

Proceedings of the
**National Conclave on
Gender Mainstreaming**

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission

SEPTEMBER

FRIDAY

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Background

In the last few years, the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, has gained significant momentum in mainstreaming gender within the programme. More than 3,500 Gender Resource Centres (GRCs) have been established across India. Advocacy platforms like the "Nayi Chetna" Campaign and Gender Samvaad facilitated widespread awareness and open discussion on the sensitive subject of gender-based violence, and the need for public action. The states have developed a Specific Gender Operational Strategy (GOS) which identifies key gender intervention priorities to accelerate the gender transformative approach. In this context, with the need to both deepen and expand gender interventions; the National Conclave on Gender mainstreaming was designed to deliberate upon enablers and barriers, and the probable future strategies to effectively take forward the gender interventions.

Objectives of the Gender Conclave

1. Defining Gender Responsive Community institutions and pathways for building the same through a strengthened Institutional Mechanism (IM)
2. Develop forward-looking strategies for forging Inter-Ministerial convergence as a joint mandate for addressing gender equality issues
3. Achieving equal position for women at the household level in access, control decision making through gender integration with Thematic Verticals of NRLM
4. Alliance and Advocacy- Pathways for expanding stakeholder engagement with a key focus on men and boys through sustained advocacy

Welcome and Setting the Context: Smt. Smriti Sharan, Joint Secretary, RL, Ministry of Rural Development

Smt. Smriti Sharan, Joint Secretary, Rural Livelihoods, Ministry of Rural Development while extending a hearty welcome laid down the the context for the National Conclave on Gender Mainstreaming:

- She informed that Deendayal Antyodaya Rural Livelihoods Mission attempts to eliminate multi-dimensional poverty through social mobilization, promotion of sustainable institutions, financial inclusion, enabling sustainable livelihoods and social inclusion and social development, and lastly convergence.
- Over 10 crore households and approximately 91 lakh Self Help groups (SHGs) have been mobilised to date. This huge social capital would ensure the agenda of eradicating poverty, one household at a time.
- The approach of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission programme is to identify the barriers that act as a deterrent to women's development and empowerment. Therefore, strengthening institutional mechanisms is non-negotiable to effectively address these barriers. This is achieved through training and building capacity of community-level institutions



- More than 41,000 staff have been trained in the Gender specific programme. Thematic support has been strengthened, with the support of Civil Society Organisation (CSO) partners and National Resource Persons (NRPs). As a result of these efforts, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission has over 32,000 gender Community Resource Persons (CRPs), and about 23 lakhs Gender Point Persons (GPP) who have been championing the gender agenda at the grassroots level giving it a cutting-edge prominence
- There are approximately 86,000 GPP collectives, more than 35,000 Gender Forums at the Gram Panchayat level, and nearly 1,700 Block Level Gender Forums have been established. Around 3,500 GRCs established at the Block Level are providing safe platforms for dialogue and action to address Gender-Based Violence, rights, and entitlements.
- Nayi Chetna and Gender Samvaad platforms act as powerful advocacy tools for creating awareness of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and the need to collaborate across stakeholders to address GBV.
- The discussion across various panels aimed to understand the process of gender mainstreaming, moving beyond viewing gender as merely an activity. A more integrated approach is emphasised, addressing existing barriers such as unpaid work, the gendered division of labour, gender integration in financial inclusion, livelihood promotions, and partnering with key ministries.

Opening Address: Shri. Charanjit Singh, Additional Secretary, Rural Livelihoods, Ministry of Rural Development

The Additional Secretary highlighted the importance of the Conclave as an important platform for cross-learning, knowledge diffusion, and strategizing the forward-looking pathways for strengthening gender interventions within the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihood Mission.



- Financial inclusion is a major tool, under which livelihood programmes like Lakhpati Didi aim to empower women financially. This initiative targets reaching 3 crore people nationwide.
- The Nayi Chetna Campaign, which was implemented in the last two years, has seen active participation from 6 crore women, helping raise awareness and demand for rights and entitlements. Awareness regarding deep-rooted gender inequalities manifesting in the form of gender-based violence along with social behaviours are central to this campaign
- More than 3,000 GRCs have been established to address gender issues at the Block level, with 22.73 lakh women engaged in gender-related programs. With continuous hand-holding and training, one lakh and fifty thousand Social Action Committees (SAC) and 19,000 Cluster-Level Federations (CLF) are set up at village and cluster levels to address gender-related issues.
- To address complex gender issues, there is a need for cross-departmental collaboration, legal and psychological support, building the capacity of resource persons, and strengthening the system.
- Women's limited access to land ownership remains a significant challenge. The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) is another initiative that recognizes the role of women in agriculture and trains them as Krishi Sakhis (women agricultural guides).
- Gender Forums at Panchayat and Block levels have been established to discuss these issues and find solutions. The SACs are actively working at the grassroots level, making a substantial impact in their communities.
- These initiatives are critical steps toward addressing gender inequality, promoting financial inclusion, and improving women's access to resources and opportunities in India. Convergence and support from various sectors, including social justice, legal, and psychological fields, are necessary to strengthen the outreach of the gender program.

