

Study of Current Status of Food Security in AKRSP(I) intervention districts in Bihar

[Focus Group Discussion]

Report prepared by



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Introduction

AKRSP(I) initiated their activities in Bihar in the year 2008 in Muzaffarpur and Samastipur districts. Both the districts have their peculiarities particularly for their large land mass being submerged in water which is popularly known as *Chaur* land. This prevents the landowners from undertaking any major agricultural activities compelling them resort to other means of livelihoods. While the big landowners can afford to abandon their land and resort to other trading activities due to available financial resources with them, the small marginal as well as landless laborers constituting large number of population have to either remain hand to mouth or resort to enemas migration (male members only) which pose another set of problems in the quality of life of the people.

AKRSP(I) launched a study entitled “Study of Current Status of Food Security in AKRSP(I) intervention districts in Bihar” with the following objective;

To understand and describe current ‘on-farm and off-farm livelihood practices’ including agricultural production for consumption [cereals and vegetables/pulses etc and barriers pertaining to the income, consumption and its relation to levels of food security in target communities in the flood affected/water logged *Chaur* areas of selected blocks in Northern Bihar.

In order to understand the above mentioned objectives the following methodology was adopted;

1. Primary Data Collection
 - a) Through Focus Group Discussion
 - b) Sample Survey through structured interview schedule
2. Secondary Data Collection
 - a) Official records of AKRSP(I)
 - b) Records available from the government of Bihar
 - c) Records available from journals and internet

Focus Group Discussion

A total of 9 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was organized. However, 3 FGDs could be termed as informal since it was done at the most preliminary stage. Hence for record the following FGDs are being included as a part of the findings of the study.

FGD guidelines were prepared that was used during the sessions. The first section was to understand the general demographic and basic village infrastructural details. In the first section, the interpretation

would also reflect the participants profile as well as their access to some of the most basic and rudimentary services that ought to be available in any village. The section II of the guidelines was to understand the preliminaries of food security that would gauge the hunger index, their comparable situation to previous year and reasons for the difficulties to procure adequate food. The final question of this section was to understand some of the coping mechanism. The third section of the FGD concentrated on understanding how climate change has impacted on food security and the villagers take on the climate change. The fourth section was to understand various type of government support that they have received during the time of difficulties. The fifth section specifically concentrated on understanding the coping mechanism during the time of food shortage.

The study emphasizes on the understanding of food security particularly targeting the vulnerable groups. Studies internationally have shown that Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) happen to be groups who have been marginalized within the marginal. Hence in the last section of the FGD, an effort has been made to get some basic idea of the status of the PwDs within each of these communities and also understanding the villagers' attitude towards this group.

FGD – 1: Nunfar Tola

Facilitator: Mr. Samir Ghosh

Co-Facilitator: Naib Jahan

Host: AKRSP(I), Bihar

No. of Participants: 50

Discussion duration: 2 ½ hrs

District: Muzaffarpur

Block – Muraul

Panchayat - Vidhyajhap

Village – Kharauna

Tola – Nunfar

Date of FGD: 26th April 2012

I. Demographic details

Nunfar *Tola* which is a part of Kharauna village under Vidhyajaha Panchayat is a mixed population consisting of 101 households. The majority i.e 72 households belong to the Muslim community, the rest 31 belonging to SC and OBC category. 98 out of 101 households are BPL families. 95 families are landless and 6 families own land which is less than 1 acre. Most of them work as seasonal farm labourers. However, as high as 75% of them are forced to migrate to other States in search of livelihood.

There is an Anganwadi in Vidhyajaha which is approximately 2 km from the *Tola*. As a result no children from this village are able to go to Anganwadi. There is a primary school and a sub centre (health) located approximately ½ km from the *Tola*. The nearest bank as well as post office is in Muraul which is 12 km from the village and the nearest ration shop (PDS shop) is within 1 km. There are altogether 9 SHGs. 4 formed under SGSY, 4 under ICDS and 1 independent SHG formed by PwDs. Hand Pump is the major source of drinking water. There was not much difficulties expressed regarding the water. While majority of the villagers go for open defecation, there are 3 households having independent toilet.

II. Discussion on Experiences on Food Security

1. Did you or your family ever got hungry this past year? Can you tell me this experience?

The members present stated that 3 months in monsoon and 2 months in winter are their most difficult period when they experienced hunger. This is primarily due to non-availability of wage employment.

2. How do you compare your situation now as in previous years? Are you better or worse or the same? Why do you say so?

Most of them expressed that their experience was worst then what it was last year. Availability of employment was far more difficult and also the overall number of days when work was available had reduced.

3. Do you switch to less expensive foods? Which are they?

Yes, they had to switch to lesser quantity of food i.e. having meal only once a day and also lower quality food was purchased.

III. Discussion on Experiences on Climate Change

1. What do you understand by climate change?

As far as climate change was concern, their observation was untimely rain, too much of hail storms and also drought. All combined together posed serious problem in the household in terms of their economics.

2. Have you been affected by climate change? If so, how?

As far as the effect was concern, they specifically mentioned 3 points i.e. increased health hazard, water crisis and food crisis.

3. What do you think are the causes of this climate change?

When asked about causes of climate change they completely resorted to the will of god who creates the nature on which they have no control.

4. Where did you get this information about climate change?

While they did not mention regarding climate change but stated that they were experiencing differences in various nature's furry from childhood till now.

5. How did you cope with the effect of climate change in your farm?

While talking about coping with the effect of climate change they stated that they only work as farm labourers and fully dependent on others field. As and when work is available they work otherwise they don't.

6. Is there any opportunity offered by this climate change to you as a farmer?

None of the members present in the discussion stated that there was any opportunity offered due to climate change.

IV. Discussion on Government Support

1. Are there governments agencies that tried to help you so you can be more food secure and adapt to climate change? If so, who are they and how did they help you?

