

THE PRO-WOMEN APPROACH OF THE INSTITUTE OF RURAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: The project uses qualitative data obtained through focus groups and individual interviews to measure the effects that women involvement in the Good Governance Now and the Capacity Building program has had on the personal empowerment of women in the Mewat district of India.

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I. Personal Introduction

My name is Sanjukta Santra and I am one of the Borlaug-Ruan interns of 2013. I attended the World Food Prize Global Youth Institute program in 2011 as a sophomore of



Global Youth Institute 2011

Fossil Ridge High School. So began my entry into the world of hunger and poverty. Agriculture had been the furthest area of interest I would have expected; my parents are both in the field and I refused to do anything parallel to them. Yet, ironically, it is within this field of agriculture and food insecurity where I

have finally discovered my purpose for the future. Here is the greatest moral I have learned from the past three years of involvement with the World Food Prize: any major, any interest, any passion has a role in the eradication of world hunger.

Thus in 2012, when I began to comply my application for the Borlaug-Ruan internship, I was searching specifically to incorporate my own interests in the fight against world hunger: governance and women empowerment. I was searching for an opportunity to understand social research in developing countries. And the Borlaug-Ruan committee found the perfect match in the Institute of Rural Research and Development.

The Institute of Rural Research and Development (IRRAD) began as an initiative of the S. M. Sehgal Foundation in 1999. The purpose of the organization was visionary: to uplift the wellbeing of rural communities. And the foundation had its focus set on Mewat, an uncharacteristically poor and undeveloped district the otherwise progressive state of Haryana.

The foundation has four sectors: Natural Resource Management, Capacity Building Center, Policy, Governance, and Advocacy, and Rural Research. During my two months, I shared my time between two of the sectors that were most relevant to me: Capacity Building Center and Policy, Governance, and Advocacy. The two sectors are common in that they aim to fight poverty and hunger with the power of rural management, one using institutions and the other using government awareness. As I began to delve into the

research of these two sectors, I began to form the question I thought to be the most interesting and relevant for my project: how can women empowerment improve rural management and alleviate poverty?

II. Project Introduction

Purpose:

One of the most progressive features of IRRAD's goals and purposes is the organization's emphasis on women empowerment as a method to develop the impoverished regions in Mewat. Yet, does women empowerment actually have an effect on rural development and the alleviation of poverty? The question is vital to give proper credibility and support to global methods to empower women. If it is proven that empowering women has a beneficial effect on the general wellbeing of rural areas, more drastic and emphasized measures would be taken to further improve this area of the development sector.

Hypothesis:

"Women empowerment has a symbiotic relationship with rural development and the alleviation of poverty."

To answer this overarching hypothesis, I formed three questions:

1) Does IRRAD empower women?

With this question, I attempted to do two things: identify which methods IRRAD employed to empower women and how, if at all, did these methods empower women.

2) Does women empowerment self-sustainably cycle throughout the community of Mewat?

With this question, I attempted to identify the self-sustainability of this empowerment. Do the women absorb the preaching of women empowerment that IRRAD employs into their community? Once established, will the environment of Mewat support and maintain the culture of empowered women even without involvement from outside NGOs such as IRRAD?

3) Does women empowerment have beneficial results on the general wellbeing of the community?

With this question, I attempted to identify: the roles of empowered women in the community of Mewat villages and the overall wellbeing of villages which have a stronger establishment of women empowerment.

I researched questions one and two during my time with the Policy, Governance, and Advocacy sector and researched questions one and three during my time with the Capacity Building Center.

Methodology:

My sole form of research was qualitative research, due to the fact that my topic of research was a very qualitatively based area of study. My methodology consisted of: focus groups, case studies, low-scale surveying.

III. Policy, Governance, and Advocacy

The Institute of Rural Research and Development (IRRAD) pioneered the Good Governance Now program (GGN) as a part of the Policy, Governance, and Advocacy sector in 2008 beginning with only 6 villages of the district Mewat in Haryana. Since then, GGN has grown to reach all 431 villages of the district.

One of the greatest problems in India is the lack of transparent governance. Several government actions have been taken place to create government schemes that can benefit rural India. Such schemes include the following: the Public Distribution System (PDS), the Midday Meal (MDM), and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).

