



DU Journal of Undergraduate Research and Innovation

Volume 1 Issue 2, Page 395-404

# Roadblocks to Effective Implementation of Social Inclusion Schemes - A Study of Tingudi Village

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## ABSTRACT

Almost all the major social Inclusion programmes run by the State are being implemented by the Gram Panchayats at the grassroots level. It is expected that Gram panchayats being institutions of direct democracy are better equipped at ensuring accountability, transparency and proper allocation of resources under these programmes. This paper presents findings from a case study of three Social Inclusion programmes, implemented in *Tingudi* village, *Singrauli* District that suggest to the contrary. Dysfunctional *Gram Sabhas* and nonexistent Social Auditing are the major factors leading to a chasm between the implementation of the programmes on ground and in govt. records. The *Sarpanch* enjoys enormous discretionary power in almost every field, as the voters are unaware of most of their rights and responsibilities. Power and caste dynamics also prove to be critical in determining who gets what. The paper suggests that though Panchayats are the best possible ways of implementing these programmes, we need to ensure that every organ of the *Panchayati Raj* Institution works in the way it is supposed to. *Gram sabhas* need to be strengthened by making it mandatory that meetings take place only if the required quorum is fulfilled. Fulfillment of Quorum should be the responsibility of the *Sarpanch*. All records of the Panchayat should be digitized and put online, so as to check misappropriation of resources. There is also an urgent need to make social auditing for all the schemes mandatory.

**Keywords:** Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS), Gram Panchayat, *Gram Sabha*, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Panchayati Raj Institution(PRI), Public Distribution System (PDS), Social Audit, *Sarpanch*, Social inclusion Schemes, Social security.

**Abbreviations-**

- Govt.: Government.
- MNREGS: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.
- PDS: Public Distribution System.
- IGNOAPS: Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme.
- PHC: Primary Health Center.
- NGO: Non-Governmental Organization.

- IAY: Indira Aawas Yojana.
- SHG: Self Help Groups.
- CSS: Centrally Sponsored Schemes
- ICT: Information and Communication Technology.

## INTRODUCTION

Almost 16% of the central planned expenditure is allocated to the Ministry of Rural Development, which runs Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) designed to provide assistance to the millions living in rural India. Apart from that, several other central and state government departments earmark massive sums of money in their budget towards such programmes.

But, as governments themselves have acknowledged, much of this money gets wasted either because of corruption or complications of red tape. Since its implementation, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS), a major Flagship Scheme of the Govt. of India has been at the center of a lot of discussion. It has been claimed that it has led to a surge in rural wages and helped contain distress migration. The paper tests the validity of these claims by analyzing the implementation of MNREGS and two other schemes namely Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) and Public Distribution System (PDS), in *Tingudi* village of *Singrauli* District, Madhya Pradesh. These programmes, if implemented properly, have the potential to transform the lives of millions of people in our villages. The implementation of all these programmes at the grassroots level is the responsibility of the *Gram Panchayat*, which is headed by the *Sarpanch*.

## OBJECTIVES

The major objective of the study is to understand the role played by *Gram Sabha* in the implementation these schemes. It has tried to understand whether or not the actual requirements of the people are in sync with the objectives of various schemes and understand if there is a need to curtail the discretionary powers of the *Sarpanch* and other Panchayat executives. The study tries to ascertain the level of awareness among the voters about the major provisions under some of the schemes. It also tries to focus on the role played by social auditing in ensuring accountability and transparency in the implementation of these schemes. Apart from this it has tried to understand the role of existing social hierarchies in determining the ease with which people could claim their share of the benefits.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was mainly based on interviews with different Stakeholders with regards to the implementation of the Social inclusion Schemes. Discussions with officials of the district administration helped me get acquainted with all the major schemes operational in the district. I interviewed officials in charge of the MNREGS implementation in the district and the head of the department of Industries, as Singrauli is a highly industrialized district. I also interviewed the head of the Tribal affairs department.

