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JEEViKA- Didi Ki Rasoi

“Before I joined Didi Ki Rasoi, I was just an ordinary woman; I had no real sense of identity or uniqueness. Didi ki Rasoi has given me a sense of self-respect as I don’t have to ask anyone for money anymore.”

Leela Devi, employee at Didi Ki Rasoi

Mr. Rahul Kumar, the officer in charge of Bihar’s Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society, also known as JEEViKA, had just finished his field visits and meeting with women from one of the program’s Self-Help Group (SHG) in that area. The women he met were self-confident and grateful for increased financial independence since the initiation of the Didi-ki-Rasoi (DKR) program, an initiative to turn community rural women into entrepreneurs to cook and deliver good quality homely food to local hospitals and schools. Additionally, Mr. Kumar received first-hand praise on the quality of food from patients admitted at the local state hospital.

Impressively, the program had continued to operate through COVID-19 pandemic times, with more than 6 lakhs meals¹ made and distributed. Mr. Kumar could see that impressive strides had been made under the program, with 1725 women empowered economically, and 2,26,092 meals served annually.² But there was much more to do. Mr. Kumar was concerned about whether the program would continue unhindered? Would it receive another round of funding? And how would they scale the program across the state and possibly to other states in India as well?

JEEViKA (Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society)

Bihar, India’s third most populous state (Census of India 2011)³, was largely rural and agrarian. The state’s heavy reliance on agriculture, coupled with the widespread issue of land fragmentation and landlessness, contributed to significant seasonal migration amongst marginalized households. Typically, male members migrated to bigger urban centres in pursuit of better opportunities, leaving behind women and children. Bihar’s social norms were feudal, which limited economic prospects for women. Deep-rooted societal taboos acted as a barrier to women’s employment.

To address this situation, Bihar’s state government launched the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS) or JEEViKA, in 2006 with a budget allocation of Rs. 1189.15 Croresⁱ. The goal was to create an innovative, scalable, and sustainable model to enhance livelihood opportunities for rural households. It

ⁱ Budget allocation for JEEViKA in 2006 was a total of Rs. 1189.15 Crores [Rs. 344 crores + Rs. 845.15 (additional financing)]

focused on empowering women by helping them form Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to create self-employment opportunities and gain access to credit, with the ultimate goal of poverty alleviation. The program was based on the fundamental belief that aggregating rural women into SHGs could help unleash their full economic potential.

From its commencement as a small-scale project in 18 blocks across six high-priority districts, JEEViKA had evolved into a state-wide movement, impacting the lives of over 12.9 million families by April 2023. Presently, JEEViKA operated in more than 44,000 villages across 534 blocks and 38 districts in Bihar.⁴ As of April 2020, JEEViKA had helped create a network of 1.45 million self-managed SHGs.⁵ These SHGs had emerged as a powerful platform for enhancing women's livelihoods in various ways, including by facilitating financial intermediation, access to resources from formal financial institutions, and providing support for agricultureⁱⁱ and livestockⁱⁱⁱ through community-based extension services. Moreover, they enabled women to engage with markets on equitable terms by leveraging economies of scale and improving awareness on access to government schemes and entitlements. It had fundamentally altered Bihar's approach to combating poverty by capitalizing on the abilities of rural women and the institutional capacities of the state.

Conceptualization of Didi Ki Rasoi (DKR)

Inadequate food quality in Bihar's hospitals and schools was a pressing issue, and upon investigation, Mr. Kumar of the state government identified a number of problems in the system. The supply chain and raw material procurement process was mismanaged. The state's constrained budget meant that tenders were allocated to the lowest bidders, leading to poor food quality. Additionally, little oversight had also resulted in a consistent decline in food quality. Finally, financial discrepancies consistently appeared when third-party vendors were introduced.

Mr. Kumar launched the 'Didi ki Rasoi (DKR)' idea in response to these challenges; to enhance the food delivery system for district hospitals and schools while empowering rural women in Bihar.

