

# **Fighting Hunger, Saving the Poorest**

## **The Story of Mallarpur I Gram Panchayat, West Bengal**



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*by*



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**Cover Photo: A poor woman saved by the action of Mallarpur 1 GP**

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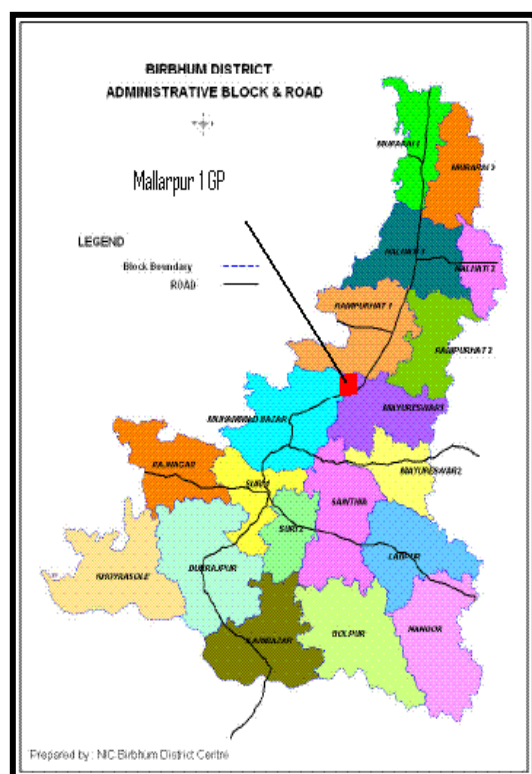
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## I. Background of the Gram Panchayat

### Geographical Location and Boundary

Mallarpur-I Gram Panchayat (GP) is located almost at the centre of the district of Birbhum, West Bengal. It falls under the jurisdiction of Mayurewar-I CD block or Mayurewar-I Panchayat Samiti in the Rampurhat Subdivision.



### Communication and other facilities

The Gram Panchayat is well connected with the outer world by roads and railways. The Mallarpur Railway Station of the Eastern Railway is situated within the boundary of the GP.

The GP has about 11 formal schools (8 Free Primary, 3 Secondary). In addition there are 3 Shishu Shiksha Kendras<sup>1</sup>, 19 Anganwari Kendras and 2 literacy centers. There are two Sub-Centers (Health) under the jurisdiction of Mallarpur-I GP.

The GP comprises five mouzas (Revenue Village) of which one is depopulated. Within the 4 populated mouzas, there are 9 habitations, each having an identity as a village.

### Demographic Composition

According to Census 2001, Mallarpur-I GP had a total population of 13783 of which 4759 (34.53%) and 858 (6.23%) belonged to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe respectively. The GP has a very poor sex ratio of 1000:942. Overall literacy rate of the GP is 64.50% while the female literacy is 56.63%.

### Socio-economic Profile

<sup>1</sup> Sishu Siksha Kendra (SSK) is a low-cost primary school set up by the state government at the demand of the local community and with the initiative of the local panchayat. They are run by the local community with support from the gram panchayat and are funded and overseen by the government. Teachers of SSK are recruited from among local educated women. They are paid honoraria. These non-mainstream schools were set up to meet the demand for enrolment quickly.

Mallarpur-I GP is predominantly an agricultural area. About 70% of the total households of the GP derive their subsistence mainly from agriculture. Trade and business appear as the main source of livelihood for about 10% of the households. Small, household and cottage industries occupy principal position in providing livelihood to about 7% households. Service sector is the main source of livelihood for about 5% of the households. The rest (8%) of the households derive their livelihood from other sources.

### **Composition of Gram Panchayat**

Mallarpur GP has 9 Sansads<sup>2</sup> and 11 elected members. There is also one ex-officio member, PS member elected from the GP area. 36.36% of the elected members are women and about 45% are from SC-ST communities.

Of these 11 elected GP members 8 belong to AITMC, 2 to CPI (M) and 1 to INC. Shree Dharendra Mohan Bandyopadhyay is the Pradhan of the GP. This is his fourth term as Pradhan.

## **II. The Good Practices of the Gram Panchayat**

Mallarpur-I GP had been selected as one of the best performing Panchayats of the country and was awarded the 'Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar' by the Department of Panchayati Raj, Government of India for the year 2011-12 for its overall performance. In the present study, an attempt has been made to document the following good practices of the gram panchayat.

- ❖ Successful Implementation of a programme on food security for the destitute;
- ❖ Planned use of MGNREGA schemes for creation of sustainable employment.

### **II A. SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF SAHAI FOOD SUPPORT PROGRAMME**

#### **The Concept**

State Action against Hunger and Inequality or SAHAI is an anti poverty sub-plan of the poverty alleviation programmes of Panchayat and Rural Development Department of the Government of West Bengal. The sub-plan is based on the findings of the 61<sup>st</sup> round of the NSSO rural household survey and Rural Household Survey (RHS) of the Government of West Bengal. Both

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<sup>2</sup> Sansad is coterminous with a constituency (or ward) of the gram panchayat. A few sansads are large and they return two members. A sansad is the village assembly of all the voters of a constituency. This assembly meets at least twice a year. Thus it is the gram sabha at the ward level. The Panchayat Act of West Bengal has given some powers to the gram sansad.

these surveys indicated that about 9% to 16.5% of the rural population of West Bengal was finding it difficult to arrange two square meals a day for all the months of the year, while about 3.5% was not getting even one square meal a day. SAHAI was designed in 2009 to provide at least one square meal a day to this 3.5% rural destitute population.

