



POLICY PAPER

Empowering Women in Agriculture:
Closing the Gender Gap through
Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) was launched as a sub component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in 2011 with a focus on empowering women in agriculture by strengthening community institutions of poor women farmers to gain more control over the production processes and manage the support systems, enhance access to inputs and services from government and others.

Women represent more than 40% of the global labour force and 43% of the global agricultural labour force. The NSSO (2009-10) shows that in India 79% of women continue to be engaged in agriculture and allied activities as against only 63% of men. Women's reported participation in the labour force in rural areas of India decreased from 36.8% in 1993-94 to 27% in 2009-10 according to NSSO data. Today, the share of agricultural labour is larger than the share of cultivators, a trend observed for the first time in the past 40 years. Also, female wage rates are only 50-75% of male wage rates. 12% of all rural households in India are now female headed with small holdings.

It is not only the extent of women's dependence on agriculture for livelihoods, but the nature of their engagement with farming that has also significantly changed. Micro

studies show that women are engaged in the majority of agricultural operations of work, including the production of major grains and millers, land preparation, seed selection, sowing, applying manure, fertilizer and pesticide, weeding, transplanting, threshing, winnowing and harvesting. Women also take on almost all the primary processing, storage and cooking of food as subsistence farmers. Such subsistence farming produces one-half of the food grains and three-quarters of the pulses in rural India.

The gender gaps in literacy, health status and low levels of asset ownership of women in general and rural poor in particular are resultant outcomes of the deep-rooted discrimination that rural women face. The opportunities for decent work and wage employment are only expanding for a small section of women in the service sector, while the bulk of the women in the production sectors continue to be unpaid or in the unorganized sector without any social protection. The lack of basic infrastructure in rural areas for water and sanitation such as piped water supply and toilets, energy especially the lack of subsidized cooking fuel add to the tedious, time consuming and back breaking work of women.

The context of MKSP is of deep distress in the agriculture sector marked by agricultural labour overtaking cultivators in the last census, persistent and pervasive food insecurity plaguing food producers, rapidly depleting share of agriculture in the GDP, farmers' suicides and growing absence of men in the fields leading to the feminization of agriculture.

In this paper, the MKSP is reviewed from the lens of women's empowerment for gender equality. Women's empowerment has been conceptualized in different ways, but almost always at the root of the notion of empowerment is the idea of 'power'. 'Empowerment' is understood as the transformation of unequal power relations, be it in gender, caste, class or any other axes of marginalisation, as well as in the distribution of and control over resources. In the way that empowerment is understood, it is a process as much as it is an end, and it encompasses various dimensions of women's lives, whether the economic, political or the social facets.

The paper presents six case studies of which five are being implemented as part of the MKSP projects. These cases offer lessons in the four key dimensions of empowerment – building women's collective strength, designing spaces to create voice and agency, acknowledging and validating knowledge and information of women farmers, enhancing women's access, control, ownership to productive resources.

In order to build collective strength, the case study of MSSRF Maharashtra highlights the means for identifying women farmers on the multiple dimensions of poverty. The case study of Jeevika Bihar's 'Procurement Samitis' highlights the need to provide opportunities for women to

engage with markets, take decisions regarding investments to be made for productive resources as a strategy to build autonomous women's organizations. The case study of the ANANDI-UN Women pilot highlights a strategy to design spaces and tools to enable critical reflection on gendered identities, division of labour and the composition of livelihood baskets. In Andhra Pradesh, the strategy for agricultural extension employed by Indira Kranthi Patham as a part of its community-managed sustainable agriculture (CMSA) programme acknowledges and validates the knowledge and information that women farmers have. The programme's pedagogy privileges women's local knowledge creation and transfer.

The case study of Kudumbashree in Kerala enhance women's access, control and ownership to productive resources in key ways. In Kerala, the land-leasing programme initiated by Kudumbashree leverages its existing multi-tier organizational structure to strengthen women's voice and agency. Using its collective strength to effect power relations within the community, women's federations negotiate terms of land leasing through local self-governments with large landowners. The Tejaswani programme in Dindori Madhya Pradesh also reinforces women's use, ownership and control over natural resources by promoting sustainable cultivation practices for millet, the traditional staple crop of the Baiga community. The success of all of these programmes has been in building and strengthening women's federations and collective action around issues of livelihoods.

