

RAJIV AJEEVIKA SAMVARDHAN ABHIYAN (RASA)



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What is RASA?

In the aftermath of COVID-19 in 2020, rural and migrant households faced not just a loss of income but a deeper disruption in livelihood continuity. Large numbers of migrant workers returned from cities to their native villages, often without savings, job security, or immediate prospects for re-employment. With limited—often negligible—local employment opportunities, households were pushed into economic uncertainty. These harsh conditions forced them to rely on irregular work, informal support systems, or short-term coping mechanisms.

This situation exposed the structural vulnerability of livelihoods that were heavily dependent on urban, wage-based employment. For many families, the crisis was not only financial but also social, as it disrupted established patterns of migration, income flow, and household stability. Women and youth, in particular, were compelled to take on new economic roles, often without prior experience or access to resources.

In such a context, it became evident that waiting for jobs alone would not be a sustainable solution. There was a pressing need to create local, resilient, and self-driven livelihood options that could withstand external shocks. Promoting self-employment and micro-entrepreneurship at the village level emerged as a critical pathway—not only to restore income but also to build long-term economic resilience.

Against this backdrop, Rajiv Aajeevika Samvardhan Abhiyan (RASA) was launched on 20 August 2020. The initiative aimed to develop rural and migrant workers into Aspiring Micro Entrepreneurs (AMEs) through training, mentoring, financial links and sustained handholding support. Enabling them to build dignified and sustainable livelihoods.

RASA AT A GLANCE
WIDEST REACH. STRONGER LIVELIHOODS. LASTING IMPACT.

RASA FOOTPRINT ACROSS INDIA

Map showing RASA footprint across India in 8 states: Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha.

TOTAL AMEs ENROLLED
8 STATES, 30 DISTRICTS
1,500

Voice from The Indian Ground

बिहार – होसले से आगे बढ़ते कदम
“ RASA से जुड़ने के बाद मुझे सही जानकारी, प्रशिक्षण और मार्गदर्शन मिला। मैंने अपनी छोटी सी किराना दुकान शुरू की। आज यह दुकान मेरे परिवार की रोजी-रोटी का मुख्य सहायक बन चुकी है। आत्मविश्वास भी बढ़ा है और आगे बढ़ने का हौसला भी मिला है।”
– सुषमा देवी
किराना दुकान संचालक, गया, बिहार

झारखंड – मेहनत से बदली जिंदगी
“ RASA के मार्गदर्शन से मैंने पशु पालन का काम शुरू किया। शुरूआत में मुश्किलें आईं, लेकिन प्रशिक्षण और मेटोर के सहयोग से मैं टिके रहा। आज इससे अच्छी आमदनी हो रही है और परिवार का जीवन स्तर पहले से बेहतर हुआ है।”
– बिरसा महतो
पशुपालक, गिरिडीह, झारखंड

ENTERPRISE MIX – TOP LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES

- KIRANA SHOPS**
Easy to start, daily demand, quick returns
- LIVESTOCK-BASED ACTIVITIES**
Sustainable income, low risk, high impact
- TAILORING**
Skills with low investment, consistent demand
- VEGETABLE CULTIVATION**
Local resources, healthy returns

Kirana shops, livestock-based activities, tailoring and vegetable cultivation dominate the enterprise mix, reflecting both low entry barriers and the programme’s emphasis on practical local livelihood options.

Conceived by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF) and implemented with support from Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS) and around 25+ Pan India NGOs with hundreds of district-level resource agencies.

