

National Rural Livelihood Mission's (NRLM) Grassroots Empowerment: Examining the Functioning and Constraints of Self Help Groups and their Federations in Punjab

Sukhvir Singh, Sanjay Kumar and Jasdev Singh

Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

Abstract

The study, conducted in Gurdaspur district, Punjab, for the reference year 2022-23, investigated the operations and limitations of stakeholders in the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). Employing a multi-stage sampling technique, the research focused on two Cluster Level Federations (CLFs), four Village Level Organizations (VLOs), and 20 Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The study's results highlighted the pivotal roles of CLFs and VLOs in mobilizing households into SHGs, facilitating credit access, providing training, and fostering entrepreneurship. The study emphasised support mechanisms such as Community Investment Funds (CIF) and Revolving Funds (RF) for SHGs' financial management and explored diverse training programs, empowering rural communities and enabling SHGs in economic activities. Examining borrowing and saving patterns, it underscored SHGs' financial responsibility and delved into distinctive procurement and marketing strategies, emphasizing local engagement for community-driven development. Finally, the study identifies implementation challenges in NRLM, including inadequate financing, limited market access, insufficient training, and family cooperation issues. Additionally, the study proposes a policy strategy for NRLM enhancement prioritizes community empowerment, sustainable rural development, streamlined loans, strengthened financial resources, digital literacy, and increased government engagement.

Keywords: Functioning, Constraints, National Rural Livelihood Mission, Self Help Groups, Cluster Level Federations, Village Level Organizations

JEL classification: I38, O12, O16, Q12

Introduction

Despite India's remarkable economic growth, nearly 25.7 per cent of its rural population remains below the poverty line in accordance with the poverty assessments presented by Tendulkar Committee's 2009 estimates (Alagh, 2010). This persistent rural poverty underscores the need for effective poverty alleviation strategies. Historically, India has implemented several poverty alleviation programs, starting with the Community Development Program (CDP) in the early days, which shifted its focus to agriculture in the 1960s, leaving marginalized communities behind (GOI, 2016). Subsequent efforts, such as the Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) and Marginal Farmers and Agriculture Laborers (MFAL) Agency Program, primarily benefited land-owning farmers. In 1980, the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) was launched to promote self-employment among the poor (Swain, 2021). The

emergence of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in 1992, centred around trust-based lending, marked a significant shift in empowering marginalized communities (Shanthi, 2021). IRDP evolved into the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY) in 1999, with a stronger focus on SHGs for poverty reduction. However, these efforts faced challenges, including NGO support withdrawal and funding cuts, leading to SHG dysfunction (Bora *et al.*, 2022). A systematic review revealed regional disparities, weak bank linkages, and the absence of SHG federations. To address these issues, the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) was introduced in 2011, emphasizing capacity building, sustained financial support, and a decentralized approach based on specific needs rather than the Below Poverty Line (BPL) list (Rai and Rohtagi, 2019). NRLM represents a holistic effort to empower impoverished individuals and communities, aiming to combat rural poverty effectively. NRLM emphasizes 'communitization' a shift in program implementation that relies on the capabilities of impoverished women. The goal

is for community institutions to take charge of the NRLM Program, supported by State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs). NRLM's institutional framework starts with Self-Help Groups (SHGs), each comprising 10-20 women from the same community (Kumar, 2016). SHGs foster self-help, cooperation, and collective efforts for social and economic development, encourage savings, and offer essential financial services, including credit. SHGs are then federated at the village level, forming Village Level Organizations (VLOs). Typically, VLOs consist of 5-20 SHGs, focusing on specific habitations or villages. VLOs strengthen unity, amplify the collective voice, enhance bargaining power, provide a platform for joint initiatives, improve market access, and expedite information dissemination. At a higher level, Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) are established at the block level, encompassing 5-30 VLOs. CLFs function similarly but on a larger scale, fostering intensified collective efforts, enhancing market access, providing structured capacity building, simplifying financial services, promoting convergence, and elevating the significance of these federations within their local context (NRLM, 2017). In the backdrop of this, the present study has been taken to examine the intricate operations and challenges faced by Self Help Groups (SHGs) and their associated federations at both village and block levels.

