

PRAGATI NEWSLETTER



**Celebrating Biodiversity Day through Capacity Building :
Reflections from the International Day for Biological Diversity Observance**

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In this Issue.....

COVER STORY: Celebrating Biodiversity Day through Capacity Building: Reflections from the International Day for Biological Diversity Observance -4

- 1.** ToT on LokOS Application for Resource Persons and SRLM Functionaries - 8
- 2.** Training of Trainers on Individual Enterprise Loan Application (IELA) under DAY-NRLM Conducted - 9
- 3.** ToT on Key Priority Areas for Development of FNHW Immersion Sites under DAY-NRLM -10
- 4.** Training of Trainers on Risk-Based Internal Audit in DAY-NRLM -11
- 5.** ToT on Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Conducted at NIRDPR -12
- 6.** Training Programme on Leadership Skills for Development Professionals of SRLM -13
- 7.** ToT on Women's Leadership in Local Governance - 14
- 8.** Training of Trainers on Gender Modules under DAY-NRLM at NIRDPR -15
- 9.** 3-Day Training of Trainers on Preparation of Quality GPDP Conducted - 16
- 10.** DAY-NRLM Skill Development Programmes for SHG Women Inaugurated at NIRDPR - 17
- 11.** Training Programme on Business Diversification and Computerisation of PACCSs - 18
- 12.** NIRDPR Delhi Branch Conducts ToTs on Marketing Skills for CRP-EPs of Tripura and Assam SRLMs - 19
- 13.** Orientation Programme Conducted for Second Batch of PhD Scholars - 20

15.	NRLM Case Study Series- Project SAHAYA: From Grief to Livelihoods – A Community-Led Innovation in Public Service Delivery	-21
16.	Orientation Workshop on Transparency & Accountability Framework under VB–G RAM G for SAU Directors	-24
17.	Workshop on Finalisation of Training Modules of IFCs for Assam SRLM	-25
18.	Writeshop on Transparency and Accountability Framework under VB–G RAM G	-26
19.	DAY-NRLM-Sponsored Skill Development Programmes for SHG Women Launched at NIRDPR	- 27
20.	National-Level Writeshop and Workshop on Livelihood-Oriented Infrastructure under VB–GRAM-G	-28
21.	Student’s Corner: From Household Hierarchy to Panchayat Voice	-29

Celebrating Biodiversity Day through Capacity Building: Reflections from the International Day for Biological Diversity Observance

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Participants with Dr. Jyothis Sathyapalan, Professor & Head, during the International Day for Biological Diversity celebrations organised by NIRDPR with the support of the NBA at Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), Nilambur

Observed annually on May 22, the International Day for Biological Diversity serves as a global reminder of the need to conserve and sustainably manage Earth's diverse ecosystems, species, and genetic resources. The day commemorates the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992, a milestone in global efforts to conserve biodiversity and ensure its sustainable use for future generations.

As part of the Capacity Building Programme for Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs), the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), with the support of the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), organised the International Day for Biological Diversity celebrations at the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), Nilambur, in Malappuram district of Kerala, on 22nd May 2026. The event brought together Biodiversity Management Committee members, local government representatives,

scientists, development practitioners, and biodiversity experts to reflect on the importance of biodiversity conservation and its role in building climate-resilient and sustainable rural communities.

The celebration formed part of a broader initiative aimed at strengthening the capacities of BMC members to effectively implement the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, and the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Act, 2023. The programme sought to enhance the knowledge and skills of local institutions entrusted with the conservation, documentation, and sustainable management of biological resources and associated traditional knowledge. By integrating the International Day for Biological Diversity into the training programme, participants were provided with an opportunity to connect legislative provisions, institutional responsibilities, scientific knowledge, and community action within a larger vision of sustainable development.



Dr. Jyothis Sathyapalan addressing participants

The programme was inaugurated by Smt. Padmini Gopinath, Chairperson of Nilambur Municipality, who emphasised the importance of local governments and community institutions in protecting biodiversity and promoting ecological sustainability. In her inaugural address, she highlighted the growing environmental challenges faced by communities and stressed the need for collective action to conserve biological resources for future generations. She noted that Biodiversity Management Committees have a critical role in safeguarding local ecosystems and ensuring that development pathways remain environmentally sustainable.

The participation of distinguished scientists and experts from diverse fields of biodiversity conservation, wildlife science, agriculture, rural development, and climate adaptation enriched the event. Dr T. V. Sajeew of the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), Dr P. S. Easa, one of India's eminent wildlife scientists and former Director of KFRI, Dr Santhosh Kumar A. V. of Kerala Agricultural University (KAU), Dr Jyothis Sathyapalan of the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Dr. Monish Jose, and Mr. Vinod of the Centre for Human Resource Development (CHRD), Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), and Mr Vinod Kumar, SoePR, NIRDPR shared their perspectives on biodiversity conservation and community stewardship.

The celebration highlighted the growing recognition that biodiversity conservation cannot be separated



Smt. Padmini Gopinath delivering the inaugural address

from the challenges of climate change, livelihood security, and rural development. Across the world, biodiversity is under increasing pressure from habitat degradation, unsustainable resource use, invasive species, pollution, and climate change. These challenges are particularly significant for rural communities whose livelihoods depend directly on natural resources.

One of the central themes of the programme was the importance of Biodiversity Management Committees as grassroots institutions for conservation and sustainable development. Established under the Biological Diversity Act, BMCs represent one of the most innovative institutional mechanisms for decentralised biodiversity governance. Their mandate extends beyond conservation to include documentation of biological resources, preparation of People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs), promotion of sustainable use practices, and protection of traditional knowledge.

Through the capacity-building programme, participants gained a deeper understanding of their statutory responsibilities and the opportunities available to strengthen biodiversity governance at the local level. The discussions emphasised that BMCs are not merely regulatory bodies but institutions capable of mobilising communities, supporting conservation initiatives, and contributing to local development planning.

A major focus of the programme was the People's Biodiversity Register. Participants were encouraged to view the PBR not simply as a documentation

exercise but as a community knowledge system. The PBR records information on local biological resources, traditional ecological knowledge, cultural practices, ecosystem services, and livelihood linkages. When effectively prepared and periodically updated, it becomes a powerful tool for conservation planning, climate adaptation, and sustainable development.

The International Day for Biological Diversity celebration also provided an opportunity to discuss the significance of the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Act, 2023. Participants explored the implications of the amendments for local institutions, conservation initiatives, and biodiversity-based economic opportunities. Discussions focused on how the amended legislation can facilitate greater participation of communities while strengthening conservation outcomes and promoting sustainable utilisation of biological resources.

