
**Focused Group Discussion in Farming System for
Nutrition study villages in Wardha**

A REPORT

by

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1. Introduction

Following four years of [the Farming System for Nutrition \(FSN\) study](#) in five villages of Wardha district from 2014-17, an endline survey was conducted in late 2017 to see the impact. In order to supplement the quantitative information with qualitative understanding, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in the study villages in early 2018. The following is a report of the same.

The objectives of the FGD were to:

- i. Understand the changes that the community experienced due to their choice of the interventions as also the changes in production, consumption, and nutrition due to the intervention
- ii. Understand the market side; whether they sell the produce or use it for self-consumption
- iii. Shed light on some questions which were not covered by the quantitative survey and find out any other aspects of relevance.

2. Methods

Men and women participants in groups of 8 to 12 were selected from each of the five study villages in Wardha – Saheli, Bitpur, Susund, Heti and Borgaon Gond. These members were contacted by the field office and selected randomly. Separate FGDs were conducted for men and women participants in each village. However, in one village, Susund, we conducted only one FGD with a mixed group. Three villages had community seed banks. Women who were members of the seed bank formed part of the FGDs with the women participants. The FGDs were conducted by a facilitator in Hindi. Translations that needed to be made from Hindi to Marathi were done by the project staff in Wardha.

Table 1: Details of Focused Group Discussions

No.	Village	No. of participants	Date
1	Borgaon Gond	9 women	9 January 2018
2	Borgaon Gond	6 men, 1 woman	9 January 2018
3	Saheli	8 women, 1 man	10 January 2018
4	Saheli	13 men	10 January 2018
5	Heti	11 men	11 January 2018
6	Heti	9 women	11 January 2018
7	Bitpur	11 women	12 January 2018
8	Bitpur	10 men	12 January 2018
9	Susund	5 women, 3 men	12 January 2018

3. Findings

3.1 Production

The participants said they had higher production of Green Leafy vegetables (GLV) and fruits than earlier i.e. 4 years ago. They also have more brinjal, potatoes, sorghum/jowar, red gram, soyabean, moong (green gram), chana (Bengal gram) and other pulses than before. Horse gram was not grown earlier and now its cultivation has started. They keep some of the produce for household consumption and sell excess in the weekly markets or in their own and neighbouring villages as well and purchase other foods that are not produced by them from the market. The weekly market in Kharangna, Arvi, Selu, Anji or the market in Wardha are about 12- 30 kms away from the project study villages. They go far only if the rates offered are more lucrative in the distant markets. At least 100-150 Rs are spent on transport; they need to pay for the load in case the weight of the produce is higher. Following the FSN intervention they now grow vegetables in fields during the month of May and June and keep them for home consumption.

They are aware about Minimum Support Price (MSP) and know there is no MSP for GLV and fruits. Also, for cotton, they think that selling at MSP is not very profitable. They don't use the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) centres as the centres are distantly located and transport cost is high. They usually sell to middlemen who take care of transportation and its costs. In any case, for the commercial crop of cotton, they have to travel only once or twice a year.

3.2 Consumption

The nutrition garden initiative and specially the community nutrition garden (in the particular villages i.e. Borgaon Gondi, Heti and Saheli) as also the home gardens have increased the availability of fruits and vegetables. The consumption of seasonal fruits and vegetables has increased for adults as well as children. Consumption of GLV, beetroot and pomegranate were motivated by nutrition awareness programmes. The participants said that they have also started growing more wheat and Bengal gram. They were earlier more dependent on pulses (dal in cooked form) but now are less dependent as they also have GLV and other vegetables to eat i.e. a more diversified diet. Earlier as more members of the households had to be fed with just dal, they added more water to it. Now, they eat dal of thicker consistency and better quality.

They access the public distribution system (PDS) for rice and wheat but they strongly believe that the quality is not as good as what they grow themselves. The Below Poverty Line (BPL) card holder households also get sugar from the PDS ration shop. Above Poverty Line (APL) households get 10 kg of rice and 15 kg wheat and BPL households get 15 kg rice, 20 kg

wheat and 1 kg sugar from the PDS. The villagers in Susund have to travel to Borgaon Gondi to access the PDS outlet.