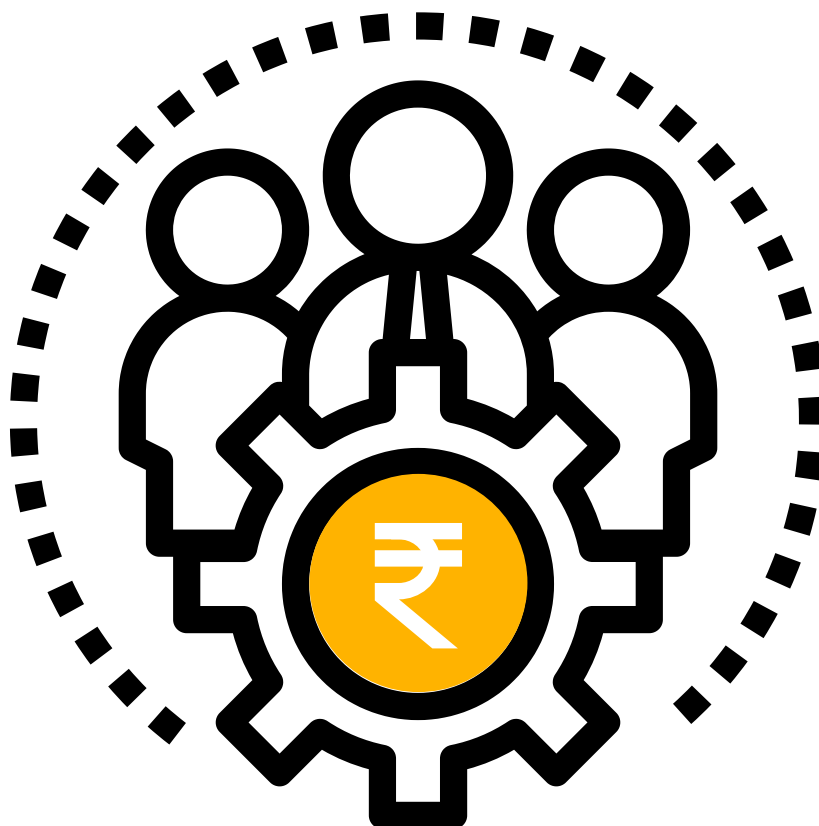
The programme was conceptualised by Mr. Vijay Mahajan CEO, Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. Its implementation was led by Dr. Rakesh Malhotra, with support from Mr. Uzair Khan and Ms. Narayani Gupta. To strengthen the training component, national-level experts were engaged. Dr. Deepankar Roy and Ms. Rita Sengupta conducted the trainings and played a key role in building the capacities of staff, mentors, and Aspiring Micro Entrepreneurs (AMEs).

The Abhiyan focused on identifying and nurturing Aspiring Micro-Entrepreneurs (AMEs) through a structured process of selection, training, mentoring, and sustained handholding support, rather than direct cash assistance.

In its initial phase, RASA was implemented across 22 districts in seven states, where 25 AMEs were identified and developed in each district through a rigorous selection process.

Building on this approach, the programme set a broader target of 600 AMEs in 2021. Within the first three months of its launch, it had already reached 648 AMEs, of which nearly 47 percent were assessed as 'ready-to-go' enterprises.

Over time, the model was scaled and expanded. By 2026, RASA has grown to cover 8 states and 30 districts, with 1,500 AMEs registered, reflecting both its geographical expansion and increasing outreach. Women account for 45.4 percent of all registered AMEs, indicating substantive female participation in rural entrepreneurship.



1. Why RASA was Launched

The RASA emerged from an extraordinary moment. During the pandemic and lockdown in 2020, large numbers of migrant workers returned from cities to their home villages, while many resident rural households also faced a sharp collapse in incomes. Relief support addressed immediate distress, but surveys in source districts showed that livelihoods had not recovered. RASA was therefore designed as a livelihood revival initiative that could help rural households move from dependence to enterprise, with a specific focus on farm and non-farm self-employment.

RASA
RAJIV AAJEEVIKA SAMVARDHAN ABHIYAN

EMPOWERING ASPIRING MICRO-ENTREPRENEURS,
STRENGTHENING RURAL INDIA

LAUNCHED ON
20 AUGUST 2020
On the birth anniversary of
Rajiv Gandhi

VISION
To build Atmanirbhar rural India by nurturing Aspiring Micro-Entrepreneurs (AMEs)

MISSION
To revive livelihoods by building capacity, providing mentorship and ensuring handholding support

Theory Applied on Field-Need for Achievement (nAch), developed by David McClelland

Strengthening Livelihood-Making Difference- Living with Dignity

The programme was formally launched on Rajiv Gandhi's birth anniversary, 20 August 2020. Its central idea was to identify potential rural entrepreneurs, develop them as Aspiring Micro-Entrepreneurs, and support them through a structured process of screening, training, business planning and handholding. This shift marked a transition from dependency on external employment to the development of local enterprise ecosystems, enabling individuals to regain agency over their livelihoods and contribute to the rural economy in a more stable and sustainable manner.