PDS facilitates the supply of food grains to the poor at a subsidized price and the distribution of essential commodities to a large percent of the population through a network of Fair Price Shops on a recurring basis. Fair Price Shops are used to distribute rations at a subsidized price to the poor. There are three types of ration cards arranged from high severity of poverty to low severity: Antyodaya, Below Poverty Line (BPL), and Above Poverty Line (APL). Problems with the program include:

- ✓ Much of the supply provided by the PDS does not reach the target group in its entirety.
- ✓ Many FPS dealers resort to malpractice, illegal diversions of commodities, hoarding and black marketing due to the minimal salary received by them
- ✓ PDS has been accused of urban bias – the theory that urban dwellers are able to influence the program to their favor.
- ✓ Illicit fair price shop owners have been found to create large number of bogus cards to sell food grains in the open market.
- ✓ Deceitful dealers replace good supplies received from the FCI (Food Corporation of India) with inferior stock and sell FCI stock in the black market.

The Midday Meal Scheme (MDMS) provides every child in every government and government-assisted primary school (grades 1 to 8) with a prepared mid-day meal. The three main goals are: To protect children from classroom hunger, to increase school enrollment and attendance, especially among students in rural regions of the country, and to improve socialization among children. Problems with the program include:

- ✓ Timely delivery of the food to the schools.
- ✓ In some areas, midday meals are a health hazard as they are not prepared in hygienic conditions.
- ✓ Sometimes MDMS disturbs the classroom process as the teachers are asked to spend time cooking.
- ✓ In some places teachers and the Sarpanches (village leaders) of the area deliberately show false higher enrolment in the schools and keep the food grains thus rendered 'surplus' for themselves.

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is India's primary social welfare scheme to tackle malnutrition and health problems in children below 6 years of age and their mothers. Problems with the program include

- ✓ Proper implementation of the program in villages where the Sarpanche allocates the money for the program elsewhere.

By establishing efforts to educate the villagers about these three primary government schemes in India, IRRAD hopes to eradicate the problems and inefficiencies associated with the government schemes, and thus take steps in promoting government reliability and transparency. The Policy, Governance, and Advocacy sector of IRRAD attempts to establish good governance practice within the villages of Mewat. The sector has three primary goals:

- 1) To make citizens aware of the policies and programmes run by the government to improving their wellbeing.
- 2) To enhance citizen participation in government programmes and institutions for promoting transparent and accountable governance.
- 3) To make policy recommendations for improving transparency and accountability in governance.

Good Governance Now (GNN) specifically adapts a method of promoting transparency and awareness as an approach to fighting corruption and fostering rural development in the villages of Mewat. GGN employs three interventions to achieve their goal: 1) training selected citizens on legal rights, entitlements and development programmes, 2) campaigning for citizen-led initiatives, and 3) sharing the GGN model with other institutes who have similar objectives¹. In each of these interventions, there is a unique emphasis on women involvement, with fifty percent or more of the villagers involved being comprised of women.

Methodology:

This report aims to measure the effects that this pro-women emphasis in the GGN model has had on the personal empowerment of the women involved. The research was based purely on qualitative data acquired through employing a methodology consisting of focus groups and individual interviews.

This report uses the United Nation's definition of women empowerment as a standard of measurement:

“Women's empowerment has five components: 1) women's sense of self-worth; 2) their right to have and to determine choices; 3) their right to [know of] opportunities and

resources; 4) their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and 5) their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.”



Fig 1: The focus group conducted in this research

In this report, only the first four components will be considered as the fifth component is a measure of collaborative empowerment, and this report will solely focus on personal empowerment of women. In this report, the components will be referred to as the following:

Component 1: “women’s sense of self-worth” will be referred to as “Self-Worth”

Component 2: “their right to have and to determine choices” will be referred to as “Choice”

Component 3: “their right to [know of] opportunities and resources” will be referred to as “Knowledge”

Component 4: “their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home” will be referred to as “Personal Control”

These four components will serve as the standard to measure the empowerment of the women participating in this study.