### **SAHAI and Mallarpur-I GP**

Mallarpur-I GP has been implementing this anti-hunger programme since its inception, i.e. from June 2009 almost without any break. The GP is providing cooked meals to about 122 SAHAI beneficiaries coming from 87 households. What is noteworthy is the fact that while implementing the programme, the GP has expanded its scope. The programme, as stipulated in the relevant government order, provides for supplying one meal a day to the beneficiaries, leaving them to fend for themselves in respect of the night meal. Considering the fact that most of the beneficiaries would go to bed with hunger most of the days if another meal were not supplied to them, the GP has arranged for the supply of dry food (puffed rice and a snack made of boiled gram and pulse) as night meal to all beneficiaries. Thus the GP is providing its SAHAI beneficiaries two meals a day in place of the stipulated one meal. The meal given in the day-time is also comparatively more wholesome than the one that can be provided with the fund allotted for each beneficiary. In other words the GP has not only successfully implemented this innovative scheme; it has expanded the scope of the said scheme.

### **Identification of the Beneficiaries**

The Rural Household Survey conducted by the state government in 2005 had identified households who were suffering from food insecurities, according to certain indicators. They were being referred to as rural destitute population. This destitute population forms the potential beneficiaries of SAHAI programme. However, as per guidelines of the programme, the GP was required to verify the present status of food insecurity of its destitute population through a field check. Moreover if any genuine destitute person is found to have been left out by the RHS, s/he is entitled to apply to the Panchayat for receiving benefits under the scheme. Their claims were also to be verified through field check, as per guidelines. There was a prescribed format for conducting this check. In Mallarpur-I GP this field check was done by the Resource Persons (RP) of SHGs formed under SGSY programme. The field check formats duly filled-in by the two RPs engaged for the work were again subjected to verification in the field by some selected GP officials. But Mallarpur-I GP had added a new dimension to this departmental programme: they utilized the programme as a means to make Mallarpur-I GP beggar-free completely. In order to identify the beggars, the GP displayed the following public notice at important public locations:

*'If you find any inhabitant of Mallarpur-I GP begging at public places, please bring him/her to the GP office. The GP would give you an award of Rs 200.00'.*

This strategy of identification of the destitute has worked. The identification and finalization of the list of SAHAI beneficiaries of Mallarpur-I GP was completed in the beginning of June, 2009. A total of 122 persons were identified as SAHAI beneficiaries.

### Profile of the Beneficiaries

Some salient characteristics of the total 122 SAHAI beneficiaries of Mallarpur-I GP are provided in the following tables:

**Table 1**  
Number and age-group of the SAHAI Beneficiaries

Sansad	Number of beneficiaries			Age-group division of beneficiaries			
	Male	Female	Total	Below 20 yrs.	20-39 yrs.	40-59 yrs.	60 & above
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1	6	6	12	1	4	3	4
3	1	3	4	-	1	2	1
4	3	11	14	-	-	10	4
6	4	2	6	-	-	4	2
8	14	14	28	6	8	7	8
2	3	6	9	3	1	3	2
5	3	14	17	2	3	10	2
7	6	11	17	-	8	5	4
9	9	5	14	3	5	6	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>27</b>

**Table 2**  
SAHAI Beneficiaries: Reasons for making them entitled as beneficiaries

Sansad no.	Reasons for selection as SAHAI beneficiary					
	Handicapped		Chronically sick & weak	Too old to work	Widow/ abandoned by spouse	Orphans
	Mental	Otherwise				
(1)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
1	2	2	1	1	5	1
3	-	1	1	-	1	1
4	1	2	6	2	3	--
6	-	-	2	2	2	-

8	4	9	2	4	6	4
2	-	1	-	1	4	3
5	-	-	4	1	10	2
7	1	4	9	2	1	-
9	-	5	6	-	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>12</b>

Source: Ek Najare Mallarpur I Gram Panchayat

The above tables bring out the following features:

- (i) Concentration of the SAHAI beneficiaries is highest in Sansad No. 8 with 29 beneficiaries (23.77%) and lowest in Sansad 3 with only 4 beneficiaries (3.28%).
- (ii) About three-fifth (59.84%) of the total 122 SAHAI beneficiaries of the GP are women;
- (iii) Most of the destitute population of the GP surprisingly appears to be in the middle age group of 40-59 (about 41%), followed by those who are in the age-group of 20-39 (about 25%). The senior citizens constitute 22% of the beneficiaries and the rest (about 12%) are children and the teen agers. The age-pattern of the SAHAI beneficiaries of Mallarpur shows that, contrary to our general perception, destitute people may not predominantly belong to the category of old people, they may come from any age-group due to multifarious reasons.
- (iv) More than one-fourth (27.87%) of the SAHAI beneficiaries are widows or women abandoned by their husbands and having no one to care for. Close to this group of hapless women is the category of physically or mentally challenged people claiming about 26.23% of the total beneficiaries. Majority of this group – 24 out of 32 - are physically challenged, while the rest suffer from mental illness. About 11% people are too old to work, while 10% beneficiaries are orphans.