DKR- An Institutional Canteen Model

In 2018, JEEViKA introduced DKR, an innovative model for institutional canteens. DKR was a community-driven initiative that encouraged rural women in SHGs to establish and operate high-quality, hygienic food canteens within public hospitals and residential schools. The project was created in partnership with the State Health Department, and received initial funding from JEEViKA.

DKR proved to be a remarkable success, enabling the provision of quality food at reasonable prices while simultaneously providing livelihood opportunities to disadvantaged rural women. The commitment of DKR entrepreneurs to serving customers with hygienic and homely food at subsidized rates had been unwavering, even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ⁱⁱ JEEViKA empowers through diverse livelihoods, involving over 50 lakh farmers and 3,148 Agri-entrepreneurs. All-women Farmer Producer Companies, selling 50,121 MT of Agri-produce, play a significant role in this economic shift, rooted in rural women's culture.

ⁱⁱⁱ Beyond agriculture, livestock programs under JEEViKA impact 6.75 lakh households, with successes like the 'Kaushiki Women Milk Producers Company' selling 75,127 litres daily and engaging in poultry and fisheries activities

Initiation of the Model

DKR was initiated with the help of seed capital (Rs. 17,00,000) provided by JEEVIKA to establish each enterprise. Cluster Level Federations (CLFs)^{iv} identified women from the local SHGs to participate in the program. Women identified under the program underwent a comprehensive 7-day training program focused on technical and managerial skills, including hygiene, book-keeping, and customer service, to prepare them to work as DKR entrepreneurs (*Refer to Exhibit 1*).

Procurement of Raw Materials

Under the DKR system, equipment and utensils were procured by the CLFs. Meanwhile, ingredients and groceries were sourced from local SHG women-run producer groups, producer companies^v, and rural retail marts, all of which are promoted by JEEVIKA. This approach ensured that the food served maintained high standards of quality and nutrition.

Quality and variety of food

The DKR model prioritized delivery of affordable, healthy, and varied home-cooked meals. This encompassed a morning menu featuring eggs, fruits, and milk, an evening snack of tea and biscuits, and a lunch and dinner menu consisting of rice, roti,^{vi} pulses, and seasonal vegetables. In the walk-in canteens, more popular items were offered on the menu, including local snacks such as Litti^{vii} and kachori.^{viii}

Digital Intervention in the Model

Mr. Kumar introduced the Central Process Monitoring System (CPMS), a fully integrated digital system designed to capture all transactional data, including data on customers and suppliers, DKR-wise purchases, inventory, and sales, and production of reports on this data, in every DKR, to track and monitor activity under the scheme. The system also enabled voucher entry to firms' balance sheets, financial accounts systems, and analysis reports. Rural women entrepreneurs specifically trained by Institute of Hotel Management to handle the process, managed the running of the system. Login IDs granted users at different levels access to comprehensive data on DKRs, including real-time information on sales, inventory, profit, margin, best/worst performing DKR, and member transactions. This information in turn enabled digital payments which ensured swift service delivery and the monitoring of sales realisation.

^{iv} CLFs unite Village Organizations (VO) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to achieve solidarity through economies of scale. With 40-60 VOs, it provides a platform for collective action, improved market access, organized capacity building, financial inclusion, and convergence for enhanced local significance. CLFs play a pivotal role in fostering cooperation and empowerment within the cluster of villages

^v Women-run producer companies are organizations led by women, registered under the Companies Act, aiming to enhance economic status by facilitating access to resources. Their leadership roles promote gender diversity, empowering women and contributing to rural development through a focus on member welfare and sustainable practices.

^{vi} Indian Flat Bread

^{vii} Indian dish made of dough balls.

^{viii} Indian snack made of fried dough balls.