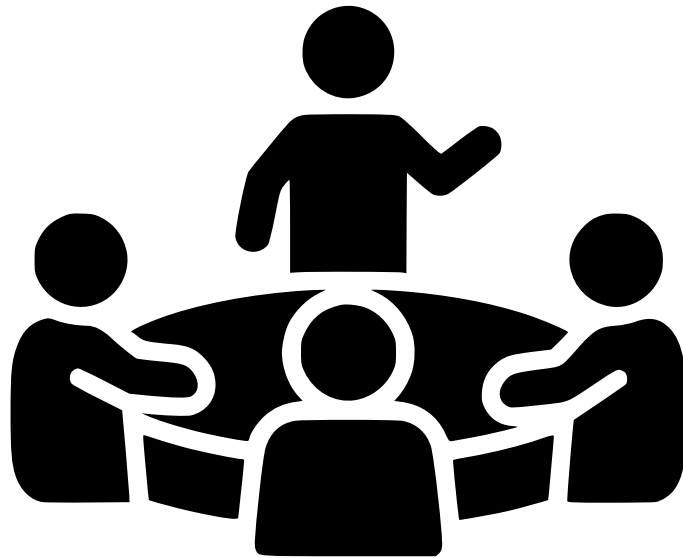
2. Programme Approach and Design

RASA combined a centrally designed framework with decentralized, field-driven implementation. The Delhi-based RGF/RGICS team provided overall conceptual direction, programme design, management oversight, and training support, while district-level resource agencies and mentors played a critical role in on-ground execution, including identification, counselling, and continuous engagement with potential and selected AMEs.

Mentors were not limited to shortlisting candidates; they were trained to assess entrepreneurial aptitude, understand motivation levels, support business planning, document progress, and guide AMEs in navigating local opportunities and constraints.

This ensured that the selection process moved beyond eligibility to focus on readiness and potential. The programme consciously prioritised individuals with demonstrated entrepreneurial motivation, rather than treating all participants as passive beneficiaries.

A defining feature of RASA was its emphasis on capability-building over subsidy-driven support. Instead of direct financial assistance, the programme focused on enabling access—to knowledge, government schemes, credit channels, SHGs, mentors, and peer networks. This approach encouraged ownership, reduced dependency, and promoted more sustainable enterprise behaviour.



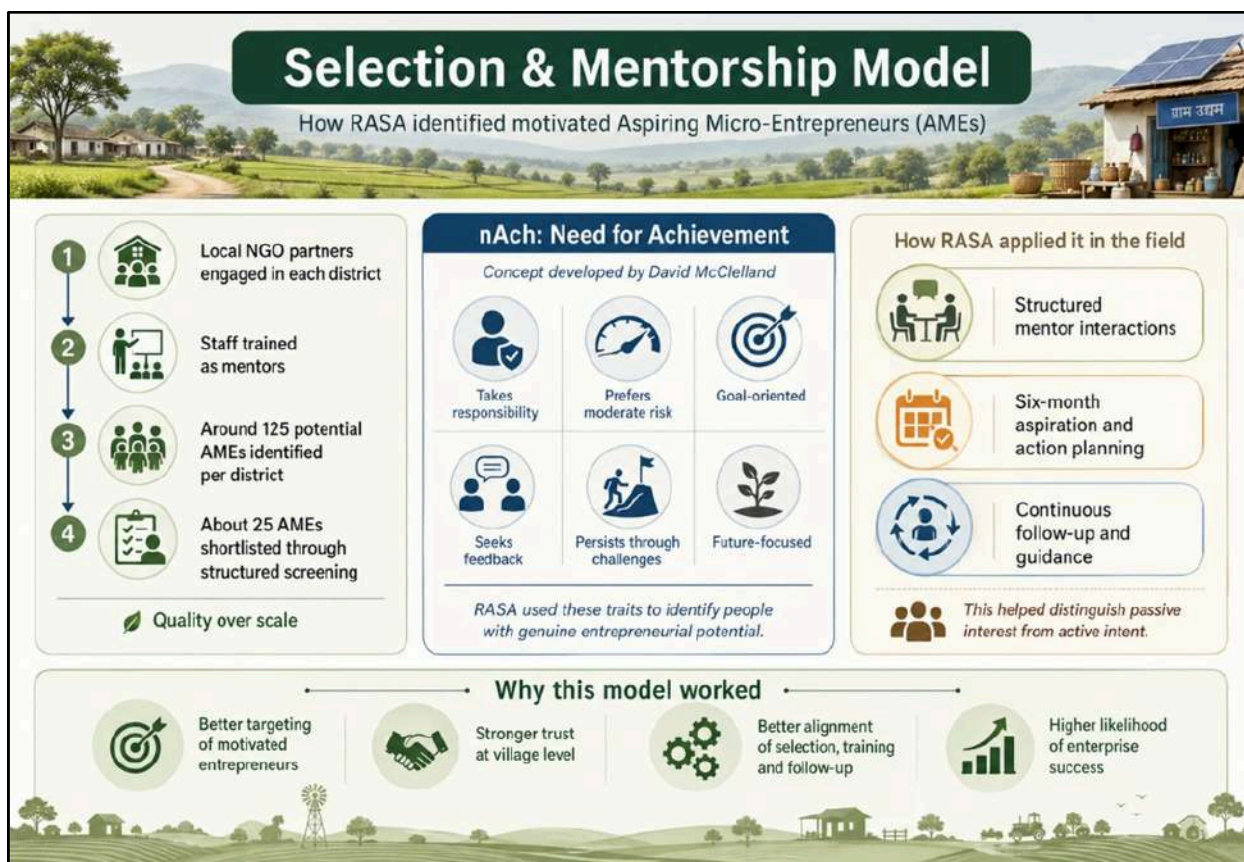
At the same time, this lean and non-subsidy model required strong ecosystem linkages for long-term success. Enterprise outcomes were influenced by factors such as local market access, availability of working capital, family and community support, and the strength of mentoring systems.

