Understanding barriers and facilitators to setting up and running women-led farmer producer companies

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Process evaluation report

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Note to readers

This process evaluation report has been submitted as part of the Swashakt: Empowering Women's Collectives Evidence Program. This program aimed to generate evidence-based scalable technical interventions for building collective livelihoods in India that economically empower women and are economically viable. 3ie has copy-edited and formatted the content for publication.

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Executive summary

In 2020, 3ie launched a program called Swashakt: Empowering Indian Women's Collectives, which aims to generate evidence on interventions that enhance the viability, sustainability, and returns for women's empowerment collectives (WECs), thereby promoting women's empowerment. Under Swashakt, 3ie is funding the implementation of four pilot and five at-scale projects across ten Indian states that support collectives and group-based models for women-led businesses.

The Gramyashakti-II intervention is one of the five scaled projects being implemented by ACCESS Development Services, a national livelihoods support organization with 17 years of experience in promoting sustainable livelihoods in rural India. Gramyashakti-II is an enhanced version of a previous model of women's collectives promoted by ACCESS in 2019 in western and southern Rajasthan. In that model, ACCESS organized women to form farmer producer organizations (FPOs) that pursued group-based agro-processing activities, and these groups were federated into a larger women-owned farmer producer company. ACCESS provided women with trainings on technical capacity and business development, established a common processing unit for spices, created market linkages, and offered quality control services. Gramyashakti-II replicates this model in four new locations and adds interventions to generate higher incomes for women, thereby empowering them economically to access higher-value urban markets. Gramyashakti -II is working in four districts across three states in India, i.e., Alipurduar and Uttar Dinajpur in West Bengal, Kota in Rajasthan, and Kandhamal in Odisha. While ACCESS had a prior presence in the two districts of West Bengal, they are initiating the project for the first time in Kota and Kandhamal.

This report presents the results of a process evaluation conducted by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The main objective of the study is to document processes and glean lessons from the Gramyashakti-II implementation model, identify enablers and barriers to setting up collectives and overall project implementation, and understand the socio-economic and cultural context and its impact on project implementation. The study also aimed to provide a set of recommendations to the implementation partner as well as to policymakers, technical support units, and other organizations working on similar interventions.

We conducted qualitative research in all four project districts. Our methodology relied on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with women members, their husbands, and the board of directors of the farmer producer companies. Key informant interviews were conducted with village heads, project managers, and the implementation team from ACCESS with the aim of understanding the intervention better.

The study examines the major interventions planned by ACCESS under the Swashakt project and looks at how they are being implemented on the ground. Gramyashakti-II has four components – capacity building of participants in entrepreneurship and financial management along with a training on gender sensitization, provisioning for agro-processing machinery and centralized facilities, setting up market linkages for final

products through a brand for urban online and offline markets, and promoting financial inclusion of women by facilitating access to loans, rights, and entitlements through the FPCs.

Our findings show that the socio-economic and cultural contexts are different in the four districts – for example, we found that gender norms in Uttar Dinajpur and Kota are far more rigid than in Alipurduar and Kandhamal, which meant that women in the latter two districts had more freedom in mobility and autonomy. Women in Alipurduar and Kandhamal also had more support from their husbands, families, and the larger community in comparison to the other two districts. Most husbands were supportive of their wives being part of the FPC and participating in training programs. We also observed higher awareness levels about the Gramyashakti-II program among the Panchayat members and village heads in Alipurduar and Kandhamal. All these factors have an impact on the project implementation process.

In terms of challenges, findings show that during the mobilization and training phase, the primary challenge faced by the implementation team was low attendance of women in village-level meetings and trainings due to competing demands on women's time. This includes domestic responsibilities as well as other available income-generating opportunities in the village, and the lack of support from family members and the community. Setting up market linkages, generating adequate market demand, and the high costs associated with catering to premium markets, were some other challenges faced by ACCESS during the implementation process. The ACCESS team was working on strategies to mitigate these challenges by changing the customer base and customizing the products to meet local consumer demand.

Many women participants in the project locations are employed in tea gardens as laborers or earn an income from MGNREGA or other daily wage agricultural work. Thus, in addition to domestic responsibilities, losing out on wages to attend trainings or meetings was a major dissuading factor for women. In addition, many women also struggled with the commute to the training center. The cost involved, rigid gender norms, lack of support from family members, and concerns over security were some of the reasons cited as a deterrent to commute for trainings.

Some key recommendations emerge for more effective implementation of the intervention. First, it can be helpful to conduct a needs assessment along with a market survey during the initial conception and design phase of the program. This should ideally take place before the implementation of the program and the setting up of the value chain. Multiple field visits should also be conducted early on to gain an in-depth understanding of the socio-economic and cultural context. Secondly, the provision of transport facilities and monetary compensation for participants to attend trainings can incentivise them, especially during the initial period.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

WEC	Women's Empowerment Collectives
FPC	Farmer Producer Company
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
BoD	Board of Directors
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-Depth Interview
KII	Key Informant Interview
IRB	Institutional Review Board
RoC	Registrar of Company
ILO	International Labour Organisation
RMAPCL	Ranthambhore Mahila Aajeevika Producer Company Ltd
SRLM	State Rural Livelihood Mission
PO	Producer Organisation
SFAC	Small Farmers Agri Business Consortium
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
WBSRLM	West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission
HR	Human Resources
CFC	Common Facility Centre
FIG	Farmer Interest Group
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
SHG	Self Help Groups
ToT	Training of Trainers

1. Introduction

Empowering women to control their economic lives is a critical means of achieving gender equality and a more equitable and just society. There is strong emphasis across national and global organizations on enhancing women's economic empowerment. One of the strategies espoused by experts, researchers, practitioners and several donors to bring about women's economic empowerment is the promotion of women-owned businesses.

In 2020, 3ie launched a program called Swashakt: Empowering Indian Women's Collectives. Swashakt supports women-owned businesses by funding nine organizations, including private and public partnerships, to establish or replicate models of women's collective rural enterprises in India. The program defines women's collective enterprises as those where a group of women come together for a common entrepreneurial activity –such as production, procurement or marketing –with formalized joint ownership of the business or informal methods of pooling and sharing resources. These collectives may be registered as companies, cooperatives or informal clusters such as producer groups. These rural women's group enterprises are viewed as vehicles for promoting women's economic empowerment and are therefore called women's empowerment collectives (WECs) (Dang et al 2022).

The Swashakt program was launched at a critical time when decades of advancement toward women's empowerment were set back by the outbreak of COVID-19 (ibid). Globally, between 2019 and 2020, women's employment declined by 4.2 percent (representing a drop of 54 million jobs), while unpaid work has increased (ILO 2021). Women-owned businesses have also been affected disproportionately due to the pre-existing gender biases, which further deepened during the pandemic (Manolova et al., 2020; Torres et al. 2021). In this context, it becomes important to study the viability and sustainability of women's collective enterprises and eventually their potential for scale.

The Swashakt program aims to generate evidence on interventions that enhance the viability, sustainability and returns for WECs, thereby promoting women's empowerment. Under Swashakt, 3ie is funding the implementation of four pilot and five at-scale projects across ten Indian states that support collectives and group-based models for women-led businesses. These include non-farm and service enterprises operating in partnership with the government.

Gramyashakti-II is one of the five scaled projects being implemented by ACCESS Development Services, a national livelihoods support organization with 17 years of experience in promoting sustainable livelihoods in rural India. Supported by 3ie as part of the Swashakt women's economic empowerment program, Gramyashakti-II is an enhanced version of a previous model of women's collectives promoted by ACCESS in 2019 in western and southern Rajasthan. In that model, ACCESS organized women into groups of 15 to 20 to Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) that pursued group-based agro-processing activities. The project targeted women from historically marginalized communities such as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. These groups were federated into a larger farmer producer company - Ranthambhore Mahila Aajeevika Producer Company Ltd (RMAPCL) - which is women-owned and operated. ACCESS incubated the farmer producer company (FPC) by providing women with trainings on

technical capacity and business development, establishing a common processing unit for spices, creating market linkages, and providing quality control services. Through this intervention, 500 women were provided employment, and the enterprise earned a revenue of over INR 6.2 lakhs (USD 7,600) in 2017-2018 and INR 4.6 lakhs (USD 5,600) in 2018-2019. The enterprise made nominal profits in the first two years of incubation.

Gramyashakti-II replicates this model in four new locations and adds interventions to generate higher incomes for women, thereby empowering them economically to access higher value urban markets. The four districts include Alipurduar and Uttar Dinajpur in West Bengal, Kota in Rajasthan and Kandhamal in Odisha.

In West Bengal, the project builds on prior interventions by the West Bengal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (WBSRLM) that established FPCs in Alipurduar and Uttar Dinajpur. In these two districts, ACCESS mobilized women to be a part of the Gramyashakti-II program – most of whom were already members of the FPO set up by WBSRLM and promoted by ACCESS, and some new women who were not members earlier. ACCESS provided trainings and set up the spice processing value chain.

In Kandhamal and Kota, the FPCs have been set up for the first time, with the same interventions of mobilizing women, providing training and setting up the spice processing value chain. Gramyashakti-II expects to recruit 200 women per location, some of whom were previously engaged with SRLM in West Bengal and familiar with the FPC model.

Specifically, Gramyashakti-II delivers:

1. Capacity building of participants in entrepreneurship, financial management, enterprise growth, and gender equity.
2. Provision of capital, such as agro-processing machinery and centralized facilities.
3. Market linkages for final products through the brand StirNSpike, a competitive commercial packaged spices brand for urban online and offline markets; and
4. Promotion of financial inclusion of women by facilitating FPC access to loans, rights, and entitlements.

In this process evaluation, the aim is to understand the structure and functioning of the FPOs set up by ACCESS, as well as the intervention and implementation process. Further, the evaluation's research questions aim to understand the societal context and the initial barriers and facilitators to the implementation process.

Research questions

The main research questions that the process evaluation responds to are:

1) What are the enablers and barriers to setting up women's collectives?
2) What are the enablers and barriers to project implementation?
3) How does overall context influence project implementation, specifically its impact (and lack thereof)?

The analysis shows several differences in context in the four districts. Women in Alipurduar and Kandhamal, to a certain extent, enjoyed relatively more freedom in mobility and autonomy; whereas women in Uttar Dinajpur and Kota were more bound by stringent gender norms. This difference in context had an impact on the program implementation. Further, findings show that during the mobilization and training phase, the primary challenge faced by the implementation team was low attendance of women

in village-level meetings and trainings due to competing demands on women's time, fear of losing out on daily wages to attend meetings, or lack of support from family members. Setting up market linkages, generating market demand, and high costs associated with catering to premium markets, were some other challenges during the implementation process. Factors like support from family members and community as well as awareness among panchayat members helped in creating an enabling environment during implementation. ACCESS was working on strategies to mitigate these challenges by changing the customer base and customizing the products to meet local consumer demand.

This report also suggests some mitigation strategies to facilitate the implementation process. For instance, it can be helpful to conduct a needs assessment along with a market survey during the initial conception and design phase of the program, provide transport facilities for participants to attend trainings, and offer minimal monetary compensation so that participants do not lose out on daily wages to attend trainings.

This report highlights the following:

- methodology used to conduct the process evaluation;
- structure and functioning of the FPCs being set up by ACCESS;
- socio-economic and cultural context in the four districts;
- intervention and implementation process – including the barriers and facilitators to implementation; and
- recommendations and conclusion.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample Size

Qualitative data was collected from four districts across three states, i.e., Alipurduar and Uttar Dinjapur in West Bengal, Kota in Rajasthan and Kandhamal in Odisha. Process evaluation was designed to go hand in hand with impact evaluation. For the impact evaluation, a set of villages were randomly divided into treatment and control. The KII and FGDs were undertaken with members and non-members of the collective, in three villages in each district. While two villages were the treatment villages, i.e., where the intervention was being undertaken, one village was a control village with no interventions being undertaken. In the treatment village, interviews were conducted with both members and non-members. This was done with the objective of gaining an understanding of the context so that any impact on beneficiaries' post-intervention can be observed in the treatment villages. In-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with some women members, husbands of the women members, village sarpanch, community mobilizer, trainer, and an influential member of the community. Key informant interviews (KII) were conducted with project managers from ACCESS. Details of the sample are provided in the table below.

Table 1: Sample Details

Location	No. of villages	Stakeholder	Focus group discussion (FGD)	In-depth interview (IDI)	Key informant interview (KII)
Alipurduar, West Bengal	3	Women members	2	2	
		Women non-members	3		
		Husbands of members	2		
		Village head/panchayat member			1
		Community mobilizer			1
		Production coordinator			1
		Field coordinator			1
		Trainer			1
Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal	3	Women members	2	2	
		Women non-members	3		
		Husbands of members	2		
		Village head/panchayat member			1
		Community mobilizer			1
		Production coordinator			1
Kota, Rajasthan	3	Women members	2	2	
		Women non-members	3		
		Husbands of members	2		
		Village head/panchayat member			1

Location	No. of villages	Stakeholder	Focus group discussion (FGD)	In-depth interview (IDI)	Key informant interview (KII)
		Community mobilizer			1
		Production coordinator			1
Kandhamal, Odisha	3	Women members	2	2	
		Women non-members	3		
		Husbands of members	2		
		Village head/panchayat member			1
		Community mobilizer			1
		Production coordinator			1
Delhi		ACCESS management team			1

2.2 Data collection process

- **Selection of consultants**: Consultants for data collection were selected through an interview process. Knowing the local language was imperative for the consultants to ensure seamless conversations between the respondents and the interviewer.
- **Training of consultants**: The 3ie team provided extensive training to the consultants before the fieldwork. In this training, the Swashakt program was introduced, along with the tools available to collect data and the process of conducting the fieldwork. They were also provided with a fieldwork protocol guide that highlighted the dos and don'ts of this process.
- **Tool preparation**: Designing the tool for data collection was an iterative process. The fieldwork for process evaluation started immediately after the baseline data collection was completed. This means that the implementation process for Gramyashakti-II had just begun in the treatment villages. Mobilization of women was ongoing, and some trainings had taken place. This information is important as it also guided the way in which the tools and research questions were designed. The interview guides and tools were prepared for the following categories:
  - FGD and IDI with participants and non-participants,

- In-depth interview with participants and husbands of participants,
- KII with the field team - community mobilizer, production coordinator and the management team. The tools can be found in Annexure 1.

