

CASE STUDY

No. 4

‘I may be uneducated but I’m not a zero’



NAME: Kalo Devi
AGE: 32 Years
EDUCATION: Class V
MUKHIYA: Since 2015
PAST EXPERIENCE: Ward Member (2010-2015)

PANCHAYAT: Nawagarh
PANCHAYAT SAMITI: Latehar Sadar
DISTRICT: Latehar
STATE: Jharkhand

Kalo Devi, Mukhiya of Nawagarh Gram Panchayat—in Latehar District of Jharkhand was waiting for us alone late one evening. The other Panchayat members were not at the office, but her husband had joined her by the time we reached.

It became obvious to us that Kalo Devi has both will-power and vision. Even after coming from an economically weak background, and with little education, she worked her way from a daily wage-earner to a ward member of the Panchayat. She was elected as a ward member in 2010 and, five years later, felt confident enough to contest for the Mukhiya’s post, when she thought that she could serve her people better as Mukhiya with a greater say in decision-making. ‘Gaon ke logo ne mujhe sagyog aur utsah diya (The villagers gave me the inspiration and help)’. As a responsible mother, too, she has entered her children in a boarding school for the best, uninterrupted education. When it comes to performing domestic duties, she does all the work in the morning before going to office.

Kalo Devi’s role as Mukhiya

Kalo Devi has been proactive as a Mukhiya. She has closely focused on issues such as food distribution at Anganwadi centre, timely care of pregnant women and vaccination of infants, inspection of schools to devise ways to halt the dropout of children from the senior classes. Infrastructure development under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNRREGS) and Panchayat Fund under 14th Finance Commission has also been under her close watch. To ensure good and effective governance, she undertakes the responsibility to facilitate the Gram Sabha meetings and preparation of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). She has also ensured timely delivery of essential documents such as birth and death certificates.

It is very encouraging to see her that even after receiving just one orientation, in the duration of only three days, on work responsibilities and government schemes at Vikas Bharati Ranchi in 2016, she has been doing her work with assurance and authority. During her two years as Mukhiya, she is putting forward her best efforts to make a difference in the following aspects:

- Proper functioning of Panchayat Bhawan by making an example of her punctuality in delivering her duties
- Ensuring time delivery of health services to children and pregnant women
- Better maintenance of Panchayat Bhawan in terms of cleanliness and construction of a small infrastructure of seating places for meetings
- Ensuring better delivery of Anganwadi services and fewer dropouts of children from school

Next on her agenda is the renovation of the Aanganwadi building with the help of the Panchayat funds.

Challenges

Kalo Devi admits her feelings of insecurity when it comes to signing papers. Though this fear has never really defeated her, she feels her confidence-level would be greater if she had been allowed higher education.

From the discussions with Kalo Devi it was also evident that she has not been able to mobilise the community during preparations for the last GPDP as she herself has very limited understanding of its purpose. The Sachiv (panchayat secretary) does the documentation in consultation with her. According to her, 'Mein kam padhi hoon, toh kya hua? Mein zero nahi hoon (So what if I have studies only a little? I'm not a zero!').

With regard to her experience as a woman as an elected representative of her village, she said that she has not faced any discrimination from anyone, and enjoys a cordial working relationship with all the other members in the Panchayat.

Kalo Devi ended with a strong expression of her need to be taught to read and write better. More knowledge of government schemes and work responsibilities would increase her efficiency, she feels.