An important dimension of the programme was the relationship between biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation. During the technical sessions, participants examined how biodiversity contributes to resilience against climate-induced risks. Healthy ecosystems provide a wide range of services that help communities adapt to changing climatic conditions.

Drawing upon experiences from climate adaptation and rural livelihood programmes, discussions highlighted the growing importance of ecosystem-based adaptation approaches. Ecosystem restoration, conservation of indigenous crop varieties, agroforestry, watershed management, sustainable agriculture, and protection of common property resources were identified as practical strategies that simultaneously support biodiversity conservation and climate resilience.

The programme also reflected lessons emerging from global biodiversity assessments undertaken by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). These assessments consistently demonstrate that biodiversity loss is occurring at an unprecedented rate and that transformative changes are needed to achieve sustainability goals. Equally important, they show that local communities, indigenous knowledge systems, and decentralised governance institutions play a critical role in conserving biodiversity and sustaining ecosystem services.

These global lessons are highly relevant to India's biodiversity governance framework. The Biological Diversity Act recognises that conservation efforts are most effective when communities become active participants in decision-making processes. Biodiversity Management Committees provide a mechanism through which scientific knowledge, policy frameworks, and local knowledge systems can be brought together to support conservation and sustainable development.

The discussions further explored the relationship between biodiversity, livelihoods, and poverty reduction. Biodiversity underpins rural economies through agriculture, fisheries, livestock rearing, forestry, medicinal plants, and various ecosystem services. For millions of rural households, biological resources represent an important source of food, income, employment, and resilience. Protecting biodiversity therefore contributes directly to livelihood security and poverty reduction.

Participants examined opportunities for biodiversity-based enterprises and sustainable livelihood initiatives, including medicinal plant cultivation,



non-timber forest products, eco-tourism, agroecological farming, value addition to biological resources, and community-based conservation enterprises. Such initiatives have the potential to generate income while simultaneously promoting conservation objectives.

The role of local governments in biodiversity conservation emerged as another important theme. Participants discussed how biodiversity concerns can be integrated into local development planning processes, including Gram Panchayat Development Plans and municipal development plans. Biodiversity conservation was presented not as a separate environmental activity but as an essential component of sustainable development planning.

Throughout the programme, participants shared experiences from their respective localities regarding conservation of traditional crop varieties, sacred groves, wetlands, water bodies, medicinal plants, and community-managed ecosystems. These examples demonstrated the wealth of local knowledge and practical experience that exists within communities and highlighted the importance of documenting and strengthening such initiatives through Biodiversity Management Committees.

The celebration of the International Day for Biological Diversity within the framework of the NBA-supported capacity-building programme reinforced the idea that conservation is most effective when supported by informed and empowered local institutions. Capacity building is therefore not simply about imparting information; it is about enabling communities to become active stewards of biodiversity and partners in sustainable development.

The active participation of BMC members throughout the programme reflected a strong commitment to biodiversity conservation and community action. The interactions between scientists, practitioners, local government representatives, and community members created a valuable platform for knowledge exchange and collective learning.

As the programme concluded, participants recognised that biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, livelihood security, and sustainable development are deeply interconnected. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts involving local governments, Biodiversity Management Committees, scientific institutions, State Biodiversity Boards, the National Biodiversity Authority, and civil society organisations.

The Nilambur celebration demonstrated how capacity-building programmes can go beyond conventional training and become platforms for inspiring action and strengthening community ownership of biodiversity conservation. By combining scientific knowledge, policy awareness, practical experiences, and community participation, the programme contributed to building a stronger foundation for biodiversity governance at the grassroots level. The message emerging from the event was clear: biodiversity conservation is not merely about protecting nature; it is about securing sustainable livelihoods, strengthening resilience to climate change, reducing poverty, and ensuring a better future for coming generations. Through empowered Biodiversity Management Committees and sustained capacity-building efforts supported by the National Biodiversity Authority, local communities can play a transformative role in achieving these goals and advancing India's vision of sustainable and inclusive development.

ToT on LokOS Application for Resource Persons and SRLM Functionaries



Participants of the Training of Trainers (ToT) on LokOS Application for Resource Persons and SRLM Functionaries under DAY-NRLM with Dr Ravindra S. Gavali, Professor & Head, CNRM, CC&DM; Dr Jyoti Prakash Mohanty, Deputy Director, NRLM Resource Cell; and R. Ravi Naidu, Mission Executive, NRLM Resource Cell, NIRDPR, Hyderabad

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through the DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, organised a Training of Trainers (ToT) on LokOS Application for Resource Persons and SRLM Functionaries under DAY-NRLM from 13 to 16 May 2026 at the Institute campus.

The programme aimed to strengthen the capacities of Resource Persons and State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) functionaries in effectively using the LokOS application, a digital platform designed to support monitoring, reporting, and management of community institutions under DAY-NRLM. The training focused on improving participants' understanding of the application's features and enhancing their ability to facilitate its use at the grassroots level.

Sessions covered key modules of the LokOS platform, including data entry, validation, reporting systems, performance monitoring, financial tracking, and management of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and their

federations. Resource persons demonstrated practical applications of the platform and highlighted its role in improving data quality, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making within the rural livelihoods ecosystem.

The programme adopted a hands-on learning approach through demonstrations, practical exercises, simulations, and experience-sharing sessions. Participants gained practical exposure to the application and discussed field-level challenges and solutions related to digital data management and monitoring systems.

The training also provided a platform for peer learning and knowledge exchange among participants from different states, enabling them to share experiences and best practices in the implementation of digital governance tools under DAY-NRLM.

The programme concluded with participants expressing confidence in using the LokOS application more effectively and supporting its wider adoption to strengthen programme management and service delivery.

Training of Trainers on Individual Enterprise Loan Application (IELA) under DAY-NRLM Conducted



Participants of the Training of Trainers (ToT) on Individual Enterprise Loan Application (IELA) under DAY-NRLM with Dr Ravindra S. Gavali, Professor & Head, Centre for Natural Resource Management, Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation (CNRM, CC&DM), NIRDPR, Hyderabad.

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through the DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, organised a Training of Trainers (ToT) on Individual Enterprise Loan Application (IELA) under DAY-NRLM from 5 to 7 May 2026 at the Institute campus.

The programme aimed to strengthen the capacities of State and district-level functionaries involved in promoting enterprise development and credit access under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM). The training focused on enhancing participants' understanding of the IELA process and improving support mechanisms for rural entrepreneurs seeking institutional credit.

Sessions covered key aspects of enterprise identification, preparation and appraisal of loan applications, credit linkage processes, financial

literacy, risk assessment, and post-credit support. Resource persons highlighted the importance of facilitating timely access to finance for Self-Help Group members and rural entrepreneurs to promote sustainable livelihoods and income generation.

