

Towards Gender Transformative Livelihoods: Strategies for Convergence

**3-4 November 2015
Ranchi, Jharkhand**

Organised by:

**Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of
India and UN Women**



About the report

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India, in collaboration with UN Women, organised a National Stakeholder Consultation titled 'Towards Gender Transformative Rural Livelihoods: Strategies for Convergence' on 3 and 4 November, 2015. The objectives of the consultation were to strengthen the design, implementation and monitoring of rural development policies and programmes from a gender lens. The Consultation showcased good practices which centre-stage women's economic rights, their voice and agency and ending gender based violence in strategies for sustainable rural livelihoods. The technical sessions focused on opportunities for rural women's access to and control over resources; priorities for women's security in approaches to sustainable rural livelihoods; strategies for strengthening women's institutions; and convergence for gender transformative rural livelihoods. Rural women and their coalitions, representatives of Union and state governments, civil society organisations and academicians participated in the two-day meet.

Part A of this report presents an analytical summary of the consultation. Part B of the report captures the detailed deliberations.

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List of Abbreviations

ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
ASHA	Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
BRLPS-JEEVIKA	Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society- JEEVIKA
CDPO	Child Development Protection Officer
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CMFRI	Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute
CRP	Community Resource Person
DDS	Deccan Development Society
DDU-GKY	Deen Dayal Upadhyay -Grameen Kaushalya Yojana
ECSR	International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
FIR	First Information Report
FRA	Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006
GoI	Government of India
GoJ	Government of Jharkhand
IAWS	Indian Association of Women's Studies
IAY	Indira Awaas Yojana (National Rural Housing Scheme)
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
ICSF	International Collective in Support of Fish Workers
MAKAAM	Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (Forum of Rights of Women Farmers)
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MKSP	Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (Women Farmers' Empowerment Programme)
MoPR	Ministry of Panchayati Raj
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
MSRLM	Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission
NER	North East Region
NRLM	National Rural Livelihoods Mission
NRLPS	National Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society
NRHM	National Rural Health Mission
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
NTUI	National Trade Union Initiative
PESA	<i>Panchayat</i> (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996
PIA	Programme Implementation Agency
PIP	Participatory Identification of the Poor
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
SAC	Social Action Committees
SECC	Socio-Economic Caste Census
SERP	Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty
SHG	Self-Help Group
SOR	Schedule of Rates
VAW	Violence against women
VPRC	Village Poverty Reduction Committee

PART A: SUMMARY OF NATIONAL CONSULTATION AND KEY MESSAGES

A national consultation was organised by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and UN Women on 3 and 4 November 2015 in Ranchi, Jharkhand (India) with a view to strengthen the design, implementation and monitoring of rural development policies and programmes from a gender lens. The two-day consultation was divided into an opening plenary, three technical sessions and a closing plenary.

The session-wise objectives were as follows:

Session	Theme	Objective
Opening Plenary	Transforming Approaches to Rural Livelihoods	Context setting: emerging trends and national priorities
Technical Session I	Women's Resource Rights and Entitlements	Identify opportunities for rural women's access to and control over resources
Technical Session II	Women's Security and Freedom from Violence	Define priorities for women's security in approaches to sustainable rural livelihoods
Technical Session III	Women's Voice and Agency	Identify strategies for strengthening women's institutions and leadership
Closing Plenary	Roadmap for Way Forward	Frame convergence strategies for gender transformative rural livelihoods

The Consultation saw the participation of over 200 delegates, including senior representatives from Union and state governments and women farmers and their coalitions. The Honourable Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India, Shri Sudarshan Bhagat presided over the two-day meet. The Honourable Minister of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand, Shri Nilkanth Singh Munda was the Guest of Honour. Senior government officials from the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India including the Secretary, Mr. J.K. Mohapatra; Additional Secretary, Mr. Amarjeet Sinha; Joint Secretary, Mr. Atal Dulloo and officials from 13 state departments of rural development participated in the consultation. Women farmers and their coalitions from the Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM¹ or Forum for the Rights of Women Farmers) were present in the two-day meet. Also present were representatives of various women's rights organisations, media and academia.



Shri Sudarshan Bhagat, Honourable Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India

¹ MAKAAM, or Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (Forum for Women Farmers' Rights) is a nationwide informal forum of more than 120 individuals and organisations of farming women, of women farmers' collectives, civil society organisations, researchers and activists, drawn from 24 states of India, to secure due recognition and rights of women farmers in India. UN Women has been associated with the creation and strengthening of this platform in India.

Summary of Proceedings and Key Messages from the Sessions

Opening Plenary: The inaugural session of the consultation was chaired by Shri Sudarshan Bhagat, Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India. It comprised of experience sharing by three rural women leaders, followed by a presentation on key challenges faced for gender equality in rural livelihoods policy. Government representatives then responded to the presentations and shared their vision for gender transformative rural livelihoods.

"There is a need to design rural development programmes which centre-stage women's rights, enhance their access to and control over resources and build their leadership skills. One way of doing so is to mainstream women's empowerment principles in government programmes."

**Shri Sudarshan Bhagat, Honourable Minister of State
Ministry of Rural Development**

"The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 recognises that rural women are key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development; and transformational change requires addressing the root causes of inequality and not just the symptoms."

**Dr. Rebecca Tavares
Representative, UN Women**

The session began with Dr. Rebecca Tavares, Representative, UN Women congratulating MoRD for leading the Government of India's work on gender equality and rural livelihoods. She identified key strategies for ensuring rural women's sustainable livelihoods and urged the delegates to centre their debates around them. These were building women's voices

and agency; recognising, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid work; developing women's skills, and creating decent work opportunities in non-traditional domains; protecting and promoting women's resource rights to land, water, forests, technologies, and finance, ensuring women's rights to social protection; and ensuring freedom from all forms of violence for all women.

Rural women leaders from marginalised communities were invited in the session to share their diverse experiences on the interlinkages between gender, caste, poverty, access to basic entitlements and economic empowerment. Ms. Lad Kunwar, a liberated manual scavenger brought forth dimensions of caste based discrimination which denied her the rights to decent work, housing, sanitation, education and healthcare; all basic entitlements mandated by the state. Ms. Anita, a woman 'mate' (worksite supervisor) under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), highlighted the difficulties women workers faced in accessing skilled and higher paying jobs in government programmes. Being among the first women 'mates' in her region, she reiterated the need for conscious measures for creating skilled employment for marginalised women. She also highlighted the importance of continuing employment programmes like MGNREGA and promoting a gender-



Ms. Gita Devi, a Community Resource Person (CRP) with the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS)

responsive Schedule of Rates (SOR) across the country to increase women's participation in the labour force. Ms. Gita Devi, a Community Resource Person (CRP) with the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society- JEEViKA (BRLPS) reflected on her experiences of training women farmers on issues of identity, rights and entitlements as part of a joint UN Women and Government of Bihar programme on gender and livelihoods. She identified the integration of a gender component in all government programmes on livelihoods as the key to creating a rural workforce of self-aware and confident women who by virtue of their enhanced knowledge about their rights and identity would be better positioned to take leadership roles as farmers and workers.

"Women's lack of education and skills training, economic dependence on their families, limited control over and access to resources and non-recognition of their unpaid work, is instrumental in reinforcing structures of discrimination."

Dr. Jean Drèze, Visiting Professor, Department of Economics, University of Ranchi

The testimonies were supplemented with a presentation on challenges for gender equality in rural India by Dr. Jean Drèze, then visiting Professor at the University of Ranchi. Professor Drèze identified women's lack of educational and skills training, economic dependence on their families, limited control over and access

to resources and non-recognition of their unpaid work, as instrumental in reinforcing structures of discrimination. One glaring consequence of this situation is women's deteriorating labour force participation in India (<25 per cent); far lower than the global average (50 per cent). In this context, he acknowledged the government's role in creating employment for rural women through programmes such as MGNREGA, the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). However, he noted that none of these programme encouraged women's employment in positions of decision making. He therefore strongly recommended for the adoption of gender parity in government programmes for women's recruitment to senior positions. He also laid stress on ensuring that women centric programmes like MGNREGA provide decent and timely wages, recognise individual women as workers in their own right by issuing separate job cards and creating individual bank accounts and promoting crèche facilities.



Dr. Jean Drèze, Visiting Professor, Department of Economics, University of Ranchi

Senior representatives of the Ministry of Rural Development then responded to the challenges and lived experiences put forth before them and presented the vision of the Government of India for gender transformative rural livelihoods. Shri Sudarshan Bhagat, Honourable Minister of State, MoRD reflected on the presentations by Ms. Lad Kunwar, Ms. Anita and Ms. Gita Devi and asserted the need to design rural development programmes which centre-stage women's rights, enhance their access to and control over resources and build their leadership skills. He shared that one way of doing so was to prioritise women's empowerment principles in government programmes. MoRD's vision for achieving this was presented by Mr. Amarjeet Sinha, Additional Secretary who talked about Mission Antyodaya, a rural poverty eradication programme. A key feature of the Mission is to optimise sustainable livelihoods opportunities for the most marginalised unskilled rural women by

integrating them into the country's semi-skilled and skilled workforce. Mr. J.K. Mohapatra, Secretary, MoRD focused on the need to prioritise rural women's rights to resources, especially land without which government programmes would not be able to achieve their desired outcome of poverty alleviation and gender equality. He identified enhancement of women's resource rights as an important stand-alone objective that government programmes must strive for.

First Technical Session on Women's Resource Rights and Entitlements: The first technical session aimed at identifying opportunities for rural women's access to and control over resources. It comprised of a diverse panel of state and civil society representatives from the states of Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The session was moderated by Ms. Kavitha Kuruganti, founder-member, Mahila Adhikar Kisan Manch (MAKAAM). The presentations focused on two key issues: 1. Ensuring use, access, control and ownership of resources and entitlements and 2. Recognizing, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid work.

Ms. Sejal Dand, Director, ANANDI, reflected on her experiences of working in Gujarat to highlight that despite rural women working three shifts each day, there is a continuous undervaluation and devaluation of the two most important resources that they have, i.e. their labour and time. There is a need for an integrated model of development which adequately addresses women's labour and time costs. In this context, Mr. N. N. Sinha, Principal Secretary, Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand urged the Union government to implement convergence strategies and focus on creation of opportunities for non-gender stereotypical works for rural women.

Ms. Suman Rawat, CEO, Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission, talked about the Dashasutri (ten organising principles of self-help) programme which, along with the Panchasutra (5 principles of financial discipline), enables women Self Help Groups (SHGs) to take action on issues of health, nutrition, employment, access to social safety nets, good governance, education and water-sanitation-hygiene and therefore view 'livelihoods' more holistically. Mr. Gagandeep Singh Bedi, Secretary, Department of Rural Development and *Panchayati* Raj, Government of Tamil Nadu referred to the 'Village Poverty Reduction Committee' (VPRC) model implemented in the state to stress upon the need to create SHGs of the most marginalised villagers for achieving social inclusion in local-level design and monitoring of government programmes like the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and MGNREGA.

Key message: All rural development programmes must strengthen women's access to and control over resources- land, natural resources, credit, technology, etc.; facilitate access to basic entitlements; make available sex-disaggregated data to recognise women's rights to resources and their rights as workers; and promote women's employment in skilled, non-traditional and non-gender stereotypical trades.

Second Technical Session on Women's Security and Freedom from Violence: The second technical session's objective was to define priorities for women's security in approaches to sustainable rural livelihoods and demonstrate how livelihood programmes have addressed the issue of violence against women, including issues related to dignity and bodily integrity of women and ability to achieve full livelihood potential. The session was moderated by Dr. Ritu Dewan, President, Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS).

Dr. Rukmini Rao, founder, Deccan Development Society (DDS), asserted that violence against women (VAW) is an issue which must be addressed by government programmes across all verticals because it is as much a manifestation of state policies such as land acquisition led displacement, as that of historical structures of patriarchy. Government agencies must therefore be held accountable for policies and programmes which directly or indirectly lead to an increase in VAW and for conditions that sustain VAW as well as for promoting an environment free of VAW. Ms. Suneeta Dhar, Senior Advisor, JAGORI (a women's rights organisation), presented their work on engendering livelihoods in partnership with PRADAN (a livelihoods organisation) and UN Women. She explained how building capacities of PRADAN staff members on gender, patriarchy, masculinity and VAW enabled them to implement their programmes using a gender lens. She called this process a continuum of security: moving from food, agriculture, nutrition security to women's bodily integrity and freedom from VAW and identified this as an important strategy that all rural development agencies of state governments should adopt. Dr. N. Vijaya Lakshmi, CEO, Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS), presented a good practice by a state agency in countering VAW. At BRLPS, a cadre of Community Resource Persons has been formed and trained to build capacities of community members to address gender inequalities at the grassroots level. Such efforts are a significant step to address gender based violence and inequalities within rural development programmes and must be scaled up at the national level.

Key message: Ending all forms of violence and discrimination against women is a prerequisite to ensuring access to decent work and sustainable rural livelihoods. All rural development programmes should therefore ensure financial, technical and physical resources to address gender based violence and discrimination.

Third Technical Session on Women's Voice and Agency: The third technical session aimed at identifying strategies for strengthening women's institutions. Representatives of Government programmes such as *Mahila Samakhya* (Education for women's equality) and *Kudumbashree* (state poverty eradication mission of the Government of Kerala), as well as members of trade unions and civil society organisations presented their experiences on the impact of their work on strengthening identity of women as citizens and economic actors; creating institutions of women for sustaining change and; promoting decision making of women. Ms. Rakhi Sehgal of the National Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) moderated the session.

Panellists in the session explained how it was necessary to accord women with citizenship rights and recognise their multiple identities in order to recognise their workers' rights and ensure access to decent work. Ms. Arundhati Dhuru, Convenor, National Alliance for People's Movements, brought to fore the point that government programmes fail to recognise women's contribution as farmers and workers as a result of which they restrict women's roles to the perimeters of their homes in policy design. This results in the undervaluation and de-valuation of women's work in state policy. Ms. Anuradha Talwar of the NTUI identified the need for state agencies to create and support an environment conducive for women's groups to organise and ensure state recognition of women as economic agents. The example of Kudumbashree was shared by Ms. Valsala Kumari, Executive Director of Kudumbashree, Government of Kerala, which centre-staged gender in its policy discourse. This resulted in a priority being accorded to building institutions of the poor, mainly of

women, in all livelihoods programmes, which was supplemented with skills training and capacity building and convergence with grassroots institutions of governance leading to strong ownership among the target constituencies, accountability among implementing officials and overall transparency in operational mechanisms. Another example shared was that of Mahila Samakhya, Assam, by Ms. Gita Rani Bhattacharya, State Programme Director, where spaces have been created for all women in the Samakhya's *sanghas* (institutions) for promoting their voice, building networks and alliances and supporting and monitoring the most excluded and marginalised women.

