

## Empowering People: Creating New Forms of Social Capital

Dear Sir  
Namaskar

LSS and SSVK have endeavored towards the cause of the underprivileged section of the society, especially the Musahars of North Bihar. We have organized people in pursuit of just and egalitarian development, and also tried to innovate simple, locally relevant and self-sustained effective development models. From land and water rights to food sovereignty, from the right to information to the panchayat raj institutions, we are reflecting a mosaic of issues, initiatives, processes and responses found in thousands of villages in Bihar.

**Gram Kosh** is such an initiative which had a humble beginning more than a decade ago in some villages of North Bihar. Poor, disempowered villagers had started saving their resources and grains collectively to meet their everyday needs and in this process, had also organized themselves for a broader social change. Extreme economic hardships remote locations, rudimentary physical and social infrastructure, hostile society and lack of experience had not deterred the poor from creating their own development programme, entirely with their own resources. Gram Kosh played a crucial role in ensuring that people have minimum economic security, they have participation in decision making and they achieve democratization of everyday life. Our initiative has covered a long way in all these years and the time has come to reflect on it collectively, to continue with our collective journeys.

We would like to underline the fact that it is important that our initiatives like Gram Kosh are viewed as expressions of autonomous, decentralized initiative, as manifestations of democratic processes and forms, as non-profit voluntary efforts, as expression of social commitment for an equitable and just society.

Over the years it became obligatory for the CBOs wanting to come under the banner of Lok Shakti Sangathan to have a gram kosh of their own. Currently gram kosh is an essential constituent of the CBOs in all the 1709 villages spread over 18 districts which have come to be under the banner of Lok Shakti Sangathan. As on date the Lok Shakti Sangathan (LSS) has a collectively generated internal resource pool of approximately Rs 13780150.00 (Rupees one Crore thirty seven lakhs eighty thousand one hundred fifty only). It has not only reduced the dependence of its target group members on the local money lenders but also enabled them to sustain many a struggle for their rights. The contribution of gram kosh has been in no small measure in enabling the LSS members to successfully struggle for laying claim to 525 acres & 18 Kattha of arable and homestead land and 127 acres & 12 Kattha of pond area. Thanks to Gram Kosh the struggle for laying claim to another 1055 acres 14 Kattha of land and 49 acres & 12 Kattha of pond continues.

At a time when the economy and polity, as also the technology and individual capabilities underwent massive transformation in our country and the globalization through unrestrained trade and investment liberalization have become a dominant feature of our society at the cost of poor people, we, through Gram Kosh and other efforts have shown what is required for the undoing of the ill-effects of the state withdrawal, and how the poor, excluded and dispossessed can and should be free from their poverty, exclusion and dispossession.

To celebrate the successes of the Gram Kosh, to get insight from this indigenous, local experiment, to assess the achievements and shortfalls, to develop skills and capacities of women-men core groups and to strategise the future of the micro-level organizations, we are organizing a two days conclave in J.P.Gram, Jhanjharpur R.S (Madhubani) Bihar on 30-31 August 2008.

We sincerely want to invite you to the Conclave and request you to share your thoughts.

Yours sincerely,

Depak Bharti  
National Convenor  
Lok Shakti Sangathan India &  
Secretary  
SSVK Bihar