Data Sources and Methodology

This study was conducted to investigate the operational aspects of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and their Federations at the village and cluster levels as part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in Punjab. To gather data, we focused on the 23 districts in Punjab that had implemented the NRLM scheme until the 2022-23 fiscal year, under the Punjab State Rural Livelihood Mission. A comprehensive list of NRLM intensive blocks for each district was obtained from the official website of Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India (Anonymous, 2022). Based on the data, Gurdaspur district has been purposively selected, which boasted the highest number of NRLM intensive blocks in Punjab. Within Gurdaspur, we randomly chose the Dhariwal block as our study area. We then obtained a detailed list of SHGs and their federations from the Block Mission Management Unit in Dhariwal block. Our research methodology involved a multi-stage sampling approach. From the selected block, we randomly sampled two Cluster Level Federations (CLFs). Within each CLF, we further randomly sampled two Village Level Organizations (VLOs). Finally, from each VLO, we selected five Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for a comprehensive in-depth analysis.

In the fiscal year 2022-23, data was collected through personal interviews using structured questionnaires. Three sets of questionnaires were employed: one for officials from each sampled Cluster Level Federation (CLF), another for officials

from each sampled Village Level Organization (VLO), and the third for SHG leaders. The information gathered from the interview schedules was organized into a master dataset, facilitating subsequent processing and analysis. The analysis primarily involved the use of descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and simple averages. This approach enabled us to comprehensively assess the functioning of SHGs and their federations within the NRLM program and draw meaningful conclusions from the data.

Results and Discussion

This study evaluates the NRLM's structure and practical implementation in rural development, emphasizing the aspects of functioning and constraints. It assesses how the mission's design translates into action, focusing on Cluster Level Federations (CLFs), Village Level Organizations (VLOs), and Self Help Groups (SHGs).

NRLM's Organisational Framework

NRLM's core strategy revolves around economically empowering disadvantaged women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and their federations. These SHGs, predominantly women-led, are the linchpin of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (Mishra, 2017). They're organized into federations at the village and block levels, with SHGs collectively selecting 10 members for representation, including office bearers and general members. The study revealed, the average count of SHGs federated within Village Level Organizations was nine, while Cluster Level Federations accommodate an average of 23 Village Level Organizations, encompassing a total of 230 SHGs.

Meetings at the Village Level Organizations (VLOs) and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) are instrumental in fostering collaboration and resource sharing among SHGs. The study's finding underscores that all VLOs hold regular monthly meetings. Notably, 50 per cent of CLFs hold monthly meetings, while the remaining 50 per cent convene bi-weekly. SHG composition trends (Table 1) reveal evolving preferences. Initially, all SHGs had at least 10 members. At present, 70 per cent prefer 10-12 members, while larger groups (12-14 members) decreased from 50 per cent to 25 per cent. One SHG had over 14 members initially, but none remain. This highlights SHGs' adaptability responsiveness to evolving requirements.

Furthermore, the criteria for SHG formation emphasize local community collaboration. All 20 SHGs (100%) were formed with members from the same village and neighbouring households, prioritizing vulnerable households, single women, women-led households, persons with disabilities, landless individuals, and migrant laborers. This participatory approach underscores NRLM's commitment to community-driven empowerment

Table 1. Distribution of sampled SHGs according to the number of members, Punjab, 2022-2023

SI No.	Members size categories	Number of SHGs	
		At start	At present
I	< 10	-	1 (5.00)
II	10-12	9 (45.00)	14 (70.00)
III	12-14	10 (50.00)	5 (25.00)
IV	> 14	1 (5.00)	-

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the per centage of SHGs in each category.

