated campaign villages and non-campaign villages (40 villages total). The major aims of Jeevika’s campaign sought to:

- a) Create awareness about the scheme through self-help groups (SHGs) and village organizations (VOs)
- b) Promote participation in PRIs and facilitating submission of work application
- c) Facilitate timely payment of wages through institutional structures

To compare uptake of MGNREGA in Jeevika’s campaign villages and non-campaign areas, the Social Observatory of the World Bank worked with Jeevika to design and implement a survey-based study to determine: awareness of the scheme, participation in PRI, work applications, as well as the average number of man days and payment. At the time of this assessment, Jeevika was nearly 6 months into its campaign. The cross-sectional study employed a comprehensive questionnaire and incorporated a retrospective component to gauge changes from the previous year. Carried out in 4 different blocks¹, the study covered 10 villages in each block and 30 respondents within each village; the assessment ultimately encompassed a total of 40 villages and 1201 respondents. Responses were recorded in the form of soft data, and respondents’ job card numbers were collected whenever possible to ensure data authenticity.

Respondents Profile

Of the 1201 total respondents:

- 598 respondents are from Jeevika’s campaign areas (49.79% of total respondents)
 - 546 of 598 respondents from Jeevika’s campaign areas are Jeevika members themselves
 - 453 of 598 respondents from Jeevika’s campaign areas are female
- 603 respondents are from non-campaign areas (50.21% of total respondents)
 - 444 of 603 respondents from non-campaign areas are Jeevika members themselves
 - 428 of 603 respondents from non-campaign areas are female

Major Findings: Awareness

To measure awareness in Jeevika’s campaign villages and non-campaign villages, respondents were asked to answer questions concerning. Those who answered 4 or 5 questions correctly are considered highly aware of the MGNREGA scheme; 3 correct answers reflect moderate awareness and 0-2 correct answers reflect low awareness.

The study found that 71% more respondents in campaign-targeted villages (240 respondents) fall into the “high awareness” category, as compared to non-campaign areas (140 respondents). In addition, nearly 54% more respondents in non-campaign areas (315 respondents) were considered to have “low awareness” than in Jeevika’s campaign villages (205 respondents). Even in villages outside Jeevika’s intervention, Jeevika members were more likely to be highly aware of MGNREGA (27%) than non-Jeevika respondents (14.5%).

Major Findings: Sources of information

The study specified 7 potential sources of information (or combination of sources) in campaign

¹ Dhamdaha, Musahari, Noorsarai and Lakhnaur.

and non-campaign villages: (1) Jeevika-only, (2) government-only, (3) government and Jeevika, (4) other sources, (5) Jeevika and other sources, (6) government and other sources, and (7) all sources.

Participants in non-campaign areas identified “other sources” as the most common information resource (237 of 603 respondents), followed closely by “government-only” sources (232 of 603 respondents). Nearly 11% of respondents in non-campaign villages specified “Jeevika-only” as a resource.

On the other hand, respondents in campaign-targeted villages reveal Jeevika and formal sources like PRIs and PRS were major sources of information. 40% of respondents in campaign areas (239 of 598 respondents) identified Jeevika as their sole information source. Furthermore, Jeevika was the most effective means of promoting awareness: 55% of those respondents who designed “Jeevika only” (132 of 239 respondents) fell under the aforementioned “high awareness” category.

Notably, participants in both campaign and non-campaign villages found “government and Jeevika” to disseminate information more effectively than formal sources alone. Nearly 28% and 37% of respondents, in non-campaign and campaign-targeted areas respectively, were considered highly aware of MGNREGA when the government was the sole information source. When participants received information from Jeevika and formal sources, 86% of non-campaign and 55% of campaign-targeted respondents reflected “high awareness.” As such, the study highlights the value of effective convergence.

Major Findings: Gram Sabha participation

Overall participation in Gram Sabha increased in Jeevika’s campaign villages; more specifically, PRI participation among respondents doubled from the previous year as the number of participants rose from 115 to 241 within the same group of 598 respondents. In comparison, the study found a 35% increase in participation among the respondents in non-campaign areas; it should be noted that this increase was driven entirely by Jeevika members, as the number of non-Jeevika participants remained constant (26 respondents).

Major Findings: Work applications

The total number of respondents who submitted MGNREGA work applications increased in villages targeted by Jeevika’s intervention (87 respondents), translating into a 45% increase from the previous year. The study also found that 166 respondents from campaign villages submitted applications in 2012 but did not apply in 2011 – this is nearly 5 times the number of respondents from non-campaign areas (38 respondents).

In non-campaign areas, on the other hand, the total number of respondents who submitted work applications decreased from the previous year. The 36% decrease in work application submissions reflects to 61 respondents who did not apply in 2012 but applied in 2011.

Major Findings: Work and payment scenario

Note: The following figures reflect the combined survey data of four blocks. The scenario may vary from block to block.

