



**Exercising their rights on land and food in accessing resources,
entitlements and support towards economic independence: the case
of women in Dhobani and Uldahi villages in Musabani district,
Jharkhand, India**

A FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (FPAR)

Conducted by **SWADHINA**, under the Breaking Out of Marginalization (BOOM) program of Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

Researcher: Yashswati Singh
Mentor: Sonia Bhattacharyya

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— Yashswati Singh

Executive Summary

This Food Sovereignty Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) report explores the challenges and rights of women in the villages of *Dhobani* and *Uldahi* in Musabani, Jharkhand, India. The research was conducted under the guidance of Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development (APWLD) as part of the *Breaking Out of Marginalization* (BOOM) program, with the aim of understanding and advancing women's rights to land and food sovereignty. This report documents the process of empowering local women in a participatory manner to investigate and assert their rights within a patriarchal society that traditionally restricts them from land ownership, decision-making in agriculture, and economic independence.

This research applies the GFM framework—*Globalization, Fundamentalism, and Militarism*—and their intersections with *Patriarchy*, to analyze systemic challenges. These forces collectively control and harmfully impact people's lives, especially women's, by restricting their access to land, marginalizing their roles in agriculture, and perpetuating economic dependency and food insecurity.

Key findings from the study highlight that patriarchal customs and local laws largely prevent women from owning land or participating in agricultural decisions, despite their primary role in food production. Globalization's shift toward commercial crops has further marginalized women, reducing their role in traditional farming and contributing to food insecurity in their communities. Economic dependency and food insecurity emerged as critical issues, with women depending on male family members, who control both land and income, and who prioritize cultivation of cash crops over food crops as per demands of the market. This dependency restricts women's autonomy and limits their access to nutritious food, health and livelihood.

The FPAR approach has empowered women in these villages by involving them directly as co-researchers, fostering collective action, and raising awareness of their legal rights and opportunities for skill development. The participatory process included community meetings, workshops, and skill-building sessions focused on organic farming, leadership, and economic independence, all aimed at enhancing food security and reducing reliance on male-dominated structures. Initial training, such as Salma's¹ proposed seminars on sustainable farming practices, has received positive responses, increased women's awareness and fostered a sense of a community that is hopeful of structural change.

Recommended actions that emerge from the research include delving into the women's traditional knowledge of sustainable farming practices, enhancing their decision-making power in food production, awareness building among women and their families on food sovereignty, mobilization of the women against the patriarchal barriers reinforced by globalization and fundamentalism, formation of women's resource groups and men's support groups, and engagement with the local government to advocate for policies that support women's rights and access to land and resources.

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The ultimate goal is to establish a more resilient, equitable food system and improve the economic and social position of women within these communities.

¹ Salma Murmu, Co-researcher, Uldahi Village

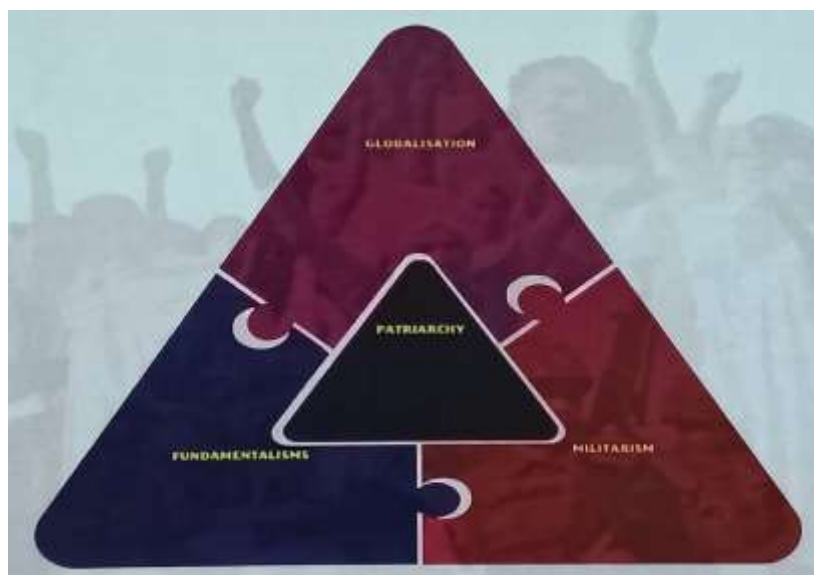
Keywords: **Food Sovereignty, Women's Land Rights, Economic Empowerment, Sustainable Agriculture**

PART 1: RESEARCH DESIGN

1.Introduction / Context:

1.1. About FPAR:

Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR), as used by APWLD, is a method that supports the growth of women's rights movements by advancing women's human rights and development justice. It builds upon the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), adding feminist perspectives to challenge and transform unjust power relations. FPAR empowers women by involving them directly in the research process, ensuring their voices shape the outcomes and solutions, while also addressing broader issues of inequality, oppression, and social justice. Feminism and PAR are aligned in their goal to dismantle systems of oppression and promote equity.



Source: APWLD

The GFM framework—Globalization, Fundamentalism, Militarism, and Patriarchy—provides a comprehensive lens for understanding how these intersecting forces control and harmfully impact women's lives. Through FPAR, women engage in research that directly addresses these forces, empowering them to challenge and transform patriarchal systems that restrict their rights to land, food sovereignty, and economic independence. By incorporating these intersecting systems of power, FPAR not only focuses on women's immediate rights but also on the broader structural changes needed to address the root causes of inequality and oppression, ultimately fostering a more just and equitable society. [\[1\]](#)

1.2. National, Social Economic and Political context:

Our area of work is in the Indian state of Jharkhand which predominantly remains rural, with approximately 24% of its populace residing in urban areas. As per the 2011 Indian Census, Jharkhand's population stands at 32.96 million, comprising 16.93 million males and 16.03 million females, resulting in a sex ratio of 947 females per 1,000 males. The state's literacy rate was recorded at 67.63%. The gross income reported for 2005 was

₹204,910 million.



Map of India showing the state of Jharkhand in orange (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Agriculture plays a pivotal role in Jharkhand's economy, contributing significantly to its growth. The state's farmers cultivate a variety of crops, including rice, wheat, maize, pulses, potatoes, and vegetables like tomatoes, carrots, cabbage, brinjal, pumpkin, and papaya.

Musabani is a Block in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand state in India. Total number of villages in this Block is 45. Musabani Block sex ratio is 974 females per 1000 of males. Musabani Block population in 2024 is 143,493. Literacy percentage is 61.70 percent, out of these 35.69 percent is male literates and 26.01 percent is female literates. Total Workers percentage is 36.61 percent, out of these 26.19 percent is male workers and 10.42 percent are female workers. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)



Map of Jharkhand showing the position of East Singhbhum (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

In Jharkhand, agricultural roles and land rights are significantly shaped by customary laws that favor male ownership^[4], affecting women's access to resources and decision-making in agriculture. Women's roles in food production are increasingly marginalized due to shifts from traditional, subsistence-based farming to market-oriented,

commercialized agriculture. According to a study on agricultural changes in Jharkhand from 2000 to 2013, the cultivation area for rice dropped from 71.53% to 47%, while land for oilseeds increased, indicating a trend toward cash crops over food crops. This transition further limits women's agency in food sovereignty, as they have traditionally led subsistence farming and seed preservation.

Customary practices prevent women from accessing land rights, even though national policies such as the National Land Reforms Policy (2009) recognize women's entitlement to land ownership. The gap between policy and practice remains a critical issue, especially in rural tribal areas where customary laws are prioritized.

Women's empowerment involves attaining a greater share of control over material, human, and intellectual resources, as well as decision-making at the household, community, societal, and national levels. Despite this, tribal women encounter numerous challenges within their society. Cultural and psychological tendencies, including male dominance, persist, even among tribal men. Sociological or cultural factors often hinder tribal women from breaking free from traditional roles.

On one hand, lack of formal learning makes it difficult for the tribal women to gain access to information on different government schemes and programs. Most of the tribal women hardly know about the different welfare schemes available to them as they cannot read any government notification or instructions, neither can they fill up the forms needed to be filled up for the purpose. This has been a common woe expressed by the women of the communities.

On the other hand, there is also a certain level of apathy by the government and related formal organizations as it is difficult to reach out to these remote areas and more so, reach the women who hardly step out of their community areas.

"Most of the women are illiterate; so often we do not have information about the various government schemes."

~ Saraswati Mardi

So, the women remain where they are. In spite of contributing in a major way towards agriculture, [\[See Picture 1:\]](#) they do not have land rights or decision-making power related to agriculture and other social issues. Nor are they supported by traditional systems to uplift themselves.

Tribal societies in India are considered among the most vulnerable segments of the population^[5] facing common socio-economic and demographic challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of developmental amenities, and inadequate primary healthcare facilities. Tribal women's condition is even more miserable in such a vulnerable community.

Indigenous communities have strong traditions of food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture. But there has been a paradigm shift in agricultural practices in the state of Jharkhand since its inception in the year 2000. From a food-crop based agricultural

system, it is now more of a system based on growing crops for cash. In a study conducted by R.P. Singh and Jai Prakash, entitled “Transformation of agriculture in Jharkhand”, it was found out that between year 2000 to 2013, there has been a decrease in the area used for paddy/rice cultivation from 71.53% to 47%. The same trend is observed in case of wheat and minor millets.² This changing pattern of agriculture is a result of succumbing to the needs of corporate culture that is growing globally.

In case of oilseeds, it is a reverse trend, with the total land usage increasing from 2.97% to 8.33% in 13 years. Oilseeds are an important source of food, both for humans as well as for cattle. But instead of local consumption, it is sold in the market as a cash crop, for higher profit. It may be noted that the indigenous food-system is heavily dependent on rice with minimal dependency on oil. Shakuntala, one of the co-researchers said that “*Most days, all three meals consist of rice and greens.*” It is thus clearly evident that the agricultural system is gradually coming under the control of the external demands orchestrated by the corporate factors. Whereas women have always played a major role in paddy cultivation and reduced paddy cultivation means, dwindling role of women in farming.

“Most days, all three meals consist of rice and greens, though once in a while I might prepare dal (lentil soup) or a vegetable in addition to the greens.”

Shankuntala Besra

Alongside, there has also been a change in the methodology of agriculture over the years. In these areas, originally, agriculture was more nature-friendly with the usage of local seeds and organic manure. Women used to preserve their local seeds in the indigenous ways for the next season. They also had a major role in preparing the organic manures using compost pits with the help of cow dung, vegetable peels, plant remains, and so on. This culture too has received a set-back with the increased use of chemical fertilizers and hybrid seeds. Sandhya Murmu said, “*Earlier we used organic manure using our own knowledge. But now chemical fertilizers are easily available in the market so people prefer to use those which require no hard work.*”

A study of chemical fertilizer usage in Jharkhand reveals that in the beginning of 2000-01 the fertilizer consumption was merely 47.29 Kg/ hectare, which increased to 65.5 Kg/ hectare in 2006-07 and further increased to 124.40 Kg/ hectare in 2011-12. And this is majorly due to the increase in usage of hybrid seeds. A study of a small area in the state revealed that 85 to 90% paddy is a hybrid rice variety on these farms. All these lead to minimizing the role of women in food production and agriculture as they were traditionally responsible for preserving the seeds. Now hybrid seeds are purchased in the market and the women are now reduced to agricultural laborers. They are no longer decisions makers.

These trends also threaten the traditional food practices in the area.

“Earlier we used organic manure using our own knowledge. But now chemical fertilizers are easily available in the market so people prefer

² R.P. Singh and Jai Prakash, entitled “Transformation of agriculture in Jharkhand.”

to use those which require no hard work.”

-Sandhya Murmu

“Women are always laborers, whether on their own farm or someone else's. They work hard in the fields but do not have decision-making power. Decisions about which crops to plant, where to sell the produce, and who receives the profit are made solely by the men in the household. Despite their significant contribution, women lack rights and decision-making power.”

— Savitri Murmu

GFMP Analysis at a Glance	
Globalization	Globalization has affected the villages (Dhobani and Uldahi) by making women rely more on external markets. For example, they have to buy seeds and chemical manures from the market instead of using traditional, local seeds or natural manures. This dependency makes it harder for women to manage their own farms and sustain their families, as they often don't have enough money to buy these inputs.
Fundamentalism	In Dhobani and Uldahi, traditional beliefs and gender roles often push women into subservient roles. For instance, after a woman's husband dies, she may be labelled as a “witch,” which strips her of rights to the land and property. This superstition is a part of the larger patriarchal system that holds back women's economic and social independence.
Militarism	In these villages, militarism also reflects in the form of domestic violence, such as witchcraft accusations and alcoholism. Women are often subjected to violence in the home due to being labelled as witches. Such practices not only harm women physically but also emotionally, as their rights and dignity are undermined.
Patriarchy	Patriarchy deeply affects the women of Dhobani and Uldahi. Even though they play a vital role in farming, women have no say in land ownership or agricultural decisions. Customary laws ensure that land is passed on only to male heirs, leaving women dependent on their male relatives for survival. These systems push women into dependency and restrict their access to resources and decision-making.

1.3. Thematic Context:

After repeated Focus Group Discussion we have learnt that the changing scenario of food security has affected food choices. Agriculture was food-need based where the prime reason for growing food was for food security. While rice and wheat were central to the

type of production, vegetables grown were mostly to cater to the needs of the families. The sale of the surplus crops and vegetables was done through an intra-village pattern through local village markets called 'Haats'. Many women would sell the surplus grown in their backyard kitchen gardens through these 'haats' and would buy vegetables from other women in return – especially the ones not grown in their field/garden.

With growing external influence of economic pressures and patriarchal control, agriculture went beyond the control of women. To procure chemical fertilizers and hybrid seeds, men travel to the urban or suburban regions to buy these, thus minimizing the role and decision-making power of women. With agriculture now being more market oriented, the focus is now on growing crops that 'bring money'..

Since women are no longer at the core of the decision-making power, they are hardly consulted about agricultural production. Similarly, with middlemen from the urban areas coming in to take the production straight from these growing hubs, most of what should be grown is governed by the need of these external agents, rather than being decided by women. The fact that women are also legally not owners of their family land poses a huge impediment to their role as decision-makers when it comes to growing the right type of vegetables.

1.4. Existing Laws, Policies and Programs:

There are many laws promulgated since the independence of India for the support of women. Gender equality has been a cornerstone of the different laws, policies and programs by the government since inception of the nation. Some of these laws are

- **The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976** provides for equal pay to men and women for equal work. It calls for equal wages for men and women. However, in India, the overall picture is grim. So, it can be assumed that Jharkhand would not be out of this. According to the Monster Salary Index (MSI) published in March 2019, women in the country earn 19% less than men. And this includes both the organized and unorganized sector.³ The situation of the unorganized sector is more pathetic. And this has a direct bearing on food choices and food security. In India the earnings of women are almost always directly contributory to their family needs – food, health care, education. In the case of a man's earnings, it has come up during our discussion with the community women that a large part of the earnings of men goes towards drinking. [[See Picture No. 2](#)]

“Alcoholism is a curse on our life. Intoxicated husband's torture us and happens regularly.”

-Sakro Hembram

In such a context, the less a woman is paid, the less she would be able to contribute to the needs of the family. Also, in most cases, lower wages are also associated with lower family and social status for the women, which again diminishes her decision-making power.

National Land Reforms Policy (2009): Recognizes women's right to land ownership, but implementation remains uneven. While the law recognizes women's right to land there has hardly been any implemented strategies in place. Although the National Land Reforms Policy (2009) recognizes women's entitlement to land ownership, customary

³ According to the Monster Salary Index (MSI) published in March 2019

laws often take precedence in rural areas.

- **National Food Security Act (2013):** Guarantees subsidized food grains to households, although women's involvement in food security committees remains limited. Increasing women's role in food security is essential, as they are the primary food providers within families and can reduce corruption in distribution if included actively. No one would understand the need of food better than women hence it is crucial to involve them at every stage of food production and food distribution system. Moreover, involvement of women would assure less corruption in food distribution processes.⁴

- **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Yojana (2010):** Aims to empower women farmers through training and access to resources, but coverage and impact are limited. This scheme particularly targeted at women farmers has been effective in many cases to empower women farmers but the hurdle lies in the fact that like most government schemes a majority of the processing is through filling up of application, following up and involves documentation processes.