The lessons from the MKSP review for gender equality outcomes are organized around five themes: Social mobilization, women's access and control over productive resources, building

women's collective institutions, engendering livelihoods and partnerships for upscaling.

MKSP is one of the first programmes of the government that recognizes the increasing feminization of agriculture and the role of women in farming. It does not make formal ownership of land the basis for working with women farmers, by also reaching out to women who are from land-owning households, landless women, sharecroppers, collectives who are leasing land and women practicing livelihood allied to agriculture. Participation in the programme however is not adequate to bring recognition to women farmers. Changing normative and institutional beliefs for the recognition of women farmers requires forums for critical reflection and collective action to challenge systemic patriarchies to make a dent on gender discriminatory beliefs and practices. Gender discrimination is lived and experienced in intersection with other social identities producing multiple vulnerabilities. The MKSP has successfully mobilized women in the program, and requires to build in measures that address other axes of marginalization to ensure protection of women's rights to productive resources and bodily integrity.

The MKSP concerns itself with the household and not the woman farmer. However, the household is not a neutral, cooperative unit - it is characterized by gendered decision making, control over women's labour, incomes and sexuality, unequal distribution of assets and resources. Outcome measurement in terms of improvement of farm productivity or agricultural output, while important, are not necessarily measures of whether women have access, control or ownership over these incomes accrued due to program inputs

In order to effectively channelize women's energies towards a transformative agenda, evidence from all the case studies points to the formation of women's collectives as a successful strategy. The MKSP is also designed around creating and strengthening women's farmer collectives. However, the program becomes prescriptive on the ground with its insistence of membership only through savings and credit-based SHGs, which cannot be assumed to be solidarity-based collectives. Women farmers need their own forums to discuss, reflect and act on their concerns. Since NRLM and MKSP already have a well laid-out three-tier structure, these forums can easily be built in to these structures without compulsorily linking them to savings and credit groups. MKSP has an opportunity to upscale through partnerships with other large government programs such as Tejaswani, Mahila Samakhya and MAVIM which have built strong women's collectives.

The MKSP has great potential to increase women's use, control and ownership of resources, especially labour, land and water. Land-leasing initiative by collectives of women agricultural labour facilitated in Kudumbashree is one strategy it could promote, while initiatives towards access to commons and water through convergence with other departments requires sustained facilitation

The agricultural technologies promoted by the program such as low-cost sustainable agricultural programs such as CMSA or System of Rice Intensification (SRI) require strategies to address strategic gender needs to be built in to them. These prac-

tices, for instance, labour-intensive, and women do not have effective control over labour. The introduction and adoption of drudgery reduction tools developed for gender specific operations in agriculture envisaged in the program objectives require to be systematically integrated, monitored and documented. Creation of tools banks for women farmers proposed by PIA's have the potential to be dovetailed into the program strategy as an essential component.

Women farmers' livelihoods are a composite of their work for production, care work and access to entitlements in cash and kind, including social protection schemes. MKSP also needs to expand into identifying and demonstrating technologies in areas of forest produce, small ruminants, poultry, horticulture in which form

significant portion of large number of women's livelihood baskets and contribute to nutrition security.

In conclusion, conceptually, empowerment has come to mean the transformation of unequal relations of power that determine the nature of the social structure, whether through gender, caste, class or any other axes of marginalization. Women are also challenging the multiple patriarchies they face, evolving their aspirations and exercising agency. Yet institutional mechanisms are slow to respond. In this regard, the MKSP is a welcome move in acknowledging and systematically investing in knowledge, technology, resources and agency of women farmers. The programme is in a privileged position to rise to occasion and make substantive equality its long-term goal.