In the aspect of which agency of the government helped them during period of crisis, they stated that it was BDO, Ward Member and the Panchayat Office.

2. What do you think are the facilitating factors for the governments' assistance?

In this community almost all of them have a job card under MGNREGA and most of them have been benefited to some extent. It was also noted that 3 of the members present in the discussion received employment for 100 days. However, none of them have received their payment in full since they are never paid their full wages by the contractors. Hence MGNREGA was the facilitating agency from the government side.

3. Are you satisfied with their assistance? Why or why not?

On the level of their satisfaction, they stated that while work was available under MGNREGA, it was definitely far from sustaining them. In addition, there are serious corruptions in the form of asking for money as well as liquor.

4. What do you think should government do to help you be more food secure, and to handle the effects of climate change?

All the villagers present unanimously mentioned that at least 6 months of work under MGNREGA should be made available to them to sustain their families. For the other part of 6 months, they were confident of being able to get employment in other States as migration is very common and accepted norm.

5. What do you think you should do as a village, or as farmers' group, to be more food secure and to handle the effects of climate change?

To this they clearly specified that the food availability was less due to climatic factor. For example last year the winter was prolonged by a additional month which cause them increased difficulties.

V. Food Shortage

1. Tell me about the types of foods (e.g. different grains) you eat when there is a food shortage. How do they compare to the types of food you eat when there is enough?

On the types of food they mentioned that most of them have rotis and a little rice. They also eat dal such as *khesari* (most of the time massor, tur and occasionally moong). Potato is again commonly consumed every day. As an on they are able to afford other vegetables they do so specially on Sundays. However the women members also mentioned that they are able to fetch some leafy vegetables from the field which is grown in the wild.

2. Do you reduce the number of people to feed by sending family members elsewhere? If so, who do you typically send away? Where do they go?

The food habit is reduced and during serious crisis either they eat rice and onion or roti and onion with no vegetables and dal to follow. During the days of scarcity and difficulty, this community also stated that they eat one meal a day.

3. Do you get food from friends or relatives? If so, do they expect you to pay them back?

It is common to get food from relatives and neighbors. They all unanimously said that the villagers help each other during the time of crisis since all of them understand and go through similar situations at some point.

4. Do you purchase food on credit? Do you gather wild food or hunt?

Purchasing food on credit is very common, leading them to deeper debt. Also gathering food from neighboring areas sometimes going to the water log, *Chaur* land and picking up some fish is not uncommon.

5. Do you skip entire days without eating? If so, how many days do you go without eating?
No, they do not have to skip entire day's meal and do manage to have one meal a day throughout the year.
6. Do you restrict the food that adults eat in order for small children to eat?
Yes, the adults restrict themselves by taking lesser quantities of meal or sometimes skip the meal in order to feed their children.
7. Do you feed working members of HH at the expense of non-working members?
Women are the worst sufferer during the time of difficulties as she is the last one to feed her and give preference to the male folk and the children.

VI. Disability

1. How many PwDs do you think your village has? (VI, HH, OH, Multiple, MR, MI, Autism)
There are altogether 15 PwDs in their *Tola* that they readily identify.
2. Do you know of any PwD going to school? If so how many?
One of them go to school.
3. Does PwDs in your village have disability certificate?
3 PwDs have been given disability certificate. Out of them 2 of the PwDs were present during the discussion.
4. Can you name some of the Govt. schemes available for PwDs? Has any PwD received any benefit in your knowledge?
Nobody was aware about the facilities and scheme offered by the government.
5. Do you think that PwDs should work and support their family? If so, what kind of work? (for men, for women)
This question generated a good amount of discussion in the community. Most of the women and men strongly felt that the PwD member should be self sufficient and live a normal life. They also mentioned that preferences should be given first so that they were

able to stand on their feet. They reiterated their support for them and were curious in knowing what were the schemes available for the PwDs and how could they be benefited. All of them unanimously stated that the SHG formed by PwDs should be given adequate help by the government.

FGD – 2: Paswan Tola, Titra

Facilitator: Mr. Samir Ghosh

Co-Facilitator: Naib Jahan

Host: AKRSP(I), Bihar

No. of Participants: 65

Discussion duration: 2 hrs

District: Muzaffarpur

Block – Muraul

Panchayat -Pilkhi

Village - Darmagatpur

Tola – Paswan Tola, Titra

Date: 26th April 2012

I. Demographic details

The discussion started with understanding some of the basics of the village. A good number of 65 to 70 villagers were present during the discussion that included majority women followed by men and children. The composition was a good mix of all age that included some very old men and women of the village, who were helpful in substantiating the village scenario of yester years.

There are a total of 161 households out of which approximately 140 households belong to BPL family. The occupational pattern seems to be mixed with small farming activities. The highest landholding pattern was between 1 to 3 acres (3 families), 78 families have landholdings of less than 1 acre and 80 families were landless. Thus majority of them were labourers with 60-70% seasonal migration to Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat and Punjab.

The village has an overcrowded Anganwadi with more than 100 children outside who are unable to attend the centre. The villagers expressed in their strong voice for starting additional Anganwadis to accommodate all children in the village. There is a primary school and a health sub centre located ½ km distance from the *Tola*. There is a nationalized bank which is located in Pilkhi which is approximately 3.5 kms and the post office is in Muraul which is 12 kms from the *Tola*. The drinking water source is through hand pump. There are both individual as well as government hand pumps located in various part of the *Tola*. The major practice of toilet is open defecation with negligible number of household toilets.

There are a total of 11 SHGs – 2 formed under SGSY, 3 under ICDS and 6 others that include the Community Based Savings Group (CBSGs) formed by AKRSP(I).

II. Discussion on Experiences on Food Security

1. Did you or your family ever get hungry this past year? Can you tell me this experience?

On the first question, all the villagers unanimously specified that they do not have any food problem as such and there is self sufficiency in every household as far as quantum of food is concerned. Most of the households have 3 meals a day.