### **The castaways of society: Tales of some of the SAHAI beneficiaries**



**Smt. Shibudasi Let**

- **SMT. SHIBUDASI LET:** She is a 70+ woman having a frail structure covered by wrinkled skin. She is so debilitated that even walking is a difficult task for her. Being abandoned by her husband in her prime youth, Shibudashi along with her child went back to her parent's home for living. Both of her parents passed away long back. Since then she had been working as a maid in the well-to-do households of the area for livelihood. Her son also used to supplement the household income by working as a farm labourer. But her son also died about 20 years ago leaving behind his wife and a mentally challenged son. His widowed wife had eloped with another man leaving behind the mentally crippled son at the custody of old Shibudasi. It is for about last 6 years that Shibudasi could not do any hard work due to old age and accompanying disabilities. She was on the verge of starvation, till the meals from the SAHAI kitchen saved her.
- **SMT. DAYAMOYEE LET:** Dayamoyee, who appears to be of the age of 70 plus, is a sick and widowed woman. She walks with the help of walking stick. She is a single member household, as both of her married sons live separately. "Nobody looks after me" (*Aamake keou gannyo kore na*), bemoans the old lady. Once Dayamoyee used to eke out a living by doing casual jobs of domestic help in neighbouring households. Sometimes she would also catch fishes in shallow water bodies (canals and marshes) and sell them in the water market. For the last 5-6 years due to old age and partial paralysis of one of her legs she cannot do any physical work and depends fully on dole. Occasionally her elder son would provide her cooked food, but it is so uncertain that Dayamoyee is the perfect example of a citizen who has been discarded by the society. It is befitting that she is a SAHAI beneficiary.





**Smt. Dayamoyee Let**

- **SMT. SHANTI LET:** Shanti, a widow with a very thin frame, is in her mid 60's and lives alone. She lives on her husband's homestead. Her only child, a daughter, had been married long back. She used to thrive on begging for the last 7-8 years when her ailing health did not allow her to do strenuous works of domestic helps. She never begged in her immediate surroundings. Her begging areas lie at least 1.5 km away from her living area. She is a beneficiary of SAHAI meals since the inception of the programme. Even now she goes out occasionally for begging in order to acquire money for meeting needs other than food.
- **MUCHIRAM SADHU (70):** A sick widower, Muchiram lives alone in his "own" hut. He has a daughter and a son. His daughter was married away long back. He had to sell part of his homestead land to arrange the marriage of his daughter. Apprehending that his father might sell away the remaining part of the homestead, Muchiram's son forced his father to record the property in his name. His son now lives with his daughter in the house, but does not care for his old and sick father. About 5 years back Muchiram used to run a small tea shop by the side of high road. But for his failing health he had to part away with the tea stall. Now for the last few years he is fully dependent on the SAHAI meals.
- **SMT. KALIDASI LET:** She is a widow of well above 60. She has 3 sons two of whom live in their in-laws' houses and the remaining one who is also married lives with her in the same house but has a separate kitchen. This son of hers is chronically sick. He works in a tea stall and earns a very meagre income. He is not in a position to support his mother on a regular basis. About 6-7 years ago when she was physically stronger, Kalidasi used to work as domestic help in 2-3 houses of the village. But due to weakness she now

works only in one house and gets Rs 150.00 a month and a bowl of puffed rice daily as her remuneration. In addition she also lays cow dung cakes in lieu of remuneration which is Rs 10.00 per 80 pieces. By laying cow dung cakes Kalidasi earns about Rs 30-40 a month. This small earning (150+30) is spent towards medicines etc. She is getting SAHAI meal since the beginning of the programme. She takes her meal home and shares it with her young grand children.

- **SMT. SUCHALA LET:** She is a widow and in her late 40's. She lives alone in her husband's homestead. Suchala is chronically sick and unable to do any physical work. Her husband, a patient of paralysis died about a year ago. In fact it was her husband who was the SAHAI beneficiary from their household. Suchala used to take her husband's SAHAI meal home and it was shared by them both. "Liladi (the SAHAI *Bandhu*) used to provide us a little more in quantity knowing that it will be shared by us both", confessed Suchala to us. After her husband's demise, Suchala was allowed to substitute her husband as SAHAI beneficiary. She has two daughters who live in their in-laws' houses and do not bother about their hapless mother.
- **SATYANARAYAN (66) & BINAPANI (61) DUTTA:** This couple – Satyanarayan and Binapani - is dependent on SAHAI meals for last three and half year. They have 4 daughters all of whom were married away long back. Satyanarayan has no farm land and used to maintain his family by hawking milk pouches door to door on a bicycle. But three and a half year back suddenly he was attacked with partial paralysis of limbs. His left hand and leg are now paralytic and the couple depends on others' mercy.



