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Shifting Social Norms through Awareness Leadership building and Strengthened Community: A Journey from 'No One' to 'Know'

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Abstract:

Gender based discrimination and violence persist as a significant obstacle in achieving gender equality and social justice and women and girls are the recipient of it. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort among various stakeholders and active participation of community members. Engaging with local communities to challenge traditional gender norms and promote gender equality is crucial. This can encompass awareness building among women to identify gender-based discrimination and violence, capacity building of cadres to support women to raise their voice against violence, coordination with line departments to prioritize women in accessing their rights & entitlements and instill leadership among women for ownership and sustained impact. Hence women's empowerment through leadership development and community building is a viable proposition. To demonstrate this endeavor, Project Concern International (PCI) India, has been implementing the Gender Transformative Model (GTM) program in the structure of Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM), Department of Mission Shakti, Govt. of Odisha since 2019 in the state. The program aims to empower Women SHGs (self-help group) to identify their vulnerabilities & address issues of gender-based violence in their private and public spaces and facilitate linkages to access entitlements.

The NFHS-5 data states, 30% ever-married women aged 18-49 years have experienced spousal violence in Odisha. PCI India also conducted two rounds of vulnerability study which revealed, women do face challenges in decision-making, mobility, and participation in their personal and societal life. To address these grim social norms, PCI had piloted this program in the largest community platform exists in Odisha i.e. WSHGs of OLM. Through this program, PCI India envisage to achieve; (i) enhanced awareness, knowledge and solidarity among SHG women through Gender Self Learning Program (GSLP), (ii) facilitate ease of access to information, resources and entitlements through Gender Facilitation Centers (GFC), (iii) Strengthen local capacity through Gender Forum (GF) and Social Service committee (SSC), (iv) System's Engagement through



joint monitoring, review and convergence meetings, and (v) Data driven decision making through mobile app based data collection and MIS Dashboard. The Gender Facilitation Center (GFC) being the heart of the program placed at Gram Panchayat Level Federation (GPLF) extends counselling and referral services to women in distress & vulnerable situation. GFC also facilitates the entire process of gender self-awareness, access to entitlements, strengthens community institutions, promotes convergence among key stakeholders and fine tunes leadership among cadres. The program has not only helped the rural women to address gender-based violence but also thrive into leadership development to amplify the voices against violence and acquire social justice.

As high as 80% of the women participated in the process evaluation study in 2021 shared that they/women were comfortable in approaching the GFCs and over 77% considered GFCs to be an important source of support for them. As of April 2024, over 44,214 cases were registered with (39702 of schemes & entitlements, 4281 of GBV and 861 of other category) at 1354 GFCs across state. Out of total received cases, 46% (20296 cases) have been resolved so far with the effort of community institutions and convergence. The GTM program has not only helped the rural women to fight against gender discrimination and resolve their problems, but it has also triggered a shift in regressive social and gender norms in the platform of OLM. **Keywords:** GTM, GFC, GSLP, SSC, GM, WSHG, OLM, Gender, Transformative, VAW, Discrimination, Gender CRP, GBV, Odisha

1. Introduction:

Navigating challenges in a consistent manner to bring social and political reforms in the society was the key strategy Maa Rama Devi adopted throughout her life and the contemporary history had witnessed the journey. She is remembered as the epitome of a woman with grace who fought for the independence of her country and brought social reforms to uplift humanity. Thousands of women followed her path and joined the mass movement against the autocratic rule of British government in India and imbibed her values i.e. compassionate, patience, sacrifice, dedication, tolerance, peace etc. throughout the freedom struggle. Maa Rama Devi is well accepted as a freedom fighter from Independence era, a social activist in post-independence time, an entrepreneur, an orator, and good writer and an influencer of her time. Her unwavering dedication to the cause of women & their empowerment in general and towards upholding the humanity free from suppression in specific is well acknowledged.

Her vision and contributions are engraved in the cultural & spiritual fabric of Odisha. She actively worked towards *uplifting women in society, promoting their education, and fighting for their equal opportunities*. She too dedicated her life to humanitarian service, particularly focusing on the welfare of the poor, disadvantaged, and marginalized communities. To advocate for the rights of women and restore the identity of the land of the country, she sacrificed her comfort and opted to live a simple life.



2. Background:

Withstanding her principles, the current paper attempts to showcase the power of community institutions led by women and grassroots leaders, in transforming the lives of oppressed and vulnerable women in Odisha and also fosters gender sensitive attitude and behavioral practices. Community members as well as service providers are being mobilized to respond to the need of woman effectively and in time bound manner through programmatic interventions.