The programme adopted a participatory approach through technical sessions, case studies, group discussions, and experience-sharing exercises. Participants deliberated on field-level challenges in enterprise financing and explored practical strategies for strengthening credit access and enterprise promotion under DAY-NRLM.

The training provided a platform for cross-learning and capacity building, enabling participants to support rural entrepreneurs more effectively and contribute to the expansion of livelihood opportunities in rural areas.

ToT on Key Priority Areas for Development of FNHW Immersion Sites under DAY-NRLM



Participants of the ToT on Key Priority Areas for Development of FNHW Immersion Sites under DAY-NRLM with Dr Ravindra S. Gavali, Professor & Head, Centre for Natural Resource Management, Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation

The National Mission Management Unit (NMMU), DAY-NRLM, Ministry of Rural Development, in collaboration with the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a Training of Trainers (ToT) on Food, Nutrition, Health & WASH (FNHW) Immersion Site Development from 4 to 9 May 2026. The programme was conducted with technical support from ROSHNI Centre and PCI India.

A total of 117 participants from 26 States and Union Territories were trained through four bilingual batches conducted in Hindi and English. The programme aimed to strengthen community-led FNHW interventions under DAY-NRLM by promoting convergence, behaviour change communication, nutrition-sensitive livelihoods, and the development of FNHW immersion sites as centres of learning and demonstration.

The inaugural session featured technical guidance from Dr Ravindra S. Gavali, Professor & Head, DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, NIRDPR; Ms Vasudha Shukla, National Mission Manager, DAY-NRLM, MoRD; and Mr Venkateswara Rao, MM-IBCB & SISD, DAY-NRLM Resource Cell. The speakers emphasised the importance of community institutions, convergence,

and social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) in improving nutrition and health outcomes experiences and innovative approaches for strengthening FNHW outcomes through community-led interventions.

The programme adopted a participatory approach through thematic discussions, case studies, group exercises, and experience-sharing sessions. Participants deliberated on strategies for establishing and strengthening immersion sites, documenting best practices, and promoting peer learning among Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and community institutions.

The training also emphasised the importance of convergence among departments and community-based organisations to address nutrition, health, and sanitation challenges in a holistic manner. Participants gained practical insights into planning, implementation, monitoring, and scaling up FNHW initiatives at the grassroots level.

The programme concluded with participants developing action plans for strengthening FNHW immersion sites in their respective States and reinforcing community-based approaches for improving health, nutrition, and well-being outcomes.

Training of Trainers on Risk-Based Internal Audit in DAY-NRLM



Participants of the Training of Trainers (ToT) on Risk-Based Internal Audit in DAY-NRLM Posing for the photo with Dr U Hemantha Kumar, Associate Professor & Head CIARD

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through the Centre for Internal Audit in Rural Development (CIARD), organised a Training of Trainers (ToT) on Risk-Based Internal Audit under DAY-NRLM from 04 to 08 May 2026 at the Institute campus.

The programme was designed to strengthen the capacities of internal auditors, trainers, and mission functionaries in adopting risk-based audit approaches for enhancing transparency, accountability, and financial governance under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM). It brought together participants from different states to build a common understanding of risk management and internal audit systems in rural development programmes.

The training focused on key areas such as risk identification and assessment, audit planning, internal control mechanisms, compliance monitoring, financial management, fraud risk mitigation, and reporting procedures. Resource persons highlighted the importance of

integrating risk-based audit practices into programme implementation to improve institutional efficiency and strengthen governance structures at various levels of DAY-NRLM.

Interactive sessions, case studies, group exercises, and practical demonstrations enabled participants to gain hands-on exposure to audit tools, risk assessment frameworks, and monitoring methodologies. Discussions also addressed common challenges encountered in internal auditing and explored strategies for improving accountability, ensuring compliance, and strengthening financial oversight within community institutions and mission structures.

The programme provided a valuable platform for knowledge sharing and peer learning, allowing participants to exchange experiences and best practices from their respective states. Emphasis was also placed on the role of internal audit in supporting informed decision-making, improving programme performance, and safeguarding institutional resources.

ToT on Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Conducted at NIRDPR



Participants of the ToT with Dr V Suresh Babu, Associate Professor & faculty members of the Centre for Wage Employment and Livelihoods (CWEL), NIRDPR

To strengthen the capacities of master trainers and field-level functionaries engaged in rural livelihoods and employment programmes, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through its Centre for Wage Employment and Livelihoods (CWEL), conducted a Training of Trainers (ToT) on Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM G] Act 2025 on 20–21 May 2026.

The programme aimed to strengthen the capacities of master trainers and programme functionaries involved in the implementation of wage employment and livelihood initiatives. It focused on enhancing participants' understanding of the objectives, provisions, and implementation framework of the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin), with emphasis on promoting sustainable livelihoods and inclusive rural development.

The sessions covered key themes such as employment generation, livelihood promotion, convergence of rural development programmes,

community mobilisation, participatory planning, and institutional mechanisms for effective implementation. Discussions also highlighted strategies for strengthening grassroots institutions, improving service delivery, and enhancing community participation in development processes.

Interactive sessions, group exercises, case studies, and experience-sharing activities enabled participants to exchange field experiences and explore practical approaches to addressing implementation challenges. The programme also provided a platform for discussing innovative practices and developing strategies for strengthening livelihood and employment interventions in rural areas.

The training is expected to contribute to building a strong pool of trainers capable of supporting the effective implementation of the mission and promoting sustainable livelihood opportunities for rural communities across the country.

Training Programme on Leadership Skills for Development Professionals of SRLM



Participants of the Training Programme on Leadership Skills for Development Professionals of SRLMs with Dr R. Murugesan, Director, NERC, NIRDPR, and Dr Lakhan Singh, Assistant Professor, CHRD, NIRDPR

Recognising the critical role of effective leadership in achieving development outcomes, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a Training Programme on Leadership Skills for Development Professionals of SRLMs through its Centre for Human Resource Development (CHRD) from 19–22 May 2026.

The programme was designed to strengthen the leadership, managerial, and interpersonal competencies of professionals engaged in the implementation of rural livelihood programmes across the country. It aimed to equip participants with the skills required to lead teams effectively, manage organisational challenges, foster innovation, and enhance programme performance in dynamic development settings.

The training covered a range of themes, including leadership styles, strategic thinking, communication and negotiation skills, emotional intelligence, team building, conflict resolution, decision-making, and

performance management. Resource persons highlighted the importance of adaptive leadership, collaborative approaches, and effective stakeholder engagement in achieving development objectives.