Key message: The rights of women as workers are inextricably linked to their citizenship rights. All government programmes should therefore facilitate women's organising by creating mechanisms in national programmes for supporting existing and facilitating new women's rights institutions. This would strengthen women's voice, choice and agency and facilitate the recognition of their work as well as their identity and rights as workers.

Closing Plenary: The concluding session of the consultation saw moderators of each of the technical sessions share key messages (summarized above). This was followed by sharing of learnings and commitments by state and Union government representatives for the rights of women workers and farmers. In conclusion, an outcome document comprising of key asks which emerged from the Consultation were presented to the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. The session was moderated by Dr. Pam Rajput.

Among the government representatives was Ms. Sarada Muraleedharan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of *Panchayati Raj*, Government of India who asserted that the need of the hour is to replicate the philosophy of gender equality in all state programmes through adoption of convergence strategies. Commitments were made by state representatives of Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab and Odisha for enhancing women's rights through rural development programmes. For example, Mr. Paritosh Upadhyay, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), State Livelihood Promotion Society, Jharkhand, reflected on the key learnings from the consultation and assured adoption of good practices in his state. In particular, he highlighted the significance of focusing on political and social empowerment of women in order to achieve economic empowerment. In this context, he praised the role of Mahila Samakhya in the country in organising rural women for empowerment. Mr. Kuldeep Sidha, Additional Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of Jammu and Kashmir reflecting on his experience of implementing a programme on strengthening gender responsive implementation of MGNREGA with support from UN Women, reflected on the importance of creating and implementing gender specific plans which focused on women's rights to employment and control over resources. He highlighted how gender specific capacity building of state officers plays an important role in enhancing their ability to design and implement such plans. At the national level, Mr. G. Muralidhar, Lead, Capacity Building, National Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (NRLPS) and representative of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India assured the gathering that gender sensitization of all the officials and representatives within the NRLM will be taken up in a sustained manner.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1. Inclusion of gender equality and women's rights as an explicit goal in the vision statement and objectives of rural development programmes:** All rural development policies, programmes and schemes should support and strengthen (1) women's resource rights by enhancing control and ownership of resources and assets by women, as well as creation of women-friendly assets; (2) capabilities and skills of women farmers by ensuring provisions for women's access to safe water, healthcare, education, etc.; (3) freedom from all forms of discrimination and violence against women through development of social, environmental and physical infrastructure which guarantees safety; (4) women's voice, choice, agency and leadership through creation and strengthening of women's institutions.
- 2. Mechanisms for building gender-related capacities of all rural development functionaries at all levels:** Capacities of all government officers, frontline functionaries and implementing agencies should be enhanced to enable them to design and implement policies which centre-stage women's rights and entitlements. Officials should be equipped with capacities and tools to adopt a gender lens in their work. This would imply a focus on ensuring women's access to and control over resources and assets, ending all forms of discrimination and violence and strengthening women's agency and voice through programmes on economic empowerment.
- 3. Time bound plans for ensuring collection of sex-disaggregated data across all socio-economic categories, including religious minorities:** Majority rural women's farm and non-farm work remains invisible in national sample surveys resulting in under-reporting of their labour force participation as well as a denial of their rights and entitlements. For example, women working in agriculture and allied activities are rarely recognised as farmers and positioned as household workers instead. This results in women not availing any benefits and entitlements designed for farmers. Sex-disaggregated data should be collected to recognise women's work, enhance their access to rights and entitlements as well as help assess the effectiveness of a programme.
- 4. Dedicated plans and resources in rural development programmes and schemes for (1) creating public infrastructure and essential public services for reducing women's drudgery and unpaid work and for (2) increasing women's ownership and control over resource rights (land, water, commons, forests, technology, finance):** Rural women are faced with a 'triple burden' as they are not only responsible for care work and household work, but also experience increased drudgery due to high male migration and feminisation of agriculture as well as the Government's inability to provide basic services and entitlements. Moreover, mechanisation of farming has led to a reduction in rural women's wages and continuing gender inequality in the labour market ensures that women are paid less than men for the same tasks. As a result, rural women continue to face discrimination in access to and control over resources and assets. All rural development programmes should therefore ensure creation of public infrastructure in order to reduce and redistribute women's drudgery and unpaid work as well as enhance their access to and control over resources and assets.
- 5. Strategy and target set by the Ministry of Rural Development for gender parity for employment of women at all levels:** In order to achieve gender equality, the State, through its programmes such as the MGNREGA, NRLM and IAY, should encourage and ensure that women occupy spaces which are

not governed by traditional, gender-specific roles. Towards this end, national programmes should create opportunities for female employment in non-gender stereotypical and skilled roles and implement targets for equal employment of women at all levels within a programme.

- 6. Creation of a cadre of women workers in every village (such as Gender Community Resource Persons (CRPs)/ women leaders organised under rural development programmes or by NGOs) for enhancing capacities of rural women for access to information, entitlements and institutions, technical knowledge and support to victims of violence.:** As demonstrated under Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society- JEEViKA, Gender Community Resource Persons play a critical role in organising rural women and enhancing their capacities on issues related to their resource rights, freedom from discrimination and violence and leadership as well as facilitating access to entitlements. The Gender CRPs thus not only address livelihood issues, but also focus on the social and political empowerment of rural women.
- 7. Time bound institutionalisation of strategies for achieving convergence:** Achieving empowerment of women is not an objective of one Ministry or Department alone. It is an aim which is interlaced in several programmes of various departments. Thus, it is important that there is a time bound effort made for departments to converge, while keeping women at the centre of all convergences. To achieve rural women's empowerment not as a means to rural development, but as a result, it is important that strategies of convergence should be institutionalised especially, between the departments of Rural Development and Agriculture, *Panchayati Raj*, Finance, Water and Sanitation and Women and Child Development/Social Welfare.
- 8. Time bound plans for systematic and continued engagement with all women who have been organised in collectives:** Women's collectives have been successfully formed across the country and these collectives should be used as resources to achieve empowerment. Systematic plans should therefore be made to engage with women's collectives, beyond those created under the NRLM.

PART B: DETAILED PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION

Introduction

The Government of India's commitment to women's rights is enshrined in the national constitution which binds the state to guarantee equality to women as well as implement measures for positive discrimination in their favour. Of particular relevance in this context are Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the constitution. It is further affirmed with India being signatory to several international conventions such as the Human Rights Declaration, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). The recently adopted Agenda for Sustainable Development with its standalone Goal 5 on gender equality is another of India's international commitments to women's rights.

Among the key strategies for achieving gender equality in development programmes, as advocated by international treaties, particularly the BPfA, is gender mainstreaming. This approach encourages implementing agencies to adopt measures which centre-stage women's rights principles in design, operationalisation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. In India, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) has led the way in adopting a gender lens for addressing rural poverty. In partnership with UN Women, MoRD has adopted and is working on implementing 'gender audit guidelines' for review of ongoing programmes from a women's rights lens. MoRD, with support from UN Women, has also undertaken capacity building of its programme staff on gender, conducted action researches to increase rural women workers' participation in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in four states, and supported measures to strengthen gender-responsive implementation and monitoring of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) in two states.

In continuation of their joint commitment to the advancement and development of rural women, including women farmers, MoRD and UN Women organised a two day national consultation on 3-4 November 2015 in Ranchi, Jharkhand. The objective of this meet was to provide a knowledge sharing and learning platform for stakeholders working on various aspects of rural development, in order to support them to:

- Identify opportunities for rural women's access to and control over resources
- Define priorities for women's security in approaches to sustainable rural livelihoods
- Identify strategies for strengthening women's institutions and leadership
- Frame convergence strategies for gender transformative rural livelihoods

The consultation comprised of an opening plenary and three technical sessions on (1) women's resource rights and capabilities, (2) ending gender-based violence and discrimination, and (3) women's voice and agency. This was followed by a closing plenary. Over 200 delegates participated in the meeting. The Honourable Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India, Shri Sudarshan Bhagat was the Chief Guest and the Honourable Minister of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand, Shri Nilkanth Singh Munda was the Guest of Honour. MoRD Secretary, Mr. J.K. Mohapatra; Additional Secretary, Mr. Amarjeet Sinha; Joint Secretary, Mr. Atal Dulloo and

officials from 13 state departments of rural development were also present. Women farmers and their coalitions from the Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM or Forum for the Rights of Women Farmers), representatives of women’s rights organisations, media and academia formed part of the audience and panel members.



Participants at the National Consultation were drawn from various stakeholders



Stalls set up by participants at the National Consultation

The following sections detail out the discussions in each of the sessions.

I. OPENING PLENARY: TRANSFORMING APPROACHES TO WOMEN’S LIVELIHOODS

Introduction: The objective of the Opening Plenary was to identify national priorities and emerging trends in the context of rural livelihoods. It began with the setting of the context of the consultation and sharing of international commitments on gender equality. Lived experiences of working in rural India were then shared by three grassroots women leaders to present the varied nature of challenges faced by them. This was supplemented by an analysis of the dominant discourses and facts on gender and the rural economy. Senior officials from MoRD, including the honourable

Minister of State, Secretary, Additional Secretary as well as the honourable Minister and Principal Secretary (Rural Development) from the Government of Jharkhand (GoJ) then responded to the challenges and shared their vision for achieving gender equality in the context of inclusive growth and development in rural India.

Session plan:

Opening Plenary: Transforming Approaches to Rural Livelihoods	
Welcome and introductory remarks	Dr. Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, Representative, UN Women
Setting the context for gender and livelihoods (<i>facilitated by: Ms. Sejal Dand, Director, ANANDI</i>)	
<i>Garima abhiyaan</i> : Right to freedom from violence for dignified livelihoods	Ms. Lad Kunwar, Feminist Activist and Liberated Manual Scavenger, Chhattarpur, Madhya Pradesh
<i>Mere haq</i> : Reflections from the field on women's resource rights and capabilities	Ms. Anita, Mate, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh
<i>Meri pehchan mahila kisan</i> : Identity, voice and agency	Ms. Gita Devi, Community Resource Person (BRLPS-JEEViKA), Muzzafarpur, Bihar
Rural women in India's development context: Challenges and opportunities	Dr. Jean Drèze, Visiting Professor, Department of Economics, University of Ranchi
Introduction to Mission Antyodaya	Mr. Amarjeet Sinha, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
Government of India's vision for gender transformative rural livelihoods	Mr. J. K. Mohapatra, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
Keynote address by Honourable Chief Guest: Centre-staging women's rights in flagship programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development	Shri Sudarshan Bhagat, Honourable Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India
Special remarks: Jharkhand's experiences of promoting women's rights in rural livelihoods	Shri Nilkanth Singh Munda, Honourable Minister of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand

Welcome and introductory remarks:

Dr. Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, Representative, UN Women Multi-Country Office for India, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka welcomed the dignitaries from the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, line Ministries, representatives from the Government of Jharkhand, women farmers and their coalitions to the two-day National Consultation on Gender Transformative Rural Livelihoods. Dr. Tavares laid emphasis on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was recently adopted by the United Nations, highlighting how gender equality is intrinsically embedded in all the goals. She spoke about the SDGs recognising the valuable role of women, especially rural women in achieving transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for

sustainable development. She added that the word “transformational,” is not restricted to just the symptoms, but refers to the root causes of inequality which must be addressed.

Dr. Tavares acknowledged the milestones achieved by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) with regard to women’s empowerment and reflected on UN Women’s learnings from its collaboration with MoRD. She also referred to gender based inequalities in rural India, especially in the context of land ownership and wages, to highlight the need for centre-staging women’s rights in rural development planning. She said that despite 60 per cent of all agriculture activities being carried out by women, only 9 per cent of rural women own land, half of the women are not paid and those who are paid earn only 50 to 75 per cent of the men’s wages. In this context, Dr. Tavares also noted the absence of rural women in local governance mechanisms.

“Unless we tackle inequality at the most fundamental level, at its very roots, we cannot expect to make the progress that we aspire for. We cannot achieve the global goals until and unless we remove the structural barriers that hold women and girls back.”

Dr. Rebecca Tavares
Representative, UN Women



Panelists for the Opening Plenary: transforming Approaches to Women’s Livelihoods

In conclusion, Dr. Tavares identified the following strategies for ensuring rural women’s sustainable livelihoods:

- Building women’s voices and agency, especially in affirming their identities as workers and farmers who contribute to the economy and to India’s growth story;
- *Recognising, reducing and redistributing* women’s unpaid work; developing women’s skills, and creating decent work opportunities in non-gender stereotypical domains
- Protecting and promoting women’s resource rights-- to land, water, forests, technologies, and finance, and ensuring women’s rights to social protection; and
- Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender based violence and discrimination.

Garima abhiyaan: Right to freedom from violence for dignified livelihoods; sharing of personal experiences

Ms. Lad Kunwar is a liberated manual scavenger from Chhattarpur, Madhya Pradesh and is associated with the *Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan* (National Dignity Campaign) as a feminist activist. In her address, Ms. Kunwar shared snippets from her life about the many struggles she faced. Ms. Kunwar was forced to take up manual scavenging after her marriage and led the majority years of her youth battling discrimination from fellow villagers.



Ms. Sejal Dand, Director, ANANDI with Ms. Lad Kunwar, a liberated manual scavenger

Her family was denied access to the local water sources, disallowed from mingling freely with villagers or entering temples, and her children forced to sit at the back of their classrooms. This was coupled with health problems including respiratory and skin related disorders. In return for long hours of inhuman work, she received stale food and sometime a couple of rupees. Any kind of refusal to continue life as manual scavengers invited violent threats from members of the elite castes forcing Ms. Kunwar's community into meek submission.

Ms. Kunwar's life took a turn for the better only after association with the *Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan* which encouraged her to question the caste-driven system of manual scavenging. Soon after, she eschewed the activity and began mobilising others to follow suit and search for alternate means of livelihoods. As member of the *Abhiyan*, Ms. Kunwar travelled across villages, only to find a continuing prevalence of manual scavenging as well as untouchability. This stood in stark contrast to government claims to the contrary.

