

Invisible Voices:

A 4S India biannual chronicle

VOLUME 7

OCT 25-MAR 26



EDITORIAL NOTE



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(Deputy Director, MEAL
& KM)**

"Together, we move forward—steadily, purposefully, and with hope"

Development is often measured through numbers in terms of households reached, livelihoods enhanced, institutions strengthened, or communities engaged. While these indicators are important, they tell only part of the story. Behind every statistic lies a journey of aspiration, resilience, innovation, and human determination. It is these journeys that truly define the impact of development.

This edition of our newsletter brings together stories that capture the many dimensions of 4S India's work over the past six months. From women transforming traditional skills into thriving enterprises and farmers embracing climate-resilient agricultural practices, to communities strengthening local institutions and accessing new opportunities through strategic partnerships, each article reflects the power of collective action and people-centred development. Alongside these stories, the newsletter highlights significant organisational milestones, knowledge-sharing initiatives, research engagements, and reflections that continue to shape our learning and practice.

At 4S India, we believe that sustainable change is built not only through well-designed interventions but also through trust, participation, collaboration, and continuous learning. Every achievement featured in these pages is the result of the dedication of countless individuals—women entrepreneurs, farmers, community leaders, field professionals, researchers, development partners, and colleagues—who work tirelessly to create positive change in their communities.

As you turn these pages, we invite you to look beyond the outcomes and discover the people whose courage, commitment, and perseverance make these achievements possible. We hope the stories in this edition not only inform and inspire but also encourage meaningful dialogue on equity, inclusion, and sustainable development.

Thank you for being a valued partner in this shared journey. Together, we continue to build resilient communities, strengthen local institutions, and create pathways for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Crafting New Futures of Mahadalit Women through Bangle-Making Enterprises

"A skill in hand today can become a livelihood tomorrow"

As part of its Mahadalit development initiative, 4S India launched a 10-Day Bangle Making Training Programme in Gaya, Bihar, on 14 December 2025, with the objective of creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for young Mahadalit women. The training aims to equip participants with practical skills while ensuring that learning ultimately translates into income generation through enterprise development and market linkages.

The programme brought together 20 women participants from 4 villages across the district. On the inaugural day, trainees were introduced to the fundamentals of bangle making, including the identification of raw materials, tools, production processes, and the overall training roadmap. The bangles are being crafted using stones, glitters, gum, with a focus on quality, design, and market appeal.



This initiative builds on 4S India's broader strategy of promoting skill-based livelihoods among marginalized women. If this is a subsequent batch, details of the earlier training programme may be highlighted here: 20 women were trained in the previous batches, of whom have initiated production, are linked to markets, and are earning an average monthly income of ₹5000.

Over the course of the training, participants will receive hands-on exposure to product development, quality control, costing, packaging, and basic business management. The programme is designed not merely as a training activity but as the foundation for future entrepreneurship.

Following the completion of the training, 4S India will facilitate market linkages, support collective marketing through Self-Help Groups, and explore enterprise models for scaling production. Regular post-training follow-up will help track income generation, enterprise establishment, and challenges faced by participants. By combining skills, mentoring, and market access, the initiative seeks to create resilient and self-reliant livelihoods for Mahadalit women while strengthening their economic and social agency within the community.

Seeds, Honey, and a Trophy Well Earned: 4S India Takes Grassroots Innovation to Pakur's Agriculture Mela



The Block Level Agriculture Mela (Krishi Pradarshani) in Pakur, Jharkhand, became a vibrant platform where farmers, government departments, and development organisations came together to celebrate local innovation and sustainable livelihoods. Partnering with ATMA Pakur, 4S India used the event to showcase how community-led initiatives are creating meaningful change on the ground.

The 4S India stall highlighted indigenous seed conservation, Ridge-to-Valley watershed management, low-cost goat rearing, kitchen gardens, and the organisation's Bio-Resource Centre. Visitors also explored locally produced honey, sattu, and chana dal developed through Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) initiatives and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), demonstrating the growing potential of rural enterprises and value chains.

"Where Community Innovation Earned More Than a Trophy"



More importantly, the mela created opportunities for dialogue between block administration and civil society organisations, encouraging stronger collaboration for local development. In recognition of its contribution, 4S India received a special trophy, acknowledging its sustained grassroots engagement and commitment to community institution building.

The event also recognised the achievements of local communities. Thirty farmers from 4S India's intervention villages were honoured for exhibiting quality agricultural produce, reflecting the steady adoption of sustainable farming practices. Four farmers received Kisan Credit Cards (KCC), improving their access to institutional finance and strengthening their farming prospects.