Through interactive lectures, case studies, group discussions, simulations, and experience-sharing sessions, participants explored practical approaches to addressing workplace challenges and improving institutional effectiveness. The programme also provided opportunities for peer learning and reflection on leadership experiences from diverse field contexts.

The participants appreciated the practical and experiential nature of the training, noting that the sessions enhanced their confidence and leadership capabilities. The programme is expected to contribute to stronger institutional leadership and improved implementation of rural livelihood initiatives through more effective management and team engagement.

ToT on Women's Leadership in Local Governance



Participants of the Training of Trainers (ToT) programme on “Championing Change: Empowering Women Leaders in Local Governance” with Dr. Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor & Head, CeCPRDP&SSD, NIRDPR

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through its School of Excellence in Panchayati Raj (SoEPR), organised a Training of Trainers (ToT) programme on “Championing Change: Empowering Women Leaders in Local Governance” from 18-22 May 2026 at the Institute campus.

The programme brought together members of State Level Master Trainer (SLMT) and District Level Master Trainer (DLMT) teams with the objective of strengthening their capacities to mentor, guide, and support women leaders in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The initiative sought to promote greater participation of women in local governance and strengthen their role in grassroots decision-making and rural development processes.

The training focused on enhancing participants' understanding of gender-responsive governance, women's leadership, social inclusion, community mobilisation, and participatory planning. Sessions also addressed leadership development, communication and facilitation skills, conflict resolution, and strategies for promoting meaningful engagement of elected women representatives in local governance institutions.

Through interactive lectures, group discussions, case studies, role plays, and experience-sharing sessions, participants explored challenges faced by women leaders and discussed practical approaches to overcoming barriers to effective participation and leadership. The programme also provided a platform for sharing successful experiences and best practices from different states in promoting women's empowerment and leadership at the grassroots level.

Special emphasis was placed on building a cadre of trainers capable of facilitating capacity-building programmes for elected women representatives and supporting institutional mechanisms that foster inclusive and accountable governance. Participants were encouraged to develop action-oriented approaches for strengthening women's leadership and enhancing their contribution to local development initiatives.

By equipping master trainers with the necessary knowledge, tools, and facilitation skills, the programme sought to create a stronger support system for women leaders and contribute to more inclusive, accountable, and effective local governance across rural India.

Training of Trainers on Gender Modules under DAY-NRLM Conducted at NIRDPR



Participants of the Training of Trainers on Gender Modules under DAY-NRLM with Dr. Ravindra S. Gavali, Professor & Head, Centre for Natural Resource Management, Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation (CNRM, CC&DM), and Director, DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, NIRDPR

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through its DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, organised a Training of Trainers (ToT) on Gender Modules under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) from 18–22 May 2026.

The programme was designed to strengthen the capacities of trainers and development practitioners to mainstream gender perspectives within rural livelihood interventions and community institutions. It focused on enhancing participants' understanding of gender-responsive programming and promoting inclusive approaches to rural development.

The training covered key themes such as gender equality, social inclusion, women's empowerment, gender-sensitive planning, institutional strengthening, and participatory methodologies for effective implementation under DAY-NRLM. Resource persons highlighted

the importance of addressing gender-based barriers and fostering equitable participation in livelihood and development initiatives.

Through interactive sessions, group discussions, case studies, and experience-sharing exercises, participants explored practical approaches for integrating gender concerns into programme design, implementation, and monitoring. The programme also provided a platform for sharing field experiences and learning from successful gender-focused interventions across different states.

The participants appreciated the programme for its practical orientation and relevance, noting that it enhanced their capacity to promote gender-responsive strategies for strengthening rural livelihoods, community institutions, and women's leadership within the DAY-NRLM framework.

3-Day Training of Trainers on Preparation of Quality GPDP Conducted at NIRDPR



Dr Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor & Head, CPRDP&SSD, NIRDPR, with participants of the 3-Day ToT on Quality GPDP Preparation

A 3-Day Training of Trainers (ToT) on Preparation of Quality Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) – Batch II was organised by the School of Excellence in Panchayati Raj (SoEPR), NIRDPR, from 20–22 May 2026 to strengthen the capacities of trainers and Panchayati Raj functionaries in decentralized and participatory planning.

The programme aimed to strengthen the capacities of trainers and Panchayati Raj functionaries in facilitating evidence-based, participatory, and inclusive Gram Panchayat Development Planning processes. It focused on enhancing participants' understanding of GPDP preparation, localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), resource mapping, participatory needs assessment, and convergence of development programmes at the grassroots level.

The sessions covered key aspects of decentralised planning, data-driven decision-making, stakeholder engagement, preparation of quality

GPDPs, and strategies for integrating community priorities into local development plans. Resource persons highlighted best practices, policy perspectives, and practical approaches for improving the effectiveness of planning and implementation at the Gram Panchayat level.

Interactive discussions, group exercises, case studies, and experience-sharing sessions enabled participants to gain practical insights into planning methodologies and strengthen their facilitation skills. The programme also provided a platform for exchanging experiences and promoting collaborative learning among participants from diverse backgrounds.

The training is expected to contribute to the preparation of more comprehensive, inclusive, and outcome-oriented Gram Panchayat Development Plans, thereby supporting effective local governance and sustainable rural development.

DAY-NRLM Skill Development Programmes for SHG Women Inaugurated at NIRDPR



The SHG women participants actively engaged in hands-on training activities under the Jute & Cloth Product Making and Home Cleaning & Sanitary Product Making programmes.

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through its DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, inaugurated the DAY-NRLM-sponsored Skill Development Training Programmes for 2026-27 at the Rural Technology Park (RTP) on 18 May 2026.

A total of 94 Self-Help Group (SHG) women are participating in two specialised training programmes on Jute & Cloth Product Making and Home Cleaning & Sanitary Product Making. The programmes aim to equip participants with practical skills, entrepreneurial knowledge, and market-oriented production techniques to enhance their livelihood opportunities.

The training programmes were inaugurated by Dr Ravindra S. Gavali, Professor & Head, Centre for Natural Resource Management, Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation (CNRM, CC&DM) and Director, DAY-NRLM

Resource Cell, NIRDPR. Addressing the participants, he highlighted the importance of skill development and enterprise promotion in strengthening women's economic empowerment and fostering sustainable livelihoods.

The programmes focus on providing hands-on training, product development skills, quality improvement techniques, and enterprise development support to enable SHG women to establish and expand income-generating activities. Participants will also gain exposure to business planning, marketing strategies, and value addition practices relevant to their chosen trades.

These initiatives reflect DAY-NRLM's continued commitment to promoting women-led enterprises, enhancing livelihood diversification, and strengthening the socio-economic empowerment of rural women through skill-based interventions.