In the village, I conducted extensive interviews and focus group discussions with people from various castes and classes, to understand their grievances with regards to the major social security measures of the govt. In total I conducted 20 personal interviews and 5 focus group discussions on various topics during my 5 day stay in the village from 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2014 to 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2014. To understand the financial challenges faced by the villagers and the effectiveness of

SHGs in tackling them, I participated in the meetings of various SHGs operational in the village. Apart from that, I stayed with one family in the village for a day, and tried to ascertain the major problems faced by them in their daily lives. After ascertaining the villager's problems, an interview was scheduled, with the *Sarpanch* of the village, a woman (1), to understand her views regarding the improper implementation of the Schemes.

## DISCUSSION

### Tingudi Village

*Tingudi* village is part of the newly created *Singrauli* district of Madhya Pradesh. According to Census of India, 2011, the total population of the village stands at 1306 people (2). The village has one Primary Health Center (PHC). Based on the focus group discussion on the condition of public health services and the physical evaluation of the PHC, it can be concluded the PHC provides most basic services and is understaffed and underequipped most of the time. Relief is that ambulance services are available fairly quickly. The village has one *pucca* road, which runs through middle of the village. The road connecting the village to the nearest marketplace, at *Waidhan*, is damaged and vehicles run at snail's pace for most of the journey. The Panchayat has one govt. primary and one middle school. Parents and students informed us that the teachers rarely come on time and lack proper training. I talked to students of class 8<sup>th</sup>, and they could not solve simple problems of division and multiplication. Most of the houses in the village were *kaccha* houses. Availability of electricity in the village is fairly good compared to other North Indian villages, probably because of abundance of power generating companies in the district. Just like most villages in *Singrauli*, *Tingudi* is endowed with an abundance of coal deposits. The village also has a school for tribal students.

### Social Structure

The majority of the village population consists of *dalits* and tribes. Dalit population stands at 733 individuals and the tribal population is 513 individuals (3). Despite this the kumhar caste (*prajapati*), with a mere population of 60 individuals in the village, controls most of the village resources. The *Sarpanch* of the village also belongs to the *prajapati* caste. They are the landowning caste in the village. The tribals, who mainly live off the *patta* land allocated to them by the government, too have sufficient resources at their disposal and thus enjoy considerable respect in the society. The hardest hit is the *Dalit* community, with almost no land and minimal skills they are dependent on manual labor for their survival. They earn daily wages as less as Rs. 50 a day. All the three castes live in different regions of the village, with the *Dalits* living in the outermost region, segregated from the main village.

Among the SC and ST communities, women's role in social life was at par with their male counterparts. It was mostly the women who ran the SHGs in the village and a few small businesses too.

## SOURCES OF LIVELIHOOD

### Farming

<sup>1</sup> Following the social convention, the interview was conducted with the *Sarpanch*'s husband, who communicated her perspective.

<sup>2</sup> Census of India, 2011. C.D block wise primary Census Abstract Data(PCA)- Madhya Pradesh, Retrieved April 23, 2015, from [http://censusindia.gov.in/pca/cdb\\_pca\\_census/Houselisting-housing-MP.html](http://censusindia.gov.in/pca/cdb_pca_census/Houselisting-housing-MP.html)

<sup>3</sup> Census of India, 2011. C.D block wise primary Census Abstract Data(PCA)- Madhya Pradesh, Retrieved April 23, 2015, from [http://censusindia.gov.in/pca/cdb\\_pca\\_census/Houselisting-housing-MP.html](http://censusindia.gov.in/pca/cdb_pca_census/Houselisting-housing-MP.html)

Farming is the single most important source of livelihood for the people living in *Tingudi*. Paddy and wheat are the major crops cultivated by the farmers. Despite having big land holdings the poor quality of soil, absence of proper irrigation facility and inadequate availability of fertilizers and pesticides, lead to poor crop yield. Most of the cultivation is done manually using hand held equipment. Lack of financial literacy inhibits farmers from availing agricultural credit available at cheaper rates for purchasing fertilizers, pesticides and hiring modern machinery like Combine harvester, Threshers and Tractors. Most villagers do not have a bank account and as a result they are left out of the formal credit market. All of this raises the overall cost of production thus making cultivation labor intensive and commercially unviable.

