

# Women Empowerment in Odisha: The Revolution That Is Already Here — And the Work That Remains

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Women Empowerment

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*"I am a member of an SHG." In a male-dominated society where women play significant but never-recognised roles, that self-identification has become a badge of honour and an assertion of a new identity of power.* — Down to Earth, on India's SHG movement, 2024

She runs the hospital canteen in a district town in Ganjam. Every morning, her SHG delivers diet-chart meals to post-surgical patients — hygienic, on time, twice a day. Before Mission Shakti, she was making between ₹500 and ₹1,000 a month from a small tiffin centre she ran out of her home. Today, her household income is between ₹20,000 and ₹30,000. The café turns a profit of ₹10,000–15,000 per month, and she supervises two staff.

Her story is not exceptional. It is, by now, one pattern in a very large fabric. Mission Shakti — Odisha's women's SHG programme, launched in 2001 — has grown from

41,475 groups in its founding year to 6,02,013 Women Self-Help Groups covering 70 lakh women. That is approximately every eighth woman in the state organised into a savings-and-credit collective. That is hospital diet management, faecal treatment plants, solid waste management, and park restoration handled by SHG women as implementing partners for the government. That is one of the most quietly remarkable social transformations in contemporary India, happening in a state that rarely makes national headlines for its successes.

And yet.

The same state where 70 lakh women are SHG members records a crime rate against women of 103.3 per 100,000 — above the national average of 66.4. Domestic violence grew by 75% in tribal areas during the COVID-19 lockdown, according to CYSD's field documentation in Koraput. NFHS-5 data shows spousal violence fell only marginally — from 31.2% to 29.3% — between 2015 and 2021. More than half of Odisha's women aged 15–49 are anaemic. Women's land ownership and political voice in tribal communities remain structurally constrained despite the reservation framework.

This is Odisha's women's empowerment paradox: extraordinary progress on economic organisation, stubborn persistence of structural violence and exclusion. Understanding both — and the distance between them — is the starting point for any serious NGO or CSR programme in this space.

This Primer draws on the global evidence base for what works in women's empowerment, examines the Mission Shakti ecosystem with honesty about its achievements and gaps, profiles five organisations whose approaches offer transferable lessons, and offers an Odisha adaptation analysis for NGOs designing programmes in this sector.

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## **Part One: Odisha's Women — The Landscape Behind the Numbers**

Odisha's gender story is, in several ways, a story of two states coexisting uneasily within the same borders.

In the coastal and peri-urban south — in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Ganjam town, parts of Puri — women's economic participation has visibly expanded. SHGs federated under Mission Shakti are running canteens, managing urban infrastructure, operating micro-enterprises. Female voter turnout in Odisha has consistently exceeded male turnout in recent elections — a remarkable indicator of civic engagement. Urban women's access to education, banking, and legal aid, while far from equal, has improved substantially.

In the western and southern tribal belt — in Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Nuapada, Kandhamal, and the interior blocks of Koraput — the picture is starkly different. Here, the intersection of gender, tribe, and poverty creates a compounded disadvantage that aggregate state statistics routinely obscure.

NFHS-5 data for Odisha shows that 57% of women aged 15-49 are anaemic — a figure that rises sharply in tribal districts. Anaemia is not merely a health statistic. It is a direct indicator of chronic food insecurity, inadequate dietary diversity, and the gendered pattern of food distribution within households where women eat last and least. Anaemic women have more complicated pregnancies, anaemic mothers have more anaemic infants, and the cycle continues into the next generation.

Child marriage, while declining, remains above national averages in Odisha's tribal districts. Data from Rayagada, Nabarangpur, and Kalahandi consistently shows marriage before 18 for a significant minority of girls — and the consequences track directly into maternal mortality, school dropout, and economic exclusion that persist across lifetimes.

Violence against women is both pervasive and systematically under-reported. A study on gender-based violence in Odisha found that women's experiences of violence are

often obscured by societal norms that stress familial honour and communal reputation over justice and personal dignity, and that police under-reporting, protracted trials, and insufficient victim support systems compound women's silence. The 2007 Kandhamal riots saw large-scale sexual violence against Christian tribal women — an extreme instance of the intersection between communal conflict, caste, gender, and tribal identity that remains a live risk in parts of Odisha.