Keynote Address: Shri. Sailesh Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development

The Secretary in his address emphasised the importance of rural development as a key engine for the overall growth and development of the country.



- The recent Economic Survey of India iterates that the thrust of the government on Rural Development is discernible. The aim of engagement of the government in the rural economy is “transforming lives and livelihoods through proactive socio-economic inclusion, integration and empowerment of rural India”
- The country's high and sustained economic growth in recent years needs to be accompanied by social and institutional progress underpinning transformative and collaborative approaches
- The economic costs of addressing gender-based violence are significantly high, particularly for rural women who often lack access to support mechanisms, thus, leaving many survivors without avenues for redress. Gender-based violence not only harms individuals but also undermines the economic and social fabric of communities by perpetuating cycles of poverty, trauma, and inequality.
- The collectivization of 10 crore women into 90 lakh Self-Help Groups under the NRLM reflects a wealth of social capital that has been created and showcases the resilience of women's groups that build on these lived experiences.
- These efforts have created a foundation for gender mainstreaming, which now requires further deepening to tackle issues that are interlinked and influenced by regressive social norms normalized over centuries
- A multi-pronged strategy premised on participatory, intersectional, and inclusive approaches should be adopted to achieve the mandate of gender equality and women empowerment. Additionally, the Secretary emphasized the whole-of-government approach adopted by multiple ministries, and mobilise support from a diverse range of partners and individuals. While gender mainstreaming is an inherently complex issue, but the challenge of achieving it at scale makes it more difficult.

Special Address: Nagendra Nath Sinha, Former Secretary, Government of India

“Gender is a cross-cutting issue in development and it affects everything” The Former Secretary highlighted the following:



- The Female Labour Force Participation Rate in rural India is lower (30%) than in some of the developed countries. Of the women who are working, 71% are self-employed, only 23% are employers, and 47% are unpaid household workers. As per statistics, women devote 5 hours of unpaid domestic or care work, a lot more than men
- The wage gap between men and women indicates that overall men earn between INR 4,000 to 6,000 more than women. Thus, women who are earning may also be earning less than men for the same job.
- Three Thousand and Five Hundred GRCs have been established, and the next immediate approach and strategy need to focus on creating opportunities for convergence and enhancing collaboration between Ministries and Departments.
- While we design a gender-rich policy but translating it into scalable impacts remains a challenge due to the existing glass ceiling, stereotypes, and norms.
- Finding outputs of implementation is relatively easy, however, measuring the ‘empowerment’ achieved is much more complex.

TECHNICAL SESSIONS

- Testimony of tribal women from Gumla, Jharkhand who produce ragi millet and market through collective shed light on women's ability to negotiate with various stakeholders including institutions, and market entities for end-to-end management. This is one of the key lessons to invest in developing women's business acumen for economic and social empowerment.

Panel One: Building Gender Responsive Community Institutions

Moderator: Prof. Aasha Kapur Mehta,
Chairperson, Centre for Gender Studies, IHD

Panellists:

- Smt. Parvati Lodi, Samata Coordinator, Janshakti CLF, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission
- Prof. Vimala Ramachandran, Former National Project Director, Mahila Samakhya
- Ms. Aasha Ramesh, National Resource Person
- Ms. Neeta Hardikar, Executive Director, ANANDI