Ms. Kunwar continues her struggle to create awareness and help liberate those who practice manual scavenging. She appealed to representatives of the government to provide the following for the betterment of her community:

- Land and housing to liberated manual scavengers and other members of the *Dalit* (Scheduled Caste) and *Adivasi* (Scheduled Tribe) community;
- Access to alternate forms of livelihoods and skills to undertake entrepreneurial activities;
- Targeted intervention for the community in government programmes along with strategies for rehabilitation;
- Construction of permanent 'wet' toilets (i.e. with water supply) in mission mode across the country.

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Mere haq: Reflections from the field on women's resource rights and capabilities



Ms. Anita, supervisor, MGNREGA, Uttar Pradesh

Ms. Anita was trained and selected to work as a mate (supervisor) under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh. She was part of a government experiment on implementing all-women work-sites which comprised of women workers as well as women mates. This was not only an important source of employment generation for the nearly 150 rural women involved but also a model for implementing gender-responsive shelf of works which contributed directly to an increase in women's access to and control over resources. For example, women workers constructed a pond which became an important source of water for the drought prone area. In addition, they also improved rural connectivity by constructing roads. The introduction of

gender-responsive schedule of rates by the state government provided women workers with encouragement to seek employment under MGNREGA.

Despite important achievements in her capacity as mate, Ms. Anita has not been able to find meaningful work for the past year. Other women workers too have suffered as a result of the recent slump in MGNREGA works. Opportunities to build on past works, such as making investments in fisheries in the existing pond and providing employment to the rural poor, are not being furthered by the local administration. Ms. Anita therefore urged government representatives to undertake the following urgent measures to provide meaningful employment to the rural poor:

- Introduce measures to support MGNREGA by addressing budget deficits and other roadblocks;
- Create opportunities for convergence for introduction of gender-responsive shelves of work;
- Provide capacity building support and gainful employment to women in the more skilled positions of mates and supervisors;
- Introduce gender-responsive schedule of rates at the national level to encourage women's participation in MGNREGA.

Meri pehchan mahila kisan: Identity, voice and agency

Ms. Gita Devi works as a trainer on women's rights and a Community Resource Person (CRP) with the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS)- JEEVIKA in Muzzafarpur, Bihar; she narrated her life story as part of this panel. She was married at the age of 16 and had two children before her eighteenth birthday. Her health soon deteriorated. In the absence of an adequate support structure in her marital home, she shifted back with her parents for better access to healthcare. Here, she neither had a source of income nor monetary support from her husband.

Courtesy the BRLPS, she received an opportunity to work as a CRP, become a member of a Self Help Group (SHG) and earned a livelihood by training others on agriculture technology. Ms. Gita recounted that her transformation from a shy and dependent person to a confident young woman took place solely because of her association with the government programme. Thereafter, she received training on gender equality, women's rights and entitlements and freedom from violence and discrimination. Discussions within the safe spaces provided by the SHG allowed women to discuss the discrimination and violence they faced on a daily basis.



Participants at the National Consultation

Some prominent issues which arose included how women do all the work in the fields and yet receive no recognition as farmers. Neither do they have the land in their names nor do they have access to markets and financial transactions. She aspired for the day when women farmers would receive recognition for their work, own land in their names, and control market linkages for sale of their produce. Another issue that was frequently discussed was the continuing violence against women within their households and the absolute lack of avenues for them to seek justice. Entitlements such as ration cards, voter IDs, etc. and the means to access them in women's names became another point of action; she also shared the experience of demanding these entitlements through protests and public marches. Ms. Gita requested government officials for the following:

- Recognise women as farmers by registering land in their names and training them in agriculture technology and market linkages;
- Support capacity building of women farmers in gender equality and women's rights to help them become aware of their entitlements and basic human rights and help end discrimination between boys and girls.

Rural women in India's development context: Challenges and opportunities

Dr. Jean Drèze, Visiting Professor, Department of Economics, University of Ranchi acknowledged the testimonies of the three grassroots women leaders as aptly descriptive of the challenging contexts in which rural women live today. He referred to a worldwide scenario, where for centuries women have been forced into unfree labour, denied education, healthcare and nutritional rights and faced with mobility restrictions, discrimination and violence. These trends are manifested in alarming proportions in countries like India which rank particularly low on gender equality indicators such as women's labour force participation, literacy rates and sex ratio. For example, in India, the female labour force participation has consistently decreased, reaching an all-time low of 23 per cent, even as neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal have recorded 59 per cent and 80 per cent

participation, respectively. He cited the chief reasons for this situation to be women's overall economic dependence on men due to the absence of adequate education, skills, credit and employment opportunities.

Dr. Drèze reflected on national programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). He noted that in every village, there are at least 4 women workers who are gainfully employed by the government. These are: Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers, Aanganwadi workers (AWW), Aanganwadi supervisors and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM). As a result, nearly 2.5 million women have been employed across the country. This has been accompanied with improvements in health and education indicators as well. Dr. Drèze however questioned government representatives regarding why rural women were restricted to the post of AWW, and why negligible numbers were employed in higher posts such as Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) and supervisor. His key recommendation therefore was for there to be a provision of gender parity (at least 50 per cent) for increasing women's participation across all levels in the institutional architecture of government programmes. He cited the example of Tamil Nadu where women run the entire ICDS, from the level of the Secretary to CDPO to AWWs. In Bihar on the other hand, other than AWW, all positions are held by men.

Dr. Drèze shared an example from MGNREGA, which in numerous states has provided the first and only opportunity to women workers to find waged employment outside their houses. Women workers have also been empowered to participate in *Gram Sabhas* (village meetings of resident adults), meet other workers and organise themselves. Women's participation has in fact been consistently increasing in MGNREGA from 41 per cent in the year of its introduction to nearly 60 per cent after a decade. For these reasons, he went on to call MGNREGA a women's programme. He however, expressed his disappointment regarding a state led weakening of the programme, chiefly through minimum wage rates not increasing at par with market wages, reductions in compensations, delays in payments, etc. resulting in workers themselves losing interest in MGNREGA.

In summary, Dr. Drèze made the following key recommendations to improve rural livelihoods and waged employment for women workers:

1. Increased wage rates under MGNREGA;
2. Time bound payment under MGNREGA, in the absence of which introduction of the provision of adequate monetary compensation;
3. Distribution of individual job cards to women workers under MGNREGA for recognising them as workers in their own right;
4. Acceleration of opening up of individual bank accounts especially for women workers;
5. Adoption of parity principle in the institutional architecture of all government run programmes to ensure equality in women's participation at all levels of the administration.

Dr. Drèze concluded his presentation by reminding the gathering that women's economic empowerment can only be achieved if access to decent work is supplemented with access to basic rights and entitlements (such as job cards, ration cards, maternity benefits, crèche facilities, etc.), capabilities (such as education, skills, health care, etc.) and freedom from violence and

discrimination. It is therefore incumbent upon government programmes to adopt a more holistic approach to achieve the same.

Introduction to Mission Antyodaya



Mr. Amarjeet Sinha, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

Mr. Amarjeet Sinha, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India shared the contours of Mission Antyodaya and explained how it envisioned a reduction in deprivations levels of the most marginalised families in the country through targeted solutions for poverty eradication.

To begin with, he acknowledged that the testimonies by Ms. Lad Kunwar, Ms. Anita and Ms. Gita Devi, provided a critical insight into the complexities of India's rural economy and polity and that MoRD's vision for rural development was aimed at addressing the very challenges shared by the three grassroots women leaders. He then went on to explain the context and "raison d'être" behind introduction of Mission Antyodaya by providing a brief about the context of rural

development, which he said was in need of targeted interventions for poverty alleviation, and creative examples for provision of multiple livelihoods opportunities to the most marginalised.

Historical context: Mr. Sinha shared that the period between the 1980s and 2015 has been witness to a significant transition in education and health indicators for rural women. For instance, in 1986, nearly half of all girls above the age of 6 years were not even enrolled in schools. At present, there are no gender gaps in the enrolment figures up to class eight in both urban and rural areas. Similarly, marked changes are noted in the health sector wherein there has been a notable increase in institutional delivery, decrease in maternal mortality and fertility rates, etc. In this context of positive transformation, where women have made significant strides in education, nutrition and health, the next big challenge before the government is to increase women's workforce participation rate by providing multiple livelihoods opportunities to the poorest households.

Targeted interventions and provision of multiple livelihoods opportunities: Mr. Sinha cited examples of livelihoods opportunities for women workers in the present times. These included employment avenues in MGNREGA, ICDS, NRHM, construction sector, self-employment, etc. He shared instances of rural development from Jharkhand, wherein construction of wells under MGNREGA increased income generating opportunities for marginalised families and systematic agricultural cultivation led to noteworthy improvements in yields. It is in such scenarios, where government agencies need to play a role to create employment opportunities for the poor, and especially for women. For instance, how can the most marginalised economically benefit from state funded construction of wells? Similarly, how can the best market rates be assured for farmers in Jharkhand? Mr. Sinha suggested that these were among the many questions that Mission Antyodaya would aim at addressing and a

critical role here would be played by the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) in identifying the most vulnerable households.

The SECC provides ample data for identification of the landless, homeless, and unemployed persons. Mr. Sinha affirmed the importance of using this data as a basis to systematically target the most marginalised women workers in all government programmes so as to ensure that the privileged alone do not reap available benefits. Numerous avenues are possible to achieve the same. For instance, rural development programmes aimed at providing housing to the poor should ensure that they employ marginalised women as masons to undertake the massive construction work. States must employ more women as mates and in positions of decision making as has been done in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh. In the process, the government must aim at increasing the overall number of skilled workers as opposed to the current scenario where the unskilled workers are the vast majority.

Mr. Sinha envisioned that Mission Antyodaya through adoption of a variety of creative strategies and targeted interventions would aim at providing the most marginalised 20 million households in India with means to reduce their deprivation levels considerably and hoped that data from the next Census would be able to capture this transition. He concluded his intervention by thanking all representatives of the state governments and assured them that the Union government was keen to learn from the existing good practices which would be shared over the course of the two days.

Government of India's vision for gender transformative rural livelihoods

Mr. J.K. Mohapatra, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India acknowledged the myriad issues around gender equality and women's rights in rural India and identified women's right to land and women's labour force participation as two critical indicators of their empowerment that can be directly addressed by efforts of MoRD.

Mr. Mohapatra affirmed his support for women's land rights. He said that nearly 79 per cent of all rural women workers contribute directly to development in the agricultural sector, but less than 10 per cent own land. He acknowledged that without land ownership, women's empowerment cannot be achieved. He recounted that policy makers believed that tenancy would discontinue after relevant legislations were introduced. However, it continues and now the need for new legislations has become more than apparent. Radical solutions are required and ensuring women's land rights is the most critical. Mr. Mohapatra also identified the lack of access to credit as another significant roadblock to women's economic empowerment. He urged civil society, media and academia to advocate with state governments to speed up on both women's access to credit as well as their land rights.

The second key issue highlighted by Mr. Mohapatra was regarding the decreasing rate of women's labour force participation which has come down from 33 per cent to < 25 per cent over the last decade. One of the reasons for this phenomenon, he said, is the mechanization of agricultural activities that were hitherto done by women workers. These include sowing, reaping, etc. He suggested that existing programmes such as the MGNREGA and NRLM should be adequately scaled

up in order to compensate for the loss of employment that is taking place in rural India. MGNREGA in particular should focus on providing women workers with at least 100 days of employment.

Mr. Mohapatra concluded his address by reiterating the importance of accelerating government initiatives on livelihoods generation for creating meaningful work opportunities for marginalised women and men.

Key-note address: Centre staging women's rights in flagship programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development

Mr. Sudarshan Bhagat, Honourable Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India made note of the significant contributions being made by Indian women in spheres ranging from farming to information technology, manufacturing, engineering, science and development. The time is therefore now more urgent than ever, he said, to make government programmes more responsive to women's rights. In this endeavour, he acknowledged the support provided to MoRD by UN Women which has been working towards strengthening women's economic empowerment, ending all forms of violence and discrimination against women, institutionalising gender-responsive planning and budgeting and increasing women's participation in policy design, implementation and monitoring. He affirmed that with support from UN Women and its partner organisations, MoRD will be able to achieve gender parity in its policy and programme implementation.



Audience at the National Consultation

Mr. Bhagat said that the Government of India is committed to strengthening women's participation in all rural development programmes in the country. He cited examples of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and Indira Awaas Yojana (National Rural Housing Scheme), which through organising women into collectives for financial inclusion and employment generation, mandatory 33 per cent participation of women workers and prioritised house allotment to marginalised women, respectively, have been at the forefront of strengthening gender-responsiveness of rural development programmes.

Women's empowerment, Mr. Bhagat said, must be understood holistically. It must include emphasis on equality in women's participation in programmes, access to and control over resources and

assets, decision making, strengthening of their voice and agency in an environment which is free from discrimination and violence. Mr. Bhagat expressed that all government led development programmes should aim at achieving women's empowerment in a manner which builds these elements in policy design. Government programmes should also aim at facilitating development of domains which have traditionally been dominated by women. For this to take place, it is important for policy makers to understand women's contributions to the rural economy. Kitchen farming, bee keeping, orchard development, crafts work, and other traditional forms of livelihoods generation comprise the many domains which rural women workers dominate. These need special attention from government officials of rural development for integration into and further development through existing national programmes and schemes.

As a signatory to CEDAW, he said that the Government of India is committed towards gender equality and the Ministry of Rural Development is responsible for implementing monitorable actions to support rural women's rights by adopting a holistic approach to development. He concluded his address by expressing gratitude to the government of Jharkhand for hosting this important consultation and assured the women farmers and civil society representatives present that MoRD would take serious note of all recommendations which emerge from the two days and ensure that women farmers become equal stakeholders in rural development policies and programmes.

Jharkhand's experience of promoting women's rights in rural livelihoods

Mr. Nilkanth Singh Munda, Honourable Minister of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand thanked the Union government for organising the consultation in the state of Jharkhand and for bringing attention to the important subject of women's rights and gender equality. He affirmed that the experiences shared by Ms. Lad Kunwar, Ms. Anita and Ms. Gita are important reminders regarding the poor status that women workers in our country continue to experience. He identified poor state led policy as a leading cause behind the current situation. He suggested that one way to achieve an increase in women's economic empowerment would be through the introduction of state led livelihoods programmes that would target the inclusion of marginalised women. In this context, he quoted the example of MGNREGA and explained how Jharkhand had introduced measures to ensure timely payment of wages and introduce shelves of work in the agriculture and allied sectors which employ women workers in large numbers and therefore directly enhance their access to and control over resources. He assured the gathering that the Government of Jharkhand was committed to investing in sectors which affected women workers directly. He concluded his intervention by expressing a hope that the consultation would provide states like Jharkhand with a vision to achieve gender equality and eradicate rural poverty.