2. How do you compare your situation now as in previous years? Are you better or worse or the same? Why do you say so?

The situation for majority of the villagers have remained unchanged with income level remaining static and expenses going up due to price rise. Thus there has not been any savings or money kept for emergency purpose. The men folks migrating to other states for work continue to remain as an accepted phenomenon. The community has good number of skill laborers such as mason, carpenters, centering mason and packaging personnel. Thus they are able to get employment at various construction sites fetching them reasonable money to support their family at home.

3. Why did you think food was not available in your home during that time?

Since there was generally no scarcity of food in the community, this question was approached differently. It was noticed that amongst the children who were present in the FGD along with their mother looked visibly underfed and malnourished. The facilitator used the measuring nutrition band which indicates the level of malnourishment amongst children from 0 to 24 months.

Scanned image of measuring band

On random check of 7 children, only 1 child was in the normal range. 4 children were severely malnourished and were in the red zone which means they are in the grade 4 category whereas remaining 2 were in the grade 3 and grade 2 category. While discussing the status combining the question of food availability verses such severe malnourishment, they stated that while food was available, they were unable to afford nutritious food. In addition the children remained ill most of the time. It was also observed that the mothers were also under fed and visibly looked anemic. Hence it can be noted that whereas

availability may be there, the right kind of food for the purpose of proper nutrition particularly at the developmental age was certainly a problem.

4. Do you switch to less expensive foods? Which are they?

On this question most of them stated that the general pattern is to eat less expensive food such as dal, rice and potato, vegetable was consumed sparingly specially due to sudden increase in the price since last one year. Meat, fish, eggs etc are consumed only on occasions. Some of the better of families consume these products on Sundays.

III. Discussion on Experiences on Climate Change

1. What do you understand by climate change?

When asked about the question regarding their understanding about climate change, most of them could understand when explained in terms of the erratic monsoon. The topic was discussed mostly targeting the elderly people to share their experience of childhood till date and the behaviour of weather. Three such persons were present in the group who were in the age range of 70 and above. They were able to explain to us regarding the erratic behaviour of monsoon which brings extreme uncertainty nowadays due to its unpredictability. Earlier they had not experienced drought conditions which have become phenomena of today.

2. Have you been affected by climate change? If so, how?

The biggest difference of the effect of climate change that they observe was that of the increased disease pattern. Health problem seem to have grown due to which the families become indebted and most of the time the money is taken on loan from the moneylender with high interest.

3. What do you think are the causes of this climate change?

On the aspect of causes on climate change, most of the villagers were unable to give any reasons and thought that it was just a nature's phenomena and god's will. However, some of them did mention that industrial pollution is one of the factors. They also further stated that they worship the trees and pray to the rain god for timely rain.

4. Where did you get this information about climate change?

No information as such.

5. How did you cope with the effect of climate change in your farm?

Most of them being agricultural labourer could not answer this question except that they were unable to get work in others' field due to reduced agricultural activity and majority of the land being designated as *Chaur* land.

6. Is there any opportunity offered by this climate change to you as a farmer?

While they did not seek any additional opportunity offered by the effect of climate change, the level of migration has increased and there was a visible change in their occupational pattern from farm labourer to constructional labourer.

IV. Discussion on Government Support

1. Are there governments agencies that tried to help you so you can be more food secure during the difficult period?

Though this community did not specifically mentioned regarding food crises, they stated that there were different types of help from the Panchayat in the village and in particular in MGNREGA was of help. However, on MGNREGA there has been a mixed reaction from the community. While a few stated that they have received work for 70-80 days, the average for the village has been approximately 25 days. Almost all the villagers did not know the provisions of MGNREGA in totality. The gap particularly was seen on the rights prospective i.e. if the government is unable to provide 100 days work, payment would still have to be made in lieu as compensation to one who has demanded the work.

2. Are you satisfied with their assistance? Why or why not?

The satisfaction level expressed was a unanimous "NO" particular reason cited was corruption.

3. What do you think should government do to help you be more food secure?

Once again on this question, the villagers stated that adequate number of days under MGNREGA must be ensured to them without having to go through the difficulties that they

face now. Some of the villagers also stated that the government could consider starting small industries where they could get permanent wage employment.

4. What do you think you should do as a village, or as farmers' group, to be more food secure and to handle the effects of climate change?

Most of the villagers stated that storing of food could be one of the methods to meet the challenges of difficult time which they currently do. However their houses are small and become difficult for creating additional storage place within the house. In addition there are problem of rats that consume their grains.

V. Food Shortage

1. What are all the ways you get more food in times of food shortage?

Since there was not much felt need of food shortage in this community, we omitted this question.

2. Tell us about the types of foods (e.g. different grains) you eat when there is a food shortage. How do they compare to the types of food you eat when there is enough?

The main grains consumed are;

- i. wheat, rice and maize
- ii. masor dal, moong (occasionally) and khesari
- iii. potato, vegetables (as per season), leafy vegetables
- iv. milk consumed by children only by relatively well of families
- v. meat, fish and egg occasionally by well of families and rarely (festivals only) by others.

3. Tell me about the quantity of food you eat when there is a food shortage. How does it compare to the quantity you eat where there is enough food?

Since there was not much felt need of food shortage in this community, we omitted this question.

4. Do you get food from friends or relatives? If so, do they expect you to pay them back?

Since there was not much felt need of food shortage in this community, we omitted this question.

5. Do you purchase food on credit?

Purchasing food on credit though seem to be a common practice, the difficulty level was very high for 50% of the villagers.

6. Do you limit portion size at mealtimes? If so by how much?

Since there was not much felt need of food shortage in this community, we omitted this question.

7. Do you reduce number of meals eaten in a day? If so, how many meals do you eat per day?

Since there was not much felt need of food shortage in this community, we omitted this question.

