



Localising SDGs

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This article is based on **Localising SDGs will pay off** which was published in The Hindu Business Line on /08/2021. It talks about the achieving SDGs in a bottom-up approach and involvement of women collectives.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global effort that has one major objective — achieving a better future for all. To achieve these global and national targets, localisation is a crucial lever.

It correlates how local and State governments can support the accomplishments of the SDGs through bottom-up action, and how the SDGs can provide a framework for local policy.

If India is to achieve its goals by 2030, it must build a mechanism for effectively localising the SDGs — one that leverages and integrates the **social capital** that exists in **women's collectives and with the local self-governance of the Panchayati Raj system**.

Women Collectives

- By the simplest definition, a women's collective is a group of women who meet regularly to achieve a shared purpose. But these groups take many forms across the world, with women coming together for different economic, legal, health, and cultural reasons.
- In India's rural areas, SHGs are an example of women collectives.

The five key elements of women's collectives



Significance of Women Collectives

- **Overcome Social Inequalities:** Women collectives have successfully overcome the deep-rooted bias of caste, patriarchy, and wealth by challenging norms and unequal social relations.
They encourage collective efforts for combating practices like dowry, alcoholism etc.
- **Paving Way For Gram Swaraj:** Women collectives have created conditions for **social equality** and ultimately, paving the way for Gram Swaraj.
 - The women of **Kudumbashree** in Kerala exemplify this.
 - By articulating the aspirations of the local community, the women were able to engage elected representatives in a two-way process — complementing their efforts while also holding them accountable.
- **Gender Equity:** Women collectives empower women and inculcates leadership skills among them. Empowered women participate more actively in developmental processes, gram sabha and elections.
There is evidence that formation of Self-Help Groups has a multiplier effect in improving women's status in society as well as in the family leading to improvement in their socio-economic condition and also enhances their self-esteem.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Women collectives reach to the poorest of the poor section of society further financial inclusion.
The financial inclusion attained leads to reduced child mortality, improved maternal health and the ability of the poor to combat disease through better nutrition, housing and health – especially among women and children.

Challenges

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- **Challenges of Limited Resources:** Undoubtedly, there are inherent challenges associated with involving community institutions like SHGs in developing the **Gram Panchayat Development Plan**, including **human resources, capacities**, and disaggregating department **budgets**.
 - **Lack of knowledge** and proper orientation among SHG-members to take up suitable and profitable livelihood options.
 - **Patriarchal Mindset:** Primitive thinking and social obligations discourage women from participating in women collectives (SHGs) thus limiting their economic avenues.
 - **Lack of Rural Banking Facilities:** Many public sector banks and **micro-finance institutions** are unwilling to provide financial services to the poor as the cost of servicing remains high.
 - **Sustainability and the quality of operations** of the SHGs have been a matter of considerable debate.

Way Forward

- **Leverage the Strength of Women Collectives:** Today, 76 million women have been mobilised into SHGs under the **National Rural Livelihoods Mission** and there are 3.1 million elected **panchayat representatives**.

For localisation of SDGs to truly work, there is a need to leverage the strength of both (PRIs & SHGs) these institutions through a partnership.
- **Reinforcing the Panchayat:** To truly localise the SDGs, the route ought to be taken within the framework of the Constitution.

Any action should not form a parallel track, but become a way of reinforcing the **institutional capacity of panchayats**.
- **Learning From the Experience:** The five southern States — Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana — have done better than the others when it comes to poverty reduction.

There are five things that these States did that seem to have played a significant role in curbing poverty.

 - The participation of adolescent **girls in secondary, higher secondary**, and higher education.
 - The **decline in fertility** has a far greater correlation to the participation of adolescent girls in secondary, higher secondary education than any healthcare and family welfare services.
 - **The formation of collectives:** when women came together to form SHGs it created an identity outside of the house.
 - Since these women over time had had basic secondary level education, their collectives or SHGs could leverage skills and diverse livelihood opportunities better than others.
 - The decision that permitted lending of up to Rs. 10 lakh without collateral for women SHGs, has recently been raised by the RBI to ₹20 lakh.

- **More Responsibility For PRIs:** The 73rd Constitution Amendment transferred 29 subjects to PRIs. For successful localisation of development, PRIs need not only emphasise their governance role but also focus on their **developmental role**.
 - The entire discourse should focus on how to enable PRIs to focus on their leadership role in achieving the SDGs.
 - This would need work on many leadership traits — visioning, mobilising and seeking partnerships, among others.
- **Leveraging Social Capital:** There are not many conversations about social capital being a strong foundation for economic activity. Ultimately, localisation efforts should lead to transformation not in social relationships alone, but also the level of economic activity in villages.

Conclusion

Localising the SDGs at the rural level will not only challenge existing unequal relations but also provide an institutional framework that is in sync with national and global priorities.

Not enough time is spent on understanding how a poor household can leverage systems or institutions to move up faster. There's a need to look at these small collectives as the root of more shared growth.

Drishti Mains Question

Leverage women's collectives and the Panchayati Raj system is an effective way to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).Comment.
