

EmpowHER: ERADA's Gender Equality Chronicles

Brief introduction

The cultivated area of vulnerable households in India is small, less than one hectare, and is mainly used for subsistence purposes. They often do not have alternate livelihood sources and migrate out of poverty. The distress migration affects women and children more adversely leading to malnutrition, wage disparities, educational inequalities among others. India has experienced persistently low levels of female labour force participation over the past four decades, with a substantial disparity of nearly 40% between men and women. COVID-19 lockdowns in April 2020 led to a 37.1% job loss for women, and its recovery post-pandemic has been hindered by sociocultural factors like increased domestic work, digital disparities, mobility constraints, and insufficient workplace support. Climate change further depletes natural resources and exacerbates challenges for women and vulnerable households. Environmental shifts limit their access to resources, jeopardizing their livelihoods and ability to maintain a decent standard of living.

The Indo-German Development Cooperation Project '*Enhancing Rural Resilience through Appropriate Development Actions*' (ERADA) was designed as a Covid-19 response. It is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and is implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India in four of the largest states that faced the internal migration crisis in 2020 namely, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

1. Promoting gender equality within the program / sector (40% of marks)

ERADA focuses on creating diverse rural livelihoods to boost women's and vulnerable households' sustainable incomes, aiming for a better standard of living and reducing dependence on labor migration. In the long term, ERADA aims to enhance resilience to future shocks such as pandemics, and climate change impacts. It is implemented in close cooperation with the world's largest and India's flagship public employment programme, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) strengthening women's livelihoods through the Self-Help Group movement. Germany's Feminist Development approach is integral to ERADA's strategy, aligning with MGNREGA and NRLM's gender-inclusive strategies.

The project has implemented the following activities to strengthen gender equality:

1. **Gender disaggregated data collection and analysis in the project baseline assessment** conducted among 1600 vulnerable households across the project locations in the four states. The results showed clear directions for example, 97% of the women participated in MGNREGA work, but only 3% women were part of the MGNREGA planning process with the local government. This resulted in the project designing activities for strengthening one of the 3R's: inclusive Representation through a participatory planning approach.
2. **Established a living income benchmark exclusively for vulnerable households** in each of the project locations. Findings, ranging from 2,860 euros in Jharkhand's Ramgarh district to 1,653 euros in Rajasthan's Sirohi district, led to the identification of tailored livelihood interventions aimed at achieving a 'decent standard of living'. For instance, land-owning households engaged in integrated agriculture and horticulture activities, while landless households



Figure 1: Oyster Mushroom cultivation by women collectives in Jharkhand State



participated in livestock management, eco-tourism, mushroom cultivation, and forest produce collection among others.

3. Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and Geographic Information System (GIS) based participatory planning approaches bridging gender-digital divide in rural areas:

IVR is phone service accessible via feature phones delivers basic information on MGNREGA job card applications, village council meeting dates, and special provisions for vulnerable communities. It includes an option for Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven question processing and auto-generated feedback. Further, women and vulnerable communities are now equipped to use GIS thematic maps for developing integrated digital action plans guiding natural resource management and livelihoods. 9,265 women and vulnerable household members have registered for MGNREGA and 163 Gram Panchayats (local governments) have submitted GIS based action plans as a result of the project interventions.



Figure 2: Women actively engaging in digital livelihood planning process.

4. Livelihood and entrepreneurship development: Tailored interventions, shaped by local factors, benefit 4,934 women in goat-based livelihoods (earning 60-90 euros annually) and 1,200 in moringa cultivation (earning 100-150 euros annually). Moringa cultivation has become a national level campaign led by women moringa farmers (Video [here](#)). Forest produce based livelihoods has enhanced the incomes of 300 tribal households (Document [here](#)). Overall, 10,000+ vulnerable households have been introduced to 3-4 localised livelihood interventions each, aiming to bridge their living income gap within 4-5 years. In partnership with the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII), the project has conducted a certified 6-days Micro-Enterprise Development Programme to 720 women and youth entrepreneurs, thus strengthening their leadership skills, access to finance and credit for setting up business.



Figure 3: Cluster of pictures from top left: Posters in Hindi language used for national moringa campaign, women attending trainings and certified for entrepreneurship.

5. Web Traceability – A web-based traceability tool has been co-created with the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society for improving the traceability of the vegetable and fruit produce of 10,000+ women farmers of 21 women Farmer Producer Groups in the state of Jharkhand, thus improving consumer confidence and thereby incomes of women farmers.

6. Gender Transformative Approaches for Livelihood Toolkit – For prioritizing vulnerable communities and gender transformation, ERADA has developed a tailored [GTA toolkit for livelihoods](#). It promotes women's rights and representation in local governance, control



Figure 4: Men and women engaged in GTA tool-based exercises at the community level.



over incomes, addresses household gender-based gaps and imbalances and fosters inclusivity. Currently, 13 customized tools are being implemented across project locations.