P. Sainath tells the story of Leelabai, a woman farmer from Yavatmal who he met during a visit to investigate agrarian distress led farmer suicides. Her husband is a much celebrated farmer credited for record yields in cotton and soybean even in years of crop failures. But as Sainath discovers, it is not her husband but she who manages the thriving farm. Not only does she have excellent planning skills, growing food crops as well as cash crops, but over the years she has also managed to locate the best lands to acquire 40 acres. Sainath sums up, "In a society where the man is always regarded the farmer and "head of the household," the credit inevitably went (and still does) to Ashanna. As with women cultivators across most of India, Leelabai is seen as a "farmer's wife" and not a farmer in her own right. Like anywhere else, women do the bulk of farming work here too, with little recognition of their massive contribution. Ashanna is a symbol of success in agriculture in these parts. But Leelabai is the architect of that success. To his credit, he recognises it. As for Leelabai, she is clear about it."

Leelabai is an exception in more ways than one. She is aware about her

contribution, clearly identifies herself as a woman farmer, takes decisions on not only all agricultural operations but also on land purchases and sale. And this successful farmer also worries about the way forward for agriculture. On agriculture Leelabai says: "Something has to happen. Farming cannot continue as it does now. These costs of cultivation, no one can bear. We must have cheaper inputs. And we must get a better price for our cotton and soybean. If there is no change, we'll all be lining up in the queue after Namdeo Gandhewar."

Sainath did not set out to meet her at the outset but she made herself be heard, not as a victim but as a leader who set course for the future of farming in the area. This story provides the *raison d'être* for a scheme like the "Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana". There are many more women farmers who require their voices to be heard, for only when women farmers are empowered does agriculture have any hope of being revived and rural livelihoods become sustainable. Women farmers need recognition- starting with the self but more importantly from the society and the state.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Mahila Kisan Sashakthikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) programme of the Government of India under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission, in which about 2 million rural women engaged in agriculture are being empowered through multiple interventions, marks a new beginning where women farmers are identified as primary stakeholders in heralding a national agricultural revival. MKSP aims to improve the status of women in agriculture and bridge the gender gap that still exists in the Indian agrarian world to bring about systemic change in the sector. The data available on evidence of the impact of the MKSP is limited. This policy paper relies on documentation and case studies of project implementation agencies of the MKSP, field interactions and interviews of relevant stakeholders of the programme. It is a review of the programme from the framework of empowerment of women, and offers key learnings from good practices and recommendations for the way forward.

The paper will try to look at evidence on whether MKSP has been successful in opening up women's access to resources and services required to enhance agricultural productivity and confer other benefits in the women's empowerment framework. Through case studies of Indira Kranthi

Patham, Kudumbashree, MSSRF, Jeevika Tejaswani and ANANDI-UN Women which are all projects supported by the MKSP, the paper analyses good practices of MKSP for the empowerment of women farmers. It discusses the positive lessons and points out the current gaps in the programme. The document also raises the question of whether more needs to be done in order to realize the goal of empowering women in agriculture within the context of wider emerging realities of women farmers in India.

The first section of the paper discusses the gender gaps in agriculture in India, the shifts in the approach towards women farmers and lays out the concept of empowerment. Within this context, the second section discusses the origins, scale and scope of the project. The third section analyses the good practices and key learnings emerging from projects of the MKSP through case studies from Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar from the empowerment lens. The authors draw upon their unique position of active partners in the roll out of the MKSP project which has provided an opportunity to interact with senior bureaucrats and officials at the national and state level and other stakeholders to shape their observations. The final

section draws lessons from the good practices, critiques the design and strategies of the programme and makes recommendations for the way forward.

1.1 Agriculture and Livelihoods

833.5 million people or 68.8% of India's population lives in its 6.4 lac villages as per the country's 2011 Census. For the vast majority in India, 54.6% of total workers or 263 million people, agriculture continues to be the biggest source of livelihood. However, the Census marks the extent of rural distress and crises in agriculture with a decrease in 8.6 million cultivators since 2001¹. Today, the share of agricultural labour is larger than the share of cultivators, a trend observed for the first time in the past 40 years. This trend is pointer to both growing landlessness of farmers and also their extreme vulnerability.