- **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005^[6]** provides immediate protection for women facing violence in their homes. In indigenous communities, this is critical due to practices such as witch branding, where single or widowed women are sometimes labeled as witches to dispossess them of land. As Supriti Murmu (local women activist) shared, "When a woman's husband passes away and she has no son, she can be labeled a witch and lose her land rights, leaving her dependent on others for survival." It provides for immediate and emergent relief to women in situations of violence of any kind in the home. In indigenous areas such as Jharkhand this Act has a great significance. It has been a norm that many a times women, especially single and widowed women, have been displaced from their family properties by branding them as witches.[6] Violence in the name of witch-hunting has been a common form of torture on such women. Laws such as these provide support and protection to women under such circumstances from the other family members of their extended families.

- **Forest Rights Act (2006):** Secures land rights for tribal communities^[7], It recognises joint land titles which are in the names of both a husband and wife. It also recognises women's land claims in single headed households and collectively as a women's group. It recognises tribal women's rights to own land equal to those of men.

1.5. Women's Movements:

In Jharkhand, women are increasingly finding themselves victims of GFMP and slowly, some movements focused on land rights, environmental conservation, and sustainable agriculture are gaining momentum. Some organizations like Ekta Mahila Manch, are also trying to bring together women farmers to advocate for better access to land and agricultural resources, empowering them to influence both policy and practice in agriculture.

Indigenous women's movements in Jharkhand, particularly through groups like Adivasi Mahila Mahasangh, are trying to secure land rights, preserving cultural traditions, and promoting food sovereignty. We have used some of these examples to raise awareness and motivate our FPAR community.

⁴ Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution, Government of India. *National Food Security Act*, 2013.

1.6. Importance of the FPAR Topic:

The FPAR topic is important for understanding and building systems that support rights and empowerment. It focuses on collecting opinions, sharing stories, and helping people create a clear action plan. This plan should make them aware of the threats to their rights and sovereignty now and in the future. The actions would help in enhancing the capacity of women as a collective group that would prevent attempts to gradually take away the rights of the women over their land and food. The purpose is to

- Build the strength of the local women at the grass-root level.
- Enhance advocacy around the issue and include other people from different sections of the society who would support the cause.
- Pave the way to collaborate with other women's organizations and grass-root women in the area to develop a collective.
- Draw up a blue-print for future action plan and program in this regard.
- Identify the specific issues around which the future campaign actions would be taken.

2. Planning the FPAR with the Community:

2.1. Pre-research Consultation

2.1.1. Activities:

Pre research consultation meetings were held in Badia and its two neighboring villages namely Dhobani and Uldahi, Musabani. We had several informal interactions with the local women and after these initial interactions, we decided to take these villages in the cluster of Badia. On November 25, 2023 and December 17, 2023, respectively, of these total 58 women (27 and 31 respectively in both places) responded very positively. They engaged with us, spoke with us and candidly shared their issues related to their food produces, their choices of food, their rights over food and land and modern-day food production system: how it changed over the years from using natural fertilizers to chemical based fertilizers which are affecting their lives and health and also decreasing food's nutritional value. The outcome of these meetings were, we found out the condition of the community women, their issues and their thoughts on potential remedies to their existing issues. [[See Picture No. 3](#)]

2.1.2. Impact Objective:

Women in two villages, *Dhobani* and *Uldahi*, in the cluster of Badia, Musabani are able to exercise their rights on land and food in accessing resources, entitlement and support towards economic independence.

Key issue of the community: Women should be able to choose nutritious food for themselves and their families. They should have control over land and its produce. They should have economic independence and decision-making power within and outside their homes.

Is the Issue 'Widely and Deeply' felt by the community members? Some women are conscious of their condition and even aware of their rights, but have not dared to stand up for themselves and demand their rights, while other women still need to be made aware of what is denied to them, so that all the women can be mobilized to demand and

exercise their rights over land and food.

Changes They Want to See: The norm of granting land rights exclusively to male family members needs to be changed, along with the rights over food production, including the choice of crops to grow and how to cultivate them. The female members should know about how to use their decision making and land rights and what papers are required in order to achieve their land rights. The female members should procure the decision-making powers regarding their land as their male counterparts have.

Empowerment of women's entrepreneurial mindset is important because it can increase income and provide them certain leverage that can change their condition.

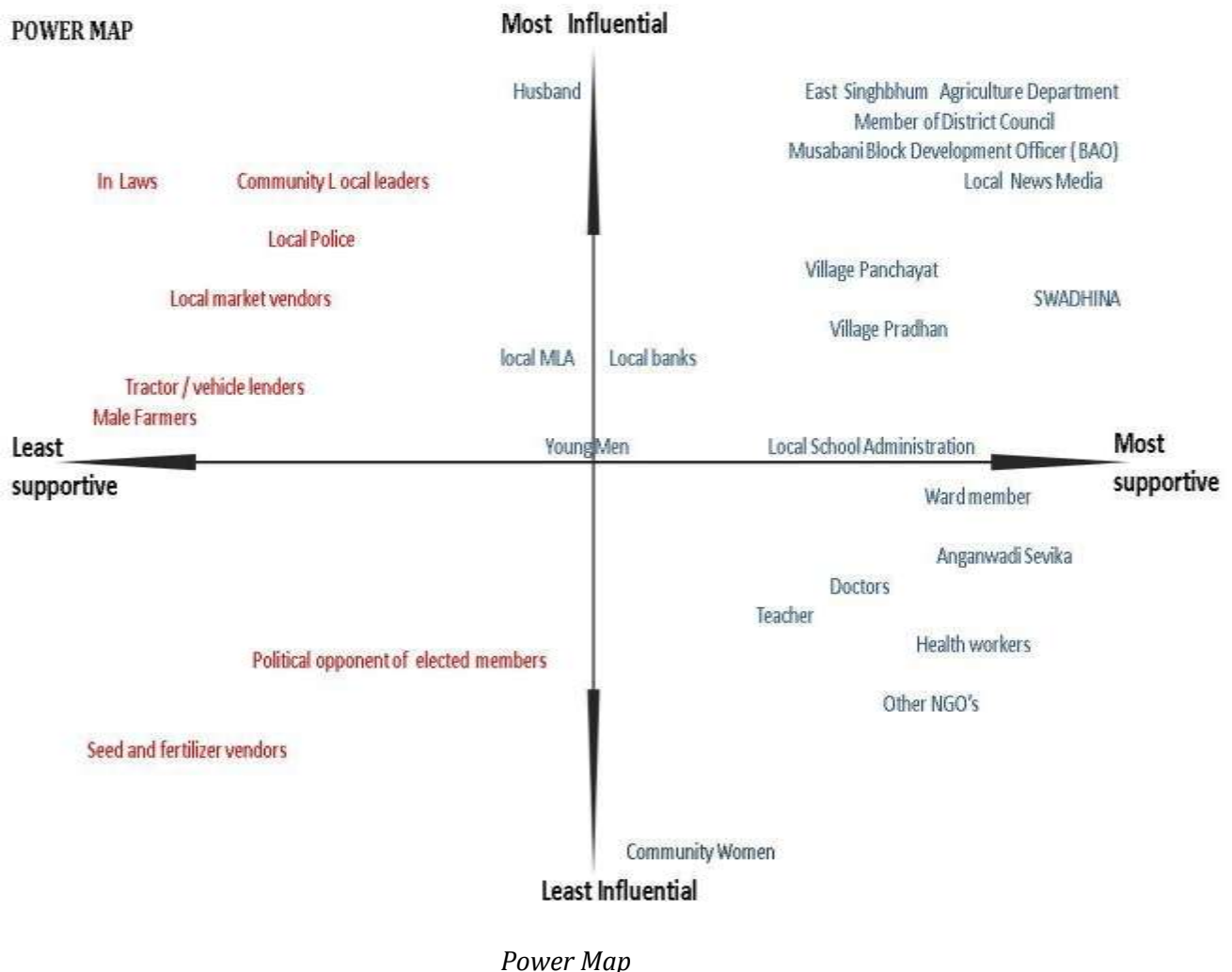
- Understanding the exact nature and extent of effect of commercialization of the agricultural and food systems of the area – identifying the direct and indirect actors responsible for it.
- Gauging the depth to which the condition of women has been affected and how far this effect can be in future.
- Knowing and understanding the different ways this trend can be reversed in favor of women.
- Making the women involved in the process aware of the real situation and build their opinion around the issue.
- Mobilizing the capacity building process of the rural women to strengthen their collective voice against any atrocities that threaten their food sovereignty.

Changes possible to achieve in two years: There are two types of action that can be envisaged during the period of two years – one that is achievable with the women and the community and the other that is achievable for the women and the community.

What can be achieved with the women:

- Understanding the factors that threaten the food sovereignty of the women of the areas where we work – especially in the context of changing socio-economic scenarios of the country.
- Identifying the gaps in our activities and implementation plans that can affect the different aspect of women's right to her land, livelihood and food in our working areas.
- Understanding the synergy of the different external and commercial forces that contribute to the changing scenario in our working areas that affect the women directly.
- Collating the local opinions for and against this changing system and redesigning our awareness programs accordingly.
- Knowing the opinion of the local women – as an individual and collective – on this and building group actions against the violations of the rights of women.
- Collecting documentary evidence of any violations that may be happening and building advocacy against such violations, creating campaigns regarding those.
- Using the opportunity to bring to the forefront the threats that the future can hold in prohibiting control and sovereignty of women over their land, produce and food.
- Strengthening local opinion to empower local initiatives that are self-sufficient and sustainable.

2.1.3. Power Map:



Source: FGD & Interviews

2.1.4. Theory of Change:

Capacity Building:

- The women understand FPAR and research design and are able to develop their leadership, analysis and actions for food sovereignty and independent economy.
- Women participate in research as co-researchers and provide inputs, etc.
- Strengthened women as a collective to protect their agriculture and food practices.
- Women are skilled in agriculture/dairy/ poultry/ others.
- Women are exercising their rights in building a viable food production system.

Knowledge, tools and resources:

- Production of materials/posters/pamphlets for training which will aid in capacity building.
- Women or women farmers have knowledge about traditional crops, natural fertilizers, access to seeds, local land laws, and land-related documents in their own

languages for their better understanding.

Advocacy opportunity:

- Women lead and engage with panchayat and village heads about the rights and needs of women.

Movement building:

- Formation of WOMEN RESOURCE GROUP
- Formation of Men's Support Groups.

2.1.5. Critical Pathway:

Impact Objective: *Women in two villages (Dhobani and Uldahi) in the cluster of Badia, Musabani are able to exercise their rights on land and food in accessing resources, entitlement and support towards economic independence.*

Change Milestone	Activity	Timeline	Resources
Women are exercising their rights in building a viable food production system.	Meetings using audio,video, picture to educate women. This would be supported by field demos, visits on organic farming to enhance practical exposure.	August - September 24	Community co-researcher
Strengthened women as a collective to protect their agriculture and food production.	training programs focused on agricultural techniques, sustainable farming practices, Men's support groups are formed to support women.	August - September 24	Community co-researchers
Women lead and engage with panchayat and village heads about the rights and needs of women.	4 Meetings with local government officials and training women about their rights.	August- September 24	Ownership and land laws documents, Community co researcher

<p>Women are skilled in agriculture/dairy/ poultry/ others.</p> <p>Women farmers have knowledge about traditional crops, natural fertilizers, access to seeds, local land laws, and land-related documents in their own languages for their better understanding.</p>	<p>Workshops on skill development</p> <p>Workshops on sustainable farming techniques and crop diversity, training sessions on food preservation and storage method</p>	<p>June – Sep. 24</p>	<p>Community co-researcher, Training centers, trainers, Equipment's, Certification on skill development Community men, educational videos, booklets, pamphlets in local language Stories in local language</p>
<p>Production of materials/posters/ pamphlets for training which will aid in capacity building.</p>	<p>Preparation of informational materials/ posters/ pamphlets on the topic, organizing workshops related to topic</p>	<p>June - July 24</p>	<p>Educational videos, booklets, pamphlets in local language Stories in local language</p>
<p>Formation of women resource group (WRG)</p>	<p>Organize gatherings where women can connect, share experiences, and build professional relationship, Training on leadership development, negotiation skills, and work life balance</p>	<p>May 24</p>	<p>Community co-researchers</p>
<p>Women participate in research as co-researchers and provide inputs, etc</p>	<p>Data gathering/ storytelling, FGDs, social and resource mapping, Meetings with community co-researchers and Participatory interviews.</p>	<p>April – May 24</p>	<p>Community co-researchers</p>

The women understand FPAR and research design, their leadership developed, and are to analyse and take actions for food sovereignty and independent economy.	Data collection process: Where FPAR framework (Structural analysis, solutions and principles and tools) are further clarified. Series of discussions/ training/workshops on FPAR research design.	December- April (2023- 24)	FPAR research document and evidences
Ground Zero: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are not aware/educated about their rights/ land rights and have no concept of food sovereignty. • Community members have a patriarchal mindset. • They don't have decision making power. • They are bound by taboos. 			

2.1.6. FPAR Principles:

FPAR principles are the basis of the research needed for this project. Every principle of FPAR holds strong weightage to the research.

- Principle 1 states that the purpose of FPAR is structural change. In the research intended, we are hoping to improve women's experience and perspective regarding food choices and options to consume nutritious edibles.
- Principle 2 states that FPAR amplifies women's voices. In the project, we are intending that the key actors with meaningful roles are governed by women.
- Principle 5 states that FPAR aims to shift power. In the project, the conclusion would be the change in power as women would control necessary decisions.
- Principle 6 states that FPAR fosters collective action. The project uses the collective mindset of the women in order to achieve the intended goal.

3. Scope of the FPAR:

3.1 Research Sites and Partners:

Our area of work is in the Indian state of Jharkhand, specifically in the Badia cluster of Musabani block. This region is predominantly inhabited by tribal communities. We are focusing on two villages: Dhobani (latitude: 22.510710, longitude: 86.447456) and Uldahi (latitude: 22.504625, longitude: 86.433517).

In Badia village, there are a total of 1645 families with a population of 5445, including 2075 males and 3370 females. Among these, 500 families are headed by women. Dhobani has a population of 956, while Uldahi has 300 residents. In this area, women traditionally have low literacy rates and limited decision-making power regarding food and daily livelihood.

The research is being conducted by SWADHINA. Hence the research partners are members of the SWADHINA team and the co-researchers in the villages of Dhobani and Uldahi. We have also enlisted the support of some local village council members.

The names of the key research supporters are as follows:

- Papiya Sharma, Age- 36, Badia, Musabani, Post – Women Organizer (SWADHINA)
- Saraswati Mardi, Dhobani, Post – Secretary of WRG
- Savitri Murmu, Dhobani, Post – President of WRG
- Sandhya Murmu, Dhobani, Post - Treasurer of WRG
- Parwati Murmu, Dhobani, Post – Assistant Secretary of WRG
- Salma Murmu, Uldahi, Post – Member of WRG
- Sukhimai Murmu, Uldahi, Post – School Teacher and Member of WRG
- Sitamani Murmu, Dhobani, Post – Panchayat council member and member of WRG

The full list of researchers is provided in the Appendix.

3.2 Community Profile:

The women of the community are indigenous and marginalized. They are not able to exercise their basic rights and decision-making power, with regards to food sovereignty, nor are they aware of their proper rights. They are not well-educated. The community is heavily patriarchal. Women work, but are not able to earn any income. They have to rely on the male household members for most of their work. They also need permission of male family members for all activities, including attending community meetings. Often permission is granted because of the expectation or prospect of augmentation of the family income, which potentially the men will ultimately control.

3.3 Research Questions:

How can the women in two villages (Dhobani and Uldahi) in the cluster of Badia, Musabani are able to exercise their rights on land and food in accessing resources, entitlement and support towards economic independence.

