
EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN JHARKHAND

SYNTHESIS REPORT



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Introduction

The "Empowering Civil Society for Social Change in Jharkhand" project (the project) was a collaborative effort between the Civil Society Academy and Gender at Work, aimed at strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs) in Jharkhand. This initiative, funded by the Oak Foundation, was implemented in two phases: Phase 1 from October 2018 to December 2019 and Phase 2 from January 2020 to June 2023.

The project had two primary objectives:

- To enhance leadership capacity within civil society organisations in Jharkhand to contribute to positive social changes for marginalized groups.
- To build strong grassroots Civil Society Organisation (CSO) networks to support social change movements in Jharkhand.

Five organisations/networks, identified by the Oak Foundation, participated in the project: Jharkhand Anti-Trafficking Network, Samvad, Ibtida, Ekjut, and Maitri. Gender at Work focused its interventions on building the capacity of the Jharkhand Anti-Trafficking Network and Samvad, while the Civil Society Academy directed its efforts towards Ekjut and Maitri.

The project focused on strengthening organisational capacities, promoting CSO leadership, fostering solidarity and alliance-building among CSOs in Jharkhand, and providing a platform for critical reflection and dialogue. Additionally, the project invested in building a cadre of organisational change facilitators in Jharkhand to continue supporting CSO capacity strengthening efforts beyond the project's duration.

This Synthesis Report examines the contribution of the project (and Gender at Work's role) in building the leadership and organisational capacities of the Jharkhand Anti-Trafficking Network and Samvad. Specifically, it examines the types of capacities strengthened in each entity and the similarities and differences in outcomes. It also considers the processes through which these changes have occurred (the pathways of change).



Methodology

The methodology employed for developing the case study relied on a qualitative approach and encompassed the following methods:

- A comprehensive desk review of programme documents, including workshop reports, reports to funders, and other relevant reports.
- Interviews with key programme staff at Gender at Work and facilitators.
- In-depth interviews with a total of nine first and second-line leaders and three field coordinators.
- Two focus group discussions with twelve, field-level staff directly engaged in community work.
- Follow-up in-person meetings with key stakeholders at the 'Learning Harvesting Workshop' held in June 2023.

Two, main limitations were encountered during the data gathering process:

- Interview participants displayed better recall of more recent trainings compared to earlier learning experiences. To mitigate this gap, the literature review was leveraged.
- Virtual, online interviews, particularly with field level staff, presented, in some instances, connectivity challenges. In-person interactions and meetings with project participants at the Learning Harvesting Workshop, however, helped to clarify and resolve data gaps.

Gender at Work Framework

The Gender at Work framework was used to analyze the findings across the four, inter-connected quadrants of change: consciousness and capabilities; resources and opportunities; rules, policies, and regulations; and social norms and deep cultures (Figure 1). The Gender at Work framework is useful for highlighting individual and organisational changes across formal and informal spheres.¹



This report is divided into three sections. It begins with a background to JATN and Samvad as well as the project implementation context. Findings are then presented under each of the quadrants, as in Figure 1. Finally, the report concludes by highlighting factors that influenced the changes and highlighting key lessons learned.

¹ See <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

Background

Although JATN and Samvad were founded in close succession, 1999 and 2001 respectively, the entities differ in their structure and focus. JATN is a network of 13 grassroots organisations that primarily addresses safe migration and anti-trafficking issues; whereas Samvad is an individual organisation, also working at the grassroots level, that focuses on promoting the social, economic, and cultural rights of indigenous communities, such as Dalits, women, and religious minorities.

During the project implementation period, civil society organisations (CSOs) experienced two major external shocks in 2020 that significantly disrupted the CSO operating landscape in India: the COVID-19 pandemic and the amendments to the 2010 Foreign Contributions Regulations Act (FCRA). The pandemic necessitated an immediate response to the challenges faced by returning migrants, limited physical movements, as well as the hardships experienced by JATN and Samvad staff. The FCRA amendments severely threatened or hampered the ability of human rights groups to secure funding. As a result, Samvad faced significant donor losses, while JATN's member organisations struggled with accessing funds. Moreover, JATN experienced an abrupt shift in leadership when the State Coordinator, a key and resource-rich member organisation, left the network for reasons unrelated to the project.

These challenges endangered the continuity of both organisations. Samvad urgently required organisational strengthening to adapt to new resource-generating methods including establishing its feminist credentials. Simultaneously, JATN required support to stabilize its new leadership and ensure the network's continuance. This backdrop underscored the need for assistance to adapt and re-strategise for survival and made the project's interventions critically important and relevant for both entities.