NC Saxena argues that Indian agriculture is in a serious crisis². He finds three distinct features in the present agricultural scenario that distinguish it from the earlier 'green-revolution' phase - agricultural stagnation, change in policy from investments to subsidies and credit squeeze. The average growth in the Tenth Five Year Plan period in agriculture is 2.5% as opposed to the rest of the economy which had a growth rate of 7.6%. This fell even further in the 11th FYP period which saw a growth rate of 3.7% against the rest of the economy which had an 8% growth rate. Even the share of agriculture in the economy which was 23% in the 9th FYP period fell gradually to 14.1% in 2010-11³. The share of the sector which supports the largest number of livelihoods in the country reflects the growing inequity in incomes between the farm and non-farm sector, between urban and rural India.

NC Saxena argues that any increase in agricultural GDP during the last seven years has been because of higher relative prices, not higher production. He finds this trend true especially in the case of food grains, wherein food production increased only at 0.7% annually between 1996-2010 as against 3.5% in the 1980s. Saxena also argues that stagnant agricultural production has resulted in a slower increase of real agricultural wages from 4.68% during 1981-91 to 2.04% in 1991-99 to just 0.6% in 1999-2005 (Eswaran et al., 2009 in Saxena 2012).

Another feature that distinguishes the two phases is the shift in policy since the 1990s, which has been to secure an increased production through subsidies on inputs such as power, water, fertilizer and by increasing the MSP rather than through building new capital assets in irrigation, power and rural infrastructure. Saxena questions the equity, efficiency and sustainability of the current approach. "This has shifted the production base from low-cost regions to high-cost ones, causing an increase in the cost of production, regional imbalance and an increase in the burden of storage and transport of food grains."

1.2 Gender Gaps in Agriculture

The effect of the crisis in agriculture on women's livelihoods is significant. Loss of viability of production, reduced public investment, decelerating and gendered wages, degradation of resources has specifically affected women who are responsible for household food security. Aruna Kanchi argues that women's work related burdens are likely to get intensified because they are now responsible

¹ <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/farmers-have-decreased-farm-labourers-increased-census-report-dated-May13,2013> accessed on 25 November, 2014.

² Economic Survey 2010-11 in Saxena 2012.

³ Planning Commission of India 2013

for ensuring household food security under adverse economic conditions with little or no rights, authority, access to or control over resources required for enhancing production and household income, and no authority over what they produce.

Women represent more than 40% of the global labour force and 43% of the global agricultural labour force. This share varies from 20% in Latin America, 50% in Eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa⁴. In India, as per the NSSO (2009-10), 79% of rural women are engaged in agriculture and allied activities as against 63% men. 81% of women agriculture workers are from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes, and 83% are from landless, marginal or small farm households. Between 1993-94 and 2009-10, women's reported participation in the labour force in rural areas of India has decreased from 36.8% to 27% (NSSO). However, the measure of labour force participation rate has been critiqued by feminist economists for not capturing the extent and nature of women's work and it has been estimated that more than 50% of female agricultural workers are unpaid family workers⁵. The abysmally low labour force participation rate of 27% never the less speaks of the absence of rural women in the formal economy. Furthermore, female wage rates are only 50-75% of male wage rates and are "insufficient to overcome poverty"⁶.

The Twelfth Five Year Plan highlights that 12% of all rural households are now female headed with small holdings, practicing agriculture for sustenance. The Agriculture Census of India 2010-11 reports that the average

size of an operational holding is only 1.23 hectares, with farms less than 2 hectares comprising 85% of all holdings and 44.5% of the area. The bulk of these lands are rain fed and has suffered severe degradation over the years. In fact, only 30% of the total area under cultivation in India is irrigated. The Agricultural Census data clearly bears out the fact that Indian agriculture is dominated by small and marginal farmers, majority of whom are women and largely engaged in subsistence farming for self- consumption. However, some of the farmers have to sell their produce immediately after harvest at low prices and buy the same products later at high prices. These farmers are also the ones who require the maximum investments to augment their meagre resources, but have the least access to irrigation, energy or financial services.