Training Programme on Business Diversification and Computerisation of PACCSs



Participants of the Training Programme on Business Diversification Opportunities and Best Practices of Computerisation of PACCSs with Dr Jyothis Sathyapalan, Professor & Head, CPGS & DE; Dr Aryashree Debapriya, Associate Professor, CPGS & DE; and A. Parasuramudu, Library and Information Assistant, NIRDPR, Hyderabad

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through its Centre for PG Studies and Distance Education (CPGS & DE), organised two training programmes on Business Diversification Opportunities and Best Practices of Computerisation of PACCSs for the Presidents, Board of Directors, and CEOs of Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperative Societies (PACCSs) and Large Area Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies (LAMPCSs) from 04-08 May 2026 and 18-22 May 2026 at the Institute campus.

Sponsored by the Department of Cooperation, Government of Odisha, the programmes aimed to strengthen the managerial and operational capacities of cooperative leaders and promote the adoption of digital technologies for improved governance and service delivery.

The sessions focused on business diversification, cooperative management, financial sustainability, digital transformation, computerisation, and member-centric

services. Resource persons shared successful models and best practices in agri-business, value addition, marketing, and technology-enabled cooperative management.

Interactive sessions, case studies, group discussions, and experience-sharing exercises enabled participants to exchange field experiences and explore practical solutions to challenges faced by PACCSs and LAMPCSs. The programmes provided valuable insights into expanding cooperative business activities, strengthening member services, and leveraging technology for institutional growth.

Participants appreciated the practical orientation of the programmes and noted that the learnings would support them in enhancing cooperative governance, diversifying business operations, and improving service delivery to members. The training programmes served as an important platform for promoting innovation, capacity building, and long-term sustainability of cooperative institutions in Odisha.

NIRDPR Delhi Branch Conducts ToTs on Marketing Skills for CRP-EPs of Tripura and Assam SRLMs



Participants and resource persons of the ToT Programme on Marketing Skills posing for photos

The Centre for Marketing & Promotion of Rural Products & Entrepreneurship Development (CMPRPED), NIRDPR Delhi Branch, organised two Training of Trainers (ToTs) Programmes on Marketing Skills (Non-Farm) for Community Resource Persons–Enterprise Promotion (CRP-EPs) of Tripura SRLM and Assam SRLM at the NERC-NIRDPR Campus, Guwahati. The Tripura programme was conducted from 13–15 May 2026, while the Assam programme was held from 18–20 May 2026.

The programmes were designed to develop CRP-EPs as Master Trainers capable of strengthening the marketing capabilities of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The training focused on key areas such as branding, product design and packaging, value chain development, pricing strategies, sales communication, e-marketing, social media promotion, financial inclusion, and GST-related issues. Participants also engaged in group exercises and marketing plan development to address practical challenges faced by rural enterprises.

The sessions were coordinated by Shri Chiranjil Lal, Assistant Director, CMPRPED, NIRDPR Delhi Branch, with

Contributions from experts, including Dr M. K. Srivastava, Dr Ratna Bhuyan, Mr Aswini Bhattacharya, Shri Adarsh Agarwal, Shri Sudhir Kumar Singh, and Shri Suresh Prasad.

A total of 41 CRP-EPs from all eight districts of Tripura and 40 CRP-EPs from various districts of Assam participated in the residential training programmes.

As part of the experiential learning component, participants from Tripura visited the National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC), Guwahati, while Assam participants undertook an exposure visit to NEDFi Haat, a prominent marketing platform for artisans, weavers, SHGs, and rural entrepreneurs in the North Eastern Region. These visits provided practical insights into successful marketing models and best practices.

The programmes concluded with feedback sessions and certificate distribution. The trainings are expected to strengthen the capacity of CRP-EPs to provide continuous handholding support to SHGs, enhance product marketing, improve branding and promotion strategies, and contribute to the sustainability and growth of rural enterprises.

Orientation Programme Conducted for Second Batch of PhD Scholars



Newly admitted PhD scholars with faculty members during the PhD Students Orientation Programme – 2nd Batch

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised the PhD Students Orientation Programme – 2nd Batch on 06 May 2026 for newly admitted research scholars.

The programme was designed to familiarise scholars with the academic framework, research procedures, institutional facilities, and support systems available at NIRDPR. It provided an overview of the Institute's research culture, academic expectations, and opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and collaboration.

Faculty members interacted with the scholars and highlighted various aspects of doctoral research, including research ethics, academic

rigor, publication requirements, and the importance of addressing contemporary rural development challenges through evidence-based research.

The orientation also introduced participants to the Institute's academic resources, library facilities, research centres, and administrative processes. The programme served as a platform for scholars to engage with faculty members and gain a deeper understanding of NIRDPR's vibrant research ecosystem.

The event marked the beginning of the scholars' doctoral journey, encouraging them to pursue high-quality research that contributes to knowledge creation and sustainable rural development.

Project SAHAYA: From Grief to Livelihoods – A Community-Led Innovation in Public Service Delivery

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At Swargadwar, the sacred crematorium ground in Puri, Odisha, where thousands of families gather every year to perform the last rites of their loved ones, an innovative initiative has transformed both public service delivery and rural livelihoods. Known as Project SAHAYA, the model demonstrates how institutional convergence, women-led enterprises, and technology-enabled transparency can address a long-standing governance challenge while creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for rural communities.

Before September 2022, Swargadwar was served by a single private vendor who controlled the sale of all 62 ritual items required for cremation ceremonies. Prices were neither standardised nor displayed, resulting

in frequent complaints of overcharging and arbitrary billing. The counter often remained closed during late-night hours, forcing grieving families to search for essential materials elsewhere during emotionally difficult circumstances. The growing number of public grievances highlighted the need for a systemic solution.

Recognising this challenge, the District Administration of Puri transferred the management of the Swargadwar sales counter to the Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS) in collaboration with the Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM) under DAY-NRLM. On 15 September 2022, the SAHAYA 24x7 Service Counter was launched with the dual objective of ensuring dignified and transparent services for bereaved families while creating sustainable livelihoods for rural women.

KEY INDICATORS AT A GLANCE		
248 Families Benefiting	₹3.5–4 Cr Annual Turnover	25% Profit Margin
100–150 kg Ghee Produced Daily	₹7,500–10,000 Additional Monthly Income	24×7 Operational Hours

Today, the SAHAYA counter operates round the clock throughout the year, providing all essential ritual materials through a software-based billing system that generates itemised receipts and ensures complete transparency. The counter offers standardised ritual packages such as Mukhagni Samagri, Pathasradha Samagri, and Kokei Packages, making the process easier and more affordable for families. Eight trained Sevaks work in shifts to provide compassionate assistance and maintain uninterrupted services across the 28 cremation platforms at Swargadwar.