From its inception, the project focused on strengthening organisational resilience and development, including staff capacities, and integrating feminist ways of working to improve organisational culture and programming. It embraced an emergent learning approach that was tailored to the individual and specific needs of each organisation. Though many project interventions, such as workshops on fundraising, advocacy, communications, and documentation overlapped, distinct areas of emphasis emerged. With JATN, the project concentrated on strengthening the network, which involved intensive collaboration with its leadership; supporting the formation of core committees; providing leadership mentoring; and finetuning advocacy strategies with external stakeholders. With Samvad, the project prioritized organisational strengthening, including on the use of digital tools and platforms, and honed individual capabilities to enhance programme effectiveness at the field level.



Findings

Individual consciousness and capabilities

Both JATN and Samvad reported significant improvements in individual capacities across all levels, especially in relation to the increased confidence of and improved communication skills of staff. For Samvad, these changes manifested in two areas: firstly, in the improved interactions with board members and the way in which senior leadership communicated with their colleagues. Secondly, increased confidence among second-line leaders and field workers led to more effective delivery of Samvad's programmes and improved team coordination and communication at the field level. Similarly, JATN's staff demonstrated better communication at the field level, applying participatory and consultative methods they learned during workshops in their community interactions. This not only facilitated more effective information dissemination but also garnered increased interest and participation in their programmes and services.

Both organisations have also shown a shift towards more inclusive leadership. At Samvad, there is senior leadership commitment for continuing and extending leadership development to more members of their staff, a thinking nurtured by the project. Similarly, the project sparked interest in planning for successive leadership within the JATN leadership. Some member organisations have already taken steps in this direction, for instance, by delegating more of their functions and putting in place systems to promote new leaders from within. There is notable enthusiasm from the second line of leadership to train a third tier and to champion women's leadership within the communities they serve.

Resources and opportunities

The project realized significant accomplishments in this quadrant. For JATN, the stabilization of the network—achieved through the establishment of a clear identity and the articulation of a shared vision, mission, and values—strengthened network cohesiveness and alignment. This clarity provided the network with a distinct and recognizable identity, bolstering its credibility with donor organisations and State agencies. A core group of active members, established during the project, has been pivotal in enhancing coordination and communication within the network.

Both entities noted enhancements in their documentation and fundraising capacities. Trainings on fundraising proved particularly invaluable, especially for Samvad. These sessions not only equipped the entities to explore diverse funding sources but also endowed them with the confidence and skills to draft proposals in a participatory manner tailored to various donors. Enhanced documentation capacities have ushered improvements in reporting practices, where greater attention is now accorded to crucial details to ensure accuracy. The storytelling approach adopted in project workshops enabled participants to better understand the impact of their initiatives, especially at the grassroots level. Many even found the storytelling process empowering. Both organisations have compiled several impact stories from the field, with JATN contemplating a dedicated publication. For Samvad, the training on digital tools helped to strengthen coordination among team members, which was particularly beneficial during the pandemic, and underscored the importance of enhancing their online presence to broaden the reach of their work.

These tangible advancements manifested at the field level by influencing adjustments in programme interventions and delivery. For example, improved documentation enabled a more discerning understanding of community needs, especially of women, allowing for more tailored interventions. A heightened focus on women's needs can also be attributed to the gender perspective introduced by the project.

Social norms and deep structure

Both JATN and Samvad reported improvements in their organisational culture and practices. For JATN, the project played a pivotal role in guiding member organisations towards more inclusive ways of working, particularly through more participatory decision-making processes. This change was fostered, in large part, by the participatory methods adopted in the training sessions that facilitated group sharing and learning. Many of JATN's interviewees not only exhibited greater recall of tools and methods used in the workshops but also provided numerous examples of how these have been applied to facilitate organisational learning and improve their programming interventions. The project also fostered more empathetic ways of working among JATN's leadership and staff, with increased attention and sensitivity to the challenges that female staff face.

Interviewees from Samvad also appreciated the training pedagogies and reported adopting more participatory ways of working, particularly in programme delivery. In the area of decision-making, Samvad described having a non-hierarchical approach that emphasizes collective decision-making. However, observations by the Gender at Work team and facilitators noted the considerable influence exerted by Samvad's senior leadership on decision-making. There was also resistance from Samvad's leadership to the project facilitating discussions on issues related to leadership transition. Even so, the project did initiate conversations on diverse forms of leadership within Samvad. It also brought about gains in terms of encouraging more empathetic ways of working and increasing attention to the promotion of women's participation in decision-making processes. These shifts indicate a move towards feminist ways of working. Both JATN and Samvad have begun integrating more inclusive and reflexive work practices in their organisations.