Recognising this, RASA's design implicitly acknowledged that while motivation and training can initiate enterprise activity, sustained growth depends on strengthening the broader rural enterprise ecosystem.

3. Selection and Mentorship Model

A key strength of RASA lies in its structured selection and mentorship model, which ensured that the programme moved beyond broad-based inclusion to targeted and effective engagement.

Local NGO partners were engaged in each district, and their staff members were carefully identified and trained as mentors. These mentors acted as anchors at the village level, playing a central role in identifying potential AMEs. They were highly trained for building trust through regular interaction, providing guidance, and ensuring continuous follow-up throughout the enterprise journey. Their proximity to the community allowed them to understand local socio-economic conditions and tailor support accordingly.



The selection process was deliberately designed to prioritise quality over scale. Drawing from established entrepreneurship experience, it was assumed that only one out of five aspiring individuals is likely to succeed in enterprise.

Accordingly, 125 AMEs were initially identified in each district and subjected to a structured screening and evaluation process.

Through this process, 25 AMEs were shortlisted, ensuring that those selected demonstrated both motivation and a basic level of readiness to pursue enterprise activities.

The concept of Need for Achievement (nAch), developed by David McClelland, played a central role in shaping this approach. Individuals with high nAch typically exhibit traits such as willingness to take responsibility, preference for moderate risk, goal orientation, desire for feedback, persistence in the face of challenges, and a forward-looking mindset.

RASA translated these behavioural principles into practical field-level assessment tools. This enabled mentors to identify individuals with genuine entrepreneurial potential rather than merely those in need of support.

This was operationalised through structured interactions with potential AMEs. During these interactions, they were encouraged to articulate their future aspirations and reflect on their goals for the next six months. They were also asked to outline the steps they were willing to take to achieve those goals.

Such exercises helped distinguish between passive interest and active intent. As a result, the programme was able to identify individuals who not only required livelihood support but were also prepared to take initiative, adapt to challenges, and sustain their efforts over time.

By combining behavioural assessment with continuous mentorship, RASA created a robust pipeline of motivated entrepreneurs. This approach improved the likelihood of enterprise success by ensuring that motivated and prepared individuals were selected.

It also strengthened the overall effectiveness of the programme by aligning selection, training, and follow-up within a coherent and purpose-driven framework.