Provision of Community Investment Fund (CIF)

Community Investment Funds (CIF), a key facet of National Rural Livelihood Mission, invigorate impoverished regions. These funds flow through VLOs and CLFs, fuelling innovative projects and poverty alleviation efforts. The Data analysis in Table 2 revealed CIF's effectiveness with VLOs receive an average of 4.5 lakh rupees and maintain a 55 percent recovery rate, amounting to Rs. 2.5 lakh per VLO. Similarly, CLFs receive around 38 lakh rupees, disburse the same to federated VLOs, and maintain a 55 percent recovery rate, equivalent to Rs. 21 lakh per CLF. The consistent 55 percent recovery rate at both levels underscores the financial mechanism's efficacy.

Table 2. Community Investment Fund receipt, disbursement, and recovery from sampled Village Level Organisations and Cluster Level Federations, Punjab, 2022-2023 (Rs. in Lakhs)

Sr No	Particulars	VLO	CLF
I	Average received amount	4.5	38
II	Average disbursed amount	4.5	38
III	Average recovered amount	2.5	21

Provision of Revolving Fund (RF)

The NRLM's Revolving Fund serves a dual role, providing crucial support to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for improving their financial and institutional management capabilities while also helping build a strong credit history. Table 3 revealed that 95 percent of SHGs (19 out of 20) benefited from the Revolving Fund, highlighting its widespread use in strengthening institutional and financial management. In terms of the RF amount, 85 percent of SHGs (17 out of 20) received Rs 15,000, while 10 percent (2 out of 20) received Rs 10,000. These funds are aimed at boosting SHGs' creditworthiness and establishing a strong foundation for their interactions with financial institutions.

Training Programs by CLF and VLO for Self Help Groups

The NRLM employs diverse training programs through CLFs and VLOs to promote rural development. These

Table 3. Provision of Revolving Fund (RF) and amount received since inception as perceived by sampled Self Help Groups (SHGs), Punjab, 2022-2023

Sr No.	Particulars	SHG
A.	Provision of RF	
I	Recipient	19 (95.00)
II	Non-Recipient	1 (5.00)
B.	RF amount in Rs	
I	10000	2 (10.00)
II	15000	17 (85.00)

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the per centage of SHGs in each category.

initiatives enhance skills and knowledge, empowering rural communities and fostering sustainability. Table 4 illustrates VLOs' and CLFs' participation in various training programs in Punjab. VLOs exhibit a strong focus on food processing (75.00%), women's economic empowerment through BC(Bank Correspondent) sakhi (50.00%) and eco-friendly alternatives with jute bags (50.00%), among other areas. In contrast, CLFs emphasize livestock and agriculture-related training with high percentages in pashu sakhi (100.00%) and krishi sakhi (100.00%), as well as other fields. The duration of training programs significantly influences their effectiveness in promoting rural community empowerment and socio-economic development. The data in Table 5 underscores that both VLOs and CLFs offer programs of varying durations. This diversity ensures tailored learning experiences, aligning with NRLM's objectives for comprehensive skill development, empowerment, and sustainable rural progress.

Table 4. Distribution of sampled Village Level Organisations (VLOs) and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) according to types of training provided, Punjab, 2022-2023 (Multiple Response)

Sr No.	Types of training	VLO	CLF
I	Sanitary and cosmetics	1 (25.00)	1 (50.00)
II	Bio pesticides	1 (25.00)	-
III	Food processing	3 (75.00)	1 (50.00)
IV	BC sakhi	2 (50.00)	-
V	Jute bags	2 (50.00)	-
VI	Vision building	1 (25.00)	-
VII	Book keeping	2 (50.00)	-
VIII	Pashu sakhi	1 (25.00)	2 (100.00)
IX	Krishi sakhi	-	2 (100.00)

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the proportion of VLOs and CLFs engaged in each category.

Table 5. Distribution of sampled Village Level Organisations (VLOs) and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) according to duration of trainings provided, Punjab, 2022-2023

Duration	VLO	CLF	Overall
One week	6 (46.15)	4 (66.66)	10 (56.40)
10 days	4 (30.77)	1 (16.66)	5 (23.15)
15 days	3 (23.08)	1 (16.66)	4 (19.92)
Total	13 (100.00)	6 (100.00)	19 (100.00)

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the per centage of training in each category.