With regard to building a culture of learning, participants from both entities actively shared project learnings within their organisations. For Samvad, this manifested as an uptick in knowledge sharing, cross-learning, and intra-organisational collaborations. JATN, on the other hand, realized more substantial progress. Frequent interactions and engagements during the project period led to a profound understanding of each other's work and greater clarity of the role of each member organisation in the network. For many member organisations, the most important learning was understanding how a healthy network works, particularly how to work more collaboratively with others. The strengthened network ensures that members remain connected, facilitating continuous knowledge exchange and collective problem-solving. Moreover, the now-active Core Committee serves as a learning platform, fostering discussions among member organisations, disseminating information to the broader group, and spearheading data collection to bolster advocacy and strategic planning. These developments have also been reflected in the field, where JATN members reported applying participatory learning methods to increase demand for and participation in their programmes.

Policies, rules and regulations

The distinct histories and structures of Samvad and JATN influenced the changes observed in this quadrant. JATN primarily consists of smaller CSOs operating at the grassroots level, while Samvad is more established, with foundational organisational policies and principles already in place. Most of JATN's member organisations lacked formal policies. Efforts to fortify JATN as a network, such as developing its vision, mission and values, revising its by-laws, and enhancing its strategic planning, had a cascading effect on individual member organisations. They, in turn, have developed key organisational policies on matters such as sexual harassment and safeguarding. However, having policies in place does not ensure that they are effectively implemented. Field workers (JATN) and community mobilizers (Samvad) were not fully acquainted with all the policies of their respective organisations. For JATN, however, the establishment of these policies has brought more operational clarity.

For JATN's member organisations, the introduction of policies and the formalization of vision and mission set the stage for review processes, which subsequently refined both organisational and programme planning. Samvad's journey, on the other hand, was different. Following the trainings, it embarked on its own long-term strategic planning process. The project's influence is evident in these decisions. A notable shift in Samvad can be seen in its heightened emphasis on promoting gender representation in decision-making. Preliminary actions, such as identifying potential women leaders and providing them with leadership training, have already begun.

With JATN, an open attitude to the project not only streamlined planning processes, enhancing programme impact, but also yielded significant advancements in advocacy and negotiation skills, which augmented their ability to engage constructively with duty bearers. The project instilled an appreciation for diverse forms of advocacy, stressing the importance of evidence-based approaches. This mindset led to a major joint initiative by member organisations on data collection focused on domestic workers' protection, and more interactions with state government officials. Enhanced dialogues with state agencies, especially government departments at district and sub-district levels, resulted in improved protection of migrant rights in those regions.



Conclusions

In reflecting on the project's journey, some key factors stand out for their role in facilitating the project's achievements:

Pedagogies applied and appropriateness of facilitators: Interviewees from both Samvad and JATN appreciated the participatory approaches of the workshops. Shifting away from traditional lectures, facilitators engaged participants using interactive methods that promoted dialogue-driven learning. This method was echoed in JATN's organisational and network strengthening and Samvad's field activities, fostering heightened community involvement. A Field Coordinator from Samvad remarked on the transformative nature of these sessions, noting their influence on their peer interactions. Facilitators, handpicked for their unique expertise, were consistently approachable, which helped to cultivate enduring relationships with members of both organisations. While Samvad's Secretary emphasized the specific contributions of each facilitator, JATN members appreciated the holistic support and accessibility. This strategic blend of innovative pedagogy and personable facilitation played a pivotal role in the project's success.

Adaptability and responsiveness of the project: Both Samvad and JATN benefited from the project's adaptability and responsiveness. An intentional effort to co-create and design the workshops with both entities ensured alignment with their specific needs and expectations. The use of 'before-action reviews' and 'after-action reviews' with project participants were instrumental for continually refining training objectives and managing expectations. While Samvad identified capacity needs in areas like digital tools and fundraising, JATN's indicated a need to respond to challenges like the pandemic and leadership transitions. In both scenarios, the Gender at Work team showcased exceptional adaptability, emphasizing their commitment to both the individual and organisational development and growth of Samvad and JATN.