What makes SAHAYA unique is its strong backward linkage with women-led rural enterprises. Pure desi cow ghee, one of the most important ritual items, is supplied by the Gopashree Guagheeya Producer Enterprise in Gop Block. Supported through SHGs, Community Investment Fund assistance, and bank linkages, 183 rural households are engaged in dairy production and ghee processing. The enterprise currently supplies 100–150 kilograms of pure desi cow ghee every day, meeting nearly 70 per cent of the counter's daily requirement.

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
Mobilisation	OLM facilitated the formation of SHGs and their elevation into Producer Groups and a Producer Enterprise in Gop Block.
Asset Creation	183 households were financed through a combination of subsidized bank loans and the Community Investment Fund (CIF) to purchase cattle for productive purposes.
Milk Collection	Daily milk collection from member households is carried out via organized routes to a centralized processing facility.
Ghee Processing	Milk is hygienically processed and converted into pure desi cow ghee at a dedicated unit equipped with standardized processing equipment provided by ORMAS.
Quality Assurance	ORMAS provides quality assurance, standardization protocols, and branding support to the Producer Enterprise.
Market Linkage	ORMAS provides a guaranteed market at the Swargadwar SAHAYA counter, creating predictable cash flows for producers.
Scale of Supply	The cluster supplies 100–150 kg of pure desi cow ghee daily, meeting approximately 70% of SAHAYA's daily demand. The remaining 30% is successfully marketed through external commercial channels.

The remaining ritual materials are supplied through the Maa Bhagavati Women Applique Cluster, comprising 58 women from 12 SHGs and Producer Groups. The cluster manages procurement, quality control, packaging,

and supply of the other 61 ritual items required for cremation ceremonies. Together, these community institutions have created a vibrant value chain that directly supports 248 families across 13 SHGs and Producer Groups.

The impact of the initiative extends well beyond improved service delivery. Women associated with the producer enterprise and cluster are earning an additional monthly income of ₹7,500–10,000, enabling them to repay loans, invest in education and healthcare, and strengthen household financial security. Many women who previously had limited economic opportunities now actively manage procurement, bookkeeping, quality assurance, and supply-chain operations, emerging as confident entrepreneurs and community leaders.

Financially, SAHAYA has evolved into a sustainable social enterprise. The service counter records an annual turnover of approximately ₹3.5–4 crore while maintaining a profit margin of

around 25 per cent. Importantly, the model ensures that a substantial share of the benefits reaches primary producers at the village level while keeping services affordable and transparent for consumers.

The success of SAHAYA has attracted attention as a replicable model for public service delivery. Plans are being explored to strengthen the initiative through Integrated Farming Clusters, automation of packaging systems, and solar-powered processing facilities. The model is also being considered for replication at other cremation grounds and high-footfall locations in Odisha, creating new opportunities for women-led enterprises and community-based service delivery.

Key Statistics at a Glance

PARAMETER	DETAILS
Location	Swargadwar, Puri, Odisha
Launch Date	15th September 2022
Implementation Agency	ORMAS, Puri District
Supporting Institutions	OLM, District Administration, DAY-NRLM
Primary Producer Enterprise	Gopashree Guagheeya Producer Enterprise (183 families)
Nodal Producer Group	Maa Bhagavati Women Applique Cluster (58 women, 12 SHGs/PGs)
Total Beneficiary Families	248 families across 13 PGs/SHGs
Daily Ghee Production	100–150 kg of pure desi cow ghee
Annual Turnover	₹3.5 to ₹4 crores
Profit Margin	~25%, equitably shared
Women's Additional Monthly Income	₹7,500 to ₹10,000
Items Stocked	62 essential ritual items
Operational Hours	24×7, 365 days
Staff Strength	8 Sevaks in 3 shifts
Cremation Platforms Served	28 platforms at Swargadwar

Orientation Workshop on Transparency & Accountability Framework under VB-G RAM G for SAU Directors



Dr C. Dheeraja, Associate Professor & Head, Centre for Social Audit, with participants of the Orientation Workshop on Transparency & Accountability Framework under VB-G RAM G for State Audit Unit (SAU) Directors

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through its Centre for Social Audit (CSA), organised an Orientation Workshop on the Transparency & Accountability Framework under Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM G] for State Audit Unit (SAU) Directors from 07 to 08 May 2026 at the Institute campus.

The workshop aimed to familiarise SAU Directors with the transparency and accountability mechanisms envisaged under the VB-G RAM G framework and to strengthen institutional systems for effective programme implementation. The programme brought together Directors and senior officials from State Audit Units across the country to deliberate on strategies for ensuring transparency, accountability, and community participation in rural development programmes.

The sessions focused on the key components of the Transparency & Accountability Framework, including social audit processes, grievance redressal systems, citizen participation, public disclosure mechanisms, and monitoring arrangements. Discussions highlighted the role of State Audit Units

in promoting accountability, improving programme governance, and ensuring effective oversight of rural development interventions.

Resource persons shared experiences and best practices from various states on strengthening social accountability mechanisms and enhancing community engagement. Interactive discussions enabled participants to exchange insights on operational challenges, institutional arrangements, and innovative approaches for improving transparency and responsiveness in programme implementation.

The workshop also explored strategies for strengthening coordination among stakeholders, building institutional capacities, and integrating accountability measures into programme planning and execution. Participants appreciated the opportunity for peer learning and deliberated on ways to adapt the framework to state-specific contexts.

The programme concluded with a shared commitment to strengthening transparency and accountability systems under VB-G RAM G and promoting participatory governance for achieving inclusive and sustainable rural development outcomes.

Workshop on Finalisation of Training Modules of IFCs for Assam SRLM



Participants with faculty members of NIRDPR during the Workshop-cum-Writeshop on Orientation of Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM G] organised by CWEL, NIRDPR, Hyderabad.

The DAY-NRLM Resource Cell of the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a Workshop on Finalisation of Training Modules of Integrated Farm Clusters (IFCs) for Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM) from 13 to 15 May 2026.

The workshop aimed to review and finalise training modules designed to strengthen the implementation of the Integrated Farm Cluster (IFC) approach under DAY-NRLM. The programme brought together experts, mission functionaries, and technical professionals to refine training content and ensure its relevance to the field realities and livelihood needs of rural communities in Assam.

Discussions focused on sustainable agriculture, integrated farming

systems, natural resource management livelihood diversification, convergence strategies, and capacity-building approaches for community institutions. Participants examined existing training materials, incorporated field experiences and best practices, and developed recommendations to improve the effectiveness of training interventions for IFC implementation.

The workshop provided a platform for collaborative learning and technical deliberations, contributing to the development of practical and context-specific training modules that can support enhanced livelihoods, productivity, and resilience among rural households.

