

# Community Livelihoods Support

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*The central focus of country's poverty reduction initiatives is livelihood development of the poor households (HHs) through adoption of sustainable practices. In the context of making poverty reduction measure more effective, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India adopted 'Livelihoods Approach' for elimination of rural poverty and restructured Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) into National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in FY 2010-11.*

**T**he NRLM encourages need-based intervention for the poor who belong to different occupational fields in diverse agro-ecosystems and expands the scope of evolving a sustainable model of extension services through involvement and leadership of women SHG-based institutions. Such comprehensive approach of NRLM is strategically significant for West Bengal to converge organisational strength of the poor families, traditional wisdom, skill, and choice of the farming community with service providers at different levels. SHG-based institutions have emerged with inevitable organisational strength, and the State appropriately utilised a scope to enhance its social capital in fulfilling the mandate of NRLM.

## Current Challenges in Farm and Allied Sectors

West Bengal is a State which is unique in respect of geographical diversity and livelihood pattern of the rural community. The farmers of the State are predominantly marginal farmers with the subsistence farm-based livelihoods' pattern that depends on the multiple farm-related activities for sustenance. The State Focus Paper of NABARD (2017-18) indicates a number of issues which are quite relevant as backdrop of community-based intervention for livelihood opportunities. The predominant issues are increasing number of small and marginal farmers and decreasing land size, adverse impact on soil health and productivity due to imbalances in fertiliser application coupled with intensive agriculture, inadequacies of quality seed or plant material, etc. These are associated with increasing dependency on livestock challenges in augmenting productivity of livestock and poultry birds

on one hand, and existence of large areas of water bodies which still suffer from inefficient management and poor production on the other. With the increasing cost of cultivation and decreasing trend of labour absorption in agriculture, a large number of rural youth tends to shift from agriculture to more remunerative non-farming jobs within or outside of the State.

Under present situation, women of the farming families in the State are getting priority in production system due to their enhanced access to microcredit mobilising system through SHGs, and absence of migrant male partners of the families. It appears that West Bengal is truly in a position to resort to synchronising large section of landless or marginal farming HHs on one hand, and has huge potentiality in terms of manpower and unutilised natural resources on the other. To handle this crisis, capacity development of the SHG community and service providers is essential for improved access to modern knowledge and better management of resources, rather than depending on conventional system of extension. So, "Anandadhara" (West Bengal State Rural Livelihoods Mission- WBSRLM) sought to find out an effective model in collaboration with BRAIPRD (B.R.Ambedkar Institute of Panchayats and Rural Development) erstwhile SIPRD, the institute which took the leadership in designing the model and capacity development of the resource pool. The spirit of this collaboration was based on the principle of building efficiency of the system, for reaching poor farming HHs, and establishing an association between community's traditional wisdom, innovations, and amalgamation of logical application of appropriate technologies.

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## Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture-extension model

Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture (CMSA) has been introduced under Anandadhara in 2015, to address the specific need of the poor farming community through improvement of farm-based livelihoods. The name CMSA itself implies that the initiative encourages and supports the “community” meaning SHG-based Institutions that are being promoted under NRLM in rural West Bengal as key stakeholders or changemakers in farm and farm-allied livelihood scenario. CMSA in West Bengal follows certain principles in fulfilling its mandate through participatory exercise. Following are the main features of CMSA:

- SHG-based Institutions (Sangha Samabay Samitis as it is called in the State) at the Gram Panchayat level have been considered as prime stakeholders of community-managed extension system in organising extension of sustainable practice, resource management, and transfer of technologies.
- Exchange of knowledge and transfer of skill for improved system are regarded as core principles for all the activities.
- For intensive facilitation, a team of trained Community Resource Persons (CRPs) is attached with these Institutions for certain period.
- Building capacity of those Community Resource Persons (CRPs) who can facilitate the process with the Institutions in different agro-climatic region.
- Focus on improvement of production system, mitigation of risk and cost through adoption of environment friendly, cost reducing technology, and use of unutilised natural resources.



*Handholding Training on Construction of Rainshelter*



*Training on Preparation of Liquid Manure by CRP Team*

- Convergence of input and services from line departments and research institutions is given utmost priority.

### Methodology in Field Execution

CMSA is being implemented in West Bengal through a team of CRPs which is headed by one Sr CRP or team leaders. The team is handed over to a Sangha Samabay Samiti to arrange for their logistics of staying in the villages. The Samiti also identifies their area of operation and selection of HHs with whom they will work for a minimum period of 15 days in a month and for a period of one year without any interruption. Around 150 HHs are being identified by the Sangha Samabay leaders for each member of the team. The CRPs start acquainting themselves with the villagers, particularly with the HHs with whom they will work for a year. They get the relevant livelihood-related information from the villagers and plan for individual HH in participatory mode with both male and female partners. The plan includes their farm-based activities only. Accordingly, they plan for handholding training on the identified interventions viz. crop and soil nutrient management, non-pesticide management, system approach, and others. At the end of each round of 15 days, each CRP submits their work-done report to the Sangha Samabay. A season-based plan is prepared by the team in consultation with Sangha Samabay and credit is planned on the basis of the seasonal livelihood plan of the SHG members. The team also coordinates with the line departments for convergence of various Govt aided schemes. CMSA team is generally deployed for 3 consecutive years in a particular block. During this period, they work with 2500-3000 HHs. On completion

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of one year in each Sangha Samabay Samiti, the CRP team identifies Progressive Mahila Kisans (PMKs) capable to serve that area even after the team's withdrawal. Thus, livelihood community cadre is developed by SHG-based institutions. Table 1 depicts current status in respect of CMSA in the State.