- **Piloting the data collection tool**: Once the interview guides were prepared, the process for acquiring Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval began. Simultaneously, the guides were piloted with a few groups of women in Kota, Rajasthan to check their viability. Based on this pilot, a few questions within the broader sub-themes were added, while those irrelevant at this point were deleted. An important objective of piloting the tool was not only to test its efficacy, but also timing. Both the IDI and FGD were targeted for around 1 to 1.5 hours, as beyond this, the participants can lose focus or interest.
- **Planning the fieldwork**: Fieldwork was planned in close coordination with the implementation partner, ACCESS. A detailed field plan was created, with district, village location, and the data collection, i.e., FGDs and IDI to be undertaken. The field coordinator from the ACCESS team helped with the mobilization and facilitation of the interview process in the treatment villages, i.e., where the intervention was being undertaken by the ACCESS team. In the control villages, i.e., where the intervention was not being undertaken, the mobilization process to interview women was carried out by the field consultants with support from ACCESS team members. The field plan was devised accounting for the total days taken for travel, mobilization as well as data collection.
- **Challenges during data collection:** The team faced several challenges during the data collection process.
  - The field location was remote and finding hotels to stay as well as commute was difficult for the researchers.
  - Delays in conducting interviews due to unavailability of women owing to domestic responsibilities and work, was another major challenge. For instance, in Kota, the interviews were conducted during the monsoon season which is usually a busy time for women as they go to the agricultural field for work. Thus, afternoons were chosen to conduct the FGDs and fieldwork, as that is a relatively convenient time for women to gather.
  - When the husband and wife were interviewed together, both did not freely share their opinion and felt restricted. This was especially true for Uttar Dinajpur and Kota, where many women did not speak freely due to the presence of other family members. Due to this, the information is sometimes skewed across locations, with more insight into cultural and social norms, mobility, economic context etc from Alipurduar or Kandhamal as compared to Uttar Dinajpur or Kota.
- **Translation and transcription**: Once the interview guides were recorded and uploaded, they were transcribed and translated by the consultants.
- **Coding**: A coding framework was prepared, which was used to code the translated interviews on NViVo. The framework had thematic codes and sub-codes. The coding framework is attached in Annexure 2.
- **Analysis**: Once the coding was complete, the team analyzed the data to understand the broad themes and observations emerging. This data was thematically analyzed and organized in notes which were helpful for the report writing.

2.3 Timeline

Table 2: Study Timeline

Activity	Jan - Mar 2022	April-June 2022	July-Sept. 2022	Oct-Dec 2022	Jan-March 2023	April-May 2023	June-August 2023
Tool preparation							
IRB							
Piloting the tools							
Recruitment and training of field consultants							
Preparation of the coding framework							
Data collection							
Transcription and translation							
Data coding							
Data analysis							
Report writing							

3. The Gramyashakti-II Project

3.1 A brief description of farmer producer organizations (FPO)

It is imperative to understand the FPO model before delving into the Gramyashakti-II model. An FPO is a legal entity, formed by primary producers, i.e., farmers in this case, which provides for sharing of profits among its members, i.e., the producers (NABARD 2015). One of the reasons that led to its formation was that small producers do not produce sufficient volume to benefit from economies of scale (*ibid*). Therefore, they are unable to negotiate in markets for good rates, and in turn, unable to increase their income (Prasad, 2019). Although the concept of FPC first came in India in 2003, guidelines for FPCs were formed only in 2013 (*ibid*).

The FPO is one type of producer organization (PO) where the members are farmers. A PO is a legal entity formed by primary producers, which could include farmers, milk producers, fishermen, weavers, rural artisans, craftsmen, etc. A PO can be a producer company, a cooperative society or any other legal form that provides for sharing of profits/benefits among the members. In some forms, like producer companies, institutions of primary producers can also become member of PO (NABARD 2015). Small Farmers Agri Business Consortium (SFAC) provides support for the promotion of FPOs (NABARD 2015). Some of the main features of the FPOs are:

- It is formed by a group of producers for farm activities.
- It is a registered body and a legal entity.
- Producers are shareholders in the organization.
- A part of the profit is shared among the producers.
- Rest of the surplus is added to its own funds for business expansion (NABARD 2015).

Producer organizations (PO) have gained currency in recent years due to several reasons. POs are seen as institutional innovations that can:

- reduce transaction costs,
- provide technical help in production and creating social capital,
- offset scale disadvantages faced by small farms in supplying to the modern value chains,
- help in farm diversification and better price realizations in output markets,
- strengthen bargaining power, and
- raise the voice of smallholders in the policy process (Kanitkar, 2016; Prasad, 2019).

An FPC is a type of FPO that is registered. An FPO can be a registered company (farmer producer company or FPC) or a cooperative, among others. Prasad *et al* (2023) posit that *"FPOs have the potential to build on the framework and mobilization offered by existing SHG networks to empower women from an entrepreneurial standpoint. Newer market opportunities and autonomy offered by FPOs can help transcend the sociocultural factors preventing women from actively participating in the agri-value chain"*. The response provided by the program manager of Gramyashakti-II on the motivation behind using the FPO model was congruent to the research and literature on this subject. In the program manager's words, *"ACCESS think of themselves as incubators who believe that working with institutions and not individuals is more sustainable and beneficial in the long run."* The program manager described the benefits of collectivization as improved negotiating power to get a better price for agriculture in markets, access to credit to purchase machines and technology, and comparative advantage through the division of labor. He also mentioned how collectives can inculcate a sense of pride, confidence, and ownership among the women. He adds that being part of an FPC and running a business can be an eye-opening experience for these women – it can increase their knowledge on several things and expand their worldview.

The data collection for process evaluation was undertaken in all the four locations immediately after the completion of baseline data collection in the early stages of the intervention. At this stage, the mobilization process had been completed and the value chain was in the process of being set up by the ACCESS team. The common facility centers (CFCs) were already set up in Uttar Dinajpur and Alipurduar, but they were still being set up in Kandhamal and Kota. Machinery was being procured in all four locations. Out of the three trainings that were to be conducted as part of Gramyashakti II, only one - the enterprise development training - had been completed.

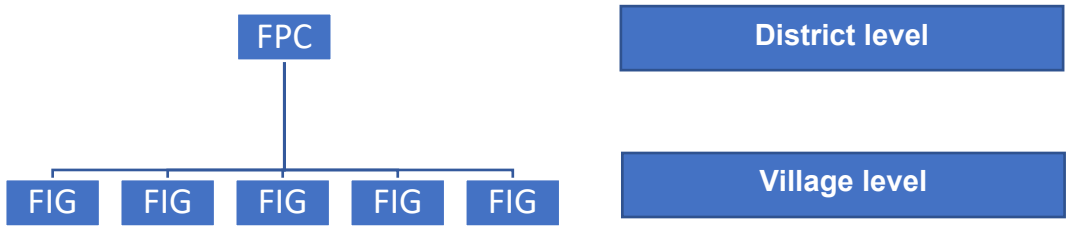
The FPCs in Uttar Dinajpur and Alipurduar were already formed as part of the WBSRLM in 2017 before the start of Gramyashakti-II and were later registered in 2021. However, the spice production value chain and the CFC had not been set up, and very few production activities were taking place. The primary activities since 2017 included some agriculture-related trainings for the women, the Board of Directors (BOD) meetings, and buying and selling of grocery items from the wholesale market for a small profit in the villages by women members. The women earned a commission for each sale they made. The FPC in Uttar Dinajpur had 2,000 members and Alipurduar had 1,720 women members. For these two districts, ACCESS planned to mobilize women from the already existing set of members. In Alipurduar, ACCESS also identified and mobilized women

from a new village because proximity to the CFC eventually proved to be an issue. Apart from the newly mobilized women from one new village, they only mobilized women who were already members of the FPC into the Gramyashakti-II program. Hence, the intervention activities as part of Gramyashakti-II would only be available to the smaller set of women mobilized into the program, and not to all the FPC members in Alipurduar and Uttar Dinajpur. In Kota and Kandhamal, the FPCs were set up from scratch by ACCESS and all women would be a part of the Gramyashakti-II program.

3.2 Structure of the collectives:

Each of the four districts has one FPC with a CFC at a selected location. The CFC in each district is a rented space where production activities are undertaken. This location is chosen based on the space requirement, project budget, distance from project villages, access to electricity and water. At the village level, farmer interest groups (FIGs) are formed, and local-level leaders are selected informally from among the group members. These FIGs are federated into FPCs, and one member is selected by other members of each FIG to represent the FIG at the FPC level.

Figure 1: Structure of the collectives



Each FPC has a BoD, whose members are representatives of different FIGs. These women are selected through a democratic process – individuals volunteer to be members of the BoD, and they are selected only once all other members accept them. The community mobilizer is also very closely involved in the selection of the BoD members to avoid any conflict, coercion, and exploitation among members. Currently, the BoD does not have roles or formal designations, but ACCESS eventually plans for the BoD to have a designated CEO, secretary, and treasurer.

The main responsibilities of the BoD members include:

- Attending meetings
- Signing off on documents
- Documenting minutes of the meetings
- Participating in any FPC-related decision-making.

Meetings for the BoD usually take place once a month, even though the statutory requirement is four times a year. Currently, BoD membership is not rotational because the process is expensive and time consuming. However, ACCESS plans to make it rotational in the future. The BoD members also work closely with the ACCESS staff – primarily the community mobilizer and the production coordinator, who implement, manage, and oversee all field-level operations, including FPC set-up, functioning and production activities.

At the FIG level, activities include any trainings that take place and meetings that happen once a month. Meeting discussions revolve around share capital, training feedback, FPC production plans, travel to the CFC and other logistical challenges.

3.2.1 Share capital

In Kota and Kandhamal, each woman had to pay a sum of INR 500 to become a member of the FPC. In Alipurduar and Uttar Dinajpur, the FPC was set up by SRLM in 2017, and the share price every woman was required to pay at the time of joining was INR. 100. Any new women who were mobilized in Alipurduar for Gramyashakti-II also paid INR 100.

3.3 Activities at the FPC level

3.3.1 Production at the Common Facility Centers

As aforementioned, each of the FPC in the four districts has a CFC in it. Currently, ACCESS is working to set up viable spice-processing and agro-processing businesses in all four locations. Their focus is on the pre-production stage which includes setting up functional marketing and sales channels to ensure profitability in the future. At this point, since production activities haven't properly begun and the business isn't set up yet, women have very little involvement in any Gramyashakti-II activities. As per ACCESS' plan, once the business is set-up, the company will source raw materials from members. These members will eventually participate in sales strategy, marketing, business decisions, and production activities from which they will earn wages.

So far, the ACCESS team - including the management, marketing and sales, production coordinator and community mobilizer - have identified products for each FPC. This has been done after considering the availability of local produce, market demand, consumer preferences, cost of production, and other factors. The field team usually undertakes market surveys and extensive research before sharing product suggestions with the Delhi team, after which a decision is made. This list of products has been evolving based on the aforementioned factors and is not yet final.

Table 3: List of products (as of January 2023)

District	Product
Alipurduar	Tea blends. Pickle for local markets.
Uttar Dinajpur	Turmeric, looking to diversify – thinking of spice blends like Kitchen King Masala
Kandhamal	Turmeric, turmeric latte
Kota	Pickle, maybe jams – guava available locally

3.3.2 Value chain

Below are the broad steps in the value chain for spice, ginger, and tea production, as told during the field visits conducted after the baseline. This was ACCESS's implementation plan, but it had not yet begun during data collection. Therefore, the fidelity of the implementation is yet to be seen.

1) ***Step 1* – Procurement of raw material:** The first step in the value chain is to procure the raw materials required for production – whether it is raw turmeric to produce turmeric powder, ginger for ginger tea or garlic for garlic pickle. When production begins, the marketing and sales team in Delhi informs the field team about the required quantity and quality of the raw material. The field team then conducts village meetings to assess whether the members grow the required product in the specified quality and quantity. They are also plan for the procurement process to be as just and fair as possible. For example, if there are two farmers growing turmeric and the FPC needs 1 quintal of raw turmeric, they will source half a quintal from one farmer and half from the other, while also accounting for cost and efficiency. The orders are collected from the members at the village, who are paid as per the market rate. The team prefers to source the raw materials from members, so they also encouraged to grow turmeric, ginger, garlic, or whichever crop is required for production. However, if the desired quantity for production cannot be procured from the members, they source the rest from the wholesale market. Some raw materials will be sourced only from the wholesale market – for example, the loose tea to make ginger tea.
2) ***Step 2 – product processing:*** The storage and processing of the raw material to make the finished product takes place at the FPC, which houses all required equipment needed for various processes. For turmeric powder, this involves boiling, drying, polishing, grinding, and sifting. For ginger tea, this includes drying and blending. For pickle making, the steps include slicing the product, preserving it, and converting it to a pickle.
3) ***Step 3 - packaging:*** For turmeric, machines are used for sifting the product, measuring specific quantities for each pouch, and then sealing and packing in the carton. The process is similar for the other products in other FPCs. The packaged products are then coded using a coding machine, which is done by the production coordinator. ACCESS expects that this will continue to be the case even after production begins.
4) ***Step 4 – Storage and sale:*** The packaged products are stored at the FPC, and based on demand, the packets are dispatched to different places. The marketing and sales team in the Delhi office is responsible for facilitating the market linkage - identifying buyers and different avenues for sale.

3.3.3 Women's involvement in the production process

The production activities had not begun when the data collection took place for the process evaluation. This section focuses on the expected involvement of women members in production activities in the CFCs within the four FPCs. However, given the constraints due to the distance of villages from the CFC and challenges pertaining to mobility, it was evident that not all women will be involved in the production process. Women residing in faraway villages would not likely be directly involved in production activities – their farm produce would be procured by the FPC for production and used as raw material for processing the final product. However, women living closer to the CFC, will be more involved in the processing and final production and may also supply raw materials for final products. The process for each district has been provided in detail below. This also indicates that possibly, the aggregate value for women located at a distance from the CFC will be less than for those who are closer to the CFC.