While these elements contributed positively to project outcomes, there were also some challenges. For Samvad, insufficient buy-in from senior leadership hindered comprehensive organisational transformation, keeping capacity development project-centric. The failure to prioritize leadership transitions and cultivate a second leadership line meant missed opportunities for long-term growth. In contrast, JATN's unexpected leadership transition amplified the project's significance. The proactive involvement and receptiveness of the incoming leadership, bolstered by mentoring from the Gender at Work team, promoted active participation across member organisations. This alignment between JATN's emergent needs and the project's objectives, backed by leadership endorsement, significantly advanced the project's accomplishments.

In addition to leadership dynamics, both organisations faced challenges related to time and resource commitments. Samvad, grappling with post-COVID-19 operational challenges, found it difficult to maintain consistent attendance at capacity building sessions due to heavy workloads. This hindered the formation of a cohesive change-facilitation cohort. Conversely, while the role of the lead organisation at

JATN was essential for ensuring the active participation of member organisations, it also resulted in an over-reliance on the lead organisation, which might have limited the potential for nurturing a more diverse leadership within the network. Both situations highlight the significance of broad-based engagement and dedicating sufficient resources by participating entities to propel organisational transformation.

Both Samvad and JATN reported that the project brought about significant changes because of its alignment with their distinct organisational exigencies. Amidst a challenging leadership transition, JATN received solid support from the project, consolidating its network identity through established core committees and policies. This robust consolidation marked JATN's shift from being predominantly project-centric to embracing a more holistic system-driven perspective. A strengthened network facilitated a lively community of learning for JATN, which emphasized collective problem-solving, cross and peer learning, and culminated in shared vision and concerted efforts.

Changes in Samvad, on the other hand, were focused primarily on the second quadrant of the Gender at Work framework: Resources and opportunities. Samvad adapted to new resource mobilization models and strengthened its organisational processes, which emphasized feminist modes of operation. This reinforced Samvad's capability to improve project delivery on the ground. Additionally, within Samvad, the project promoted cross-learning among staff, ensuring that project insights percolated throughout the organisational, and enhanced team collaboration and cohesion. However, the changes at Samvad remained largely project centric, with systemic organisational changes being relegated to long term future planning processes.

Across both entities, individual capacities were significantly enhanced. Training methods fostered improved confidence, communication skills, and the adoption of inclusive leadership styles. Moreover, the project acted as a catalyst for refining coordination, documentation, fundraising, and strategic project planning skills and processes. This resulted in enhanced community resources, with improved capacity leading to more participatory methodologies in project execution.

Overall, both organisations, JATN and Samvad, experienced transformative changes due to the adoption of several key strategies. A holistic approach to training, which incorporated both formal and informal needs, was pivotal in ensuring project results, especially in reinforcing JATN's network. Embracing feminist methods fostered inclusivity, empathy, and participation, ushering transformative work cultures. The blend of senior and junior staff in workshops not only elevated engagement but also catalysed inter-generational knowledge exchange. Adaptability, a trait showcased by the Gender at Work team, proved essential in navigating challenges and meeting articulated needs. JATN greatly benefited from Gender at Work's unwavering support as the network responded to challenges such as leadership shifts and the pandemic. For both, the role and commitment of senior leadership emerged as a fundamental driver of comprehensive organisational transformation.

Tying these transformative journeys together was the unwavering support of the Gender at Work team, including the workshop facilitators. The inclusive team composition, including dynamic young women, cultivated an empowering atmosphere. Their commitment, active engagement and guidance fostered relationships, anchored in trust and mutual respect, that went beyond mere professional interactions, evoking a sentiment akin to family among all involved.

Key Lessons Learnt


- 1 Holistic Approach:** Both organisations found that a comprehensive systems perspective in training design and delivery led to successful project outcomes.
- 2 Feminist Methods:** Implementing discursive, inclusive pedagogies while ensuring safe spaces was vital. Such methods cultivated cultures of inclusivity, empathy, and participation, driving transformative work practices.
- 3 Mixed Group Dynamics:** Careful participant selection for workshops, blending senior and junior staff members, enhanced engagement. This mix facilitated inter-generational knowledge transfer and fostered peer learning.
- 4 Adaptability:** Flexibility, as demonstrated by the Gender at Work team, was paramount and crucial for pivoting in the face of challenges to ensure needs articulated by the organisations were addressed.
- 5 Leadership Buy-In:** Both organisations' experience highlight the importance of securing senior leadership's commitment for comprehensive organisational transformation.







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