**Table: 1**

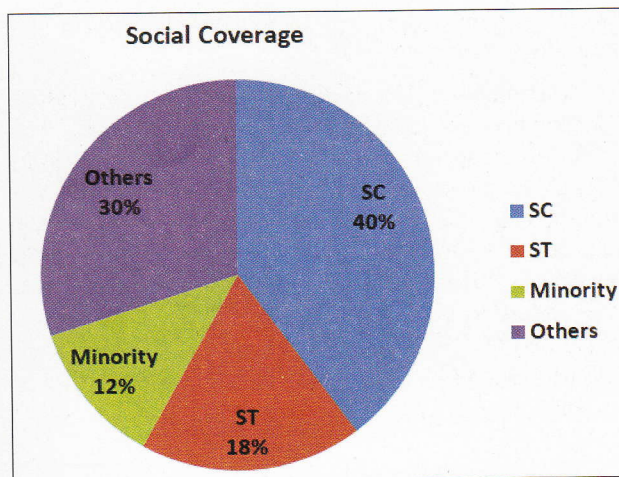
Total number of CRPs	Total number of Community Cadres developed since 2015 (Including PMK)	Total number of Blocks covered since 2015
598	7163	128

The table shows that quite a large number of CRPs are engaged in the extension model which could successfully generate employment for atleast 15 days in a month. Among those CRPs, 53 are designated as Senior CRPs to lead the team of CRPs deployed in specific blocks. Out of 53 Sr CRPs, 24 are entrusted with two blocks to lead the team. More than 70 per cent of total CRPs are women. The team of CRPs identifies a group of PMKs from the trainees to whom they give continuous support throughout the year. The table shows that more than 7163 such PMKs are now providing support to Sangha Samabay Samitis after CRP team is withdrawn.

Field investigation reveals the level of effectiveness of the model in respect of coverage of HHHs, transmission of need-based technology, and critical gaps in adopting eco-friendly technology by the farming HHHs. Following observations are found to be common in almost all agro-climatic regions of the State.

- Involvement of Sangha Samabay Samitis makes it easier in identification of the poor HHHs and covering large number of HHHs within a short period.
- Physical presence of the team for 15 days with the community is effective in identifying strength and opportunities of individual HHHs, and providing services at any point of time..
- Being farm practitioners, members of CRP team themselves are naturally equipped with better understanding of problems and potentials of the farm and allied activities, and prove to be effective in extension work.
- Household approach in CMSA is useful to ensure participation of both male and female members in any discussion on sustainable practices and adaptation of technology.
- Traditional practices of the community thus identified

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*Figure 1: Distribution of HHHs-CMSA initiatives during 2016-19*

by the team enrich the knowledge bank for the practitioners.

- Network of the CRP team members can intermediate in supply of critical inputs like bio-inoculants, mushroom spawn, fish spawn, and other for the benefit of the farmers
- Services and supports from technical departments, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and panchyats are converged successfully as CRP support is available for the farmers at every stage.

### Farmers' Choice and Impact on Production

Interaction with CRPs and farmers reveals that there is a variation in acceptance of different technologies and new crops. Farming HHHs are inclined to accept those concepts, technologies or crops which primarily reduce cost of farming including labour and input, provide scope of additional crop from fallow land, user-friendly, improve production, provide protection of crops, reduce loss, and give higher profit margin. One of the objectives of CMSA is promotion of eco-friendly practices among the rural HHHs. There is a striking difference in levels of acceptance in use of organic material for cultivation. Field experience shows that reduction of chemicals in field crops has been made possible to a certain extent, particularly in case of crop protection. Non Pesticide Management (NPM) has become much preferred than any other measures demonstrated by CRPs.

### Focus Areas for Future

The areas which need more focus are:

- Availability of inputs required for organic farming is a vital hindrance to the farmers in continuing eco-friendly practices. Plants useful





*Integrated Farm of Jhinku Bibi, Mahila Kisan of Nakasipara*



*Light Trap at Rice Field - Natural Way of Crop Protection*

for bio-farming need priority in social forestry programmes and plantation plan under MGNREGS.

- Poultry feed, routine vaccination of birds and animals, fish feed, processing of mustard and pulses, optimum utilisation of water bodies are major areas where improvement needs to be achieved.
- One year duration is inadequate for motivating all the HHs under Sangha Samabay Samitis to adopt appropriate practices for getting better results and experimentation on different practices.
- Considering vital need of the inputs like bio-inoculants, vermiculture, and other useful material, Govt needs to intervene to ensure availability of the material through establishment of bio-lab in decentralised mode, particularly utilising the infrastructure of KVKs.
- Huge potentiality of self-employment can be harnessed for input production and service delivery in farm and allied sector. Cottage-level establishment, if properly designed and financed, can absorb substantial number of educated youth in emerging sectors of employment.

### Conclusion

Addressing heterogeneity and diverse need is a challenge for any development initiative in our country. Community-based institutions have been given priority for the last few decades to strengthen the institutional base for better management and effective delivery of services and above all, inclusion of the community wisdom in the entire process of innovation towards change. CMSA model, though initially designed in top-down delivery mode, undoubtedly widens a chance of developing a community's own strategy and internalising the necessity of linking credit requirement with training and extension. Now it is to see whether these Sangha Samabay Samitis

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can assume a self-sufficient revenue model in future to extend these services to the member HHs with the help of the CRPs or PMKs. The success of CMSA in West Bengal confirms that developing and strengthening new generation rural extension team in farm and allied sector is the task ahead. This ultimately will satisfy greater objectives of NRLM which envisages reduction of rural poverty through institutional strengthening and livelihoods development.

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### End Notes

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