The land rights dimension is particularly acute. Despite Forest Rights Act provisions for individual and community forest rights, tribal women's land ownership remains minimal. Women who do not own land have no collateral, no legal claim to household assets in case of marital breakdown, and limited bargaining power within the household. Mission Shakti's SHGs provide economic organisation but do not, by themselves, resolve the land access problem.

The structural picture, then, is this: Odisha has built remarkable economic organisation infrastructure for women through Mission Shakti. What it has not yet done — and what NGOs have a critical role in addressing — is translate that economic organisation into security from violence, meaningful political voice, and land and legal rights.

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## **Part Two: What the Global Evidence Actually Says**

### **The SHG Evidence: What It Delivers and What It Doesn't**

India's SHG movement is, by scale, the world's largest microfinance programme. As of 2023, 8.9 million SHGs had availed loans of ₹2.54 lakh crore. The bank repayment rate consistently exceeds 96% — a figure that astonishes conventional lenders and reflects the social accountability structures within groups. Every eighth Indian woman is now an SHG member.

The evidence on what SHGs actually deliver for women's empowerment is detailed and somewhat nuanced. A rigorous multi-state study from five eastern and central

Indian states, using the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), found that SHG membership positively and significantly affects women's overall empowerment scores and reduces the empowerment gap between couples. Strong impacts were documented on control over income and decision-making.

But the same research found that SHG membership does not significantly affect other forms of empowerment driven by deeper gender norms — specifically, attitudes towards domestic violence and respect within the household. The uncomfortable finding: joining a savings group helps a woman control more of the household income. It does not automatically change her husband's belief that he has the right to hit her.

A case study from West Bengal published in 2024 offered a more nuanced picture: SHGs that move beyond savings and credit into collective public action — organising around community-level social problems like grain banks or alcohol prohibition — produce more durable empowerment outcomes than SHGs that remain purely economic. The mechanism is specifically that public decision-making by women in collectively-chosen initiatives challenges patriarchal norms in ways that private financial control does not.

A national-level analysis using NFHS-4 data found that districts with higher concentrations of SHG members had significantly higher odds of women delivering in institutions (OR: 1.53), taking iron supplements, and participating in household decisions. This suggests that SHG presence — at scale — produces health and empowerment spillover effects beyond direct members.

**The key insight:** SHGs are a necessary but not sufficient condition for women's empowerment. They are the best platform that exists for reaching rural women at scale with economic inclusion. They do not, by themselves, dismantle patriarchal norms. The organisations and programmes that have produced the most durable empowerment results are those that have layered social norm change, legal awareness, and collective action capability onto the economic SHG platform — not those that treated the SHG as an endpoint.

## **Gender Norms: What Actually Changes Them**

The most uncomfortable finding in the global women's empowerment literature is that economic empowerment and norm change are not the same thing, and the path from one to the other is neither automatic nor short.

The research of Jensen and Oster (2009) — now cited widely in development economics — examined the introduction of cable television into rural Indian villages. They found that exposure to programming featuring urban settings where women's lives and choices differed from village norms produced significant changes in gender attitudes: women were less likely to report that intimate partner violence was acceptable, experienced increased decision-making autonomy, and had greater mobility. The mechanism was sustained, repeated exposure to alternative models of femininity and gender relations — not a specific intervention, but the simple availability of a different image of what women's lives could look like.

More recent research in Adivasi-majority villages in central India found that women from communities with greater norm openness reported behaviours consistent with greater freedom of movement — again through peer-norm effects rather than programmatic intervention. The consistent finding: individual women challenging patriarchal norms alone are far less effective than women embedded in peer networks that collectively model and reinforce alternative norms.

This is why SEWA's model — which has always combined economic organising with social and legal activism — has produced different outcomes than pure microfinance programmes. Economic resources matter. But women need peer solidarity, role models, legal knowledge, and platforms for collective voice to translate economic independence into changed norms. The SHG is the foundation. It is not the building.