The focus group discussion conducted in this report was comprised of 25 women of the village Kalwari in the Mewat district, most of whom were previous trainees for GGN,

selected because of their superior experience and knowledge of the program. The duration of this focus group study was approximately 90 minutes. In addition to the focus group, data was also collected through individual interviews of four different women, all of whom were trainees for GGN. All of the women participating in this study were asked a series of questions regarding four topics: women involvement in training sessions, women involvement in community/group meetings, overall benefits and drawbacks of being involved with GGN, and women empowerment. Based on the discussion conducted on each of these topics, the four components of women empowerment will serve to measure any impact on the empowerment of the women in this study.

The first hypothesis answered by this report will be: women empowerment increases as the amount of involvement with GGN increases. This will be tested with the following methods:

- ✓ The survey questionnaire I have prepared can measure empowerment within the same group of respondents; it measures empowerment before GGN involvement and after GGN involvement.

The hypothesis is that women will answer lower numbers on the first question (before GGN) and higher numbers on the second question (after GGN).

- ✓ The survey questionnaire I have prepared can measure empowerment between groups of respondent: 1) No involvement → 2) involvement.

The hypothesis is that women with no involvement will answer low numbers on the survey questions and women with involvement will answer high numbers.

The second hypothesis answered by this report will be: women empowerment is a self-sustainable cycle. When one woman is empowered, this empowerment spreads to the other women she interacts with. This will be tested with the following method:

- ✓ The survey questionnaire I have prepared can measure empowerment between villages: 1) Little women involvement → 2) Heavy women involvement.

The hypothesis is that women (belonging in the same group of respondents) will generally answer higher in a village with heavy women involvement than women (belonging in the same group of respondents) in a village with little women involvement.

The discussion questions serve to provide reasons and explanations behind the survey's qualitative numbers. The discussion questions will also help prove whether GGN involvement has more benefits than drawbacks thus proving whether GGN involvement is a self-motivated phenomenon. This will provide qualitative evidence as to whether woman



Fig 2: An example of a typical training session

involvement in this region is self-sustainable and contagious

Training Sessions

Summary:

Every year, two or three villagers are selected from all the villages of the Mewat district for the structured

GGN training sessions taught by GGN guides; these villagers are called trainees. The primary aim of these trainings is to make the trainees aware of the government schemes available to their village and their constitutional rights. These trainees then serve as a link between GGN and the rest of the villagers in Mewat. The IRRAD staff facilitate 24 training sessions in one year at the block level, in which women are required to make up at least half of the people present at each

session before the trainings can even begin. This unique emphasis on women involvement has seemed to have profound effects on the empowerment of the women involved.

Analysis:

In regards to this intervention, I sought to answer one general question: what are the personal effects for the women attending these trainings.

“Self-Worth”: There was unanimous concord among the former-trainees in that attending training sessions had made them feel more important as human beings. A former trainee from 2012, named Sunita, spoke up during the focus group and stated that “[she] enjoyed learning, [she] enjoyed the knowledge, [she] enjoyed the awareness that [she] received because she knew it was important for GGN.” Being able to learn and being treated as a pivotal necessity for GGN made the women feel more imperative as a citizen for their village and for the program. Thus this component of women empowerment is positively impacted by GGN.



Fig 3: Sunita (on the left) was a participant in the focus group.

“Choice”: Allowing women the opportunity to attend these trainings and get out of their standard routine, offers them an expanded selection of actions and activities. When asked about her daily life, Sunita, who had her first child at the age of 17 years, described a monotonous routine that she has done every day for the past 23 years. These women, who have relatively monotonous lifestyles, generally seem to welcome the training sessions because they allow the women more choice and opportunity to leave the house. Thus this component of women empowerment is positively impacted by GGN.

“Knowledge”: The women all affirmed that the training sessions provided them with new knowledge and awareness of schemes and rights of which were previously unknown to them. The knowledge they were receiving was very useful for

Below Poverty Line (BPL) citizens. They started learning about government schemes previously unknown to them; the monetary benefits provided by the schemes made the

women excited to learn during these trainings. Thus this component of women empowerment is positively impacted by GGN.

“Personal Control”: All of the women in this study had begun attending these trainings only after gaining their husbands’ approval. They would not have begun to attend the trainings without the permission of another. Therefore, in regards to the training sessions, women involved do not seem to have complete personal control, as all of the self-worth, choice, and knowledge they receive through GGN involvement are only accessible if the husbands allow it. Thus this component of women empowerment is not positively impacted by GGN.