Another significant issue is that men's role in farming, especially subsistence farming is decreasing at a rapid pace. Able bodied men are choosing wage employment over subsistence farming. They are migrating to urban and peri urban areas, leaving women to care for the family and the farms almost single handedly. Micro studies show that women are engaged in the majority of agricultural operations of work, including the production of major grains and millers, land preparation, seed selection, sowing, applying manure, fertilizer and pesticide, weeding, transplanting, threshing, winnowing and harvesting. Women also take on almost all the primary processing, storage and cooking of food. Such subsistence farming produces one-half of the food grains and three-quarters of the pulses in rural India⁷.

⁴ FAO 2011

⁵ Kanchi 2010

⁶ Planning Commission of India 2013

⁷ Dand 2010

Women's Access to Resources and Assets:

The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11 argues that there is a productivity gap between men and women farmers and attributes this to the gender gap in access to productive resources and assets. The FAO notes, "Closing the gender gap in agriculture would generate significant gains for the agriculture sector and for society. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20%-30%. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4%. These potential productivity gains are just the first round of social benefits that would come from closing the gender gap. When women control additional income, they spend more of it than men do on food, health, clothing and education for their children. This has positive implications for immediate wellbeing as well as long-run human capital formation and economic growth."

For women, access to productive assets usually comes through membership within the household. Many feminist economists demonstrate that household wellbeing may not necessarily translate into individual wellbeing. Articles 15 and 16 of CEDAW must be read in this context - "Recognise women's rights to own, inherit and administer property in their own names;" "Provide equal rights for both spouses in respect to ownership, acquisition, management, administration."⁸ For individuals and within households, ownership of, access to and control over productive assets determines their wellbeing. "In its productive capacity, an asset generates income and facilitates

access to capital and credit. It also strengthens a household's capacity to cope with and respond to shocks by enhancing its ability to diversify income and ease liquid constraints. While there is widespread agreement that women's asset ownership is important from a gender equity perspective, till date little data has been available on their access, ownership and control of assets." It is also argued that the ownership of assets corresponds to lower incidence of domestic violence⁹ and higher mobility of women¹⁰.

The Karnataka Household Assets Survey collects individual-level sex-disaggregated data on asset ownership. The survey itself shows the obvious - that men own and control a significant portion of productive assets in the country. However, the study also shows how individuals acquire assets and the nature and extent of the asset gap. The study looks at various physical and financial assets including household consumer durables, jewelry, livestock, principal residence, building and other construction, agricultural land, vehicles, televisions and call phone. The study finds, "Women are least likely to own their residence and agricultural land and most likely to own jewellery, livestock, agricultural tools and certain consumer durables. In general, women do not own assets by themselves; they co-own assets with some or all household members. Jewellery is the only asset that they own individually and which shows a reverse gender gap. Since jewellery is often pawned or sold during economic crises, it leaves women assetless and more vulnerable even as it provides a coping strategy for households¹¹."

Prevalent gender gaps are resultant

⁸ UN 1980.

⁹ Panda and Agarwal 2007

¹⁰ Swaminathan, H, JY. S., Lahoti, R 2011

¹¹ ibid

outcomes of the deep-rooted discrimination that rural women face. Be it the higher mortality rates of girls and women, lower primary and secondary school enrollment rates for girls, unequal access to economic opportunities, less decision making or control over resources within households¹², women face discrimination in all stages of their lives. In India, women account for 48.46% of the country according to the 2011 Census. The literacy rate among females aged 6 and above increased from 65% in 2001 to 74% in 2011 but it is still 15 points less than for men. While there has been a gain in the sex ratio from 933 to 940 from 2001 to 2011, child sex ratio has fallen by 13 points from 927 to 913 females for every 1000 males. The gap between male and female infant mortality rate is stark with 49 for girls as compared to 46 for boys. The under-five mortality rate for girls in India is also very high at 64 per 1,000 live births as compared to 55 per 1,000 live births for boys¹³. The World Development Report 2012 notes, "Gender gaps persist where girls and women face other disadvantages. For poor women in poor places, sizeable gender gaps remain. And these disparities are even larger when poverty combines with other forms of exclusion, such as remoteness, ethnicity and disability."