For NGOs in Odisha: the implication is that programmes focused exclusively on SHG formation and savings linkage are doing important but incomplete work. The programmes that add legal literacy, gender rights awareness, collective advocacy for

community norms, and sustained engagement with GBV are the ones producing the deeper change. This doesn't mean every SHG programme needs to also run a GBV shelter. It means that the social and legal dimensions of empowerment need to be integrated — not siloed into separate interventions.

## **Political Representation: The Evidence from Panchayats**

India's 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1993) reserved one-third of Panchayati Raj seats for women. The results, after three decades, are documented and complex.

India now has over 1.4 million elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions, constituting nearly 46% of panchayat members — one of the highest rates of local-level women's political representation in the world, outpacing France, Germany, and Japan. Twenty states, including Odisha, have expanded reservation to 50%.

The evidence on outcomes is striking. Research by Chattopadhyay and Duflo found that Gram Panchayats reserved for women invested significantly more in public infrastructure directly relevant to women's daily lives — particularly drinking water facilities. Topalova's research found that GPs reserved for women provided objectively better water quality — while also finding the perverse result that villagers were less satisfied even when receiving better service, because they perceived women as weaker policymakers. The bias persisted even in the face of evidence.

Critically, a 2025 piece on lessons from 30 years of women's reservation found that reservation alone does not ensure empowerment. Many women holding elected positions find that decision-making power rests with male relatives — a phenomenon documented across India as the "proxy pradhan" problem, where husbands or fathers effectively exercise the elected woman's authority. Reservation guarantees a seat, not a voice.

**The Odisha specific:** Odisha's two-child norm — which bars candidates with more than two children from contesting elections — has been documented as

disproportionately restricting women's entry, particularly women from tribal and lower-income communities who have less access to family planning. This is a structural policy contradiction: a state that has 50% reservation for women in panchayats simultaneously bars a significant subset of women from exercising it.

**For NGOs in Odisha:** Supporting elected women representatives with legal knowledge, solidarity networks, and confidence-building is one of the most direct investments in women's political empowerment available. The seat exists. The support structure often doesn't. Programmes that help women representatives understand their authority, connect with each other across panchayats, and learn to exercise their mandate independently of male relatives — rather than deferring to them — produce measurable governance outcomes.

## **GBV: What Interventions Work**

The global evidence on gender-based violence prevention and response has become substantially clearer in the last decade. Several findings stand out for their relevance to Odisha.

Community-based volunteer networks — specifically, male and female volunteers trained in GBV recognition and response at the village level — consistently outperform formal system-only approaches in tribal and remote contexts. CYSD's programme in 30 villages of Boipariguda block in Koraput district, which trained male and female volunteers as Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Warriors and set up helpdesks at the grassroots, produced documented increases in reporting and community accountability precisely because formal systems — police, courts — were inaccessible and distrusted by the communities involved.

Early-age interventions on gender norms show promise. Evidence is emerging that gender-responsive modules in school settings reduce propensity towards GBV before it becomes entrenched. Odisha, in partnership with UNICEF, is piloting gender-responsive modules to strengthen inclusive learning outcomes in schools — an

initiative that researchers are watching with interest as a prevention model.

"Whisper circles" — peer networks of women connected by smartphone during COVID-19 — proved an effective tool for identifying violence cases and connecting survivors with counsellors in contexts where formal reporting was impossible. The lesson for programming is that informal, peer-based systems of information and mutual support are often more accessible to women than formal service infrastructure in rural and tribal areas.

The shelter and legal aid infrastructure for GBV survivors in Odisha is concentrated in district towns and urban centres. For women in remote tribal blocks — where the nearest One Stop Centre may be hours away — formal support structures are effectively unavailable. The gap between what exists on paper and what is accessible in practice is enormous.

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## **Part Three: Five Organisations Doing This Exceptionally Well**

### **1. SEWA — Self-Employed Women's Association (Gujarat and 20 States)**

SEWA was founded in 1972 by labour lawyer Ela Bhatt in Ahmedabad. It is today the single largest women workers' trade union in India, with 3.78 million members across 20 states and cooperatives in 14 states.