8. Do you skip entire days without eating? If so, how many days do you go without eating?

Since there was not much felt need of food shortage in this community, we omitted this question.

9. Do you restrict the food that adults eat in order for small children to eat?

Since there was not much felt need of food shortage in this community, we omitted this question.

10. Do you feed working members of HH at the expense of non-working members?

Since there was not much felt need of food shortage in this community, we omitted this question.

11. Do you ration the money you have and buy prepared food?

Since there was not much felt need of food shortage in this community, we omitted this question.

VI. Disability

1. How many PwDs do you think your village has? (VI, HH, OH, Multiple, MR, MI, Autism)

There were altogether 14 households as they could count which had PwD members in the family belonging to different categories.

2. Do you know of any PwD going to school? If so how many? If not, why
None of the PwDs according to their knowledge were going to school.
3. Do PwDs in your village have disability certificate?
Only 1 person has a disability certificate
4. Can you name some of the Govt. schemes available for PwDs? Has any PwD received any benefit in your knowledge?
No knowledge regarding government schemes for PwDs.
5. Do you think that PwDs should work and support their family? If so, what kind of work? (for men, for women)
While most of the villagers expressed that all PwDs should become self-supportive and have a stable livelihood, they were unable to express how the PwDs be engaged in the livelihood process and also in the education field.

Special Remarks:

1. In the beginning of the FGD with this group, the women who were more vocal than the men expressed that the community needs to give adequate importance and education to their children. They also stated that there is serious parental negligence of sending their children to school. One of the women, who was a member of the village education committee, wanted to reiterate in this gathering that parents need to take interest in sending their children regularly to school not only for mid-day meal but also for their overall development.
2. It was quite interesting to note that the villagers discuss openly regarding gender discrimination and giving importance to girl child. They expressed their deep concern on depleting gender ratio and said that they do not want to create a situation of Hariyana in Bihar. Coming out very openly many men folk stated that girls were better than boys as they are always worried about their parents and visit them whenever required. Most of them also very strongly mentioned that dowry system is the main cause of preference to male child. They also

were very proud that nowadays they have decided to do away with the dowry system in their community and most recently and there were 5 such marriages which included both girls and boys – nobody taking or demanding dowry.

FGD – 3: Ram Tola

Facilitator: Mr. Samir Ghosh

Co-Facilitator: Naib Jahan

Host: AKRSP(I), Bihar

No. of Participants: 25

Discussion duration: 2 hrs

District: Muzaffarpur

Block – Muraul

Panchayat –Pilkhi

Village – Titra

Tola – Ram Tola

Date: 13th May 2012

I. Demographic details

Ram *Tola* is a part of Pilkhi Panchayat of Titra village has 100 households with 75 households belonging to BPL families. It's a *Tola* of 100% landless community who are engaged as seasonal farm laborers and contract laborers when employment is not available in the village. Almost all of them migrate to all the other states to work that include West Bengal, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Almost all of them work as unskilled laborers. There is an Anganwadi in the village and a primary school just within the vicinity. The FGD was conducted in the primary school veranda. There was also a middle school and a health sub centre located within 1 km. There is a nationalized bank is located in 3 kms away so is the ration shop which is opened only for 3 days a month. The nearest post office however is within ½ km. the main source of drinking water is hand pump that include a large number of hand pump within the household. There are altogether 12 SHGs, 5 of which were formed under SGSY and the remaining 7 CBSGs formed by AKRSP(I). the general habit of toilet is open defecation, even before the discussion was started there was an eagerness among the villagers for having individual toilets constructed in their house. They were very insistent on the representative from AKRSP(I) who was the co-facilitator of the FGD to give top priority to their village for construction of toilets. Hence the initial part of the discussion almost ½ hr dominated this topic.

Occupationally, their traditional association has been with hides, whether it is tanning or production of leather goods. It is, however, not necessary that their occupation be always associated with hides. They were cultivators and agricultural labourers in much larger numbers (Singh 1993: 301-22).

The Chamar caste has thrown up political leaders of national stature like Jagjivan Ram and Bhola Paswan Shastri (from Bihar) in the past, and Kanshi Ram (from Punjab) in the present times. Bhola Paswan Shastri was thrice Chief Minister, and even held a cabinet rank at the Centre. Ms. Mayawati of Uttar Pradesh, was the first ever Scheduled Caste woman to become a Chief Minister of any State. In Bihar, they have been involved with the radical Maoist Naxalite Movement.

There were nearly 3m Chamars in Bihar in 1981, of which overwhelming numbers of workers were agricultural labourers (77%) and substantial numbers were cultivators (13%). Only 3.5 percent were engaged in manufacturing and processing. This indicates a drastic decline in their traditional craft (Singh 1993: 304-6). Chamar, in Bihar, accepted water from Brahman, Rajput, Bania, Hajam, Turah and such other communities, but did not accept it from Dom and Muslim (306). The Census of 1981 reported a low literacy rate of 11.52 percent, with female literacy at 2.36 percent and male at 20.51 percent.

They generally used firewood, kerosene oil and cowdung cakes as fuel resources. For credit, they showed dependence on moneylenders and shopkeepers. Though electricity was generally out of their reach, radio listening was common. For health and medical needs they continued to rely heavily on indigenous resources (306).

II. Discussion on Experiences on Food Security

1. Did you or your family ever get hungry this past year? Can you tell me this experience?

The community though did not have to go to the phase of hunger; the average number of meals they have is twice a day.

2. How do you compare your situation now as in previous years? Are you better or worse or the same? Why do you say so?

The current year has been definitely more difficult due to price rise, in addition there has been outbreak of disease in the village which left them with severe cash crunch.

3. Why did you think food was not available in your home during that time?

Due to not having money in hand and also because of the problem of ration shop opening only 3 times a month the possibility of storing foodgrains was almost nil. This results in their remaining in difficult conditions although.