Starting with the questions like:

- What are the rights and entitlements which are violated or not fulfilled?
- What are the barriers from achieving or fulfilling these rights?
- What are the barriers to your food and economic security?
- What do you think should be done to overcome these barriers? What are your recommendations to the community, to the local village councils, to other policy-making bodies?
- What does food mean to you?
- What is your idea of a food system that is viable and sustainable for communities?
- How do you make decisions at home/household in terms of what to plant, what to eat, how to generate income?

3.4 Data Collection Method:

Specific data and information needed to answer the research questions:

The specific data needed would be

- Why do women not have rights over their land in their homes?
- For how long have they not had them and how has this affected their life and food?
- What steps have they taken so far to get their rights?

Who needs to be involved:

All key actors would be involved who are community members, community women's, women's family, male farmers, market vendors, seed seller, local news media, village panchayat, village sarpanch, ward members, local school administration, youth of the community, doctors, teachers, WOMEN RESOURCE GROUP, local SWADHINA group, APWLD etc.

Time needed:

The time needed would be 3 to 4 months.

Most appropriate methods for the people involved:

- Participatory interviews
- FGDs
- Drawing
- Storytelling
- Timeline
- Journalling

Methods of gathering reliable evidence:

It can be audio recording, video recordings, photos, charts showing facts regarding the project and so on.

3.5 Limitation of FPAR:

It's difficult to get women and men to understand their problems because they've been following their mindset for years and don't want to change. There are multiple issues that contribute to the declining role of women in food production in these areas. What could be the most profound issue for one may not be the most profound one for the other. Even though the underlying reasons are more or less the same, it becomes, at times, challenging to collate the most pertinent issues. When in groups, most women are influenced by the thought process of the other so it takes time and patience to study each problem or issue in an in-depth manner.

During our discussions we try to make it a safe space for the women to express their views and opinions, however it is also important to understand that the opinions of women are often influenced by the men of their families, especially when they get back to their families. For this, we plan to include community level dialogues as well, to create a more acceptable environment for all.

PART 2: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4 FPAR Findings

The Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) conducted in Jharkhand's Dhobani and Uldahi villages highlighted critical human rights challenges around women's land access and food sovereignty, with customary laws significantly restricting their rights. This section details findings across key themes, as well as an analysis of relevant laws, policies, and women's initiatives that shape the potential for change.

Women's control over their food systems is crucial for achieving food security, gender equality, and ecological sustainability. Securing land rights and increasing access to land are essential for women's food security. With increased resources and income generation, women will have enhanced bargaining power and negotiating ability. This will lead to security and empowerment. This is what we learned from our FPAR.

4.1 Key Findings

1. Human Rights Issues

1. Barriers to Land Ownership for Women

A significant portion of the work was focused on understanding the barriers women face in land ownership. Customary laws, deeply entrenched in tribal communities, often restrict women's legal rights to land. Through interviews and community meetings, [\[See picture no. 4, community meeting on land rights and customary laws that restrict women's access to land ownership\]](#) it was found that in every household, women are excluded from land ownership, with only the male head of the family holding rights to land and agricultural assets. Women like Salma Murmu shared their experiences, highlighting that despite working on the land, they do not have the legal right to it: *"The land will not be registered in my name; only my husband has the right to use it."*⁵ In addition, the loss of land rights following the husband's death is a common issue. Supriti Murmu (a local Woman Activist) revealed that in tribal communities, women who lose their husbands without a son often lose their land rights and are labeled as "witches," further marginalizing them. *"In tribal households, when a woman's husband passes away and she doesn't have a son, she is sometimes labeled as a witch and this strips her of her land rights,"*⁶^[7] she explained. This practice forces women to depend on male relatives for survival and leaves them vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition, as they are unable to cultivate their own food. These practices not only limit women's access to financial independence but also contribute to their broader economic dependency on male relatives.

"The land will not be registered in my name; only my husband has the right to use it."

- Salma Murmu

⁵ Salma Murmu's testimony on land registration and ownership.

⁶ Supriti Murmu on land rights and widowhood in tribal households.

“In tribal households, when a woman's husband passes away and she doesn't have a son, she is sometimes labeled as a witch and this strips her of her land rights.”

- Supriti Murmu

2. Economic Dependency and Food Insecurity

Over the course of several activities, including household interviews and focus group discussions, it became clear that women's economic dependency on male family members is a major factor contributing to food insecurity. While women are deeply involved in agricultural labor, they have minimal control over the income generated from it. Many women reported that their husbands control the financial decisions, including food purchases. *Shakuntala, a participant, shared, “Even though I work in the farm, my husband decides how the income is spent. We often don't get enough food for the children and me.”* This financial dependency on male relatives exacerbates food insecurity, as women's access to adequate nutrition is often deprioritized in favor of male family members.

Savitri Murmu further elaborated on the issue of food insecurity: *“Rainbow Coloured food is often missing from our plates because we don't have access to all the nutrients we need.”* This gap in nutritional intake, coupled with economic dependency, highlights the challenges faced by women in securing their basic needs and ensuring the well-being of their families. The reliance on staple foods like rice and lentils, without sufficient access to protein-rich foods, vegetables, and fruits, leads to widespread nutritional deficiencies. Nutritional insecurity is not only a health issue but also a barrier to economic productivity, as malnourished individuals are less able to engage in labor-intensive agricultural work.

3. Exclusion from Decision-Making

Women, despite working on the farm and contributing to household food production, are rarely included in decisions regarding which crops to plant, how resources should be allocated, or how income should be spent. Women expressed their frustration, noting that their role is often relegated to performing physical labor while men make the strategic decisions. *Savitri Murmu noted, “Women are always laborers, whether on their own farm or someone else's. They work hard in the fields but do not have decision-making power. Decisions about which crops to plant, where to sell the produce, and who receives the profit are made solely by the men in the household.”* This exclusion from key decision-making processes further limits women's capacity to improve their agricultural productivity or achieve economic independence.

Women are excluded from decision making in another vital area that is the village panchayats, where the phenomenon of women being in leadership positions but having their authority undermined by male relatives was also noted. Supriti Murmu (a local Woman Activist) explained, *“In village panchayats, when a woman becomes the head, people frequently see her husband as the real leader. Even though the woman holds the position, all decisions are made by her husband, and he is addressed as the 'Pradhan Pati' (Head's Husband).”* This illustrates how patriarchal norms persist even within

institutional frameworks, where women's leadership roles are seen as secondary to the influence of their male counterparts.

4. Limited Access to Education and Skill Development

A major finding that emerged during skill training was that women face significant barriers when it comes to accessing educational and skill-building opportunities. Cultural and societal norms limit women's mobility and access to external knowledge sources. The story of Sanjita reflects this:

Sanjita was still in school when she was married off. She then gave birth to two girls in quick succession at a very young age. She has the sole responsibility of taking care of her daughters as well as her elderly mother-in-law. She has to also perform other household duties and chores. In the little time that she can spare she works in the fields to help her husband. She does not get any money in hand and eats whatever her husband provides. She wanted to continue her education but she has neither time nor money. She is torn between educating her daughters and providing them with proper nutrition and security. She wants her daughters to have good education so they don't have to depend on anyone in the future unlike her current situation. She doesn't want them to be married early but given her helpless condition she is afraid she may not be able to prevent it.

One of the most consistent findings from focus group discussions and community meetings was the strong desire among women to access skill development programs that would empower them economically. But their ability to attend training sessions outside their villages was restricted.

Sulekha Murmu, a young woman of about 24 years, shared her dissatisfaction of not being able to go out of the village for skill training. "I want to learn a new skill which will enable me to earn money. But I cannot go out of the village because my family members will not allow me to go outside the village for trainings".

5. Lack of Legal Knowledge and Property Rights

Through community legal rights counselling sessions, it was revealed that many women are unaware of their legal rights, particularly regarding land ownership and inheritance. Papiya Sharma, another co-researcher, shared her frustration regarding family property issues: "There is no proper paperwork, and all the documentation is in the names of ancestors, not legally transferred to the family members. As a result, men exercise rights over the property, while women are not allowed to assert their rights." Without legal recognition or documentation, women like Papiya cannot claim ownership, leaving them vulnerable to exclusion from property rights and other economic benefits.

6. Nutritional Deficiencies and Food Insecurity

Nutritional and household food security assessments done through FGD(Focus Group Discussion) and Drawing on the Food System (Past, Present, and Future) revealed significant deficiencies in the diets. The reliance on staple foods like rice and lentils, without sufficient access to protein-rich foods, vegetables, and fruits, leads to widespread nutritional deficiencies.

The drawing [[See Picture No. 5](#)] revealed that in the past several varieties of vegetables and pulses were grown and used but now there is a growing tendency to eat unhealthy food from the market.

Shakuntala, who is a co-researcher, shared how her family's meals are often inadequate. She wishes she could have the time and skills to grow some vegetables on her own land, or if she knew how to make something from the leaves she collects from the forest and sell, she could earn a little more money. This gap in food diversity and economic opportunity contributes to food insecurity as well.

“Most days, all three meals consist of rice and greens, though once in a while I might prepare dal (lentil soup) or a vegetable in addition to the greens.”

~ Shankuntala Besra

7. Cultural Barriers to Economic Participation

Throughout the period, social and cultural norms were identified as significant barriers to women's participation in economic activities and decision-making processes. These norms restrict women's mobility, their ability to attend markets, and their involvement in community-based development initiatives. Sitamani Murmu shared her perspective on the cultural barriers she faces: “When a woman is newly married, she has no say in any household matters; not until she has a child and the child is at least ten years old.”

The cultural constraints not only limit women's ability to access economic opportunities, and participate in decision-making, also thwart their voice to assert their rights in their communities. Saraswati Mardi, a co-researcher, shared her experience of facing backlash from her family for even discussing her rights:

“When I spoke about these thoughts with my family, everyone, including my father, my uncle, and my brothers, were angry. They said, ‘Why are you demanding rights here? You are married now; your rights are with your in-laws, not here.’”

- Saraswati Mardi

8. Dual Burden of Domestic and Agricultural Work

Studies on how people spend their time and the work they do revealed that women carry a disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, in addition to their agricultural work. This dual burden leaves them with limited time to engage in productive agricultural activities or participate in community initiatives. Shakuntala Besra shared, “I do all the cooking, cleaning, and childcare, and by the time I finish those tasks, it's too late to work in the field.” This uneven distribution of labor reduces women's productivity in agriculture, which further affects their ability to

earn income and secure food for their families. It also limits their capacity to participate in skills training or community meetings, preventing them from gaining new knowledge or advancing their position within the household and community.

9. Desire to learn Sustainable Livelihood Practices

Many women expressed interest in learning about sustainable farming, organic agriculture, animal husbandry, and small-scale business practices (organic soap making). Savitri Murmu shared, “We used to practice organic farming in the past, which was much better for our health and the soil. We want to return to those methods.” Women's eagerness to learn new skills demonstrates their readiness to take on more significant economic roles. Providing women with these skills would enhance their food security, improve their economic independence.

“We used to practice organic farming in the past, which was much better for our health and the soil. We want to return to those methods.”

- Savitri Murmu

10. Insights from Social and Resource Mapping

The social and resource mapping exercise in Dhobani and Uldahi villages highlighted critical challenges faced by women in accessing essential resources and infrastructure. Forests, a vital source of firewood and other materials, are located far from the villages. Women without bicycles must walk long distances, which is physically taxing and time-consuming. Water scarcity emerged as a significant issue, particularly during the summer months, when limited and distant water sources force women to spend hours collecting water, leaving little time for other activities. The absence of nearby healthcare facilities adds to their hardships, as villagers often have to travel far for basic medical needs, making them vulnerable during emergencies. Furthermore, the lack of adequate transportation infrastructure restricts their mobility, limiting access to markets, healthcare, and educational opportunities. These challenges, identified through the mapping process, allowed the women to collectively reflect on the gaps in their villages and initiate discussions about potential improvements in resources, infrastructure, and community well-being. This exercise not only highlighted the pressing issues but also fostered a sense of unity and awareness among the women, encouraging them to advocate for solutions to improve their quality of life.

11. Hurdles in Accessing Government Schemes:

Although there are many schemes which aim to support women in agriculture, barriers such as limited literacy, low awareness, language barriers and bureaucratic hurdles restrict many rural women's access to these benefits. For women in remote areas, support from community organizations is often necessary to navigate these challenges and access government programs effectively.

4.2 Analysis of Local and National Laws, Policies, and Programs

Customary Laws as Barriers: Customary laws in these villages are a significant barrier to women's land rights and food security. These laws favor male control over property, which perpetuates women's exclusion from land ownership and limits their influence on food sovereignty.

Forest Rights Act (2006) as an Opportunity: The Forest Rights Act provides a pathway for tribal women to secure land access. By enabling women's involvement in community resource management, the Act can serve as a foundation for women's food sovereignty and economic independence. *On 25th August, the women interacted with Mrs. Debjani Murmu, a member of the District Council and the District Forest Office, which approves applications for obtaining land pattas (legal documents) under the Forest Rights Act. She explained the application process for acquiring land through the Act.*

Plans/Recommendations: She assured the women of her help when they apply for land through the Forest Rights Act. SWADHINA is actively promoting this Act to counteract the restrictions imposed by customary laws, aiming to increase women's control over resources essential to food security.

[[See Picture No. 6 on Forest Rights Act Discussion with District Council Member](#)]

Source: Local Newspaper: Dainik Bhaskar

National Food Security Act (2013): This Act ensures subsidized food access, essential to supporting women's food security. However, SWADHINA's findings suggest that many women remain excluded from the benefits of this Act due to limited awareness and the controlling influence of male family members in household food allocation. Efforts to raise awareness of the Act among women aim to empower them as primary food providers.

[[See Picture No. 7 Discussion on the women's protection under Human Rights](#)]

Source: FGD, Participatory interviews (24th Aug. 24)

4.3 Women's Initiatives and Collective Action

Through FPAR, SWADHINA facilitated initiatives to strengthen women's voices and create pathways to land and food rights:

1. Women's Resource Group (WRG) Formation: Women in Dhobani and Uldahi villages formed WRG to collectively address land rights, food security, and decision-making issues. This group serves as platforms for women to share experiences, advocate for rights, and strategize ways to navigate restrictive customs.

2. Women's Capacity Building: Through regular interactions, discussions were held with women on the issues affecting their lives. Such discussions enabled women to opt to think about looking for new opportunities to improve their lives - like they expressed the desire for trainings, developing community garden.

3. Skill Development Trainings: Training sessions empowered women with organic farming skills enabling them to produce food sustainability and enhancing their role in the community food production. These practices aim to restore traditional farming methods and support food sovereignty on limited, often stony, terrain. As a part of skill building process the women were also imparted organic soap making trainings as per their desire. The highlight of the trainings were that these used locally available plant products such as Aloe Vera, Turmeric, Basil etc which are grown by the women. The trainings not just provided them a way to generate income by these organic soaps but also helped them build an idea of how, as women, they can best utilise the farm resources grown by them. This would not just help them in income generation but also play a key role in highlighting women's rights as decision makers about their farm produce. The training on 'Nutrimix' (healthy food supplement) using local resources was provided. The fact that it is a very strong alternative to commercial health drinks and supplements is an important way to establish food choices and decision by women based on locally available resources.

4. Community Governance Participation: Some women are now participating in panchayat discussions to voice their needs and demand equal access to land and food resources, gradually shifting community attitudes toward gender inclusion in decision-making. This progress was part of a training and mobilization session held at the Dhobani Panchayat Bhawan (local government building), where the Mukhiya (locally elected government representative), Mr. Ratan Murmu, was present. During the session, Mr. Murmu explained to the women how they could access government schemes, including obtaining saplings, manures etc.

[See Picture No. 8 Women in Dhobani and Uldahi villages participate in focus group discussions on gender sensitization, sharing personal experiences and insights.]

