NEWSLETTER APRIL 2026

Strengthening Gram Sabhas through PESA Awareness: SIGN Launches ToT Programme: In a significant step towards strengthening grassroots self-governance and promoting the rights of tribal communities, SIGN has launched a comprehensive Training of Trainers (ToT) Programme on the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) and related issues across seven districts of Jharkhand. The initiative aims to build the capacity of Gram Sabha representatives and create a network of informed community leaders who can effectively safeguard tribal rights and promote participatory governance.



The programme covers 15 Gram Sabhas each in Ranchi (Bundu Block), Seraikela-Kharswan (Kuchai Block), Gumla (Chainpur Block), Khunti (Bandgaon Block), Garhwa (Garhwa Block), Lohardaga, and Simdega districts. Three representatives from each Gram Sabha have been selected to undergo intensive training and serve as Master Trainers within their communities. These trained leaders will subsequently facilitate awareness-building and capacity-development initiatives in their respective villages.

The Training of Trainers programme has been designed in four modules, focusing on tribal rights, constitutional safeguards, the PESA Act, community leadership, natural resource governance, and grassroots democracy.

The first module of the programme was successfully conducted at the district level in a phased manner. Training sessions were organized in Lohardaga from 7–9 April, in Khunti (Binda) from 9–11 April, in Gumla (Tongo) from 15–17 April, and in Simdega from 17–19 April. Each three-day programme witnessed enthusiastic participation, with approximately 45 to 50 participants attending the sessions. The participants represented their respective Gram Sabhas and actively engaged in discussions on governance, community rights, and leadership.



The theme of the first module was **"Tribal Identity, PESA and Legal Foundations."** The objective was to build confidence among participants and provide them with a clear understanding of the legal and constitutional provisions that protect tribal communities. The training emphasized the role of Master Trainers as community resource persons who can guide and motivate their Gram Sabhas towards informed decision-making and collective action.



Participants were introduced to the provisions of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution and the PESA Act, with special emphasis on the powers and functions of Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas. The sessions also explored the history and significance of traditional tribal self-governance systems and their relevance in contemporary democratic structures.

Other important topics included tribal struggles for the protection of land, forests, and natural resources; constitutional rights and democratic participation; the Chotanagpur Tenancy (CNT) Act and the Santhal Parganas Tenancy (SPT) Act; and legal safeguards against illegal land transfers and unjust land acquisition.

The enthusiastic response from participants reflected a growing awareness among tribal communities regarding their rights and responsibilities. Many participants expressed a renewed commitment to strengthening their Gram Sabhas and ensuring greater community participation in local governance and development processes.



Through this initiative, SIGN seeks to create a strong network of capable grassroots leaders who can promote community rights, strengthen local governance institutions, and contribute to sustainable and inclusive development. The subsequent modules of the programme will further deepen participants' understanding of governance, natural resource management, community planning, and advocacy, enabling Gram Sabhas to become more effective institutions of self-governance and social transformation.

Formation of Internal Complaint Committees Strengthens Safeguarding Structures in Five Diocesan Social Service Societies: As part of SIGN's ongoing commitment to promoting safe, accountable, and child-friendly institutions, Mr. Walter Zaphed Kerketta, Regional Coordinator and Safeguarding Focal Point of SIGN, undertook a series of visits to the Diocesan Social Service Societies (DSSSs) of Daltonganj and Simdega on 15 April, Dumka on 20 April, Hazaribag on 27 April, and Khunti during April 2026. The visits were organized to facilitate the establishment and strengthening of Internal Complaint Committees (ICCs) in accordance with safeguarding standards and statutory requirements.



The meetings brought together the Directors and key staff members of the respective DSSSs. During these interactions, Mr. Walter emphasized the critical role of Internal Complaint Committees as an essential safeguarding mechanism for creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for employees, volunteers, beneficiaries, and all stakeholders associated with Church institutions and social service organizations.



The discussions focused on the purpose, composition, and functioning of ICCs. Participants reflected on the need for robust safeguarding structures and deliberated on the appropriate size of the committee, the requirement for external representation, and the importance of ensuring transparency, impartiality, and accountability in addressing complaints and concerns. Detailed guidance was provided regarding the eligibility criteria and selection of committee members. It was stressed that ICC members should be persons of integrity,

sensitivity, credibility, and commitment to safeguarding principles. The recommended structure included a Chairperson, preferably a senior female staff member or a respected female person from outside the organization, a Secretary, a member with knowledge of legal matters, a Safeguarding Focal Person conversant with safeguarding policies and procedures, and at least one reputed external member. Discussions also covered the minimum and maximum number of members required to constitute an effective and representative committee. Mr. Walter further elaborated on the specific roles and responsibilities of each member of the ICC. Special attention was given to the role of the Chairperson and the importance of female leadership within the committee. A woman Chairperson helps create an atmosphere of trust, confidence, and accessibility, particularly for women and vulnerable persons who may need to report concerns. The discussions underscored that a gender-sensitive leadership structure is fundamental to ensuring fairness, encouraging reporting, and safeguarding the dignity of all persons.



The sessions also addressed procedures for receiving complaints, maintaining confidentiality, conducting impartial inquiries, adopting survivor-centred approaches, documenting proceedings, and ensuring compliance with safeguarding policies and relevant legal provisions. One of the most significant outcomes of these visits was the successful formation of Internal Complaint Committees in all five DSSSs. In addition, each organization identified and appointed a Safeguarding Focal Person who will serve as the primary contact for safeguarding concerns and coordinate the implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures within their respective institutions. This marks a major milestone in strengthening safeguarding structures across the region.



The Directors of all five DSSSs also unanimously agreed to organize a one-day orientation programme for ICC members and safeguarding personnel. The programme will focus on safeguarding principles, roles and responsibilities of safeguarding structures, complaint-handling mechanisms, and investigation procedures. This capacity-building initiative will further equip committee members and institutional leadership to implement safeguarding standards effectively and professionally.

In addition, the Regional Coordinator requested all partner organizations to develop safeguarding awareness posters and display them prominently on notice boards and office premises. The initiative aims to increase visibility of safeguarding mechanisms, raise awareness among staff and beneficiaries, and reinforce a culture of dignity, respect, accountability, and protection across all institutions.



These visits reflect SIGN's continued dedication to fostering safe organizational environments and strengthening safeguarding systems throughout the region. With the establishment of Internal Complaint Committees and the appointment of Safeguarding Focal Persons, the partner organizations have taken a significant step towards ensuring that every person associated with their institutions is treated with dignity and protected from abuse, harassment, discrimination, exploitation, and all forms of misconduct.