



School Nutrition Garden Initiative

Youth Groups Mobilization
for better Education & Health

Fight Hunger First Initiative , Devipur, Deoghar



When school teachers in Madanpur village of Devipur block in the Jharkhand district of Deoghar, went on a two month strike in late 2012, a group of young girls from the village formed the 'Jyoti Yuvati Club' and convinced the school management to let them oversee the day-to-day functioning and teaching at the local Madanpur primary school.

But an initiative that started off as an attempt to support the educational activities of the school has been transformed into a mission against malnutrition.

Today, members of the Jyoti Yuvati Club, supported by the Abhivyakti Foundation; a socio-cultural group based in the district also tend to a vegetable garden from its premises, supplying leafy greens to the canteen to be included in the mid day meals of the school.

Moreover, this project is now being replicated in 19 other primary schools spread across three panchayats at Daranga, Tatiyo and Barwan in Devipur at Deoghar.

These young girls, aged between 14 and 18 years, who were once barred from stepping out of their homes by their highly patriarchal Ghatwal and Kumhar communities, are addressing serious issues of hunger, nutrition, sanitation, child marriage, reproductive health and education in their villages.



Teenage girls of the Jyoti Yuvati Club at Madanpur village tend to the vegetable garden they have painstakingly created (Photo: Krishna KantWFS)

And their parents, who were once unsure of their daughters' actions, are supporting them wholeheartedly in their efforts to change the nutritional status of the children in the area.

Malnutrition is one of the most persistent problems in Deoghar with more than 50 per cent children in the district being stunted and every second child being underweight.

According to a study of 3700 households conducted in late 2011 by a group of NGOs working on this health crisis, every twelfth child in the district is severely malnourished. Further, more than half the population here is illiterate with only one out of nine persons pursuing an education beyond primary school.

Solving two problems with one solution are the lush vegetables gardens in select villages. Kranti Kumari, daughter of local farmer, who leads the team of the girls in Madanpur village, is happy with the work they have undertaken.

She says, "When we saw that there was a big patch of wasteland in the school premises and no one around to cook mid day meals for students, we volunteered to do so.

“Younger students came only when they knew there was food to eat. So to keep children in class and provide them with a proper meal we started growing vegetables on this patch. “We began when the teachers’ strike had started and by the time it was over there were vegetables in the garden. It takes two months for leafy vegetables like ‘pui saag’ and spinach to be ready for plucking, while gourds, brinjals, tomatoes and beans are ready in a span of three months.”

Like Kranti, Nagina Kumari feels responsible for the garden their Jyoti Yuvati Club has worked on together. Every day she walks by the primary school on her way back from her school, Balthwar High School, Deoghar, located three kilometres from Madanpur, to check if the plants are okay.

She says, “When we decided to volunteer at the school it was a collective decision of all the members of the club. We were a group of 13 girls then. We did not want the school to close down for two months.

“Firstly, it would have meant an interrupted education for our younger siblings and secondly, we knew that the mid day meal is a real necessity for the children of this remote village.” As the girls took on the task of conducting classes and the school remained functional during the strike period, the management committee had to keep the kitchen running as well and hence the girls were given the opportunity to develop the kitchen garden.

The kitchen garden model has proved to be a godsend. “Earlier, the students used to get only khichdi (rice and lentils). By way of vegetables, there was only potato. But with our girls maintaining the garden, where they grow green leafy vegetables as well as gourds and beans, the children get the best vegetables in their daily meals,” says Basudev Singh, the father of Mamata Kumari, 14, another member of the Jyoti Yuvati club at Mandanpur.

In an effort to give a knowledge boost to these young activists, the Abhivyakti Foundation has partnered with the Deutsche Welthungerhilfe, a German developmental agency that is running the Fight Hunger First Initiative (FHFI) campaign against hunger across different states in India. Under FHFI, Kranti, Nagina and others are learning about ways to promote nutritional awareness among their parents and neighbours, as well as develop their own neighbourhood gardens.

Says Krishna Kant of Abhivyakti Foundation, “We have joined hands with these young girls and fully support them in their endeavours to engage with the community. We also advise them on the right way to cook and eat, so that the nutritional intake can be maximised.” Kranti, who studies in Baltharwa Middle School, is proud to belong to a farming family, “Since we are all daughters of farmers we know how to till the land. We are glad that children who had earlier eaten only starchy foods like rice and potatoes now have more proteins and other nutrients in their meals.”

A story from the field by: Sadiya Azim Women Feature Service

The Young Brigade fighting against corruption in Education

Solidarity of youth groups has imbibed self confidence and a sense of responsibility and active citizenship among the girls. Villages like Madanpur had hardly any girls at school beyond upper primary level in the past. This is first time that 5 of the girls have appeared for matriculation examination and many more to follow in coming years. The girls were illegally demanded to pay bribe for the free bicycle and filling up registration forms. They were outraged by this corrupt practice and together they put the issue before the Block Development Officer and Block Education Extension Officer at the Vikas Mela in their locality. They also complained this to local media who highlighted the issues and finally the school authorities returned the excess money and provided them free bicycles.

Fight Hunger First Initiative is a right based approach in Devipur block of Deoghar district in Jharkhand by CWS and Abhivyakti Foundation with support of Welthungerhilfe and BMZ to improve Food & Nutrition Security and quality of education for at risk community. The experiences of Fight Hunger First Initiative are also scaled up in Giridih, Pakur and Godda districts under the ongoing programmes and interventions of Abhivyakti Foundation.

Under both the focus areas of intervention we work with local schools and anganwadi centres to improve quality and outreach of supplementary nutrition services and education. FHFI has focus on involvement of local community in educational planning and management through capacity building of School Management Committees, Bal Sansad and frontline workers. Youth Initiatives is an innovative approach to influence behavior of the young for sustainability of quality education and parent's sensitivity to schooling of children. The school level interventions include school nutrition garden, facilitating teaching and learning methodologies and learning aid to help children learn with improved pace. At these institutions Abhivyakti facilitates learning process through extra curricular activities to complement the school based learning for real life connect.



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