The lack of basic infrastructure in rural areas for water and sanitation such as piped water supply and toilets, energy especially the lack of subsidized cooking fuel add to the tedious, time consuming and back breaking work of women. The extensive use of woodfuel or biomass used in the cooking has short and longer term impacts on women's health.

The absence of social protection schemes like universal food security, maternity benefit and pensions, increased privatization of health services and education is linked to gender roles and in most cases the burden is largely borne by woman in terms of her rest and care.

These gender disparities also have consequences on the mobility and bodily integrity of women. The National Crime Records Bureau shows that the total number of reported crimes against women increased by 29.6% between 2006 and 2010. The NFHS 3 also reported that 1 out of every 3 women between the ages of 15 and 49 has experienced physical violence, and 1 out of 10, sexual violence. The median age of marriage for women according to the same survey is between 16.5 and 18.3 years. It is in this context that one must see the more than 90% of women in the country who continue to struggle in the informal, unorganized sector with no legislative safeguards¹⁴.

1.3 Positioning 'Women's Empowerment as a Transformative Process

In this paper, the MKSP will be reviewed from the lens of women's empowerment for gender equality outcomes. Women's empowerment has been conceptualized in different ways, but almost always at the root of the notion of empowerment is the idea of 'power'.

From a gender equality perspective, Srilatha Batliwala's definition of empowerment¹⁵ suggests a process of *transforming the relations of power between individuals and social groups*, shifting social power in three critical

¹² The World Bank 2012

¹³ Planning Commission of India 2013

¹⁴ Saxena 2012

¹⁵ Batliwala 1993

ways:

- By challenging the ideologies that justify social inequality (such as gender or caste)
- By changing prevailing patterns of access to and control over economic, natural and intellectual resources
- By transforming the institutions and structures that reinforce and sustain existing power structures (such as the family, state, market, education, and media).

She argues that ideological and institutional changes are critical to sustaining empowerment and real social transformation. Transformation therefore is at the core of the understanding of empowerment. Several women's movement scholars and activists identify 'empowerment' as a transformative process that challenges not only patriarchy but also the structures of class, race, and ethnicity, which determine the condition of women and men in society. In the Indian context, it is regarded as challenging caste and religion too (Batliwala, 1993; Kabeer, 1994).

Kabeer (1994)¹⁶ places her analysis of empowerment more specifically within gender analysis, asserting its central place in any efforts to achieve gender equity. She defines empowerment as 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them' (Kabeer, 2001)¹⁷. She conceptualises empowerment in terms of changes in three inter-related domains: resources,

which form the conditions under which choices are made, agency or the ability to define one's goals and act on them, and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices. Change in each of these dimensions contributes to, and is strengthened by, changes in the others. Jo Rowlands (1997) draws on Foucault's notion of power and further argues that 'empowerment is more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions'¹⁸.

Carr, Chen and Jhabvala¹⁹ aver that in the South Asian context, women's empowerment cannot be achieved without organising. Within feminist spaces, the role of women's collectives, feminist leadership and movement-building in the context of rights and empowerment emerged from the birth of global women's organisations like Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)²⁰ and Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)²¹ in the early 1980s. These institutions emerged in the backdrop of the UN international conferences and UN Decade for the Advancement of Women. Both DAWN and AWID were platforms of feminist activists, researchers and practitioners who highlighted the role of organising women in collectives, and building collective bargaining power by lateral sharing and networking, in the face of the macroeconomic onslaught of food and fuel crises, financial liberalisation and environmental destabilisation, which severely impacted women, their work and their wellbeing. Collectives or 'women's solidarity groups' were considered as pillars of empowerment. Sejal Dand (2003) views empowerment

¹⁶ Kabeer 1996

¹⁷ Kabeer 2001

¹⁸ Rowlands 1997

¹⁹ Carr, Chen and Jhabvala 1999

²⁰ www.dawnnet.org

²¹ www.awid.org

as “...a broad-based and multi-dimensional process which takes place on different levels. The starting point of this process is to create time and space for women to reflect on their reality...This process gains legitimacy and meaning particularly in collective action which increases women’s strength.... A learning environment must be created which provides a broader vision and supports women to really decide on their own path of development and their own struggles. The strength of collective action grows from the local to the global by creating forums to enable networking between groups”.