While the exhibition lasted only a day, its impact extends beyond the event. By strengthening partnerships, promoting local enterprises, and creating visibility for community-led innovations, the Pakur Agriculture Mela reaffirmed that sustainable rural transformation grows from local knowledge, collective action, and enduring collaboration.

Where Strategy Meets the Sea: 4S India's PLR 2026 Resets the Compass for a Year of Deeper Impact



From February 15–18, 2026, professionals from Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh gathered at ADB Canvas Resort, Mandarmani, for 4S India's annual Professional and Personal Learning and Reflection (PLR) retreat. Over three days, the organisation reviewed its performance, reflected on challenges, and charted priorities for the year ahead.

The retreat began with regional presentations on livelihoods, enterprise promotion, and institution-building, followed by candid SWOT discussions. Teams openly discussed gaps in documentation and data discipline while recognizing strengths such as committed field teams, growing community trust, and grassroots credibility. A session by Mr. Dharmendra on the OSPA and PMS frameworks reinforced the importance of accountability, ownership, and continuous improvement.

"PLR 2026 reaffirmed a simple truth: meaningful change begins with honest reflection and purposeful"



On Day 3, chaired by Executive Director Mr. Mihir Sahana, teams presented concrete commitments for the coming year, including strengthening 25 Farmer Producer Organisations, enhancing household incomes, expanding watershed initiatives, increasing Gram Sabha participation, and promoting preventive community health systems. A thought-provoking case study on Maha Dalit exclusion underscored the need to prioritize the most marginalized through a structured pathway of survival support, livelihood stabilization, and convergence with government systems.

The retreat reinforced several key learnings: the importance of honest self-reflection, the need for stronger documentation and evidence systems, the value of strategic planning over routine implementation, and the centrality of social inclusion in development practice. Participants also recognized that sustainable impact requires moving beyond project targets toward long-term institutional and community transformation.

PLR 2026 emerged as more than an annual review—it served as a strategic reset, reaffirming 4S India's commitment to equity, accountability, learning, and lasting change.

Day 2 featured an experiential learning session led by motivational speaker Mr. Ajay Gomes. Through team-based challenges and problem-solving exercises, participants learned the value of planning, collaboration, innovation, and strategic thinking. A key takeaway was that meaningful results come not from reactive action but from deliberate planning and reflection. The day concluded with intensive PMS goal-setting exercises facilitated by Mr. Gaurav.

Momos, Koftas, and a Community Finding Its Footing: Belgaria's Mushroom Contest Was About Far More Than Food



On March 19, 2026, Belgaria Township in Dhanbad witnessed an event that blended livelihood promotion, innovation, and community participation. Organised under the AROHI Project, a CSR initiative of Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) implemented by 4S India, a mushroom-based culinary contest brought together residents, aspiring entrepreneurs, and technical experts to explore the economic potential of oyster mushrooms.

Participants showcased an impressive range of dishes, including mushroom momos, koftas, biryani, pakora, and polau, demonstrating both creativity and the versatility of mushrooms as a nutritious and affordable food source. Entries were evaluated by a panel comprising representatives from BCCL, 4S India, and a mushroom scientist from KVK Deoghar, who assessed taste, presentation, nutritional value, and market potential. Mushroom momos, koftas, and polau emerged as the winning dishes.

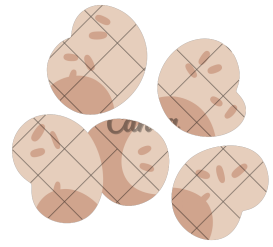
"Where Community Innovation Earned More Than a Trophy"



Beyond the competition, the event served as a practical platform for market education and enterprise development. Belgaria Township is home to thousands of families relocated under the Jharia Master Plan, many of whom continue to rebuild their livelihoods. The contest formed part of AROHI's broader vision of creating community-owned food enterprises through a proposed Cloud Kitchen and FoodKart model. By linking local mushroom cultivation with food preparation and sales, the initiative aims to establish a farm-to-fork value chain managed by the community itself.

The event demonstrated not only culinary talent but also the potential for entrepreneurship, particularly among women. More importantly, it generated enthusiasm around mushroom cultivation and value addition, offering a glimpse of how community-led enterprises can contribute to sustainable livelihood recovery and economic resilience in Belgaria.