In Alipurduar, the CFC is in Mendabari village, which is far from the villages where the women participants lived. The ACCESS field team had tried finding a location closer to the participating women but was unable to do so. The production coordinator said that the women earn wages in their villages from agriculture and other sources, so it is unlikely that they would travel from the faraway villages to the CFC for production activities, given the cost of travel to Mendabari. He added that they expect women's participation from just one village, Dakshin Satali, which is very close to the CFC. Most of the women members cultivate ginger in their farms, and ACCESS had plans of procuring these as much as possible for the preparation of ginger tea, which is one of the products to be produced and packaged at the Alipurduar FPC. The primary benefit to women in far-flung villages in the future is likely to be from the procurement activities and not from employment in the center. Thus, benefits to women will essentially be seen from backward linkages to production. So far, in Alipurduar, members of the BoD have been the most active. As part of the FPC activities, these women are also involved in the purchase of grocery items from the wholesale market, packaging it, and then selling it to other women members and residents in their respective villages. They receive a commission for every packaged grocery item sold.

In Uttar Dinajpur, turmeric powder is the main product which is processed and prepared at the FPC. Like in Alipurduar, the CFC is at a distance from the villages where the participants come from, so it is expected that a small percentage of women, located in villages close to the CFC will be involved in the production process. Moreover, only three women are required per day to produce one quintal of turmeric, implying a relatively low demand for labour at the CFC for turmeric production. The production coordinator said that many women in Malduar village in Uttar Dinajpur want the turmeric to be sent to them in the villages where they will package it and send back. However, he said that this may not be possible because of the unavailability of equipment and other items required for packaging at the village level. Maintaining hygiene and quality is also a factor that can't be controlled if the production activities are being done by individual women in their homes. Most members, not just the BoD members like in Alipurduar, are involved in the purchase and sale of grocery items as described earlier.

In Kandhamal, the production coordinator reported their plans to involve all the women participants in the production process. *"In the future, these women would be responsible for running the company. We will leave this place. That's why we are training them in every aspect of production in functions like marketing, sales, etc."*. He also added that some women will most likely be more active and directly involved than others once the production process begins. The women in Batingia, one of the treatment villages in Kandhamal, also report that they have been trained to operate the equipment needed to process and package the turmeric once the production process begins. They expressed keen interest in participating in production activities. Kalpana, a participant said, *"We get done with our household tasks early in the day. We are eagerly waiting for the production to start. This would be a good opportunity for us to work together."* In both Kandhamal and Uttar Dinajpur, the women are encouraged to grow turmeric in large quantities so that the FPC can procure raw turmeric from them as much as possible.

In Kota, garlic and coriander are the two ingredients which will be used by the FPC to make pickles. The production coordinator reported that there are three ways in which women will be involved in the income-generating activities.

i) through the sale of whole garlic for which women will get a small share of the profit for a specific quantity of garlic sold.
ii) through their shareholding.
iii) through the wages they earn from participating in the production of garlic pickle and other products which will be made at the CFC.

The production coordinator also added that women will be involved in marketing and sales. Speaking to the women in the villages, we learned that they have internally discussed the division of tasks– for example, they had decided that someone who is more educated will read the labels and stick them on the boxes, others will be involved in cutting and peeling and other activities in the production process.

3.3.4 Accounts

Women were not involved in handling accounts for the FPCs in the four districts. The production coordinator said that accounts for the FPC is managed by an external consultancy which has been hired to look after book-keeping, GST, tracking vouchers and bills and bank statements, handing the FSSAI license procurement procedure, among other things.

3.3.5 Marketing, sales, and branding

Apart from identifying products, the ACCESS team was also working on setting up marketing and sales channels, branding and packaging. They planned to target premium as well as local markets with different packaging styles and costs based on market surveys conducted to understand demand in both types of markets (villages, towns, tier 2 cities). They are also looking at alternative sales channels, such as partnering with the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to supply spices to schools and employing members as commission-based saleswomen.

Initially, ACCESS planned to brand the Gramyashakti II products under the Tamara brand, which was developed as part of an earlier project and used for the Sawai Madhapur/RMAPCL products. However, they did not solicit a trademark for this. Out of concern for trademark infringement, they developed a new brand, StirNSpike, and secured a trademark. StirNSpike is now the brand name for all Gramyshakti II products.

3.3.6 Monitoring

At the project level, the field team in each district is expected to share a monthly report with the ACCESS Delhi office. In addition to this, monthly meetings with each district team also take place, during which updates and challenges are shared and overall progress is discussed.

At the FPC level, there is a system for tracking the number of shareholders, details on sales, monthly production, and procurement information. They also distribute a feedback form to women after completing the training, which captures information on what aspects of the training the women liked and did not like, what they learned, and other things. In addition to this, individual-level data on attendance for each day of the training is also recorded. ACCESS has an MIS officer in Jaipur who collates data across the four clusters, which has to be in line with project reporting requirements.

4. Implementation

4.1 Selection criteria

The initial selection criteria developed by ACCESS for a woman to be a part of the Gramyashakti-II program specified that:

- A member should be in low-income groups with a monthly household income not exceeding INR10,000.
- A member should be a farmer either cultivating their own land or leased (legally owned).
- A member should be cultivating one of the dominant spices grown in the region around which production and marketing activities will be targeted. This criterion can be relaxed for Kota in Rajasthan.
- All members under one enterprise should belong to the same geography, i.e., women staying within a radius of 5 - 10 kms of the primary operations will be offered membership.
- Only one adult woman (18-55 years of age) from a household will be offered membership. This will ensure there is no concentration of power in the enterprise.
- Members should preferably be from small and marginal farmer/producer community.
- There will not be any restriction on membership based on religion, caste or social status of a member.
- As far as possible, politically strong households will be excluded to ensure minimal power gaps within the enterprise.
- Members should be willing to contribute towards the mutually agreed share price of the FPC to ensure sufficient share capital.
- Membership will be voluntary.

However, during the implementation process, some of these criteria were relaxed or changed and most women who showed interest in being part of the FPC activities were mobilized. The production coordinators and community mobilizers across districts spoke about how they gave preference to women farmers who belonged to economically weaker sections of society. From the interviews, it became clear that the selection criteria were modified and relaxed for the four different locations based on the specific context and production requirements for the FPC in that location. For example, the production coordinator in Kota mentioned that they tried to mobilize women from households who owned less than 6 *bighas* of land, whereas in Uttar Dinajpur, members needed to be from households who owned at least 1 *bigha* of land so that they could cultivate turmeric. However, land ownership was not a criterion for selection in Alipurduar where most households only had kitchen gardens.

4.2 Mobilization process

The mobilization process in Alipurduar and Uttar Dinajpur differed from Kota and Kandhamal because the women who had to be mobilised into Gramyashakti-II were already a part of the existing FPCs in the first two districts. In Alipurduar and Uttar Dinajpur, the households to be mobilized were identified based on baseline activities and mobilization was restricted to households most likely to participate in the project. The community mobilizer visited these households and introduced the project to the women and their family members, explaining the various roles they are expected to play in the

production process, the share capital payment and the equipment to be used during production. The women who showed interest were mobilized - their names and numbers documented, and they were called for further meetings held in the village. The community mobilizer formed a WhatsApp group and set up a date and time for a meeting in the village as per everyone's convenience. The production coordinator was also involved in conducting the village level meetings and awareness sessions with interested women. During the meetings, the value chain and their role in it is told to them along with all the benefits of being a part of the Gramyashakti project.

In Kandhamal and Kota, the mobilization process was slightly different because there were no existing FPC's here. The field team coordinated with the Block Development Office and the Women and Child Development Office initially and connected with Aanganwadi workers in the selected villages. After this, the mobilization process was the same as West Bengal.

4.3 Training

ACCESS is conducting two main trainings: enterprise development and gender sensitization. It is also training women to handle machinery required for production and to acquire knowledge of the production process.

4.3.1 Enterprise development training

The Enterprise Development training was a three-day training that took place in all four districts at the village level. They were conducted in batches of two to three villages together. Initially, ACCESS planned the trainings to equip women with enterprise building and management skills, but feedback from field teams revealed the need for a more basic training. They revised and simplified the training curriculum and implemented it in 2022 with the objective of orienting the participants to the idea of women running an enterprise, i.e., to build an entrepreneurial mindset among women. The training aimed to motivate women, build leadership capacity among them, inculcate a sense of belief that women can run businesses and become entrepreneurs, as reported by the trainer. The modules were developed by the team in Delhi without any involvement of the trainer, whose only role was to facilitate and conduct the training.

As part of the training, women were shown how to develop business plans, taught the possible threats and risks in business, concepts in marketing and sales, and the different opportunities that are available at the village level. Games like Snakes and Ladders were used as an analogy to explain the highs and lows of running a profit-making business. Case studies and stories of women starting businesses, the challenges they faced and how they tackled them, were told to the participants during the training.

4.3.2 Gender sensitization training

According to the ACCESS team, women in their project villages face three primary challenges:

1. Lack of transportation facilities,
2. Social norms that dictate what a woman can and cannot do – for example. the notion that women shouldn't be traveling for work
3. Domestic responsibilities

To address these sociocultural and societal challenges, ACCESS planned a gender sensitization training. The ACCESS team believed that, ultimately, the success of the enterprise would motivate women and their households to overcome these challenges and participate in the FPC work.

ACCESS hired an external consultant (gender expert) to develop the module and the training was conducted at the village level in four sessions spread over a year.

1) **First session**: Orienting women to the idea of bringing about change in people's mindsets and in different aspects of their lives. The aim was to help women understand that change – in society, mindsets, and their lives - for the better is truly possible.
2) **Second session**: Introducing women to the concept of gender stereotypes and patriarchy.
3) **Third session**: Challenging these gender stereotypes and the existing gendered division of labour – the idea was to help them understand that women are physically and mentally capable of doing work that men traditionally do. They were told that the upcoming technical trainings would help them overcome barriers and work in occupations (production activities) that are otherwise largely dominated by men.
4) **Fourth session**: Introduce the concept of equality – familiarize women with the idea that the goal is not to reverse gender roles, but to establish more equal gender relations.

When the fieldwork was conducted, the gender sensitization process had either just been initiated or was being planned in different locations. The initial plan was to conduct these trainings with women and their family members, especially husbands and in-laws. However, the implementation plan was different as the ACCESS team decided to first conduct these trainings with women, empower them, and in turn, also create a safe space for them. We were told that the husbands and family members would be involved in later activities, and this would be contingent on their willingness to participate. This is because in many of these locations, ACCESS was also mobilizing women for the first time, and it might have been difficult to secure buy in from families to attend such sessions. The strategy was to capacitate women, who in turn, would also communicate some of their learnings to the family members. For the long term, ACCESS planned to disseminate these learnings through training of trainer (ToT) model, wherein influential community members would be capacitated as trainers to conduct these trainings among the larger community. This, in turn, would ensure the sustainability of these learnings by embedding it within the community.

4.3.3 Technical training

The technical trainings were to be conducted at the CFC in each district with multiple batches of women to teach them how to handle all the equipment used in the production process. ACCESS has an in-house trainer who would travel from Delhi to the field locations to conduct these trainings in the four districts.

During the technical training, ACCESS plans to map the members to different parts of the value chain based on their perception of activities they are skilled or interested in. They plan to lay out a chart with all activities and processes in the value chain, and the women will be asked to put in their preferences.

5. Context

5.1 Overview of districts

This section provides an overview of the four districts in which the fieldwork was undertaken.

5.1.1 Alipurduar

Alipurduar district was carved out from Jalpaiguri on 25th June 2014 as the 20th district in the state of West Bengal, India. The district mainly comprises rural population, with almost 80 per cent belonging to the SC/ST community. The state borders with Cooch Behar in the south, the international border of Bhutan in the north, Assam in the east and Jalpaiguri in the west. There are lots of tea gardens and forest in the region, and major livelihood is agriculture and tea gardens (District profile: alipurduar.gov.in/aboutus.html). Alipurduar district has 61 organized tea garden (Ansari & Sheereen, 2016) and the tea workers are mostly the descendent of migrant workers from Nepal, Chota Nagpur (Jharkhand) and Santhal Pargana (Jharkhand) who came here a century ago to live in the tea garden (ibid). More than 52 per cent of the tea workers are women (ibid).

5.1.2 Uttar Dinajpur

The district of Uttar Dinajpur is enclosed by Bangladesh in the east, Bihar in the west, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district in the north and Malda district in the south. Uttar Dinjapur has fertile soils, and agriculture includes paddy, sugarcane and jute in the region. Muslims constitute 49.92% of the population; Scheduled Caste 26.8% and Scheduled Tribe 5.4% (Census of India, 2011).

5.1.3 Kandhamal

The Kandhamal district is in central Odisha, bound by Boudh district in the north, Rayagada district in the south, Ganjam and Nayagarh districts in the east and Kalahandi district in the west. It is famous for handicrafts such as Dokra, Terra–Cotta, Cane and Bamboo works. In Odisha, Kandhamal is the main producer of turmeric (Sahoo *et al* 2018) and organic turmeric from the region is famous. The Scheduled Castes comprise around 15.8% population, and Scheduled Tribes comprise 53.6% (Census of India, 2011). Kandhamal is also an aspirational district under the Government of India program, which was launched in 2018 with an aim to quickly and effectively transform 112 most under-developed districts across the country.

5.1.4 Kota

Kota is the only district in Rajasthan that has more urban than rural population. Around 21% population comprises Scheduled Castes, and around 10% Scheduled Tribes. It is bound in the north by the district of Sawai Madhopur and Tonk, south by district Jhalawar, east by district Baran and west by district Bundi and Chittorgarh (District survey report, 2016). Some of the major crops grown in the region are wheat, soyabean,

mustard, coriander, and garlic. Mining activities are prevalent in the region due to the presence of limestone, bajari, sandstone and masonary stone (*ibid*).

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 Socio-economic context

The social and economic context in the four locations is very different from each other. Most of the respondents in the villages of Alipurduar district are from Nepal and belong to different tribes, whereas in Uttar Dinajpur, the majority are Muslim. Kandhamal largely consists of women belonging to tribal communities and the participants in Kota are largely lower caste Hindus.