Mr. Nilkanth Singh Munda, Hon'ble Minister of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand

II. TECHNICAL SESSION I: WOMEN'S RESOURCE RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS

Introduction: The first technical session focused on two issues: (a) ensuring women's use, access, control and ownership of resources and entitlements and (b) recognizing, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid work by ensuring women's access to quality public services to reduce household subsistence and care responsibilities (e.g. water, sanitation, fuel, childcare); work sharing of agricultural and unpaid work with men; adoption of labour-saving technologies for drudgery reduction; and increased participation of women in the paid labour market.

Session plan:

Technical Session I: Women's Resource Rights and Entitlements	
Moderation: Ms. Kavitha Kuruganti, National Convenor, Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) and Member, Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM)	
Approach	Dana Kothi Khali Kyun? (Why is my grain bin empty?) Ms. Kusumben Nayak, Member, Devgarh Mahila Sangathan and Ms. Sejal Dand, Director, ANANDI
Application	Learnings from gender responsive sustainable rural livelihoods in Jharkhand Mr. N. N. Sinha, Principal Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand and Ms. Sheela Devi, Internal Community Resource Person and Member, Self Help Group, Jharkhand
	Learnings from the Village Performance Review Committee Model, Tamil Nadu Mr. Gagandeep Singh Bedi, Secretary, Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Tamil Nadu
	Learnings from Dashasutri, Maharashtra Ms. Suman Rawat, CEO, Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission
Special remarks	Towards gender and climate responsive rural livelihoods Ms. Nalini Nayak, General Secretary, SEWA Bharat and Founder Member International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF)
Discussion	
Take-away and Special remarks	Mr. Amarjeet Sinha, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

Opening remarks by session moderator: The session was moderated by Ms. Kavitha Kuruganti who is the National Convenor, Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) and Member, Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM), which is a national coalition of women farmers. Ms. Kuruganti referred to the High Level Committee (HLC) on the Status of Women set up by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India which had identified declining rural women's workforce participation, particularly from the agricultural sector and resulting out of a steady increase in landlessness, as a cause for concern. In the absence of sex-disaggregated data on land records in India, the adverse impacts of this problem continue to remain invisible. Another key issue flagged by the HLC report was that majority women report themselves as engaged in unpaid household work, captured under codes 92 and 93 of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). This is in fact erroneous given that these very women perform unpaid work on

agricultural farms. Despite the National Policy for Farmers, 2007 recognising unpaid female farm workers as farmers in their own right, the failure of government surveys to capture their work has translated directly into the state's inability to recognise, train and empower women farmers. A third issue put forth by Ms. Kuruganti highlighted the approach of state led programmes which continue to use women as instrumentalities for other development goals as opposed to centre-staging women's rights and their empowerment as an end in itself. She urged the government to adopt the feminist framework where power with, power within and power to women are the core guiding forces in the implementation of programmes. Low pensions and gender parity within line departments of government machineries were other key issues highlighted by Ms. Kuruganti, which need to be addressed at the earliest possible.



Panelists at Technical Session I: Women's Resource Rights and Entitlements

APPROACH: *The first presentation of the session outlined the approach which can be used to centre-stage women's rights in development programmes oriented towards strengthening resource rights and entitlements. The key issues addressed in the presentation were as follows: (1) structural issues that are critical to achieving gender transformative rural livelihoods; (2) mechanisms adopted by the current policy framework to address these issues and (3) existing gaps. The speakers additionally shared examples which focused on marginalised women, particularly single women, women from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and religious minorities.*

Dana Kothi Khali Kyun? (Why is my grain bin empty?)

Ms. Sejal Dand, Director, ANANDI commenced her presentation by highlighting the point that just as there are multiple facets to poverty, there are similarly multiple ways of understanding livelihoods. Income generation alone does not amount to livelihoods. Livelihoods is in fact a complex amalgamation of multiple aspects which together make existence possible. She cited the example of women farmers to explain this further. Women farmers are on the one hand responsible for food security of the entire nation.

However, they belong to the most malnourished families which are constantly at risk of slipping further into poverty by virtue of meeting their daily health, education and other survival related expenses. A prism of multi-dimensionality, she said, forces one to look at 'livelihoods' more holistically. For instance, the impact of decrease in state budgets on critical indicators like the rights to health, education, water, sanitation, etc. should be seen as inalienable adjuncts to livelihoods along with the rights to employment, housing, etc.

The other important issue is women's unpaid work and the lack of state recognition of this work. Ms. Dand talked about India being witness to a steady feminisation of agriculture and allied sectors as a result of increased male out-migration from rural to urban centres of production. In this context of rural women being burdened with the entire continuum of unpaid-underpaid-paid work, the two most critical resources that they possess are their labour and their time. What is required therefore is for the state to intervene in supporting rural women in better management of their labour as well as their time. It is common knowledge that rural women work in three or more shifts, from cooking, cleaning, to working in the fields and caring for the young. Ms. Dand explained that the current approach on rural livelihoods does not recognise this triple burden on rural women and is therefore unable to meaningfully engage with them either as economic actors or as social and political actors. Rural livelihoods policies which focus only on income generation will never be able to empower women unless they simultaneously address the multiple issues of their access to resources, capabilities and entitlements as well as the triple burden of unpaid-underpaid and paid work on them.

In conclusion, Ms. Dand cautioned policy makers from continuing to use household as the unit for planning and programme implementation. This approach is based on the assumption that there is inherent equality between all members of a given household, that the resources provided to a poor family are equitably distributed and that there is parity in opportunities and decision making. Ms. Dand asserted that this is a false and a dangerous assumption. What is meaningful from a women's rights lens is to instead view the individual as the unit for planning and development. She concluded her presentation by sharing that single women were the most adversely affected by family oriented state policies, given that they are neither recognised in their natal nor marital homes. This was illustrated further by Ms. Nayak who leads the Devgarh Mahila Sangathan (a women's collective based in Gujarat) and as a single woman has helped organise numerous other marginalised women in her region.



Ms. Kusumben Nayak, who leads the Devgarh Mahila Sangathan

Ms. Nayak described the key strategies used by Devgarh Mahila Sangathan to empower rural women. These included the creation of Block level facilitation centres where rural women are informed about their rights and where they are then supported in accessing entitlements such as BPL cards or registering land holdings in their names. In fact, among the first few struggles initiated by the collective was to ensure women's access to and control over non-timber forest produce. The collective also registers children and pregnant and lactating women in order to make the health department more responsive to nutrition and care concerns of the poor.

She shared that the biggest challenge faced by the collective is getting Dalit and Adivasi women's names listed under the BPL category. Ms. Nayak affirmed that organising women for awareness generation and access to entitlements has led to an increase in their participation in local welfare and development committees such as the *Pani Panchayat* (water council), *Gram Sabha* (village meeting of resident adults), Sanitation and Education Committees, etc. Ms. Nayak shared that single rural women continue to face institutionalised discrimination. She herself struggled for a decade to get a ration card, Aadhar card, and a bank account in her own name because she failed to submit a valid address proof, which is a requirement for all identity cards. Despite her efforts, even today she does not have a BPL card. She requested government officials to prioritise reaching out to single women who are the most vulnerable category among the poor.

APPLICATION: *Panellists were requested to share the key strategies and learnings from good practices on strengthening women's resource rights and entitlements which have been implemented in their states.*

Learnings from gender responsive sustainable livelihoods in Jharkhand

Ms. Ahilya Devi, Secretary, *Mahalaxmi Mahila Samuh* (Mahalaxmi Women's Self Help Group) and Mr. N. N. Sinha, Principal Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand presented the key strategies that have been used to ensure inclusion of marginalised women, especially single women, women from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and religious minorities in the rural development programmes of Jharkhand.



Ms. Ahilya Devi, Secretary, Mahalaxmi Mahila Samuh

Ms. Ahilya reflected on her experience of undergoing technical training on livestock management which helped her increase her annual income. She explained how traditional knowledge on goat rearing was supplemented with new theoretical and practical knowledge. Consequently, she began working as a Community Resource Person in order to spread awareness regarding nutritious feeding, cleanliness, vaccination and deworming, etc. and was able to prevent goat mortality by a significant percentage. She currently works with at least 500 people in her village and provides business support pertaining to sale and purchase of goats. Ms. Ahilya opined that organising women in SHGs is a critical first step for awareness generation and achieving sustainable income generation for poverty reduction.

Mr. Sinha proposed a model of convergence of all programmes for livelihoods development in the country. He appealed to the Honourable Minister and Secretary of the Department of Rural Development, Government of India to prioritise convergence of all wage employment and livelihoods programmes and initiate capacity building of staff and resource persons on the same. He highlighted the importance of prioritising women's participation in all livelihoods programmes, be it

MGNREGA or NRLM as these are important means to strengthen their leadership skills through organising and political participation, including in *Mahila Gram Sabha* (all-women's village meeting) as well as to increase their access to and control over resources.



Mr. N.N. Sinha, Principal Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand

He further acknowledged that rural development programmes need to take into account women workers' security related issues. He said that it was never the case that women did not work outside their homes. Traditionally, especially in states like Jharkhand, women have led farm and non-farm work outside their homes, albeit at high risks to their safety. This scenario must change. He urged rural development policy makers to understand livelihoods in a multi-layered manner by focusing on the interlinkages between emerging issues such as climate change and its effects on drought and decreasing agricultural yields. He then described some of Government of Jharkhand's many initiatives on drip irrigation, Systematic Rice Intensification technology, etc. which aim at addressing the ongoing agricultural crisis in the state.

In conclusion, Mr. Sinha suggested that government programmes should encourage women's recruitment and participation in non-gender stereotypical trades, i.e. domains which are traditionally dominated by men. He cited the example of tassar silk and lac production in Jharkhand which witnessed a significant increase after women began to partake in it. This approach, he believed, can be scaled up in other states as well.

Learnings from the Village Poverty Reduction Committee Model, Tamil Nadu



Mr. Gagandeep Singh Bedi, Principal Secretary, Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Tamil Nadu

Mr. Gagandeep Singh Bedi, Secretary, Department of Rural Development and *Panchayati Raj*, Government of Tamil Nadu presented the key learnings of the 'Village Poverty Reduction Committee' (VPRC) model which is being used as a vehicle to implement all poverty eradication programmes in the state and bring about rural women's empowerment.

Mr. Bedi began his presentation by opining that *Panchayat* and *Panchayat* level federations are inherently unable to serve the interests of marginalised sections of society because they largely comprise of socially upward communities.

In contrast, the VPRC is an independent body of 10-20 SHG members from among the targeted poor communities in a given village. 50 per cent membership comprises of women along with mandatory representation of every habitation (including the marginalised SC/ST habitations in a village), the differently abled, the aged and single women. Mr. Bedi suggested that this unique composition of the committee allows it to centre-stage the interests of the most marginalised in all its decisions. Furthermore, the ex-officio President of the VPRC is the *Sarpanch* (Village Council Head) of the *Gram Panchayat* (village council). S/he acts as the nominal head of the VPRC and ensures that there is synergy between the decisions taken by both bodies. In a new initiative, the government of Tamil Nadu has now directed *Panchayats* to provide the VPRC with an office which will be constructed in convergence with MGNREGA funds.

Introduced in the state of Tamil Nadu 10 years ago, the VPRC is formed through an elaborate exercise which comprises of what is called 'Participatory Identification of the Poor' (PIP). The PIP comprises of five key steps:

- (1) **Awareness generation:** A team of 5 experts spend 10-15 days in a village to share information about the VPRC with the most marginalised sections.
- (2) **Social mapping:** The team of experts visit every marginalised household and enquires about asset ownership.
- (3) **Wealth ranking:** The same team then ranks the household in order of relative poverty.
- (4) **Triangulation:** The assessment is then crosschecked by two separate teams which visit the village one after another.
- (5) **Display and approval:** Finally, the ranking is displayed in the village for a period of eight days followed by which it is presented before the *Gram Sabha* which then formally approves it.

Members of the VPRC undergo intensive training on roles, responsibilities, funds and accounts management, etc. An appraisal is then conducted by experts to evaluate the readiness of the VPRC to manage the functions assigned to it. Every instalment to the VPRC is released after social audit clearances for satisfactory management of the previous phase.

Among the key functions of the VPRC are the following:

1. Implementation of NRLM at the village level including disbursement of the revolving fund.
2. Formation of SHGs targeting marginalised women who have been left out from existing groups. These prioritise the elderly and the differently abled.
3. Planning for and funds disbursement of the revolving fund under an ongoing World Bank programme which is meant to be used by individual SHGs.
4. Identification of the most marginalised youth who are to be provided with capacity building and skills training under the ongoing Deen Dayal Upadhyay -Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) and the World Bank funds as opposed to assigning government officials with the said task. Additionally, all monitoring of the skills training is done by the VPRC. Funds are directly transferred to the VPRC accounts and they are vested with the responsibility of paying the training institutes.

5. Management of the Community Investment Fund provided to every village, along with oversight of loans and livelihoods assistance to the differently abled.
6. Management of funds for common livelihoods, i.e. physical equipment bought for common usage by SHGs.
7. Management of the solid waste management systems being implemented in a pilot phase in 2000 villages of the state: The government disburses funds to the VPRC for recruitment of sanitation workers from SHGs. The workers are entrusted with garbage collection from every household, which is segregated based on whether it is degradable or non-degradable and then buried into pits. Payment for the first 100 days is made through MGNREGA funds and supplemented with funds from the state government for the remaining duration.
8. Periodic presentation of all activities to the *Gram Sabhas*.

In conclusion, Mr. Bedi shared data in support of the VPRC model. The government of Tamil Nadu has created VPRCs in 10,300 of the total 12,000 *Panchayats* in the state; through which INR 6.82 billion has been channelled for assistance to more than 340,000 differently abled and marginalised individuals, skills training to vulnerable sections, and for support to common livelihoods groups, etc.

Learnings from Dashasutri, Maharashtra

Ms. Suman Rawat, CEO, Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM) presented the 'Dashasutri' (ten organising principles of self-help) model which has been adopted by MSRLM. The model comprises of ten key parts pertaining to financial and institutional management of rural women led SHGs along with their social, economic and political empowerment. The first five elements of the model are common across the country and include the organising of women into SHGs who meet regularly and undergo training and practical experience for promotion of savings, lending, repayment and book keeping.