In recent years, in a review of contemporary definitions of ‘empowerment’, Harris (2007) says that in the World Bank Sourcebook on Empowerment (Narayan, 2002), empowerment is defined as the ‘expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives’. According to Harris (2007)²², there are therefore four key elements in this definition – access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability, and local organisational capacity.

The World Development Report (2012)²³, however, again draws attention to the ‘intrinsic value of gender equality’. According to Razavi (2011)²⁴, not only the ‘agency/voice’ of individual women ‘bargaining’ with

men within households (although this is central to the conceptual framing of the report), but women’s engagement in collective action and associations, and the role of women’s movements and feminist groups in moving the agenda forward, complemented by the positive contribution of international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women 1979²⁵ (CEDAW)²⁶ are critical to the conceptual framework.

In summary, we conclude that the essence in the understanding of ‘empowerment’ has been transformation of unequal power relations, be it in gender, caste, class or any other axes of marginalisation, as well as in the distribution of and control over resources. In the way that empowerment is understood, it is a process as much as it is an end, and it encompasses various dimensions of women’s lives, whether the economic, political or the social facets. Critical to this journey of empowerment is the value accorded to women’s voice, agency and agenda-setting power. Further, almost all conceptualisations of empowerment envisage transformations in individuals, in collectives as well as in institutions, whether in formal or in informal domains. While empowerment is about the process of transformation, it is also about the achievement of gender equality, and the transformation of power relations.

²² Harris 2007

²³ World Bank (2012)

²⁴ Razavi, Shahra (2011)

²⁵ www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw

²⁶ CEDAW highlights the importance of indicators of equality not only as policies, law or institutions that have been created to give opportunities to women, but in what all these laws and policies have achieved in terms of gender equality.

II. THE MAHILA KISAN SASHAKTIKARAN PARIYOJANA (MKSP)

The context of MKSP, as described above, is one of deep distress in the agriculture sector, marked by increasing numbers of agricultural labourers and dwindling numbers of cultivators, persistent and pervasive food insecurity plaguing our food producers- farmers, rapidly depleting share of agriculture in the GDP, growing farmer suicides and a steady shift of rural men from farm to other activities leading to a feminization of agriculture.

It was in response to the acute distress of the “suicide widows” of Maharashtra, who would be left with debt ridden households, get dispossessed of their lands, disowned by their marital families and forced into waged labour, that Dr. M S Swaminathan, Chair of the Farmers Commission, suggested the need for intervention with the women farmers. The need for a national programme for the empowerment of women farmers, especially single women was proposed by Dr. M S

Swaminathan during his tenure in the Rajya Sabha²⁷. The Mahila Kisan Shashaktikarn Pariyojana was later announced with a start- up fund of 100 crores by then Finance Minister, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee in his budget speech in 2010-11.

Dr. Swaminathan also tabled the ‘Women Farmers Entitlement Bill (2011) in the Rajya Sabha. The Bill was particularly significant for expanding on the definition of farmers²⁸, by reflecting on the special activities undertaken by women in agriculture, and providing recognition to women as farmers. In India, the word farmer, being highly gendered, has historically been seen to represent the land owner and “male” farmer. The word is not only an occupational category but a social category encompassing class, caste and sex. The definition in the Bill (2011) highlighted that (a) “agriculture means and includes, all activities related to cultivation of crops, animal husbandary, poultry, livestock rearing,

²⁷ Personal email correspondence with Dr Mina Swaminathan, MSSRF, 3rdDecember, 2014. The proposals made in the Rajya Sabha were based on experiences of the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation's programme on organizing women farmers into collectives that would be based on solidarity, resist gender discrimination and prevent further violence on women as well as find ways to make agriculture more cost effective.