Primary sources of livelihood and migration patterns

There is variation in the primary sources of livelihood and the larger economic context in the four locations as well.

In the villages of Alipurduar district, each household has at least one member employed at the tea gardens. Almost all households have a kitchen garden in which they grow basic vegetables, and sometimes spices and fruits. *Supari* is also grown widely in the region. Most respondents said that the maximum produce from the kitchen garden is used for household consumption and a small amount is sold in the market. Some members, usually from the Bengali, Bihari, or Marwari households, also worked at local mason shops or owned small shops. None of the Nepali households owned any shops or did any business activities.

The respondents also spoke about the abysmal working conditions at the tea garden, which have two kinds of workers: bigha workers and permanent workers. The permanent workers are given work before the bigha workers and have a more stable source of income. Every household has at least one permanent worker employed in the tea gardens. The months in which there is less work in the tea garden, bigha workers have to look for other work opportunities.

Nearly every respondent reported that at least one member of their household had migrated to other places in search of work. Both men and women migrate to cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Siliguri and Bangalore, and mostly work as household help or in hotels. Some also work as construction workers, masons, or in parlors. While most of the migration is for work reasons, some also migrate for higher studies. From observations, it can be concluded that migration is very common in the district because income from the tea garden is not sufficient to support an entire family. Daily laborers in tea gardens earn INR 230 per day, after a recent increment in wages.

In Kandhamal, most respondents said that both men and women worked in agriculture, and their income was supplemented through daily wage labor, which is non-agricultural in nature. Many of them also mentioned doing MGNREGA work whenever available. The village head reported that apart from MGNREGA and some agricultural work, there was no other income generating opportunity in the region. Due to the dearth of opportunities, most people migrated to other cities. It is more often the men who migrate for work to places like Kerala, Chennai, and Bangalore, among others.

Similarly, in Kota and Uttar Dinajpur, the primary source of livelihood is agriculture. In Kota, the households own small pieces of land, usually one to two *bighas*. In addition to farming on their own land, people are also involved in agricultural labor in the village, and some even travel to nearby towns and work in shops – grocery and hardware stores. In Uttar Dinajpur, around 90 percent households owned land, which was mostly in the name of the respondents' husband or father-in-law. Most respondents also reported that they hired labor from primarily the tribal community to work on their land. Jute and paddy are the two primary crops that are cultivated in the region. When asked whether they are also involved in agricultural labor, women clearly said that women from their community don't go out for any kind of labor work. Some of them said that their husbands work on others' land, apart from also farming on their own land. Migration is less prevalent in Uttar Dinajpur and when it does happen, it is only the men who travel to nearby towns, primarily Kishanganj in Bihar which is a neighboring town, to work as masons, in shops, as construction workers or in railway stations.

To summarize, it was observed that agriculture is the main source of livelihood in Kandhamal, Kota and Uttar Dinajpur, whereas working in tea estates is the primary source of income in Alipurduar district. Most people in Alipurduar work in the tea gardens, whereas in Kota, they supplement their income from farming on their own land, with income from wage labour or MGNREGA work, or income from leased agricultural land. In Uttar Dinajpur, most families own land and are engaged in paddy and jute cultivation. Migration is common across the four districts.

5.2.2 Gender context

The interview and FGD guides contained questions around women's mobility, their confidence level, social capital, gender norms around marriage, education and financial context. The idea was to gain an understanding of the context in which these projects are being implemented, which in turn impact the project outcomes. There is evidence and literature which shows that group membership, or being part of collectives has an impact on women's empowerment outcomes, including access to credit, self-efficacy, mobility and social capital (Brody *et al* 2017). These indicators are useful to understand the barriers and facilitators to project outcomes as well as the difference in impact in various regions and context. Rogers *et al* (2021) in their study discuss the interplay between context and implementation. Failure to recognize or account for variations between context, due to norms and cultural practices, can cause implementation challenges due to barriers (Braithwaite, 2018).

Women's mobility

During the fieldwork, it was observed that gender norms varied across locations. In Alipurduar, most women did not face many restrictions on their movement. Several men were supportive of their wives working. *"No, if my husband doesn't have a problem, then why will anyone else in the village say anything? My father-in-law also tells me to go and work. There are no restrictions here."* said a woman in Chhuapara village in Alipurduar. When asked whether they go to work because they wish to or because they feel compelled to due to financial difficulties, the women say that most often it's because they feel compelled to work as the income earned by their husband isn't enough to sustain their household. One woman in Chhuapara village said, *"All families let the women work because here the income per household is very less. So, for one man to fulfil the expenses of the entire family is not possible. That's why females here work, no matter*

from what caste, Bihari, Muslim, or anything, they all work." However, women also mentioned that they don't make the decision to work independently. They are required to take permission from their husbands. *"We can't ignore them; we live under them only,"* said Seema. In Alipurduar, a large proportion of women said they had scooters that they used for work commute or running errands within or outside the village. Some women mentioned using public transport like buses or autos if they have to go to a nearby town or village for a training.

Similarly, in Kandhamal, Odisha, women did not face a lot of restrictions. They have the freedom to work outside their homes, go to the market to buy groceries, pick up their children from school and run other errands. During the FGDs in Kandhamal, women also mentioned that they travel in groups, whether it is for work or to visit nearby towns and villages during festivals. A panchayat member in Kandhamal even said, *"Women have been working outside their home from the beginning. I do not remember that ever being different before."*

The situation in Kota, Rajasthan and Uttar Dinajpur in West Bengal was very different. In Kota, women cannot leave their houses without the permission of their husbands. In the rare instances that they do go, it was always with their husbands or relatives. They always cover their faces everywhere they go (*ghoongat)*. Some respondents (women, and their husbands), claim that women face restrictions on their mobility because they fear young women may elope with men outside their town or caste group. *"It is not safe out there for women"* is the belief among people in the villages of Kota.

In Uttar Dinajpur, women mentioned the stigma and judgement they face from society if they work outside their homes. *"I'm going out every day, everyone in the village will start talking about this -- where does this woman go every day, what is she doing? The culture and mindset is like this. For this reason, a lot of times women from the village cannot go anywhere,"* said Kamla in Uttar Dinajpur.

Household work and chores

Most women respondents across the four locations said that household work and chores completely fall upon them. This, coupled with the agricultural work, puts in a lot of pressure on them. Most of the women said that their husbands do not help them out, but in a few cases, sons helped their mothers. In the cases where women had a grown-up daughter or mother-in-law at home, they helped in looking after younger children. Men's support was confined to going to the market to purchase material for the household.

Self-efficacy

As observed previously, women in Alipurduar are more confident as compared to women in other districts. When asked whether they would want to hold leadership positions as part of the ACCESS FIG, multiple women expressed interest. One woman said, *"Since I joined the group, I have learned how to voice my opinion and handle different situations."* Some women in Alipurduar also spoke about wanting to start a business of their own in the village. One woman reported, *"I have this plan of starting a footwear business. In this whole village, there is only one single footwear shop. It's a huge village but only one shop, so I would want to do that. I can also take a loan from my SHG."*

In Kota, Kandhamal and Uttar Dinajpur as well, when asked whether they would want to

hold leadership positions as part of the ACCESS FIG, most women expressed interest, even though the women in Alipurduar came across as more entrepreneurial and confident in comparison. There were also a few women in these three districts who explicitly said no, unlike in Alipurduar.

Autonomy and decision-making

In all four locations, women said that they needed the permission of their husbands and in-laws (if they lived in a joint family) to attend trainings, travel for work, buy a mobile phone, etc. Most of them said that decisions pertaining to household purchases or education of children are made jointly by the husband and wife. However, while women in Alipurduar and Kandhamal enjoyed more autonomy, the situation was different in Kota. Several respondents mentioned that they had permission to attend trainings only if it is in the village. Their families, especially husbands, did not allow them to travel even to Sangod (the closest town) for work or trainings.

In Alipurduar, largely, women and their husbands consulted each other before making any household decisions. *"It doesn't feel right to take decisions alone. That is why I generally consult my husband, so he also feels good that way. He consults me as well."* a woman respondent said. Some women also spoke about how their husbands go to the tea gardens every day for work, so they're the ones usually taking the decisions in the house, whether it's about what grocery items to purchase or how much of their kitchen garden produce to sell. One of the respondents also added that despite actively participating in decisions around buying a television, fridge or furniture for the house, their husbands take the final decisions. However, there are variations in the responses among the women that were interviewed. One woman spoke about how her in-laws and husband are the primary decision-makers in her household and she has very little say in these matters. A few of the women also reported that they have more say in decisions taken about household supplies and appliances, but their husbands are more involved in decisions pertaining to the children's education.

In Kandhamal, based on most responses from women that were interviewed, it appears that men are more involved in the household decision making process. Women also have less mobility and less access to the market in Kandhamal compared to women in Alipurduar *"I do not know anything about home appliances or phones. My husband purchases these things. I do not know how to buy anything. My husband purchases everything that is needed for me and my children, including dresses and other things. My younger son gets the groceries while going to college."* However, a few of the women participants in a FGD also said that decision making in their households was a consultative process. They reported that they were very much involved or consulted when agriculture-related decisions were made.

The dynamics in Kota are like in Kandhamal, where a few women say they are involved in decision-making, but a majority say they aren't involved or that they don't know enough to take decisions. Women are the least involved in the decision-making process in Uttar Dinajpur. The women here, unlike in Alipurduar and Kandhamal, don't leave the house for work and therefore, aren't earning an income independently. They also have the least mobility and access to the market. Most women mentioned that even if they are consulted when a decision is being taken, their husbands take the final call since they have full control over all household monetary resources. Women in Uttar Dinajpur are

also not involved in agricultural activities, whether its farming on their own land or performing agricultural labor. Consequently, they are not involved or consulted in agriculture-related decisions. *“I don’t buy or accept any item even if it is for free. I can’t take this decision, so I ask my husband for his permission. If my husband tells me to buy or take it, then only will I take it.”* said a woman respondent in Uttar Dinajpur.

Hence, considerable variation was observed in women’s involvement in household-level decision-making in all four districts, even though women seemed to have the least involvement in Uttar Dinajpur.

Social capital

In Alipurduar, women seemed to have the most agency and freedom to meet friends and neighbors for various purposes in the village as compared to other districts. Most of the women said they have friends in the tea gardens where they work, and consult them on issues regarding work, family, etc. One woman shared, *“Yes, I have friends. If I don't socialize and communicate with the people of my village, how will I get to know what is going on in the village? Hence, it becomes essential to socialize with people of my village.”* Others added that they usually approach one woman leader in the village in times of need or whenever they want any kind of support. This woman is a part of the ACCESS FIG and is also the president of the SHG in their village.

Some of the respondents also reported having studied in a school outside their village, so they also had school friends who lived in nearby villages and towns. To commute for socializing, some claimed to use their own scooters while others used autos and buses to meet friends and relatives or to visit the market.

In Kandhamal, the respondents reported that they frequently met their friends in the village and also during Church service, in the market, and during the Dussehra festival when they go to puja functions. A few o women said they could reach out to their friends for borrowing money or loans. However, unlike Alipurduar, women in Kandhamal did not own any personal vehicles and had no freedom to travel outside their village.

In Kota, there was some variation in the responses. Some women said that the SHG or FIG meetings were the only time they met other women in the village. However, women said that they don’t necessarily consider these women as friends or feel comfortable sharing any personal problems or asking for help of any kind during these meetings. It can be inferred that this process of coming together for group meetings is in itself a big step for these women, who otherwise do not socialize with anyone outside their families. However, a few women also said that they have some friends in the village who they can occasionally visit and speak to in times of need.

In Uttar Dinajpur, most women said they don’t have anybody they can reach out to when they want to talk or need help, advice or support. Their only support in times of need was their husbands. *“I have my husband only as a friend.”*, said one woman. The women here have very low mobility and freedom and are entirely dependent on their husbands to travel anywhere outside their homes, whether it is to work or meet a relative or friend.

Access to resources

Some women in Alipurduar were confident about selling the produce from their kitchen gardens in the market or to buyers who came to their homes. *“This market is set up*

every Saturday. Or women here open small stalls for vegetables also" as told by Kalpana from Chuapara village. Women are aware of the market rate for different produce from their kitchen gardens or land. Some women had even done computer courses from nearby towns. Most women also mentioned they had phones with internet connections which they sometimes used to access different kinds of information. *"Once I had opened a seller account in Flipkart and Meesho, for handcraft products. But they needed me to have a current account, so I left it then. But I have thought of pursuing it again, I'll sit with a laptop and do it."*, said Kusum. With regard to access to credit, most women reported that they had taken loans from their SHGs at some point. A few said they had taken loans from Bandhan bank. Here, it was also observed that most women had taken loans for their children's education, daughter's marriage, for agriculture or livestock-related reasons, for health reasons or to make purchases to help family members. Very few women took loans for their own personal needs or purchases. Only one woman reported that she had taken a loan from her SHG to start her own shop, which she runs on her own.

In Kandhamal, women were involved in taking their produce, primarily paddy, to the mill for processing as well as in selling the processed paddy to shops and cooperatives. Women also have access to the market when they need to buy groceries and provisions for their home. For credit, most women said they go to the SHGs in the village, while a few also said they go to moneylenders for very small amounts. All the women said they had taken loans largely for marriages, hospital visits, or to buy vehicles or other things for their families.

5.2.3 Caste context

In Alipurduar, there are migrants from Nepal, Bihar, Rajasthan, as well as tribals and people from West Bengal. During the FGDs and interviews, participants did not report any explicit instances of caste or religion-based discrimination in the village. However, it was observed that women belonging to the tribal communities were not educated and economically less well off than others in the group. They also participated very little during the discussions, implying the presence of hierarchy and power dynamics in the society. In Kandhamal, the participants primarily belonged to tribal communities. Women spoke about going to Church every week with their friends and celebrating Durga puja together. No other observations were made in Kandhamal.