Community/Group Meetings

Summary:

In the second intervention, the trainees are assigned to organize community and group meetings within their village between every training session. Community meetings are comprised of a greater number of people and happen less frequently than group meetings. These meetings are supervised by the guides assigned to the block of which the village falls under and led by the trainees of that village. During these meetings, the trainees attempt to link GGN with the grassroots by raising awareness of government schemes and constitutional right among the average citizens of the villages. The aim of these community/group meetings is to enhance citizen participation in governance; with a greater number of people aware and involved in the improvement of governance, the probability of corruption and poor government service to go unnoticed falls drastically. Again, there is a very strong pro-women approach in this second initiative. In the year 2012, out of the approximately 76,000 villagers who attended community/group meetings, 34,200 were women. I observed through my focus group discussion that at this intervention, there plays a type of self-sustainability. The empowerment of the trainees in this program links and spreads to other women who attend the community/group meetings.

Analysis:

In regards to this intervention, I sought to answer two general questions: 1) what are the personal effects for the women leading these community/group meetings and 2) what effects do these meetings have on others.

In response to the first question:

“Self-Worth”: The women stated that they liked being able to discuss and show off what they learned at the trainings to their village. They enjoyed being able to spread the issues that they learned about to their neighbors and children because they felt like an intelligent and important citizen of their village. Thus this component of women empowerment is positively impacted by GGN.



Fig 4: Santosh is a trainee for GGN; she was one of the women interviewed for this study.

“Choice”: The women again stated that they enjoyed the opportunity to have more activities in which they can participate in their village. The community/group meetings allow them more ways to get involved and act in their villages. Thus this component of women empowerment is positively impacted by GGN.

“Knowledge”: Though most of the knowledge they gain is through training sessions, women trainees also seem to learn more through these meetings. One woman interviewed, Santosh, mentioned that the villagers ask questions that make her think and discover even more knowledge about government schemes and constitutional rights. Thus this component of women empowerment is positively impacted by GGN.

“Personal Control”: The women interviewed stated that they feel freer to act as they wish during these meetings. Because they have the support of GGN, the women feel more open

to voice opinions, thoughts, and discussions. Thus this component of women empowerment is positively impacted by GGN.

In response to the second question, the women cited their experiences of interaction during the meetings.

Sunita during the focus group shared her experiences of speaking with her fellow villagers about the entitlements and schemes she learned about through GGN. She observed how “the neighbors and the villagers become very interested in the program”. Sunita explains that her fellow villagers get excited after hearing about the program because they believe that learning about the schemes and entitlement will give them personal monetary benefits. Sunita also brings up an interesting experience with the women she interacts with. Women become incredibly interested in her involvement with GGN simply through word of mouth. Several of the women Sunita has interacted with want to become involved as well; they think “if Sunita can do it, so can we”. The women realize that being a trainee brings recognition in the village; the other villagers certainly recognize the women who are involved in this program.

When asked how the effects of these discussions differ between the men and the women, the women I interviewed stated that men who were educated were just as supportive and encouraging as the women. Men who had developed a more modern education were concerned with the good of the community and thus were less traditional and restricting of women being involved with GGN.

Overall Involvement:

Limitations of the GGN Program

Mewat is a district that is overwhelmingly comprised of Meo Muslims. This group of people is known for their preservation of social and cultural traits; thus the demography of Mewat consists of a population that is traditional and resistant to change. This fact has the potential to create various limitations and barriers for the GGN program to reach out to the women of Mewat. The women trainees involved in this study were asked to identify any negative impacts caused by their involvement with GGN. The following were the most common drawbacks identified:



Fig 5: In a typical training session, patriarchy still shows its overwhelming presence.

First – many corrupted officials in their villages would give the women trainees threats when the women attempted to file complaints. Santosh cited in her interview that depot holders and Anganvadi workers were perhaps the greatest obstacle to their work. They would create hurdles for the trainees attempting to end the corruption present in their villages.

Another woman who was interviewed, Shameli, noted her experience as a cook for a school. When she attempted to file a complaint about the corruption present at the school, she was fired. It is evident that perhaps the greatest limitation of the GGN program is the hurdles presented by the corrupt officials in the village.