Key takeaways from the Panel Discussion

- Moving forward, comprehensive gender training is essential for the entire Mission team, including the Management Information System (MIS) and Human Resource Training Units. This training should extend to every stakeholder in order to effectively mainstream gender.
- The GRCs are strong facilitation platforms at the block level for expanding opportunities to women. GRCs provide immediate first-hand support and facilitation by creating referrals to cases of gender-based violence and also providing them with information regarding their rights and entitlements.
- Further, the GRCs not only refer cases to relevant authorities but also collaborate with other institutions to foster open discussions around gender issues at the community level, thereby strengthening the gender architecture such as SHG, Gender Point Persons, Sakhi Manch, VO SAC, Gender Forum, CLG SAC, and GRC.
- Interventions of Gender Point Person (GPP) at the SHG level, Sakhi Manch at the village level, Gender Forums at Panchayat and Block levels, and GRCs at the block level represent a decentralized approach that adequately addresses women's needs.
- It is crucial to recognize that gender initiatives require adequate funding and resources across all program verticals, as gender work is neither low-cost nor no-cost. Furthermore, women's contributions and time must be adequately valued; volunteerism from women who are already working to overcome their challenges should not be expected.
- An essential aspect of the work could include reviewing the Panchayat's Gender Action Plan and the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) to ensure their cohesion and effectiveness in addressing community needs and fostering inclusive development at the local level. Furthermore, there is a need for intensifying and diversifying training so that the cadres are capable of addressing the complexities of intersectionality in gender issues.
- The selection of "Samta Sakhis", women who have experienced violence or have supported others to lead dignified lives has proven beneficial; they provide empathy and understanding, encouraging others to pursue dignified lives.
- Smt. Parvati Lodi shared her experience in strengthening Institutional Mechanisms, which play a crucial role in reaching the last mile. She informed that the Gender Forums and Samta Sakhis are instrumental in ensuring women's access to government schemes and services in Madhya Pradesh. The government of Madhya Pradesh with the support of the technical partner extensively trained gender community resource persons and master trainers on gender and on developing gender action plan follow-up actions to be taken post-training.

TECHNICAL SESSIONS

Key lessons from the Mahila Samakhya program could be referred which could inform future programs:

- Gender is not an add-on component rather; it needs to be integrated from the inception of the programme.
- Gender issues are context-specific, and differ for dalit, tribal, rural, and urban poor women.
- Intensive training—both vertical and horizontal—is essential for all women, fostering experiential learning rooted through their lived experiences.
- For Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihood Mission to bring meaningful changes, a shift in organizational priorities, budgeting, and monitoring practices are necessary, emphasizing behaviours rather than merely meeting targets.

Panel Two: Pathways for Convergence

Moderator: Smt. Suneeta Dhar, Independent Senior Gender Expert

Panellists:

- Shri Vipul Ujjwal, Director, Capacity Building, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India
- Shri Daya Shankar, Director, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India
- Smt Reena Das, Kiriburu Livelihood Women Cluster Organisation, Noamundi, Jharkhand
- Smt. Biraj Laxmi Sarangi, Project Director, PCI



Key takeaways from the Panel Discussion

- There is a need to strengthen the existing robust institutional mechanisms for Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) integration with Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP). These are significant areas for building organic linkages between community institutions and Gram Panchayats and for allocating public resources for gender actions at local levels
- The Self-Help Groups and Elected Representatives (ER) of Gram Panchayats at the grassroots level offer differential advantages in providing the macro and micro-level perspectives. Elected representatives can bring the macro view, the SHGs can bring the micro view. Elected representatives can take part in institution-building and nurturing to create a gender-responsive space. SHGs can help create gender awareness and gender actions at the local level along with monitoring the same
- The onus of addressing gender inequalities through targeted interventions and investing in public resources is a shared mandate between the Ministries of RD and PRI through SHGs and ERs. The partnership between SHG and ERs is organic and highly valued in creating scalable impacts at the cutting-edge level. Thus, capacity building on gender concepts followed by actions and interventions is non-negotiable. There is a need for inter-ministerial convergence to address such complex gender issues
- Significance of One-Stop Centres (OSC), which provides a safe space for women to report and redress GBV. Out of 816 approved centers, 785 are currently operational, allowing women to voice their experiences openly. There could be a convergence between GRCs and OSCs.

- Women and Child Development intends to integrate services like the 181 women’s helpline, Nirbhaya helpline, Childline, and the installation of Women’s Help Desks at police stations including the “SHE” portal to address Sexual Harassment at the Workplace.
- Both Ministries – Rural Development and Women and Child Development are working towards the common goal of ensuring quality life for women.
- A robust PRI convergence framework is required.
- Experiences from Odisha suggest that Joint letters from different Ministries can ensure smoother convergence processes.
- Niche training for gender CRPs on legal instruments, basic counseling, and soft skills. This is highly needed as CRPs are constantly providing services to a range of stakeholders on a varied range of issues like GBV, rights, and entitlements.
- Methods to be devised for fast-tracking cases at the Panchayat level, ensuring the engagement of gender CRPs and convergence, therefore, women’s voices are heard through the convergence of schemes and programmes. These issues were of varied range which included rights and entitlements cases to GBV.
- Need to look at gender-disaggregated data that helps to achieve the mandate of data-driven governance.
- A case study presented by Reena Das Didi from Jharkhand demonstrated fast-tracking and addressing different gender issues through the provisioning of services as a result of successful convergence when different departments collaborate.