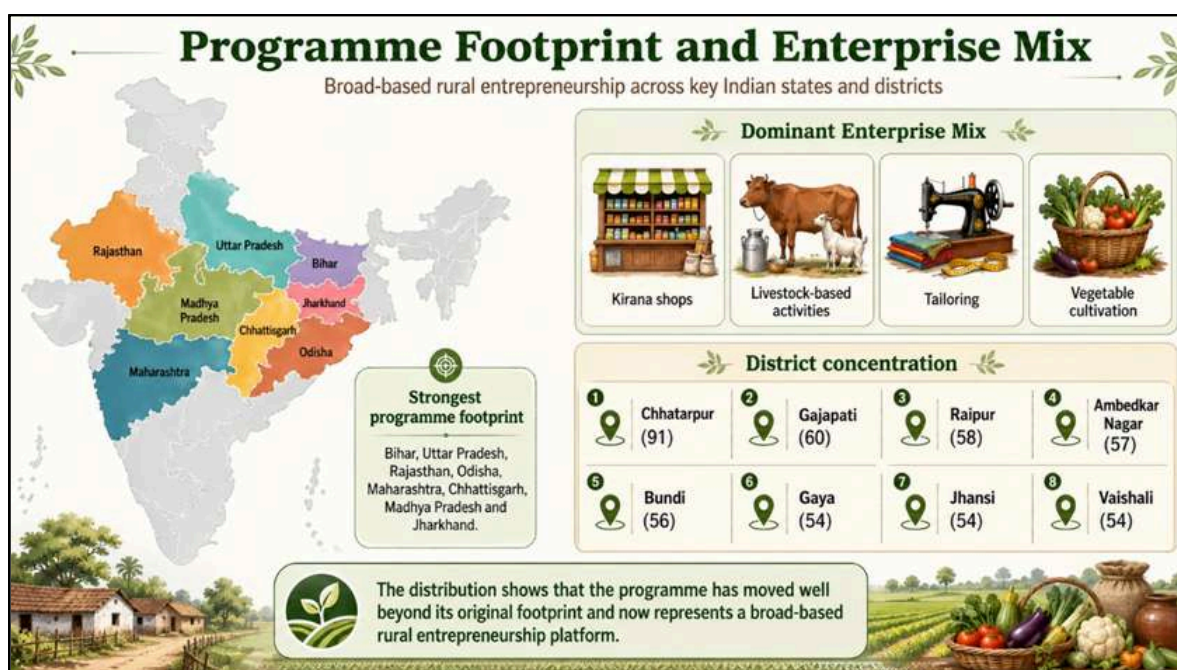
4. Scale and Current Footprint

Indicator	Current picture
Launch	20 August 2020
Initial reach	22 districts in 7 states; target of about 600 AMEs
Early progress	648 AMEs by 26 November 2020
Current progress and reach	1,500 AMEs across 8 states and 30 districts
Gender composition	45.4% women; 54.6% men

The programme footprint is strongest in Bihar (310 AMEs), Uttar Pradesh (195), Rajasthan (162), Odisha (159), Maharashtra (153), Chhattisgarh (152), Madhya Pradesh (149) and Jharkhand (50). Kirana shops, livestock-based activities, tailoring and vegetable cultivation dominate the enterprise mix, reflecting both low entry barriers and the programme's emphasis on practical local livelihood options.

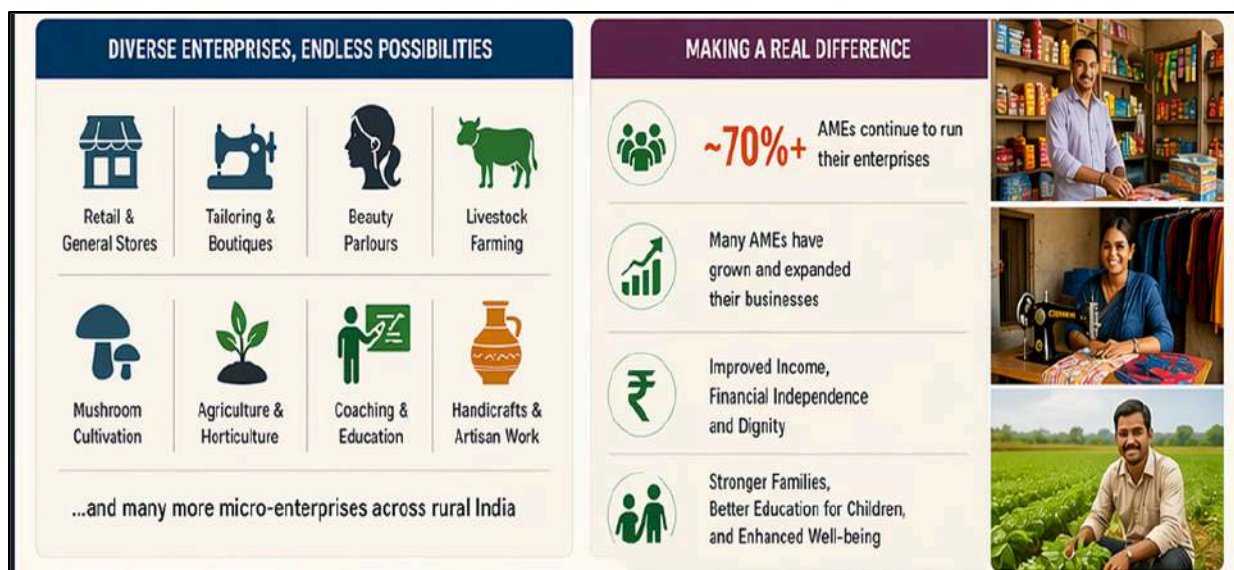
District concentration is strongest in Chhatarpur (91), Gajapati (60), Raipur (58), Ambedkar Nagar (57), Bundi (56), Gaya (54), Jhansi (54) and Vaishali (54). These clusters suggest where mentor networks and local partnerships were particularly effective.

This distribution shows that the programme has moved well beyond its original footprint and now represents a broad-based rural entrepreneurship platform.