Strengthening Credit Access

CLFs and VLOs are key intermediaries in NRLM, fostering credit access for SHGs. They assess credit needs, link SHGs with formal financial institutions, and promote financial inclusion. This collaboration empowers SHGs to undertake income-generating activities, livelihood projects, and community initiatives. Table 6 outlines the diverse strategies employed by CLFs and VLOs to enhance SHG credit access. All sampled VLOs (100%) and both CLFs (100%) actively provide Community Investment Funds (CIF), bolstering SHGs' credit access. Additionally, all VLOs (100%) and half of the CLFs (50%) facilitate bank linkage, enabling SHGs to connect with formal financial institutions. Most VLOs (75%) and all CLFs (100%) develop Cash Credit Limits (CCL), amplifying SHGs' access to credit. VLOs (100%) also create Joint Liability Groups (JLGs), while some CLFs (50%) provide access to Mudra loans. Furthermore, half of the CLFs (50%) conduct financial literacy awareness programs.

Household Mobilisation and Beneficiary Convergence

Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) and Village Level Organizations (VLOs) playing pivotal roles in Household Mobilization and Beneficiary Convergence. CLFs actively

mobilize households into SHGs by identifying beneficiaries, raising awareness about SHG benefits, and promoting participation through community-led methods. The study demonstrates that CLFs annually mobilize an average of 632 beneficiaries into the SHG network. VLOs operate at the grassroots level, directly engaging with communities. They ensure seamless integration of beneficiaries into government programs, bridging the gap between them and available opportunities, thus enhancing NRLM's impact. It indicates that each VLO, on average, converges approximately 10 beneficiaries per year into other schemes, constituting around nine percent of total VLO members.

Economic Activity Distribution Among Self Help Groups (SHGs)

In the NRLM framework, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) engage in various economic activities, contributing to community development and financial inclusion. These activities include dairy production (70% of SHGs), emphasizing livestock-related endeavours like milk production. Farming is another substantial activity (20% of SHGs), highlighting their active participation in agriculture and local food production. Food processing (20% of SHGs) underscores skill development and value addition. Boutique activities (55% of SHGs) demonstrate women's engagement in handicrafts and textiles, empowering them through traditional skills. A smaller proportion is involved in soap making (5%) and operating Common Service Centres (CSCs) and videography (5%). Lastly, shopkeeping (30% of SHGs) contributes to local commerce and retail, reflecting the diversified economic landscape nurtured by NRLM.

Empowering SHGs: Experience sharing & capacity building

Cluster Level Federations plays a dynamic role in empowering SHGs through experience sharing and capacity building, fostering their growth and sustainability. The strategies employed by CLF's for sharing SHG experiences, including special programs, regular meetings, and awareness

Table 6. Role in empowering credit access for SHGs as perceived by sampled Village Level Organisations (VLOs) and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs), Punjab, 2022-2023

Sr No.	Efforts and approaches	(Multiple Response)	
		VLO	CLF
I	Provision of Community Investment Funds (CIF)	4 (100.00)	2 (100.00)
II	Facilitating Bank Linkage	4 (100.00)	1 (50.00)
III	Developing Cash Credit Limits (CCL)	3 (75.00)	2 (100.00)
IV	Formation of Joint Liability Groups (JLG's)	4 (100.00)	-
V	Providing access to Mudra loans	-	1 (50.00)
VI	Awareness programmes	-	1 (50.00)

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the proportion of VLOs and CLFs engaged in each category.