Most farmers are not able to obtain subsidized fertilizers provided by the government. This is probably because of corrupt practices and lack of knowledge about the scheme. Some SHGs were able to obtain their share of the subsidized fertilizers because they acted as a group and were better informed about the schemes. Proper irrigation facilities need to be provided in the village. The farmers also need to pool their resources so as to make cultivation viable. They can collectively purchase and own major machines and implements like tractors, ploughers and threshers.

The dependence of villagers on cultivation needs to be lessened, as most of the employment is disguised. If more people are engaged in other sectors then the per capita productivity from cultivation would go up. At present some farmers, who are the biggest landowners, are the only ones able to produce at a commercial scale. Other cultivators are able to feed only their own families.

#### Forest Produce

Villagers' lives are closely integrated with the forest all around, though the dependence has declined in the past few decades, owing to 'Shrinking land' under forest cover as a result of irreparable exploitation of forests at the hands of villagers and government agencies. Locals informed us that their forefathers used to depend on forest for every need arising in their lives, one of which was using medicinal plants for curing rare diseases. Such needs have been eliminated because of access to better healthcare and declining superstition. Forests still have a crucial role to play in their lives. Villagers collect *mahua* fruits and *tendu* leaves, which they easily trade at the local grocery shop either for money or for other goods. They also get wood for constructing their houses (though illegally).

#### Cattle Rearing

Cows could be found in abundance in and around the village, though the villagers do not pay much attention to their cattle. They do not work towards turning their cattle into a source of livelihood. The production of milk in the village is so little that the local tea shop owner sources milk from outside the village every day. The state and the NGOs need to work towards making the villagers understand the importance of giving good care to their cattle. If the cows are domesticated and given proper diet after consultation with experts, then the milk production will definitely go up. This could provide an alternate source of income to the villagers and lessen their dependence on agriculture and dwindling forest produce. State needs to provide financial support in the form of low interest loans to the people so that they could invest in their cattle and find an alternate source of income.

## Manual Work

Apart from these some people who don't have significant land holdings, work on other's farms as manual workers or at brick kilns to make ends meet. Some young people have been able to find work in neighboring industries. They work as drivers or casual workers at those factories. Because of absence of proper primary and secondary education and training facilities there is virtually no skilled labor available in the village. As a result most of the high paying jobs at the industries are cornered by migrant workers from other states. There are not significant opportunities available with the people living in the village.

In these circumstances the role of state sponsored schemes becomes pivotal in helping the people fight poverty. Here is a brief description of some of the schemes operational in the village and the problems in their proper implementation.

### MAJOR STATE SPONSORED SCHEMES

#### Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS)

The implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) was worst among all the schemes being run. The scheme, whose aim is to provide 100 days of guaranteed employment to every household demanding work; fails to deliver on much of its promises. Though doing great on paper, its actual implementation in the Panchayat leaves much to be desired.

Most of the families had Job Cards but they claimed that, the local *Sarpanch* and *panchayat sachiv* never provided any kind of work to them, despite their constant demands. I physically examined the Job Cards of most of the families and failed to find a single entry in it. The villagers accused that the *Sarpanch* uses his tractor and other heavy machinery in the few projects implemented under the scheme instead of laborers. Villagers also accused that despite repeated demands of constructing village roads under the scheme, the *Sarpanch* has constantly been reluctant to do so. Most of the villagers did not have any bank account, which is crucial as the payment of wages is made only through the accounts of the workers.

I observed that almost all the families in the village were in need of work under the scheme but none got any. However, the impact of not getting work varied across different sections of the village. Families with sizable land holdings and those that had access to financial help through SHGs, were able to somehow make ends meet. Though the quality of land in the region is not good enough, people with land were able to produce sufficient grains to feed their families. Some of the families even had surplus production and sold the excess in the market. Members of such families told us they had stopped asking for work under the scheme as the time and effort which they put in to go to the *Sarpanch* everyday asking for work is too much and could be better utilized in their farms or in looking for job opportunities in urban centers.

The worst victims of the improper implementation of the scheme are those who barely have any land of their own. They were forced by circumstances to live their life on a day to day basis. With virtually no other opportunity for work available in the village and an inability to migrate to urban centers because of financial issues; they have no other option except to live on the bare minimum available to them. This also makes them prone to exploitation at the hands of big farmers.

