



SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF RURAL WOMEN IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR UNDER NATIONAL RURAL LIVELIHOOD MISSION

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Abstract

In order to confirm the Millennium development goals and Sustainable Rural Livelihoods frame work the govt. of India has launched National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). The NRLM in J&K is launched through the governmental society namely UMEED. The detailed policy of NRLM was modified in case of J&K with the help of Society for Elimination Poverty (SERP) Andra Pradesh and the program has been implemented in various blocks of state in phased manner. The program being women oriented has shown the impact on women in terms of increased earning capacity, availability of money within their institutions, capacity building for livelihoods, increased mobility of women to community and other institutions. The success of the program is also envisaged for high emphasis on institution building, capacity building, and increment to existing livelihoods. The aims of social and financial inclusion are met by planned systematic creations of institutions like Self Help Groups (SHG), Village Organizations (VO), Cluster Level Federations (CLF) and Block level federations (BLF). There is unique community cadre policy for running the program under principle of “Communitization”, which ensures the high inclusion of poor women and sustainability of the program. The present paper will try to evolve the impact of the program and overview of implementation mechanism existing in NRLM.

Key Words: *NRLM, SHG, Community Cadre.*

Introduction

National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) has been launched across the India in... the project was launched by restructuring the existing program SGSY. The aim of the program is “To reduce poverty by enabling the poor households to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities resulting in appreciable improvement in their livelihoods on a sustainable basis, through building strong and sustainable grassroots institutions of the poor.” The aim of the program reflects to have considerable impact on the Poverty scenario in India Micro credit the programs that provide credit for self employment and other financial and business services (including savings and technical assistance) (Micro Credit Summit, 1997) serves as basis for the institutions and their sustainability. It is the through the micro credit that micro enterprises are born (Kaladhar, 1997). The conceptualized architecture for NRLM has been thus formed on this premise. NRLM primary focus is on building strong institutions of the poor. These institutions are complemented with capacities (information, knowledge, skills, finance, and tools) to help them to deal with a rapidly changing external world. Dedicated sensitive support structures, both Government and Non-government Organizations, at various levels build, nurture and strengthen the institutions of the poor. The institutions of the poor provide livelihoods services to their members. These services include credit, skills, marketing support, infrastructure support, etc. These platforms also facilitate the poor to access their rights and entitlements and public services directly, through the institutions or through convergence and partnerships.

NRLM acknowledges that the livelihoods of the poor are complex and diverse. NRLM’s livelihoods strategy rests on three pillars – enhancing and expanding the existing livelihoods options of the poor, building skills for employment and nurturing self-employed and entrepreneurs.

Universal Social Mobilization

The centre-piece of a policy framework for poverty alleviation has to be the mobilisation of the poor in order to enable them to participate directly and effectively in the decisions that affect their lives and prospects. Experience after experience has proven that organising the poor (Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, 1992) in the form of self-governing communities works, in relation to the myriads of their felt needs. The UMEED has been able to mobilize the poor through poor. The Mobilizers are called *Community Resource Person* (CRP) and are those who have been already organized in Self Help Groups. The Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), of Andra Pradesh has been under the MoU with UMEED for providing the CRP’s.

Promotion of Institutions of Poor SHG/VO/CLF

A major inadequacy of the past development response has been the neglect of institutions for the poor. (Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, 1992). The institutions of the poor in the UMEED are same as per NRLM guidelines. However, the states can modify their structural framework, but in case of Jammu and Kashmir there are very less changes. The structure of institutions is as shown in figure 1.



The Self Help Group is group of 10-12 women locally, which has been formed by women living in nearby neighbourhood after mobilization through CRP. There can be no. of SHG in the village, depending upon the population of poor and frequency of mobilization conducted. The first level of federation of SHG's is made at village level and referred as primary level federation or VO. It is the federation of 8-14 SHG. The secondary level federation is known as CLF is federation of generally SHG's of 5-6 villages or representing the VO's of 5-6 villages. The BLF is the apex federation of all institutions of the block. It has also function of keeping block level trainings. The essence of these institutes lies in the fact that all are to be managed by poor women themselves and are sustainable.



Capacity Building and Skill Development

The mobilization of women is done by CRP through quarterly rounds conducted village wise and subsequently, SHG's are formed. The capacity building is first initiated by these CRP's and later the community cadre starts trainings on various aspects like book keeping, effective leadership, training on five cardinal principles (PanchSutra), Role and function of various members in SHG, VO and CLF. The higher level training and skill trainings are conducted at block level training centres. The effective mechanism of training evolves through proper development of community cadre who are being provided trainings outside state in different institutions.