Table 7. Economic activity distribution as perceived by sampled Self Help Groups (SHGs), Punjab, 2022-2023 (Multiple Response)

Sr No.	Economic activities	SHGs engaged
I	Dairy	14 (70.00)
II	Farming	4 (20.00)
III	Soap Making	1 (5.00)
IV	Food Processing	4 (20.00)
V	Boutique	11 (55.00)
VI	CSC Centre	1 (5.00)
VII	Videography	1 (5.00)
VIII	Shopkeeping	6 (30.00)

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the proportion of SHGs engaged in each category.

camp. About 50 per cent of CLFs arrange special programs, while all CLFs hold regular meetings to facilitate experience exchange. Additionally, 50 per cent of CLFs organize awareness camps, further promoting knowledge sharing among SHGs. Further Table 8 reveals CLFs' initiatives for SHG capacity building, covering various aspects for comprehensive empowerment. All CLFs introduce credit linkage, promote basic literacy, provide SHG orientation training, and offer skill development programs, demonstrating a holistic approach to enhancing SHG capabilities. Furthermore, 50 per cent of CLFs offer specialized training in digital literacy, recognizing its growing importance in the empowerment process.

Table 8: Initiatives for capacity building of SHGs as perceived by sampled Cluster Level Federations (CLFs), Punjab, 2022-2023 (Multiple Response)

Sr No.	Kind of Initiatives	CLFs
I	Introduction to credit linkage	2 (100.00)
II	Promoting basic literacy	2 (100.00)
III	Training on SHG orientation	2 (100.00)
IV	Skill development	2 (100.00)
V	Special trainings on digital literacy	1 (50.00)

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the proportion of CLFs engaged in each category.

Household Investment Plans: Unveiling CLF and VLO contribution

Under the NRLM, both VLOs and CLFs actively participate in implementing Household Investment Plans to enhance rural households' financial security. All CLFs (100%) employ special drives, likely campaigns to promote investment plans. Half of them (50%) use counselling sessions to guide members, while all CLFs (100%) conduct awareness

camp to inform and raise awareness about these plans.

Also, VLOs in Punjab facilitate member participation in various Household Investment Plans. The study unveiled the types of plans and their coverage per VLO with around 33.33 per cent of VLO beneficiaries join the Atal Pension Yojana, ensuring retirement financial stability. Approximately 26.67 per cent benefit from PM Shram Yogi Mandhan Yojana, offering income security for unorganized sector workers during retirement. About 17.33 per cent access PM Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, providing affordable life insurance. PM Suraksha Bima Yojana, covering 22.67 per cent, offers accident insurance. In essence, VLOs play a vital role in enhancing members' financial security through these investment plans.

Borrowing and Saving Pattern in SHGs

The study also explores two critical aspects of Self-Help Groups (SHGs): loan distribution and average monthly savings. Our analysis revealed that 55 per cent of SHGs had 8 to 12 members who borrowed loans in the past year, indicating active lending. About 20 per cent had 4 to 8 members borrowing, reflecting moderate activity. Additionally, 15 per cent saw 12 to 16 members availing loans, indicating substantial credit usage. Notably, 10 per cent reported fewer than 4 members accessing loans, suggesting lower lending activity.

In terms of savings, Table 9 categorizes SHGs into four tiers based on their average monthly savings. Category 1 (5% of SHGs) had savings less than 1000 Rs. Category 2 (65% of SHGs) showed savings ranging from 1000 to 1200 Rs, representing the majority. Category 3 (25% of SHGs) reported savings between 1200 and 1400 Rs, and Category 4 (5% of SHGs) had savings exceeding 1400 Rs. These categories shed light on the diverse savings practices among SHGs.

Table 9: Average monthly saving per sample SHG in different categories, Punjab, 2022-23

Sr No.	Amount in Rs.	SHG
I	<1000	1 (5.00)
II	1000-1200	13 (65.00)
III	1200-1400	5 (25.00)
IV	>1400	1 (5.00)

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate the per centage of SHGs in each category.

Approaches to Procurement and Marketing by Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

In the context of NRLM, SHGs are vital drivers of local economic growth and empowerment, particularly through their procurement and marketing strategies. The study revealed that all 20 individually operating SHGs (100%) proactively engage in input procurement, highlighting their self-sufficiency. Additionally, two collectively operating

SHGs (10%) opt for shared procurement, indicating collaborative efforts. Regarding marketing, 16 SHGs (80%) prefer individual marketing, emphasizing their independence. Conversely, five SHGs (25%) opt for collective marketing, signifying joint marketing efforts. Furthermore, the analysis explores SHGs' Market Penetration in Produce Marketing strategies in Punjab. Notably, 60 per cent concentrate on village marketing, 65 per cent expand to nearby towns, and five per cent operate within the state contributing to the

strategy of promoting local economic development.

