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Social Initiatives for Growth and Networking

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SECRETARY'S REVIEW



Every annual report is an invitation to pause, reflect and give thanks. It is an opportunity not only to look back at what has been accomplished but also to recognise the people whose courage, commitment and resilience make transformation possible. The year 2025-2026 has been a remarkable journey for Social Initiatives for Growth and Networking (SIGN), marked by deeper community engagement, stronger partnerships and renewed hope.

As the Church celebrates the Jubilee Year under the inspiring theme "Pilgrims of Hope," I have often reflected on what hope truly means. Hope is not wishful thinking. It is born when a child enters a classroom with confidence, when a farmer believes that the land can once again provide a secure livelihood, when a woman discovers her voice in the Gram Sabha, when a tribal community proudly protects its heritage, and when society reaches out to those who are often forgotten. Throughout this year, SIGN has witnessed these expressions of hope in countless villages and communities across the JHAAN Region.

From its inception, SIGN has been entrusted with a unique responsibility-to strengthen the social mission of the Church by networking the diocesan social service societies of the JHAAN Region, promoting collaboration, building institutional capacities and accompanying communities on their journey towards integral human development. During the past year, this vision continued to guide every programme, every partnership and every interaction with the people we serve.

Perhaps no investment yields greater returns than education. Through the Children's Sponsorship Programme, implemented in partnership with Fondazione Fratelli Dimenticati, Italy, 11,858 children-including 6,607 boys and 5,251 girls-continued their education through 37 Sponsorship Centres spread across Ranchi, Lohardaga, Gumla, Simdega and Khunti, while also reaching children living in the urban slums of Ranchi through REDS. Behind every number is a child whose dreams remain alive because someone chose to believe in the power of education. More importantly, thousands of parents found renewed confidence that poverty need not determine the future of their children.

Education, however, extends beyond classrooms. Throughout the year, SIGN welcomed students from universities and social work institutions for field placements and internships, including postgraduate students from Holy Cross College, Tiruchirappalli, and interns from St. Xavier's College, Ranchi. Their exposure to village life, Gram Sabha institutions, Self-Help Groups and climate-resilient agriculture demonstrated that genuine development is learned not merely from textbooks but through relationships with people. As these young professionals learned from communities, our communities also benefited from their enthusiasm, creativity and fresh perspectives, creating a truly enriching exchange of knowledge.

Climate change continues to threaten rural livelihoods, making sustainable agriculture an urgent priority. During the year, SIGN worked with 1033 farmers across 65 villages, introducing climate-adaptive agricultural practices through training, field demonstrations and continuous technical support. Farmers embraced organic cultivation, the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), crop diversification and improved seed varieties. The formation of 63 Farmers' Clubs comprising 1033 members has created local platforms where farmers learn from one another and collectively build resilience. These initiatives remind us that sustainable agriculture is not simply about increasing production; it is about protecting the soil, conserving water and securing the future of farming families.

Women's empowerment remained one of the defining strengths of our work. SIGN accompanied 102 Self-Help Groups comprising 2702 women, whose collective savings have now crossed INR 12.06 lakh. Yet the real achievement lies beyond financial statistics. Women are increasingly participating in village governance, leading livelihood initiatives, making informed household decisions and inspiring others through their confidence and leadership. Their journey demonstrates that genuine empowerment grows through solidarity, savings, knowledge and collective action rather than dependence on external support.

One of the most significant developments during the year was the strengthening of tribal self-governance and indigenous identity. Working across five dioceses, SIGN continued to promote awareness of the Fifth Schedule, the PESA Act and traditional governance systems. The programme strengthened 105 traditional Gram Sabhas, of which 92 now conduct meetings independently, while 46 Gram Sabhas have successfully resolved village issues through dialogue and consensus. These are not merely institutional achievements; they represent communities rediscovering the confidence to govern themselves, protect their natural resources and preserve their rich cultural heritage for future generations.

Throughout the year, SIGN also continued to invest in people and institutions. Capacity-building programmes for teachers, catechists, community leaders, women, youth, farmers and diocesan social service societies strengthened local leadership and improved institutional effectiveness. These investments reaffirm our conviction that sustainable development depends not merely on successful projects but on strong institutions that continue serving communities with integrity, professionalism and accountability.

Looking back, several important lessons emerge. We have learned once again that communities themselves are the true agents of transformation. Development is sustainable only when people participate in decisions affecting their lives, when local institutions become stronger, and when partnerships are built on mutual trust and shared responsibility. We have also learned that the greatest impact is achieved not by working for communities but by working with them.

The road ahead continues to present new challenges. Climate change, migration, safeguarding concerns, unemployment and changing social realities call for greater innovation, stronger institutions and deeper collaboration. These challenges also present opportunities to expand our partnerships, strengthen local leadership and accompany communities with renewed commitment and hope.

As we continue our pilgrimage of hope, we remain convinced that the lasting legacy of SIGN will not be measured by the number of programmes implemented or funds utilised. It will be measured by the lives transformed, the institutions strengthened, the communities empowered and the hope that continues to grow wherever people work together with faith, compassion and determination.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to Archbishop Vincent Aind, our President; Bishop Binay Kandulna, our Vice President; the Bishops of the JHAAN Region; the members of the Governing Body and members of the General Body, the Diocesan Social Service Societies; our generous funding partners; government departments; collaborating organisations; religious congregations; the dedicated staff of SIGN; and above all the communities who continue to inspire us every day. Your trust and partnership make this journey possible.

May this Annual Report encourage each one of us to continue walking together as Pilgrims of Hope, building communities that are empowered, institutions that are accountable, and a society where every person can live with dignity, justice and peace.



Fr. Bipin Kumar Pani
Secretary
Social Initiatives for Growth and Networking (SIGN)