The biggest problem with the scheme in the village was massive corruption in its implementation. Proper information was not disseminated to the people. People had nowhere to complain against the corrupt practices of the village representatives. Villagers said that the officers who came to

inspect the implementation listened to their complaints but did nothing substantial to help their cause. Though it's difficult to put the blame on any one person without solid evidence, the *Sarpanch* and other Panchayat executives have the biggest responsibility. The Social audit of the scheme was nothing more than formality in the village. Most villagers had never heard of anything that could be categorized as social audit. Other forums where they could raise their voice is the *Gram sabha* which too just had a formal role in the system. No one knows when the *Gram sabha* is going to be organized.

### Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)

Ideally, families should look after the needs of the elders, but due to poverty or a lack of desire to share resources, some families in the village have deserted their elders. There was an 80 year old woman living by herself in a small hut. She was not in good health and had no one to look after her. Neighbors said that, out of pity they cooked food for her, but they cannot do it very often as they have their own families too. The woman had a ration card, which entitled her to affordable grains but that could not buy her anything more than wheat, rice and sugar. There was also an old man, probably in his early 70s, well beyond the retirement age, who had to work as a manual laborer to support himself and his family. Then there were others who, though they lived with their families were not cared for in the way they should be, probably because they were not bringing home any money. The situation was worsened by the fact that most of the people in the village did not work in the formal sector which would have entitled them to post retirement benefits like pensions and other allowances.

In such circumstances the govt.'s pension scheme, which entitles every individual over 60 years of age to Rs 200-500 every month, though not sufficient enough, should come as a relief, but evidence suggests to the contrary.

Most of the people were aware of the pension scheme but almost none availed of it. They told me that their families had repeatedly asked the *Sarpanch*, on their behalf, but nothing came out of it. The identification of people eligible for availing pensions is the responsibility of the *Gram Sabha*, but nobody knows that, instead people believe that it is the *Sarpanch* who has the power to decide. On the other hand the *Sarpanch's* husband said that most people availed of the pension. The villagers informed us that only some people who were very close to the *Sarpanch* were able to avail of the facility. Among them were even those whose financial condition was good enough and they were able to sustain themselves on their own.

### Public Distribution System

Public distribution system, which provides minimum quantities of essential food grains like wheat and rice at subsidized rates, is also present in the village. Most of the poor families had their names in the BPL list for a long time but they did not receive any ration. People said that only from the past 2-3 months they have been receiving wheat, rice and sugar. This is probably after the Madhya Pradesh govt. implemented the Right to Food Act. I was informed that there were many families who, despite being well off, had their names enrolled in the BPL list.

Some of the villagers also complained that despite their miserable condition their names have been removed from the BPL list. They claimed that proximity to the *Panchayat Sachiv* or the *Sarpanch* is the only way to get your name in the list. People said that, beginning since 2-3 months ago, each family gets coupons which fetch them 5 kg of rice and wheat per person and 1 kg of sugar per family. Though not perfect but the PDS system was of some help to the people.

## CONCLUSION

### Dysfunctional *Gram Sabha*

The central cause inhibiting the proper implementation of these schemes is the dysfunctional *Gram Sabha*, the village parliament which, unlike parliament and State legislature, enables voters to get directly involved in the decision making process. All adult members of the panchayat, enrolled in the voters list, are members of *Gram Sabha*. Just like with parliament, all the major decisions of the *Sarpanch* and other panchayat executives need to be approved by the *Gram Sabha*. I observed that the *Gram Sabha* was functional only on paper. Most people were unaware of the powers of the *Gram Sabha*, which includes identification of BPL families, people in need of *Indira Aawas Yojna* (IAY), individuals eligible for availing Old Age Pension, etc. Apart from this the *Gram Sabha* is responsible for deciding on the developmental work to undertaken in the panchayat and approving the annual Budget. Almost all the major executive decisions need to be approved by the *Gram Sabha*.