The programme concluded with the finalisation of key module components and action points for their adoption and rollout by Assam SRLM.

Writeshop on Transparency and Accountability Framework under VB-G RAM G



Participants of the Writeshop to Prepare ToT Module on Transparency & Accountability Framework under VB-G RAM G with faculty members of NIRDPR

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a National-Level Writeshop and Workshop on Planning and Implementation of Livelihood-Oriented Infrastructure under Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-GRAM-G] from 06 to 08 May 2026 at the Institute campus.

The programme brought together experts, practitioners, programme functionaries, and rural development professionals to deliberate on strategies for planning, designing, and implementing infrastructure interventions that directly contribute to sustainable livelihood enhancement in rural areas.

The workshop focused on strengthening the understanding of livelihood-oriented infrastructure and its role in promoting rural employment, income generation, and economic development. Discussions covered key themes such as infrastructure planning, convergence of schemes, asset creation, natural resource management, market-linked infrastructure, and community

participation in development processes.

The writeshop component facilitated collaborative discussions on developing guidelines, training materials, and implementation frameworks to support effective execution of livelihood-oriented infrastructure initiatives under VB-GRAM-G. Participants examined field experiences, best practices, and innovative approaches that could be adapted across different states and regions.

Interactive sessions, group exercises, and thematic deliberations enabled participants to identify implementation challenges and explore practical solutions for improving the quality, sustainability, and impact of rural infrastructure investments. Special emphasis was placed on creating durable assets that support livelihoods, strengthen local economies, and contribute to inclusive rural transformation.

The programme served as a platform for knowledge exchange and collective learning, reinforcing the importance of integrated planning and community-driven approaches in achieving the objectives of VB-GRAM-G.

DAY-NRLM-Sponsored Skill Development Programmes for SHG Women Launched at NIRDPR



Participants engaged in hands-on training activities during the DAY-NRLM-sponsored Skill Development Programmes on Jute & Cloth Product Making and Home Cleaning & Sanitary Product Making

The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) sponsored skill development programmes for 2026-27 were inaugurated at the Rural Technology Park (RTP), National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad.

A total of 94 Self-Help Group (SHG) women are participating in two specialised training programmes on Jute & Cloth Product Making and Home Cleaning & Sanitary Product Making. The programmes have been designed to strengthen the entrepreneurial capabilities of rural women by providing them with practical skills, technical knowledge, and enterprise development support.

The training programmes were inaugurated by Dr Ravindra S. Gavali, Director, DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, NIRDPR. Addressing the participants, he highlighted the importance of skill development, value addition, and entrepreneurship in creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for rural women. He emphasised that such initiatives play a crucial role in enhancing household incomes, promoting self-reliance, and strengthening women-led enterprises

under the DAY-NRLM framework.

The programmes combine classroom instruction with hands-on practical training, enabling participants to gain experience in product design, manufacturing techniques, quality control, packaging, branding, and marketing. Special emphasis is being placed on developing entrepreneurial skills and understanding market opportunities to help participants establish and manage successful micro-enterprises.

In addition to technical training, participants will be exposed to enterprise management concepts, financial literacy, and business planning, which are essential for transforming skills into sustainable income-generating ventures. The programmes are expected to contribute to livelihood diversification and create opportunities for SHG women to become successful entrepreneurs in their respective communities.

The initiative reflects the continued commitment of DAY-NRLM and NIRDPR towards promoting women's economic empowerment, strengthening rural livelihoods, and fostering inclusive and sustainable rural development through skill-based interventions.

National-Level Writeshop and Workshop on Livelihood-Oriented Infrastructure under VB-GRAM-G



Participants of the Writeshop with Dr R. Chinnadurai, Associate Professor, CPRDP & SSD; Dr R. Aruna Jayamani, Assistant Professor, CGGPA; and Dr Pratyusna Patnaik, Assistant Professor, CPRDP & SSD, Dr S.K.Sathyaprabha, Assistant Professor, CPRDP & SSD, NIRDPR, Hyderabad.

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The programme served as a platform for knowledge exchange and collective learning, reinforcing the importance of integrated planning and community-driven approaches in achieving the objectives of VB-GRAM-G.

From Household Hierarchy to Panchayat Voice

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Elected women representatives are increasingly visible in rural governance, yet genuine leadership often remains contested. Based on field observations in Uttar Pradesh and insights from Kerala, this article explores the challenges and pathways of women's leadership at the grassroots.



Field Setting: Bela Persua near the Nepal Border

In Bela Persua near Nighasan, close to the Nepal border, distance is not only measured in kilometres. It is gauged in the weak mobile signal, seen in the flood-prone landscape, and felt in the silence of women who know their village's problems deeply but are still learning how to speak in public spaces. During my field visit to Uttar Pradesh, I realised that rural governance is not only about Panchayat buildings, elected positions, or development plans. It is also about the invisible social boundaries that decide who speaks, who remains silent, and who still needs permission even after being elected. A woman's journey to public leadership does not begin in the Panchayat Bhawan. It begins inside the household.

In areas like Nighasan, Mihinpurwa, and Bundelkhand, women's lives are shaped by family hierarchy, low literacy, weak mobility, social customs, borderland vulnerability, and institutional distance. Even when women become elected representatives, these older boundaries do not disappear automatically. The Panchayat seat may

be public, but the permission to use it is often negotiated within the family.

Reservation Gives the Seat, Not Automatically the Voice

India has made a significant democratic achievement by bringing women into local governance. Around 1.4 million women serve as elected members in Panchayati Raj Institutions, forming about 46 per cent of the total elected representatives in PRIs. Constitutional reservation has opened the door for women's participation in grassroots democracy.

But the deeper question is this: does occupying a Panchayat seat automatically give a woman voice, confidence, and decision-making power? The persistence of practices such as purdah, restricted mobility, and gendered family control shows that the answer is complex. Reservation creates entry, but leadership needs much more – awareness, confidence, family support, social acceptance, institutional exposure, training, and community recognition.

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In many villages, women are elected, but their participation remains uneven. Some attend meetings but do not speak. Some know the village's issues but hesitate to raise them formally, partly because authority and decision-making still centre around male members of patrilineal family structures. Women's representation is not the end goal; it is the beginning of a longer journey. Leadership grows when a woman begins to speak in public, interact with officials, participate in planning, and gradually earn community trust.

Familial Hierarchy: The First Gatekeeper

Before a woman can engage the Panchayat, she must first negotiate with her household. Before marriage, she may remain under the authority of her father's family; after marriage, under her husband's. Her movement, communication, education, and public interaction are all shaped by household expectations. Becoming an elected representative does not immediately free her from these constraints.