In Kota, the participants mainly belonged to the Scheduled Caste group, and when asked about any discrimination they faced or the caste-dynamics in the village, they hesitantly spoke about how casteism is prevalent in the villages. One woman, Surekha, 34 said, *"Whenever we complain about water or sewage problems, we get abused by the men (upper caste men)."* Women also spoke about how there is tremendous stigma around inter-caste marriage in Rajasthan. *"If any girl marries outside her caste, she is never welcomed back in her house. Parents just leave them. They consider them dead."*, says Malti from Borda village. She also mentioned how the Brahmins and Vaishnavs have more land in the village. They prevented the entry of women from lower castes into their temples. *"Untouchability is practiced in Shyampura village in Kota. A Scheduled Caste woman cannot even pass an upper-caste person's house wearing slippers/footwear",* says the ACCESS community mobilizer.

In Uttar Dinajpur, the participants primarily belonged to the Muslim community. Most villages are divided into different hamlets or paras. In one village in Uttar Dinajpur, there are four settlements or paras, and the divisions are based on caste. The community mobilizer explained that there is a Malo para, an Adivasi para, a Rajbongshi para, and one Desi Muslim and one Bhatia Muslim para. She said that there's no real difference between the two Muslim paras, except that they have always historically lived in different settlements. Occupations are also divided on the basis of caste. During the FGDs, the participants shared that it is only Adivasis who are involved in agricultural labour in the village. Muslims owned more land in the village.

It was observed that caste dynamics do play a role in women's participation in the project and in the implementation process. However, the data only provides a brief overview on the caste dynamics in the different regions.

5.2.4 Presence of other groups or interventions in the project locations

It was observed that the SHGs are the only other village-level groups present in the four project locations. These SHGs were established as part of the Government's National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). There is considerable variation in the level of activity in SHGs across the four districts in the three states. Largely, SHGs in West Bengal seem to be more active and functional as compared to SHGs in Odisha and Rajasthan. This can be attributed to the presence of FPOs in West Bengal by ACCESS, which also made the institutional linkages stronger. Secondly, women in West Bengal also appear to participate more actively in the SHG group activities, and this may be attributed to a more recent push by the State Government's Anandadhara scheme (State Rural Livelihood Mission) to form more SHGs and increase women's participation, as told by a Panchayat member in Chhuapara village in Alipurduar district. He mentioned that in 2016-17, many SHGs were formed in the district because of the government orders, women leaders in the village experienced a lot of pressure to form groups and encourage women to join. Women reported that they were involved in preparing meals for the mid-day meal program, keeping the school premises clean, along with other village level activities.

On speaking to the husbands of the participants in Alipurduar, it was revealed that the men in the village did not object to these activities because they often think of these activities by the women as social work. The women in this district have also undergone multiple trainings, like pickle making, parlor training, making stuffed teddy bears, book-keeping, accounting, among others. Several women said they had even traveled to nearby towns and villages for these trainings. They mentioned that they had taken loans at some point or the other from their SHG and this was their primary source for credit. The Panchayat member in Dalsinghpara village had a very positive outlook on the role played by SHGs in the village. He said, *"In my opinion, if women go out, meet other women, and talk to them then it will benefit them. It makes them more advanced and knowledgeable. I am very happy with the self-help groups here, all the SHGs formed here are very good. Earlier, no one had a bank account or a passbook, but the didi's (sister) went from house to house, took the people to the banks and helped them make a passbook"* (Somnath, 40).

In Uttar Dinajpur, most women are members of an SHG, but the level of participation is low in comparison to Alipurduar. The number of meetings held here are also less. Some

women reported attending trainings on forming SHGs, how they function and to build awareness on various credit options. They mentioned that they never travel alone for any trainings, unlike the women in Alipurduar. All women said they had taken loans from their SHG at some point or the other, and had passed on the money to their husbands who, in turn, had used it for different purposes including for agricultural equipment, buying motorbikes, etc.

In Kandhamal, there are SHGs in the villages, but these are less in number as compared to other districts. Women reported that they took loans from both banks as well as SHGs, whereas women in the other districts only claimed to have taken loans from SHGs. A Panchayat member mentioned that it is usually an Aanganwadi worker who creates these SHG groups in the village and a lot depends on her initiative. None of the women had attended any trainings as part of their SHG activities.

In Kota, it was observed that the Rajeevika, the SRLM, is active, like in West Bengal and all women appear to be members of an SHG. One woman in Sangod village informed that she bought two *mangalsutras* (gold necklace), a bed for her house, and two small gold earrings with an SHG loan and ther savings. She made these purchases while paying for all household expenditures. *"My husband doesn't work, so I buy everything for the house and do all the savings through my SHG",* Suman, 35 said. She then goes on to say, *"Rajeevika is nice and it's because of them that I'm here right now. Otherwise, I would have died in a ghoonghat (veil) in my home.*" Kavita, another woman in Sangod relayed that she started a business to sell sarees, but it eventually failed because of low demand. Some women reported that they have attended trainings organized by Rajeevika on how to form and run SHGs, make soaps and incense sticks, stitching, etc. Only a few women had never attended any trainings as part of their SHG membership.

In another village called Shyampura, Sunita, an SHG member, said that some women have started dropping out of the SHGs over the years because their family members don't approve of them going to others' houses for group meetings. She said that the SHG had provided a space for the women to talk about their problems – domestic and work-related, ask questions regarding insurance, government schemes, credit facilities etc. Thus, it was observed that the experience of the women was mixed in Rajasthan. While some women had a very positive experiences and benefitted in various ways, there were others who could not take full advantage of being part of SHGs due to family and social restrictions.

5.2.5 COVID-19 and its impact

The COVID-19 pandemic had debilitating effects on everyone. While a large number of people were affected by the disease, there were other severe effects caused by the pandemic, including physical, social, economic, psychological, education, healthcare. For instance, the WHO (2020a) reported that COVID-19, being a new disease, is bound to cause confusion, anxiety and fear amongst people. This led to feeling of stigma, anxiety among the infected people, healthcare workers and otherwise. There were also reports of increase in domestic violence and child abuse due to various stressors like loss of job, unemployment, lockdown (Das 2020). Bina Aggarwal (2021) posits that the global focus on gendered impact of COVID-19 was on domestic violence and burden of care work among women. However, these effects were far more complex as women were more at risk of losing their livelihood, as they are concentrated in the informal

economy, with fewer employment options (*ibid*). Rural households also faced a shortage of food, and as per existing social norms, women and young girls faced the brunt of this as they are usually the last to eat in a family (*ibid*). Since this fieldwork happened immediately after the three major waves of COVID-19 in India, the process evaluations captured the experiences of women in the four locations during this period.

Economic impact

Several respondents across the four locations discussed the economic implications of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown on their family and overall household income. Many women reported that their husbands, or other male family members remained out of work, returned from their workplace in another location and were unable to earn any income for 1 to 1.5 years. In Alipurduar, at least one of the family members in most cases was employed in the tea garden. The monthly income in the tea garden amounts to INR 4,200 for eight hours of work each day (INR 203 per day). Although shifts in the tea garden also reduced by half, the work continued for most part. The tea gardens were closed for a week, but then the work continued, although the workers were expected to wear gloves and masks. The income was meager, but it remained the only source of income. Some women in Alipurduar reported that while the overall household income was reduced, they could afford food to eat. However, the education of their children was impacted due to the lockdown.

Another observation was the challenge faced by women and their family members to access basic food and other items. Apart from dearth of money, the markets remained closed, and they were unable to access necessity goods. Everything became inaccessible due to the lack of public transport. These challenges caused physical as well as psychological distress. Kusum, in Kandhamal, said *"We faced a plethora of problems. It was difficult to get out. The masons had stopped working. It was difficult to get work. Even if we had money, we could not travel using auto-rickshaws. The public transport system came to a halt"*.

Some women from Kandhamal mentioned that they had to rely on rice and food supplies provided by the government, as there was nothing else available. Their own agricultural produce was also disrupted. They needed money to sustain agricultural practices which was less, and the markets remained inaccessible to sell their produce. A woman in Uttar Dinajpur said that the insects infected paddy, and since they did not have money to buy pesticides, they lost their crops.

Respondents from all four locations predominantly reported that men migrated back to the village during COVID-19 lockdown, which disrupted household income, and caused economic distress. Many of them did not find jobs in their hometown, and eventually had to migrate to other cities or locations to find work when the crisis abated.

Psychological impact

In all four locations, both members and non-members reported that COVID-19 was a stressful period with a lot of uncertainty. In Kandhamal, most of them said they felt scared to even sit next to each other. Some of them spoke about the stigma that was associated, and how it increased the stress levels of going out and interacting with others. One of the respondents said, *"The persons who were infected with Covid were treated worse than dogs"* (Sukuma, 35).

Another respondent, Sabina, noted *“We were scared too. A normal cough and cold were also terrifying. If we had to go to the hospital, there they would also have put us in isolation. So, we feared that, and hoped that we wouldn’t fall sick”.*

Family members who returned home from other areas were quarantined in a public place like a school in the village. These people as well as their family members had to face a lot of stigma during that time. Some interviewees mentioned that villagers felt the people, who had come from outside, will infect others in the village as well.

Due to the fear of contracting COVID-19 and subsequent isolation imposed, the SHG meetings came to a halt. These women were unable to go to the market, visit their friends or family members. This led to a feeling of loneliness and anxiety among several women. Most of them connected through telephone with their friends or family to discuss how they were feeling. Some women also felt suffocated and burdened with household work during this time.

Impact on education

Several respondents reported the impact on the education of their children due to COVID-19. One of them mentioned that both her daughters had to drop a year because of the lockdown. Respondents also said that it was not possible for all the children to attend online school due to connectivity issues and lack of access to mobile phones or computers. One of the female respondents said, *“In the online mode the child will not understand much, in class the teacher will explain. And for online classes you have to give the mobile, which was mostly used for playing games. The children did not gather much from the online classes”* (Sushma, Alipurduar). Some other women mentioned that they could not afford smart phones for children’s education, as their income was already scarce due to COVID-19. This led to a loss in their studies and tensions within the household.

Apart from the economic crisis, respondents spoke about other challenges as well. A Sarpanch of a village in Alipurduar said that substance abuse became a challenge in the area. He said, *“In 2020-21, addiction became a big issue. We held a meeting with all our village's elders and position holders, and we placed all the people who had become addicted to intoxicating substances in rehab”*. He attributed this to a lack of work among the youth. Some women also mentioned that the household work increased due to children and other family members being home. They had to devote a lot of time in care work and cooking. These women could not visit their native families or friends and could only speak on the phone with them.

Many of these women were part of the SHG groups under the SRLM. These groups were engaged to distribute rations to other families in the village during the lockdown. Some of the respondents discussed their experience, and the fear and apprehension that was felt by them as well as their family members as they ventured out of the house to do this work. Kamla describes, *“During Covid, I was distributing rations to people. That time everyone was at home. And my husband was such a coward! So, I had to report at 7 a.m. and work till 6 p.m. We were told to help others so that they would not starve. We had to distribute the ration so that everyone could feed themselves. I used to leave my house at 7 a.m. My husband stayed at home; he even wiped the gate with sanitizer! I have so much sanitizer in my house. He told me to not go, and if I did, to not come back!*

We had many arguments. I told him it was a responsibility given to me; I must help people".

Some other women who were part of similar food distribution campaigns said that they wanted to continue doing this, despite the fear of COVID-19 and resistance from their family members. They felt a sense of duty to serve the country, and the people of their village in this hour of need.

Most respondents, while talking about the fear and stigma pertaining to COVID-19, mentioned that their family members did not suffer from it. They mentioned a few deaths in the village, and how three to four people went and cremated them. Some of them said that few people in their family had cold, fever but not COVID-19. A Sarpanch in Uttar Dinajpur vehemently mentioned that everyone in the village had been vaccinated, and no one suffered from COVID-19. A few respondents mentioned how other medical issues were neglected due to the paucity of doctors and fear of visiting hospitals at that time.

Overall observations: Most of the respondents discussed the impact of COVID-19 on the education of their children. There was economic and mental distress due to the lockdown, but it was somehow managed through rations, single income etc. Almost all of them said that they or their family members did not suffer major setback in terms of health or contracted Covid 19, although some other people in the village did contract the disease and die as well.

6. Implementation - enablers and barriers

6.1 Enablers

6.1.1 Awareness levels among Panchayat members

In Alipurduar and Kandhamal, it was observed that there was more awareness about the Gramyashakti-II project among the panchayat members and the village heads. This enables implementation and the uptake of intervention by the participants. On interviewing them, it was noticed that most of the village heads in the two districts were not only aware of the intervention but were also supportive of it. *"I told my wife that the most important thing is knowledge. So, she should go to the meetings and learn about what they are saying. She told me it was about ginger cultivation and processing."*, said a panchayat member who is also the husband of an FPC member in Alipurduar. In Kandhamal, one village head said, *"Women here are eagerly waiting for the production to start. Some of them complain that the meetings are being conducted regularly but there is no update on whether the production will begin or not. I am sure that women will travel to the production center regularly."* On the contrary in Uttar Dinajpur and Kota, most of the village heads knew very little about the ACCESS program. Knowledge and awareness about the program might play a role in creating an enabling environment for implementing the program.

6.1.2 Family and community support

In Alipurduar and Kandhamal, family members of participants were more supportive of them working and attending meetings as compared to Kota and Uttar Dinajpur. In Alipurduar, most husbands of participants and other family members were supportive of women learning new skills and did not usually impose restrictions on them. During an

FGD with women members in Alipurduar, Kamla said, *"My family supports me, they tell me to go and learn. There's always something to learn."* Savita adds, *"My husband supports me, and keeps encouraging me. I share everything with him, and he gives me advice on what I should do or not do."* Aarti said, *"Only the husband working is not enough now. It is helpful if the wife also goes out and does some work. So why will they say no? Normally in our families, there is no problem with working. Everyone plants Supari trees, and vegetables and takes care of the animals, so if someone is going out to do some work, it is considered helpful."*

In Kandhamal as well, most families were supportive of women working or attending trainings. During an interview, the husband of a member was asked his thoughts about his wife's involvement in the ACCESS program. He responded *"I thought it was a good thing. It will help the women earn some money; it is beneficial for poor people. Everyone needs money."* He further added, *"My wife would come back home and tell me that she didn't understand what they had said. Then I would explain it to her. They used to explain things using games and she didn't understand some of it."*

6.2 Barriers

6.2.1 Barriers during program implementation

- **Challenges in setting up market linkages:** The ACCESS team claimed that working out the sales strategy for the products had been their biggest challenge so far. Initially, they planned to only focus on premium markets via their brand, StirNSpike, however, costs associated with premium markets such as shelf rentals and margins, were found to be high. They also found that the listing fees to place the products in premium retail stores and sell on platforms like Amazon, Big Basket and others is very high. It was realized that the premium market is limiting in many ways. The cost of the premium packaging is very high. Shipping the packaging materials from Delhi to the remotely located CFCs was proving to be an expensive endeavor. The marketing team at ACCESS mentioned that they did not have the budget to compete with brands like Catch and MDH, which are well established with economies of scale.