What makes SEWA different from the SHG movement is the integration of struggle and development as co-equal strategies. SEWA's model holds that economic organising alone is not sufficient — women also need the legal knowledge, collective voice, and policy advocacy capacity to change the conditions that keep them poor and excluded. This is why SEWA played a decisive role in the passage of the Street Vendors Act 2014, which recognised and protected the livelihoods of 4 crore street vendors after decades of organising. The act was not given. It was demanded.

SEWA's Aagewans — local women leaders who organise at the grassroots — are the operational expression of this philosophy. They are not programme beneficiaries. They are the driving force of the organisation, responsible for organising campaigns, delivering services, and representing their communities in policy forums from panchayats to national government.

A 2007 survey of SEWA Karmika School graduates found that 68% reported more confidence in their work and higher status within the family. SEWA's programmes have increased women's participation in community affairs and reduced domestic violence — outcomes that go beyond what economic SHG programmes typically measure.

**The transferable lesson for Odisha:** Mission Shakti has built the economic infrastructure. What SEWA demonstrates is that the next level of empowerment requires building women's collective voice, advocacy capacity, and leadership — not just their savings books. The gap between Mission Shakti and SEWA is the gap between economic participation and political agency. NGOs can help bridge it.

## **2. Mahila Housing Trust (Gujarat)**

MHT emerged from the SEWA ecosystem with a specific focus: the homes and communities of poor women. Their core insight — that housing and neighbourhood conditions are fundamentally women's issues, because women spend more time in them and bear the consequences of inadequate water, sanitation, and infrastructure more acutely — is directly transferable to tribal Odisha.

MHT's approach starts not with construction but with organising — getting women to articulate their own understanding of what they need in their communities, and then supporting them to access government schemes, negotiate with local bodies, and collectively implement improvements. The community savings model linked to housing improvement is particularly relevant to Odisha's tribal blocks, where housing quality is extremely poor and government housing schemes routinely exclude the most marginalised households.

**The transferable lesson for Odisha:** Housing, water, and neighbourhood infrastructure are not separate sectors from women's empowerment. They are the physical substrate on which women's economic and social lives are lived. NGOs that integrate housing rights and community infrastructure into SHG-linked programmes — helping groups access Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission, and MGNREGS for community infrastructure — are doing more integrated empowerment work than those that treat savings and credit as the only domain.

### **3. CINI — Child in Need Institute (West Bengal and Eastern India)**

CINI's relevance to women's empowerment lies specifically in their integrated community health model, which deploys SHG women as front-line health workers and demonstrates the link between women's economic organisation and improved maternal and child health outcomes.

The SWABHIMAAN demonstration programme — implemented across Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha, including by CINI — trained SHG members as Poshan Sakhis (nutrition friends) to deliver reproductive health and nutrition messages to adolescent girls and pregnant women. The programme found that SHG-linked women with training and supervision can effectively manage grants for improving last-mile delivery of essential nutrition services — provided they are enabled, supervised, and protected against exploitation.

The Odisha component is directly relevant. CINI has worked in tribal Odisha and understands the specific dynamics of community health delivery in these contexts.

**The transferable lesson for Odisha:** SHG members can be trained as community health workers, legal aid navigators, and scheme-awareness facilitators — expanding their role from savings-group members to community resource persons. This adds value to the women themselves (skills, status, income) and to the communities they serve (better access to entitlements and services). The key design requirement is

proper training and genuine supervision — not just nominal designation.

#### **4. CYSD — Centre for Youth and Social Development (Odisha)**

CYSD is one of Odisha's own exemplary organisations and deserves specific examination for what it has demonstrated in tribal GBV contexts. Their work in Boipariguda block of Koraput during and after COVID-19 is a model for community-based GBV response in remote tribal areas.

The key design elements that made the CYSD approach work: they recruited both male and female volunteers from within the communities, not just women; they trained Anganwadi workers and ASHAs alongside the community volunteers; they set up grassroots helpdesks rather than expecting women to reach district-level services; and they connected the helpdesks to panchayat and block child protection officials — creating a genuine referral pathway rather than a dead end.

The results, while not from a controlled trial, were documented: more than two dozen AWWs and ASHAs trained; helpdesks established; women who had previously never reported violence beginning to file complaints; sarpanches and ward members engaged in the response.

