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Jamuni Devi is a goat farmer in Jharkhand's Latehar district. Of late, her animals had been falling ill frequently, and dying, and she just couldn't understand why. This adversely affected her already meagre income and veterinary doctors are unwilling to cross the hilly terrain and risk visiting the Maoist-hit villages in these remote tribal hinterlands.

“We did not know about the best practices for goat rearing. But, now the Pashu Sakhi didi

castrates, vaccinates and de-worms goats at our doorstep, resulting in their good health and growth,” Jamuni says.

In Jharkhand’s Maoist-dominated areas where a huge tribal population majorly depends on poultry and goats for livelihood, Pashu Sakhis are playing a key role in bringing down the rate of morbidity and mortality of livestock, which was as high as 35 percent in 2012. It is now down to 5 percent.

Not surprisingly, United Nations’ Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) has shortlisted the Johar Pashu Sakhi project among best practices which can be replicated in other Asian countries.

Helping boost farmers’ incomes

Doctor didis are transforming lives of not only animals but also farmers (known as producers groups) in these areas.

They were provided training under the World Bank-funded \$100-million Jharkhand Opportunities for Harnessing Rural Growth

(Johar) project, which aims to double farmers' income by 2023.



Innovative bamboo goat sheds built under Johar project at a village in Jharkhand.

The World Bank started funding the Johar Pashu Sakhi project in 2018 and it is being implemented by the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS), a unit of the state rural development department.

“The Pashu sakhis are trained over three sessions of seven days each, covering skills related to feeding, animal health, housing and

management, farmer training and market support. Over 1,000 Pashu Sakhis have been certified based on both an online test and oral examination by veterinarians contracted by ASCI and are eligible to be para-veterinarians,” says Kumar Vikash, programme manager (communication) JSLPS.

They maintain vaccination records and monitor and report disease outbreaks. They are linked to government veterinary hospitals and dispensaries in the area, he adds.

Jharkhand has the second-highest poverty rate in the country after Chhattisgarh, with 37 percent of the population below the poverty line. In such a scenario, Pashu Sakhis play an important role in diversifying incomes.

An ecosystem of mutual benefit

Pashu Sakhis also tag animals to keep records of their vaccination and health. Emeldena Ekka, a Pashu Sakhi in another rebel hit Manoharpur block, which has Asia’s largest Sal forest, is happy that she is not only helping villagers but also supporting her family.

Initially, she could cover only a few villages as Ekka had to walk long distances. “But after my income increased I have purchased a scooter and cover an entire panchayat. This has further boosted my income,” she adds.



Pashu Sakhis vaccinate goats in a village in Jharkhand. Pic: Shawn Eli

Apart from the over 1,000 ASCI certified Pashu Sakhis, there are nearly 6,500 non-certified para-veterinarians offering door-to-door medical care

to livestock in Jharkhand villages since the last seven years. Under a scheme started in 2012, the JSLPS provided veterinary training to women associated with self-help groups (SHGs).

Bimla Devi, a goat farmer in Hunterganj block of Chatra district, says around two years ago, 10 of her goats died because of an unknown disease.

“However, now we are aware about the diseases among goats and also their treatment. Earlier, we would sell goats once they were 3 to 4 months old because we could not take care of their health. But as Pashu Sakhis help us in getting castration, de-worming and timely vaccination along with healthy feed, we sell them after full growth at more profits. Our income has nearly doubled,” says Bimla.

A friend, philosopher and guide

Pashu Sakhis also conduct Kisaan Paathshala (farmers’ school) once a month for poultry and goat farmers to share resources on scientific methods of goat rearing.

Farmers of goat and dual purpose poultry (Kuroiler) mother units are expected to achieve Rs 1 lakh profit annually while those rearing pig, broilers and small scale Kuroiler will be able to have profit of Rs 65,000, Rs 42,000 and Rs 14,000 respectively, he adds.

However, during emergencies the cases are referred to local veterinarians. "Emergency backup support for cases such as a broken leg or complicated birth is referred to local veterinarians by the Pashu Sakhis through their online community groups," Kumar adds.