  Some of these challenges had not been envisaged at the outset. Thus, a mitigation strategy was not prepared by them. However, in order to deal with these high costs and budget constraints, the ACCESS team decided to diversify their sales channel and focus on local markets and smaller towns and cities as well. The team conducted a market survey during the implementation process in their new target locations and found that in local markets, there is a demand for small packets or sachets that cost INR 5 or 10 and not larger packets. They also realized that the brand name 'StirNSpike' would not necessarily resonate with buyers in small towns and cities. To address these differences, they plan to change their packaging, marketing, and branding to cater to non-premium, local markets. The labels will be different, packaging costs will be much lower, selling prices will be lower, and the quantity of product per packet will be less.

- **Ensuring legal compliance:** As mentioned earlier, ACCESS planned to brand the FPC products under Tamara, which was the brand that was used for the Sawai Madhopur/RMAPCL products. However, they hadn't acquired a trademark

for Tamara, and out of concern for trademark infringement, they had to develop a new brand, StirNSpike, for which they secured a trademark.

There were also some issues with licensing. In Kota, the process of nutrition testing, finalizing the recipe, quality assurance took more than three months. This delayed the inception of production activities. The marketing team lead in Delhi said, *"Getting licenses is a time-consuming process -- recipes have to be developed and this takes very long. The women get impatient after initial mobilisation. Mobilisation has to take place again because of delay in starting the production process."* In general, procedures are much more rigid and strict because the premium market is being targeted as part of Gramyashakti II.

- **Low attendance in training sessions due to competing demands on women:** Gramyashakti II project primarily targets marginalized communities, for whom foregoing a day's wage to attend a training or meeting isn't always an option. This proved to be a problem in some project locations where women went to work outside their homes. The community mobilizers and production coordinators in Alipurduar, Kota and Kandhamal discussed the challenge to ensure women's participation in the monthly meetings and trainings. The women in Alipurduar work in the tea gardens, whereas women in Kota and Kandhamal are engaged in daily wage (agricultural) labour. Since their families rely on their incomes, it is difficult for them to forego a day's wage to attend training sessions. In Alipurduar, the community mobilizer said, *"If the women were getting an income from the meetings and trainings, they would readily attend them. Making them see the long-term benefits of joining an FPC and the possibility of having a stable source of income in the future is not easy, given that they have to forego a day's income to attend a training session."*

  Apart from work, these women also had domestic responsibilities and chores, which made it difficult to attend the trainings. The community mobilizer in Kota said, *"The women have requested us to keep the training at a time when they don't have work to miss out on. In this way, they would not lose their income because of the training."* Women with younger children found it harder to work and attend trainings and meetings, especially if they have less support at home. In Alipurduar, Kavita, a FPC member said, *"My sister wanted to join, but her baby is very small, so she won't be able to attend the meetings. She hasn't joined."* The impact of gender norms on the participation of women varies by district. Women in Kota and Uttar Dinajpur face more restrictions from family members as compared to Kandhamal and Alipurduar. The trainer in West Bengal also shared that several women participants in Uttar Dinajpur attended the enterprise development training with three to four children with them. However, this was not the case in Alipurduar district, where women faced less restrictions.

6.2.2 Barriers due to the socio-economic context

- **Challenges in commuting to the FPC for trainings:** Since some of the villages were located far from the training centre for some sessions due to the empirical strategy, many women found it difficult to commute. The cost involved, along with strict gender norms, issues from family members, concerns over security were some of the reasons cited as a deterrent to travel.

- **Mobilization-related challenges:** The mobilization process in West Bengal was easier than in Kota and Kandhamal, owing to the presence of ACCESS and the FPCs in the two districts. In West Bengal, the response rate was more positive in Alipurduar district in comparison to Uttar Dinajpur because gender norms are more relaxed in the former. The community mobilizer in Uttar Dinajpur reports that she had to spend a considerable amount of time speaking to the women's husbands and other family members to convince them about the benefits of joining the FPC. In Uttar Dinajpur, some households also thought that the ACCESS team was collecting their data for the NRC and Gramyashakti II was not a legitimate project. In these areas, the field team had to make multiple visits to onboard members for the program. The ACCESS staff had to also take help from the SHG leaders and other village leaders to assure participants that this wasn't a scam or for the NRC.

  In Kota and Kandhamal, the process took a little longer because ACCESS had never worked in these villages before. In Kandhamal, the production coordinator said that they had to visit each village two to three times to mobilize women. They also add that when surveying the villages and doing household visits, the husbands of the women were suspicious and inquisitive, so they had to spend a lot of time explaining the purpose and benefits of the project not just to the women, but their husbands as well. Titli, one woman member, talks about how the recruitment took place, *"In the first meeting at the Aanganwadi Kendra, they told us about the various benefits of being part of this company, and how women of the village can earn livelihood through the company. Only a few of the women who were present understood what was being said and agreed to join. There were a small number of people in the first meeting. In the second meeting, they did the same thing, but the response was much better. After that, everyone present (17 of us) came on-board."* The women in Kandhamal don't get more than three to four months of regular employment in the village and getting access to work is a major concern for them. ACCESS instilled interest in them to join Gramyashakti II by saying that they would eventually get regular employment and a steady income once production at the FPC began. This was the primary incentive for the women to join the FPC in Kandhamal.

  The field teams reported that women have low mobility and agency in the villages of Rajasthan, and this had an impact on the mobilization process. The community mobilizer reported that she had to organize regular meetings for over a month with the women to get their buy-in. The COVID-19 pandemic also meant there was a break in the usual mobilization process followed by ACCESS. During the pandemic, the community mobilizer kept in touch with the women over telephone, and after the lockdown lifted, she resumed her household visits. Rajesh, the community mobilizer in Kota told us, *"We would hold village-level meetings regularly and ask the women to let us know if they would join us or not. The women would respond saying that they would consult their husbands, sons, and in-laws first. They would ask us to come back after a few days. We would organise another meeting in a few days during which five out of ten women would be willing to join the group."* This makes it evident that the process of mobilization took longer and was more challenging in Kota because of the larger socio-cultural

context and particularly the restrictions women face when it comes to working outside their homes. The community mobilizer also added that the households were twice as apprehensive about paying the share capital for the FPC because they had previously received visits from scammers who had taken money from households under the pretense of loan programs and fake government schemes.

7. Recommendations

- It was observed that institutional linkages and prior presence in the region play a pivotal role in setting up FPOs and activities in the region. The presence of ACCESS in West Bengal, working with SRLMs, was helpful in mobilizing women from the new villages, and initiating work at the FPO level as compared to Kandhamal and Kota.
- A need-based assessment during the conception and design phase of the project to plan the marketing strategy of products is helpful. It was realized that the food processing enterprises, especially those that target premium markets, come with their own set of unique challenges during the setting up phase. Therefore, market research at baseline before the implementation and the setting up of the value chain can be beneficial. A baseline study of the region, as well as potential demand for the product, can also enable marketing and planning for the products which are conducive to the local market. It was also realized that the three-year period for implementation may not be sufficient to set up FPC enterprises working on spice production, which requires licensing and due diligence, legal compliances, among other processes. These processes are time-consuming and can delay the intervention timeline, resulting in dropout of the participants. Market surveys and field visits conducted at the beginning to develop a contextual and sectoral understanding can help integrate the aforementioned factors in the program design, so appropriate mitigation strategies can also be developed.
- Providing transportation facilities for participants can motivate women to attend the trainings. Women and their families may also feel more secure about their safety with commute provision. Further, providing compensation or some allowance to attend training sessions may also incentivize women as well as their families, as they would not lose a day's income for attending the training. Also, a need-based assessment to understand the constraints of these women and adjusting the training module and schedule can be helpful in ensuring women's attendance to the sessions. Since some of these sessions are long, providing women with refreshments or a meal can also motivate them to attend the trainings.

8. Conclusion

This report has aimed to understand the implementation model of Gramyashakti-II, the socio economic and cultural context in which the program is being implemented across locations, and the initial barriers and facilitators to the implementation process. The fieldwork and data analysis from the four locations, i.e., Alipurduar, Uttar Dinjapur, Kandhamal and Kota indicates several differences in context. Women in Alipurduar, and to an extent in Kandhamal, enjoyed relatively more freedom in mobility, access to resources, autonomy, and self-efficacy. In Uttar Dinajpur and Kota, these norms were far more stringent. Women had to get permission from family members before attending trainings. It

was also observed during the interviews that many women did not express themselves freely, especially when their mothers-in-law or other family members were present.

The varied context has an impact on the program implementation as well, which has been illustrated in the report. Although implementation was still in its nascent stages, there were challenges pertaining to demand and market access for the product, as well as legal compliances that hamper the production activities. During conversations with the management team, ACCESS had identified these challenges and was working on a strategy to customize the product for local markets and needs. These offer learnings on both barriers that small scale enterprises face, as well as possible solutions. However, ensuring long-term sustainability of such a model can be a time-consuming process, especially when working with women who come from different contexts.

The ACCESS management team thinks of scaling up in terms of helping the FPCs increase their size and profitability and replicating the model in other locations. In the business sense, they define scale as making the FPC profitable and diversifying their product range. Inculcating a sense of ownership among women and establishing partnerships with SRLMs are also important aspects of how they envisage both scale and sustainability. An exit strategy is important to ACCESS' long-term sustainability plan. In their words, an FPC is sustainable when they can carry out their business without ACCESS’ involvement or interventions. The FPC should be able to invest its own resources to meet all their business needs without capital provided by ACCESS. ACCESS aims to continue providing support to the FPCs in some form or the other until the FPCs attain this stage. By their estimate, it takes an FPC six to seven years to become fully sustainable. They also mentioned that if there is no demand for the products being sold, then there is no point in scaling up the operations. The ACCESS team adds that to ensure sustainability, it is important to step into business mode from project mode. The FPC needs to be linked to service providers of all kinds and the idea of accountability must be inculcated among members. However, Gramyashakti II, as envisaged in its present stage under Swashakt is for three years. To ensure its long-term sustainability, both financially, as well as by creating ownership among the women members towards this enterprise, would require the program to be extended beyond the stipulated time. This would require ACCESS to generate alternate funding options, or other strategies to ensure project implementation, so that it reaches its desired scale and sustainability.

Appendix A: Tools

A] FGD and IDI for members and non-members
FGD/IDI for participants and non-participants
Name of the Researcher:
Name of the respondent:
Name of the Collective:
Year of joining the collective:
State:
District:
Town:
Ward:
Date of Interview:
Place of Interview:
Discussion start time:

Background and Context (For both members and non-members)

1. Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your family? [Probe: info on age, number of children and their ages, education and husband's education. Do the children/husband live with her? Are there elderly people who live with her? If you have asked women to gather from outside the village, ask which village they are from.]
2. What is your main work – agriculture or other work as well? Who is in charge of farming related decisions within the household? [Probe – which crops to grow, whether to use pesticides, whether to buy farming equipment, where to sell produce etc.] Who takes the primary decisions for the family farm? The men or women? What are the different activities in which men and women are involved in the agriculture value chain? [Probe – In case the women are not involved in selling/marketing work, we can ask them whether they would like to be involved in these activities. Do you think women should be involved in these activities? Would you like to be given trainings on marketing/selling? -- Need to understand the different kind of work and gendered division of labour, if any).
3. What does your husband do for a living? [Probe: Is there any other source from which your family earns income? How many members earn an income? How many contribute to running of the household?]
4. Do you do any work from which you earn an income, however small it may be? Last year, how much income did your household earn from agriculture processing or cultivation? How much did your household earn from other sources if any? How much did YOU earn from agriculture processing or cultivation? How much did you earn from any other sources? [Let the choice of unit be the respondents' i.e she may give you monthly income or annual income. Be sure to be clear about the time unit.]
5. How many generations in your family have practised farming? In your husband's family? Or did you recently shift to farming from a different profession? If so, what was your family doing before they started farming?
6. Let's now talk about the farming work you do. How did you learn farming? Do you practice farming mostly for consumption or for sale? When you started farming what kind of farming activities did you do? What farming activities do you do

now? Has there been any change in the kind of farming activities that you do in the past 5 years? If yes, what has changed?

7. What do most households in your village do for a living? How important is agriculture processing or cultivation for the household in the village?
8. In your village, what are your thoughts on women working outside of the house? Is it something you like or would like to do? What is the attitude of people/society towards women working?
9. How much say do women have in decisions taken in the household? (Probe – different kinds of decisions and how they are taken – children's education/health/household items like TV/fridge, household supplies) [DECISION MAKING]
10. Do you go to work outside your home either inside your own village or to another village/neighbouring town? If so, for what work? How do you travel? Do you travel alone or in a group? Does anybody in your house object to this? If yes, what are their views? Have their views changed in any way over the years? In general, are women in your village allowed to leave their homes to work? Would you consider your village to be a safe place for women? [Probe: Can young unmarried women go wherever they want within the village? Accompanied or unaccompanied?] [MOBILITY]
11. Do you interact with people who are not your family members often? Are these interactions social in nature or for work? If yes, who are these individuals? Are they all from your village or from other villages as well? How did you meet them? How were these bonds/friendships created? Do you feel like you can reach out to these individuals in times of need? Are there any other people in the village you look to for any kind of help or advice or when you want someone to talk to? Who are the individuals you meet most frequently? Who are the individuals you meet frequently for work related matters (not necessarily agriculture processing or cultivation). [SOCIAL CAPITAL]

For non-members:

1. What was your reason for not joining a collective? [Probe: did you have information about Access? Were you approached by them?] Anyone else from the family are part agriculture processing or cultivation collectives? What are main advantages/benefits from collectives? What are main disadvantages of collectives?