2. Gender as a quality feature of our work (20% of marks)

The project design ensured that economic empowerment of women and vulnerable communities is at the center of its implementation. The initial Baseline Assessment threw light on the status of **Rights** of women and vulnerable communities, **Representation** at various levels and access to and control over **Resources**. The study covered indicators that captured both 'Access to resources' and 'Power and Agency'. At the project's initiation, a well-structured approach was implemented to ensure inclusive participation of all genders, particularly marginalized groups like Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities. As representation of women is always a challenge, specific efforts were made to mobilize them through innovative awareness campaigns and digital tools such as the IVR. To enhance women's skills and empower them in entrepreneurship, capacity building focused on nuanced learning, practical application, and creating personalized livelihood plans using digital tools like GIS. Entrepreneurship programs addressed learning gaps, ensuring women are prepared for real-world challenges, have access to finance and technology. Participant selection for all project activities prioritized gender and youth inclusivity. For example, availability and convenience for women to attend a training was considered while choosing the location. It was also ensured that the implementing local NGOs of the project included women and vulnerable community members, as part of their contract with GIZ.

3. Implementing feminist core principles (20% of marks)

On the lines of Germany's Feminist Development Policy, a gender-transformative approach seeks to reshape dynamics by addressing root causes, redistributing resources, and promoting collective action. The cornerstones of the new political orientation include the three Rs: strengthening the rights, resources and representation of women and girls worldwide and promoting social diversity. According to BMZ, a gender-transformative approach supports attitude changes and social change and acknowledges that unjust social norms underpin unequal power relations that disadvantage women, girls, and people of non-binary gender identities and diverse sexual orientations.

In rural India, gender disparities persist specifically affecting women's productivity and hindering broader economic and social goals. Livelihood strategies hinge on asset control, market access, information, organization, vulnerability management, and policy context. The project has been working towards reducing (1) gender gaps in labour markets by improving participation of women and vulnerable communities in MGNREGA (**right** to work) and their **representation** in community level planning processes improving local governance, (2) strengthening women's economic empowerment through promoting localized livelihood interventions, developing their entrepreneurial capacities and access to technology and financial **resources** (3) and fostering empowerment at the household and community levels through **gender transformative approaches**, contributing to overall well-being, sustainable development, and responsive governance. Innovative approaches, including awareness campaigns and IVR, tackled women's representation challenges.

4. Cooperation (20% of marks)

The Indian government recognises the significance of incorporating gender into public policy, aligning with global agreements against discrimination. The Constitution of India ensures equality for all on Indian territory, with evolving gender-responsive budgeting supported by foundational groundwork. In terms of agriculture and allied livelihoods, gender mainstreaming in public policy is mainly done through different interventions like The National Strategy for New India (2018), The National Policy on Farmers



2007, National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001), National Policy for Women (2016), and The SDG Index, etc. The MORD consistently prioritizes integrating gender perspectives into its flagship schemes. The NRLM programme of the MoRD reflects the national commitment of empowerment of women. NRLM mobilizes 80 million women in the Self-Help Group network, targeting those in exploitative situations or occupations, including single women, divorced, separated, survivors of violence, trafficked women and HIV positive women. The MGNREGA programme on the other hand is a universal safety net of guaranteed employment to all Indian households in rural areas with special provisions for 8 categories of vulnerable households for priority inclusion, and further a mandate to ensure 33% participation by women in public works.

ERADA Project is implemented together with the local governments and civil society organisations at the community level. Steering committees are set up at district, state and national levels under the leadership of the respective government officials, with participation of converging government programmes, civil society partners, and also private sector partners in a few cases. This sustainable committees does periodic progress review, monitoring of implementation and looks at ways of mainstreaming the activities to other areas and programmes. Building on Project ERADA's insights, MGNREGA is looking forward to expanding the living income benchmarking method to other states, for enhancing rural living standards. Additionally, NRLM is expanding the successful moringa plantation initiative based on ERADA's learnings, nationwide. ERADA project together with MoRD is working towards strengthening gender transformative social protection.

5. Learning

During the project planning phase, a deliberate attempt was made to work with women and vulnerable communities to ensure achieving the outputs in a short span of three years. Our Terms of References for contracting implementing partners, included civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations, which outlined specific criteria. These criteria mandated someone with adequate experience working with the targeted vulnerable community. Additionally, a minimum of 30% of the team members and at least two out of four community mobilisers had to be women. These criteria ensured the selection of local and strongly grounded partners for effective implementation. However, we discovered a collective need for unlearning regarding concepts like 'gender transformation' and 'gender equality' etc. The GIZ India ERADA GTA toolkit was initially applied with our implementation partners, enhancing their gender sensitivity, and facilitated comprehensive community engagement. Efforts to scale up the implementation of the GTA toolkit for livelihoods is underway.

6. Competition related information

ERADA, uniquely focused on vulnerable and marginalised communities and has gained significant momentum in just 2.5 years of its implementation, by incorporating gender-responsive measures at macro, meso, and micro levels. The seeds of gender transformation are being sown with strong partner ownership, for sustaining project activities post the project ending. It is also expected that the GTA approach learnings would guide other GE1 projects beyond just numbers and targets, and will contribute significantly to quality based integration of gender responsive and transformative measures. If the program wins the GIZ Gender Competition 2024, we would utilise the additional resources to include other marginalised groups such as the LGBTQI+ community and persons with disabilities, and develop at least a few activities aimed at their livelihood development within the project timeline. The project has a follow up phase planned, and activities can hence be continued successfully.