A group of SAHAI beneficiaries

## Modus Operandi

Like identification survey of the beneficiaries, the GP relies fully on the network of all-women SHGs to run the SAHAI kitchens. Two RPs, Smt. Leela Mondal and Smt. Bhagyabati Das who are the Secretaries of Mansa and Purushottam SHGs respectively, are given the responsibility of feeding the 122 SAHAI beneficiaries. The two RPs, as per the guidelines of the programme, are called SAHAI Bandhus (friends of SAHAI beneficiaries). Both of them are entrusted with the responsibility of providing cooked meals to equal number of beneficiaries (61 each). In the beginning of each month the GP divides the monthly SAHAI allotments into two equal halves and gives one half each to the two SAHAI Bandhus. They again divide the amount proportionately among the selected SHGs under them to run the SAHAI kitchens. At present there are 7 SAHAI kitchens. Four are under Smt. Bhagyabati Das and three under Smt. Leela Mondal.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of SAHAI beneficiaries among SHGs**

Name of SAHAI Bandhu	Name of SHG running kitchen	Number of beneficiaries attached to each SHG	Located at Sansad no.
Smt. Bhagyabati Das	Purushottam	28	8
	Nabadiganta	25	3, 4, 6
	Bhagabati	5	1
	Goansai	3	1
Smt. Leela Mondal	Mansa	40	5, 7, 9
	Lakshmi	11	2
	Marangburu	10	9
<b>Total</b>		122	X

Three of the seven kitchens - namely those run by Manasa, Purushottam and Nabadiganta SHGs - serve comparatively large batches of beneficiaries. All the 28 beneficiaries under Purushottam come from only one Sansad (Sansad 9). But for Mansa, the largest of the SAHAI kitchen, the beneficiaries come from three different Sansads (5, 7 & 9). The positional advantage of Mansa kitchen is the only reason for it being the biggest of all SAHAI kitchens. It is almost at the central point of three Sansads of 5, 7 & 9. The same also holds good for the Nabadiganta kitchen too.

It is the responsibility of the two SAHAI Bandhus to collect the detailed accounts of each of the SAHAI kitchens under their disposal. Each of them submits the consolidated expense statements for 61 beneficiaries every month with bills and vouchers. To make it convenient and easy all the seven kitchens purchase their provisions from the same shops and traders/producers.

## **SAHAI kitchen and the beneficiaries**

We visited the largest of the SAHAI kitchens at Fatepur at around 12-30 pm. It was run by Mansa Swanirbhar Dal. The kitchen was located at the residence of Smt. Leela Mondal, leader of the group and one of the RPs. It was a walled house with a rectangular and a long cemented *courtyard*. At the end of the courtyard was the kitchen. The kitchen serves about 40 beneficiaries. It was time to serve meals to the beneficiaries. Most of the beneficiaries had already come. Some had taken their sits on the floor with their plates and some came with aluminum cans and other utensils to carry the food to their respective homes. The inscription on the can indicated that these were supplied by the GP. The GP has given each SAHAI beneficiary aluminum can and a bowl. Serving of meals had just started. There was no discrimination - the sick and even leprosy patients were sitting side by side with others in the rows. The SAHAI *Bandhus* were serving hot cooked rice, pulses, vegetable curry and pickle. The eating place was kept reasonably clean and there was nothing in the gestures or body language of those who were serving that they were treating the beneficiaries with any contempt or disrespect simply for the reason that they were being given free meals. Required number of polythene packs full of puffed rice were also there to be given to the SAHAI beneficiaries after the meals were served. The Pradhan of the GP also said that 8 of the SAHAI beneficiaries were so incapacitated that they could not come to feeding centers and their meals and dry food packs were being sent to their homes.

The food chart of the SAHAI beneficiaries of Mallarpur-I GP generally consists of the following:

- (i) Boiled rice of 200gms of dry rice;
- (ii) Vegetable curry;
- (iii) Egg curry twice a week;
- (iv) Chicken once a month;
- (v) Pulses once a week; and
- (vi) Curd, sweetmeat and *papad* once a month.

This chart was prepared by the GP in order to ensure that the beneficiaries get balanced food as far as possible. As the SAHAI budget does not allow anything beyond the bare minimum, GP had to supplement the fund received under SAHAI with fund from other sources including donations.

## **Financing the programme**

The SAHAI programme has a shoe-string budget. Even though the rate sanctioned per beneficiaries has been enhanced by the Government from time to time from Rupees 7 per beneficiary in 2009 to Rupees 20 per beneficiary in November 2012, the programme funding is



**Pradhan (in white) supervising SHG members serving food to the poorest**

not enough to cover the expenses of the kind of meals being served by the Mallarpur GP. The additional funds required for it were obtained, as will be seen later, from different sources that included donations.

First of all, the GP sought help from the two Rice Mills located within the area. They were persuaded to supply rice at a cheaper rate. They agreed and the table below shows the difference between the retail price of rice in local market and the rate at which rice is supplied for the programme by the rice mills.