Source: FGD (24th Aug. 24)

5. Community Garden Establishment: One community garden has been formed at Dhoboni village where vegetables are collectively grown by the women. The garden is collectively maintained by the women and they take decisions regarding the crops to be grown, and how the produce is to be shared. This initiative has made women visible as a decision maker rather than being farmers. To reinforce this initiative, Swadhina has provided a water pumping device to the Women's Resource Group so that they can use it for irrigation. It is important for the women to receive agricultural implements which usually the men get as 'farmers'. [See Picture No. 9]

[See Picture No. 10]

4.4. Challenges and Resistance

1. Opposition from Male Family Members: Initially family members often discouraged women from discussing land rights or participating in community governance. This was majorly found to be due to existence power imbalance between men and women in the community. It was observed that this was rooted in the age-old customary practices which gave men the power of land inheritance. Moreover, it was also seen that it is the men who were heading the decision-making process with relation to land and agriculture. In some cases, we have observed the patriarchal mindset stood as a barrier to women

from opening up freely for discussion on land rights. The WRG members have found ways to address this resistance after having received different trainings and workshop participation under FPAR. Inviting men to join workshops on women's rights as part of FPAR has also been a strategy to make the men understand the need to have a gender-balanced society, including in the matter of land rights.

2. Limited Social Acceptance of women in agriculture: Women have immense contributions in agriculture but their contributions are rarely acknowledged. They are never accepted as farmers. Customary laws remain a deeply ingrained barrier to equitable social change. Hence it is not enough to discuss these issues with women only. It is crucial that such discussions should include men and other family members.

3.Social taboos against women: To fight against the taboos which are in practice for ages is a tougher challenge. Though branding women as 'witch' is legally prohibited, it is still practiced, mostly to deprive a widow from her right to land. Women would continue to be victims of violence if Women's land rights will always remain a distant reality if such practices continue to thrive.

4.Lack of women's mobility: As already mentioned elsewhere in this report, women hardly move out of their village without the permission of the male members. For skill development or any other development initiatives women's limited mobility was a hindrance and it was difficult to organise any training outside the village.

5.Weather Abnormalities and seasonal disruption: Conducting activities were difficult due to excessive heat during the month of May when outdoor activities were restricted as per government instruction. Again during the monsoon, women were not available for meetings since they were busy with agricultural work.

6.Postponement of Activities due to Election: In the month of May 2024, Parliamentary election was held in Jharkhand. So it was difficult to conduct meetings in Government premises or contact local government representatives in the discussion due to the model code of conduct.

4.5 Community Impact and Theory of Change Domains

1. Access to Capacity Building: FPAR activities significantly enhanced women's knowledge and confidence regarding human rights, organic farming, and land rights. Capacity-building workshops and skill development sessions have strengthened women's agency in advocating for themselves. So far, they never had an access to such capacity building processes that could enhance their confidence. These capacity building processes enabled them to bring in many positive changes in their lives.

2. Developed Knowledge Tools and Resources: SWADHINA provided educational materials in local languages, including posters and pamphlets, to support ongoing advocacy within the community. Co-researchers used flash

cards to explain the Forest Rights Act to the women, with a flex banner on the Forest Rights Act displayed on the wall. Using these banners, posters, etc., enabled us to create awareness through visual media. Women were specifically impressed by seeing these flashcards. These cards have a picture on one side and a message on the reverse, written in simple language, and the cards can also be used by co-researchers. These resources have helped women gain greater awareness of legal provisions, such as the Forest Rights Act, which can support their land rights claims. [[See Picture No. 8](#)]. These were not just helpful for the women during the FPAR process but can be very important tools for any future interventions and actions to be undertaken by these women.

3. Movement Building and Advocacy: The formation of WRGs has established a foundation for continued advocacy. WRG members work collaboratively with local leaders, hold discussions on progress, and pursue avenues to increase women's food security and land rights. Meetings with the district council members further reinforced their engagement with local governance structures, and SWADHINA plans to support women's continuous advocacy efforts through targeted workshops on the Forest Rights Act.

4. Giving 'voice' to the women: One of the biggest changes that happened to the women in the community as a result of FPAR program is that it gave the women the "voice" as individuals and as a collective. It was very visible how the women evolved over the course of time mostly due to the different capacity building workshops and programs. For the first time they were allowed to voice their opinion and explain their problem in open forum. Most of the women who were demure and shy initially became very confident with the way they spoke and acted. Saraswati Mardi, from Dhoboni village, was initially a shy, introvert village women gradually became confident and was one of the chief organising leader for the different village based workshops in her village. Alongside the Women's Resource Group (WRG) members gained so much confidence that they could explain their problems and issues in front of other community members, especially in front of their grass-root representatives.

5. Improved situation on Women's Rights over land and food: Including men in the discussion processes and organising programs at the community level enabled a gradual change of situation. Initially while the men were reluctant to even to let the women participate in such discussions, they are now more open to gender-balanced changes. For instance, in the recent days during a program where women were being supported with reclamation of fallow land, the men of the families willingly came forward to sign the applications which granted the right of growing food crops on these reclaimed fallow lands to the women. When we checked these areas later we found that in these fields it is the women who were growing food crops such as pulses and vegetables as per their choice, using traditional organic processes. Infact, a few women have also sold surplus vegetables such as spinach in the local market after consumption. For the first time, in these areas, women are owning these reclaimed plots of land as their own where the decision of the men of their family is minimal. In a

place where customary laws inhibit a women's right to land inheritance, this is a big step indeed. On one hand women are establishing their right as women farmers on the other hand they are active decision makers. All these changes were possible due to the numerous interactions with these women as a part of FPAR journey.

6. Enhancement of collective strength: What FPAR has managed to do very well is to build the collective strength of local women. The women folk of Dhobani and Uldahi are now able to function as a team, specially in matters of agriculture. It may be mentioned that the community garden of the women of Dhobani has set a very strong example of how women as a team can arrange their own food. They also collectively own a pump set that is used by them. They have successfully grown variety of vegetables in the garden which is used by them. This is indeed remarkable as a symbol of women's collective right on food .

One important outcome of the collective strength of women has been their request to the local police station against illegal country liquor den that had made the lives of the local women difficult and were demolished with the help of local police. This strengthened the safety and security of the women of the area, especially to those who had to travel through these difficult spots to reach their agricultural fields.

7. Mobilising government representatives to work for women: It must be mentioned that the activities of FPAR has been successful in attracting the attention of local government towards their needs. Earlier the local government representatives were aloof towards their need of women. But, over the time, due to the efforts of the local women, the grassroot government representatives are coming forward to support these women . The panchayat head of Dhobani has not just participated in the workshops but has also been helpful in providing information to these women regularly on the different schemes available for the women. Recently the Forestry department of government has handed over vegetable seeds to these women of Dhobani at their request. Alongside there is local level mobilisation on the part of the women to approach the government departments themselves. It may be foreseen that in future the women would be successfully creating a social system where they would go forward and discuss their needs related to land, agriculture and livelihood.

8. Effective awareness generation: One of the key outcomes of the different knowledge tools and resources has been how well the women could grasp the basic concepts expressed through these knowledge materials . The women

have understood the purpose of these materials could be understood in the fact that the women groups at Uldahi and Dhobani have developed songs on forest rights in their local language during the capacity building exercises . They even presented these songs during their community events . This means that not just being aware themselves , these women have become awareness creators themselves . This is especially significant since it has a direct impact on the community. Another interesting aspect is the fact that most of the women

were hardly aware about Forest Rights Act. Due to the regular usage of the flex banner on Forest Rights Act (which have been explained in a simplified manner in these posters) the women had developed an understanding of the Act. It needs to be mentioned that the women's group at Dhoboni and Uldahi have begun to formulate a list of beneficiaries for FRA in their own region. It also needs to be mentioned that this action has been exclusively led by the women of the WRG. Recently a delegation of women had met the officials of local Block Office to apprise them about their status of the FRA applications and also to get a first-hand knowledge about the various departments at the Block office that could be of benefit to the women. All these would have never been possible had the women not had information about FRA through these awareness materials.

9. Enhancing women's participation in governance process: One of the most effective ways to grant women their due rights is to ensure their participation in local governance process. It may not be an overnight happening but it is comforting to know that the process has already begun due to the capacity building processes for the women of the community. Two of the women from WRG – Sukhimai Murmu (Dhobani) and Salma Murmu (Uldahi) were the two women leaders from their respective villages who spearheaded the government's drive called ' Dwar pe Sarkar' which grants different schemes for women among other schemes. They were part of the village-level Gram Sabhas where they collected the names of the beneficiaries, and took active part in enrolling their names for different government schemes during the camps held in the month of August 2024. Both these women gained their courage and leadership skills from the FPAR programs.

10. Breaking Social Taboos: FPAR program has enabled us to break many social taboos that are often taken as granted. For the first time women discussed

their problems openly, for the first time the women took part in processes such as Participatory Resource Mapping, for the first time women understood how their decision-making power was crucial to establishing a gender-balanced society. Breaking the chain of generational silence was important. Added to this, when the women developed their own community garden that was entirely their own, it was a symbolism of their first step towards upliftment. The effectiveness became more profound when the women's group received the water pumpset which was to be an asset jointly owned by the women. In agriculture it is always socially believed that while the women would do most of the manual labour, the mechanised operations are to be controlled by the men. Their owning of the water pumpset broke this social taboo!

4.6 Voices from the Community

Salma Murmu's insights vividly illustrate the challenges women face regarding land ownership:

“The land will not be registered in my name; only my husband has the right to use it. Whatever benefits he receives, we will share, but we don’t have any land in our own names. Since my husband uses land that belongs to his great-grandfather, all that land is effectively his. Therefore, we cannot have this land registered in our names. Whatever land comes from the husband’s side cannot be registered under a woman’s name, and even the panchayat cannot help us in this matter. That land can only be passed down to my husband, to my son, and to all male heirs. We cannot change this because it’s a tradition. If we want land registered in our names, we must buy new land specifically in our names. Even though my husband uses this land, it is not officially registered in his name, as the land papers are still in the name of his great-grandfather. Decisions about what we grow on the farm are made by my husband’s grandfather.”

– Salma Murmu

PART 3: Conclusion

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings and Impact of FPAR

The Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) conducted in Dhobani and Uldahi villages in Jharkhand identified the main challenges and opportunities for rural women, especially related to their rights to land, food, and economic independence. The findings show that, despite their important role in agriculture, women face strong social, cultural, and legal barriers. Customary laws often prevent women from owning land and making decisions about farming, which limits their economic independence.

The findings also show that economic pressures and patriarchal control have shaped agricultural systems in ways that undermine women’s role as food producers. Although women play a key role in farming, they are excluded from decisions about land use and food production.

The FPAR project helped raise awareness and develop skills among women, enabling them to address these challenges and understand their legal rights, including how the Forest Rights Act can support sustainable resource management and food sovereignty.

Women have learnt how the global market influences agriculture, focussing more on short-term profits, ignoring local food needs. They have understood how the external forces make it harder for women to take control of their land and food systems.

Recommendations

- To overcome the barriers, it is important to move towards sustainable farming practices that reject commercial systems focused on monocropping. These systems often harm local food security, so promoting farming that supports food sovereignty is essential.
- There needs to be stronger alignment between policy and community efforts to challenge patriarchal land ownership and give women more power in decision-

making about farming.

- It is crucial to address the combined effects of patriarchal authority, global market pressures, and social control.
- We need to shift farming practices to prioritize local food needs and empower communities.
- Training women in organic farming and supporting models where women can collectively own and manage land will help them build sustainable food systems they can control. When women regain control of land and food production, they can help create more just and sustainable food systems.
- An effective monitoring system is needed to ensure that the laws are not flouted at the ground level.
- Social vices like alcoholism, witchcraft must be curbed and there should be effective motivational policies to promote savings as a family.
- Equal wages should and must lead to equal contribution to the needs of the family and better nutrition choices due to improved purchase capacity.
- There must be social dialogues on how the customary laws may be modified to suit the needs of the women.
- The level of awareness about the laws is very low among the indigenous communities. The systems of redressal are also weak and flawed. Thus it is important to strengthen the awareness systems. The redressal system for the victims must be easy to approach and available for all.

5.1 Key outcomes:

Better Understanding of Impact of Patriarchal Customs and tradition on Women's Land Rights

Though there is always a social discussion and debate about the effect of patriarchal customs and tradition on women's land rights, there has never been such an in-depth study of the issue in this region, especially in the community we were working with. The FPAR findings corroborated the fact that patriarchal customs and tradition in Jharkhand significantly hinder women's access to land and influence in agricultural decisions. Customary inheritance laws typically favour male heirs, constraining women's legal access to land and, consequently, their economic independence. Although national policies, such as the National Land Reforms Policy, recognize women's land rights, these are often ineffective in areas governed by traditional customs. This study is a crucial documentation in this regard and would help highlight the challenges of the women of the community.

Women's collective on the issue of land and food rights for women

In the villages of Uldahi and Dhobani the women have found a collective strength in the form of Women's Resource Group as a result of FPAR. Normally, at these villages, collective of women would normally mean small SHG groups run by the women. However, for the first time a collective was formed that centred around women's rights on land, food and agriculture. Together, these women have been instrumental in forming the foundation for future actions on the issue of women's land rights. This has sowed the seeds of future advocacy and movement building for the women on the issue of rights to land, food and agriculture.

Influencing community perspective

There is a difference between the community's perspective of women's land, agricultural and food rights at the beginning of the FPAR journey and towards the end of it. Initially there was resistance from the men – they even objected to the women sitting together and discussing their problems. Towards the end of the research program, the men were not only supporting the women in their gatherings, in many cases they helped in organising these programs like arranging for sitting places, arranging food and water for the participants etc. They have become more open to the idea of women being co decision makers on the issue of agriculture. They are seen to be more encouraging about the different land and agricultural schemes for women. Though a very small percentage, but now even the village elders are not too resistant to the idea of women's land ownership.

Going back to traditional women friendly methods of farming

Agriculture in the region had transitioned to a more commercial, market-oriented practice in recent years as per the findings of the FPAR research. This had marginalised women's contribution to traditional farming. However, minor shifts in this approach is being witnessed now. Women are using traditional organic farming methods and local indigenous variety of seeds in the reclaimed fallow lands where they are taking the primary decisions. Also, the community garden managed by the women is serving as a great example. Shifting away from the tendency to grow market friendly cash crops, the women are growing more food crops such as spinach, brinjal, pumpkin, okra, green chillies and bitter melon in this land. We have high hopes that this would be a growing tendency where the role of women would be enhanced as well the agricultural practices would become more nutrition-oriented.

Building bridges with the government

One of the key outcomes of the FPAR program has been the connection that the women of the villages have been able to establish with the grassroot and local governance. Prior to FPAR, the women were isolated and unaware of the local schemes and facilities available for them that would boost their rights over agriculture and food. But the FPAR program enabled government representatives to directly reach out to the women (such as Mukhiya, panchayat head, head of forest department etc) and the women in turn were able to directly place their problems in front of them. This has paved way for the women to get schemes specifically for themselves, financial support for farming, agricultural loans and seed support.

Bridging the awareness gap

Despite the customary laws not being in favour women's land ownership, there have been other Acts such Forest Rights Act that offers an opportunity for women to gain control over forest land which can bolster their food security and autonomy if promoted effectively. However, there is a huge gap in understanding of the FRA by the women of these communities. This awareness generation was effectively done through the various forms of awareness materials and repeated interactions with the women as a part of FPAR.

Better understanding of women's food sovereignty

Women's right to food and food sovereignty had been an unheard of concept for the women. Instead there was a silent acceptance of generational subjugation of their rights on agriculture and food. FPAR enabled us to make them aware and understand their right to food sovereignty. This was done through a series of discussion and the usage of booklets developed during the FPAR process. This is certainly an important way to include these women as a part of the global process of ensuring women's food sovereignty.

Desire for Gender Equality and the Recognition of Human Rights –

Women expressed a strong desire to challenge gender-biased norms. Increased awareness of human rights through FPAR is encouraging women to assert their roles within family and community decision-making, marking progress toward equitable treatment and resource access.