Second – because the district of Mewat is very traditional, the women who become involved with GGN sometimes receive scorn from others in their village. Shameli estimates that about 90% of the villagers are against her involvement. While these villagers do not present obstacles as great as the village officials, they can still present emotional and psychological barriers for the women trainees, making it more difficult to recruit them into the GGN program.

Finally – while these women involved with GGN are gaining immense independence, they are still living in a patriarchal society. To begin attending training sessions, the women first required the permission of their husbands. During training sessions, they are still required to sit on the floor while the men sit on chairs. During community/group meetings, it is still difficult for them to discuss government schemes with traditional men. While immense improvement has been made to their independence, these women still live in a patriarchal society, making it difficult for them to do the work assigned to them by GGN and making it difficult to recruit more women into the program.

Benefits of the GGN Program

While there are certainly drawbacks and limitations for these women who are involved with GGN, their involvement gives them the empowerment necessary to tackle these



Fig 6: Sunita is a guide for Good Governance Now.

obstacles. The personal benefits the women identified show a trend of immense personal empowerment.

First – the women show that being involved with GGN has empowered them to fight back against the obstacles they face. Both Santosh and Shameli faced threats when conducting work for GGN and both refused to give in to the threats. Second – the women all seem to have gained a personal empowerment to fight against the patriarchal values of their community. When asked whether these women would end their involvement with GGN should their husband demand it, every woman in this study stated that they would not end

their involvement regardless of what their husbands say. One guide who was interviewed, named Sunita, stated that her husband actually gained interest in GGN because of her work. Hers was a case in which a woman actually influenced and empowered a man. Third – the women respond positively on all four components of women empowerment. When asked whether they've gained more self-worth, more choice, more knowledge, and more personal control after becoming involved with GGN, every single women cited positive impacts. The discussion with the women in this study show that once women get involved in the program, the growth in personal empowerment is unsurpassed.

Conclusion:

Once women become involved with GGN as trainees, their empowerment seems to be self-sustainable according to the results of this study. In the first intervention of training sessions, the women in this study show three components of women empowerment: self-worth, choice, and knowledge. However, the patriarchal values of their society still have an

overwhelming presence during training sessions – thus the women do not have personal control. However, once they reach the second intervention of community/group meetings, the women seem to become more empowered. During community/group meetings their senses of empowerment seem to heighten. They begin to experience positive impacts on all four components of women empowerment. Finally, in an overall reflection of their involvement with GGN, all the women in this study cite positive impacts and provide success stories on each of the four components of women empowerment. Because the four components seem to get more positively impacted the more invested the women become with GGN, it can be proven that GGN’s unique emphasis in involving women creates self-sustainable empowerment in the women involved.

IV. Capacity Building Center

This report aims to measure the effects that this pro-women emphasis in the CBC model has had on the personal empowerment of the women involved. The research was based purely on qualitative data acquired through case studies.

This report uses the United Nation’s definition of women empowerment as a standard of measurement and will only focus on the fifth component: the effects and influence women have on their social community.

Introduction: School Management Committees



My translator and I interviewing Kiran – a woman involved in the local School Management Committee

School Management Committees (SMC) are constituted in every government public school under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act). Parents/guardians comprise 75% of the members and are responsible for ensuring the implementation and monitoring of the RTE Act at a school level. The purpose of involving the local community to maintain school quality is: to bridge the

distance between the school and block/district authorities by representing the school at various platforms. Parents and children are the primary stakeholders of an education system and it is they who bear the brunt of the faulting school system. Through SMCs, parents are given the opportunity to bring positive change in the education quality of their children.

The Capacity Building Center (CBC) initiative began in 2011 with only 13 villages. Now it covers more than 50 villages in the district of Mewat. The initiative aims to help the villagers in building the capacity of Village-Level Institutes in their community – including SMCs. The initiative improves accountability, transparency, and responsiveness of SMCs by encouraging communal leadership among the villagers. Through training sessions and exposure visits, the CBC initiative directly interacts with members of local SMCs and improves the efficiency of their work by raising awareness and providing easy access to knowledge. Women are required to make up 50% of the members of SMCs; thus the CBC initiative additionally has a unique emphasis on the involvement and subsequent empowerment of women members of SMCs.