**The transferable lesson for Odisha:** Community-based GBV response in tribal contexts requires male engagement from the start — not as an afterthought. Male volunteers, male panchayat members, and male community leaders who understand violence prevention are part of the solution. Programmes that mobilise only women to address a problem created by gender norms held across the whole community are fighting with one hand.

#### **5. Kudumbashree (Kerala)**

Kerala's Kudumbashree programme — launched in 1998, today covering 45 lakh women in 2.98 lakh neighbourhood groups — is the most completely realised women's empowerment ecosystem in India. Its relevance to Odisha is both aspirational and

cautionary.

Kudumbashree's achievements go beyond SHG savings to include: women-led micro-enterprises in 18 sectors including IT and electronics; women managing community kitchens, contract farming, and social care services; direct convergence with the local body system through elected women representatives; and an explicit poverty eradication mandate with documented outcomes on household poverty reduction.

The reason Kudumbashree achieved what it did — and Mission Shakti, despite larger absolute numbers, has not fully achieved — is the depth of government commitment, the quality of the institutional support structure, and crucially, the long-term patience to allow the programme to evolve over three decades. Kudumbashree invested heavily in federation and in the political empowerment of SHG members alongside economic empowerment. It also operated in a Kerala context with dramatically higher baseline female literacy and social norms.

**The transferable lesson for Odisha:** The Kudumbashree model cannot be transplanted wholesale to Odisha — the baseline conditions are too different. But the principle of treating economic SHGs as the starting point for a multi-decade journey toward women's full civic and political participation, not as the endpoint of an empowerment programme, is directly applicable. Mission Shakti is twenty-five years old and has built extraordinary reach. The next phase of Odisha's women's movement needs to be about depth, not breadth.

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## **Part Four: The Odisha Adaptation — What Transfers, What Doesn't, What Must Be Built**

### **What Transfers Directly**

**The SHG-as-platform model** is already established in Odisha through Mission Shakti. What transfers from global evidence is the understanding that the platform must be loaded with more than savings and credit. Legal literacy, health information,

scheme awareness, and collective advocacy need to ride the same infrastructure. NGOs that work with Mission Shakti SHGs to add these layers are working with the grain of what already exists — not building parallel structures.

**Community-based GBV response** — specifically the use of trained male and female village-level volunteers, connected to formal referral pathways — works in remote tribal contexts precisely because it doesn't require women to navigate inaccessible formal systems. CYSD demonstrated this in Koraput. The model is scalable across Odisha's high-GBV districts.

**Women's political leadership support** — training programmes for elected women representatives that build legal knowledge, solidarity networks, and governance confidence — transfers directly from numerous state-level programmes elsewhere in India. Odisha has 50% reservation in panchayats. The infrastructure for political participation exists. The support structure for elected women to use it genuinely, rather than as proxies for male relatives, does not consistently exist.

**SHG federation to micro-enterprise** — Mission Shakti's newer phase is explicitly moving in this direction, with SHG members managing government contracts for services. The evidence from Kudumbashree and SEWA is that federation into cooperatives, combined with access to working capital, produces sustainable enterprises. NGOs can support this transition by providing business development support, market linkage, and financial literacy that the government programme typically does not.

## **What Requires Significant Adaptation**

**Legal aid and justice access** — the formal mechanisms exist (One Stop Centres, legal services authorities, POCSO and domestic violence laws) but are essentially inaccessible to tribal women in remote blocks. Distance, language, literacy, and cultural barriers between formal institutions and tribal communities are enormous. Adapting legal aid to these contexts means placing legal awareness at the community

level — in Odia and tribal languages — and building patient relationships between community volunteers and district-level formal mechanisms.

**Livelihood programme design** for women in tribal communities must account for the seasonality of agricultural labour, the centrality of forest produce collection (often managed by women), and the land rights context in which women operate without secure tenure. Standard SHG livelihood models built for non-tribal contexts — assuming women have time, mobility, and savings stability — need fundamental redesign for PVTG and Scheduled Tribe women in high-poverty tribal blocks.

**Gender norm change programming** in tribal communities requires understanding that Odisha's 62 Scheduled Tribes have internally diverse gender norms — some more egalitarian than caste Hindu society, some not. A blanket "gender sensitisation" programme designed for mainstream communities will not work in Bonda communities in Malkangiri or among Dongria Kondh in Rayagada. Programmes need to start from a genuine understanding of each community's norms, build from existing egalitarian elements, and work through trusted community institutions.