Husbands, fathers-in-law, elder male members, and sometimes senior women may influence whether she can attend meetings, travel to offices, use a mobile phone, or interact with officials. This is where proxy leadership appears: the woman is elected, but a male relative speaks for her, handles documents, and influences decisions.

Yet proxy leadership should not be read uniformly. There is a distinction between control and support. A family member who helps initially with mobility and procedures, and gradually steps back as the woman's confidence grows, can enable a genuine transition. What matters is whether the woman is learning, speaking, and gaining decision-making space over time. Leadership is not a fixed identity. It is a process of learning, negotiating, and becoming.

Institutions have a direct role here. Officials and Panchayat systems should communicate with elected women representatives directly – not only through male relatives. Training invitations, certificates, and public recognition directed to the woman herself make a practical difference in reducing proxy practices.

Vulnerable Landscapes: Nighasan, Mihinpurwa, and Bundelkhand

Women's leadership in these regions cannot be understood through gender alone. It must also be read through geography, poverty, ecological stress, and the reach of public institutions.

Nighasan, around Bela Persua near the Nepal border, is a flood-prone area, where connectivity is weak. When communication depends on specific networks – or in some locations on a Nepali SIM – geography itself shapes access to information and welfare. The Nepal-border region also carries a long history of cross-border social and marital ties, understood locally as “Roti-Beti ka Rishta” – bonds of food, kinship, livelihood, and marriage between Indian and Nepali communities.

But as governance has become document-based, these ties have created new vulnerabilities. Nepali women married into Indian families have faced difficulties obtaining Aadhaar and identity documents, affecting their access to ration,

pension, healthcare, and housing. For these women, identity, marriage, documentation, and welfare are the same problem. A woman may belong to a household, but if her documents are weak, her access to entitlements depends on others.

In Mihinpurwa, remoteness and forest-border conditions weaken institutional access. Travel is difficult, public offices feel distant, and for women, every public movement may require prior negotiation at home. In

A woman may know the problem, but the system may not hear her. That is the real gap.

The Psychology of Silence

Many women are not silent because they lack opinions; regrettably, they have been socially trained to remain so. From childhood, they may be taught to listen more than speak, to obey more than question, and to avoid public confrontation. Education is interrupted, movement is monitored, and confidence in public spaces never develops the way it might otherwise.

NFHS-5 data for Uttar Pradesh records that about 16 per cent of women aged 20–24 were married before the legal minimum age of 18, compared to 6.3 per cent in Kerala. These numbers matter because early marriage shapes education, mobility, confidence, and social exposure for an entire generation. Even where child marriage has become less visible, its effects persist in the lives of many adult women today.

During field interactions, I observed what I call the “softening of voice.” In courtyard conversations, women spoke clearly and confidently about water, ration, roads, pensions, and household problems. But as soon as the discussion moved toward Gram Sabha, official procedures, or formal authority, the same women became careful, hesitant, and quieter. The knowledge had not changed. What changed was the social permission to express it.

Bundelkhand – particularly in areas like Muskara and Naraini – water stress, seasonal migration, and livelihood insecurity are not abstract indicators, but daily responsibilities that women carry. They know where the water point has run dry, which road floods, whose ration has not arrived, and which child has stopped attending school. This is substantive development knowledge. The challenge is whether the system creates any channel for it to enter formal planning.

For an elected woman representative, the internal questions are real: Can I speak in front of men? Will people laugh if I make a mistake? Will my family allow me to attend? These reveal the gap between knowledge and expression. Confidence-building is therefore not a soft skill in Panchayati Raj – for many women, it is the first condition of democratic participation.

Many women leaders begin quietly. They observe, sit in meetings, listen, ask questions privately, and slowly learn how the Panchayat works. The journey is often: hesitation → observation → awareness → confidence → voice → leadership.

Kerala as a Learning Contrast

The comparison with Kerala clarifies something important: women’s leadership is not only an individual quality. It is an ecosystem outcome.

Kerala should not be presented as perfect, nor Uttar Pradesh reduced to backwardness. The meaningful comparison is between two different support ecosystems. In many vulnerable regions of UP, a woman leader may stand alone between household hierarchy and Panchayat expectations – she has the seat, but not enough collective support to use it confidently.

Kerala's Kudumbashree programme works with about 48.08 lakh women organised into around 3.17 lakh Neighbourhood Groups, connected upward through Area Development Societies and Community Development Societies. Repeated group meetings, savings, discussions, and local participation create confidence as a collective resource. A woman who has spoken in group meetings for years does not find Gram Sabha entirely unfamiliar. A woman with collective backing feels less isolated. Collective engagement makes public confidence easier to build.

The lesson is not to copy Kerala mechanically. It is to learn from the principle: women's leadership becomes stronger when individual courage is supported by collective platforms and institutional recognition. For regions like Nighasan, Mihinpurwa, and Bundelkhand, this could mean stronger SHG-PRI linkages, pre-Gram Sabha women's meetings, regular leadership training, family sensitisation, and direct official engagement with elected women representatives. The difference lies not

in women's capacity, but in the ecosystem around them.

Conclusion: From Hierarchy to Voice

The journey of women's leadership in Panchayati Raj is not only from household to Panchayat. It is from hierarchy to voice – from hesitation to confidence, from informal knowledge to formal participation, from proxy presence to recognised leadership.

Women's leadership is shaped by many layers: familial hierarchy, low literacy, restricted mobility, early marriage, flood vulnerability, weak connectivity, documentation gaps, and limited institutional access. These layers make public participation difficult, but they also make women's leadership deeply meaningful when it begins to emerge.

Women do not lack capacity. They need families that support them, communities that recognise them, institutions that engage with them directly, and platforms that help their everyday knowledge become public action. Reservation gives women the seat. The work that remains is ensuring the seat can speak.

"In these villages, democracy does not fail because women do not know; it weakens when their knowledge remains trapped between household permission and institutional silence."

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), an autonomous organisation under the Union Ministry of Rural Development, is a premier national centre of excellence in rural development and Panchayati Raj. Recognised internationally as one of the UN-ESCAP Centres of Excellence, it builds capacities of rural development functionaries, elected representatives of PRIs, bankers, NGOs and other stakeholders through inter-related activities of training, research and consultancy. The Institute is located in the historic city of Hyderabad in Telangana state. The NIRDPR celebrated its Golden Jubilee Year of establishment in 2008. In addition to the main campus in Hyderabad, this Institute has a North-Eastern Regional Centre at Guwahati, Assam, a branch at New Delhi and a Career Guidance Centre at Vaishali, Bihar.



राष्ट्रीय ग्रामीण विकास एवं
पंचायती राज संस्थान

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