5. What Kinds of Livelihoods RASA Supported

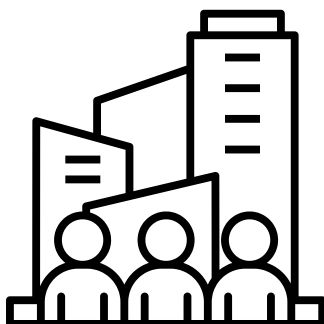
RASA's enterprise portfolio is grounded in practical, low-entry rural activities. The most common enterprises are kirana shops (228), goat-based activities (144), vegetable cultivation (125), tailoring (125), cow rearing (65), trading of clothes/garments (50), buffalo rearing (46), poultry (46) and cyber cafés (38). This pattern broadly aligns with the programme's early profile, where kirana, tailoring and livestock-related ventures also emerged as dominant preferences.



These enterprises are significant for two reasons. First, they are rooted in local demand and modest capital requirements. Second, they allow women, return migrants and rural youth to begin small and grow gradually. At the same time, their viability depends heavily on local markets, working capital and technical support—factors that often determine whether a micro-enterprise survives beyond its early stage.

Financing shows a mixed resource pattern. The own contribution remains the largest source (473 AMEs), followed by loans from SHGs/federations (359), other sources (113), loans from relatives/friends (111), and bank loans (95). This suggests that RASA has been more effective at catalysing enterprise intent than at unlocking formal credit on a scale.

The programme's continued relevance therefore lies in helping AMEs move from informal and small-ticket financing toward stronger financial planning and more sustainable capital access.



6. What Changed: From Distress to Enterprise

The strongest contribution of RASA has been behavioural and institutional. It converted a moment of economic helplessness into an organised process of local entrepreneurship. The early report already showed strong movement from uncertainty toward enterprise readiness: by 26 November 2020, 47 percent of AMEs were in Category I ('ready to go').

The current evaluation indicates that the programme sustained and expanded that momentum. Among the 1,067 records with income values, the median reported gross monthly income is about ₹8,000 and the average is about ₹8,846. These are modest income levels, but they matter in the rural household economy: they create local income streams, reduce vulnerability, and in some cases allow women to continue an enterprise even when male household members migrate again for wage work.

7. Evaluation and Success Stories from Bihar and Jharkhand

The 2025-26 evaluation in Bihar and Jharkhand provides important insights into the long-term outcomes of RASA. Based on two rounds of field visits conducted in August 2025 and February-March 2026, the study covered 55 AMEs across Muzaffarpur, Nawada, Gaya and Giridih, representing both successful and struggling enterprises.

The findings highlight that RASA has been successful in transforming livelihood distress into sustained entrepreneurial activity for a majority of participants. Most AMEs in the sample continued to engage in income-generating activities several years after programme entry, reflecting persistence and growing confidence. Notably, 40 out of 55 cases demonstrated strong performance, driven by a combination of prior experience, consistent mentor guidance, support from family or SHGs, and a clear understanding of local market demand. These enterprises were able to stabilise incomes, gradually expand operations, and in some instances, create additional livelihood opportunities at the local level.

While a smaller set of enterprises (15 out of 55) faced constraints, these were largely linked to external and structural factors such as limited market access, working capital constraints, livestock-related risks, and health or migration-related disruptions, rather than lack of effort or intent. Overall, the evaluation underscores that even small-scale rural enterprises, when supported through continuous mentoring and aligned with local demand, can evolve into stable and reliable sources of income. Activities such as kirana shops, tailoring, coaching services, masonry, beauty services, small trade, and agriculture-linked enterprises showed relatively higher continuity and resilience. The evidence shows the effectiveness of RASA's low-cost, high-touch enterprise promotion approach, while also pointing toward the need to further strengthen market linkages, business support systems, and risk management mechanisms to help these enterprises grow in scale and sustainability.

8. Key Constraints and Strength that Emerged

Some constraints were observed at the field level. Limited market linkage and local competition affected price realisation, particularly in small-scale activities. Many enterprises operated at a very small scale, restricting income growth and making them vulnerable to cost fluctuations.

Access to working capital remained limited, with reliance on SHG or informal loans increasing repayment pressure. Livestock-related risks, health issues, family responsibilities, and occasional migration also disrupted continuity in some cases. In addition, limited access to advanced training, business incubation, and digital market platforms constrained enterprise growth.

However, despite these challenges, most AMEs showed resilience and continued their livelihood efforts, creating a strong foundation for the success patterns observed across the programme.

A key strength that emerges across the field insights is the **strong internal motivation and persistence of AMEs**, even in highly constrained environments. Many participants did not wait for ideal conditions but started small and gradually built their enterprises through continuous effort. For instance, Shri Manoj Kumar from Muzaffarpur began vegetable cultivation with limited land and a small loan. In the initial phase, he faced losses and low sales. With training and mentor support, he gradually stabilised his operations. Today, he earns over ₹1 lakh annually, showing how sustained effort and guidance can convert uncertainty into stability.