From Pond to Prominence: Bihar's 'Superfood of the Wetlands' Takes Centre Stage at National Festival



The National Makhana Mahotsav 2025, held on October 8 at the National Makhana Research Centre (NMRC), Darbhanga, brought together nearly 700 farmers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and policymakers to celebrate the growing significance of makhana (fox nut) in India's agricultural landscape. Organised by 4S India in collaboration with ITC Mission Sunhara Kal, the event highlighted the remarkable journey of this traditional wetland crop from local ponds to national prominence.

The festival featured technical exhibitions, machinery demonstrations, farmer-scientist interactions, and discussions on research priorities, value addition, and strengthening the GI identity of Mithila Makhana. Addressing the gathering, experts emphasized that scientific cultivation, mechanisation, and market-oriented innovation are critical for unlocking the full potential of the sector.

"Bihar's Superfood Makhana: From Tradition to Transformation"



A major highlight was the contribution of 4S India, which, under the ITC Mission Sunhara Kal initiative, has supported more than 2,500 beneficiaries across Darbhanga, Madhubani, Katihar, and Araria districts. Through training on scientific cultivation practices, pond management, and value-added processing, the organisation has helped farmers improve productivity and explore new livelihood opportunities. Its exhibition stall showcasing value-added makhana products and processing technologies attracted significant attention from participants and visitors.

The Mahotsav also underscored key lessons for the future: agricultural transformation requires strong partnerships between farmers, research institutions, market actors, and development organisations. With growing demand for healthy foods, increasing opportunities for value addition, and expanding export potential, makhana is poised to become a major driver of rural livelihoods. The event reaffirmed that when science, enterprise, and community participation come together, traditional crops can create pathways for sustainable growth and prosperity.

From the Hilltops of Jharkhand, Women's Day Rang Louder Than Any Stage Could



International Women's Day 2026 was celebrated across the remote villages of Littipara and Belgaria in Jharkhand, where women gathered not only to mark the occasion but also to reflect on their achievements, aspirations, and collective strength. Organised by 4S India, the events brought together women from Paharia and other rural communities, creating a vibrant platform for dialogue, learning, and celebration.

In Ketokuria, Littipara, around 30 women from 16 villages participated in sports competitions, cultural performances, and community discussions. Traditional Jhari and Kandha dances showcased the rich cultural heritage of the region, while group interactions focused on strengthening Self-Help Groups (SHGs), enhancing income-generating activities, and addressing local development concerns. Women openly discussed challenges related to mobility, access to services, and livelihood opportunities, while also sharing practical solutions emerging from their own experiences.

**"In Jharkhand's hills,
Women's Day was not
celebrated—it was lived"**



Similar celebrations in Belgaria brought together women across age groups through competitions, cultural programmes, and open forums. Beyond the festivities, the events highlighted an important reality: women are increasingly shaping decisions within their households, communities, and local institutions.

The celebrations reaffirmed that meaningful empowerment goes beyond symbolic recognition. When women come together to share experiences, preserve culture, discuss challenges, and envision solutions, they become active drivers of change. Across the hills of Jharkhand, International Women's Day 2026 served as a powerful reminder that empowered communities begin with empowered women.

The event featured inspiring voices from within the community. Women leaders spoke about overcoming social barriers, building solidarity, and creating opportunities through collective action. A particularly motivating session was led by Sammual Malto, the first LLB graduate from the Paharia community, who encouraged young women to pursue education, leadership, and their rights with confidence.

AROHI Takes Flight: A New Chapter for Livelihoods in Belgaria Township

"From Safe Homes to Sustainable Futures"



With the support of Bharat Coke Coal Limited, 4S India has launched the AROHI Project on developing cluster value-chain-based economic livelihood development in the Jharia coalfield region, Jharkhand. With a total project outlay of ₹16 crore and a duration of 1,095 days (3 years), the initiative aims to reach nearly vulnerable people by creating sustainable, market-linked livelihood opportunities and strengthening community resilience.

Belgaria Township was established to provide safer homes for families relocated from the fire-prone areas of the Jharia Coalfields. While the move addressed a critical safety concern, it also disrupted traditional livelihoods, leaving many households searching for stable and dignified sources of income. The AROHI Project has been conceived to bridge this gap by promoting locally relevant enterprises, skill development, and community-led economic growth.

Building on these insights, 4S India will prepare Detailed Project Reports for high-potential livelihood sectors and work closely with communities and stakeholders to translate evidence into action. More than a livelihood programme, AROHI represents a long-term commitment to helping Belgaria's families rebuild economic security, strengthen local enterprises, and shape a more resilient future.