A community based and community led program named “**Gender Transformative Model**” (GTM) was initiated at Gram Panchayat level of Odisha to enable women to be conscious about their rights free from all kinds of discrimination and violence. And support each other to access social security and justice and the key indicators are;- identification and recognition of pervasive violence at private/public/work places, recognizing it as a violation of human rights, providing safe, supportive environment for women to share, promote collective action to shift norms that normalize gender based violence, support access to rights & entitlements, amplify collective voices, creating institutional response mechanisms to address gender issues, respond proactively in a structured manner to address varied needs of multiple vulnerabilities of women in rural area.

3. Rationale of Gender Transformative Model (GTM) Program:

Gender inequality is the root cause of major developmental challenges globally. Violence against women is a major violation of human rights. As per an estimate published by WHO ([World Health Organization, 2021](#))¹, globally one out of three women have been subjected to either physical and /or sexual violence in their lifetime. Violence against women (VAW) inappropriately affects women and girls in low and lower middle-income countries. Studies have shown a severe impact on economies of families and nation due to violence against women and girls. This can be in the direct form of loss of income to indirect form of lack of women’s participation in the economy of the country. Any form of violence or discrimination whether in public or domestic spaces, affect women negatively and has a larger impact on social construct. Violence against women is preventable and it needs concerted efforts from all stakeholders within an eco-system. Through this intervention, it’s a deliberate effort to mobilize rural women of Odisha to identify VAW, raise voice against it and strengthen community institutions and promote leaderships to act against the same.

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women#:~:text=Estimates%20published%20by%20WHO%20indicate,violence%20is%20intimate%20partner%20violence>



4. How the GTM Program work towards Empowerment of Women and Prevention of Violence Against Women (VAW):

In 2019, PCI India initiated its engagement with Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM) to develop a Gender Transformative Model (GTM), to increase awareness among community members on gender-related issues and facilitate linkages with government schemes and entitlements.

GTM program was piloted in eight gram-panchayats of two districts of Odisha in 2019, to test its efficacy and effectiveness in bringing changes at scale in livelihood structure. Later, it was scaled up to all 30 districts of Odisha in a phased manner. Currently the program is operational in 1354 Gram Panchayats, 64 Blocks and 30 Districts of Odisha. The GTM program stands on four prime commitments, i.e., increased awareness on rights among Women SHGs through gender self-learning program (GSLP), access to

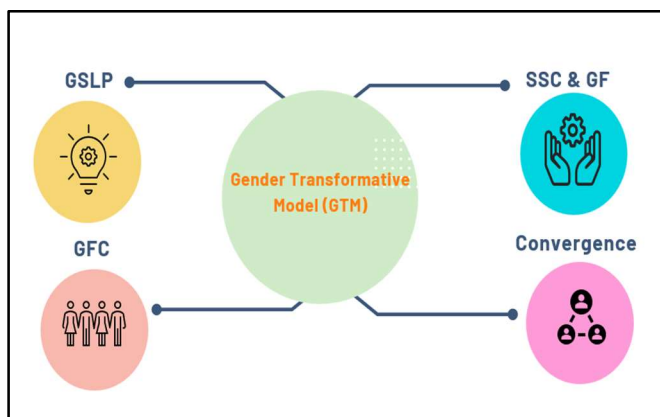


Figure-1: GTM Program Intervention Framework

schemes & entitlements through gender facilitation center (GFC), raise collective voices against GBV through Gender Forums (GFs) and Strengthened Social Support Committee (SSC) members, and Convergence with allied departments for timely disposal of cases.

5. Intervention Strategy:

5.1 Enhanced Awareness and Knowledge among women SHGs:

The program had planned and rolled out a well-structured capacity building framework in cascade mode to increase awareness among SHG women about gender issues, rights, and entitlements of women, and strengthen their negotiation skills. The training program has been named as GSLP (gender self-learning program). The GSLP not only educates SHG women, but also GPPs (Gender Point Persons) and CRP-CMs (Community Resource Persons- Community Mobilisers) of the Gram Panchayat to play a crucial role in support of a woman facing any kind of discrimination or violence. The GSLP topics have been divided into 4 modules and 13 sessions encompassing different laws related to women and schemes that are pivotal for women to lead a better life. The trainings have enabled WSHG members to be aware about their rights and related laws which can be availed/accessed in future.