**Table 4A: Price of Rice**

<u>Quantity of rice</u>	<u>Retail market rate</u>	<u>Rate for SAHAI kitchen</u>
1 kg	Rs 20	Rs 14-15
1 kg	Rs 16-18	Rs 10-12

Similarly, Vegetables for the SAHAI kitchens are purchased from the nurseries of SHGs as and when available. The SHG nurseries sell vegetables at wholesale price and, as such, the cost of procuring vegetables for the programme remains comparatively low. The SAHAI kitchens purchase pulses, in both husked and un-husked forms, directly from the local cultivators as far as possible. The local cultivators also sell pulses at wholesale price. As the difference between

the market price and farmer's price is substantial, as will be seen in the following table, the cost of procuring pulses also is kept at a low level. Sometimes, the cost is reduced by buying un-husked pulses and then husking the same manually by hand-operated grinder.

**Table 4B: Price of pulses**

<u>Variety</u>	<u>Market price</u>	<u>Cultivator's price</u>
Husked	Rs 40.00	Rs 25.00
Musur	Rs 65.00 (husked)	Rs 30.00 (un-husked)

Even after cost-cutting in procurement, the GP had to supplement the departmental allotment for SAHAI with funds from other sources. One of the sources was the fund received under Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF). The other source was own source revenue (OSR) of the GP. The GP has been making efforts to mobilize resources by utilizing its own fiscal powers to levy tax, fees etc. These efforts have borne fruit and OSR of the GP has been increasing every year, as will be revealed from table 5.

2010-11		2011-12		2012-13	
Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
1,93,363	3,36,263	4,99,375	5,16,253	8,00,000	7,00,000+

Source: Mallarpur-I GP

Table 8 shows total expenditure of the GP for running the SAHAI programme during the year 2012-13 and the quantum of funds received from different sources to meet the expenditure. It will be seen that about 91% of the total fund came from the government grant sanctioned under the programme. The balance 9% fund came equally from two sources, namely BRGF and OSR, each contributing around 4.5% of the total expenditure.

**Table 6  
Income-expenditure of SAHAI for the year 2012-13**

Income by sources		Expenditure (Rs)
Source	Amount (Rs)	
1. SAHAI (P&RD)	8,90,600.00	9,79,660.00
2. BRGF	44,530.00	
3. OSR	44,530.00	
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,79,660.00</b>	<b>9,79,660.00</b>

Source: Mallarpur-I GP

### **Breakup of expenditure of feeding beneficiaries**

Though 7 SAHAI kitchens are run for the programme, accounts are maintained at the RP level. A RP submits expenditure account of SAHAI kitchen for 61 beneficiaries at the completion of each

month to the GP. The income-expenditure account for the month of April, 2013 of 5 kitchens under one RP, namely Smt. Bhagyabati Das is furnished below.

**Table 7**  
**Income-expenditure statement of 5 SAHAI Kitchens for 61 beneficiaries during April, 2013**

Income		Expenditure			
Source	Amount (Rs)	Item	Quantity (kg)	Rate (Rs)	Amount (Rs)
<b>Mallarpur-I GP</b>	43194.00	Rice	500	20.00	10,000.00
		Pulses	40	100.00	4,000.00
		Cooking oil	30	100.00	3,000.00
		Other grocery items			4,980.00
		Potato	500	8.00	4,000.00
		Other vegetables			2,940.00
		Chicken	12	120.00	1,440.00
		Egg	488 (pieces)	4.00	1,944.00
		Muri (puffed rice)			4,890.00
		Firewood	1200		6,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>43194.00</b>	<b>Total</b>			<b>43194.00</b>

Source: SAHAI Account Book of Smt. Bhagyabati Das, one of the SAHAI Bandhus

### **Other kinds of Support to the SAHAI Beneficiaries**

Each year during the winter the GP provides to its SAHAI beneficiaries warm clothes, shawls etc. The required fund for this comes from the government.

### **Celebrating the Harvesting Festival with the SAHAI Beneficiaries**

Each year Mallarpur-I GP celebrates *Nabanna* or harvesting festival with its SAHAI beneficiaries. In such festival all the important functionaries of PRI at the block, sub-division and district levels are invited. These dignitaries take their meals sitting side by side with the SAHAI beneficiaries, the orphans and the destitute. By organizing such festivals, the GP provides a forum where the privileged sections of society may get an opportunity to express solidarity with their less fortunate fellow citizens.

Though this programme was meant for all the GPs of the state, very few had accepted it. Most the GPs which started the programme in their respective areas discontinued it midway due to paucity of fund and other operational hazards. Mallarpur-I GP is one of handful of GPs which have been running this difficult programme without interruption since 2009.

## PUBLIC WORKS UNDER MGNREGA and CREATION OF SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

This GP has an excellent record in implementing MGNREGA schemes. It has about 1924 family job-cards. And the size of the job card holding labour force is 3494. In the year 2011-12 the GP had created about 158196 person day's employment under its various MGNREGA schemes. This was the highest for the district. But in terms of average person days per job-card holding household the GP with '81 average person days' ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>. Another characteristic that needs to be highlighted is the fact that women workers constituted as much as 52% of the total person-days of jobs created under MGNREGA during 2011-12. One of the reasons for this is that the local SHGs insisted on giving preference to women workers in giving jobs under the scheme. The other reason was the fact that the male workers of the area preferred jobs available at the nearby stone mining units, because they offered higher wages.