5.2 Policy Recommendations:

The FPAR program enabled us to detect the loopholes and drawbacks in the policy and systems that are responsible for women's lack of right on food, land and agriculture. The policy recommendations are desirable to be implemented at three different levels - Regional level, National level and Community level. The inputs for policy recommendations at the local level have emerged as a part of the conversations with the local women during the several meets. Also, while the women spoke about the several challenges that they face it became clear that there is a definite lack of approach and access on the part of government to reach out to these women with government schemes and programs. These recommendations have been based on the basis of the needs of the local women as expressed by them.

The recommendations at the National level have come up as a part of the different research related studies during FPAR and our first-hand experience at the field level during the community interactions.

The recommendations at the Regional level are aimed at developing long term strategies to amplify the experiences of the women at the local level and build a strong foundation for women's food sovereignty and rights at the global level.

Regional Level:

- Establish regional knowledge-sharing platforms where women's groups working on food sovereignty and land rights can share strategies to access resources, and overcome traditional law barriers.
- Conduct study on impact of external market forces versus local food sovereignty.

National Level:

- Focus on Forest Rights Act and National Land Reforms Policy to ensure better

status of land rights to women.

- Mobilising local women's group to regularly interact with the local government to bridge the gap between policy and practical access for the women especially in the tribal areas.
- Prompting the government to organise local level camps on the part of the local governments to expedite speedy filing of applications.
- Publishing short consolidated information about the Acts in easily understandable local languages for the women to understand these laws and act more effectively.
- Making available the contact details of the responsible authorities at the grassroots level.
- Strict monitoring of legal provisions for women's land rights and food security and immediate addressing of the loopholes in implementing those.

Local/Community Level:

- Availability of forms for government schemes in local language which will enable women to leverage government schemes and adopt informed agricultural practices.
- Mobilising easy access points for women to help them with application filing and any form of redressal.
- More focus on women as farmers and emphasis on women's legal literacy.
- Voicing for prompt actions against any form of atrocity on women on the issue of land, agriculture and food security.

6. Advocacy and Future Actions

Current Advocacy Engagements

The FPAR initiative has raised awareness around women's rights to land, food, and economic independence within the community. While customary laws continue to present obstacles, there is an increasing interest in the FRA as a pathway for women to gain access to communal land and resources. Swadhina has invited the local government representatives like the Village Mukhia, Mr Ratan Murmu (Dhobani village), Mrs Sukurmani Hembram, (Benasole village) Members of East Singhbhum District Council, Mrs Debjani Murmu, Mrs Laxmi Murmu to further the discussions on women and land rights, especially with reference to the customary laws. The discussions were held also on how women can access saplings, seeds, manure support from them.

Future Advocacy Potential

The FPAR follow up Advocacy plan would focus on to specific approaches of Advocacy. These are designed to provide immediate as well as long-term benefits to the women of the communities we have worked with, as well as pave way for ensuring land, food and agriculture rights to other marginalized women in the coming days. With the experience of the several workshops and trainings, the women from these communities are capable of leading these actions, with the strategic support from Swadhina.

A. Building Bridges - To advocate for changes at the policy level, system of governance, building safety of access to the rights of women and lobbying for social changes. This would be not just concentrated at the local level, but would also be amplified to the national and global levels to contribute to the global movement of women's rights.

B. Breaking Barriers - To address the issue of social and customary systems and practices that inhibit the rights of women and to advocate for changes at the social level that promotes women's rights on land , agriculture and food.

Advocacy Action Plan

Activities for advocacy would be the following:

A. Building Bridges:

A1. Interactive Sessions with the Government: The FPAR report findings will be shared with the concerned government departments, also sending delegations to government departments, initiating dialogues on customary laws and women's land rights, as well as on promoting existent laws (such as FRA) and schemes for women. The delegation would be led and represented by the women from the communities which were a part of FPAR.

A2. Advocacy workshop for promoting FRA: This workshop would focus on highlighting FRA as an effective way to enable the community women to gain access to land under FRA. Representatives from the government, different strata of the society would be invited to the workshop. Since a drive for FRA has been initiated in the area, the women from the communities would put forward the hurdles and difficulties they are facing at their local level and initiate direct interactive and sharing process through these workshops.

A3. Lobbying for highlighting women's land marginalization: The demand for more profound and specific actions for promoting land and food rights of women (especially in areas where customary laws are more important) in the National Land Reform Policy would be highlighted through a series of posters distributed across the nation. The challenges and hurdles of the women from the community, as expressed during the FPAR journey, would be presented in these series of posters containing pictures and quotes of the women of the communities. These would be sent to different organisations, departments and individuals across the nation and also globally. Each poster would also depict a concrete strategic solution towards making the policies more gender sensitive. The posters would be developed in collaboration with the women from the communities.

A4. Setting up of a nodal committee of women: Making a committee of women at the state level which would be led by the women co-researchers of WRG (set up during the FPAR program), women community representatives from other areas, social activists and various social representatives to monitor the working process of the local government in reaching schemes for women that promote their land and food rights. This would also serve as a platform for women from remote marginalized areas to voice their challenges and grievances in this matter (including any forms of violence and discrimination they may face) and find a possible solution with the active support of the members of the committees. Hopefully, this platform would escalate to a national level in the coming times. An information portal specifically for women could also become a part of this.

A5. Ensure reach of the voices to various national and global agencies: The stories of these women and their gradual evolution may influence many more women at different

levels across the world. Hence the findings of the report and successive actions would be sent to and shared with different government and non-government actors across the nation and also collect their feedback and understanding in their context. These would also be shared at different global platforms and media.

B. Breaking Barriers:

B1. State-level dialogue-building on Customary Laws and gender discrepancies: It is not possible to change the customary laws overnight, but it is important to highlight the opinion of the women and their real-life experiences in this matter. A social dialogue and debate on this would be organised where the women from these communities would share their opinion on the matter. The men and elderly from the community would also be a part of the process to initiate a dialogue on social change – if not in law but in terms of social actions. This would be helpful in breaking generational barriers of gender discrimination.

B2. Ensuring more participation of women at the grass-root governance system: A series of Rallies would be undertaken by the women to promote and activate ensuring of more local women in different local governance systems that are responsible for ensuring land and agricultural activities. These rallies would also highlight the quest for the local women to break the social system of women being under the governance system headed by the men. Cultural expressions and wall-writings could be used alongside to strengthen the demands.

B3. Mobilising women to seek alternative methods of land rights: The experiences of these community women are a proof that there are avenues to ensure alternative systems of women's land rights are possible. Kitchen gardens, community collective gardens, fallow land reclamation are several alternatives. The co-researchers would mobilise the local women to avail of such opportunities. Alongside, the information portal could be used to disseminate more information on such opportunities.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Interim Activity Report

1. Title of the Research:

"Exercising their rights on land and food in accessing resources, entitlements and support towards economic independence: the case of women in Dhobani and Uldahi villages in Musabani district, Jharkhand, India."

List of Activities and Outputs:

2. List of Activities and Output:

2.1 Pre-research Consultation in Badia and Neighboring Villages:

1. On November 25, 2023, and December 17, 2023, pre-research consultation meetings were held in Badia and its neighboring villages, Dhobani and Uldahi, Musabani,

Jharkhand, engaging a total of 58 women (27 in Badia and 31 in Dhobani and Uldahi) to understand their issues related to food production, choices, and rights. The purpose was to gather insights into the conditions of community women, their issues with food production and choices, and the impact of modern agricultural practices on their lives and health. Several informal interactions were conducted to build rapport and trust, revealing that the shift from natural to chemical fertilizers was affecting their health and the nutritional value of their food. As a result, these villages were included in the broader research initiative, emphasizing the importance of sustainable practices to protect their health and food quality. This inclusion aims to ensure that the specific needs and challenges of women in these villages are addressed comprehensively in future research and interventions.

2. January to April 2024, Exploratory visits and meetings were continuously conducted in surrounding villages within the Musabani block during this period, with a particular focus on food security. These visits aimed to assess local food security issues, understand the impact of agricultural practices on food availability and quality, and gather insights into community perceptions and challenges related to food access. This ongoing engagement helped to identify specific areas where interventions could improve food security and ensure that the broader research initiative addressed the most pressing concerns of the local communities. This is when we identified our co- researchers.

3. On May 1, 2024, an exploratory visit took place in Dhobani village, Musabani block, Jharkhand, with co-researchers from Dhobani and Uldahi participating to deepen their understanding of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) and the women's situations in detail. The visit aimed to: enhance understanding of FPAR principles among co-researchers, ensuring they grasped the collaborative and inclusive nature of the methodology; advocate effectively for local women's rights and needs, equipping co-researchers with the knowledge to support and represent these women accurately; identify specific challenges faced by women in food production and resource access, uncovering barriers and issues that hinder their roles and responsibilities; and build trust for meaningful engagement, creating a safe and welcoming environment for open dialogue.

Activities included: face-to-face interactions, which fostered direct engagement and rapport-building; detailed discussions, providing in-depth insights into the women's daily lives, challenges, and aspirations; active listening, ensuring that the co-researchers fully comprehended the women's narratives; and encouraging storytelling, which facilitated a rich exchange of knowledge and experiences in a comfortable and safe environment. This engagement emphasized: collaboration, making the local women feel like partners in the research process; active participation, encouraging all women, especially those marginalized, to contribute; and the inclusion of marginalized voices, ensuring that those previously overlooked had a platform to share their experiences. [[See Picture No. 11 Interaction with community co- researchers](#)]

4. On May 16, an interactive session was held with co-researchers from Dhobani and Uldahi villages in Jharkhand, organized at the home of community co-researcher Saraswati Mardi. The session aimed to understand local women's food habits, farming challenges, and interest in sustainable agriculture. Using storytelling and interviews, the women shared that their daily diet mainly includes soaked rice, available greens, and sometimes lentils. They said this is mostly what they eat all three times of the day, and all

family members, including the children, eat the same food, as they have become used to it.

When asked how they manage lunch since they go out to work, they explained that they cook food for both breakfast and lunch in the morning before leaving for work. During months when farming is not possible (as it's only done once a year), they go to the forest to collect wood and leaves (such as sal and kendu leaves) to sell in the Musabani market. They also take up labor work, like road construction. After returning from work, they prepare dinner.

The women spoke about the traditional foods they make during festivals and discussed the unavailability of 'rainbow-colored meals' (as promoted by nutritionists), exploring whether these colorful foods are part of their regular diet. Additionally, they discussed the inadequacy and unavailability of nutritious food in their daily lives.

Later in the conversation, they discussed the women involved in animal husbandry and revealed that they raise chickens, pigs, and ducks, among others. They also highlighted issues with farming, particularly water scarcity during the hot season and the rocky terrain, which makes it hard to practice organic farming.

Sukhimai Murmu explained, *"Our land is so stony that water doesn't reach the fields properly, making farming very difficult."* Women with flatter land expressed a desire to expand organic farming, but those with rocky land resort to using chemical fertilizers due to the poor water retention in the soil. The area is drought-prone with scanty rainfall, and global warming has further impacted their farming practices and productivity. [[See Picture No. 12 Photographic Evidence of Rocky Field](#)]

Sanjita's story: Sanjita was still in school when she was married off. She then gave birth to two girls in quick succession at a very young age. She has the sole responsibility of taking care of her daughters as well as her elderly mother-in-law. She has to also perform other household duties and chores. In the little time that she can spare, she works in the fields to help her husband. She does not get any money in hand and eats whatever her husband provides. She wanted to continue her education but she has neither time nor money. She is torn between educating her daughters and providing them with proper nutrition and security. She wants her daughters to have good education so they don't have to depend on anyone in the future unlike her current situation. She doesn't want them to be married early, but given her helpless condition, she is afraid she may not be able to prevent it.

The women have expressed their eagerness for training in organic farming to improve their agricultural practices. This discussion provided valuable insights into their dietary habits, farming problems, and hopes for sustainable farming that fits their cultural and environmental needs. They shared ideas about food and the food system, emphasizing the importance of integrating traditional foods with more sustainable practices. Furthermore, the women showed interest in learning new skills that could provide additional sources of income and financial independence. Their desire for change and their wish to use their rights properly and live independently were clear indicators of their readiness to embrace new opportunities and improve their quality of life.

A day in the life of Shakuntala: Shakuntala is one of our co-researchers. She wakes up at 3 in the morning to complete all the household chores and prepare food, which is just rice and some green leaves that grow around her house and garden. After finishing her morning work, she heads to the forest to collect firewood and different types of leaves, like

sal leaves. She sells them at the Musabani market. By the time she returns home from the forest, it is usually around 1 or 2 in the afternoon.

Once back, she has lunch, which is often the same rice and greens. Most days, all three meals consist of rice and greens, though once in a while she might prepare dal (lentil soup) or a vegetable in addition to the greens. The children eat the same food without complaining because they have become used to it.

She continues with household chores till 7 or 8 pm, when she gets so tired from the day's work that she falls asleep. One day, when she was unwell, she couldn't complete her household tasks or go to the forest. She still made food for the family, but she couldn't sell the firewood and leaves that day.

Shakuntala wishes she could have the time and skills to grow some vegetables on her own land, or if she knew how to make something from the leaves she collects from the forest and sell it, she could earn a little more money. However, she doesn't have those skills.

[[See Picture No. 13 Interaction with community co-researchers](#)]

5. Continuing our research, we held a meeting on May 22, 2024, at the government school in Dhobani, Jharkhand. Community co-researchers participated in this meeting, which aimed to answer the question, "What are the barriers to your food and economic security?" The women explained several key barriers:

- **Food Security Challenges:**

- The rocky soil in the region severely hampers effective crop growth, leading to reduced yields and food shortages.
- Insufficient rainfall exacerbates crop production challenges, contributing further to insecurity around food availability.
- Scarcity of food directly impacts nutrition, resulting in health issues among community members.
- During the hot season, severe water scarcity intensifies difficulties in maintaining crop production and securing adequate food supplies.
- When food availability is low, women get less food than men.
- Limited access to quality seeds, fertilizers, and farming tools due to financial constraints affect crop yields, compounding food shortages.
- The unpredictable weather patterns caused by climate change, such as untimely rains or prolonged droughts, increase uncertainty in farming, worsening the food security situation.

- **Economic Security Challenges:**

- Women lack access to formal education and skill development, which confines them to low-paying farming and labor work that fails to meet their economic needs.
- Heavy reliance on farming as a livelihood source makes them vulnerable to crop failures, which directly affect their economic stability.
- The available labor work pays inadequately, making it difficult for women to achieve economic security and forcing them to remain dependent on men.
- Poor transportation issues limit access to larger markets, making it challenging

for

- women to sell their produce and generate better income.
- Many women do not have legal ownership of the land they cultivate, which restricts their access to government subsidies, loans, or farming schemes that could support agricultural improvement.
- Social norms and traditional gender roles burden women with household responsibilities, such as fetching water and caring for children, leaving them little time for income-generating activities or self-improvement.

“Farmers want high yield, quickly. They don't think about what causes harm or what will happen in the future. They need the money.” — Sandhya Murmu

“In tribal households, when a woman's husband passes away and she doesn't have a son, she is often labeled as a witch and stripped of her land rights. This forces her to depend entirely on the men of the household for survival. Despite this, she is still required to work in the fields like a laborer. As a result, she faces significant challenges, not only in maintaining her dignity and independence but also in securing her basic needs, including access to food. Without land rights, she cannot cultivate her own food, leaving her vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition, and wholly reliant on others for sustenance.” — Supriti Murmu

Saraswati Mardi is one of our co-researchers. She has been coming to our meetings, of late she has been quiet and reserved. When we asked her the reason, she told us what happened. Because of our discussions, she started thinking about her rights, her own interests, and her food sovereignty and health. When she spoke about these thoughts with her family, everyone, including her father, her uncle and her brothers were angry. They said, 'Why are you demanding rights here? You are married now; your rights are with your in-laws, not here.' Her niece who is an educated woman also joined them in abusing her. We assured her that we would gradually speak with other members of the families during the next phase of our project.

We noted that she was unperturbed by this reaction of her family as were the other co-researcher present. This is because this kind of behavior is normal and expected in this community. A married woman is considered external to her paternal family. On the other hand, in her marital family also she is treated as an outsider for a long time until she has children.