5.2 Facilitate Access to Information, Resources & Entitlements:

Through GFC, women who are marginalized get a platform to ventilate their problem/issue and are being supported with basket of choices to opt for and encouraged to take informed decision. Services like counselling, information and referral are being provided to woman in distress. GFC- popularly known as Prerana Kendra in Odia language, is physically situated at Gram Panchayat Level Federation (GPLF) office and supported by GPLF members. It is managed by Gender-Community Resource Person (**GCRP**)/ **Prerana Didi**, who is also a Community Resource Person cum Community Mobilizer (CRP-CM) of OLM. One GCRP manages the gender-based violence (GBV) cases of one GPLF, that consists of 8 to 12 cluster level federations (CLFs). Along with GBV cases, she also addresses the cases related to schemes and entitlements. The GFC is designed to provide a safe, supportive, and empowering environment for GBV survivors and individuals seeking assistance. Through collaboration, awareness, and capacity building, it contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the protection of women's rights within the community. Case reporting at GFC is done in the following 3 ways –

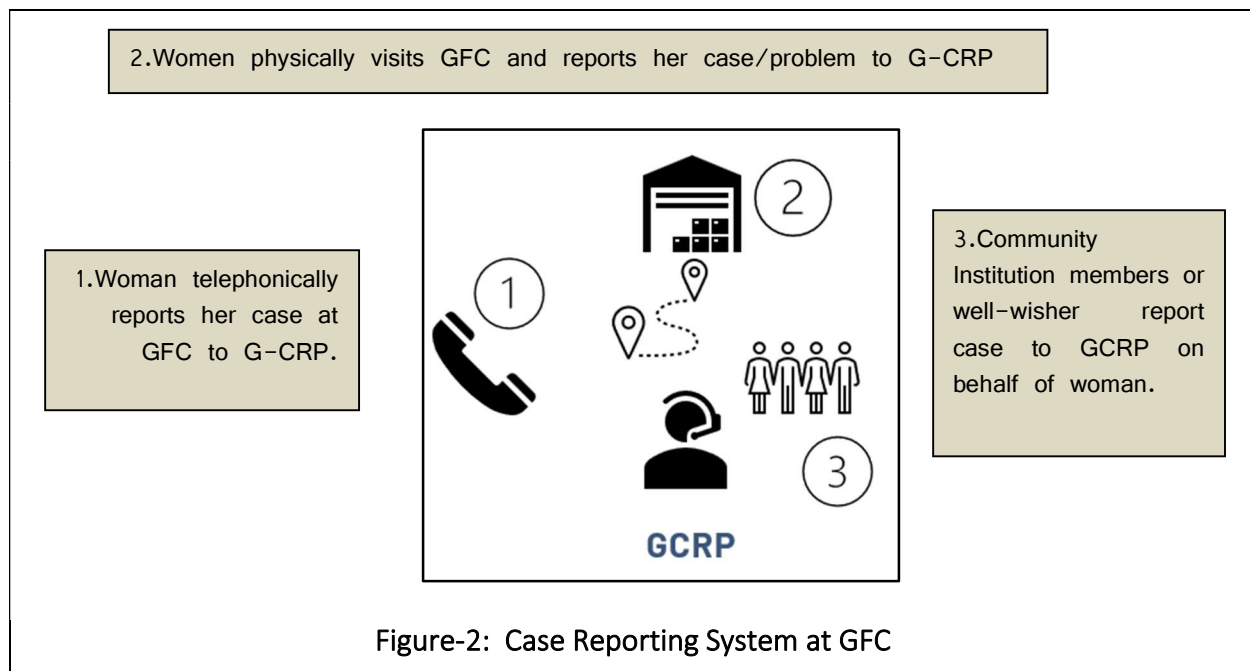


Figure-2: Case Reporting System at GFC

5.3 Advancing Women's Agency for Collective Actions:

In most instances, a woman in a vulnerable situation or specifically a GBV survivor look up to the support of community members to pave her forward path and stand by her in her decision-making process. Hence, the program through its intervention strategy tries to strengthen the community institutions existing at GPLF level (Social Support Committee & Gender Forum), to support woman



in following situations;- who have experienced GBV, ensure access to different rights, entitlements and quality services, actively work to question and shift norms and behaviours that sanction such discrimination, take collective action to amplify voices of women and gender-diverse individuals, from different sections of society and hold stakeholders at various levels accountable to protect their rights.

5.4 System's Engagement & Convergence among Stakeholders:

In the process of referral and follow up of received cases, GFC establishes link with different government departments based at GP and Block level to interface with women collectives and ensure faster grievance redressal and smooth service delivery mechanism. Through convergence, key stakeholders from various line departments are involved in gender discourse and expedite schemes related cases (widow pension, old age pension, ration card, house allotment/Indira Awas, labour card etc.) pertaining to their department for faster reconciliation.

5.5 Economic Advancement of GBV Survivors:

Gender based violence significantly impacts the economic advancement of survivors in multiple ways, which ultimately prevents them to actively participate in the economic activities and gain benefits. Through this program, a concerted effort has been made to integrate survivors of GBV into livelihood initiatives, with the goal of restoring their dignity and independence. Through systematic mapping and profiling, the survivors have been identified in operational areas who had registered their cases at GFC since its establishment, are assisted with business loans and their successful cases are being documented. In total 622 survivors have been assessed until April '24, of which 162 survivors have been supported in initiating livelihoods i.e. (vegetable cultivation, goatery, agriculture, poultry, mushroom cultivation, kirana shop etc.). Moving forward, the GTM program aims to expand its reach to identify and assist more GBV survivors on their path to economic self-sufficiency and social inclusion.