## **What Must Be Built**

There are two critical gaps in Odisha's women's empowerment landscape that do not have existing solutions to adapt.

The first is **land rights security for tribal women**. Despite the Forest Rights Act, individual forest rights titles for women are rare. Despite Mission Shakti's reach, women's names on agricultural land patta are the exception. Without land security, women's economic empowerment is structurally fragile — a divorce, a death, or a family dispute can erase everything they have built. NGOs that specialise in land rights documentation, FRA claims facilitation, and legal support for women's property claims are doing foundational work that SHG savings programmes cannot substitute. This work is slow, unglamorous, and requires legal expertise that most NGOs don't have. It needs to be built.

The second is **survivor-centred GBV services at the habitation level** in remote tribal blocks. One Stop Centres at district headquarters serve women who can reach them. Women in Nabarangpur's most interior blocks cannot. What doesn't exist is a functioning continuum of care — community-level first response, block-level counselling, district-level shelter and legal support — that actually works as a system. Individual pieces exist. The system doesn't. Building it requires sustained NGO commitment, government partnership, and multi-year funding that looks nothing like a typical project grant.

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## **Part Five: Government Scheme Mapping**

**Mission Shakti (Odisha):** The primary women's empowerment programme in the state — 6 lakh SHGs, 70 lakh members, federations at GP/block/district levels. NGO role: support SHG quality, federation development, market linkage, addition of legal and health content to SHG meetings, and connection to government schemes through SHG platforms.

**Mamata Scheme:** Conditional maternity benefit (₹5,000 in instalments) for women who complete antenatal and postnatal care. NGO role: enrolment support, documentation facilitation, monitoring exclusion in PVTG communities.

**PM Ujjwala Yojana:** Free LPG connections to BPL households. Directly reduces women's time and health burden from biomass cooking. NGO role: awareness, enrolment, follow-up on refill subsidies, and monitoring actual use (many connections are inactive due to cost of refills).

**One Stop Centres (Sakhi Centres):** Integrated support for women affected by violence — medical, legal, police, shelter, psychosocial. Odisha has OSCs at district level. NGO role: bridge between community and OSC; community-level awareness of OSC services; survivor accompaniment.

**DAY-NRLM (Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana — National Rural Livelihoods Mission):** Central programme for SHG formation and livelihoods, implemented

through ORMAS in Odisha. NGO role: supporting SHG quality at the community level, particularly in remote blocks where government outreach is limited.

**Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana — Gramin:** Housing scheme explicitly requiring women's names on title documents. NGO role: ensure PVTG and SC women's names are actually recorded, support construction quality monitoring, and link with MGNREGS for community infrastructure.

**Forest Rights Act (2006):** Provides for individual and community forest rights for tribal households. Women's names must be included on IFR titles for both spouses. NGO role: community awareness, claim preparation support, follow-up with DLC on pending claims, and advocacy for women's inclusion in CFR governance.

**Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** Focus on sex ratio at birth, girl child education, and protection. NGO role: community awareness, school enrolment monitoring, and connecting adolescent girls to scholarship schemes.

**PM Mudra Yojana:** 68% of loans in 2024 went to women entrepreneurs. NGO role: financial literacy, loan application support, and business development for SHG-linked micro-enterprises.

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## **Part Six: Further Reading — The Best of What's Been Written**

### **SHG Evidence:**

- *The Power of the Collective Empowers Women* — Kumar et al., PMC (2021): The most careful econometric study of SHG impacts using WEAI in eastern India. Establishes what SHGs do and do not change. Essential reading before designing any SHG-based programme.
- *Public Decision-Making by Women's SHGs and Its Contributions to Women's Empowerment* — Zavaleta Cheek and Corbett, World Development Policy (2024): Makes the case for collective public action, not just individual income,

as the route to durable empowerment. Use alongside the Kumar study.

