A Social Observatory for the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)
NRLM

- A poverty reduction project – aims to improve access to credit, encourage stable livelihoods, promote food security, and engender social change.

- **Core Intervention**: Self Help Groups (SHGs) of 10-15 women created, and federated into Village Organizations (VO) of 10-15 SHGs for credit provision, empowerment, and livelihoods promotion.

- **Sub-Interventions**: Bank Linkages, Nutrition and Health, Disability, Food Security, Education Scholarship, Handicrafts, Sustainable Agriculture, Crop Intensification, etc.

- Project executed by NRLM, a society under the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India. *$4 Billion from GoI, $1 billion in World Bank credit.*

- 12 states with greatest number of poor, NRLP in all the other states. 270 million women targeted under NRLM.
Key Challenges


- Local Heterogeneity
- Heterogeneity in Intervention

• Requires strong culture of Learning By Doing
Social Observatory

• Research and Learning Unit Within the Project

Close collaboration with project implementers:
- Mr. Vijay Kumar, Joint Secretary in charge of NRLM
- Mr. Parmesh Shah – World Bank Task Team Leader in charge of NRLM
Researchers (so far)

- Radu Ban (Gates Foundation) (AP – IE)
- Urmila Chatterjee (SO team) (Orissa – IE, National Survey)
- Upamanyu Dutta (SO team) (Bihar – IE, MIS)
- Karla Hoff (WB) (Experiments – Bihar)
- Vivian Hoffmann (Univ of Maryland) (Bihar - IE)
- Ethan Ligon (Cal - Berkeley) (AP - IE)
- Nethra Palaniswamy (SO team) (Orissa – IE, TN – IE, National Survey)
- Vijayendra Rao (WB) (SO team Lead)
- Paromita Sanyal (Cornell) (Qualitative - Bihar)
National Evaluation

Key Outcomes:
Household-level economic outcomes:
• Level and cost of debt
• Asset portfolio
• Consumption level and patterns
• Income-generating activities

Private empowerment and welfare:
• Women’s dignity, voice and mobility
• Women’s say in household decision-making
• Women’s subjective well-being

Public engagement:
• Participation in political processes
• Instances of collective action
Study Instruments: National Quantitative Baseline

- Sample Size to be representative at the State Level (very large – TBD)
- 3 round panel over 5 years
- Open Access Policy on Data
- Household Level Questionnaires
  - General Module: household-level economic indicators, capability based poverty indicators
  - Women’s Module: women’s mobility, decision-making, public participation, subjective well-being
- Community Level Questionnaires
  - General: village composition, wealth distribution
  - Women’s: Quality of public services; collective action
Planned Impact Evaluations

• National – calibrating sample design in each state (where possible) to allow either discontinuity based on poverty score for block cut-off, or PSM.
• Orissa – Similar to Bihar
• AP – 3 arms: Health, Nutrition, Sustainable Agriculture, random assignment
• Open to proposals to evaluate sub-interventions in other states.
  - Key principle: IE must be designed in collaboration with state implementation agency.
  - Project should drive the research rather than other way around.
Monitoring - MIS

Census of all SHG Members:
- Annual Profile capturing key socio-economic indicators at member level.
- Monthly “Didi’ Sheets capturing the weekly transactions of savings, disbursements and repayments.
- Dashboard to display results as required by project staff at all levels (village, block, district, state, HQ) with tools for simple cross-tabs and graphical analysis.
- Database updated in real time with e-bookeeping and m-booking methods.
- Data posted on internet
Monitoring - Process

- Rotating random sample of villages in every state.
- Visited by independent agency
- Track challenges in project implementation
- Track social and political change
- Reports summarized in brief summaries that will actually be read by managers.
Qualitative Studies Planned

• Bihar:
Tracking matched pairs of treatment-control panchayats over 2 years

• AP:
A study of the SHG deliberative process at from the village, block and district level
Selection of villages for Bihar Qualitative Survey

• Using data from Quantitative Baseline Survey, select similar villages in project and control panchayats matched in:
  • Demographics
  • Land distribution
  • Administration - Within same block and similar leadership
  • Credit access

• Field visits to confirm qualitative similarity and finalize 10 communities across 4 districts
Open-ended questions to be investigated in Bihar

• How intervention actually functions
• Process of economic change
• Process of social change
• Process of political change
• Role of inequality in influencing change
• Gender dynamics of the intervention and potential backlash by men
Method in Bihar

• In two districts randomly assigned treatment-control pairs
• In two districts: triplets (treatment, control and a Phase 1 village where Jeevika has been active for 2 years)
• Each village will be visited every three months by a team of 3-4 investigators
• They will reside in the village for a week
• Conduct in-depth interviews with key informants, FGDs, PRA work
• Summarize findings in village reports
• PIs will participate in field visits
• Village reports will be analyzed in depth by PIs.
Field Experiments

• An important source of change in the development process occurs within people—
  - their world-views and self-concepts
  - their sense of having certain basic rights.

• Experiments are well-suited to assessing transformations of social actors and norms

• We propose to undertake experiments to assess women’s:
  • self-confidence,
  • ability to work with persons with higher social status,
  • bargaining power in the household.
  • access to social networks to obtain information
  • the lenses through which they view the world
Methods - Field Experiments

In Bihar – same Sample as qualitative villages:

For most experiments, we will draw random samples from 4 treatment and 4 control villages in two different years to assess treatment effects:
  in the short-run
  in the long-run (permitting a diff-in-diff analysis)

The detailed knowledge we have of these villages will permit us to assess the channels through which the Livelihoods project affects outcomes

For one game—a test of self-confidence—we will draw on a random sample of all villages in the treatment and control groups

The results of our experiments will complement, and provide a check on, qualitative work that assesses whether women are imbued with a sense of agency: e.g., to confront problems in their villages through collective action.
Academic Interface

• Guided by SO Advisory Committee (TBD)
• Matchmakers – Researchers to Project Needs
• Open Data Policy
• Research Fund for India-based researchers
• Bridge to the Project
  - Summarize Research Findings for Project Learning
  - Work with project in developing tools for learning
Conclusion

• Data-driven learning-by-doing in a flagship project that requires an enormous amount of contextual understanding, innovation, experimentation and learning from failure, to be effective.

• Open to ideas and potential collaborations from researchers

• Looking for young people to work in the SO staff as researchers, field coordinators, research assistants, etc.