Ms. Suman Rawat, CEO, Maharashtra Rural Livelihoods Mission

The five additional aspects integrated into the Dashasutri model include the following:

1. **Health, hygiene and sanitation:** Implemented in convergence with the Swachh Bharat (Clean India) Mission, this aims at achieving construction of *pakka*² toilets, provision of clean drinking water, capacity building on personal and family hygiene including menstrual hygiene, and ensuring malnutrition free SHGs. For instance, Osmanabad district has implemented modules on solid liquid waste management, menstrual hygiene, etc. and Jarna district employs SHGs to work as *Nirmal Doots* (grassroots activists) for awareness generation under the Swachh Bharat Mission.

² A structure constructed with materials that are resistant to wear, such as bricks and stone.

2. **Education:** The SHGs are tasked with ensuring 100 per cent enrolment in schools, and participation in school management committees. For instance, in Nandurbar district, 18 villages came together and contributed INR 500 each to develop local schools, and in Osmanabad district, 2 villages were saturated with e-digital classrooms. Both initiatives were entirely led by SHGs.
3. **Active participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions:** Women's participation is encouraged in not just *Gram Sabhas* (village meetings) but also smaller councils like ward *sabhas* (meetings), *mahila sabhas* (all-women's village meetings), etc. to build their political agency and leadership.
4. **Access to entitlements and schemes:** SHG meetings are used as a platform to generate demand for access to entitlements and schemes. This is formalised and submitted to PRIs and the complete coordination is supervised at the level of cluster managers.
5. **Sustainable livelihoods:** MSRLM ensures focus on sustainable livelihoods through strengthening of existing and traditional livelihoods as well as additions to the basket of income generating activities that women workers can undertake.

Ms. Rawat shared that Dashasutri is being visualised as a vehicle for organising women for access to rights and entitlements as well as poverty eradication under NRLM. It allows planners and policy makers to understand women's everyday livelihoods concerns as well as aspirations and accordingly address them through appropriate solutions. It also allows them to view both poverty reduction and livelihoods as multi-dimensional entities where aspects like health, education and other capabilities play roles which are as important as access to decent wages and credit. What the model has additionally made clear is the extent to which state led entitlements are available for the most marginalised rural women, including problems related to access and discrimination, existing social hierarchies, etc. thereby enabling administrators to think of solutions. Owing to its success, the model has now been scaled up in non-intensive *Talukas* (administrative Blocks) of the state.

In conclusion, Ms. Rawat summarised the impact of the Dashasutri model as having bridged the gaps between the administration and marginalised rural women. It has positively influenced the lives of rural women in economic, social and political empowerment, and mainstreamed gender concerns in rural development policy initiatives.

Special address: Towards gender and climate responsive livelihoods



Ms. Nalini Nayak, General Secretary, SEWA Bharat and Founder Member, International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF) talked about the need to work towards both gender and climate responsive rural livelihoods. In her presentation, she cited examples of increasing marginalisation of women workers in coastal communities of India in the face of growing mechanisation of the fishing trade and as a result of depletion of their access to common resources. Consequently, she shared relevant guidelines and good practices as a way forward.

Ms. Nalini Nayak, General Secretary, SEWA Bharat and Founder Member, International Collective in Support of Fish Workers

Ms. Nayak briefly captured the development of marine fisheries and its effect on women, in the context of sustainable development. She stated that modernisation of the fishing trade has led to rapid depletion of resources, destruction of habitat and detrimental changes in the coastlines. This has in turn adversely affected women's access to fish, making the exercise more labour intensive for them. It has undermined their voice and agency and made them dependent on men who dominate the mechanised fishing trade and who now require liquid cash to manage their vocation. As a result, problems such as dowry and son preference which were hitherto alien in coastal regions of southern India are now rampant.

A simultaneous development in coastal regions has been the depletion of women's resource rights. Ms. Nayak talked about resources such as land, fisheries and forests which are central for the realization of human rights of the poor. With growing industrialisation, giant corporations are increasingly capturing common resources. For instance, inland fishing is being poached by the aquaculture industry. This is at the expense of rural poor's access to local fish which is a source of nutrition and income. With this context, Ms. Nayak urged governments to clearly define marginalised people's access rights to natural resources and shared details of relevant guidelines which mandate state agencies to do so. For example, the voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure in land, fisheries and forests and the voluntary guidelines on small scale fisheries both highlight the need for the state to acknowledge women's contribution to rural livelihoods as well as secure their tenure rights to commons.

Ms. Nayak described inter-departmental convergence strategies as one way to implement the above mentioned guidelines. She cited numerous examples of possible convergence of the Departments of Fisheries with that of Forestry for preservation of mangrove forests which are critical for the regeneration of fish; with the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) and Central Institute of Fisheries Technology for enhancement of women friendly technology development; and with Departments of Rural Development for establishing linkages through NREGS for guaranteeing employment to women fish workers.

The presentation was concluded with her sharing good practices and examples of convergence from different Indian states. These ranged from the recognition of women as fish workers in state programmes (Kerala), provision of transportation to fish vendors (Kerala and Tamil Nadu), Infrastructure support to fish markets (Goa), waste management and provision of lighting through biogas plants (Kerala) and inclusion of women in boards of cooperatives in inland fisheries (Bihar). She urged MoRD to adopt similar measures to recognise women as workers, secure their access to common resources and provide them with tools and resources for economic, political and social empowerment.

DISCUSSION AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS: *A rich discussion took place where women farmers, members of civil society, representatives of line departments got an opportunity to pose questions as well as make suggestions for ensuring rural women's access to and control over resource rights and entitlements.*

Questions and suggestions: A large number of questions were on whether MoRD has in place a coherent strategy for achieving gender equality. This question was posed with the context that patriarchy is as old as civilisation and it would take long-term strategic, institutional and technical support to outdo it in rural India. Specific references were made to MoRD's approach of targeting families as beneficiaries and thereby failing to address intra-household inequality, be it in MGNREGA or NRLM. It was highlighted that MoRD must look within at the limited capacities of its administrators and functionaries at different levels of the institutional machinery to address gender justice concerns. Similarly, the lack of sufficient availability of sex-disaggregated data was highlighted as an example of MoRD's inability to monitor gender responsiveness of its policies and programmes. Administrators were requested to develop a gender policy for rural development and issue relevant advisories to support gender-responsive implementation and monitoring of all its programmes.

Response: The administrators acknowledged the suggestions provided by the audience and shared some examples of convergence which holistically addressed women's empowerment. They explained that a country wide network of SHGs is being created as a means to build collective strength of marginalised rural poor not just for financial inclusion but in order to address issues ranging from violence, access to resources, voice and agency, etc. In fact, SHGs formed under NRLM are now being used as a unit for awareness generation on health, water and sanitation, etc. by multiple departments. For instance, INR 20 million was spent by the state government of Tamil Nadu to train women on self-protection and this money was channelized through SHGs. Anti-dengue, pro-sanitation related awareness is being spread through existing SHGs, again in Tamil Nadu. These and other examples show that collective strength of SHGs can be used to bring about social, political and economic change in rural India, and can lead to positive development outcomes, as well as initiate the process of transforming gender relations.

Question: With specific reference to states of North-East India and mountain regions, MoRD was asked whether a climate responsive policy was in place to mitigate risks associated with global warming. Examples regarding the adverse effects of climate change on agriculture and consequently on marginalised rural women's livelihoods were shared to illustrate this point further.

Response: Panellists shared that planning for rural development programmes is expected to be bottom up. The Union government encourages planning for central resources to be done at the *Panchayat* level. The North East Region (NER) and mountain states should therefore submit proposals for climate-responsive strategies which would be unique to their regions. However, the panellists agreed that handholding of local governments should to be done by the Union/state government and a conducive environment created to address climate change.

Question: Members of the audience requested the panellists to share their views on MoRD's approach to providing small scale livelihoods solutions to rural women in the face of increasing budget cuts on the one hand and capturing of commons by corporates on the other hand.

Response: With regard to larger macro-economic questions, the panellists suggested that existing democratic institutions in the country must be made use of. This included evidence based research, legal action, and mass people's movements. Constituency based pressures have the power to bring change and encourage policy makers to create pro-poor programmes in the face of competing demands on public resources.

Marginalised women's resource rights

Questions and suggestions: A number of questions were raised on how the government can ensure marginalised landless women's control over individual landholdings, commons and access to entitlements in keeping with existing legislations such as the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) and *Panchayat* (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) and national programmes such as the Indira Awaas Yojana and Swachh Bharat Mission. Suggestions were made to use SHGs under NRLM as a vehicle to ensure distribution of commons and individual landholdings for livelihoods generation and to introduce mechanisms to ensure and monitor that only quality land is distributed to women.

Responses: Mr. Amarjeet Sinha, Additional Secretary, Rural Development, Government of India acknowledged that land was a key resource for marginalised households, especially single women and promised to share the valuable suggestions and discussion points with the department of land resources for further action. He reiterated the need to have mechanisms in place to ensure that houses constructed under IAY were not just allotted but also registered in the name of women. He conceded that while Tamil Nadu has shown exemplary leadership in this regard, other states were yet to introduce relevant measures. He assured the audience that suitable advisories would be issued to address the matter.

Panellists used the opportunity to provide a plethora of examples from across the country to showcase innovations that enabled women's access to landholdings and commons. For instance, Andhra Pradesh uses the *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana* (MKSP) as a vehicle to provide landless women with land on lease. Tamil Nadu has issued an advisory to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) encouraging them to lease commons to marginalised families for livelihoods generation. West Bengal, under Operation Barga has made it possible for landless farmers to be registered as tenants and access rights and entitlements which were hitherto limited to landowners alone. Kerala has introduced a number of initiatives to support women's access to not just land, but housing and other entitlements. States like Himachal Pradesh do not allow purchase of land by non-residents in order to protect land rights of residents.

Marginalised women's right to employment under MGNREGA

Question and suggestion: MoRD was requested to issue an advisory to all states to allow SHGs to take up the role of Programme Implementing Agencies (PIAs) under MGNREGA. This is the only way to enable the voice of the most marginalised women to be included in planning and monitoring processes under the programme.

Response: As per the MGNREGA legislation, the PRIs are required to be PIAs for only 50 per cent of the prescribed works. State governments can therefore innovate and enable SHGs to become PIAs for the remaining 50 per cent. However, experts have voiced concerns regarding the same biases being espoused by SHGs as seen in PRIs.

Marginalised women's rights to livelihoods under NRLM

Question and suggestions: Members of the audience acknowledged that significant progress had been made under NRLM, however they asked administrators to explain whether the poorest of poorest women were being reached through the SHG movement or not. This point was raised under the premise that the NRLM machinery perhaps reached only around 10 per cent of the rural female population in the country and empirical evidence suggests that the poorest women barely have the means to save or collectivise. Audience members also asked whether specific strategies were being devised to end violence and discrimination against women under NRLM, especially since this is critical for achieving gender equality. In this context, it was suggested that the elaborate NRLM institutional machinery be used as a means to provide legal literacy to rural women at the *Taluka* (administrative block) level through creation of resource centres.

Response: Mr. Atal Dulloo, Joint Secretary, MoRD highlighted that NRLM emphasises not just on the creation of SHGs, but also on building a cadre of Community Resource Persons (CRPs) for achieving social change. CRPs and other such trained personnel in fact have led many a programmes in different states on issues ranging from ending violence against women to curbing human trafficking and spreading awareness on healthcare and nutrition. This is being achieved through implementation of convergence strategies. Panel members shared examples from Maharashtra (MSRLM) where SHG members in one instance had adopted a strategy of curbing alcohol distribution to curb violence against women. The steps taken to realise this goal developed in an organic manner and the NRLM institutional machinery through the SHGs provided the necessary institutional framework for implementation. It was also shared that the focus of NRLM has hitherto been on formation of SHGs, institutional building and capacity building. In the next phase, creation of livelihoods opportunities and mobilization of credit for marginalised rural workers with special focus on women will be prioritised.

TECHNICAL SESSION II: WOMEN'S SECURITY AND FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE

Introduction: The session was designed to draw linkages between sustainable rural development and women's security, freedom from gender-based violence and discrimination and from forced labour forms such as manual scavenging, trafficking and bonded labour that violate women's rights as well as the ability to achieve their full livelihood potential.

Session plan:

Day 2: 4 November 2015	
Technical Session II: Women's security and freedom from violence	
Moderation: Dr. Ritu Dewan, President, Indian Association of Women's Studies	
Approach	Mainstreaming gender in rural development policy for women's security Dr. V Rukmini Rao, Executive Director, Centre for World Solidarity
Application	Engendering livelihoods institutions for women's security Ms. Suneeta Dhar, Executive Director, JAGORI and Member, Civil Society Advisory Group, UN Women and Mr. Avijit Mallik and Ms. Tukleswari Devi, PRADAN
	Learnings from the experience of Nari Adalats in Jharkhand Ms. Sahida Khatoun and Dr. Smita Gupta (SPD), Jharkhand <i>Mahila Samakhya</i> Society
	Ending violence against women through sustainable rural livelihoods Dr. N. Vijaya Lakshmi, CEO, Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotions Society- JEEVIKA
Discussion	
Take-away and Special remarks	Dr. Govind Kelkar, Senior Advisor, LANDESA

Opening remarks by session moderator: The session was moderated by Dr. Ritu Dewan, President, Indian Association of Women's Studies. In her opening remarks, she stated that violence against women should not only be looked at as a social issue, but also as an economic construct. Violence is a factor of numerous economic issues including women's access to decent work, education, mobility, health, reproductive and sexual rights, etc. These issues must be contextualised within the paradigm of privatisation and neo-liberal policies being practised by the governments in power. She cited the example of how increasing privatisation of transportation has led to a greater incidence of violence against women in public spaces in both urban and rural India. In her research on access to state roads in Jalna District of Maharashtra, Ms. Dewan was able to establish a direct link between an increase in violence against women and privatisation of transport services. Where state roads had been constructed with World Bank funds, loan recovery was sought by levying toll taxes on commuters resulting in an increase in fares of state run vehicles. Marginalised women were thereafter forced to use cheaper modes of private transport and expose themselves to sexual harassment and violence. She used this example to demonstrate that non-ownership, non-access and non-availability of resources render women vulnerable to violence.

APPROACH: *The panel discussion began with an overview of the linkages between gender-transformative rural livelihoods and issues of gender based violence and discrimination.*

Mainstreaming gender in rural development policy for women's security

Dr. V. Rukmani Rao, Executive Director, Centre for World Solidarity highlighted the linkages between women's security (economic, social and cultural) and bodily integrity and provided different examples of how despite important work undertaken on women's rights to freedom from discrimination and violence, recent state policy on rural development was reversing the gains made. Citing examples from the work undertaken by the Deccan Development Society, Dr. Rao referred to how over thirty years, women in Telangana had worked towards achieving food and seed security.