III. Discussion on Experiences on Climate Change

1. What do you understand by climate change and effect of climate change?

Though none of the members could clearly discuss regarding climate change, they did mention about observing delay in rain as well as the erratic behaviour of monsoon. They also stated their observation regarding too much or very less rainfall.

2. What do you think are the causes of this climate change?

Taking loan from the local moneylender is the most common form of coping up strategy in this community as well.

IV. Discussion on Government Support

1. Are there governments agencies that tried to help you so you can be more food secure and adapt to climate change? If so, who are they and how did they help you? What do you think are the facilitating factors for the governments' assistance?

On asking whether there was any help in the government help during the time of crisis, they categorically stated the indifference attitude of Sarpanch as well as the block officials. However, the community has been benefited under the IAY with as high as 60 out of 75 BPL families house built under the scheme.

2. Are you satisfied with their assistance? Why or why not?

Though the villagers expected work under NREGA (all the families having job card), not a single person from the village have received employment under the scheme.

V. Food Shortage and Coping Strategy

1. What are all the ways you get more food in times of food shortage?

The difficult period that they mentioned regarding food shortage was from August till February. During this period they had to rely on one another's help in the community as well as going for additional loan to sustain themselves. Health hazard happens to be one of their prime concerns which is severe particularly during July to September. Due to additional expenditure on health during this period there are serious repercussion on their dietary habits.

2. Tell me about the types of foods (e.g. different grains) you eat when there is a food shortage. How do they compare to the types of food you eat when there is enough?

As far as their type of food is concerned, their staple food earlier use to be rice which still continues to be their first preference but have shifted to wheat as wheat is more affordable. In addition potato is the most commonly consumed ingredient meal followed with khesari dal. Other vegetable eating habits are not as much since it is difficult to afford.

3. Do you purchase food on credit?

Purchasing food on credit is also a common practice. In addition eating smaller portion by the adult to feed children as a practice was taken by most of the villagers.

VI. Disability

1. How many PwDs do you think your village has? (VI, HH, OH, Multiple, MR, MI, Autism)

The number of PwDs through a general counting came to 20, though they couldn't describe the category.

2. Do you know of any PwD going to school? If so how many? If not, why
3 of the PwDs they could identify who went to school.

3. Does PwDs in your village have disability certificate?

None of them were aware regarding the provision of disability certificate nor they knew anyone among them had one.

4. Can you name some of the Govt. schemes available for PwDs? Has any PwD received any benefit in your knowledge?

They were by n large unaware of any government schemes for PwDs.

5. Do you think that PwDs should work and support their family? If so, what kind of work? (for men, for women)

To this question most of them stated in affirmation though did not have any specific idea of how to go about it.

FGD – 4: Dhobi Tola

Facilitator: Mr. Samir Ghosh

Co-Facilitator: Niraj

Host: AKRSP(I), Bihar

No. of Participants: 35

Discussion duration: 2 hrs

District: Samastipur

Block – Pusa

Panchayat –Mohammadpur Koari

Village – Koari

Tola – Dhobi Tola

Date: 15th May 2012

I. Demographic details

Dhobi *Tola* is a part of Mohammadpur Koari Panchayat is dominated by Muslim community. There are altogether 200 households, out of which 17 of them belong to BPL families. Approximately 10% of the population is engaged in agriculture activities in their own land, 5 households have people working in the government sector. The rest are seasonal farm laborers who also migrate outside the state for their livelihood mostly to Haryana, Punjab and Delhi. As far as landholding pattern is concern there are 100 families who are landless, 80 families having landholdings less than 1 acre and 20 families have land between 1-2 acres. There is an Anganwadi, a primary school in the village and a secondary school which is approximately at 4 kms distance. There is a PHC in a distance of 2 kms from the village. The nearest bank is within 6 kms and the post office is within a km surprisingly the ration shop is in 2 kms distance. There are 2 CBSGs formed by AKRSP(I). Sources of drinking water are hand pump and a dug well. This is a community with severe shortage of drinking water. There are altogether 12 household toilets while others go for open defecation.

II. Discussion on Experiences on Food Security

1. Did you or your family ever got hungry this past year? Can you tell me this experience?

On the question of food shortage they stated that rainy season and in summer people take only 1 meal a day. Though occasion of without meal has not occurred, eating less and eating anything available is very common.

2. How do you compare your situation now as in previous years? Are you better or worse or the same? Why do you say so?

The response to this question was very emphatic and stated their situation was worst then last year due to high rate of foodgrains and consumables as compared to their income which remained unchanged.

3. Why did you think food was not available in your home during that time?

Due to lack of financial resources and erratic income pattern there was no possibility of storing foodgrains.

III. Discussion on Experiences on Climate Change

1. What do you understand by climate change and its effect?

Their experience suggest that there has been erratic behaviour of rainfall sometimes extreme that it causes flood and while other time it is a drought situation. They also stated regarding prolonged winter that causes severe difficulties. This directly affects their livelihood pattern particularly availability of food.

2. How did the farmers' group cope with the effect of climate change in the whole village?

Since 100 families own some amount of land they mentioned regarding their agriculture practices and have started taking *maize* as one of the crop. Others who have very small plot of land give it as grazing land for cattle to earn money.

IV. Discussion on Government Support

1. Are there governments agencies that tried to help you so you can be more food secure and adapt to climate change? If so, who are they and how did they help you?

Though there were no specific government agencies such as block office or Panchayat coming forward to help them. They do know about MGNREGA and most of them had a job card. However, only 3 families have received 19 days payment for their employment for 37 days.

2. What do you think are the facilitating factors for the governments' assistance? Are you satisfied with their assistance?

IAY is definitely one of the most important facilitating factor of the government assistance which most of them looking forward to. However, their satisfaction level with the

government scheme seems to be as usual low as only 17 out of 200 families benefitted by it.