5.6 Leadership Building among Gender CRPs/Community Cadres:

Promoting leadership among gender community resource persons (GCRPs) at Gram Panchayat level contribute towards empowerment of women through decision making and active participation in governance system. Leadership building takes place in a structured manner encompassing various approaches i.e. educating GCRPs about rights of women and strategy to access those, consistent capacity building and mentoring of cadres by district officials, legal empowerment through awareness camps/sessions, enrollment of GCRPs as para-legal volunteers



(PLVs), networking and coordination with line departments and community engagement to promote gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes.

5.7 Impact of the GTM program in Enabling Women to Realize their Rights & Access Social Justice:

Buoyed with the acceptance of the model by the community and its impact in addressing gender issues at community level, PCI India successfully advocated the scale-up of the GTM program through OLM community institutions. The increased focus of NRLM to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue in all its program, as well as interest of Odisha's government on GBV issues, enabled SRLM to scale-up the model across the state in phased manner.

(A) Quantitative Growth:

The process evaluation by [IDInsight – \(phase 2\)](#)² held in March 2022, reflected encouraging results in GTM program-

- (i) Awareness about **GFCs** is highest (66.7%) in Odisha,
- (ii) Use of **GFCs** is highest (24.5%) in Odisha among 4 states (MP, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh & Odisha),
- (iii) **SHG** women who have the contact info of their GCCRP is highest (74%) in Odisha,
- (iv) **GCRPs** are the most preferred resource for women in Odisha to seek support.

(B) Qualitative Growth:

In the same report, some findings are also indicative of the quality aspect of the program -

- (i) Awareness of Gender CRPs on gender concepts is 98% in Odisha in comparison to 70% in MP;
- (ii) In Odisha, 87% of the SHG women attended at least one training session but only 74% found the training to be useful;
- (iii) Odisha have cited Panchayat as the preferred institution for resolution of GBV issues;
- (iv) 57% GPLF leaders in Odisha were of the opinion that GRCs/GFCs are an irreplaceable resource whose continued existence was vital for supporting women in their communities in comparison to 43% in MP & 60% in Chhattisgarh.

(C) Primary information received from the community cadres/GCRPs in the initial phase of the program, have spotlighted the inclusion aspect in the selection of GCRPs-

- (i) 71% of the GCRPs of Odisha have passed either 10th or 12th class.
- (ii) 15% of GCRPs are graduates.

² https://iwwage.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SWAYAM_process_evaluation.pdf



(iii) 47% GCRPs are from OBC, 24% are ST, 18% are SC & 11% are from [General category](#).³

(D) Comprehensive program management focusing on women's need and support from community institutions helped oppressed woman to raise their voice against GBV and notify the same by registering cases at GFC. From program inception -

(i) 4473 number of GBV cases have been registered in 1354 GFCs until June '24.

(ii) 41277 number of schemes and entitlement cases have been registered.

(iii) 20968 number of cases have been closed so far, of which 2896 cases are of [GBV](#)⁴

5.8 Way Forward:

While implementing the GTM program at Gram Panchayat level in WSHG platform, the organization also had commenced few studies to comprehend the missing links /important factors that contribute to the journey of empowerment fostering gender equality. Such studies are-

(i) Study of drudgery experienced by rural women in GTM project areas in Odisha and exploring the possible drudgery reduction measures.

(ii) Baseline mapping of skills and available opportunities for Adolescent Girls.

(iii) Assessment of gender and social norms assessment for women's economic advancement in rural Odisha.

(1) The study on the drudgery aimed at reducing drudgery and improving the well-being of women. By leveraging these findings, PCI aims to implement targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by rural women in GTM project areas, improving their quality of life and reducing drudgery associated with their daily activities.

(2) The insights gained from the baseline mapping study on adolescent girls shall ensure that future interventions are targeted and responsive to the specific needs of adolescent girls in the project areas. This approach will maximize the effectiveness of GTM's efforts in promoting economic empowerment and enhancing opportunities for adolescent girls in Odisha.

(3) The findings of third study on social norms aims to promote gender equality and enhance women's economic participation within Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in the project areas.

³ N of GCRPs- 1048

⁴ MIS data from Mform APP



Conclusion:

The way Maa Rama Devi navigated her path by accepting the challenges with perseverance, patience, dedication, and devotion and stood as a role model for the future generation, the GTM program venturing its path at self-help group level through different strategic interventions to create an enabling environment for women to be empowered enough to actively participate in economic activities, have equal access to opportunities, and contribute to the overall development of their communities; free from discrimination and violence.

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¹ MIS data from Mform APP