Case Study: Kiran

Kiran is a 45 year old retired member of the local School Management Committee in the village of Mundhaka in the district of Mewat.

Kiran was married at the age of 15 years, bore her first child at the age of 16 years, and has nurtured four children to adulthood. As a woman who dropped out from school before reaching the fifth grade, she never received the opportunity to become literate and educated in her lifetime. However, now as a mother of four, Kiran has dedicated her time and efforts to ensure that the children in her village have the opportunity to pursue a quality education through her work with the local SMC.

Kiran was one of the first members of the SMC when it was introduced to her village on March 24th, 2011. She was selected and voted into the committee by the headmaster and



Kiran and her family

school teachers of the school district for her interest and participation in her children's education. Kiran emphasized that in the beginning, her motivation had little to do with an interest in improving the quality of education and more to do her status. However, after attending a training session sponsored by the CBC initiative, Kiran noted an obvious shift in her drive. For the first time in her life, at this training, Kiran was realizing the importance of an education. At the training session, Kiran learned, for the first time, an explanation of the benefits of educating children; for the first time, the RTE Act was put into words that she was able to comprehend, for the first time, she learned about her roles and

responsibilities as a parent and a member of the SMC; for the first time, Kiran felt compelled to educate herself and fight for her daughters' education.

Attending CBC trainings have motivated Kiran to become involved in her children's education. It has completely changed her mentality to make her more aware of importance of education.

Kiran reached a climax in her work with the SMCs with a specific project she undertook. There was no facility for drinking water at the Mundaka school at which she did her work. So IRRAD had proposed a roof water-harvesting project that required 25,000 rupees. However, school teachers claimed there was no money and did not want to contribute to the project. Kiran, though, knew this was a lie; the money was simply being hoarded for the school teachers themselves. She discovered the money and announced it to the rest of the School Management Committees. She took a stand. The other teachers pressured Kiran into maintaining their secret; but Kiran knew the importance of clean water for children, thus

she gave money to IRRAD and she monitored the project. Her tenure is over but she still keeps an eye on it and keeps motivating others about SMC and its roles.

Conclusion:

Kiran is one woman whose life has been impacted by the Capacity Building Center and IRRAD's effort but her actions have impacted the lives of many children in her village. This case study is an epitome of the importance of empowering women in the rural setting. Women are most directly involved in the issues on which most efforts and schemes regarding rural development focus, including: education of youth, village health and sanitation, nutrition, children's health, and access to clean water. Women are also more motivated to support a cause in the rural village setting. These two factors make women empowerment a necessity for the alleviation of poverty in rural India.

V. Personal Conclusion

My two months in India have rendered me into a completely different person as I stepped back into the United States. I learned more about myself in the two months than in my eighteen years. Because of the Borlaug-Ruan internship, I can go into college with a firmer understanding about my passions and interests.

I discovered the difficulties of social research. Unlike qualitative, scientific research, social research requires specific circumstances to be applicable. Even a single variation would render the research to be lacking. I struggled with my introduction to social research during my entire internship; the lack of cold, hard data frustrated me. Within my own questionnaire during my time with Policy, Governance, and Advocacy sector, I attempted to use numerical scales to measure the amount of women empowerment in the women I interviewed. I have learned that my interest lies not in pure qualitative research; I believe that social research must maintain some quantitative research as well to be relevant.

I discovered a new interest in women empowerment during my time in India, both within and outside of my professional research. The women I interacted with during my village visits were beautiful and had such energy and vivacity; yet the moment a man would walk into the room, they would cover their faces and cease to speak. I spoke to very few women who actually felt they had control over their personal lives and social community.

They felt as if with IRRAD's support they could act empowered, but they never truly felt it. It disheartened me a bit the difficulty of the task of not only empowering women but also making it a self-sustainable cycle. Even with ten years, it still seems a daunting task for IRRAD to revolutionize a culture that creates gender hierarchy with women being the lower status. Outside of my research, for the first time in my life I felt gender discrimination. At home, I work with the local Sexual Assault Resource Team. I give presentations about sexual harassment and assault, read about case studies of men and women who have tragic stories, and met with those who have become survivors. Yet, my work with this area had become more real, more important since my internship to India. For the first time, I woke up every morning dressing, acting, speaking in a way that would prevent me from getting sexually harassed, or even sexually assaulted. I felt like an animal at the zoo when walking down the street, even right outside of my complex. The lack of gender equality both in urban and rural India frightens me – and it has become something with which I want to work, as I grow older.