Another critical success factor has been consistent **mentor engagement and training support**, which helped AMEs make informed decisions and improve their practices. Beneficiaries repeatedly acknowledged the role of mentors in guiding them through early-stage challenges. **Smt. Anita Devi (Muzaffarpur)**, who started a beauty parlour with a modest investment, credited regular mentor interaction and training for helping her establish and expand her enterprise into a stable income source.

Family and community support, especially through SHGs, has also played a decisive role in enterprise success. In many cases, access to small loans and emotional backing enabled AMEs to take the first step. **Smt. Rita Devi (Muzaffarpur)** strengthened her family's existing furniture business through SHG support, eventually scaling it into an enterprise that now employs multiple workers. This highlights how enterprise growth is often a collective outcome rather than an individual effort.

A notable strength is the **high participation and resilience of women entrepreneurs**, many of whom became primary earners in their households. Even in difficult circumstances, women demonstrated strong adaptability and commitment. **Smt. Rinku Devi (Nawada)**, despite her husband's illness and financial stress, continued her small business activities and sustained her family through consistent effort.

Similarly, **Smt. Kiran Kumari (Muzaffarpur)** built a successful beekeeping enterprise, generating substantial income and even creating local employment—demonstrating the transformative potential of women-led enterprises.

INSIGHTS FROM BIHAR & JHARKHAND EVALUATION (2025-26)

- ✓ Most AMEs are active in livelihood activities.
- ✓ Success driven by prior experience, mentor guidance, family/SHG support and market understanding.
- ✓ Key challenges: market linkages, limited finance, information gaps and external constraints.
- ✓ Even in difficult situations, the spirit of self-employment continues – a strong sign of resilience and impact.

CHANGING LIVES, ONE ENTERPRISE AT A TIME

“ RASA gave us the right knowledge, confidence and handholding support to start our own work. Today, we earn with pride and stand on our own feet. ”

– AME Beneficiary (Bihar)

**RASA – Reviving Livelihoods.
Restoring Hope. Building Aatmanirbhar Bharat.**

Another important driver has been the **ability to align enterprises with local demand and available skills**. Activities such as kirana shops, tailoring, livestock rearing, and small services showed higher continuity because they were rooted in local consumption patterns.

Smt. Malti Devi (Nawada), who established a flour mill, not only created a steady income stream but also strengthened her household’s overall economic condition, with multiple family members contributing to livelihood activities.

The evaluation also highlights the role of **learning orientation and willingness to experiment**. Many AMEs did not succeed in their first attempt but adapted and shifted to more viable options.

Smt. Ruby Kumari (Gaya/Aurangabad) moved from failed goat farming and mushroom cultivation to nursery development, where she now earns up to ₹4 lakh annually. Her journey reflects resilience and the ability to pivot based on market realities.

Additionally, **gradual adoption of digital tools**, even at a basic level, has supported business operations. Several AMEs reported using WhatsApp and digital payments, improving their access to customers and transactions. While still limited, this shift indicates readiness for further digital integration.

Overall, the success stories demonstrate that when **motivation, mentor support, family backing, and local market alignment come together**, even small-scale enterprises can evolve into stable and income-generating livelihoods. These strengths underline the effectiveness of RASA’s approach in building not just enterprises, but confidence, resilience, and long-term livelihood pathways in rural communities.

9. Current Status and Way Forward

RASA today stands at an important transition point. It has already been shown that rural and returning worker households can be mobilised into entrepreneurship through mentoring, motivation and practical support.

It has also built a sizeable base of 1,500 AMEs with strong participation by women. The challenge now is no longer only to stimulate enterprises, but to deepen their viability.

The next phase should therefore focus on five priorities: stronger market linkage; sector-specific technical support and risk management; regular business incubation and digital bookkeeping; better access to formal finance and working capital; and selective digital commerce pathways for rural products and services. These shifts would help move AMEs from survival enterprises to more resilient and income-enhancing enterprises.

In summary, RASA began as a crisis-response initiative but has evolved into a meaningful rural entrepreneurship platform.

Its core achievement lies not merely in the number of AMEs registered, but in demonstrating that handholding, local partnerships and entrepreneurial confidence building can create durable livelihood momentum even in highly constrained settings.

The case for its continuation is therefore strong but the case for its strengthening is even stronger.