This meeting underscored the critical interconnectedness of environmental and educational factors in shaping the overall well-being of women, highlighting the urgent need for interventions that enhance agricultural productivity, water management strategies, and skill development opportunities. Such initiatives are crucial to improving food and economic security of the women and fostering sustainable livelihoods in Dhobani village.

6. On May 30, a meeting took place at the home of a co-researcher in Dhobani, Musabani, Jharkhand, involving community co-researchers. The session utilized

storytelling and participatory interviews to explore how decisions are made within households regarding farming, food choices, and income generation. One co-researcher mentioned that women have no rights in any matters as the community is male-dominated, and this reflects in various aspects of life. In village meetings, men's opinions are prioritized over women's, and the same applies to food consumption where men eat first, and women eat afterward. While some families may not follow this practice, their numbers are very few. Discrimination still persists, and even if men do not work in the fields, they retain their rights, whereas women's rights are not recognized.

The women shared that decision-making power in their community predominantly rests with men. Men decide everything from which crops to plant, how much to cultivate, where to sell the produce, and who benefits financially. Even decisions as basic as a woman leaving home require permission from her husband or in-laws, illustrating the extent of male authority in their lives.

During discussions, the women were asked if they had ever discussed or attempted to assert their rights within their homes. For example, if a woman suggests planting additional crops alongside rice, what happens? The women stated that while their suggestions might be heard, if the man does not agree, the proposal will not be implemented. The man's will be considered more important. One co-researcher mentioned that men can go anywhere and do anything as they please, and they often question, "Why should we ask you? Who are you to decide?" However, women are not permitted to act similarly.

The co-researchers revealed that they had not previously given much thought to these issues because the community's mindset is deeply entrenched. They added that if they attempt to discuss their rights at home or within the community, their concerns are often disregarded or misunderstood, and they lack support in challenging these norms. One co-researcher said, "New brides have absolutely no say in the family until a woman has a son of at least 10 years. She has no voice in the family." Many women described their dependence on their husbands or in-laws despite their significant contributions to farming. Women handle all aspects of farming, from sowing seeds to harvesting and maintaining crops, yet they receive no benefits from their labor except for the food they prepare daily. They highlighted that the benefits from their agricultural labor often flow to male family members rather than to themselves. "The produce is sold in the market by the men, so the men keep the money."

The meeting illuminated profound gender disparities in decision-making power and autonomy within the community. Women face significant challenges due to entrenched patriarchal norms that grant men predominant control over agricultural decisions, financial matters, and household dynamics. Despite their substantial contributions to farming, including planting, maintaining, and harvesting crops, women receive minimal direct benefits, as the profits are typically managed by men. Their autonomy is further restricted, with even basic decisions like leaving the home requiring male approval, reflecting deep-seated patriarchal control. Efforts to assert their rights are often met with resistance or indifference, highlighting a lack of support and advocacy for women challenging these norms. The discussions emphasized the urgent need for initiatives that not only raise awareness about gender equality but also empower women to actively participate in decision-making processes and advocate for their rights. To achieve more equitable outcomes, it is crucial to address systemic disparities by fostering an environment that supports women's active involvement and promotes fair and inclusive practices within the community. Women need to be empowered through

capacity-building initiatives that strengthen their personal and professional lives. When women gain ownership rights over land, they enhance their decision-making power and independence, enabling them to use their agricultural knowledge to grow crops effectively and take control of food sovereignty, which benefits both their families and the community. Additionally, regular discussions with village elders, community members, and family members, particularly men, are essential to build awareness about the importance of women's roles in the family and society. These dialogues can help stakeholders recognize that women's contributions are vital for societal development, fostering a shared commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive environment.

"When a woman is newly married, she has no say in any household matters; not until she has a child and the child is at least ten years old." — Sitamani Murmu

"In our community, women do not have decision-making rights, and this tradition has been going on for a long time. If a woman raises her voice against this, she receives no support." — Sitamani Murmu

"Women are always laborers, whether on their own farm or someone else's. They work hard in the fields but do not have decision-making power. Decisions about which crops to plant, where to sell the produce, and who receives the profit are made solely by the men in the household. Despite their significant contribution, women lack rights and decision-making power." — Savitri Murmu

"In village panchayats, when a woman becomes the head, people often see her husband as the real leader. Even though the woman holds the position, all decisions are made by her husband, and he is addressed as the 'Pradhan Pati' (Head's Husband)." — Supriti Murmu

Papiya Sharma is one of our co-researchers. She is inspired by our discussions. However, she faces a significant dilemma regarding her family property. There is no proper paperwork, and all the documentation is in the names of ancestors, not legally transferred to the family members. As a result, men exercise rights over the property, while women are not allowed to assert their rights. It has traditionally been this way. If a man has only daughters and no sons then other male relatives take control over the land and property denying all rights to the daughters. All the land documents are in the name of the forefathers. Although the property may be divided among family members, the paperwork does not reflect this. Because of this arrangement, Papiya is unable to claim any land title legally. She is also afraid if she speaks up about this issue, she will not receive any support and may be told to leave the house.

Without legal name change, Papiya cannot make a claim, and according to tradition, men have rights while women do not. This is a tradition and norm in their village and community.

[[See Picture No. 14 Storytelling and participatory interview](#)]

7. On June 6, at the government school in Dhobani village, we conducted social and

resource mapping and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to understand the social background and available resources in Dhobani and Uldahi villages. The women of the villages actively participated in this activity as it was a new experience for them. Before conducting this activity, we explained to our co-researchers what social and resource mapping is, why we were doing it, and its importance. After this, we divided the co-researchers into two groups: one group mapped Dhobani village, while the other mapped Uldahi village. The women found this mapping exercise very engaging. They first discussed among themselves how to create the social and resource map, and then proceeded with the mapping.

Through this activity, they created a geographical view of their villages, highlighting the location of resources such as fields, water sources (ponds, wells, government hand pumps), forests, markets, and the distance to facilities like hospitals. The mapping process helped identify both the available resources and what was lacking, such as the inadequate availability of transportation. This exercise allowed both groups and the other women to gain a deeper understanding of their villages. Additionally, it provided us with insights into the social and resource background of the communities. By participating in this mapping, the women also gained a better understanding of each other and their community, which enhanced their sense of connection and awareness.

This process not only facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the available resources but also helped the women to collectively reflect on the gaps in infrastructure and resources, encouraging discussions about potential improvements like schools, health centers, transportation, better communication facilities, etc.

[[See Picture No. 15 Drawing: Social and Resource Mapping](#)]

8. On June 12, 2024, the meeting at the Panchayat office in Dhobani village brought together co-researchers from Uldahi and Dhobani, along with the Panchayat head, to address the community's perspective on creating a viable and sustainable food system. Before the session, the Panchayat head was briefed about the goals of the initiative. The women co-researchers had already shared detailed insights into their food habits, farming methods, and how these had evolved over the years.

The Panchayat head took an active role, highlighting the various government schemes available to women and assuring the group of his support in their efforts. He stressed that whatever assistance the community required from his end would be made available to ensure that the necessary initiatives could move forward.

During the session, the women delved into how their ancestors once relied on organic farming practices and homegrown seeds. They used traditional tools and cooking methods, and food was free of adulteration, which they believed contributed to the better health of the older generations. However, as time passed, the community saw significant changes in how crops were grown, how meals were prepared, and the tools used. One of the key shifts was the increasing reliance on market-purchased seeds, which came at a high cost. The heavy use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides caused a sharp decline in soil fertility, which in turn impacted their crop yields and, eventually, their diet. The decline or degradation of the agricultural lands might have been exacerbated by the use of chemical-based farming systems that stripped off the important nutrients in the soil. Adulterated food became a norm, and they noticed its harmful effects on their health and that of their children.

Through these discussions, the women voiced their concerns about how these shifts have affected their community and expressed their desire to return to organic farming methods. They understood the importance of restoring soil health and reducing chemical use in order to produce healthier food. This vision, driven by a desire to improve crop productivity and food security, became a central theme of the discussion. The women felt empowered, knowing they had a role in shaping their village's agricultural future, and the meeting provided a foundation for future initiatives that could support organic farming, enhance food security, and improve the overall well-being of their community.

"Because the soil is so bad now, men are seeking work outside the village. They are going to other states like Gujarat, Maharashtra and sending money from there. So, we have a little more money than before." — Salma Murmu

"We used to practice organic farming in the past, which was much better for our health and the soil. We want to return to those methods," — Sandhya Murmu

[[See Picture No. 16 Drawing: Past, Present, Future Food System](#)]

9. After these meetings, we organized a training program on organic farming and animal husbandry for the women of Dhobani and Uldahi villages on July 8 and 9, 2024, at the Panchayat (village council) office.

Who: The co-researchers from both Dhobani and Uldahi villages participated in this training.

What: The training focused on organic farming and animal husbandry.

When: The training took place on June 8 and 9, 2024.

Where: The venue for the training was the Panchayat office in Dhobani village.

Why: The purpose of the training was to encourage the women to adopt organic farming and to improve their skills in animal husbandry.

Organic Farming:

The training explained what organic farming is, why it is important, its benefits, and why it is essential for their agricultural practices. The women were trained on various methods of making organic manures and pesticides, including how and when to use them, as well as the appropriate quantities. They were taught how to make organic manure using easily available items like vegetable and fruit peels, egg shells, etc. and they learned purification of seeds by **Bijamrit method**. The necessary ingredients for this method are cow dung from indigenous cows, cow urine, lime or clay, water, and a handful of farm soil. To prepare Bijamrit, all these materials are mixed together in water and left to ferment for 24 hours. During this time, the solution is stirred twice daily using a wooden stick. After 24 hours, the mixture, now known as Bijamrit, is applied to the seeds to purify them. Once treated, the seeds are dried in the shade before being sown.

This method is highly effective in naturally nourishing and protecting seeds, playing a significant role in organic farming. The co-researchers not only observed this method but also participated in its preparation. They learned how to use the right proportions of each material and understood the process thoroughly. Through this

hands-on experience, they gained a deeper understanding of the importance of each component in the method. The women also had the opportunity to ask questions and clarify their doubts, ensuring a comprehensive learning experience.

Animal Husbandry:

The focus was on teaching the women how to care for their livestock, such as pigs, ducks, cows, and chickens. They were guided on the types of food and medicines needed for each animal, including the right time and dosage for proper care. The training also covered practical methods to ensure the animals' health and well-being. The women were actively engaged in the session, asking questions and clarifying doubts such as, "When and how should we take care of our livestock, and how can we maintain their health?" Their involvement reflected a deep interest in learning these essential skills.

Additionally, the program has gradually begun to involve men, recognizing the importance of their support. Some men have already participated in the training, as their engagement is seen as crucial to the success of the initiative. Encouraging their involvement will likely strengthen the community's collective approach to livestock care. Chhita Tudu expressed, "This training has been incredibly useful. I've learned valuable techniques, from making organic fertilizers and pesticides to caring for livestock. Even if I can't fully implement these methods this year, I am committed to using them in the future, beginning with the small vegetable plants I grow at home." Sukhimai Murmu stated, "If we use these techniques, we won't need to rely on chemical fertilizers, which will reduce our costs and help restore the health of our soil."

Outcome:

The outcome of this training was that the women gained valuable knowledge and skills in both organic farming and animal husbandry. This will help them improve their agricultural practices, increase productivity, and ensure the health and well-being of their livestock. Additionally, this initiative boosted their confidence and motivation to implement sustainable practices in their communities. Further training sessions will be held to continue building on this knowledge and support the ongoing development of sustainable agricultural practices in the villages. The expectation is set that this woman will be future trainer for similar training in the community.

[\[See Picture No. 17 Training and Practical Demonstration on Organic Farming\]](#)

10. On August 24, 2024, a meeting was conducted at the Dhobani Panchayat office, focusing on human rights with co-researchers from Dhobani and Uldahi villages. The Mukhiya of Dhobani village was also present. The session engaged women from both villages in a Card Activity designed to raise awareness about human rights and assess their existing knowledge.

During the meeting, the women were introduced to various human rights through an interactive Card Activity. This method allowed them to identify which rights they were already familiar with, which were new to them, and which rights they actively practice in their daily lives. The primary goal of this activity was to enhance their understanding of their rights and to discuss strategies for addressing any violations they might encounter. Feedback from the co-researchers indicated that many of the rights were previously unknown to them. They expressed a commitment to begin observing these rights in their everyday lives. However, one co-researcher noted a significant challenge: although they now understand their rights, enforcing these rights within their

households and community remains difficult due to the prevailing male dominance in the area.

Additionally, the meeting included a discussion on gender equality. The women were divided into groups and asked to use a chart activity to list the tasks typically assigned to men and women. They discussed their findings within their groups and then shared their points. This activity highlighted the significant gender-based disparities in work distribution. Through this process, the women and the facilitators gained insights into the existing biases and inequalities in their community. The main objective of this activity was to help the women understand what gender equality is, why it is essential, and how they can start implementing it at their own level.

The feedback from the co-researchers indicated that many of the rights were previously unknown to them. They expressed a commitment to begin observing these rights in their everyday lives. However, one co-researcher noted a significant challenge: although they now understand their rights, enforcing these rights within their households and community remains difficult due to the prevailing male dominance in the area.

The discussion on gender equality revealed significant insights as well. The chart activity, where women listed tasks typically assigned to men and women, exposed the prevalent gender-based disparities in work distribution. This activity illuminated the biases and inequalities within their community and helped the women understand what gender equality entails, why it is crucial, and how they can start advocating for it at their own level. Despite the awareness gained, implementing gender equality in their daily lives remains a challenge due to existing social norms and gender biases.

[\[See Picture No. 18 Activity on Human Rights\]](#)

[\[See Picture No. 19 Activity on Gender Equality\]](#)

11. On September 4, 2024, we conducted a face-to-face meeting with men from Dhobani and Uldahi villages at the Dhobani Panchayat office. During this interaction, we explained the project's focus on women's food security and the necessity of equal rights for women. We highlighted the benefits of men's support for women's advancement, emphasizing that such support would lead to improvements in household prosperity, farming success, and overall self-reliance.

The outcome of this meeting was the formation of a Men Support Group. This group aims to include men who are willing to support the project and contribute positively. Further interactions with these men are planned to continue building their understanding and involvement.

[\[See Picture No. 20 Interaction with men\]](#)

12. On September 18, 2024, a training session on preparing low-budget nutritious food was organized at the home of Savitri Murmu, a co-researcher, in Dhobani village. The primary objective of this training was to teach the community co-researchers how to create nutritious food using locally available ingredients. This initiative aimed to benefit their families, including children and other household members, while reducing the need to spend money on store-bought products marketed as nutritious.