Drying pulses on the roof, Borgaon Gondi

The participants said that they spend almost 50-60% of the total monthly expenditure on food and other groceries. They spend around Rs 200 per week on vegetables such as onion, garlic and fruits, and almost a third or half their expenditure is on purchasing food which cannot be produced at home such as cooking oil or non vegetarian food products. Earlier they spent even more on food. One participant said that expenditure on food might be less than before but because of inflation they

don't see any difference. A few groups of men weren't sure about how much is spent on food.

The participants said that with extra money that they get from selling what they grow in the village, they buy more fruits especially banana and grapes. Sometimes they buy fruits and vegetables from the local *kirana* (grocery) shop also.

In the summer season, they have less fruits and vegetables and sometimes have to buy from the market. Vegetables are available throughout the year only for those who have irrigation facility and others purchase from market particularly during the summer season. Leafy vegetables are less during the two months of May-June. They are now eating some new vegetables such as bottle gourd and drumstick leaves. Pulses are available and consumed through the year: they soak it in water, and then dry it for preservation. For better quality, they add more oil and hot water and dry it more. Subsequently, they use traditional *chakki* (grinder) at home to split the pulses/dal. A few households also get the pulse/dal processed at the local *chakki*. The cost is around 5 Rs per kg. They get around 60kg-100 kg processed depending on the family size. They do this for Bengal gram and red gram. The pulses are stored in drums, containers/*koti* or gunny bags. Many a times they make *wadi*³ out of different pulses to consume them at a later date.



Meeting in house of member maintaining the Community Seed Bank, Saheli

³ Mildly spiced sun dried dumplings made from pulses

3.3 Interventions

The participants believe all the interventions promoted are good and will help tackle malnutrition in some form or the other; but they feel Community Nutrition Garden (CNG) and Nutrition Garden (NG) are the best interventions. They got seeds for the nutrition garden from the project. The produce from the community garden was also used during community festivals such as for Durga devi and Ganpati.⁴ The surplus produce was also given to the school. Due to the community seed bank, more seeds are available for fruits and vegetables.



Woman showing healthier pod of red gram/tur from seed given under the project as against the traditional variety, Saheli

In future, they will collect seeds from seed bank only. Red gram (Tur) seeds provided under the project had 9-10 seeds in the pod while normal seeds being used in the village had 3-4 seeds in the pod. These seeds can be used to plant for a healthier crop.

The seed bank members give the seeds and go to regularly check whether the seed was planted properly. This is because the seeds borrowed from the seed bank have to be replaced once the crop harvests. The participants said that they didn't have seeds of beet. Sometimes they preserve some

seeds at household level or else purchase from market. They said that in future they will use their own seeds, which will be saved at the seed bank. However, in case seeds are not enough, they would get them from the market. Seeds of cash crops are purchased from market or exchanged between the villagers. Animal attacks are a major problem in getting more produce and therefore the community needs to be vigilant.

Participants who had taken the poultry intervention said that they consume eggs and feel that the taste and quality is better. They sell the excess eggs for Rs.10 each within the village itself. One participant made two thousand rupees by selling eggs in the whole season i.e. between May-August 2017 apart from consuming at home.



Household with Poultry, Heti

⁴ Auspicious festivals in India

The feed for livestock has increased now because of growing more, red gram, green gram and sorghum which have more residual matter. There is better land use. However, animal attack is a major problem specifically for sorghum; both production and fodder availability is less due to it. For commercial crops, pesticide is used. Chemicals need to be given even though with mixed cropping with pulses, soil seems healthier. Crop rotation has improved soil nutrition. One participant said that due to soil testing, she found there was more phosphate in the soil. Therefore she stopped applying phosphate and the soil became better.

The participants, both men and women said that even though work has increased now and they put in more hours than before, the whole family helps out. They sometimes have to ask other people to help out in work as well, especially in the harvest season. The women said they work at least 2 to 2.5 hours more than before. The villages now have better irrigation through another NGO's initiative and there is not much free time. A few discussants said that workload has decreased as there are newer agriculture implements which are available. Time for childcare particularly for older children above five years of age is not necessary and for younger children less than five years of age, there is not much change in the time spent in caring for them. Help of older siblings and grandparents is taken for child care.