### **Odisha Context:**

- *Evaluation of the Impact of Mission Shakti in Women Empowerment in KBK* — IIPA (multiple authors): The most systematic study of Mission Shakti outcomes in Odisha's highest-deprivation districts. Essential reading for anyone designing women's programmes in Kalahandi, Koraput, Bolangir, or adjacent districts.
- *Women Empowerment: SEWA's Lessons for Mission Shakti* — Odisha Plus (2025): An honest comparative analysis of what Mission Shakti has achieved and what it has not yet done, using SEWA as the benchmark. Readable and practically useful.

### **GBV:**

- *Analysing Gender-Based Violence in Odisha* — Journal of Political Science and Governance (2025): The most recent systematic examination of GBV patterns, barriers to justice, and community response in Odisha's context.
- *Efficient State Intervention Can Help Prevent GBV in India* — The Quantum Hub (2024): Argues for consolidated, dedicated GBV response infrastructure rather than diffuse responsibilities across multiple departments. Applicable to Odisha's district-level planning.

### **Political Empowerment:**

- *Lessons from 30 Years of Women's Reservation in Panchayats* — ORF (2024): The most current assessment of what reservation has achieved and failed to achieve across Indian states, with specific attention to proxy-pradhan dynamics.
- *The Impact of Reservation in the Panchayati Raj* — Chattopadhyay and Duflo, Poverty Action: The foundational RCT study demonstrating that reserved-seat GPs invest more in women's infrastructure. Short, rigorous, influential.

## Global Models:

- *India's Self-Employed Women's Association: Empowerment Through Mobilisation of Poor Women at Large Scale* — World Bank: Documents SEWA's model systematically. Still the best single overview of what makes SEWA different from standard SHG programmes.
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## A Final Note: The Distance Between What Exists and What Is Needed

Odisha has something most Indian states don't: a 25-year-old, state-wide, government-backed women's organisation infrastructure that has already reached 70 lakh women. Mission Shakti is not a pilot. It is a platform. The question is not whether to build it — it is already built — but what to build on it.

The global evidence, the Odisha-specific research, and the experience of exemplary organisations all point toward the same answer: economic empowerment through SHGs is the foundation, not the ceiling. What goes on top of that foundation — legal literacy, GBV response, political leadership support, land rights, norm change — is what transforms economic participation into genuine life change.

NGOs working in Odisha's women's sector have a specific and important role: not to duplicate what Mission Shakti has already done, but to take it further. To add the layers the government programme cannot easily add. To work in the communities that Mission Shakti's own efficiency data reveals are less well served — the most remote, the most tribal, the most excluded. To build the survivor-centred systems that exist nowhere but are needed everywhere. To support the elected women representatives who have the seat but not yet the voice.

This is slow work. It produces outcomes that are hard to photograph and harder to attribute. It does not lend itself to annual project reports. It is also some of the most important work that can be done for the communities where it is needed most.

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*This Sector Primer was written by the JaBaSu Trust knowledge team as part of the JaBaSu Knowledge Commons. Published April 2026. For corrections, additions, or discussion: [knowledge@jabasu.org](mailto:knowledge@jabasu.org)*

*Evidence Grade: B — Multi-study. This Primer draws on multiple independent evaluations and peer-reviewed research. It does not represent a systematic review.  
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### **Related Knowledge Commons Content:**

- Practice Note: SHG Federation Models — Beyond the Savings Group
- Practice Note: Community-Based GBV Response in Remote Tribal Contexts
- Practice Note: Women's Political Leadership — Supporting Elected Representatives
- Org Spotlight: SEWA — Struggle and Development as Co-Equal Strategies
- Org Spotlight: CYSD — GBV Response in Koraput's Tribal Villages
- Org Spotlight: Kudumbashree — What a Mature Women's Ecosystem Looks Like
- Sector Primer: Child Welfare (Sector 01) — The maternal economics link
- Sector Primer: Social Justice & Tribal Welfare (Sector 03) — Intersecting exclusions

### **Government Schemes Referenced:**

- Mission Shakti / ORMAS
- Mamata Scheme
- PM Ujjwala Yojana
- One Stop Centres (Sakhi)
- DAY-NRLM / ORMAS
- PM Awas Yojana — Gramin
- Forest Rights Act 2006
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

- PM Mudra Yojana

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