Key Impacts of the Model

Economic Outcome

The DKR initiative was rolled out in approximately 95 enterprises⁶ in Bihar, including government hospitals, medical colleges, schools, banks, and other institutions. The initiative involved more than 1523 women entrepreneurs and 150 full-time employees, supported by 20 consultants experienced in hotel management and catering, deployed by JEEViKA.⁷ (Refer Exhibit 3). On average, each woman entrepreneur generated an annual income of approximately Rs. 1.20 lakhs⁸ and the JEEViKA-Didi Ki Rasoi business turnover is over Rs. 40.15 Crores.⁹

Social Changes

DKR was ensuring the provision of nourishing and hygienic food, through the expertise of its professionally trained women entrepreneurs (Refer Exhibit 2). The model was also playing a pivotal role in curbing unethical practices by fostering greater community engagement, employing digital solutions, and enhancing transparency.

Sustainability

The DKR model rigorously adhered to its established Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to effectively replicate and expand the model to additional units, ensuring consistency and sustainability in operations. The SOP encompassed:

1. Food service
2. Cleaning
3. Human Resource planning
4. ISO certification
5. Governance procedures
6. Business plan models

The model's remarkable success prompted the Cabinet to extend DKR canteens to all Bihar government hospitals, residential schools, and medical colleges, with the goal of scaling operations to over 300 units by 2024.¹⁰

Conclusion

The Didi Ki Rasoi model exemplified the remarkable strength of community-driven and community-managed initiatives. It also showcased the immense potential of women to thrive as entrepreneurs when provided with essential resources, funding, and the opportunity to become self-reliant. This innovative model, built on the foundation of collaborative decision-making, decentralization, and a democratic approach, where responsibilities were assigned based on individuals' skills and passions, consistently delivered improved outcomes, evident from the increase in the number of DKR units across the state. The DKR evidently served as a beacon of empowerment and sustainability for society.

Mr. Kumar was pleased with the progress, but he needed to be sure that the program would continue unfettered even in his absence, would receive continued access to state funding, and would grow and scale with time. He needed to put the right framework in place to ensure continuity, and towards this goal, he brought in his right-hand person, Mr. Rajesh Kumar, Officer on Special Duty, JEEViKA, to discuss next steps.

EXHIBITS:

Exhibit 1 Women Entrepreneurs Outside one of the DKR enterprise units



Source: Image excerpted from Didi Ki Rasoi (Provided by the case protagonist) – Accessed November 2023

Exhibit 2 Women Entrepreneurs serving food in a DKR unit



Source: Image excerpted from Didi ki Rasoi (provided by case Protagonist). Accessed November 2023

Exhibit 3 Women Employees of DKR

Source: Image excerpted from Didi ki Rasoi, (provided by case protagonist) Accessed November 2023

About the Authors

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The following members of the Capacity Building Commission, under the guidance of Dr. R Balasubramaniam, the Member – HR of the commission, edited and reviewed the case study: Akshaya Elangovan, Meena Priyadarsnee and Sanya Dhillon

ENDNOTES

¹ JEEViKA-Didi Ki Rasoi case document, Data extracted from case protagonist, Accessed December 2023

² JEEViKA-Didi Ki Rasoi case document, Data extracted from case protagonist, Accessed December 2023

³ Census of India, 2011, Data extracted from <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/>, Accessed November 2023

⁴ Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Strategy, Data extracted from [https://brlps.in/UplodFiles/Career/BRLPS%20Internship%20\(1\).pdf](https://brlps.in/UplodFiles/Career/BRLPS%20Internship%20(1).pdf), Accessed November 2023

⁵ Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Strategy, Data extracted from <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=202180>, Accessed November 2023

⁶ World bank , Data extracted from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/02/27/didi-ki-rasoi-a-rural-women-led-enterprise>, Accessed November 2023

⁷ World bank , Data extracted from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/02/27/didi-ki-rasoi-a-rural-women-led-enterprise>, Accessed November 2023

⁸ CPMS (Central Process Monitoring System) data, Data extracted from case protagonist, Accessed November 2023

⁹ CPMS (Central Process Monitoring System) data, Data extracted from case protagonist, Accessed November 2023

¹⁰ Annual Action Plan of BRLPS, Data extracted from case protagonist, Accessed November 2023