During my research, I discovered the severe complexity of the issues revolving poverty and rural development. As I become more learned in the field, I find myself becoming more and more anxious and confused about the issue. Enough worth is not given to this phrase: "I don't know". In a world where it seems we must know everything to be intelligent, the phrase seems to connote only stupidity. I had once believed that I knew everything about poverty: the cause and the solution. Though, never have I understood the intricacy of the issue until my internship in India. It is at this climax where I finally realized: I know very little. To ensure clean drinking water, I thought we must simply provide water filters. But most of the villagers I met with believed that waterborne diseases come from God, not bacteria. They believed that water filters and science could not rid them of any illnesses. As an incentive for children to come to school, superficial research would convince me that we must simply provide free midday-meals. But the amount of corruption present in India's society would cause officials to hoard the food and sell it for a profit. This is my greatest lesson: on the surface, problems regarding poverty seem to have obvious solutions; however, I cannot yet fathom a remedy to the true complexity of the issue. Thus, I will simply have to keep learning and exploring.

Annex

Questionnaire for Trainees (Respondent Type 1):

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- What are your educational qualifications?
- At what age were you married?
- How did you find out about GGN?

1. How aware were you about government schemes and your constitutional rights before being involved with GGN, on a scale of 1 to 5?

(1 = knew nothing and 5 = knew everything)

1 2 3 4 5

2. How aware were you about government schemes and your constitutional rights after being involved with GGN, on a scale of 1 to 5?

(1 = knew nothing and 5 = knew everything)

1 2 3 4 5

3. How important did you feel before being involved with GGN, on a scale of 1 to 5?

(1 = felt no importance to your village and 5 = felt like the most important citizen of your village)

1 2 3 4 5

4. How important did you feel after being involved with GGN, on a scale of 1 to 5?

(1 = felt no importance to your village and 5 = felt like the most important citizen of your village)

1 2 3 4 5

5. How free did you feel to talk as you wished and go out of the house as you wished before being involved with GGN, on a scale of 1 to 5?

(1 = did not feel free at all and 5 = felt completely free)

1 2 3 4 5

6. How free did you feel to talk as you wished and go out of the house as you wished after being involved with GGN, on a scale of 1 to 5?

(1 = did not feel free at all and 5 = felt completely free)

1 2 3 4 5

7. How much influence did you have on your village's activities before GGN, on a scale of 1 to 5?

(1 = had no influence at all and 5 = had all the influence)

1 2 3 4 5

8. How much influence did you have on your village's activities after GGN, on a scale of 1 to 5?

(1 = had no influence at all and 5 = had all the influence)

1 2 3 4 5

Discussion Questions:

Training Sessions:

9. What interested you to attend the trainings and become a trainee for GGN?
10. Was your husband supportive when you wanted to become involved with GGN?
11. If your husband or your in-laws told you to end your involvement with the program, would you end it?
12. Do you enjoy GGN trainings and why?
13. Why do you think GGN trainings are important?

Community Meetings:

14. Do you enjoy community meetings and why?
15. Why do you think community meetings are important?
16. What effect do you think community meetings have on your village?

Self-Sustainability:

17. Do you talk to other women about your work with GGN?
18. How do they respond to what you tell them? Or why not?
19. Do you talk to men about your work with GGN?
20. How do they respond to what you tell them? Or why not?

Disadvantages:

21. Do any people treat you negatively for being involved with GGN?
22. What are the greatest negative consequences you personally have faced because your involvement with GGN?

23. Have you seen any negative effects in your village because of GGN?

Advantages:

24. Do any people treat you better for being involved with GGN?

25. What are the greatest benefits you personally have experienced because of your involvement with GGN?

26. What are the greatest benefits your village has experienced because of GGN?

Women Empowerment:

27. How do you think GGN has impacted the women of your village as a whole?

28. How do you think being involved in this program has changed your life?

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