Access program (Only for members):

1. How many women in your family have joined the collective? Were other women in your family interested in joining? If so, how were you selected to join, and how did you or your family members decide on who would join the collective?
2. What do your family members think about you being part of the collective? What is their perceived advantage of you being a member? Did anyone resist when you wanted to join the collective? What made them change their mind? [FAMILY SUPPORT]
3. What are your expectations from joining the ACCESS FIG?
4. Which trainings have you been a part of so far since you joined the FIG? What were the trainings on? Can you please tell us a little bit about what you learnt from the training? Did you find them useful?

5. Will your husbands be involved in the spice production work of ACCESS? If yes, what kind of activities would they be undertaking? If ACCESS does not allow them to get involved, do you think they will stop your participation in the collectives?
6. Would you feel comfortable becoming a leader of the group? Why or why not? What would help you to feel more confident?

Information on farming work:

1. In the past, apart from the trainings provided by ACCESS, have you been part of any kind of training or course? What was the training about? Have you ever received training on agriculture processing or cultivation/ business/marketing sales? Who gave these trainings? Are there any trainings that you have had to pay for? Did you find them useful? If so, how? If not, why not? [SKILL DEVELOPMENT]
2. What are your main sources for any information on spice processing or cultivation? Who would you go to if you needed information on agriculture processing or cultivation? [Probe: role of government, other NGOs, internet]
3. Can you tell us what are the markets where you sold or are going to sell your agricultural produce? [Probe: how much did you sell in the local markets and in urban/online markets? Who were your largest buyers? How do you market your products?] [ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND MARKETS]
4. Have you ever tried to take a loan to support your agriculture processing or cultivation work when you needed it? Where did you take the loan? What was your experience like, irrespective of whether you got the loan or not? [Probe: how easy/difficult is it to get a loan?]
5. Have you received any support from government schemes/subsidies for agriculture processing or cultivation? What were these schemes and how helpful have they been? Do you think that existing supports are adequate?
6. What are the main challenges that farmers are facing today? What are specific problems women farmers face? What can be done to alleviate the constraints you face?

Current Covid-19 situation

1. How did the Covid-19 lockdown impact your family? Did the lockdown and restrictions impact your household earnings, emotional health or physical health? If yes, how so? [Probe - Was your mobility impacted? Was your work impacted? Was your husband's work impacted?] How has COVID affected your agriculture processing or cultivation work? [Probe: low orders/ unable to meet orders/unable to find workers/ unable to sell] If they're part of an SHG - were the SHG meetings happening? Were you able to meet your friends/other women in the village when you needed to talk? Was your husband at home throughout? How did you deal and cope with the entire situation?
2. Is your daily life impacted by the pandemic today?

B] Community gatekeepers (IDI)

(Note: This tool is for individuals (could be village head/Aanganwadi worker/any influential member in the community/value chain actors) who can speak about the village context and societal barriers to participating in the Access program.

Name of the Researcher:

Name of the respondent:
Name of the Collective:
Year of joining the collective:
State:
District:
Town:
Ward:
Date of Interview:
Place of Interview:
Discussion start time:

Background and Context

(1) Are you from this village originally? If not, where did you grow up?
(2) How long have you been in your role as _____?

Now we want to ask you some questions about this village.

(3) What is the main source of income for most households in this location? (Note – ask occupation for both men and women) What would you say is the average monthly household income in the village?
(4) Do men usually migrate to urban areas in search of employment? Does your village have instances of violence against women or instances of caste violence? Please tell us more.
(5) What are the challenges and issues that come up on regular basis within the village? (Probe – could be water/caste conflict/lack of work/agriculture related issues etc)
(6) What crops are traditionally grown by the communities in these regions Are these still grown or has there been a change in the agrarian process? Are women involved in agriculture? If yes, what kind of activities? What other livelihood options are available for women in the region?

Social norms and community change

(1) What is the typical age of marriage for women and men in your village? Do households practice purdah? Do underage marriages happen in your village? **]** Do you do anything to prevent the same?
(2) Did you see increase in child marriages in the aftermath of Covid 19? Can you tell us more about it? If yes, why do you think this happened?
(3) Were any steps taken to prevent such practices?
(4) Do the women in the village work outside their homes? If so, what are the different kinds of work they are involved in?
(5) Was this always the case? Were women always working outside their homes to earn an income? If no, how did this change come about over time?

About ACCESS

(6) **[Village head only]** How did you first come to know about Access? Did Access team approach you to get buy in from the community? If yes, what was your initial reaction when people of Access came and spoke to you about employing members from community (women) in the collectives? (Probe: Were you in favour of women working outside the home, or hesitant? Why or why not? Do you

think women working outside the home helps your community in anyway?) Has your view changed in any way? (Probe: If they were initially against it, and they aren't anymore, why is that? What changed?)

(7) **[All leaders]** Did the community (or you) need to be convinced to accept women and their choice to join these collectives? What was the reaction of the community? What challenges did you face in the process? How did you overcome these challenges and convince the community members? Which other influential members from the community got involved in this process?

(8) **[All leaders]** As a ----, what role do you play in advocating change among the community?

(9) **[All leaders]** What kind of awareness generation activities were organised (if any) to promote Access's work? If it was undertaken, who was responsible for conducting these initiatives?

(10) **[All leaders]** What changes have you witnessed over the past few years with the Access program?

(11) **[All leaders]** In your opinion, does being part of these collectives, offer a 'safe space' for women? If yes, then in what ways? Has this led to changes in women within the community, esp. those who are part of these collectives?

(12) **[Aanganwadi/ASHA worker only]:** What are household expectations from women who are expecting children? Are they able to rest and attend doctors' appointments? Does childbirth happen at home or in the clinic? How often do you make home visits? How many children participate in childcare programs in this village?

a. How would you describe the mental or emotion health of the women you work with in this village? How would you describe their physical health? How would you describe their lives at home, and in the community, broadly?
b. Do women speak about their feelings? If yes, do they confide in you about their problems at home or in the community? Do women speak about headaches, stomach aches, dizziness, fatigue or other physical symptoms? If yes, do you think these symptoms could be connected to mental or emotional health?
c. Did you find that COVID-19 affected mental or emotional health of the women you work with? Why, or why not? Did you do anything about it? How did the community more generally respond to the pandemic?

(13) **[Village head only]** Have you supported or helped women wanting to start their own venture through funding/provision of space for training etc?

(14) **[All leaders]** In your opinion, what are the challenges women face in managing their own facilities? Is the inherent discrimination (or discriminatory practices) prevalent in society around likely to spill over in this space as well? If yes, then are aware of specific incidents and can you talk in detail about it?

Power relations

(1) In your view, if a woman becomes financially independent, what are the advantages and disadvantages? [AGENCY AND INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING]

(2) Do you encourage participation of women during community meetings/panchayat meetings? If yes, how do you encourage them and ensure the same? How do the

women feel about actively participating in these village meetings? [CONFIDENCE, AGENCY AND INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING]

(3) How do male community members feel about women's active participation in these meetings?

(4) In your opinion, with economic empowerment, what other changes do you see among the women? (Probe – more participation, more involvement in decision making etc) Do you think gender dynamics have changed in any way in the village? If so, how?

(5) Do you celebrate women role models within the village, who have broken various social norms such as stigma around women working and achieving financial security? If yes, how do you do that? If not, what prevents you from celebrating or talking about their journeys?

Covid-19

(1) What was the impact of Covid\19 on the livelihood opportunities for the people in the village?

(2) Did the women, who are part of these collectives, continue work during Covid 19?

(3) If yes, what were the kind of challenges they faced in the process? Did they work from home or had to go to the collective centres? Are you aware of any support that Access team provided to these women and their families, or to people in the village during Covid 19? If yes, can you discuss it in detail?

(4) Do you think in the aftermath of Covid-19, are more women farmers and their families interested in being part of these collectives? If yes, why and if no, why not?

C] Community mobiliser

1. Please describe your role and experience.
2. How do you usually mobilise independent farmers? What information is given about the project? How do you build the case for collectivisation?
3. Has there been any change in your criterion for selection of women to the collectives? Why? (Probe: challenges being faced in the process). How does this change in selection criterion impact the program implementation, like cost etc.? [This is a probe: Do you have any preference for the kind agriculture that farmers produce that influences selection (if not spices, any other crops you prefer, which also have an impact on the women selected to work in the collectives)?]
4. What are some of the implementation challenges you anticipate? (Probe – with respect to mobilisation and setting up collectives) What is your plan for overcoming these risks?
5. What are some of the other challenges the women face? Are their family members open to them attending the trainings, especially if the training centre is away from the village? What is the mode of transport they use? Is this a challenge that Access faces? (in terms of attrition due to mobility issues and safety concerns)

D] Production coordinator

1. Please describe your role and experience.
2. Has there been any change in your criterion for selection of women to the collectives? Why? (Probe: challenges being faced in the process). How does this change in selection criterion impact the program implementation, like cost etc.?

[This is a probe: Do you have any preference for the kind agriculture that farmers produce that influences selection (if not spices, any other crops you prefer, which also have an impact on the women selected to work in the collectives)?]

3. What are some of the implementation challenges you anticipate? (Probe – with respect to mobilisation and setting up collectives) What is your plan for overcoming these risks? Have you worked to develop a sustainable supply chain to connect farmers in collectives to raw spices? How is that going? Are participants involved in the set-up process? How have you changed or adapted the spice procurement process in RJ, WB and OD? Are spices procured locally where possible?
4. How do you plan to monitor participation in trainings and in the interventions? Are monitoring systems in place? [PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSE]

E] Husbands of the women participants

1. What is the main occupation you are involved in? Which activity do you earn the most income from?
2. What does your usual day look like? What are the different activities you are involved in? (Probe – Are they members of the gram panchayat? Are they involved in village level decision making?)
3. What aspects of agriculture value chain are you involved in? What activities? Do they do the selling/marketing of produce? Are the women also involved in these aspects? If no, why not?
4. Are you involved in any other business/enterprise activities? Which activities? Is your wife also involved?
5. How are decisions made in your household? Are the women (your wife specifically) also involved? (Probe – give example of buying a TV/fridge, children's education related expenses, which crops to grow, other household level expenses like buying vegetables)
6. When did your wife become a part of an SHG? What were your views/initial reaction to her being a part of the SHG initially? Did you initially have apprehensions or were you against it? What changed? Were you supportive of your wife joining an SHG? Were other members of your family also supportive? If not, who had an issue? What was the issue? What has changed now? What do you think are benefits of joining the collective?
7. What are your views on your wife being a part of the Gramyashakti collective (FIG)? Did you have an issue with your wife joining the ACCESS collective? When production starts, your wife will be traveling to the production centre, what are your views and your family's views on this?
8. Do the women in your own family (like wife/daughter/sister) have the freedom to work?
9. What are your views on women working out of their homes and going to other workplaces which may or may not be in the same village? Do you think women should work?
10. What is your perception and understanding of the work your wife does as part of the FIG/Gramyashakti collective?

F] ACCESS Leadership (Mayukh and Puja)

Background and context:

1. Please describe your role in ACCESS? How long have you been part of this organisation?
   How was the Gramyashakti project conceptualised? What were the motivations and inspiration behind this? Has this conceptualisation and the model in general changed since then? How is Gramyashakti 2 going to be different and why?
2. Could you tell us a little bit about the socio-cultural context in the regions you work in with the FPCs? (Probe – main sources of livelihood, what do men and women do, caste groups, migration patterns)
3. Can you describe SRLM activities in each of the 4 project districts prior to the start of Gramyashakti II (2021?)? Did SRLM participation vary at the village level, e.g., some villages more involved than others? How did the robust presence of SRLM led SHGs help in collectivising the women?
4. Are there any other agencies/collectives/NGOs working in your implementation sites, apart from the SRLM SHGs? If yes, what is the work/activity they are doing or are engaged in? How many women in the location (approximately) part of these organisations?
5. What are the different kinds of societal challenges you face while approaching women? (With respect to caste/religion dynamics and other comm unity dynamics. For researcher – make sure you mention that this is with respect to caste dynamics and other community dynamics)
6. What are the power dynamics that you need to negotiate while forming the FPCs? (caste/religion/gender) How do you overcome the same?
7. In addition to these, what are some of the community perceptions on gender roles (Regarding women working/ domestic work) that you encounter? How do you overcome these challenges and community dynamics that are in place in rural settings?

Overall functioning of the organisation:

1. How was the Gramyashakti project funded initially? What have been the different sources of funding for the project? What were the challenges you face or used to face in acquiring funding?
2. What challenges do you face during the implementation process? Let us, start at the more organisational level - what type of challenges do you face in human resources and skills match? Staff attrition? Challenges in mobilisation, trainings, setting up CFCs, market linkages? Anything else? How do you deal with these issues?
3. How do you monitor the work being done? Do you have an M & E system in place? Do you collect monitoring data through app? Or manually? (Probe: Ask in detail about the indicators, process in place for monitoring, ensuring quality checks in data. For the researcher: Ask if they would be willing to share monitoring sheet or framework they use, or if any document they have which can help in understanding the system better).
4. Do you do data-based decision making - like use the data to make changes in the business plan/marketing strategy etc? Can you talk about the process and tool used in greater detail?
5. For Gramyashakti, what is the division of work like – between the field team and the management in Delhi office? How often do you visit the field sites?