V. Food Shortage and Coping Strategy

1. What are all the ways you get more food in times of food shortage?

Taking advances and loans was one of the most common ways to cope from the food shortage. The loans that they take are as high as 130%. With the formation of CBSGs there has been a lot of relief.

2. Tell me about the types of foods (e.g. different grains) you eat when there is a food shortage. How do they compare to the types of food you eat when there is enough?

Their food habit mainly is chapatti made out of maize, rice, potato, pumpkin, bottle gourd and leafy vegetables. Meat and fish is eaten once in 2 months.

3. Do you purchase food on credit?

Purchasing food on credit also seems to be very common in this community. Possibility of arranging any other vegetable from the forest or in the vicinity was not a practice in this community. However during summer season, people do go to the forest to pluck raw mangoes.

VI. Disability

1. How many PwDs do you think your village has? (VI, HH, OH, Multiple, MR, MI, Autism)

There seem to be quite high incidence of disability in this community. Though they could not categorize the PwDs, they were able to count 53 persons in their community who had disability. They also stated that one of the families had 3 children and all of them had disability.

2. Do you know of any PwD going to school? If so how many? If not, why

Only 2 children according to their knowledge went to school.

3. Does PwDs in your village have disability certificate?

The members of the group could not tell if any of the PwD members had disability certificate. There were 6 members who had PwD as family member stated that none of them had certificates.

4. Can you name some of the Govt. schemes available for PwDs? Has any PwD received any benefit in your knowledge?

None of the members knew regarding the benefits that they could get from the government schemes.

5. Do you think that PwDs should work and support their family? If so, what kind of work? (for men, for women)

While everybody agreed that the PwD member should be self sufficient and get all the benefits, nobody was aware of how to go about it.

FGD – 5: Musahar Tola

Facilitator: Mr. Samir Ghosh

Co-Facilitator: Niraj

Host: AKRSP(I), Bihar

No. of Participants: 27

Discussion duration: 2 hrs

District: Samastipur

Block – Tajpur

Panchayat -Rajwa

Village – Chakmansoor

Tola – Musahar

Date: 27th April 2012

I. Demographic details

The Musahar consists of three sub-groups, the Bhagat, Sakatiya and Turkahia. Each of these clans are endogamous. The Musahar were once rat catchers, but this activity has been abandoned. They are now mainly landless agricultural labourers. They are one of the most marginalized groups in India, and have suffered discrimination. Although the Musahar are Hindu, they believe in a number of tribal deities.

In Bihar, the Musahar are employed in the stone quarries of the state. Many have also emigrated to the states of Punjab and Haryana, and are employed as agricultural labourers. They speak Bhojpur, but many now have working knowledge of Hindi. The Musahar are found throughout Bihar.

In the rural areas, Musahar are primarily bonded agricultural labourers, but often go without work for as much as eight months in a year. Children work alongside their parents in the fields or as rag pickers, earning as little as 25 to 30 rupees daily. The Musahar literacy rate is 3 percent, but falls below 1 percent for the women. By some estimates, as many as 85 percent of some villages of Musahars suffer from malnutrition and with access to health centres scant, diseases such as malaria and kala-azar, the most severe form of Leishmaniasis, are prevalent.

Besides eating rats, the Musahars are known for producing a good and cheap alcohol so not surprisingly alcoholism is rampant among the community, particularly the men.

A total number of 27 villagers participated in the discussion with 15 women, 10 children and 2 men. The composition was mostly of young and middle aged women and with 2 men who were under the age of 40. There were school going children and a few who were with their mothers below 2

years. All the adult men and women were illiterate. However the children present who were of school going age were seen in their school uniform.

There are a total of 60 households all belonging to BPL category. The occupational pattern was homogeneous with all being farm laborers. Since employment within the vicinity is extremely obscure, 90% of the men worked as unskilled contract labourers. Migration is not much of a phenomena with this community as most of them look for their wage labour in Samastipur district or other bordering districts. The entire village belongs to landless category.

There is no Anganwadi in the village neither a health centre. There is a primary school located within the village. The nearest bank is in Tajpur which is 4 kms away and a post office in Rajwa Panchayat which is within 1 km. Rajwa also happens to be their nearest ration shop. There is only 1 SHG formed by AKRSP(I) as Community Based Savings Group (CBSG). Drinking water source though is hand pump; there is water shortage particularly during peak summer. It's a village with open defecation. A community toilet was built under Total Sanitation Campaign which remains unused.

II. Discussion on Experiences on Food Security

1. Did you or your family ever get hungry this past year? Can you tell me this experience?

This being a community of extreme poor, availability of food is a serious problem. The problem is severe especially during the 4 months of rainy season when it is extremely difficult for the men folk to get any employment in the adjoining districts when most of the construction works become negligible and no engagement as farm labour in the villages.

2. How do you compare your situation now as in previous years? Are you better or worse or the same? Why do you say so?

The situations remain almost unchanged for them and were hardly able to express anything specific when compared to previous year. The scarcity goes to such an extent that on an average they eat only 1 meal a day for 5 months in a year. There are times when the adult family members go without a meal as they try to accommodate the children first so that they don't go hungry.

3. Why did you think food was not available in your home during that time?

To this question they stated that they do not have any spare resources to store food coupled with no ready cash coming at home during this period.

4. Do you switch to less expensive foods? Which are they?

This question was omitted since their basic food basket itself happen to be extremely meager and scanty even during normal conditions hence question of switching to any other type of food which is less expensive did not make much of a sense.

III. Discussion on Experiences on Climate Change

Mushahar community falls in the category of *Mahadalits*, who happen to be extremely marginalized and ignorant. The questions related to climate change did not make any sense to them. When we were trying to ask these questions, we realized that they could not comprehend or analyzed any peripheral subject such as climate change and its impact on their life. For them it was a question of tomorrow's meal. However, only thing that they mentioned was that due to less rainfall in the *Chaur* area, there has been some increased agricultural activities by the land owners which has brought some degree of labour employment for them.