Sharing Information on MGNREGA activities

MGNREGA schemes are often evaluated only on their performance in creating additional employment during construction period. Its other objective of creating public assets generally gets neglected. Mallarpur 1 GP appears to be an exception. It provides a concrete example of the potential of NREGA schemes in becoming instrumental to the creation of employment not only during the period of its operation, but also long after such schemes are closed. Mallarpur GP did this by creating productive assets through MGNREGS and taking subsequent actions for ensuring that such assets are used for productive purposes. This story deserves to be told, so that others may draw lessons from it.



## **Role of Gram Unnayan Samiti in planning of MGNREGA schemes**

All the 9 Gram Unnayan Samitis<sup>3</sup> (GUS) of Mallarpur-I GP are vibrant and take active part in planning of MGNREGA schemes of their Sansads. What is noteworthy is that each of the Sansads takes all its decisions on the basis of consensus and not on the basis of majority. The Birbhum district office of the Panchayat and Rural Development department helps the GUSs of the GP in planning their MGNREGA schemes. There is a healthy competition among the GUSs of Mallarpur-I GP. One Panchayat official is tagged to each GUS. His/her responsibility is to motivate the GUS he/she is associated with. The GP gives the best *Sachib* and the best worker (GP employee) of GUS prizes every year.

The GUS plans are presented, discussed and approved at the Sansad meetings. The Sansad meetings of 2012-13 were attended by about 40% of the electorate on an average. In almost all Sansad meetings women surpassed men in number. Women were found to be more vocal in Sansad meetings compared to the male voters. They raised questions on the individual plans and gave suggestions. Almost the same was scenario in the Gram Shabha meetings where attendance was more than 30%. According to Pradhan, such high rate of participation, especially that of women, in Sansad and gram sabha meetings may be attributed to the SHG movement in the GP area. The Mallarpur-I GP area has about 115 SHGs: 44 of BPL category and 71 of non-BPL category. These are under a SHG cluster known as Nivedita Cluster. Mallarpur Nai Suva, a voluntary organization located at Mallarpur, played a significant role in strengthening the SHG movement in the area.

### **Nature of Assets Created**

Through NREGA schemes, the GP has created following categories of public assets.

❖ **Infrastructure:** The infrastructural schemes under MGNREGA of Mallarpur-I GP included the followings:

- (a) Road construction and repair.
- (b) Repair of canals and construction-maintenance of embankments on *Kandars* which are natural water courses carrying accumulated rain water of the Chhotonagpur plateau down

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<sup>3</sup> A gram Unnayan Samiti (GUS) is the executive arm of a gram sansad. Its members are elected by the Sansad, according to the guidelines given by the State Government. The day-to-day functioning of the GUS is run by its *Sachiv* or Secretary.

south during monsoon. During other seasons these remain dry. Mallarpur-I GP has two such *Kandars*.

(c) Construction, repair and maintenance of drains.

❖ **Tree plantation and land development**

❖ **Excavation and re-excavation of ponds**

The GP has about 172 ponds under its jurisdiction. As a result of long and continuous neglect most of these ponds became silted and rendered not only useless, but became breeding grounds of insects. While most of these water bodies were private properties, some were common properties of the village or communities. About 80% of these water bodies were re-excavated by the GP using MGNREGA funds over a period of time.

### **Revamped Ponds as sources of Employment**

By resuscitating the moribund ponds, the GP has been instrumental in creating productive assets. But that was not enough to put them to use for creating employment opportunities. For this, other kinds of interventions had to be made. The GP made such interventions also and could succeed in generating additional economic activities in the area through fish farming and agriculture.

#### **Fish farming**

Pond is a good site for breeding fish. Catching fish from the pond is also less hazardous. The resuscitated ponds had therefore good potentiality for developing fish farms and providing employment through such activity. However there were some problems. First, there were legal problems of ownership. Among the revamped ponds there were some, which belonged to the state. There was no problem in giving lease of such ponds to the fish farmers. But most of the ponds were in private hands and there were multiple owners of such ponds. In most cases, such owners were not interested to undertake fish farming on commercial basis. Hence if their ponds have to be used for such farming, then lease has to be obtained from them by the producers. Establishing linkage between the owners of a pond and the potential lessees of the water body often requires a third party intervention. The GP performed this role very effectively and developed a standardized set of terms and conditions for giving lease of the ponds. These terms and conditions are as follows.

- Usually the duration of a lease period of fish pond ranges from 5 to 7 years. Any time period less than that is not viable for a fish farm.

- A yearly rent is fixed mutually between the owner(s) and the leaseholder(s). It may be paid either in cash or in kind, that is fish, or in both. In case of multiple owners of a pond, each shareholder gets his/her share of rent in proportion to his/her share value in the property.
- In case the rent is paid in kind, the cash value of the share of an owner in the joint property is usually fixed according to the wholesale rate of fish prevailing at the time of the execution of contract. The residents among the shareholders prefer to have their share in fish while the absentees prefer cash.
- No shareholders or their relations will catch fish from the pond either by wheel and nail or by net.
- The contract may be terminated if at any point of time the leaseholder fails to pay the lease amount by the stipulated date, as mentioned in the agreement.

