

TESTING APPROACHES TO STRENGTHEN GENDER WITHIN NRLM

Background

The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) India, is the largest government programme working exclusively with rural women. NRLM focuses on creating groups and institutions of poor women and building their social capital, so they have better bargaining power to claim their rights and entitlements and to compete in markets. Implemented across 34 states and union territories, NRLM has so far mobilised nearly 6 million Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of women covering nearly 65 million households across villages in India.

Global evidence shows that women's empowerment collectives can have a transformative effect by leading women from a position of limited power and voice to having skills, resources and opportunities to access markets and public spaces on an equal footing. SHGs can have significant positive impacts on economic and political empowerment, women's mobility, and women's control over family planning. However, these effects can be accelerated further through gender transformative interventions with group-based programs which help expand women's agency.

Recognising this, NRLM is anchoring a program that would actively work towards strengthening women's agency, decision making and leadership skills. The goal is to build strong women-led, self-driven groups and federations that are capable of representing women's interests, helping them control decisions about their social and economic well-being, and addressing existing social and gender inequalities. NRLM is committed to ensuring that such a gender transformative approach is integrated in all its institutions, and its programming, resources, and measurement reflect this intent. The Mission's new Gender Operational Strategy is one such mechanism.

IWWAGE's Partnership with NRLM

Supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, IWWAGE - an initiative of LEAD at Krea University, with its mandate to support gender equality through economic empowerment of women has partnered with NRLM to provide a Technical Assistance (TA) programme to institutionalise gender across all levels of the Mission. Specifically, the partnership will:

Build gender capabilities of NRLM staff
at all levels through training.

Redesign the existing gender training curriculum.

Test innovative ways of delivering
training (including through technological aids).

Build institutions such as Gender Resource Centres (GRCs) that
can help address gender equality concerns and help women claim
their entitlements.

Build performance indicators and knowledge management
mechanisms to inform programme design.

The Technical Assistance provided by IWWAGE proposes to provide proof of concept on what works to effectively institutionalise gender and build women's agency within SHGs and their federations.

Partnership with State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs)

IWWAGE is developing and testing four scalable institutional models for SHG federations to serve as gender resource centres, which can be taken to scale. These four models are being piloted in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, and will serve in future as resource federations to learn from and replicate. Pilot partners include well-known organisations who have worked on gender-integrated/entitlements-based models in their own groups or with SRLMs in the past.



Illustrative Theory of Change for the four pilots and overall support offered to NRLM and select SRLMs