Of the 1201 respondents from campaign and non-campaign areas, 428 respondents indicated their participation in the MGNREGA work scheme in 2011. The reported average of man days worked is 35.14 days; however, 234 respondents – nearly 55% – worked 15 or fewer days. 79 respondents (18%) reported working 16-30 days, while 54 respondents (13%) worked 91 days or more.

The average weighted payment for the 428 MGNREGA participants is Rs 65.60 per day. Though 73 respondents reported payments of Rs 121-144 per day for their labor, 65 respondents indicated that they did not receive any compensation. Furthermore, more than a third of the 428 respondents reported that more than 1 month had elapsed before they received payments for their participation in the MGNREGA scheme (165 respondents).

PDS

Jeevika's intervention in the Public Distribution System (PDS) in Bihar originated from a large volume of complaints lodged against PDS dealers. A list of problematic PDS shops was shared with Jeevika's leaders, thus leading to examinations that assessed the capacity of Jeevika VOs in the affected villages. Administration of the PDS shops was re-assigned to the Jeevika VOs that expressed readiness; the remaining shops were re-assigned to private dealers.

By re-assigning PDS shops to its VOs, Jeevika seeks to have empowered women groups participating in the improved delivery of public services. As such, SHG women are responsible for procuring and distributing grains to the shops' beneficiaries. At the time of the study, nearly 100 Jeevika VO-run PDS shops were functioning across the state.

PDS study design

A comprehensive questionnaire based cross-sectional study was carried out in 4 blocks; the assessment ultimately covered 1200 respondents in 40 villages. The study also included a retrospective component to compare Jeevika-run PDS shops' performance with the past PDS dealers. Responses were recorded in the form of soft data. The study identified non-Jeevika PDS shops that had been running for many years as the "control villages" – however, this does not reflect an ideal situation².

Major Findings: Frequency, quantity, and price

Since PDS shops were re-assigned to local VOs, Jeevika has increased the frequency of wheat and rice distribution, as well as the quantity of the food goods. In comparison to PDS shops run by past and current private dealers, Jeevika's PDS shops distributed wheat with greater frequency by 0.15 months and 1.38 months respectively. Jeevika-run PDS shops also out-performed their predecessors by distributing an additional 0.45kg of wheat on average. The intervention had similar effects on rice: Jeevika-run shops distributed rice more frequently than previous PDS shops by 0.27 months, and current private PDS dealers by 1.36 months. Jeevika-run and current non-Jeevika PDS shops made similar improvements to the quantity of rice distributed by increasing output by 1.7kg over past PDS.

However, the quantity of kerosene distribution has decreased slightly since PDS shops were re-assigned to Jeevika's VOs and non-Jeevika private dealers. The study found that Jeevika-run PDS shops distributed 0.04kg less kerosene, while private shops had an average deficit of 0.1kg.

Total prices have increased in Jeevika and non-Jeevika PDS shops alike, though the difference was greater in private PDS shops. Compared with past PDS shops, the total amount charged in Jeevika's PDS shops increased by an average of Rs 8.6; on the other hand, the difference between past PDS and current non-Jeevika dealers is Rs 12.3.

Major Findings: Perceived quality of food grains

Respondents' chose between 4 categories to identify their perceived quality of food grains: (1) good and fit for human consumption, (2) inferior but still consumed, (3) inferior and good for animals, and (4) unfit for any consumption. The study found that respondents believe overall quality has improved since PDS shops were re-assigned; furthermore, improvement was greater in PDS shops run by Jeevika's VOs. More than 50% of respondents found food grains in Jeevika-run PDS to be "good and fit for human consumption" (275 of 536 respondents). This number falls to 31% in non-Jeevika PDS shops and 30% in past PDS shops, both of which had at least one respondent categorize food quality as "unfit for any consumption".

Major Findings: Regularity of shop opening

The study found that Jeevika-run PDS shops were more likely to be characterized as regularly available. 57% of Jeevika's 573 PDS shops were regularly open (327 shops); whereas only 40% of non-Jeevika PDS shops were similarly described (247 shops).

² Ideally, the study design would have allowed comparisons with re-assigned PDS shops.

Major Findings: Returning empty-handed

Since PDS shops were re-assigned to Jeevika's VOs and private dealers, fewer respondents report leaving the shop empty-handed. Notably, respondents were nearly twice as likely to return home with their food entitlements from Jeevika-run shops than past PDS shops. 44% of respondents recalled returning home with their food entitlement before PDS shops were reassigned (251 of 572 respondents); this number increased to 61% when respondents visited non-Jeevika shops (370 of 609 respondents) and 80% when respondents visited Jeevika-run PDS shops (459 of 576 respondents).

Limitations

Recognized limitations of this study include recall errors and social dynamics. However, M&E plans to conduct similar regular studies at least once a year nonetheless for different interventions. The procured data will provide a snapshot of the situation, and will act as an on-field validation tool as well.