Apart from the services rendered by the GP in establishing linkage between the fish farmers and the owners of the pond and getting an agreement signed between the two parties, the GP along with the respective Gram Unnayan Samitis identified about 250 unemployed young persons and motivated them to take up fish farming as livelihood. Some of them took pond(s) on lease in individual capacity and some took them as a group (SHG). The GP also arranged for them proper training on commercial fish farming through the Fishery department of the Community Development Block. All these bore fruit and, as indicated below, contributed towards economic development of the area.

- ❖ Previously only 10% of the ponds of the GP were being used for fish breeding. Now most of them are being used.
- ❖ These ponds are being used both by the farmers who were already in the trade as well as by those who took up fish farming as a new vocation. The old farmers enhanced their farms and thereby generated additional jobs. The resuscitated ponds created employment for 250 young persons (principal employment for some and subsidiary employment for others).
- ❖ Expansion of fish farms that led to the emergence of three wholesalers in the area and stoppage of imported fish in the local market from outside.



**A pond that has been revamped through MGNREGS**

### **Snapshots**

- Bhubanmohan Banerjee (42) of Fatepur village is cultivating fish and fish seedlings in leased in ponds for about 20 years. Pisciculture is his principal occupation. Presently he grows fish in 6 leased-in ponds. Total area of these ponds is about 5.95 acres. Bhubanmohan has been growing fish seedlings of traditional Indian carps in one of these ponds since 2003. The GP has re-excavated this pond in 2010. The pond has 8 shareholders. Bhubanmohan took the pond for fish farming on lease for the first time in 2003. The lease was mediated by the GP. It was for a 7 year term (2003-2010). After re-excavation of the pond, the lease was renewed again for another 7 years' term (2011-2018).

Bhubanmohan's net yearly earnings from the sale of grown up fish which the locals call *Mar Machh* and fish seedlings (*Chara Machh*) is about Rs. 150,000 to 170,000. He has 6 labourers who work round the year in his fish ponds without any break. Their normal daily remuneration is Rs. 100.00 per head and on the days of netting of *Mar Machh* they get 1/5 of the catch. His fish ponds, thus, generate 2555 person days per year (2190 person days of workers plus self-employment of 365 days). Moreover about 40 traders of fish seedlings frequently visit him to buy fish seedlings.

- The members of a SHG called 'Swadhin Swanirbhar Dal' have taken a number of ponds re-excavated by the GP on lease for 5 to 7 years for cultivating fish. The negotiations between the owners of the ponds and the leaseholders were mediated by the GP through the local gram unnayan samiti. Availability of the pond gave the leaseholders an opportunity to choose fishery as their secondary occupation. Even though they were new in the occupation, the fish growers could generate an additional income of Rupees 3000 to Rupees 15000 in 2012-13.
- The Sharada SHG of Aamba village is growing fish in a revamped pond having an area of 0.24 acre only. As per the lease deed the SHG gives 15 kg of fish or Rs. 1500.00 in cash to the owners as yearly lease rent. Total cost of growing fish in pond in 2012-13 was about Rs. 3500.00 plus 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the catch as wage payment to the fishermen who were employed for catching fish. The Group's net earnings were Rs. 8000/- (4500 in cash and about Rs. 3500 in kind). The cash earning was deposited in the group's bank account.



**SHG members who use the revamped pond (behind) for irrigation and fish Farming**

## Agriculture

Side by side with fish farming, most of these revamped water bodies are also being used as sources of irrigation in Rabi and summer season. Prior to the re-excavation of these water bodies cultivation of summer paddy and Rabi crops like wheat and mustard in Mallarpur-I GP area was very rare. Now the coverage of summer paddy is about 160 acres. Wheat, mustard and Rabi vegetables are cultivated in about 200 acres. Apart from the benefit accrued to the farmers from such increase in cropping intensity of lands, it has led to the generation of additional employment for agricultural labourers.

### Snapshots

- Madhusudan Mondal of Aamba village had cultivated wheat, mustard, potato and summer paddy in 2012-13. Two years ago, when irrigation facility was absent, coverage of these crops in his farm was less than half. This increase in coverage is due to the revamped ponds near his agricultural lands. The figures of coverage, production and labour employment in his lands during Rabi and summer are furnished in the following table:

**Pond irrigation and raising of crops in Rabi and summer seasons**

Subject		Name of crop			
		Wheat	Mustard	Potato	Boro paddy
Coverage (0.00acre)		2.5	1.5	0.24	0.80
Production (kg)	Total	2500	563	2500	1100*
	Per acre	1000	375	10417	1375*
Labour days required (number)	total	213	64	22	124
	Per acre	85	43	92	155

\*last season untimely rain had damaged summer paddy by 45%

- Bhubanmohan Banerjee of Fatepur village had been growing summer paddy in 2.40 acres of land for last two years using irrigation water from the revamped ponds nearby. Previously he was cultivating summer paddy in only 0.60 acre. This increase of coverage of summer paddy by 1.8 acres has been possible due to the enhanced capacity of the pond to hold water and release the same for irrigation. As a result of increase in cropped area during

summer season, labour requirement of the farm rose from 44 person days to 174 person days – a rise of 130 person days.