There are also problems with the actual provisions concerning the *Gram Sabha*. Quorum for the meeting to take place was 10 % of the total electorate, which is grossly inadequate for making decisions on behalf of the entire panchayat. Panchayat representatives informed us that, if after making three announcements, the required quorum was not achieved then the proceedings would be deemed to be approved by the *Gram Sabha*. Given the fact that voters rarely attend the meetings, it is not difficult to assume that most of the time the executive were getting approved by the *Gram Sabha*, even without actual voting. The proceeding of the *Gram Sabha* is carried out in Hindi and though the villagers spoke Hindi they were unfamiliar with the technical Hindi used in the proceedings. The problem was aggravated by the fact that very few had received formal education. As a result, even those who made an effort to attend the proceedings could not contribute to the debates and discussions at the meeting in a constructive way.

Though, in the social life of the village women had almost equal say as men, during *Gram Sabha* meeting they rarely spoke. Most of the time, it was men sitting in the front who spoke along with the *Sarpanch* and the *Panchayat Sachiv*.

### Nonexistent Social Auditing

Another area of concern is the almost nonexistent Social Auditing, which means in principle *Gram Sabhas* have the power to conduct social audit of Development Projects operational in the panchayat, in which they can verify the records maintained by the Executives and match it with actual implementation on the ground. Most of the voters had never heard of Social Audit. Since Social Auditing of MNREGS was made compulsory, the government had entrusted a private organization with the responsibility of conducting Social Auditing. The fact that very few knew about Social Audit makes it abundantly clear that it has been reduced to mere paper work.

Social Auditing is extremely important to check widespread corruption allegations in the Implementation MNREGS. There were complaints of forging of payrolls, faulty implementation of projects and violation of the mandatory labor to material ratio. It has been alleged that a fixed group of people are shown to be working in most of the projects. In most cases they avoid doing any work by paying a part of the money they receive to the concerned authorities.

Given the fact that all the payments under the MNREGS are made through bank accounts it is inconceivable that the alleged misappropriation and forgery could be committed without the involvement of the beneficiaries. There is a big possibility that people not doing any work are registered under the scheme and are being paid for no work. Because of this nexus those actually

in need of work have to suffer. Most of the families I met had job cards, but those cards rarely had any entry.

The use heavy of machinery like tractors by the *Sarpanch* in the few projects executed under the MNREGS, is defeating the purpose of this scheme, i.e creation of employment. The scheme intends to set a benchmark in wage rates, increasing the value of labor. In the village this could not be achieved as virtually no jobs are being made available under the scheme and there is constant availability of surplus labor which brings down the wage rate. Stopping distress migration also happens to one of the goals of the scheme, by providing work to the applicants in and around their village. But the factors leading to low migration from the village happen to be lack of awareness and the inadequate financial support. Almost no one was aware of the provision that if a job card holder is not provided with work within 15 days after he/she asks for the same, the card holder is entitled to avail of unemployment allowances from the 16<sup>th</sup> day.

With regard to the pension scheme and the PDS it is evident that the selection of the beneficiaries is based on the discretion of the *Sarpanch* and the *Panchayat Sachiv*. Those not in their good books have higher chances of being left out. Because of the dysfunctional *Gram Sabha*, the *Sarpanch* is able to enjoy a lot of unchecked discretion.

Social hierarchies also had a role to play in ensuring access to the benefits. The dalits were the most deprived lot followed by the tribals. Problems of the dalits were aggravated by the fact that they possessed almost no land. They depended mainly on manual labor for their survival. On the other hand tribals had been given *Patta* land by the Govt.



## RECOMMENDATION

There is no better alternative to implement these programmes other than the Gram Panchayat. But we need to ensure that all the organs of the Panchayat function in the way they were intended to. Above all there is an urgent need to restore the institution of *Gram Sabha*. Effective functioning of the *Gram Sabha* would go a long way in fixing accountability. The present quorum for *Gram Sabha* needs to be increased to at least 50% of the total voters. Under no circumstance should the *Gram Sabha* meet if the quorum is not fulfilled. Meetings of the *Gram Sabha* should take place every quarter.