The convergence between all relevant stakeholders has proven to be beneficial it helped to address 974 domestic violence cases, 223 cases of *dain pratha* (witch hunting), 27 cases of human trafficking, 86 cases of sexual violence, 78 child marriage cases, and 175 other forms of gender-based violence cases.

Panel Three: Gender Intentionality in Program Design

Moderator: Shri Anjani Kumar Singh, Senior Program Officer, BMGF

Panellists:

- Ms. Shilpa Vasavada, Independent Development Professional
- Ms. Kalamani Arumugam, National Resource Person
- Shri Raman Wadhwa, Deputy Director, DAY-NRLM, Ministry of Rural Development
- Smt. Nisha Devi, SRT Gender, Geeta SHG, Umang Rajeevika CLF, Alwar, Rajasthan
- Ms. Madhu Khetan, Integrator, PRADAN



Key takeaways from the Panel Discussion

- Nisha Devi from Rajasthan shared her inspiring journey that narrates the transformative impact of SHGs on women's roles within their families and communities. Women in her village have received gender training which helps them to decide on their income and negotiate with the market.
- It is crucial to integrate gender intentionality into livelihood programs. Engaging families in dialogues, particularly husbands, to share household responsibilities can help support women's participation in the workforce. Peer-to-peer networks also serve as vital support systems for women.

- Gender Mainstreaming is not only needed within NRLM but is needed within different Ministries, and NRLM can take the lead in this.
- Women's voices are increasingly being heard, not just in terms of accessing banks, but also in income-generating activities, thus moving from Micro credit to microfinancing of livelihoods interventions.
- Women should engage in end-to-end management of the enterprises, enabling them to negotiate with various institutions such as the market and build self-confidence in managing enterprise operations.
- All FPOs should have a gender policy that ensures at least 50% of leadership positions are occupied by women. Additionally, the diverse aspirations of young women today must be taken during programme design and implementation.
- Involvement of gender experts in evaluating projects not limited to government only, through a gender lens to achieve transformative outcomes. Enhancing women's economic autonomy is crucial for their mobility and active participation in various livelihood activities.

As a way forward for SHGs to Take Control of their Finances following were discussed:

- Development of **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** related to gender-livelihood audits and modules, as suggested by Shri Raman.
- Further **research is needed to identify which types of activities best suit women and determine how they can be effectively supported in these areas.**
- Indicator Development for monitoring progress is recommended.
- Ensure that **capacity building includes working with men, keeping a gender-inclusive plan in place, and driving sustainable, systemic change.**

Panel 4: Alliance and Advocacy

Moderator: Ms. Moumita Sarkar, Co-Lead, SWAYAM

Panellists:

- Smt. Madhu Joshi, Lead-Gender Equity, C3
- Smt. Sushmita Mukherjee, Director-Gender & Adolescent Girls, PCI
- Smt. Papeshwari Thakur, CRP, Nari Shakti CLF Panchanpaal, Bastar, Chhattisgarh




Key takeaways from the Panel Discussion

- Smt. Papeshwari Thakur from Chattisgarh has shared her experience of working with males and other stakeholders through a platform called **Pariwar Choupal**. The platform discussed about health and nutrition of the pregnant and lactating mothers engaging male counterparts. Despite challenges such as domestic violence and trafficking, women in the Bastar district are progressively improving their lives through participation in SHG meetings and other activities, including those under the "**Nayi Chetna**" initiative. A noticeable shift has been observed where gender-based discrimination has reduced and gender roles are being redefined. Approximately 15,000 women in the Bastar district have seen improvements in their conditions.