### LESSONS LEARNT

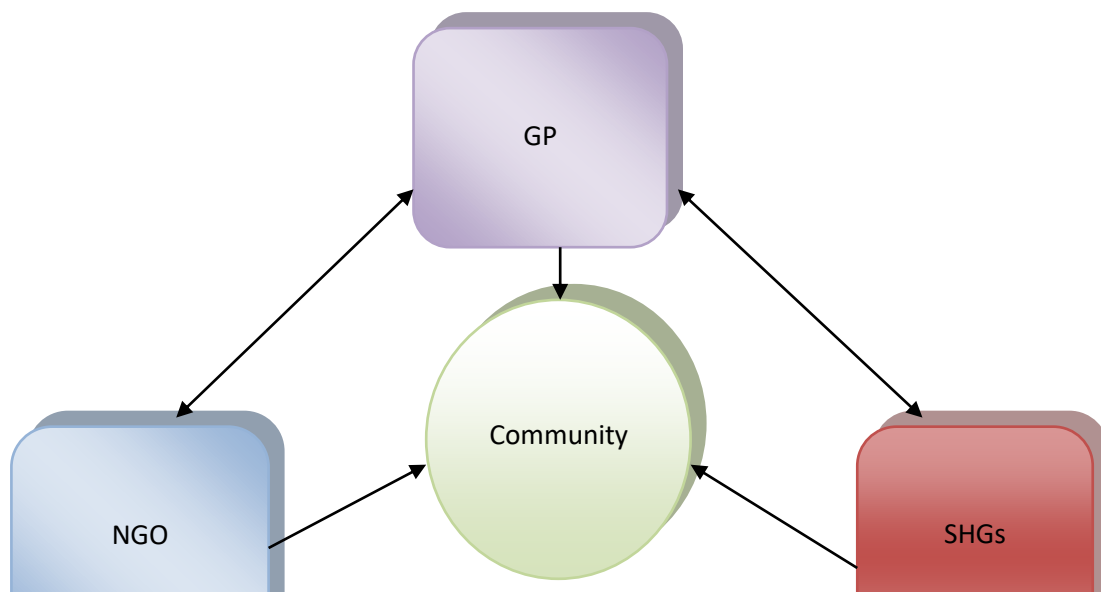
The foregoing stories of good practices show that Mallarpur-I GP stands out as a unit of local government. The factors, which seem to be responsible for its success, are as follows.

The leadership of the GP is excellent. The Pradhan has developed a strong camaraderie with the elected members as well as the employees of the panchayat which in turn had led to the formation of a team. In every innovative and complicated work, all the members of the team seemed to work together.

This gram panchayat work democratically. That is why it could keep the Gram Unnayan Samitis of the respective sansads active. In planning, prioritizing and executing development schemes with MGNREGA and other funds, the gram unnayan samitis provided all kinds of cooperation.

The most noteworthy feature of the style of working of this GP is that it has created synergy by enlisting the cooperation of the local NGO, namely Mallarpur Nai Suva, and the SHGs in planning and implementing development work. It is also worth mentioning that the said NGO took the initiative in forming most of the SHGs of the GP. The facilitation provided by the NGO has inspired the SHG members to work voluntarily for various development works. As this case study shows, without the help of the NGO and the SHGs the GP could not have implemented so many difficult projects.

**Diagram 1: Synergy between GP, NGO and SHG in Mallarpur 1 GP**



### **Annex 1: List of interviewed persons**

- Shri Dhirendramohun Bannerjee, Pradhan
- Rajjak Seth, Executive assistant
- Shri Subal Daam, Panchayat Assistant
- Smt. Mousumi Chatterjee, Sahayak
- Shri Dipankar Mandal, Engineer
- Shri Biswajit Mandal, Jeevika Sevak
- Shri Anupam Mukherjee, GRS
- Shri Angshuman Bhuimali, GP staff
- Shri Anukul Bagdi, GP staff
- Shri Sushil Kumar Das, Tax Collector
- Shri Sisir Kumar Sarkar, Tax Collector
- Shri Pritideb Dhar, Engineering Assistant
- Shri Bhubaneswar Bhuimali, GP temporary worker
- Shri Sadhan Sinha, Secretary, Mallarpur Nai Suva (NGO)
- Smt. Leela Mandal, SHG leader, SAHAI Bandhu
- Smt Bhagyabati Das, SHG member, SAHAI Bandhu,
- Smt Putul Sahani, Secretary Nibedita SHG Cluster
- Suradhani Maddi, Kiosk bank customer
- Bahamani Baski, Kiosk bank customer
- Patamoni Tudu, Kiosk bank customer
- Shri Pinaki Sinha, Kiosk Bank operator
- Various SAHAI beneficiaries – Sibudasi Let, Dayamoyee Let, Satyanarayan Dutta, Binapani Dutta, Shanti Let, Muchiram Sandhu, Kalidasi Let, Suchala Let
- Beneficiaries of revamped pond – Shidhdeswar Baul, Madhusudan Mandal, Raju Ghatak, Jayanta Bagdi, Dinanath Das, Bhuban Mohun Bannerjee.
- Villagers in various villages