

# Success Story

## A SMALL DECISION CHANGED THE LIFE OF WOMEN IN SARDIH

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Sardih is a small geographically isolated village in Manora, Jashpur Chhattisgarh, India, surrounded by forest and made up of approximately 375 people. Most of the villagers are Oraon people, and depend on agriculture and forest products for their livelihoods. For a variety of reasons, most of the women in this village are illiterate and lack awareness of their rights. Locally brewed liquor, called Desi Mahuwa Daru, is an important traditional and cultural part of tribal life. However, in recent years, many male members of the community have been consuming large amounts of liquor, called Desi Mahuwa Daru, and women have consequently often been the victims of various types of alcohol-fuelled violence such as physical attacks, quarrels, and sexual abuse.

Since 2012 Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti (JJVS) has been working on a Women's Empowerment and Development programme in the village to try and prevent alcohol-related violence and support female victims of abuse. JJVS has also been involved with a Women's Self Help Group (SHG) in the village called the Gulab SHG, which also supports women's income generating programmes. Around 45 women participate in the self-help groups on a regular basis, meeting about once a month.

Mrs Anima Toppo is a resident of the Sardih village who was affected by alcohol-related domestic violence, but successfully took action to improve not only her situation, but also that of all the women in Sardih. Married since 1999, Anima and her husband Mr Satish Toppo are 35 and 38 years old respectively and have two children, a seven year old boy and three year old girl. Prior to their marriage, Satish was working in the Jashpur district police force. However, following their marriage, Satish developed negative alcohol consumption habits and would come home after drinking with his friends to quarrel and beat Anima. When discussing her problems with other female members of her community in the JJVS Women's Empowerment program, it was suggested that Anima visit JJVS.

Anima contacted JJVS staff members who counseled her on her issues and encouraged her to take action to better her family and community. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2016 Anima filed a case to the One Stop SAKHI Center, a scheme intended to support women affected by violence. Staff members of the One Stop Center then lodged a first information report (FIR) against Satish at the local police station, following which police officers arrested Satish. This was the first time a woman from the Sardih village

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had ever filed a case against their husband for domestic violence. As well as a case hearing, Satish and Anima also received marriage counseling. Within a month of lodging the complaint and the extra judicial trial, Mr and Mrs Toppo reached a compromise whereby the case was withdrawn but Satish received a warning that any further acts of domestic violence or alcohol abuse would result in jail. Satish also promised to be a good husband and father and support his family financially. He recommenced working at the local police department and the Toppo families are now live together again.

After hearing of this case, women in the Sardih village became more aware of violence against women. Women in the community stopped preparing alcohol at home and also started putting pressure on male members to stop drinking. Women also discussed the case in their self-help groups and encouraged each other to raise their voices against violence and promote their rights. Today, women community members actively participate in JJVS's programs and have become aware and united. Gulab SHG members have even begun charging perpetrators of alcohol-related violence and domestic violence a fine of 1000 Rupees (approximately 15 US-Dollars). Men who want to drink must go outside the village as no Mahuwa Daru liquor is distilled in the village, meaning that overall consumption of alcohol has gone down. Male community members have also begun to support women who raise their voices against violence, though they have not themselves yet started taking any initiatives to decrease gender-based violence.

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Looking to the future, Anima wishes her daughter to have a safe and secure life, especially in terms of gender relations. The negative effects of alcohol abuse and alcohol-induced violence must therefore be effectively managed and mitigated to ensure the safety and empowerment of women and girls, who must also be educated about their rights and supported to take action against perpetrators of gender-based violence. The Indian government and not-for-profit sector has a role to play in this, by continuing to support the fight to end violence against women through programmes led by organisations like the Ministry of

Women & Child Development, Integrated Child Development Schemes (ICDS), Women Cell, One Stop Sahki Center and JJVS. Village-level ICDS workers, health workers and female health volunteers (Mitanins) should also continue to be directly involved in women's empowerment.