About the collectives:

1. In your opinion, what are the benefits of forming a collective? Why have you adopted this collective model - FPC, with village level FIGs? Did you consider other forms of organisation, other than forming collectives/FPC? What considerations led you to arrive and work with this model?
2. Could you explain the structure of the FPC? (Probe – FIG at village level, any intermediary level? FPC level; what are the different designations at each level, roles and responsibilities associated with each designation).
3. FIG level - How do you usually mobilise women to be a part of the FIGs? How is the selection done? What is the process you follow? What are the different kinds of challenges you face?
4. At the FPC level – how are the women/employees selected or hired? How are the BoD members selected? What are the challenges you face in this process?
5. Could you explain the FPC model to us and the value chain? Who are the different actors? What is the role played by each actor? What are the different activities as part of the FPC work, who does each activity and where does it take place? Who are the buyers? What is the input cost and the profit margin?
6. How did you decide on what the product would be for each FPC? Have you ever had to pivot or change products?
7. How do you facilitate access to markets, raw materials, credit, technology, equipment, government schemes, and infrastructure for the collectives that you set up? What are some of the challenges you face while doing this? [ACCESS TO RESOURCES]
8. Could you tell us a little bit about the different sources of income for the women who are part of Gramyashakti? [Probe – income from FPC profits on account of being a shareholder, income from selling groceries, income from working at the FPC) Could you also tell us how the women will get paid – cash/online transfer?
9. How did you initially pursue the various value chain actors to provide raw materials/source final products from these cooperatives?
10. What is the process for establishing common facility centres? What is the criterion for selecting the location? How do you get community buy in for it?
11. While these are the activities being conducted at the FPC/collective level, what kind of activities are conducted at the village level? Can you elaborate on the difference between the two?
6. Do you capacitate the women in FPOs to do M&E work? If yes, can you talk in greater detail about it?
7. Are these FPO's envisaged only for economic empowerment for women? Do they help in creating a social support and network for these women? If yes, then how?
8. What changes have you observed among these women, their households as well as community members due to their work? (Probe – confidence, decision making, etc)
9. Do the women associated with ACCESS engage in other activities as a group? If yes, what kind of social and cultural activities do these groups engage in (for instance, behaviour change communication regarding health issues; gender issues like violence etc)? If they do, is there some backlash received from the community, especially from men?
10. How did COVID-19 complicate setting up the new collectives? Did you observe any changes in the mental or emotional health of the women during the set-up and launch phase of the project?

Training:

1. What trainings are to be provided to members at the FIG level? What trainings are to be provided to BoD members at the FPC level? Do the BoD members get additional trainings? What is the training plan for both levels and what has been done so far?
2. Please list out the trainings and what you perceive to be the value of each of these trainings – the expected outcome of each training. [Example – improved technical skills, improved gender dynamics in household/collective, improved management skills etc] How long do you think these outcomes will take to manifest? [Probe – 1 year? 3 years?]
3. In the same list, can you provide details on the month and year the training is expected to take place, the different modules they intend to cover in each of these trainings, who these trainings are meant for (FIG or FPC level), how many participants for each training, how many days each training will be for, plan for refresher trainings, expected location for each training, transport provisions.
4. How do you design the training programs? Is a needs assessment done before deciding which trainings to do? Are the training modules piloted and modified based on participants' understanding?
5. What is the process for developing training materials? [DESIGN] Who develops the training modules? Is the field team like the production manager, community mobiliser or the external trainer involved in developing or adapting the training modules? Did the Delhi team make visits to the field before designing the training modules?
6. Do you have any plans to assess or evaluate the trainings? [Probe - through test scores at beginning and end, or other methods]. If so, are the data being recorded and monitored and do you enable tracking of the progress of individual women?
7. What is the selection criterion for the trainers? (if they can provide the CV of the trainers conducting the trainings for Gramyashakti)?
8. What kind of issues and challenges do you expect to face when conducting the skill development trainings? (Probe – with respect to getting women to participate in training programs, attrition, infrastructure, other challenges)
9. What are some of the other challenges the women face? Are their family members open to them attending the trainings, especially if the training centre is away from the village? What is the mode of transport they use? Is this a challenge? (in terms of attrition due to mobility issues and safety concerns)
10. What is the duration of the trainings? How many hours a day and for how long? How was the decision for the duration of the training made? Were the women consulted? Do the women usually face any issues when it comes to putting in the time to travel and attend these trainings?
11. How was the idea of gender and leadership training conceptualised? What were the key considerations you had in mind while designing the program? Will this training be provided to all women at the FIG and FPC level? What is the current status of implementation? What difficulties do you envisage in its implementation, especially in the long run? (Probe: If they envisage difficulties, what are the mitigation strategies they are planning for it) Are men or their family members also going to be a part of the gender trainings?

12. Do women also have other opportunities to receive similar training? (for instance, through other organisations working with women collectives/SRLM's in this area?) If yes, can you provide some detail into the kind of trainings being provided by these organisations to them? Is gender sensitisation training provided as part of SRLM too – since groups in WB and Kota were part of the SRLM? (In Kota it seems that some women had received gender sensitisation trainings from Rajeevika). Then, is ACCESS looking at their gender modules to see what training has already been done, and how much is retained by these members?
13. In Sangod, Kota, we were told that there weren't any plans to roll out gender sensitisation trainings in the near future – can you elaborate on that? How do you decide the time to initiate these trainings – and do you keep the field staff in loop for the same?
14. If the women from far away villages not going to be part of the FPC training, or even going to be part of the branding exercise, since they live too far from the centre – what is their incentive for joining any of the ACCESS teams training or programs happening even at the village level? Can any of these training sessions play a role in improving women's other types of employment?
15. Since the FPC consists of women who are part of the Gramyashakti program as well as women who are not, what spillover effects of the Gramyashakti project are expected for the members who are not part of Gramyashakti? Also, how would you maintain the distinction between Gramyashakti and other products, when there is common FPC for all?
16. According to you, are there biases among your own staff members when it comes to question of women empowerment, and also mobilisation process? If yes, how do you work towards the staff behaviour change, so that their biases do not have an impact on the intervention?

Scalability

1. What is your understanding of scaling up and what does it entail? What is the best way to scale up an intervention? According to you, what are the determinants or pre-requisites for successful scale up?
2. Can you talk about the model that you scaled up successfully (Ranthambhore Mahila Aajeevika Producer Company Ltd (RMAPCL)? How was this achieved and what was the process? What made you decide to replicate it in other States?
3. What are your plans/aspiration with the other collectives that are being set up as part of Gramyashakti 2? How do you plan to scale them? Are inputs taken from technical experts in scaling up these enterprises?

Sustainability

1. How would you define a sustainable collective?
2. What are the steps ACCESS takes to ensure sustainability of the collectives? In what way do you think the collectives need to be sustainable? (Probe - financial/environmental etc)
3. What kind of handholding support do you provide to these FPCs (for example – trainings, branding)?
4. We know that you have been providing trainings to the women and supporting them with branding and marketing. Is this (training and marketing and branding support) going to be an ongoing component of the ACCESS program, or do you

plan to stop being involved at some point in the future? Do you have plans to be able to cover the training costs using profits generated by the FPC eventually? What about other input costs that currently being borne by ACCESS? Do you have plans to make the training model sustainable by training some members as trainers, and starting a ToT model? If yes, how do you plan to actualise this?

5. What is your plan in making them sustainable in the aspects where active support is currently being provided by the ACCESS team? How long do you think it will take, and what are the factors that could adversely (or positively) affect this?
6. From your field experience, how much time does it take for an FPC to become independent, wherein they don't require handholding support? How long did the RMPACL take?
7. Is there a minimum scale of operation (production) that is required for sustainability?
8. What are some of the challenges or issues you are expecting while trying to ensure sustainability?
9. Assuming sustainability can be achieved only after a minimum scale of production is achieved, do you envisage problems as more women start working at the FPC and membership becomes more diverse? [caste/religion dynamics]
10. How do you work towards creating ownership of the brand by the community?
11. Do any of these enterprises/clusters have insurance (For eg. RMAPCL)? If yes since when? What is the kind of premium paid? Has it been helpful for them in the past?
12. Do the women invest their own money if the enterprise is running well, and they are earning sufficient income or is it always dependent on external funding (like in the RMAPCL)?
13. The outbreak of COVID 19 led to substantial changes in the market as well as demand. How did the RMPACL/other FPOs realign their strategies to remain sustainable/afloat during this crisis? What kind of support was provided by ACCESS?

Appendix B: Fieldwork Protocol

Guidelines for Swashakt Fieldwork

Appendix C: Coding framework

Data sources:

- FGDs with women members of the collectives (in agriculture, ACCESS)
- FGDs with women members of the collectives (in weaving, Chitrika)
- FGDs with women members of the collectives (in crafts work, Urmul)
- IDIs with women members of the collectives (in agriculture, ACCESS)
- IDIs with women members of the collectives (in weaving, Chitrika)
- IDIs with women members of the collectives (in crafts work, Urmul)
- IDIs with women non-members (in weaving, Chitrika)
- FGDs with women not members of the collectives
- IDIs with spouses of collective members
- FGDs with men who are members of the collective
- FGDs with Board of Directors (Chitrika)
- IDIs with leaders of the collective
- IDIs with master weavers
- KIIs with community gatekeepers (sarpanch/panchayat member)
- KIIs with Chitrika/Urmul/ACCESS leadership
- KIIs with community mobilisers, production coordinators, other field level staff
- KIIs with master trainers
- Academic articles (including evaluation studies; research articles)
- Project Documents
- Observations

Context

- Societal and village context
    - Social norms
    - Gender norms
    - Groups in the village and other interventions
    - Caste and religion
        - Conflict in the village
        - Restrictions based on caste
- Individual or personal context
    - Socio-cultural context
        - Education levels
            - Women's education
            - Men's education
        - Mobility
            - Within village
            - Outside village
        - Confidence
            - Making decisions
            - Traveling
            - Voicing opinions in public platforms
            - Negotiation with external stakeholders or buyers/sellers
            - Self-efficacy/own capabilities to do work
        - Involvement in decision making

        - Household level
        - Community level
        - Collective/group level
    - Social capital
    - Participation in village development work/politics
- Economic context
    - Current primary and secondary sources of livelihood
        - Agricultural sources of livelihood
        - Women's sources of livelihood
        - Men's sources of livelihood
    - Women working with master weavers
        - Context and history of association
        - Roles and responsibilities
        - Advantages
        - Disadvantages
        - Wages and payments
        - Awareness levels regarding value chain activities
        - Value chain
        - Product details
    - Gender roles and responsibilities in income generating activities
    - Migration context
    - Access to resources (markets, schemes, credit)
        - Household level (example - buying groceries and household supplies)
        - Collective level (example - buying/selling work as part of the PC/FPC/collective)
    - Land ownership
    - Income and wages
        - Women's income
        - Men's income
- Family context
    - In-laws background
    - Native family background
    - Number of children
    - Support with household work from family members
    - Power dynamics at household and community level

- Impact of COVID
    - Economic impacts
        - Individual level/household level
        - Business/collective level
    - Mental health impacts
    - Impact on education
    - Impact on physical health

- Program context
    - Genesis and historical background
    - Program design

    - Service delivery/implementation
        - Roles and responsibilities of employees
    - Business development
        - Market linkage plans
        - Branding
    - Infrastructure
    - Scalability
    - Sustainability

Collective structure and functioning

1. Characteristics of the collective
    - Governance structure and hierarchy/positions and designations
    - Descriptions of the collective enterprise model
    - Selection criteria for members/employees/BoD
    - Functioning
    - Value chain
        - Women's activities
        - Men's activities
    - Product details
    - Roles and responsibilities
    - Weaving
    - Farming
    - Agriculture processing activities
    - Crafts
    - Marketing and sales
    - Accounts
    - Overlooking daily operations and conflict resolution
    - Business development including procurement of raw materials and interacting with different stakeholders
    - Providing trainings
    - Mobilization
    - Gender and caste composition
    - Meetings
    - Type of meeting
        - Regular scheduled meeting
        - Unscheduled meeting
    - Frequency of meeting
        - Weekly
        - Monthly
        - Quarterly
        - Yearly
    - Costs, sales, and profits
    - Share money paid
    - Input costs
    - Sales
    - Profits
    - Distribution of profit among shareholders

2. SHGs Structure and Functions
    - Frequency of meetings
    - Functions
    - Membership
    - Trainings
3. Weaver societies and other collectives in the village
    - Frequency of meetings
    - Functions
    - Membership
    - Trainings
    - Value chain
    - Product details

Implementation

1. Implementation progress
    - Industry/sector (Farming/weaving/crafts)
    - Mobilization process and awareness generation
    - Recruitment
    - Trainings conducted
        - No trainings conducted
        - Type of training
            - Enterprise development
            - Business management
            - Industry specific trainings (weaving/ag processing/other crafts)
            - Technology/equipment use trainings
            - Finance
            - Marketing
            - Gender sensitization
            - Life skills
            - Refresher training
            - Grievance redressal
        - Location
        - Mode of training
            - Online
            - Offline/In person
        - Refresher training
            - If yes, then frequency of refresher trainings
        - Level of understanding and recollection (of the women)
        - Perception of usefulness (women's perception)
        - Challenges in implementation of trainings

    - Monitoring
        - Monitoring of trainings
            - Attendance records
            - Participation
            - Feedback mechanism
        - Different indicators for monitoring program implementation
        - Frequency of monitoring

    - Mode of monitoring
        - Manual
        - App-based monitoring
    - Challenges with monitoring

- Production
    - Volume of sales and profits margins
    - Costs - input costs, transportation costs
    - Designing process and branding
    - Quality assurance
    - Market linkages and other information on buyers
    - Production related challenges
- Awareness levels among members

2. Barriers to uptake
    - Harmful social norms - what others perceive or expect to be acceptable
    - Family restrictions
    - Payment or wage rate related issues
    - Lack of awareness
    - Primary caregiver responsibilities
    - Caste barriers
    - Lack of mobility
    - Lack of confidence
    - Presence or association with master weavers

3. Facilitators
    - Acceptance by community and family
    - Support in domestic chores
    - Social network and support through the collective
    - Trainings are made available to enhance skill
    - Infrastructure set up
    - Materials provided
    - Awareness sessions
    - Health/insurance cover/provider well being

4. Fidelity
    - Operational/implementation issues
        - Attrition/ high dropout rates
        - Travel to CFCs/production centres
            - Safety concerns
            - Insufficient transport
            - Distance too high
            - Family restrictions
        - Distance to production centre/work shed
    - Strategies to tackle challenges and implementation issues
    - Power dynamics and decision making within the collectives

- Administrative challenges
- Mobilisation challenges
- Budget constraints
- Sustainability/scalability related issues

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