

# Supporting women's economic empowerment through goat rearing in rural Bihar, India

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## Highlights

### Evidence impact

- Formative evaluation findings confirmed programme assumptions about women's roles as key household decision-makers with respect to goat rearing and their willingness to pay for veterinary services. This informed Project Mesha's theory of change in working with women's self-help groups to train and develop community veterinary service providers.
- Findings also informed the design of the project implemented by Aga Khan Foundation.

### Other details

Title: [Project Mesha: transforming the lives of rural women through productivity impro...](#)

Authors: Bidisha Barooah, Ritwik Sarkar, Priyanka Dubey, Avantika Bagai

Status : Completed October 2016



## Context

In India, goats account for more than one quarter of all livestock and provide livelihoods to an estimated 33 million households, the majority being landless farmers or marginal landholders. However, high morbidity and mortality amongst the goats limit the potential of goat rearing to enhance incomes amongst the rural poor.

Project Mesha is a community-based intervention that aims to improve quality of life for landless and marginal farming households in four blocks of Muzaffarpur district, in Bihar, by strengthening goat farming. The project was implemented in 2017 by Aga Khan Foundation's Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and supported by the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (JEEViKA) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The programme trains women's self-help group members to become 'pashu sakhis' ('friends of animals' in Hindi). These community veterinarians provide critical veterinary services that benefit women who rear goats and other animals as part of their livelihoods.

Before implementation, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme requested information about the relevance, feasibility, context and evaluability of the project. Responding to this request, 3ie conducted a formative evaluation in 2016 to assess goat rearing and management practices and the demand and supply constraints of veterinary services to help inform better project implementation and evaluation. Apart from the theory of change, the authors of the formative evaluation also assessed the output and outcome indicators, making suggestions as to how they could be collected in subsequent evaluation.

# Evidence

The formative evaluation highlighted the economic importance of goat rearing in intervention areas, the key role played by women in managing and rearing goat flocks, and the high mortality amongst goats on account of disease spread. Findings highlighted a willingness to pay for veterinary services such as vaccinations, deworming and castration, but suggested further community engagement to identify acceptable pricing.

The study also found that goat farmers were more likely to be middle-aged women with low schooling and limited physical mobility, networks and communication skills. Training should be tailored to engage this cohort.

## Evidence impacts

“ 'The formative evaluation by 3ie was used to further refine the Project Mesha theory of change and the findings were also used to finalise the indicators for the baseline evaluation.' ”

**Tinni Sawhney**

*chief executive officer*

*Aga Khan Foundation India*

### **Formative stage findings help refine the intervention**

The implementing agency, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, [incorporated findings and recommendations](#) from the formative evaluation into the design of Project Mesha. This included engaging the community in identifying prices for the different services. The implementers also ensured the training programme was designed appropriately for candidates interested in joining the Pashu Sakhi cadre. In 2018, Population Council conducted a [baseline evaluation](#) of the project. JEEViKA and the implementing agency are now planning to scale the model in 13 districts across Bihar.

## Suggested citation

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[Meet the 'pashu sakhis' of rural Bihar](#)

This news article describes the programme that is now being implemented in collaboration

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