Makhana, popularly known as foxnut or gorgon nut, has gained global recognition as a "superfood" due to its high nutritional value and rising demand in health-conscious markets worldwide. However, despite this potential, producers in North Bihar continue to face challenges such as low processing efficiency, limited access to credit, inadequate infrastructure, and fragmented marketing systems.



The journey has already begun with a comprehensive baseline survey covering 1,873 households. Conducted by a team of 26 trained enumerators using digital data collection tools, the exercise has generated valuable insights into education, employment, income, financial inclusion, and livelihood aspirations across the township.

The findings reveal both pressing challenges and promising opportunities. While unemployment and low household incomes continue to affect many families, the survey also highlights strong local demand for sectors such as food enterprises, tailoring, repair services, transport, digital services, and micro-livestock activities.

A New Chapter Begins: Building Livelihoods, Resilience, and Hope for 3,500 Paharia Families

"A landmark partnership to transform the future of 3,500 Paharia families"

4S India is embarking on a transformative five-year initiative to strengthen the livelihoods of 3,500 Paharia families across two aspirational blocks of Jharkhand. Supported by the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), the project will run from November 2025 to October 2030, focusing on one of India's most vulnerable Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

More than a development project, this initiative represents a long-term commitment to building resilient livelihoods, stronger community institutions, and greater opportunities for future generations. It reflects a shared vision that sustainable transformation becomes possible when communities, development partners, and institutions work together toward a common goal of dignity, self-reliance, and inclusive growth.

The initiative aims to address the interconnected challenges of poverty, limited livelihood opportunities, natural resource degradation, and social exclusion through a comprehensive development approach. Interventions will include sustainable agriculture and livestock promotion, watershed and natural resource management, women-led enterprise development, youth skill training, and strengthening community institutions.

Over the project period, 4S India will directly engage with 3,500 households, treat 3,000 hectares through watershed development, create 2,400 water conservation structures, strengthen 140 Self-Help Groups, support 100 women-led enterprises, and train 500 youth in livelihood-oriented skills. The programme also envisions developing five model villages and increasing average annual household income to ₹80,000.

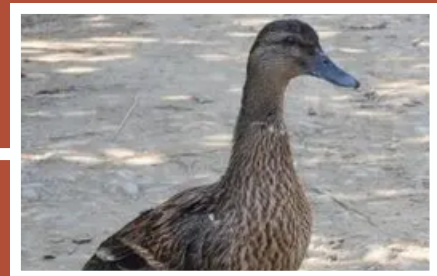
As a foundation for evidence-based planning, a detailed baseline survey covering 1,000 households has already been completed. These households will form the Phase-I intervention cohort, providing critical insights into local livelihood systems, vulnerabilities, and development priorities.



“From Backyard to Business: How Nirmala Devi Built Three Income Streams from a ₹4,500 Investment”



At 52, Nirmala Devi, from Majhaullia Village from Mujaffarpur district, had spent most of her life contributing to her family's livelihood without having an income of her own. Her husband, Pramod, worked as an agricultural labourer and cultivated their 15 katha of land under a traditional wheat-maize-rice cycle. While the household managed to meet its basic needs, income remained uncertain and dependent on seasonal agriculture and wage labour.



In December 2024, Nirmala became a beneficiary of the LIFE Project, implemented by 4S India with support from LIC HFL. She received a one-time grant of ₹4,500 to start backyard duck rearing, along with training on duck management, vaccination, and disease prevention. The project also introduced multi-layer vegetable cultivation on her 15-katha plot, promoting crops such as cabbage, tomato, peas, bottle gourd, and potato using organic inputs. In addition, veterinary support was provided for her goats, and she was linked to a ₹50,000 Jeevika SHG loan, issued in her own name.

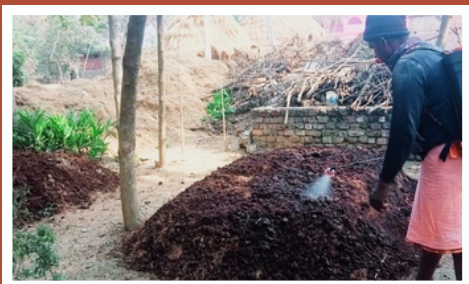
The results have been remarkable. Her duck flock increased from 5 to 12 birds, generating approximately ₹15,000 annually through egg and meat sales. Vegetable cultivation has earned her ₹45,000, with harvesting still ongoing, while goat rearing contributes another ₹8,000. Together, these activities have created an annual income of over ₹68,000, representing a return of more than 15 times the initial grant amount.