Uncovered Constraints in NRLM Implementation Constraints Perceived by Cluster Level Federation (CLF)

Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) are vital to NRLM implementation in Punjab. However, sampled CLFs face significant constraints. Family non-cooperation, often due to cultural norms, hampers beneficiary empowerment.

**Table 10: Constraints faced in implementation as perceived by sampled Self Help Groups (SHGs), Punjab, 2022-23
(Per cent Multiple Response)**

Constraints	Formation stage	Self-Helping stage
I. Financial management:		
a. Difficulty in making payment of thrift money	35.00	5.00
b. Fear of losing thrift money	60.00	0.00
d. Improper utilization of funds	60.00	70.00
e. Delayed repayment of loans	40.00	45.00
f. Lack of funds to start new enterprises	50.00	70.00
II. Group dynamics and commitment:		
a. Discouragement of members by family to join the group	50.00	20.00
b. Lack of commitment from group members	70.00	70.00
c. Reluctance of members to take leadership roles	15.00	45.00
d. Lack of will from members in participation in trainings	50.00	55.00
III. Skills and training:		
a. Lack of skills	100.00	35.00
b. Lack of training opportunities	25.00	30.00
c. Lack of localized trainings	55.00	60.00
IV. Governance and organization:		
a. Improper division of work	60.00	70.00
b. Irregularity in holding meetings	20.00	10.00
c. Low attendance by members in group meetings	55.00	45.00
V. Market access and marketing:		
a. Difficulty in marketing	25.00	25.00
VI. Collaboration and synergy:		
a. Lack of convergence with other schemes	95.00	100.00
VII. Employment and livelihood:		
a. Lack of wage employment opportunities	100.00	100.00
VIII. Entrepreneurship and innovation:		
a. Lack of new startup ideas	65.00	70.00
b. Lack of will to shift from conventional works to start new ventures	40.00	35.00
IX. Financial management and record-keeping:		
a. Difficulty in maintaining accounts	25.00	0.00
X. Knowledge and awareness:		
a. Lack of awareness among members	95.00	65.00

Funds shortage limits activities like training, hindering NRLM progress. SHGs struggle to market produce due to market access, information, and skills gaps, limiting income potential. Inadequate local infrastructure, including office spaces, impedes essential activities. The absence of localized training programs affects skill development. Some CLFs lack coordination with other schemes, missing synergistic impacts.

Constraints Perceived by Village Level Organisation (VLO)

Village Level Organizations (VLOs) are integral to NRLM implementation but face significant constraints. These issues impact the effectiveness of NRLM initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation and community empowerment. Challenges include the misutilization of funds, with concerns about resource diversion for non-productive purposes. Inadequate local infrastructure, such as training and meeting venues, hampers effective NRLM facilitation. Localized training opportunities tailored to village-specific needs are absent, hindering skill development. Family support is lacking, affecting beneficiary motivation. Insufficient financial backing for new trainees and the inability of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to market their produce pose additional hurdles. A general lack of motivation for start-ups and a critical shortage of funds further constrains VLOs.

Constraints Perceived by Self Help Groups (SHGs)

In the context of the 2022-23 NRLM implementation in Punjab, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) encounter various constraints during different phases of their development. During the formation phase, around 35 per cent of SHGs face difficulties in collecting thrift money, which is a form of regular savings contributed by members. Additionally, half of the SHGs (50%) encounter resistance from the families of their members, which can hinder the group's establishment. Skill deficiencies are prevalent in all SHGs (100%) during this phase, highlighting the need for skill development initiatives. As the SHGs progress to the self-helping stage, some constraints improve, such as reduced family resistance (20%) and fewer issues related to thrift money collection (60%). However, challenges persist, with approximately 60-70 per cent of SHGs reporting problems like improper fund utilization and loan repayment delays, impacting their creditworthiness. Commitment remains a consistent challenge, affecting about 70 per cent of SHGs in both formation and self-helping stages. These constraints underscore the importance of targeted support and capacity-building efforts to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of SHGs in NRLM initiatives.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