Their dream was to transform their villages into a world seed heritage site. However, recent government policy in favour of creating industrial parks and privatisation has destroyed their access to resources as well as their life's work. This scenario, she said, is slowly turning into increasing instances of threats to women's bodily integrity in the face of growing scarcity of resources. Another example she talked about was that of the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), a Government of Andhra Pradesh undertaking, under whose umbrella, rural women had been organised into SHGs, and as Gender Resource Persons. A Gender Fund was created to help resolve nearly 50,000 cases of violence and discrimination, spread awareness on women's rights, curb child marriage and domestic violence and protect women's property rights. The recent turn of political events in Andhra Pradesh have led to budget cuts under SERP and resulted in a disintegration of this elaborate network which was created to advance women's rights. These examples, she said, go on to show state funded structural violence against women which not only threaten their resource rights and bodily integrity but also destroy grassroots movements and women's life's worth of work.

Dr. Rao concluded her presentation by advising NRLM to recruit para legal workers tasked with spreading awareness on issues of violence against women and their rights to resources such as land and commons. She elaborated on the linkages between the two by citing how numerous cases of 'witch hunting' continued to take place in the country and that these were the starkest examples available to demonstrate violent dispossession of marginalised women from their property and resources. Para legal workers were critical also in a context where natural resources such as fisheries, etc. is being increasingly colonised by large corporations and where the marginalised are being forced to undertake bonded labour. Lastly, Dr. Rao urged the government to devise strategies to work with marginalised men. At present, female members of SHGs often take loans to support their husbands' or sons' enterprises. Majority of the credit is therefore being used by men but channelled through women. Instead, she requested governments to directly target men for micro-credit and encourage women SHG members to use their savings and loans for enterprises run by them.

APPLICATION: Administrators and representatives of civil society organisations shared key strategies, learnings and gaps from their experiences of implementing livelihoods programmes which centred on the issue of women's freedom from violence and discrimination.

Engendering livelihoods institutions for women's security

Ms. Suneeta Dhar, Executive Director, JAGORI and Mr. Avijit Mallik, PRADAN addressed the key challenges, learnings and opportunities in the UN Women Fund for Gender Equality- PRADAN and JAGORI project on engendering livelihoods institutions. They also presented the process of arriving at a shared vision for gender equality within communities by PRADAN which is a mainstream livelihoods organisation and JAGORI which is a women's rights organisation. Ms. Tukleswari Devi, PRADAN shared her experiences from being part of this process.



Audience engage panelists with questions

Ms. Dhar shared JAGORI and PRADAN's work on gender-responsive livelihoods undertaken with 80,000 women with support from UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality. While three decades of interventions had resulted in an increase in food security and women's incomes, instances of violence and discrimination against them in families as well as within communities remained high. A major reason behind PRADAN's inability to address this issue was the lack of focus on securing women's physical security in its ongoing livelihoods programmes. JAGORI thus began its intervention through a number of capacity building exercises on gender-responsive planning and programme

implementation covering the issues of patriarchy, masculinity, and violence. The target of these trainings comprised of office bearers of PRADAN, a majority of whom were men. Through these trainings, a shift within PRADAN's framework of livelihoods was achieved. A continuum of security, from food and nutritional security to women's physical security, bodily integrity and freedom from violence, was adopted as the new conceptual guideline. This transformation resulted in the adoption of different gender-responsive issues being undertaken by the staff in the field.

In this context, Mr. Avijit Mallik described the creation of *Nari Adalats* (women's courts), with support from PRADAN, which are responsible for spreading awareness on issues of violence against women and providing legal support to survivors. Ms. Tukleswari Devi, a member of *Nari Adalat* who received para-legal training, described how she used street theatre as a medium to spread legal awareness among marginalised rural women on issues pertaining to their rights and entitlements. These ranged from women's access to healthcare, menstrual hygiene, political participation, control over resources and sharing of unpaid care and farm work and ending gender based discrimination.

Another critical point made in the presentation was on the subject of state responsibility towards women's physical security. Ms. Dhar asserted that violence against women was not only a "woman's issue", but a state issue for which it should be held accountable. While a lot of work on spreading awareness and providing legal support to survivors of violence is being undertaken by autonomous women's organisations and civil society groups, state support for the same has been negligible. It is therefore critical for state agencies like the NRLM which are involved in advancing livelihoods rights of rural women to establish mechanisms which provide security, shelter, counselling and other necessary infrastructure to female survivors of violence. It is time, she concluded, that state programmes understand that freedom and autonomy are critical to women's livelihoods rights and the goal of sustainable rural livelihoods would be achieved only when sufficient budgetary and human resources are directed towards securing women's security and bodily integrity.

Learnings from the experience of Nari Adalats in Jharkhand

Dr. Smita Gupta, State Programme Director, Jharkhand *Mahila Samakhya* and Ms. Sahida Khatoon, SHG member, *Mahila Samakhya* described how the work of *Nari Adalats* in Jharkhand has led to greater sensitisation on issues concerning gender based violence among government functionaries and institutions in rural development. Dr. Gupta introduced *Mahila Samakhya* and the processes followed in the programme to achieve empowerment of women. A flagship programme of the Government of India, *Mahila Samakhya*, employs a bottom up approach which helps women in identifying their own issues and the methods of resolving them.

She described how the issue of violence against women is addressed in all the meetings of the SHGs and federations. Individual cases which cannot be solved at the SHG level are brought before the *Nari Adalats*. Given the success of the programme in conflict resolution, cases from the State Commission for Women and police stations are also reviewed by the *Nari Adalat*. Citing examples, she highlighted how most instances of violence faced by women resulted from disputes pertaining to private property ownership. Ms. Khatoon shared her experience of working holistically on women's health and education issues by addressing the related concerns of mobility, sexual violence and reproductive health. Her work has led to an increase in women's participation in *Gram Sabhas* as well as greater awareness in their rights and entitlements.

Ending violence against women through sustainable rural livelihoods

Dr. N. Vijaya Lakshmi, CEO, Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society- JEEViKA shared the key strategies and challenges in the implementation of the organisation's pilot programme on gender. JEEViKA works on livelihoods enhancement and vulnerability reduction. In the pilot programme, it employed a participatory action tool developed together by ANANDI, UN Women and *Mahila Samakhya* which consisted of modules on social construction of gender and women's identity, women's access to their rights and entitlements under public programmes and women's social, political, cultural and occupational roles.

Under the pilot, trainers from *Mahila Samakhya* were employed by JEEViKA to use the ANANDI- UN Women modules to build capacities of a cadre of Gender Community Resource Persons (CRPs). The

CRPs in turn implemented the modules in different village level SHGs. Social Action Committees (SAC), formed under the JEEViKA model, were used as platforms to engage on the modules, build solidarity and undertake social action. A multitude of issues emerged relating to control over public resources, private ownership of land, participation in *Panchayats*, freedom from violence in both domestic and public spheres. The role of the Gender CRPs was clearly defined to include implementation of the modules at the SHG levels, handholding at the SAC level and support for social action undertaken by rural women as a follow up to the awareness generation process.

Dr. Lakshmi concluded her presentation by sharing that the success of government programmes targeting economic development depends on their ability to achieve women's social and political empowerment, especially in the context of Bihar where caste and gender based discrimination remain structurally ingrained. The UN Women-ANANDI gender module provided JEEViKA with an excellent opportunity to understand the constraints faced by rural women and evolve strategies to support them holistically. She expressed the hope to be able to continue and expand this programme in the whole state.

Special remarks

Dr. Govind Kelkar, Senior Advisor, LANDESA summarised the discussions that took place in the session and placed them in the larger context of rural livelihoods. She reiterated the significance of rural development programmes to necessarily focus on women's access to and control over resources such as commons and individual landholdings and public goods such as water for livelihoods purposes. She informed the audience of the backlash and violence that marginalised women faced in their attempts to access these resources or exert their voice. In the absence of institutional support for women's security and bodily integrity, forms and instances of violence are likely to only increase. An emphasis on ending gender based violence and discrimination should therefore be at the centre of all policy discourse on livelihoods both at the Union and state levels. One clear starting point for this is gender related capacity building of administrators at all levels to enable them to design and implement programmes which address women's rights and for ensuring that all existing modules for engagement with rural women are gender-responsive and address issues of their safety, rights and entitlements.

DISCUSSION: *A short interactive round followed the panel discussion where members of the audience expressed their support for greater efforts towards gender mainstreaming in livelihoods programmes. This is summarised below.*

Gender pilots versus gender-responsive national programmes

The question of engendering all national policies and programmes in a manner similar to that demonstrated by JAGORI and PRADAN was raised. Ms. Dhar responded to this by stating that it is high time administrators quit pilot and small scale 'engendering processes'. Her experience of working with PRADAN taught her that it is necessary to change the institutional architecture and vision of an organisation and make it gender sensitive. For instance, the central work of PRADAN is

now to work towards gender equality. This is a remarkable shift in approach for a mainstream livelihoods organisation. She advised the NRLM machinery to adopt learnings from the PRADAN experiment especially since there is enough documented evidence to show that this strategy has worked well in addressing rural women's rights based issues including gender based violence and discrimination.

TECHNICAL SESSION III: WOMEN'S VOICE AND AGENCY

Introduction: The session was designed with the objective to discuss approaches and good practices on strengthening rural women's leadership, voice and agency through recognition of their identity as economic actors, as workers, as citizens, etc., and extension of support for institutional strengthening.

Session plan:

Technical Session III: Women's Voice and Agency	
Moderation: Ms. Rakhi Sehgal, National Trade Union Initiative	
Approach	Organising women workers for rural development: Strategies, challenges and opportunities Ms. Anuradha Talwar, General Secretary, National Trade Union Initiative
Application	Engendering Rural Employment Policy Ms. Arundhati Dhuru, Convenor, National Alliance of People's Movements and Ms. Pushpa, Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh
	Feminist organising and education for women's livelihoods: The experience of Mahila Samakhya Ms. Gita Rani Bhattacharya, SPD, Assam Mahila Samata Society
	Engendering governance for the right to rural livelihoods Ms. Valsala Kumari, Executive Director, Kudumbashree, Government of Kerala
Discussion	
Take-away and Special remarks	Ms. Sarada Muraleedharan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India

Opening remarks by session moderator: Ms. Rakhi Sehgal, Member, National Trade Union Initiative introduced the session by highlighting global trends wherein erstwhile paid labourers in government enterprises are now being engaged as volunteers. This allows the agencies to flout workers' rights as prescribed under national labour laws. She gave the example of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation which originally employed permanent sanitation workers who were later sub-contracted and reduced to an unorganised work force. More recently, in the face of growing unionisation, the government categorised existing contractors as NGOs and the workers as volunteers, thereby bringing sanitation workers outside the purview of labour laws. A large number of these workers are women. In another example, she talked about the cadre of ASHA workers which has been organising to demand for inclusion in the organised labour force and for minimum wages. She further reflected on examples of recent strikes in tea estates of Kerala where women workers have been demanding equal wages. Each of these examples, she said, goes to show that women continue to remain invisible as economic agents, as workers and as citizens. A majority of their work has historically remained either unpaid or under-paid and now in the context of globalisation, where opportunities for formal work are increasingly shrinking, the effects on women workers is far more adverse.

APPROACH: *The linkages between questions of voice and agency and rural women’s livelihoods were explored in the introductory presentation. Key gaps and learnings from the current policy framework and the key principles for organising rural women workers were described.*

Organising women workers for rural development: Strategies, challenges and opportunities

Ms. Anuradha Talwar, General Secretary, National Trade Union Initiative began her presentation by acknowledging that a lot had changed with regard to women’s empowerment in the last thirty years. Indicators pertaining to women’s literacy, opportunities for decent work, access to healthcare and political representation had all shown a significant improvement. However, she asserted that these changes were taking place in a development context that supported the feminisation of unskilled and drudgery filled labour. As a result, women workers are increasingly replacing men in factory floors where they are forced to work longer hours for fewer wages and under poorer working conditions. Budget cuts in health and education are adding to their unpaid work and forcing them to pay for basic entitlements and capabilities. In the absence of a policy on women’s unpaid work within this economic paradigm, she affirmed, achieving women’s agency has become more challenging despite improvements in their human development indicators.

A major roadblock in enhancing women’s agency, in Ms. Talwar’s opinion, was the approach adopted by government agencies towards their organising. She pointed out that women’s organising is seen as an instrument for rural development and not as a goal in itself. She cited the example of NRLM where rural women’s meagre savings are being used to fund marketization of the rural economy with no promise of significant returns to them. This approach is self-defeating and is evident in the lack of efforts made to include women in the organised work force or ensure their participation in decision making, etc. This is also symbolic of structural discrimination against women. Ms. Talwar opined that government agencies should not be in the business of organising rural women at all and that breaking them into small SHGs in fact impeded their abilities to unite and demand citizenship rights.



Participants in interactive question answer session with panelists

She concluded her intervention by suggesting strategies for organising women. The first step is to create a conducive environment for the formation of autonomous women’s organisations. Alongside this, efforts should be made to engage with male workers and encourage women workers’ participation in mainstream efforts at organising. The government must play a supportive role and protect women’s organisations through recognition and consultation on issues of development.

APPLICATION: Examples of strategies for organising women by government and non-state agencies were presented by panellists. Key gaps and learnings were shared to demonstrate how women's collectives have facilitated their access to rights and entitlements.

Engendering rural employment policy

Ms. Pushpa, Member, Vanangana, Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh and Ms. Arundhati Dhuru, Convenor, National Alliance of People's Movements made a joint presentation and shared successful strategies for organising marginalised women, especially single women, and women from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and religious minorities.

Ms. Pushpa shared the experiences of working in the community on awareness generation regarding the right to work under MGNREGA with special emphasis on ending caste and gender based discrimination, ensuring the availability of entitlements such as crèche, etc. at worksites and institutionalising non-gender stereotypical works for women such as masonry, etc. This began with organising women through group meetings, street plays, etc. and building consensus on common demands. Collectives then approached local government authorities to present the challenges faced by women workers which caused their participation rates to remain low. After a long period of struggle and negotiation including presentation of social audit reports to administrators, women workers were able to participate in MGNREGA, access entitlements and earn their wages for gender-responsive and non-gender stereotypical shelves of work such as masonry, hand pump repair, etc. One challenge which remains, she said, is the continuing environment of suspicion with regard to women's ability to work. This "institutionalised suspicion" together with preference for men to undertake technical tasks creates "glass ceilings" for women. The only way, in her opinion, to overcome this situation was to introduce policy measures and mandate participation of women in technical and higher skilled shelves of work.