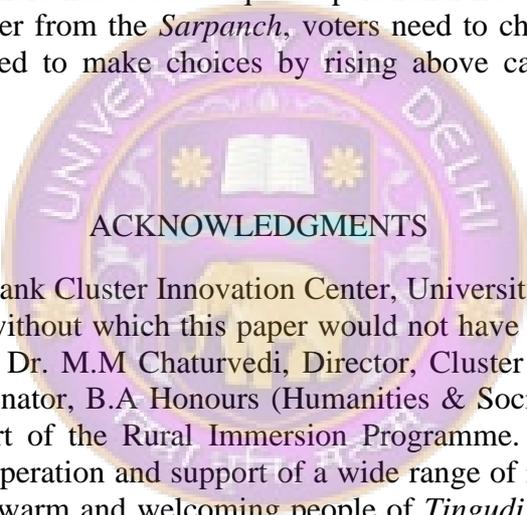
We also need to use a lot of technology to make the functioning of the Panchayats more Transparent. There should be provision for audio-visual recording of the proceedings of the *Gram Sabha* meetings, so that it can be verified by the officials. All the records need to be computerized and put on the internet. Preferably, local language should be used as the medium of communication during the meetings, so that most people can participate. People should be adequately informed about their rights and responsibilities with regards to the Panchayat and other necessary laws. Identification of beneficiaries for certain schemes should solely be done by the *Gram Sabha*. Social auditing should be performed for all programmes in a transparent manner during *Gram Sabha* meetings. Adult literacy programmes should be introduced in the village as illiterate people turn out to be the biggest victims of corruption.

With regards to MNREGS it was observed that not everybody is in dire need of MNREGS jobs. We must think of other ways of empowering such people. We need to get rid of the one size fits all approach. For those who do need the scheme, social auditing of the scheme should be done in a fair and transparent way by the *Gram Sabha*, with audio-visual recording of the proceeding. We need to learn from successful models in social auditing like the one in Karnataka, called

*Jamabandi*. Under this system members of the general public along with the officers can participate in an open system of audit where they could even visit the work spots and inspect the progress and quality of work, they are also equipped with cameras and measuring equipments. The *Jamabandi* report has to be placed before the *Gram Sabha* along with an action taken report so that transparency is ensured<sup>4</sup>.

Youth must have access to skilled employment. There should be Industrial Training Institutes (ITI's) in and around the village, so that they could find better paying jobs in the nearby industries. There were complaints of irregularities in the public distribution system. The biggest challenge here is the identification of beneficiaries, which could be solved by making the *Gram Sabhas* effective. The other problem is the illegal diversion of subsidized goods in the black market by the dealers. The present system could be made more efficient by learning from states that have made significant improvement in the delivery system. One example could be Tamil Nadu, which has successfully used ICT in the entire delivery system, right from the warehouse to the village PDS store. A more long term solution could be achieved through direct transfer of subsidies through *Aadhar* card linked bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

We also need to keep in mind that we should not curtail all the powers of the *Sarpanch* and make the institution ineffective. There has to be adequate operational freedom given to the executive. Instead of taking away power from the *Sarpanch*, voters need to choose leaders of impeccable personal integrity. They need to make choices by rising above caste lines and setting aside personal differences.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all I would like to thank Cluster Innovation Center, University of Delhi for providing the adequate financial support without which this paper would not have been a reality. I would also like extend my gratitude to Dr. M.M Chaturvedi, Director, Cluster Innovation Center and Dr. Sukrita Paul Kumar, Coordinator, B.A Honours (Humanities & Social sciences), for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the Rural Immersion Programme. The study has been made possible by the constant cooperation and support of a wide range of individuals and institutions. Foremost in the list are the warm and welcoming people of *Tingudi* village. They freely shared their opinion on the implementation of various state and centrally sponsored schemes in their village. They pointed out the problems in the effective functioning of the *Gram Panchayat* and other state institutions operating in the village.

I would also like to thank the district administration of *Singrauli*, Madhya Pradesh for facilitating my stay in the village and providing logistical support throughout the course of the study. The officials also acquainted with the various schemes being implemented by the government through Panchayats in the villages of the district.

The study would not have been possible without the planning and coordination by Mr. Rohit Joshi and Dr. Govind Singh. They coordinated with the district administration, the *Gram Panchayat* and *Pradan*, which was crucial in getting the desired outcome from my study. I would also like to thank *Pradan*, an NGO working in the village for helping me get familiarized with villagers. People in the village have a lot of faith in *Pradan*, which helped in ensuring that people opened up and shared their views candidly.

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