In summary, the NRLM in Punjab empowers economically disadvantaged women through SHGs and their federations, facilitated by VLOs and CLFs. Financial mechanisms like CIF and RF enhance stability, while tailored

training programs drive empowerment. CLFs and VLOs bridge the gap between beneficiaries and opportunities, and SHGs engage in diverse economic activities with robust support. Varied borrowing and savings patterns among SHGs showcase the financial responsibility and resilience of their members. Additionally, a comprehensive policy strategy is recommended to further enhance the effectiveness of the NRLM. This strategy focuses on several key areas. Firstly, it aims to improve financial empowerment and accessibility by simplifying loan processes and strengthening resources for Community Investment Funds (CIFs) and Revolving Funds (RFs). Secondly, it prioritizes skill enhancement and capacity building through targeted training programs and digital literacy initiatives. Thirdly, to expand market reach and visibility, the strategy includes building both physical and digital market infrastructure, fostering collaborations, and creating dedicated markets for Self-Help Group (SHG) products. Fourthly, government engagement is emphasized to act as a risk-taker, facilitate market linkages, and advocate for program convergence. Additionally, promoting innovation, digital transformation, effective information dissemination, empowering local communities, ensuring inclusive and localized implementation, robust monitoring, and inter-departmental collaboration are key components of this comprehensive policy approach. These strategies collectively strengthen NRLM's capacity to empower rural livelihoods and promote sustainable growth in India.

References

- Anonymous 2022. NRLM block identification status, Retrieved from <https://nrlm.gov.in/BlockWiseSHGMemebrsAction.do?methodName=showShgMembers&encd=0>
- Bora B, Barman U and Saikia H 2022. Performance of Jeevika Sakhi of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihood Mission on improving livelihoods of rural poor in Assam, India. *Asian Journal of Agricultural Extension, Economics & Sociology*, **40**:416-23. <https://doi.org/10.9734/AJAEES/2022/v40i121811>
- GOI 2016. National Rural Livelihoods Mission framework for implementation. Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi. <https://msrls.nic.in/sites/default/files/nrlm-framework.pdf>
- Kumar M 2016. Convergence between NRLM-led microfinance sector and government programmes for social development and economic empowerment. *Microfinance Review*, **8**:34-49. <https://www.cabdirect.org/cabdirect/abstract/20183181642>
- Mishra A 2017. Self-employment programmes in India: A journey from integrated rural development programme (IRDP) To National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). *International Journal of Advanced Research*, **5**:2036-38. <https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/4939>
- NRLM 2017. Manual for District Level Functionaries, Retrieved from <https://nrlm.gov.in/outerReportAction.do?methodName=showIndex#gsc.tab=0>

- Rai N and Rohatgi S 2019. Self Help Groups as an agency of women empowerment: A case study of Bijanbari block of Darjeeling district. *International Journal of Innovative Studies in Sociology and Humanities*, 4:21-25. <https://ijissh.org/storage/Volume4/Issue1/IJISSH-040105.pdf>
- Alagh Y K 2010. The poverty debate in perspective: moving forward with the Tendulkar committee. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 4: 33-44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973703020100102>
- Shanthi R 2021. Impact of social condition of self-help groups in Kanyakumari district. *Journal of critical review*, 59:490-515. <https://www.jcreview.com/admin/Uploads/Files/61c050556e52d9.27001778.pdf>
- Swain S K 2022. An Evaluation Study on National Rural Livelihood Mission in the State of Odisha. *International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Topics*, 2:32-37. <https://journals.ijramt.com/index.php/ijramt/article/view/1219/1167>

Received: September 11, 2023 Accepted: November 18, 2023