Appendix: The ABCDEFGH of Micro-Entrepreneurship Promotion

There are four actors in Micro-Entrepreneurship Promotion-

(1) the promotional institution in this case was RGF, acting through its staff. RGF identified NGOs in each district who had some experience in promoting micro-enterprises. Then they were asked to identify a staff member with the necessary skills and also a high need for achievement. This person was trained as a Mentor to the AMEs.

(2) the Mentor, who is usually a highly trained staff member of a local NGO. They should have a high need for achievement (n-Ach). This person is identified by the RGF staff through psychometric scoring based on 15-minute conversations. Then they are trained as Mentors to the AMEs.

(3) the Trainer-Entrepreneur who is already running an enterprise in some nearby town who is willing to train a potential start-up in the same activity but elsewhere from their own town/area.

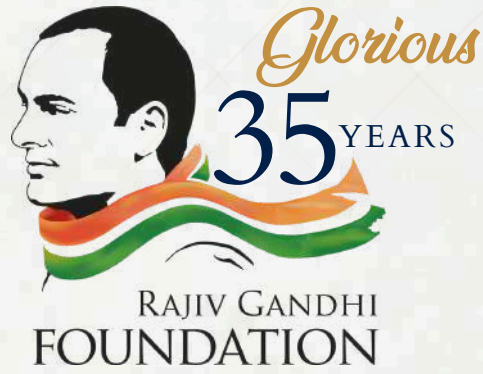
(4) the Aspiring Micro Entrepreneur or the AME, who must have a high n-Ach

Here are the eight steps in the process.



Step	Main Goal of This Step	Instruments/ Actions
A	Achievement motivated Individuals (known as Aspiring Micro-Entrepreneurs or AMEs) selection and Activity Identification	Identify individuals who have a high need for achievement (n-Ach) through psychometric scoring based on 15-minute conversations, selection rate max 20% (1 out of 5). This has to be done by the Mentor for the district. Activity identification will be based on market survey in chosen location. So, it has to be in the AME's place.
B	Business skills common to all activities	Lectures with videos and PPT. Can be on-line. Will cover buying, stock keeping, accounting, selling and customer relationships, managing operations. After initial training, these inputs will be given by the Mentor as needed during monthly visits.
C	Competencies specific to chosen activity - for example a welding shop, a beauty parlour	These are best learned by working in an existing enterprise engaged in that activity. Mentor should help to find such a willing trainer-enterprise. It is unlikely that an existing entrepreneur in the chosen location will agree to train a potential competitor. So it is best to look for the Trainer-Entrepreneur in some nearby town. He should be sufficiently well-established to not feel threatened by a new competitor
D	Digital Enablement - using one's smart mobile phone	Lectures with videos and PPT. Can be on-line with the RGF Media Lab team. Covering - applying for PAN, GST and Udyam numbers how to open and operate bank account, order inputs, make payments, receive payments, display products and services on website, making posters, using Instagram, Youtube,
E	Enterprise planning	This is the stage where with the help of the Mentor, the AME prepares an Enterprise Plan which shows what products /services will be made/traded and the planned capacity per month. The prices at which these will be sold. Thus, the total revenue per month. From this deduct the variable costs - (per unit input and labour costs, multiplied by number of units pm) the per month fixed costs like rent, electricity, salary, to calculate net profit per month. See if this is enough. Ensure that GST is accounted for. Source of inputs, workers to be identified

Step	Main Goal of This Step	Instruments/ Actions
F	Financial arrangement	<p>How much capital is required will have to be calculated as part of the Enterprise Plan above. The components of capital cost are machinery and equipment, furniture and storage, electric/water connections, assuming building is rented. Then the working capital should be calculated for- inputs, wages, rent, and personal drawings per month multiplied by three months. This total amount has to be arranged up front. The sources are - own savings, family, friends, loan from Self-Help Group, loan from MFI, loan from Bank, grant from any special government scheme</p>
G	Get going - start operations	<p>This is the big day - when the shop/workshop is inaugurated and the first customer is served, or the first product is sold. But the start-up stage lasts much longer than the first day or month. Usually, it takes one full year to build and stabilise. No need to get nervous if this does not happen in first few months.</p>
H	Handholding ongoing	<p>This is very important, and the handholding will be performed by the Mentor during monthly visits by reviewing all the operations and the accounts systematically. If profitability has not been achieved, why not? Is it because sales are too low or are the costs too high? If costs are high, are those per unit variable costs or fixed costs. Actions will be planned to make corrections as needed. If planned earlier, were those done? If not, why not? If done but no results, why so?</p> <p>In between these monthly visits by the Mentor, the AME can also call them on the phone and seek advice about any specific problem. Seeking help is good.</p> <p>The AME can also reach put to his activity Trainer Entrepreneur and seek their guidance. Seeking help is good.</p>




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