- Need to emphasize the importance of understanding access and control within gender dynamics, particularly in engaging men and youth.
- The initiative aims to change the mindset by fostering discussions, recognising that mindset shifts are more effective when initiated during formative years. Additionally, men must be involved in discussions about alliances and program design.
- The importance of alliances among men to create a respectful, violence-free workspace and safe public transportation was emphasised. This approach will not only enhance women's participation in the workplace but also create a gender-friendly environment where women and men can collaborate effectively. It will also increase mobility with fewer safety concerns.
- Furthermore, it is suggested that “**Nayi Chetna**” evolved as an effective way to engage with different stakeholders to discuss GBV including men and boys.
- Initiatives to create safe community spaces for interaction between girls and boys are essential, as traditional norms still limit the communication between boys and girls in rural villages.
- VOs and CLFs can serve as safe and effective spaces for facilitating these interactions
- There should be a system for disseminating information to identify the factors that influence women's respect within households. Collaborating with SHG members, especially women, is crucial for navigating difficult conversations about gender dynamics within households. These discussions are vital to tackling intergenerational behaviour patterns, and ensuring that knowledge and strategies for change are effectively transmitted to the next generation.
- Behaviour cannot be discussed in isolation; shifting behaviours requires incentives and resources. However, it is equally important to take further steps to not only shift attitudes and behaviours but also to transform social norms. Both structural and systemic issues contribute to women being placed in precarious situations.

Concluding Remarks by Ms. Nivedita Prasad, Deputy Secretary, Rural Livelihood, Ministry of Rural Development

- Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission has mobilised 91 lakh SHGs under DAY-NRLM to empower women. The gender integration strategies across 32 SRLMs to advance the women's empowerment agenda.
 - **Nayi Chetna** initiative is a national advocacy initiative which will see its third year.
 - The key focus is on addressing barriers such as unpaid work, gendered division of labour, wage gaps, and mainstreaming gender in institutional mechanisms.
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- Gender is a cross-cutting issue that should not be seen in isolation- whether it is livelihood, training, or convergence.
 - There is a need for knowledge-sharing platforms to enhance women's empowerment initiatives.
 - **Gender Mainstreaming** became a key priority area and thus efforts have been made to ensure that gender is integrated into programs at all levels.
 - Gender training needs to be provided to all Mission staff and not just SISD thematic. It also needs to be provided to panchayat representatives as well. The training should be both horizontal and vertical.
 - **Ongoing Support:** Institutions striving to be gender-responsive need continuous mentoring and handholding support. This support is essential for fostering an environment where women's contributions are valued, and their time is recognised and incentivised. Additionally, adequate budgetary allocations are necessary to ensure the sustainable support of gender-related activities.
 - **Leadership Representation** is a critical aspect of building gender-responsive institutions that ensure that women who have experienced GBV and overcome it are considered for leadership roles.

- Strengthening Local Institutions like VOs and CLFs is important as they play a vital role in addressing local issues, particularly gender-based violence. When such issues are referred to GRCs, it indicates to strengthening grassroots institution. Further, gender discourse should occur in other forums including convergence meetings, planning sessions, and budget discussion
- The importance of engagement with men and boys has been identified as a priority area and is not limited to women only. The conversations should further extend to gender-diverse groups. The discourse should be around voice, choice, decision-making, ownership of assets, and bodily autonomy. Also, it is important to engage with youth and adolescents as there are issues like substance abuse, school dropout, and mental health issues that disrupt the equilibrium
- While it is undeniable that convergence is occurring, a better institutional mechanism and robust framework are needed to enhance it further. It is important that elected PRI representatives take ownership of VPRP, GRC, and One Stop Centres work hand in hand, and complement each other, there is fast-tracking of cases at panchayats, etc. Localisation of SDG and the creation of women-friendly panchayats should be the key issues in GPDP
- Mobility and safety remain a key concern for women in public spaces
- Alliance and collaboration are very important for gender mainstreaming
- The other issue is how communication is established at the household level, especially with adolescent boys and girls. Their Aspirations are high but there is a mismatch with reality. There is a need to prepare the next generation of collectives to anchor the cause
- The journey of gender mainstreaming is not easy. So much so that we have more women in the discourse today than men. Gender is still considered to be an issue around women. The distinctions are stark in the kind of employment that men and women have
- Evidence-based policymaking demands a collation of experiences and studies to better inform the program. Thus, enabling NRLM to develop an MIS system just not around numbers but some qualitative indicators as well. Participants were requested to share diagnostic studies around gender intentionality and gender mainstreaming
- Based on the key takeaways discussed during the conclave, **a strategy paper for gender mainstreaming will be developed and finalized, not only within the National Rural Livelihood Mission but also to expand its scope beyond NRLM.** As an immediate measure, it is proposed that other verticals of NRLM also start taking similar initiatives like **Gender Samvaad** in their functional areas.

Vote of Thanks by Ms. Radha Chellappa, Executive Director - IWWAGE

Ms. Radha Chellappa extended her heartfelt thanks to the National Rural Livelihood Mission, all stakeholders, panellist and moderators, participants, and the dedicated teams at IWWAGE and NMMU for their unwavering support in making the event a success.