Beyond income, the intervention has strengthened Nirmala's confidence and decision-making role within the household. Her journey demonstrates how a combination of small financial support, technical guidance, diversified livelihoods, and access to credit can help rural women transform existing household resources into sustainable economic opportunities.

“Turning Waste into Wealth: Sanju Sinha's Composting Journey Inspires Rural Women”



For Sanju Sinha, a 60-year-old widow from Rasalpur Bhithiya village of Jehanabad district, rising fertilizer costs and limited income opportunities were constant challenges. Through the UttHaN Project, 4S India introduced her to Waste Decomposer Technology, a low-cost composting method developed by the National Centre of Organic Farming (NCOF) that converts household and farm waste into organic manure using locally available resources.



With support from the project, Sanju began compost production using organic waste, cow dung, water, and a starter microbial solution. Over the last two years, she successfully completed 18–20 composting cycles, producing nearly 900 kg of organic compost. She sold 560 kg at ₹10 per kg, earning ₹5,600, while using the remaining 340 kg on her own fields. By replacing chemical fertilizers, she saved an additional ₹2,000–₹2,500, generating a total economic benefit of ₹7,600–₹8,100 without any financial investment.

Sanju's success soon inspired others. In her village alone, 8–10 neighbouring women adopted composting after observing the results. Similar peer-led adoption was seen in Sumera village, where 5–7 women followed the example of another beneficiary, Rita Devi.

Today, the intervention has reached 90 women across eight villages. While income generation from compost remains modest, the model's strength lies in its zero-cost entry, ease of adoption, and ability to reduce farm input costs. Sanju's journey demonstrates how a simple, locally appropriate innovation can improve livelihoods, strengthen sustainable farming, and inspire community-wide change.

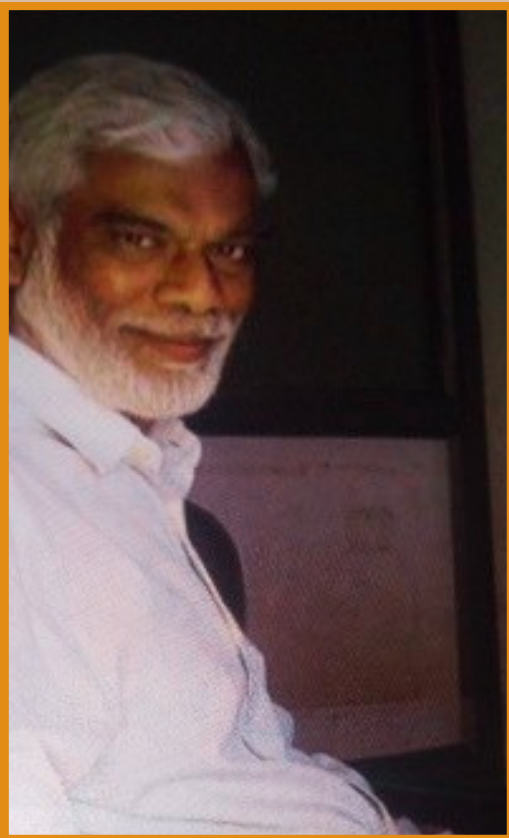
WHAT I ENJOY AND LEARN AT 4S INDIA

-VIJAY NANDKARNI

4S India is an organisation which I call a “wealthy organisation”. While its financial position, no doubt, is sound, I consider 4S to be wealthy for different reasons. I consider it wealthy for its wealth of experience in rural livelihoods harvested over the years, the wealth of knowledge which its people possess of the various aspects of agriculture, livestock rearing, natural resources management and the social processes; the wealth of youthful, energetic and innovative teams of human resources it possesses and above all, its wealth of ideas and its innovative spirit.

While we work for improving the economic and social conditions in the region, we need to keep in mind that humane warmth and the social bonds are not lost in the process. It can be asked if this is within the remit of 4S India. While the question is valid, we should also think the purpose for which we work for the livelihoods and the enhancement of income of the people. Are these ends in themselves?

A point I keep repeating is that organisations like 4S India work on various projects in diverse spheres of activity but for a limited period of time. While the projects certainly do create the intended impact, we lose our close connection with the community developed over the period of the project and we move on. Sometimes there is a risk of the community losing whatever it had acquired during the period of interaction with us as and so do we. I suggest we should identify a geographical area and / or a community for sustained all-round work so that there is close bond developed. We could plan a string of projects in such a manner that our association in the area continues over at least a decade, if not more. Eventually, our experiment should prove to be a resource for training and social research.