During the session, the co-researchers learned how to prepare nutrient-rich powders and

laddoos using maize, chickpeas, wheat, peanuts, flattened rice (chura), and puffed rice (mudhi). The participants found the training highly informative and valuable, as it equipped them with practical skills to improve their health and their families' health using affordable and accessible resources. [[See Picture No. 19](#)]

On October 21, 2024, An interactive session on organic soap-making was held at the home of Saraswati Mardi, a co-researcher, in Dhobani village. Women from both Dhobani and Uldahi villages came together to learn about the potential of organic soap-making as a livelihood opportunity. The facilitators explained the process, the benefits of organic soaps, and the materials required for production. The primary goal of the session was to assess the interest of the women in adopting this skill. The participants engaged in discussions about the feasibility of starting soap-making initiatives within their villages, with many expressing enthusiasm for its potential to supplement household income. The session concluded with a brief demonstration of the basic steps involved in soap-making, sparking curiosity and motivation among the attendees. [[See Picture No. 20](#)]

On October 22, 2024, Following the interactive session, a hands-on training workshop on organic soap-making was conducted at Saraswati Mardi's home in Dhobani village. Women from Dhobani and Uldahi actively participated, learning each step of the soap-making process, including selecting natural ingredients, preparing mixtures, and shaping the soaps. The facilitators ensured a practical, engaging approach, allowing every participant to practice under supervision. By the end of the session, the women displayed confidence in their newly acquired skills and showed keen interest in using these skills to create small-scale businesses. This training not only equipped them with valuable knowledge but also instilled a sense of empowerment and hope for economic independence. [[See Picture No. 21](#)]

On October 27, 2024, community discussions were organized at Savitri Murmu's home in Dhobani village to explore strategies for building the capacity of women in farming. These interactions focused on promoting gender equality in agricultural practices and recognizing women's vital role in food production. A key outcome of these discussions was the formation of a collective garden, designed to enable women to actively participate as food growers and strengthen their contributions to farming activities. The initiative aims to foster collective efforts toward community development, establish women as farmers, and give greater visibility to their roles as decision-makers in farming. The participants expressed optimism about this approach and shared a commitment to taking an active role in farming. [[See Picture No. 22](#)]

Methods Employed

- Social and resourcing mapping of Dhobani village.
- Social and resourcing mapping of Uldahi village.
- Collective drawing work on the food system.
- FGD's
- Participatory interview

3. Outcomes and Impacts:

Adequacy and Availability of Nutritious Food:

- **Identification of Nutritional Gaps:** Women noted that while traditional diets included diverse vegetables and grains, the shift to commercial crops has reduced their access to nutritious food. As Shankuntala shared, “Rice and greens are all we have, even for our children,” but nowadays more land is used for cash crops like oilseeds instead of food for our families. They also pointed out that while some of these foods are available, others are not. This is because food cultivation is market driven. This conversation served to identify nutritional gaps in their diets and underscored the importance of enhancing the availability of diverse and nutritious food options within their community.
- **Resource Limitations:** The stony nature of their land makes farming difficult. There is also inadequate water which affects crop yields and also affects a variety of crops. There is only monocrop cultivation. So, awareness of climate resilient crops is required.
- **Water Scarcity Issues:** During summer, water scarcity further complicates vegetable farming and affects livestock rearing. Training is required on how to deal with these issues.

Impact of Seasonal Changes on Agricultural Activities:

- **Seasonal Challenges:** Women identified the difficulties posed by seasonal changes, particularly during the summer when water scarcity is most severe.
- **Effect on Crop Production:** Stony land and insufficient water supply were mentioned as significant barriers to successful farming.

Ideas About Food and the Food System:

- **Traditional vs. Modern Farming:** Women compared past traditional farming practices, which were more organic and produced more nutritious crops, to current practices that rely heavily on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, reducing soil fertility. Although women express a preference for traditional, sustainable farming methods, economic pressures and limited access to resources often force them to adopt modern agricultural practices, such as chemical fertilizers and hybrid seeds. This situation reflects a challenging trade-off, as these techniques may increase short-term yields but can damage soil health and reduce long-term sustainability.
- **Future Aspirations:** They expressed a desire to return to traditional and organic farming methods to improve soil fertility and crop productivity, resulting in more nutritious food.

Situation at Home and Decision-Making Power:

- **Limited Decision-Making Rights:** Women reported limited authority in household decisions related to farming and food. According to Supriti Murmu, “Women in our community have no say in what is grown or sold; even though we work the fields, men decide everything.”
- **Economic Control:** Despite their labor in the fields and at home, women do not receive their rightful share of money, which is controlled by their husbands or in-laws.

- **Lack of Support:** Women who attempt to challenge these norms receive little to no support from their community.
- Women realize that they need economic independence to have more decision-making power at home and in society.
- While women are essential to agricultural labor, performing many of the tasks involved in farming, the patriarchal structure assigns men primary control over agricultural decisions, including what crops to plant and where to sell produce. This dynamic allows men to benefit from women's labor without giving them decision-making power, illustrating the gendered power imbalance in agricultural households.

Interest in Learning New Skills:

- **Skill Development:** Women showed interest in learning new skills indicating a desire to diversify their income sources and become more self-reliant.
- Despite contributing significantly to farming and household labor, women's limited control over land and earnings due to customary norms reinforces their economic dependence on men. This dependency restricts their ability to make independent financial decisions, limiting their economic autonomy within the household. They need training in climate resilient crops and organic farming. Desire for Change and Use of Rights.
- **Empowerment:** Through these activities, women have begun to understand themselves better and are actively seeking solutions to their problems.
- **Increased Confidence:** The activities have boosted their confidence, helping them trust themselves more and reduce their fear of challenging the status quo. The activities have boosted their confidence, helping them trust themselves more and reduce their fear of challenging the status quo. Many women have started thinking more about their decision-making rights and have begun discussing these rights within their households on a small scale. For example, during the human rights meeting, women engaged in meaningful discussions and expressed a desire to assert their rights in household decisions. Additionally, co-researchers have mentioned plans to start using Bijamrit and other organic farming techniques at a small scale, such as applying these methods to the vegetables they grow in their homes. This shows that they are beginning to take steps towards change, both in their personal and agricultural practices.
- **Proactive Approach:** Women are now more proactive in addressing their issues and are eager to take steps to change their situations.
- **Increased Awareness of Human Rights:**

The meeting successfully raised awareness among the women about their human rights, many of which were previously unknown to them. The interactive Card Activity allowed them to recognize which rights they already practice, and more importantly, introduced them to new rights they were unaware of. This newfound knowledge has motivated the women to begin observing these rights in their daily lives, marking a critical first step toward empowerment.

Challenges in Enforcing Rights:

While the women gained a better understanding of their rights, enforcing these rights remains a significant challenge. The male-dominated culture in their households and

community acts as a barrier, making it difficult for women to assert their rights despite being aware of them. This reflects the ongoing struggle to break traditional norms and highlights the need for continued efforts in advocacy and support to overcome these challenges. While the Domestic Violence Act (2005) theoretically provides protections against abuse, low awareness and weak enforcement in rural areas leave women vulnerable to practices like witch branding. This tactic, often used to dispossess single or widowed women of property, continues despite legal protections. Community awareness programs are needed to bridge this enforcement gap.

Increased Understanding of Gender Inequality:

The gender equality discussion, particularly through the chart activity, made the women more conscious of the deep-rooted gender disparities in work distribution. They realized how tasks are unequally divided between men and women in their community. This awareness of gender inequality is crucial, as it helps them see the biases they face and gives them a starting point for advocating for change in their roles within their households and the larger community.

Commitment to Change:

The women expressed a commitment to implementing what they learned about human rights and gender equality. Though changing deeply entrenched societal norms is a slow process, they are determined to advocate for equality at their own level. Whether it is through small-scale discussions within their families or taking gradual steps to assert their rights, the meeting planted the seeds for long-term transformation in both personal and community spaces.

Recognition of Barriers:

One of the significant outcomes of the session was the recognition of barriers that still hinder the implementation of both human rights and gender equality. The male-dominated society, reinforced by cultural and social norms, continues to limit the extent to which women can exercise their rights and advocate for equality. This understanding is essential for identifying the next steps and possible interventions that can support women in overcoming these obstacles.

a. Capacity Building:

Training is being provided for capacity building of women in organic farming and animal husbandry. To further empower the women, meetings on gender equality and human rights were arranged, which played an impactful role in their capacity building. These discussions helped them better understand their rights and the importance of gender equality, enhancing their confidence and ability to advocate for change. Additionally, the leadership training provided has been useful in strengthening their capabilities. In the future, further leadership and skill development programs will be conducted to support their growth, and efforts will focus on strengthening the women co-researchers as a collective to protect their agricultural and food practices.

b. Tools and Resources:

Booklets, pamphlets, and posters are being produced to support the training in organic

farming and animal husbandry.

Efforts are being made to collect knowledge about traditional crops.

Trainers are being identified for skill development.

c. Advocacy:

During our research discussions we have involved and actively sought the support of the village council members and village council head. We are taking initiatives at the local level. We are working on connecting women with the panchayat (village council) and bringing their issues to the panchayat's attention.

d. Movement Building:

The co-researchers have actively organized themselves in WOMEN RESOURCE GROUP. This group has divided various tasks among the women, such as gathering the women, informing others about meetings, spreading awareness in the village, and connecting with women in remote areas. The co-researchers are also taking the initiative to change their situation. They are coming together to find solutions to their problems.

5. Lessons Learned:

Reflections: Slowly, the co-researchers are starting to speak about their problems and are also finding solutions. They are becoming more aware and empowered. The WOMEN RESOURCE GROUP and co-researchers are actively engaging in discussions on how to make the impact objective fruitful. They are collaborating and strategizing on how to effectively communicate their rights, particularly food rights, within their households. By explaining these concepts to family members, they are beginning to create a ripple effect of awareness in their communities.

For example, Chhita Tudu has not only started implementing organic farming techniques at home but is also applying the methods taught for the care of her livestock. She is using these techniques to improve both her vegetable production and the health of her animals. This practical application of the knowledge gained during training reflects how the women are becoming more aware and empowered, taking concrete steps towards achieving the project's goals and fostering sustainable changes in their daily lives.

- The reason for the lack of food security among women are as follows:
- Food production is controlled by men. The women need the support of the men and their families to achieve food security and exercise their rights.
- Limited variety of crops are produced because of soil and climate conditions
- The market also controls the food production
- The women need to find ways to produce what they want, and exercise their rights over their food.
- The families of the women need to be also aware of the problems faced by women so that they can provide better support and understanding.
- The women need support from their family so we have to also build awareness

among men and family members.

Challenges: We faced several challenges in our research, including the elections in May, which led to postponed meetings and unavailability of government officials for consultation. Additionally, extreme heat waves in April and May forced us to delay meetings as people were advised to stay indoors. Now, during the rainy season, the women co-researchers are occupied with farming activities, which has affected their availability for meetings.

Another challenge was the formation of the Men Resource Group. Gathering men for the group required overcoming initial resistance and persuading them to engage positively with the issues at hand. Despite these hurdles, efforts to foster a supportive mindset among men regarding gender equality and women's empowerment continue to progress.

6. Follow Up Action:

The next step involves advancing the training for women co-researchers. We have already made significant progress in strengthening women as a collective to protect their agriculture and food production. In these areas, including:

- Prepare a mix of nutritional food on a low budget.
- Animal care and rearing
- Moving forward, additional training will be conducted to further enhance their skills and knowledge in these areas.
- Form a men's support group to support the women.
- Economic empowerment of women.
- Legal awareness.

In the next phase, we will focus on building awareness among men regarding gender equality and its importance. This initiative aims to engage men in understanding and supporting gender equality, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive community. As part of this effort, dedicated sessions on gender equality will be organized specifically for men. These sessions will:

- Provide insights into the benefits of gender equality.
- Encourage men to actively contribute to a more balanced and equitable society.

Inference

The FPAR findings underscore the deeply rooted challenges faced by women in Dhobani and Uldahi villages regarding land ownership and food security. Customary laws, which favor male dominance in property rights, significantly restrict women's access to land, thus reinforcing economic dependency and limiting their agency within their households and communities. Women's exclusion from decision-making in agricultural and household matters perpetuates inequalities, affecting their autonomy over food choices and undermining food security. This situation highlights the urgent need for structural changes that can empower women to assert their rights and actively participate in community governance, particularly as they contribute substantially to agriculture and

food production. The study reveals that while some national policies like the Forest Rights Act and National Food Security Act aim to improve women's access to resources, awareness and effective implementation are limited. Women's initiatives, such as forming resource groups and engaging in skill development for organic farming, show promise in fostering local resilience and sustainable practices. These grassroots actions indicate that with adequate support and resources, women can drive positive changes within their communities. However, the presence of strong patriarchal norms and resistance from male family members pose significant barriers that impede women's full empowerment and social inclusion.

Need for Advocacy

The findings call for targeted advocacy efforts to create awareness and eradicate discriminatory practices against women and create pathways for equitable land rights and food sovereignty for women. Advocacy should focus on engaging local leaders, policymakers, and community members to shift cultural norms that currently restrict women's rights to property and decision-making. Efforts should include educational campaigns to raise awareness about the legal provisions available under the Forest Rights Act and other national policies. Moreover, building alliances with local governance bodies, such as panchayats, can amplify women's voices and foster a more supportive environment for gender equality. Advocacy initiatives should prioritize the involvement of both women and men in dialogues about gender equality. Forming men's support groups could play a crucial role in changing perceptions and fostering male allies who support women's rights in land ownership and food security. Training sessions focused on gender sensitization, economic empowerment, and legal awareness would equip women with the necessary tools to advocate for their rights effectively. By strengthening community solidarity around these issues, advocacy efforts can help create a more inclusive framework that respects women's rights and ensures equitable access to land and resources.

Annex B: Researcher Reflectivity

Knowledge and Concepts Before FPAR

Before participating in the APWLD FPAR program, I was entirely new to this field of research and activism. My understanding of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) was minimal, and I had no prior experience in engaging communities through structured research methodologies. This program introduced me to concepts, frameworks, and tools that were unfamiliar yet transformative in their approach to amplifying women's voices and addressing structural inequalities.

Changes in Myself and My Methods Through FPAR

The FPAR journey required me to dive deeply into participatory and feminist approaches to research. Working alongside the women of Dhobani and Uldahi villages, I learned how to involve community members as co-researchers, ensuring that their voices shaped the outcomes. The process moved beyond traditional data collection to fostering a shared sense of ownership and collective problem-solving.

The methods employed—such as storytelling, focus group discussions (FGDs), participatory mapping, and community dialogues—taught me the importance of creating safe spaces for women to express themselves. These techniques not only helped gather rich insights but also empowered the women to reflect on their rights and roles in the community. For instance, mapping exercises revealed gaps in resources and infrastructure, sparking conversations about improving access to land, water, and farming tools.

Personal Growth and Lessons Learned

Personally, the FPAR experience has been a journey of growth and transformation. It challenged my initial lack of familiarity with feminist principles and participatory research, encouraging me to adopt a more inclusive and empathetic perspective. The program helped me understand how deeply entrenched patriarchy shapes women's realities, from being excluded from decision-making to facing barriers in land ownership.

Key lessons I learned include:

1. **Power of Collaboration:** The collective effort of the community highlighted the strength of shared experiences and solutions.
2. **Value of Reflection:** FPAR taught me to reflect critically on my own assumptions and biases, which helped me build stronger connections with the participants.
3. **Importance of Contextual Understanding:** Understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of Jharkhand, including customary laws and gender norms, was essential for addressing the community's challenges.

Impact on My Work and Identity

Being new to this field, the FPAR journey has profoundly influenced my identity as a young researcher. It taught me to see research not merely as a tool for analysis but as a means for empowerment and change. The role of a researcher, as I experienced it, is to act as a facilitator, enabling marginalized voices to lead the process of change.

Challenges, such as resistance from male family members and the deeply rooted patriarchal mindset, were difficult to navigate. However, these experiences reinforced the importance of patience, community engagement, and the inclusion of men as allies in dismantling systemic barriers. Initiatives like the formation of WOMEN RESOURCE GROUPS (WRG's) and skill-development programs were instrumental in creating a foundation for collective advocacy and leadership.

Concepts and Frameworks

Through FPAR, I gained a deeper understanding of critical concepts such as food sovereignty, gender equity in land rights, and the intersectionality of gender, culture, and socio-economic conditions. These ideas were central to the program's objectives, which emphasized empowering women to reclaim their roles in agricultural decision-making and secure access to shared resources.

The program also introduced me to the importance of building local movements. For instance, the WRGs and the advocacy work around the Forest Rights Act helped women in these villages assert their rights over shared land and participate in governance processes. These efforts have already begun shifting community attitudes, with some male family members starting to recognize women's contributions to agriculture and decision-making.

Annex C: Data Collection

Data Sources: Interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), storytelling, social maps, and participatory activities.