IV. Discussion on Government Support

1. Are there governments agencies that tried to help you so you can be more food secure?

As far as government support was concerned, they could relate it only with the public distribution system (Ration shop). Since all of them have BPL card, they were able to get 13 kg of rice, 9 kg of wheat and 2.75 litres of kerosene. However, many a times it is difficult for them to arrange for money when grains are available at these shops.

2. Are you satisfied with government assistance?

All the families stated that they were given small plot of land by the government in accordance with the announcement of the Chief Minister. The land was allotted for making houses under Indira Awas Yojana (IAY). However, the IAY has not yet been implemented. None of their family members are enrolled under MGNREGA and has a job card. Hence they were satisfied with the fact that the government has at least allotted a piece of land to

them but were dissatisfied on the account that neither houses were made nor they had any sources of livelihood.

V. Food Shortage and Coping Strategy

1. What are all the ways you get more food in times of food shortage?

Most of the time they help one another within the community. Children and women visit the house of the big land owners and work in lieu of food. They also buy foodgrains on credit and the credit burden keeps increasing. This keeps them in perpetual debt.

2. Tell me about the types of foods (e.g. different grains) you eat when there is a food shortage. How do they compare to the types of food you eat when there is enough?

Their major food is rice and wheat. While they prefer to eat rice, wheat comes cheaper. Hence now rice is being replaced with wheat. Along with this they eat potato and the cheapest variety of dal being available known as *Khesari*. Vegetables are eaten only once a month and sometimes it is replaced with meat.

VI. Disability

1. How many PwDs do you think your village has? (VI, HH, OH, Multiple, MR, MI, Autism)

The total number of PwDs that they could count was 14, all belonging to different households.

2. Do you know of any PwD going to school? If so how many?

They did not have knowledge about any PwD going to school.

3. Does PwDs in your village have disability certificate?

Nobody has heard regarding disability certificate.

4. Can you name some of the Govt. schemes available for PwDs? Has any PwD received any benefit in your knowledge?

Nobody had knowledge regarding any government scheme for PwDs.

FGD – 6: Sahani Tola

Facilitator: Mr. Samir Ghosh

Co-Facilitator: Niraj

Host: AKRSP(I), Bihar

No. of Participants: 28

Discussion duration: 2 hrs

District: Samastipur

Block – Pusa

Panchayat –Kuboliram

Village - Khaira

Tola – Sahani

Date: 27th April 2012

I. Demographic details

Sahani *Tola* of Khaira village in Kuboliram Panchayat was included in the second phase of AKRSP(I)'s work. There are altogether 160 households in Sahani *Tola*, out of which 120 belong to BPL families. While entering Khaira village most of the households on both sides of the road were well made *Pacca* house depicting a look of well to do village. Our vehicle stopped at a point from where we had to walk across the village to approach Sahani Tola. From this point onwards there was a distinct difference between left and right side of the road. While on the left side there were all well built colored *Pacca* houses whereas on the right side houses were thatched and looked extremely vulnerable to rain, thunder storms and other vagaries of the weather. We walked across and took a right turn to enter the habitat known as Sahani *Tola*, only to find that almost all houses were similar with minor variation i.e. some had a concrete courtyard others made out of mud but very neat and clean. It was a day when majority of the villagers had gone to attend some marriage function as it was a day after *Akshay Tithiya*, an auspicious day according to Hindu religion for starting a good work. Under the circumstances, we were wondering whether it would be possible for us to sit down and discuss on the topics we were intending to. However, on meeting one of the active community members, he stated that let us sit down with whatever members we could gather. And to our surprise in about 15 minutes wait there were more than 20 people gathered and when included with children the general figure counted 28 leaving out the small babies in the lap of their respective mothers.

The popular history regarding this community go to suggest that there was a gentlemen named *Suresh Sahani* who took a revolt against the rich land owners which became a potential threat to

the government system, who were indirect supporters of this feudal structure. Subsequently, the struggle was crushed due to the death of the leader, who was supposedly murdered by the interest group. The police force came to their optimum atrocity by putting most of his followers behind bars, beating them ruthlessly and subsequently putting false charges against them as thieves. Since the entire community was part of this struggle, the entire community was branded as community of thieves and dacoits ultimately ostracizing them from the mainstream.

As far as occupation goes a few of them are engaged in shared cropping while majority of them work as contract laborers. 80% of the men folk migrate to Nashik and Pune as skilled and semi-skilled workers. A good number of them are masons and carpenters who work in the construction industry in Pune while the rest go to Nashik in the packaging industry of grapes. About 140 families are landless whereas 20 families have land less than 1 acre. There is an Anganwadi in their *Tola* and a primary, middle and secondary school in Khaira village. There is a health sub centre within ½ km, the nearest bank and post office is within 3 kms on Pusa road. The ration shop is also within the vicinity. There was 1 SHG formed under SGSY and 2 CBSGs formed by AKRSP(I). Hand pump is the major source of drinking water installed by the Panchayat. 2 households have their own toilet while the rest goes for open defecation.

II. Discussion on Experiences on Food Security

1. Did you or your family ever got hungry this past year? Can you tell me this experience?

Most of them stated that though they do not go hungry but do face severe problem for 2 months of rainy season and 2 months during winter.

2. How do you compare your situation now as in previous years? Are you better or worse or the same? Why do you say so?

The situation as compare to last year remains unchanged as per as the quantum of money earned by the family but difficulties have increased due to shooting price rise of the essentials of the daily life.

3. Do you switch to less expensive foods? Which are they?

Switching to less expensive and bare essential food is one of the coping mechanism they used during these 4 months of difficulties. They also stated that taking advances from the contractor to manage difficult time is one of the common method used for coping

III. Discussion on Experiences on Climate Change

1. What do you understand by climate change?

The villagers stated that there is a visible experience of increase in temperature during summer, winters have become more prolong and the onset of monsoon is delayed and erratic.