Audience at the National Consultation

Ms. Dhuru's presentation highlighted the point that government programmes are premised on the assumption that women workers have a singular identity. As a result, the livelihoods opportunities created for them are restricted within the confines of their immediate households. This includes care work, goat rearing, poultry and other such trades. She asserted that women have historically engaged in all kinds of work, be it in the farms or in trades. Women have multiple identities as workers both inside and outside the household. It is only when this premise is challenged that government programmes will truly be able to stop the undervaluation and devaluation of women's

work, especially unpaid work. She cited the example of MGNREGA which although emerged from a long drawn labour movement, has now become an official instrument to devalue women's work. For instance, in Kashmir, women are paid INR 400 to clean rice as per market wages. In such a context, in order to work under MGNREGA, women are forced to undervalue their market worth considerably. Another critique of MGNREGA is the institutionalisation of a dependency structure, where in the absence of muster rolls in vernacular languages, it is difficult for poor women to even become aware of their enrolment in the programme. Ms. Dhuru concluded her presentation by requesting government officials to undertake a review of all rural development policies and vision statements from a gender lens in order to identify the loopholes which remain.

Feminist organising and education for women's livelihoods: The experience of *Mahila Samakhya*

Ms. Gita Rani Bhattacharya, State Programme Director, Assam Mahila Samakhya made a presentation on the key strategies implemented by *Mahila Samakhya* in Assam for achieving women's security in livelihoods. Ms. Bhattacharya first presented the history, objectives and structure of *Mahila Samakhya* which has been instrumental in organising nearly 200,000 marginalised rural women in the state, generating awareness on their rights and entitlements including freedom from violence and discrimination, facilitating their participation in development programmes and monitoring relevant indicators. She shared examples of *Mahila Samakhya* Assam's work against practices such as 'witch hunting' and domestic violence. She then shared examples of interventions in promoting women's participation in non-traditional and non-gender stereotypical trades. These included creating all-women farm management committees which until then had been a male bastion, wetland management, marketing and sale of traditional arts and crafts, collective farming, etc. She concluded her presentation by reiterating the importance of providing institutional support to women's collectives in order to enable them to fight structural discrimination and violence. *Mahila Samakhya* has led the way in this regard, she said, and must therefore be nurtured to protect women's rights in rural India.

Engendering governance for the right to rural livelihoods

Ms. Valsala Kumari, Executive Director, Kudumbashree, Government of India presented the key strategies, challenges and learnings from her experience of heading Kudumbashree. She opined that bringing gender relations to the centre stage of any discourse on 'governance' is critical for achieving inclusion and equality. The main factors for gender-responsive governance include an equitable division of labour between men and women, contesting and erasing the binaries of the public and the private, ensuring women's access to 'power with'/'power within' and 'power to' and encouraging horizontal and non-hierarchical relations. Kudumbashree, she said, has evolved to adopt these guiding principles in its work.

The strategies used by the organisation for building sustainable livelihoods include the following:

- ***Institution building***, including financial institutions for the poor.

- **Capacity building** for the poor including creation of a cadre of community trainers /CRPs and a network of training groups for facilitation.
- **Convergence** between departments at the *Panchayat* level.
- **Diversified and sustainable livelihoods** for enhancing incomes of the poor by upgrading vocational and entrepreneurial skills and creating opportunities for wages/self-employment.

Ms. Kumari shared some old and emerging challenges in implementation of the above strategies. These pertained to increasing privatisation of markets resulting in shrinking of the consumer base for poor producers. Given the broader economic context, she conjectured that long term solutions for this development needed to be found in order to protect the rights of poor producers as well as consumers. She concluded her presentation by sharing the key learnings from her experience of implementing the programme. These included the need for the state to be an active stakeholder in promoting livelihoods of the poor, handhold young producer groups and individual entrepreneurs and implement convergence strategies in partnership with financial institutions, NGOs, private agencies, etc. at the *Panchayat* level in order to sustain community development and support.

Special remarks



Participants at the National Consultation

Ms. Sarada Muraleedharan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India reflected on the strategies shared by the panellists. She also shared the processes to institutionalise principles of organising in national policy on rural development and governance in order to increase women's voice and agency.

Ms. Muraleedharan opined that public policy has failed to fully recognise women's rights to full citizenship. This has resulted in women's labour becoming invisible and consequently their rights as workers being denied. As a result, women's empowerment is rarely looked at as a goal in itself,

instead it is treated as an instrument to reduce poverty, achieve development and other economic changes. The first step in achieving gender-justice in rural and urban development would therefore be to recognise women as full citizens, only then would public policy evolve to view women's empowerment as a goal in itself and not as a mere means to other goals.

She then went on to discuss the role of government agencies in the "business" of organising women and the critique of this approach. Pointing out that when it comes to questions of scale and recognition, government participation becomes inevitable. For instance, in the case of Kudumbashree, the "raison d'être" behind the organisation was to recognise women's citizenship rights and organise them to sustain participation in local governance institutions. With this spirit, Kudumbashree implemented 'neighbourhood groups' where women were encouraged to share their social, political and economic concerns and then use the platform of the *Gram Sabhas* to take

discussions forward. Drawing a parallel with women workers enjoying multiple identities of citizens, economic agents and individual rights holders, etc., she encouraged audience members to question why government should not facilitate women's organising for accessing their rights and entitlements for which they would have to necessarily engage with public agencies.

She concluded her intervention by sharing strategies for institution building and organising women, which she said is key to strengthening their voice and agency. These included: democratisation within institutions in a manner that they are equipped to handle questions of power hierarchies and gender inequity, introducing accountability mechanisms such that institutions are able to reach the most marginalised rural single woman in a village and also enjoy independence from external pressures from political establishments, cross-learning between and within programmes through exchange of learnings especially between institutions of the stature and scale of *Mahila Samakhya* and NRLM including sharing of para workers, trainers and experts, and periodic monitoring of gender responsive targets followed by course correction, if need be. In the event that these and other elements are ignored, she averred that most government agencies would be nothing more than micro-credit institutions.

DISCUSSION: The question and answer session which followed the panel discussion reflected chiefly on whether the government should intervene in organising women for empowerment and what exactly its role should be. The key issues are summarised below.

Should the government participate in organising women?

The panel discussion presented divergent views on government participation in organising women. On the one hand, it was expressed that organising is an organic process and state intervention not only instrumentalises the process of collectivisation but also builds in a dependency factor thereby limiting people's abilities to critique and oppose the state. On the other hand, it was suggested that organising can take place in myriad ways. If the state apparatus offers one such opportunity with the objective to enable access to entitlements and rights, then it should be seen as supplementary to existing organic movements and not in contradiction.



Audience members in discussion with panelists

In the discussion that followed, audience members cited examples of existing SHG collectives, ASHA cadres, ANM and AWW cadres to support the view that government agencies should get involved with rural women for ensuring access to rights and entitlements. However, other participants opined that SHGs should not become the unit for ensuring access to rights and entitlements, which by definition are universal. Women outside the existing network of SHGs should be able to access their rights with the same ease and efficiency as others who are part of government funded networks.

What the current NRLM approach is doing in other words, is creating a class of beneficiaries who can avail their rights only on the condition of membership of SHGs. It was shared that this is nothing but a superimposition of urban power structures onto rural India which has created further divisions in an already deeply stratified village society.

How should the government participate in women's organising?



Audience interacts with panelists

The discussion also reflected on what the role of the government should be as far as organising women is concerned. Panellists responded to comments by reiterating that it is wrong to assume that the poor do not have the potential or the awareness to organise. The reason there is not as much organising today is because the poor live under a constant fear of death and violence if found organising by government agencies. This is where the government should intervene and ensure that its agencies support poor people organising organically. Numerous examples were cited with regards to what the government can do. For instance, where labour laws are not being implemented, the government can invest in strengthening the labour enforcement mechanisms.

Where violence against women is on the rise, the

police can be directed to lodge First Information Reports (FIR) and the courts be better equipped to close pending cases. Where the marginalised remain resource-less, commons and individual landholdings can be distributed. There are therefore a multitude of solutions which can be adopted by governments to bring about genuine development for the vulnerable sections of society without necessarily getting into the business of forming SHGs and positioning it as the only route to access services and entitlements.

CLOSING PLENARY: ROADMAP AND WAY FORWARD

Introduction: The concluding session comprised of opening remarks by the moderator, Dr. Pam Rajput and special remarks by Mr. Alok Rawat, Member, National Commission for Women. This was followed by a summarising of key messages from each of the technical sessions by the respective representatives. Dr. Pam Rajput then invited representatives of the Union and state governments to respond to the key messages and share their learnings from the two-day consultation. The session ended with a vote of thanks to all panellists and participants.

Session plan:

Closing Plenary: Roadmap for Way Forward	
Moderated by Dr. Pam Rajput, Chairperson, High Level Committee on the Status of Women appointed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India	
Key learnings from the technical sessions	Session representatives
Policy responses to the presentations and roadmap for way forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Alok Rawat, Member, National Commission for Women• Mr. G. Muralidhar, Lead, Capacity Building, NRLPS, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India• Ms. Sarada Muraleedharan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of <i>Panchayati Raj</i>, Government of India• Mr. Paritosh Upadhyay, CEO, Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society
Vote of thanks	Dr. Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, Representative, UN Women

Opening remarks by session moderator: Dr. Pam Rajput, Chairperson, High Level Committee on the Status of Women appointed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India moderated the closing plenary. She began her opening remarks by reiterating that women must be viewed as individual rights bearing citizens. This would then translate into recognising women as workers and in the context of agriculture, as farmers. Related to this is the urgency of securing women farmers' rights to resources and particularly land. Another key issue is that of recognising, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid work and evolving a national strategy to ensure that all rural development programmes address it. She cited the adoption of inter-departmental convergence strategies and gender related capacity building of the entire institutional architecture of MoRD and state departments as critical for achieving the immediate concerns of rural women workers. Erstwhile programmes such as *Mahila Samakhya* were noted as important vehicles for supporting both convergence and capacity building.

Special address: Mr. Alok Rawat, Member, National Commission for Women gave the special address and acknowledged that women's empowerment should be viewed holistically in conjunction with their rights to health, education, sanitation, decent work, livelihood opportunities, freedom from violence and discrimination, etc. He congratulated the participants of the two-day consultation

for bringing up a wide range of issues and encouraged government administrators to incorporate the valuable suggestions.

SUMMARY PRESENTATION OF THE THREE TECHNICAL SESSIONS: *The moderators of the three technical sessions summarised and presented the key issues discussed during each session. These were later developed into a Charter of Key Asks and submitted to the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.*

Key Asks from the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India

1. Inclusion of gender equality and women's rights as an explicit goal in the vision statement and objectives of rural development programmes such as the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and Indira Awaas Yojana.
2. Mechanisms for building gender-related capacities of all rural development functionaries at all levels.
3. Time bound plans for ensuring collection of sex-disaggregated data at all levels and across indicators for all social groups (scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward castes, religious minorities, single women and women headed households).
4. Dedicated plans and resources in rural development programmes and schemes for (1) creating public infrastructure and essential public services for reducing women's drudgery and unpaid work and for (2) increasing women's ownership and control over resource rights (land, water, seeds, commons, forests, technology, finance).
5. Strategy and target set by the Ministry of Rural Development for gender parity for employment of women at all levels, especially in skilled work that is created through key flagship programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme; the National Rural Livelihoods Mission and the Indira Awaas Yojana.
6. Creation of a cadre of women workers for rural development in every village such as Gender Community Resource Persons (CRPs)/ women leaders organised under rural development programmes and a range of interventions by NGOs, for support to women workers and women farmers through awareness of women's human rights, information and facilitating access to entitlements and institutions, technical knowledge and support for victims of violence.
7. Time bound institutionalisation of strategies for achieving convergence between the departments of Rural Development and Agriculture, Panchayati Raj, Finance, Water and Sanitation and Women and Child Development/Social Welfare.
8. Time- bound plans for systematic and continued engagement with all women who have been organised in collectives beyond those created under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission.

Response from the Union and state governments: Dr. Pam Rajput requested representatives of the Union and state governments who were part of the panel and in the audience to respond to the afore-mentioned key asks and share their learnings from the two-day consultation.

Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India: Mr. G. Muralidhar, Lead, Capacity Building, NRLPS, MORD expressed gratitude at the numerous important suggestions shared by the panellists and the audience members. He assured the gathering that NRLM was determined to use its machinery to eradicate rural poverty and achieve gender equality. In this regard, NRLM has already initiated a process to institutionalise gender sensitization of all its officials through an iterative process. He shared that the SHG network under NRLM is envisaged by planners as a foundation for social change including women's political empowerment, voice and agency, leadership, and ending violence and discrimination. This is being achieved based on local requirements through inter-departmental convergence strategies. He additionally agreed with the suggestions that existing pilots need to be scaled up at the national level and women's land rights should be centre-staged in policy and programme design.

Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India: Ms. Sarada Muraleedharan, Joint Secretary, MoPR said that the philosophy of gender equality needs to be structured into all existing programmes and contextualised based on socio-economic-political identities of different regions. This can take place through varied convergence oriented programmes. She elaborated on the issue of convergence by describing its different forms: i.e. convergence of financial and human resources; of strategies; of processes and procedures; and of institutions. She opined that the way forward for achieving gender transformative strategies is to intensify pilot programmes and nurture existing schools of practice in a convergence mode.

Responses from state governments: Mr. Paritosh Upadhyay, CEO, State Livelihood Promotion Society, Government of Jharkhand identified Maharashtra's Dashasutri programme under NRLM and innovations like the adoption of a gender-responsive Schedule of Rates developed under MGNREGA in Uttar Pradesh as examples that he would try and replicate in his state. He also acknowledged the contribution of the *Mahila Samakhya* Programme in advancing women's empowerment in rural regions of the country. Mr. Kuldeep Sidha, Additional Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of Jammu and Kashmir acknowledged the support of UN Women in strengthening gender responsive implementation and monitoring of MGNREGA in the state through an ongoing action research. He assured the gathering that he would implement gender-responsive schedule of rates and shelf of works under the programme at the earliest possible. Representative, Government of Punjab reiterated the importance of relooking at the issue of women's land rights. In Punjab, a third of land under commons is reserved for members of scheduled castes. This should be extended to include other categories of marginalised women. Additionally, given that farming has become a highly technical profession, efforts need to be made by the government to build skills of women farmers in both production and marketing as well as create tool banks. Dr. Rizvi, Joint Director of Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission mentioned that he was particularly inspired by the Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra models of implementation and would explore the formation of village committees comprising of marginalised SHGs as well as introduce the five additional elements under Dashasutri.