3.4 Other enabling factors

The participants seemed happy and satisfied and requested if we could meet them once or twice a year even after the programme was over. They felt that if the project continued it would be good and useful. They are happy with the programme and could not think of any weaknesses. The participants told relatives and friends from other villages about the FSN approach.

The women participants said that not only did the intervention help them eat better; somehow it also led to better health and more confidence. They were able to convince the male members to eat better, explain the programme to relatives and friends from other villages. In the last three years, coinciding with the programme, there have been improvements in sanitation under *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*.⁵ Toilet facility has increased by 40 to 50 per cent over 4 years. The village area is under forest cover and the forest department gave them LPG so they don't cut trees to use as fuel. This has also decreased work load for women. However, once the cylinder is over, it is not easy or cheap to get the LPG. Then, they resort to using traditional stove (*chulha*) again.

⁵ *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* is a campaign in India that aims to clean up the streets, roads and infrastructure of India's cities, smaller towns, and rural areas.

3.5 Nutrition and Nutrition Awareness

The participants claimed that they have less body aches than before and don't feel as tired as before. Weakness has decreased. A few participants however did say that as work had increased, they were now more tired than before. Animal attacks are another reason; they feel tired as they have to guard their fields in the night against wild boars and *nilgai*. The women also said that there is less weakness among children.

The members were aware of nutritious food relating to good health. In the last 3 years, they said consumption of GLV, fruits and pulses in the diet has definitely increased. They were able to list foods that are rich in Vitamin A and iron - carrot, spinach, *methi* (green leafy vegetable). The calendars that they got with the nutrition messages were useful to see messages in pictorial form. Few women reported that their children had shared about the drawings and messages in the calendar.⁶ One woman said that her children shared the awareness messages that they learnt from school. The children taught them six ways of washing hands. The men said they had seen the calendar but not paid much attention to it.

Participants said that they had interacted with the Community Hunger Fighters (CHF) and the CHF sometimes even spoke to them informally while walking, telling them importance of good food. The CHF shared nutrition messages with them.



Nutrition Calendar in Marathi

They think food is tastier. It may also be due to seed quality. (One farmer however said that earlier the taste was good and the taste of new varieties is not good). Meetings on nutrition awareness have helped. Participants said they are more aware of recipes, importance of vaccination and balanced nutrition. They now add a bit of *choona* (limestone powder) in rice as it is rich in calcium, eat curry leaves (earlier they threw them away) as it is rich in Vitamin B complex. They have learnt to enjoy drumstick leaves. They make *parathas*⁷. They even eat drumstick leaves with *besan*⁸ and *gogu sharbat*⁹. They make *kachori* and *vada*¹⁰ from bottle gourd. In fact, bottle gourd was not eaten earlier. They said they have linseed chutney, salad and mixed vegetables (all of which they learnt during nutrition awareness activities under the project).

⁶ The nutrition calendar was developed using drawings made by school children with relevant messages in Marathi on healthy habits and nutritious foods. These were distributed to all households in the study villages, schools and government institutions.

⁷ Flat bread made of wheat

⁸ Bengal gram flour

⁹ Drink made of GLV

¹⁰ Fried delicacies made with a mix of pulses and wheat flour

At a block level function on 1 December 2017, which was celebrated as Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) day by the Primary Health Centre, all ASHAs were supposed to cook and take something to eat. The ASHA from Saheli had made a few dishes using vegetables and pulses from the CNG and everyone praised the food. She had made *paratha* using drumstick leaves and some red gram *wadi*. She won the first prize. In fact some women, after delivery ask for CNG vegetables as they are grown in an organic fashion and they feel it is tastier and healthier. One lady had a knee problem after an accident. She said she ate foods rich in iron and eggs and is able to walk without pain now.

The ASHA worker also shared that there was a camp held in the village for haemoglobin levels and everyone's haemoglobin level had improved. A lady summed up "*aage bhee accha khaate rahenge, jeete rahenge*" (We will keep eating healthy and keep living)

4. Conclusion

Overall, it seems the community benefited from the interventions by growing and eating healthier foods, conserving seeds and decreasing expenditure on food. They also learnt healthier and tastier recipes to cook and eat for a healthier lifestyle.