2. Have you been affected by climate change? If so, how?

Higher expenditure on irrigation due to less rainfall. Previously the *Chaur* land used to be submerged into the water for a longer period allowing them to do some fishing which is no more possible.

3. Where did you get this information about climate change?

Though nobody got any official details or even read about the subject but they were speaking out of their own experience over a period of last 10-15 years.

IV. Discussion on Government Support

1. Are there governments agencies that tried to help you so you can be more food secure and adapt to climate change? If so, who are they and how did they help you?

Regarding the government support, they mentioned that the job card under NREGA is available to few though none of them have got work. Foodgrains and kerosene is available under the PDS.

2. Are you satisfied with their assistance? Why or why not?

There was a high degree of dissatisfaction with the government system particularly of NREGA, IAY and also micro-credit.

3. What do you think should government do to help you be more food secure, and to handle the effects of climate change?

The government should ensure work particularly during the rainy and winter season.

V. Food Shortage and coping strategy

1. What are all the ways you get more food in times of food shortage?

The main method of coping up with food shortage is taking advances from the contractors and supporting the family. Since majority of them migrate to Maharashtra, almost all of them work with the same contractor for last several years. Hence they advance them the money before the work season starts.

2. Tell me about the types of foods (e.g. different grains) you eat when there is a food shortage. How do they compare to the types of food you eat when there is enough?

Rice, wheat, masor dal, rahar dal and occasionally khesari. They also eat potato, pumpkin, bottle gourd and ridge gourd. Meat and egg is consumed only during festivals or once in 2-3 months.

3. Do you purchase food on credit?

Purchasing foodgrains on credit also happens to be a common practice in this community.

4. Do you gather wild food or hunt?

Gathering of vegetables particularly leafy vegetables is done frequently from the nearby places.

5. Do you reduce number of meals eaten in a day? If so, how many meals do you eat per day?

This community though seems to be in difficult time during these 4 months, are able to manage somehow the 3 meals a day throughout the year in spite of being in a perpetual loan with the contractors and private moneylenders.

VI. Disability

1. How many PwDs do you think your village has? (VI, HH, OH, Multiple, MR, MI, Autism)

The community could recollect a total number of 24 PwDs in their community belonging to various categories. They were by n large able to specify as 3 visually impaired, 7 speech and hearing impaired, 10 locomotor disability, 2 mentally challenged and 2 mentally ill.

2. Do you know of any PwD going to school? If so how many? If not, why
There were 2 PwDs going to school.

3. Does PwDs in your village have disability certificate?
14 of them have disability certificate.

4. Can you name some of the Govt. schemes available for PwDs? Has any PwD received any benefit in your knowledge?
On asking regarding the government scheme they mentioned that 6 of them received the government pension and 2 of them have been given tricycle.

5. Do you think that PwDs should work and support their family? If so, what kind of work? (for men, for women)
Their view regarding the PwDs being self sufficient, everybody unanimously stated that they should and work must be given them according to their ability.

VII. Group Formation

During the course of discussion it was evident that a large number of members had complaints regarding the unscrupulous activities of the ration shop owner who always created problems in supply. In addition it was also observed that the government authorities had taken their job card and not provided employment under MGNREGA. This situation was discussed with them in details and they were advised to form a group, meet the BDO and then District Collector, if required with their grievances. There was a discussion amongst the members who were initially reluctant to come forward due to their adverse experience with the block officials. Most of them shared that they are rebuked and threatened by the officials when making a justified demand. However they were ready to go as a group if one of the officials from AKR initially SP(I) could also visit along with them. Thus the AKRSP(I) officials agreed to go along with them to the block office to help them meet the BDO on a pre-decided date.

Alcoholism

In all the focus group discussions that we had in Muraul, Tajpur and Pusa blocks, one of the grave problem expressed in every village was that of alcoholism. It is one of the most common phenomena that the men folk have habit of both drinking as well as consuming *Khaini* (chewing tobacco). *Khaini* is also taken by many women. Alcoholism and physical abuse are widespread throughout the village family life. Physical abuse by fathers is common due to alcohol use and a lack of a healthy family model. Ironically, despite the bounty of fresh vegetables, rice, and fruit harvested by the farmers, food for the farmers and their families is sparse. It is not uncommon in these villages for a child's daily diet to consist of only two *Chapaties*. The impact of this protein deficiency at a young age can still be seen in many of the children. Apparently, in one of the FGDs (Titra village) in Ram *Tola*, the participants particularly the women were extremely vocal regarding the problem and desperately needed a solution to combat this. Even when the FGD was on, which was around forenoon, there were men who were drunk and came to disturb the discussion process. Identifying their wives, they had started abusing them in public and also tried to be physical which was prevented by rest of the women. This made the situation tense till such time a few other men drag them along and removed them from the scene.

The FGDs that represented on an average 35-40% of the household in each of these *Tolas*, expressed that in every family the problem of addiction is rampant. In several households, there is more than 1 member of the family who suffer from addiction. In 3 out of 6 villages, the liquor shops were present within the village itself; this makes the situation even worse as many a time the men folk go to these shops more than once a day. The average amount spent in liquor as well as *khaini* was stated to be between Rs. 30-40 per day.

While working on livelihoods and to make the villagers more secure as far as food is concern, it is important that AKRSP(I) take this social problem seriously which has direct impact not only economic development but also to create a conducive fabric in the family. In many States, SHGs of women have played crucial role in combating this problem provided they get handholding support in this endeavor. It must be understood here that external support must be ensured to combat the alcoholism problem since the sale of liquor though seem local, are always operated by big liquor barren, who have money, muscle as well as political power. For combating this problem, support needs to be accrued from the

administrative authority particularly the police force through a collective method. Hence organization such as AKRSP(I)'s constant support and encouragement need to be ensured.