The vote of thanks for the two-day consultation was given by Dr. Rebecca Tavares, Representative, UN Women.

Annexure 1: Agenda

09:00- Registration and Tea

Day 1: 3 November 2015	
Opening Plenary: Transforming Approaches to Rural Livelihoods 10:00-12:30	
Welcome and introductory remarks	Dr. Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, Representative, UN Women
Setting the context for gender and livelihoods (<i>facilitated by: Ms. Sejal Dand, Director, ANANDI</i>)	
<i>Garima abhiyaan</i> : Right to freedom from violence for dignified livelihoods	Ms. Lad Kunwar, Feminist Activist and Liberated Manual Scavenger, Chhattarpur, Madhya Pradesh
<i>Mere haq</i> : Reflections from the field on women's resource rights and capabilities	Ms. Anita, Mate, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh
<i>Meri pehchaan mahila kisan</i> : Identity, voice and agency	Ms. Gita Devi, Community Resource Person (BRLPS-JEEViKA), Muzzafarpur, Bihar
Rural women in India's development context: Challenges and opportunities	Dr. Jean Drèze, Visiting Professor, Department of Economics, University of Ranchi
Introduction to Mission Antyodaya	Mr. Amarjeet Sinha, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
Government of India's vision for gender transformative rural livelihoods	Mr. J. K. Mohapatra, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
Keynote address by Honourable Chief Guest: Centre-staging women's rights in flagship programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development	Shri Sudarshan Bhagat, Honourable Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India
Special remarks: Jharkhand's experiences of promoting women's rights in rural livelihoods	Shri Nilkanth Singh Munda, Honourable Minister of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand
Lunch 12:30-13:30	
Technical Session I: Women's Resource Rights and Entitlements 13:30-17:00	
Moderation: Ms. Kavitha Kuruganti, National Convenor, Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) and Member, <i>Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch</i> (MAKAAM)	
Approach	Dana Kothi Khali Kyun? (Why is my grain bin empty?) Ms. Kusumben Nayak, Member, <i>Devgarh Mahila Sangathan</i> and Ms. Sejal Dand, Director, ANANDI
Application	Learnings from gender responsive sustainable rural livelihoods in Jharkhand Mr. N. N. Sinha, Principal Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand and Ms. Sheela Devi, Internal Community Resource Person and Member, Self Help Group, Jharkhand
	Learnings from the Village Performance Review Committee Model, Tamil Nadu Mr. Gagandeep Singh Bedi, Secretary, Department of Rural Development and <i>Panchayati Raj</i> , Government of Tamil Nadu
	Learnings from Dashasutri, Maharashtra Ms. Suman Rawat, CEO, Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission
Special remarks	Towards gender and climate responsive rural livelihoods Ms. Nalini Nayak, General Secretary, SEWA Bharat and Founder Member International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF)
Discussion	
Take-away and Special remarks	Mr. Amarjeet Sinha, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
Tea 17:00-17:30	
Cultural evening organised by the Jharkhand State Rural Livelihoods Mission 17:30	

Day 2: 4 November 2015	
Technical Session II: Women's Security and Freedom from Violence 09:30-11:30 Moderation: Dr. Ritu Dewan, President, Indian Association of Women's Studies	
Approach	Mainstreaming gender in rural development policy for women's security Dr. V Rukmini Rao, Executive Director, Centre for World Solidarity
Application	Engendering livelihoods institutions for women's security Ms. Suneeta Dhar, Executive Director, JAGORI and Member, Civil Society Advisory Group, UN Women and Mr. Avijit Mallik and Ms. Tukleswari Devi, PRADAN
	Learnings from the experience of Nari Adalats in Jharkhand Ms. Sahida Khatoun and Dr. Smita Gupta (SPD), Jharkhand <i>Mahila Samakhya</i> Society
	Ending violence against women through sustainable rural livelihoods Dr. N. Vijaya Lakshmi, CEO, Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotions Society- JEEVIKA
Discussion	
Take-away and Special remarks	Ms. Govind Kelkar, Senior Advisor, LANDESA
Tea 11:30-11:45	
Technical Session III: Women's Voice and Agency 11:45-14:00 Moderation: Ms. Rakhi Sehgal, National Trade Union Initiative	
Approach	Organising women workers for rural development: Strategies, challenges and opportunities Ms. Anuradha Talwar, General Secretary, National Trade Union Initiative
Application	Engendering Rural Employment Policy Ms. Arundhati Dhuru, Convenor, National Alliance of People's Movements and Ms. Pushpa, Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh
	Feminist organising and education for women's livelihoods: The experience of Mahila Samakhya Ms. Gita Rani Bhattacharya, SPD, Assam Mahila Samata Society
	Engendering governance for the right to rural livelihoods Ms. Valsala Kumari, Executive Director, Kudumbashree, Government of Kerala
Discussion	
Take-away and Special remarks	Ms. Sarada Muraleedharan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of <i>Panchayati Raj</i> , Government of India
Lunch 14:00-15:00	
Closing Plenary: Roadmap for Way Forward 15:00-17:30 Moderated by Dr. Pam Rajput, Chairperson, High Level Committee on the Status of Women appointed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India	
Key learnings from the technical sessions	Session representatives
Policy responses to the presentations and roadmap for way forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Alok Rawat, Member, National Commission for Women • Mr. G. Muralidhar, Lead, Capacity Building, NRLPS, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India • Ms. Sarada Muraleedharan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of <i>Panchayati Raj</i>, Government of India • Mr. Paritosh Upadhyay, CEO, Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society
Vote of thanks	Dr. Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, Representative, UN Women

Annexure 2: List of Participants

S. N.	Name	Organization
1	Dr. Rebecca Tavares	UN Women
2	Ms. Lad Kunwar Bai	Rashtriya Garima Abhiyaan
3	Mr. Sudarshan Bhagat	Minister of State (RD), Gol
4	Mr. JK Mohapatra	Secretary, MoRD, Gol
5	Mr. Amarjeet Sinha	Additional Secretary, MoRD, Gol
6	Ms. Gargi Sharma Goel	MoRD, Gol
7	Mr. Pramod Kumar	MoRD, Gol
8	Ms. Kavitha Kuruganti	ASHA and MAKAAAM
9	Ms. Kusumben Nayak	Devgarh Mahila Sangathan
10	Ms. Sejal Dand	Anandi
11	Mr. Gagandeep Singh Bedi	Secretary, RD & PR, Tamil Nadu
12	Ms. Suman Rawat	CEO, MSRLM, Maharashtra
13	Ms. Nalini Nayak	SEWA, Kerala
14	Dr. Ritu Dewan	Indian Association of Women's Studies
15	Ms. V. Rukmini Rao	Centre for World Solidarity
16	Ms. Suneeta Dhar	JAGORI
17	Ms. Govind Kelkar	Landesa
18	Mr. Avijit Malik	Pradan
19	Ms. Arundhati Dhuru	National Alliance of People's Movements
20	Ms. Gita Rani Bhattacharya	Assam Mahila Samakhya Society
21	Ms. Valsala Kumari	Kudumbashree
22	Ms. Sarada Muraleedharan	MoPR, GOI
23	Ms. Pam Rajput	Centre for Women's Studies and Development
24	Mr. Atal Dulloo	MoRD
25	Mr. JN Singh	PHD Chamber
26	Mr. D. Bhattacharya	Indian Chamber of Commerce
27	Mr. Bandi Singh	Satyam Seva
28	Mr. Shankar Kumar	Galaxy India
29	Mr. Arvind Kumar	Social Activity for human rights
30	Mr. Raajdeep	R.D.D
31	Mr. Rajib Mohanty	JSLPS
32	Mr. Santosh K Jaiswal	BBPC
33	Mr. MM Singh	Minister of State (RD), Gol
34	Mr. Deepak	Prabhat Khabar
35	Mr. Brajendra	R.D.D.
36	Ms. Pooja	Srijan Foundation
37	Mr. Ram Rai Banra	JSLPS
38	Ms. Sheela Devi	JSLPS
39	Mr. Anik Bara	Mahila Samakhya, Ranchi
40	Ms. Silna Tigga	Mahila Samakhya, Ranchi
41	Mr. D. Sengupta	SRI, Ranchi
42	Mr. D. Panir	SRI, Ranchi
43	Mr. HN Mishra	FXB India Suraksha
44	Ms. Rizwana Soni	Mahila Samakhya Society
45	Ms. Shahida Khatun	Mahila Samakhya Society

46	Mr. Shekhar Singh	Srijan Foundation
47	Mr. AS Bhullar	ADC (DEV), Punjab
48	Mr. PK Singh	JSLPS
49	Suman Kispotta	JSLPS
50	Mr. Shantanu Garg	JSLPS
51	Ms. Shakuntla	SRI, Ranchi
52	Mr. Abhay Kumar	JSLPS
53	Mr. Nitish Kumar Sinha	JSLPS
54	Mr. Praveen Srivashetty	Digital Green
55	Mr. Ranjeet Gupta	Pradan
56	Mr. Chandrashekhar Tiwari	Cohesion Foundation
57	Mr. Shashi Barla	Samvad
58	Ms. Capila Ekka	JMSS, Ranchi
59	Ms. Anita Kujur	JMSS
60	Ms. Pritiwanty Nag	JSLPS
61	Ms. Anita Lakra	JSLPS
62	Ms. Ciciliya Gari	JSLPS
63	Ms. Punam Devi	JSLPS
64	Mr. Sanjay Kumar	JSLPS
65	Mr. Vivekanand Mehta	JSLPS
66	Mr. Anil Kumar	JSLPS
67	Ms. Novela J Murmu	JSLPS
68	Ms. Anita	JSLPS
69	Ms. Deoki Devi	JSLPS
70	Mr. Vijay Kumar Mishra	JSLPS
71	Mr. Lalu Kashyap	RDD
72	Ms. Kalpana Dayala	Action Aid
73	Mr. Byomkesh	Action Aid
74	Ms. Purabi Paul	Shramjivi Mahila Samiti
75	Ms. S Seethalakshmi	RSV
76	Ms. Rupa Dhanorkar	JSLPS
77	Ms. Aarti Singh	JSLPS
78	Ms. Rita Kujur	Mahila Samakhya Society
79	Mr. Raveesh Sinha	JSLPS
80	Mr. VK Pandey	JSLPS
81	Ms. Sita Mamidipudi	Anandi
82	Mr. Deepu Kumar	JSLPS
83	Mr. Anil Kumar	JSLPS
84	Ms. Minakshi	JSLPS
85	Mr. G. Muralidhar	NRLM
86	Mr. Debasish	JSLPS
87	Mr. Khalid Hussain	JSLPS
88	Ms. Jyoti Kumari	JSLPS
89	Ms. Asha Devi	JSLPS
90	Mr. Amit Jain	JSLPS
91	Mr. Arif Akhtar	JSLPS
92	Ms. Shanti Mardi	JSLPS
93	Mr. Jean Dreze	Ranchi University

94	Ms. Ahilya Devi	JSLPS
95	Ms. Seema Singh Munda	JSLPS
96	Mr. Rajesh Kapoor	Cohesion Foundation
97	Mr. Dibyendu Sarkar	Commissioner, West Bengal
98	Kr. Vikash	JSLPS
99	Ms. Hekali Zhimimo	Secretary, RD
100	Dr. Isha Prasad Bhagwat	Aajeevika
101	Ms. Richa Audichya	Janchetna Sansthan, Rajasthan
102	Ms. Rakhi Sehgal	NTUI
103	Ms. Archana Singh	Pradan
104	Mr. JR Sarangal	Aajeevika
105	Mr. M. Latifi Tasir	DPO, J&K
106	Ms. Aarti Bais	Swarajaymitra, Amravati
107	Ms. Basanti Bahen	Kasturba Mahila Utpan Mandal, Kosani
108	Dr. Binni	SHARC, Hazaribag
109	Ms. Burnad Fathima Natesan	Society for Rural Education
110	Mr. KK Sidha	AS, Jammu & Kashmir
111	Ms. Manjula Dey	Pragati
112	Mr. Anil Kumar	PWESCR
113	Ms. Shilpa Vasavada	WGWLO
114	Ms. Vinuben S Bhoya	Cohesion
115	Ms. Jyoti Rani	
116	Mr. Brijlal	
117	Ms. Anita	
118	Ms. Pushpa	
119	Ms. Gita Devi	
120	Mr. Shakti Upadhyay	
121	Ms. Vijaya Lakshmi	
122	Ms. Anuradha Talwar	
123	Ms. Archana Tiwari	
124	Mr. Anup Kumar Lal	
125	Ms. Tohra Begum	
126	Mr. AK Singh	
127	Mr. Kaushik	
128	Ms. Smita Gupta	
129	Anil Kumar Singh	
130	Mr. Rohit Upadhyay	
132	Ms. Saumya	
133	Mr. Rajeev Ranjan Pandey	
134	Mr. Amardeep Singh Bains	
135	Mr. AK Dasgupta	
136	Mr. Swadheen Patnaik	
137	Kumari Rakhi	
138	Ms. Yoshita Ravi	
139	Ms. Chandana Deogharia	
140	Ms. Reshma Kashyap	
141	Ms. Punam Lakra	
142	Ms. Mona Dave	

143	Ms. S. Ashalatha	
144	Dr. Farid Rizvi	
145	Ms. Aditi Vyas	
150	Ms. Kalpana Sathish	
151	Ms. Shubhaja Singh	
152	Ms. Keerti	
153	Ms. Rinku Kumari	
154	Mr. Ranjan	
155	Mr. Deepak Upadhyay	
156	Ms. Divya Tigga	
157	Mr. Arindam Mishra	
158	Ms. Badi Bai	
159	Ms. Suneeta Kashyap	
160	Mr. Sanjay Kr. Das	
161	Ms. Purnima Mukherjee	
162	Ms. Ratna Kumawat	
163	Mr. Diwakar Kumar	
164	Mr. Praveen K Mishra	
165	Mr. Samit Kumar	
166	Mr. Bishnu C Parida	
167	Ms. Geeta Gairola	
168	Ms. Sonam	
169	Ms. Gouri P Singh	
170	Mr. Madan Kumar	