Financial Inclusion and Interest Subvention

NRLM facilitates universal access to the affordable cost-effective reliable financial services to the poor. These include financial literacy, bank account, savings, credit, insurance, remittance, pension and counselling on financial services. The core of the NRLM financial inclusion and investment strategy is "making poor the preferred clients of the banking system and mobilizing bank credit". The major component in the program is credit, credit is considered as important in the lives of the poor in the developing economy. As the distribution of land in the countryside remains skewed, the majority of rural population is left with inadequate resource base for production. (Chavan & Ramakumar, 2002).

The fund support to SHG comes from three sectors one is their self savings, second grants by Mission like UMEED in the form of Revolving Fund and Community Investment Fund and third is the Bank linkage. The interest subvention is however optional for category "A" districts of country and not for all. It is imperative to mention that the percentage of interest charged by bank is very low and further lowered on prompt repayment..

Livelihood Promotion

The NRLM has focused on strengthening of existing livelihoods initially for SHG's. It has been good to keep the sustainable option of livelihood for poor. There are less chances of failure in taking or upgrading of existing livelihood. Thus, focus of UMEED is on existing livelihood options. Hence, it helps in promotion of effective livelihoods continuously and upgrading the same. The success of using the existing livelihoods lies in the existing skill among poor in their respective trades. The Marketing support is also facilitated by the UMEED at various levels. The participation of SHG members in the SARAS Mela is one of the routine features, development of milk cooperatives and introduction of package of best practices in the field of agriculture. Convergence and partnership is the underlying core in the NRLM guidelines. The SHG are linked with different departments and programs, one of the major convergence area has been the participation of SHG on MGNREGA.



Impact of Social and Financial Inclusion of UMEED Program on Women

The first impact is the Institutions of poor women. The essence of institutions for the poor has not been considered in earlier programs of poverty alleviation. It is under the NRLM the SHG are forming their institutions and voicing their issues. The institutions are acting like mini banks for these poor women who at any instance can receive loan, as lending is done by their own institutions. The SHG members take up the loan for various activities; it has been the pattern that less amount is taken from internal savings of the SHG for daily consumption needs. The loan taken from VO and Bank is used for promoting the Livelihoods. This existing pattern ensures the social and financial security to these poor.

The second impact is increased earning capacity. There is not only the increase in income among members but also the earning capacity is increasing through the creation of new assets and livelihood options. Availability of material and non material resources within their institutions has been one of major impacts of the program. The availability of funds and other emergency requirements in the institutions like at SHG level, VO level, CLF level has given poor the vision to build upon their assets. The placements of various community cadre people by Mission are the readily available human resource which is helping the poor by facilitating and mobilizing them towards the needed resources.

Capacity building for livelihoods has been seen through the convergence initially wherein the SHG members are trained in different trades. The various departments like RSETI, Handicrafts, Handloom, Milk cooperatives, Sheep and Animal Husbandry are pivotal in promoting the livelihoods. The trainings imparted are generally of two types, one involving the course based given within different departments other being the training provided at UMEED institutions like BLF and CLF through resource persons.

Increased mobility of women to community and other institutions has been key in reducing the women related issue. The issues of women get settled through their own institutions. The empowerment is also reflected since members of the SHG are in continuous engagement with their local banks. The participation of members also gives them security since they feel they belong to a larger group. The social issues like dowry, illiteracy among women, conjugal disharmony and harassment cases are also addressed. There is not only the decrease in social issues but other community issues are also highlighted. The social action on safe drinking water supply, transport facility, health institutions and free and quality education at community level has been addressed at various instances. The fruits of empowerment are not only yielded by present generation but also the preservation for next generation reflected.

Lastly, Social security of vulnerable community is ensured. It being also one goal in NRLM which UMEED has been able to achieve. Social security goals are achieved through minimizing the risks allied to these vulnerable women like health risks, widowhood, ignorance and squalor. The financial inclusion of these women is first step in their social security. The saving accumulating at various institutions also helps in reducing the frequent lending on interest.

Communitization is the process by which all the activities of the various institutions of SHG members are managed by SHG members themselves. It involves the gradual transfer of all the key activities from mission support to SHG members under continuous capacity building. Since, one of the major challenges to poverty alleviation programs has been to provide the sustainable support to poor, the NRLM has been able to reflect on this challenge. The empowerment and high participation of women directly in development has been its key to success.

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