Board Member

INHERITANCE OF EXCLUSION – A REFLECTION ON MAHADALIT POVERTY

-SUSHNAT PUSHKARNA

The more time I spend in the Mahadalit tolas of Bankey Bazar, Imamganj, and Jehanabad, the clearer it becomes that poverty here is not an episode but an inheritance—quietly passed down through generations. It is embedded in the landscape, in the location of settlements at the margins, and in the everyday realities that shape life for these communities.

What I witness is not merely a lack of income but a deeper form of exclusion. Landlessness, historical displacement, and caste-based boundaries have created a geography where Mahadalit families remain physically and socially isolated. This separation affects access to water, education, mobility, employment, and public services. Even today, women speak of walking long distances for water, being the last to benefit from schemes, and children facing ridicule on their way to school. Poverty here is intensified by caste and sustained through routine discrimination.

Conversations with elders reveal childhoods remembered not by years but by phases of hunger. Many recall seasons when food ran out months before the harvest. One woman's quiet words remain with me: "हमर लगे गरिबी एक-दू दिन के नय, जनम भर के घेरल नियति हइ।" Poverty accumulates across lifetimes, with each generation beginning from the same point of deficit—without land, savings, or social capital.

Yet, within this deprivation, the resilience of Mahadalit households, particularly women, is remarkable. Their strength is not romantic; it is rooted in survival and the determination to hold families together despite limited choices.

These experiences remind me that poverty in these tolas is not just a condition but a system. Addressing it requires more than programmes—it requires confronting the structures that continue to sustain exclusion.



**Regional Director-South
Bihar**

Growing Together: My Journey in Strengthening Farmer Institutions

-Jibanjit Mahato

Working in the agriculture and rural development sector has been a journey of learning, adaptation, and meaningful engagement with farming communities. My experience with Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) and Integrated Farming Clusters (IFCs) across Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts has strengthened my understanding of grassroots development and the power of collective action.

In Jalpaiguri, I have worked closely with SHYAMDHENU Mahila FPC and supported IFC activities across Gadong-I, Sakoyajhora-II, and Jharalta-I Gram Panchayats, promoting sustainable agriculture, farmer participation, and improved livelihoods. In Alipurduar, my engagement with Moynajhora FPC in Madarihat block and Kalchini Pragati FPC in Kalchini block has further enriched my experience in farmer mobilization, field planning, and community outreach.

The journey has not been without challenges. Mobilizing farmers, developing market linkages, and coordinating among multiple stakeholders require patience, persistence, and continuous learning. These experiences have reinforced my belief that trust, collaboration, and strong community institutions are the foundation of sustainable agricultural growth.

Looking ahead, I remain committed to strengthening farmer collectives, promoting innovation, and supporting integrated farming approaches that enhance productivity, improve incomes, and build resilient rural communities.

A Journey of Learning, Leadership, and Purpose

-Swarup Nag

When I graduated as a civil engineer, I never imagined that my career would lead me to the development sector. Looking back, every stage of my journey has reaffirmed that it was the right decision.

After seven years as a development practitioner, I joined 4S India as Team Leader in Pakur, working with the Pahariya PVTG community—one of the most vulnerable communities living in remote and challenging terrains. What began as a professional assignment soon became a deeply personal journey. I realized that meaningful development requires far more than technical expertise; it demands patience, empathy, resilience, and a genuine understanding of people's lives.

Working closely with my team and spending time in villages taught me the value of listening, building trust, and learning from the community. Every small milestone reinforced that lasting change is achieved through consistent effort and collaboration rather than quick results.

This experience has transformed my perspective from delivering projects to facilitating community-led development. Working with the Pahariya community has been one of the most enriching chapters of my professional life, shaping me into a more compassionate and reflective leader. I remain grateful for the opportunity to learn, serve, and grow alongside the community and my colleagues at 4S India, and I continue to be inspired to contribute towards sustainable and inclusive development.



District Manager- North Bengal



Team Lead and NRM Expert



Biannual Newsletter

*Appreciate
you!*

Published & Printed by Sarva Seva Samity Sanstha (4S India)

**Registered office.- Vill+Post- Rajan, Gurua, Gaya- 824237, Bihar, Head Office-
BC-247, Sector 1, Bidhannagar, Kolkata-700 064, Email: info@4sindia.org.in**

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Officer)**

Thank you 