1. List of Interviews, FGD's, Consultations with Date and Location and Interviewees:

Date	Names	Interview, FGD's	Documentation
01.05.24	Savitri Murmu Salge Baskey Shakuntala Besra Guruvvari Murmu Lukhi Murmu Asmit Murmu Shilpa Murmu Chhita Tudu Jasmi Tudu Sandhya Murmu Punta Murmu Sitamani Murmu Heera Mardi Baasanti Tudu Tulsi Mardi Sumitra Murmu Saraswati Mardi Sakro Hembram Kajal Rui Das Sheetal Murmu Savita Soren Sanjita Murmu	Face to Face Interaction, Group Discussion	Notes, Video Recording, Photos, Attendance list

	Papiya Sharma Singo Hansda Yashswati Singh		
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Date	Name	Interview, FGD's	Documentations
16.05.24	Sitamani Murmu Saraswati Mardi Sanjita Murmu Sulekha Murmu Shakuntala Besra Tulsi Mardi Chhitamani Murmu Gurubari Besra Singo Hansda Jasmi Tudu Lukhi Murmu Upal Tudu Sabitri Murmu	Participatory Interview, storytelling	Photo Video recording, Attendance list

	Salma Manjhi Punta Murmu Saro Murmu Puja Hembram Salge Baske Chhita Tudu Saswati Roy Papiya Shirma Yashswati Singh		
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Date	Name	Interview, FGD's	Documentations
22.05.24	Saraswati Mardi Sitamani Murmu Punta Murmu Sabitri Murmu Mayno Hembram Sandhya Murmu Sabita Soren Sheetal Murmu Sanjita Murmu Renuka Mardi Sankuntala Besra Tuli Mardi Chhitamani Murmu Chhita Tudu Jasmi Tudu Sumitra Murmu Shurubali Devi Sakro Hembram Salma Murmu Shakuntala Hembram Sarala Hembram Singo Hansda	Storytelling	Photos, Notes, Attendance list

	Papiya Sharma Sarita Besra Basanti Hansda Yashswati Singh		
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Date	Name	Interview, FGD's	Documentations
30.05.24	Sitamani Murmu Sheetal Murmu Chhitamani Murmu Saraswati Mardi Sandhya Murmu Punta Murmu Sanjita Murmu Sabitri Murmu Raaymat Murmu Puja Hembram Sukhimai Murmu Sarala Hembram Chhita Tudu Salma Murmu Singo Hansda Papiya Sharma Yashswati Singh	Storytelling, Participatory interview	Photo, video recording, notes, Attendance list

Date	Name	Interview, FGD's	Documentations
06.06.24	Sabitri Murmu Saraswati Mardi Sumitra Murmu Parwati Soren Shakuntala Besra Lukhi Murmu	Social and Resource Mapping, FGD's	Photo, video recording, Attendance list

	Kajal Rui Das Heera Mardi Upaal Devi Baasanti Tudu Parwati Murmu Mayno Hansda Sheetal Murmu Sunita lohar Phulo Soren Chhitamani Murmu Salma Murmu Sukhimai Murmu Chhita Tudu Mayno Hembram Lakshami Hansda Bhaago Hembram Aarsu Mardi Hiramani Hansda Bango Hembram Malti Hembram Sukhi Hembram Dulari Murmu Luski Hembram Jasmi Murmu Paansuri Murmu Sandhya Murmu Punta Murmu Raymat Murmu Mayno Soren Singo Hansda Sakro Hembram Papiya Sharma Yashswati Singh		
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Date	Name	Interview, FGD's	Documentations
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12.06.24	Bango Hembram Malti Hembram Sukhi Hembram Chhitamani Murmu Aarsu Mardi Dulari Murmu Sitamani Murmu Jasmi Tudu Sandhya Murmu Punta Murmu Raymat Murmu Mayno Hembram Singo Hansda Sakro Hembram Papiya Sharma Sabitri Murmu Saraswati Mardi Sita Soren Aladi Murmu Sumitra Murmu Sheetal Murmu Salma Murmu Heera Mardi Upaal Devi Baasanti Tudu Mayno Hansda Renuka Mardi Sarala Hembram Shakuntala Besra Sanjita Murmu Papiya Sharma Yashswati Singh	Drawing, FGD's	Photos, Videos, Notes, Attendance list
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Date	Name	Interview. FGD's	Documentations
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08.07.24	Asmet Murmu Salge Baskey Gurubari Besra Singo Hansda Shakuntala Besra Mayno Hansda Sunita Lohar Kapra Hembram Salge Murmur Sukhi Hembram Chinta Hansda Sabitri Murmu Salma Murmu Mayno Murmu Sitamani Murmu Sarala Hembram Mayno Soren Duli Mardi Baasanti Murmu Mayno Hembram Sombaari Hembram Maalti Hembram Kajal Baske Suniya Baske Baangi Hembram Luski Hembram Renuka Mardi Lukhi Murmu Chhitamani Murmu Sanjita Murmu Pinki Murmu Maanki Soren Dulari Murmu Hiramuni Mardi Raymat Murmu Monika Murmu	Training	Video Recording, Photo, Attendance list
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	Salge Murmu Parwati Soren Parwati Murmu Sandhya Murmu Sheetal Murmu Jasmi Tudu Aarsu Mardi Parwati Murmu Punta Murmu Shilpa Murmu Sulekha Murmu Lakshmi Hansda Malti Murmu Karmi Mardi Pansuri Murmu Chhita Tudu Sumitra Murmu Saraswati Mardi Salma Murmu Sakro Hembram Sukhmati Devi Surbali Devi Baasanti Tudu Jasmi Murmu Salge Murmu Papiya Sharma Yashswati Singh Laduram Mahato		
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Date	Name	Interview, FGD's	Documentations
09.07.24	Sitamani Murmu Sarala Hembram Mayno Soren Duli Mardi	Training	Videos, photos, Attendance list

	Baasanti Murmu Mayno Hembram Sombaari Hembram Maalti Hembram Kajal Baske Suniya Baske Baangi Hembram Luski Hembram Renuka Mardi Lukhi Murmu Chhitamani Murmu Sanjita Murmu Pinki Murmu Maanki Soren Dulari Murmu Hiramuni Mardi Raimat Murmu Monika Murmu Salge Murmu Parwati Soren Parwati Murmu Sandhya Murmu Sheetal Murmu Jasmi Tudu Aarsu Mardi Parwati Murmu Punta Murmu Shilpa Murmu Sulekha Murmu Lakshmi Hansda Malti Murmu Karmi Mardi Pansuri Murmu Chhita Tudu Sumitra Murmu Saraswati Mardi		
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	Salma Murmu Sakro Hembram Sukhmati Devi Surbali Devi Baasanti Tudu Jasmi Murmu Salge Murmu Papiya Sharma Asmet Murmu Salge Baskey Gurubari Besra Singo Hansda Shakuntala Besra Mayno Hansda Sunita Lohar Kapra Hembram Salge Murmur Sukhi Hembram Chinta Hansda Sabitri Murmu Salma Murmu Mayno Murmu Jagbandhu Soren Paresh Lohar Laduram Mahato Yashswati Singh		
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Date	Name	Interview / FGD	Documentation
24.08.24	Mayno Murmu Sitamani Murmu Sandhya Murmu Chhita Tudu Sukhimai Murmu Sakro Hembram	Card and Group Activity, Group Discussion	Photos, videos, Attendance list

	Shakuntala Besra Saraswati Mardi Basanti Tudu Kapra Hembram Dulari Hembram Renuka Mardi Salma Murmu Aarsu Mardi Dangi Kisku Basanti Hansda Shakuntala Hembram Sarita Besra Parwati Mardi Parwati Murmu Chhitamani Murmu Savitri Murmu Sheetal Murmu Punta Murmu Raimat Murmu Singo Hansda Parwati Soren Sarla Hembram Papiya Sharma Yashswati Singh		
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Date	Name	Interview / FGD	Documentation
04.09.24	Dasmal Tudu Karan Hansda Babulal kisku Shivnath Murmu Lakhan Murmu Maheshwar Murmu Sudhir Hansda Anil Patar	Face to Face Interaction	Photos, Attendance list

	Chandrarai Mardi Mangal Murmu Lakhan Mardi Sukhlal Murmu Papiya Sharma		
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Date	Name	Interview/ FGD	Documentation
25.08.24	Debjani Murmu (Member of District Council) Shaswati Roy Aditi Roy Saraswati Mardi Papiya Sharma Subhra Pani Karmi Kisku Gracy Kisku Nilima Sarkar Puja Kisku Prabir Sarkar Suraj Hansda Madhumita Sarkar Payal Patar Supriti Murmu Sandip Mahato Laduram Mahato Yashswati Singh	Meeting and Interaction	Photos, Videos, Attendance List

Date	Name	Interview / FGD	Documentation
18.09.24	Basanti Murmu Parwati Besra Saroti Mardi Parwati Mardi Sunita Murmu Maya Mardi Sanjita Murmu Raymat Murmu	Training on Low Budget Nutritious Food	Attendance List, Photos, Videos

	Salge Murmu Malti Murmu Pansuri Murmu Sabitri Murmu Chhitamani Murmu Chhita Tudu Sitamani Murmu Hiramuni Hansda Saraswati Mardi Sandhya Murmu Punta Murmu Sheetal Murmu Jasmi Murmu Parwati Sorem Yashswati Singh Madhumita Sarkar Papiya Sharma		
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Date	Name	Interview/ FGD	Documentation
21.10.24	Sandhya Murmu Sitamani Murmu Saraswati Mardi Chhita Tudu Savitri Murmu Shakuntala Besra Sukhimai Murmu Sarita Besra Papiya Sharma Basanti Murmu Sanjita Murmu Aditi Roy	Interaction with Co-researchers	Photo, Attendance List

Date	Name	Interview/ FGD	Documentation
22.10.2024	Sandhya Murmu Sitamani Murmu Saraswati Mardi Chhita Tudu Savitri Murmu Mayno Hembram	Workshop on Organic Soap Making	Photos, Videos, Attendance List

	Renuka Mardi Shakuntala Besra Sukhimai Murmu Sarita Besra Papiya Sharma Basanti Murmu Sanjita Murmu Sakro Hembram Basanti Tudu Aditi Roy		
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Date	Name	Interview/ FGD	Documentation
27.10.2024	Sandhya Murmu Sitamani Murmu Saraswati Mardi Chhita Tudu Savitri Murmu Raimat Murmu Monika Murmu Salge Murmu Parwati Soren Parwati Murmu Mayno Hembram Renuka Mardi Shakuntala Besra Sukhimai Murmu Sarita Besra Papiya Sharma Basanti Murmu Sanjita Murmu Sakro Hembram Basanti Tudu Aditi Roy Laduram Mahato Saswati Roy Yashswati Singh	Interaction with Co-researchers	Photos, Attendance List

2. Social and Resource Mapping of Dhobani and Uldahi Village:

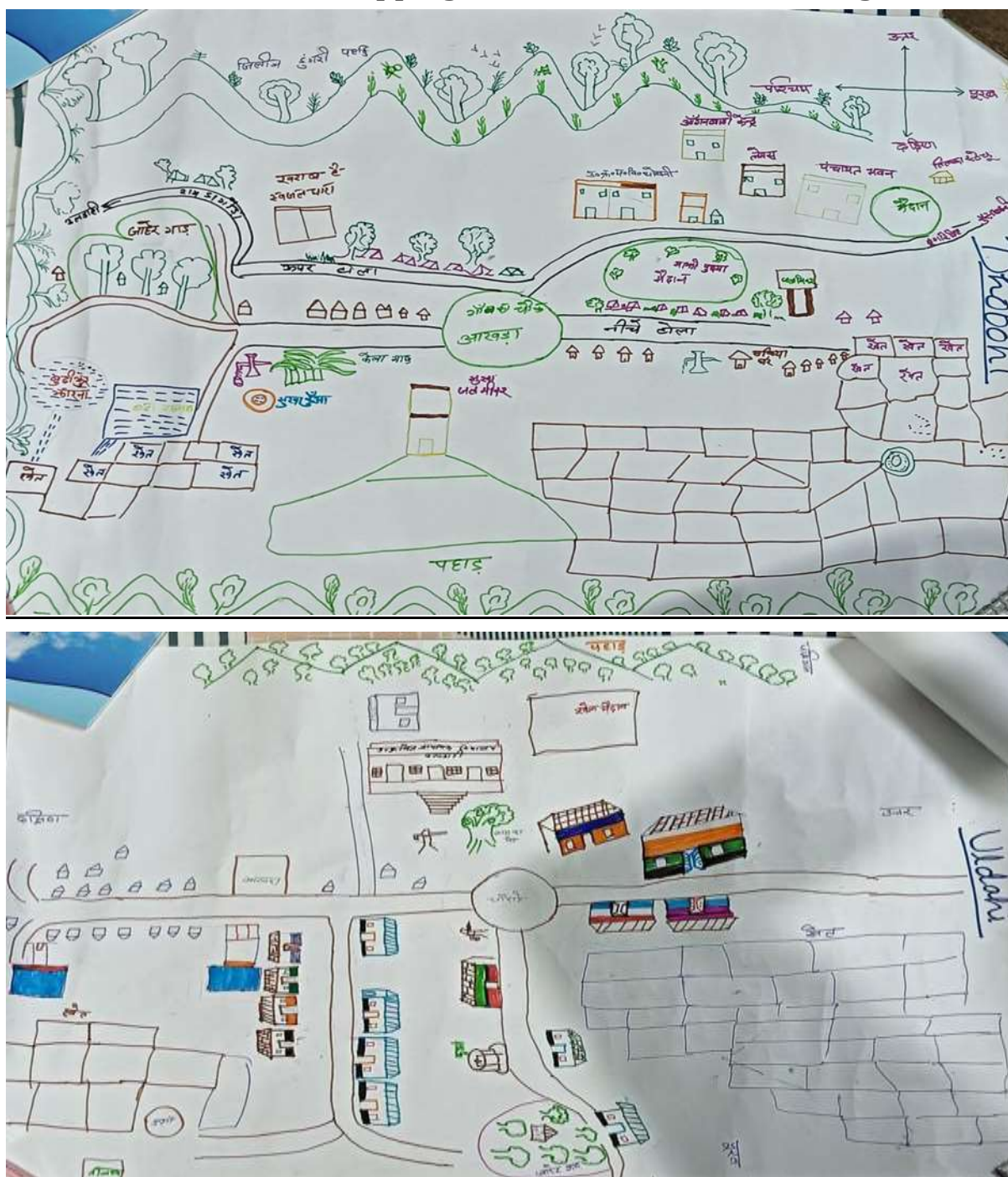


Fig. 19: Social and Resource Mapping of Dhobani and Uldahi

Source: FGD-6th June 2024

3. Photos of FPAR Activity:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Spvd91_8VeUoEvccRNWLhGlv5kqFsvGo

The document includes:

- 1) Pre-research consultation

- 2) Interaction with Community Women
- 3) FGD's, Participatory Interviews, Storytelling
- 4) Women contribution in Agriculture
- 5) Rocky Field
- 6) Social and Resource mapping
- 7) Past, Present, and Future on Food system
- 8) Training and Practical Demonstration On Organic Farming and Animal Husbandry
- 9) Training on low budget nutritious food
- 10) Awareness program on Gender Sensitization
- 11) Forest Right Act
- 12) Human Rights
- 13) Meeting with Local Government
- 14) Interactive session on Organic Soap Making
- 15) Workshop on Soap Making
- 16) Interaction with Community co-researchers
- 17) Dainik Bhaskar News Article
- 18) Making plates and bowl with leaves
- 19) Water Pump
- 20) Community Garden

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/13D4rd3jwP62Xxb6YaGVXlvrOUwqH5Zqr>

The document includes:

- 1) Flash cards
- 2) Booklet on Women's Food Sovereignty

7.Appendix:

Terms and Definitions:

- APWLD: Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
- BOOM: Breaking Out of Marginalization
- FPAR: Feminist Participatory Action Research
- JHARKHAND: Jharkhand is a state in India.
- PANCHAYAT: A Panchayat is a local self-government institution in India, typically at the village or small-town level, responsible for governance and development activities.
- SARPANCH: A Sarpanch is the elected head of a village-level Panchayat in India, responsible for overseeing local governance and development activities.
- Block Development Officer(BAO): The Block Development Officer is the official in charge of the block.

- District Council: The Local ruling body of an urban or rural district.WRG: WOMEN RESOURCE GROUP
- NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
- FRA: Forest Right Act

8. References:

<https://apwld.org/>

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