²⁸ <http://kractivist.wordpress.com/2012/06/20/the-women-farmers-entitlements-bill-2011/> downloaded on 27 November, 2014

apiculture, gardening, fishing, aquaculture, sericulture, vermiculture, horticulture, floriculture, agro-forestry, or any other farming activity carried out through self-employment, tenurial cultivation, share-cropping, or other types of cultivation including shifting cultivation, collection, use and sale of minor or non-timber forest produce by virtue of ownership rights or usufructory rights; (b) “agricultural activity” means any activity related to agriculture; (c) “farmer” means any person who is, individually or jointly with any other person (i) engaged in agriculture directly or through the supervision of others; or (ii) contributes to conservation or preservation of agriculture related varieties or seeds or breeds of farm animals; or (iii) contributes through traditional knowledge to any type of innovation, conservation or to propagation of new agricultural varieties or to agricultural cultivation methods or practices or to the practice of crop-livestock integrated farming system; or (iv) promotes agro-processing, and value-addition to primary products. The National Policy for Farmers (2007)²⁹ had also expanded the definition of farmers by encompassing all activities related to agriculture and allied sectors, thereby opening a window for women to be rightfully recognized as farmers.

2.1 Opportunities and Challenges in Programme Design

MKSP was launched as a sub component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in 2011 with a focus on empowering women

in agriculture by strengthening community institutions of poor women farmers to gain more control over the production processes and manage the support systems, enhance access to inputs and services from government and others.

The outcomes of MKSP aim at improved food and nutrition security of women and their families, increased incomes with sustainable agriculture practices to improve the quality of assets, access to productive resources such as land, credit, information, reduced drudgery of women farmers through use of gender friendly tools, and improved visibility of women farmers in the region by strengthening their institutions and supporting entrepreneurship.

The basic objectives translated through various guidelines of MKSP are to³⁰

- (1) Create sustainable livelihood institutions of women around agriculture and allied activities;
- (2) Create sector-specific geography-specific sustainable package of practices;
- (3) Create a wide pool of community resource persons for scaling up livelihood interventions in the entire country;
- (4) Promoting and enhancing food and nutritional security at Household and Community level;
- (5) Sustainable increase in income from primary sector livelihoods (Rs. 30,000 to 50,000 per annum);

²⁹ The National Policy for Farmers (2007) defined a farmer as “a person actively engaged in the economic and/or livelihood activity of growing crops and producing other primary agricultural commodities and will include all agricultural operational holders, cultivators, agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants, poultry and livestock rearers, fishers, beekeepers, gardeners, pastoralists, non-corporate planters and planting labourers, as well as persons engaged in various farming related occupations such as sericulture, vermiculture, and agro-forestry. The term will also include tribal families /persons engaged in shifting cultivation and in the collection, use and sale of minor and non-timber forest produce.”

³⁰ Presentation provided by NMMU on 10th November, 2014 New Delhi

- (6) Drudgery reduction for women farmers;
- (7) Poorest of poor focus-specific initiatives for the PoP-landless, small and marginal farmers as project participants;
- (8) To enable women to have better access to inputs and services of the government and other agencies;

The MKSP marks a departure from agriculture programmes of the past where the focus was production centered instead of being farmer centered. The MKSP seeks food and nutrition security at a household level through improvement in women's control over production processes and resources. It is also a programme that moves beyond providing information to women to creating institutions for women farmers for investments in livelihood activities and enhancing their assets. The funds earmarked in the programme are therefore to create the human and social capital, while physical, natural and financial capital will be made available through convergence with other programmes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, National Food Security Mission, Agriculture Technology Management Agency, etc.

Despite being forward looking compared to most past government policies on agriculture, the MKSP suffers from numerous conceptual and operational challenges. Achieving convergence with other programmes and other ministries is one of the most prominent challenges of MKSP, especially with the absence of a clearly

spelt out strategy for convergence of services in the programme. On the ground, MKSP relies on the Programme Implementing Agencies (PIAs) to drive its convergence agenda.

Furthermore, there is an implicit assumption in the programme that women's collectives/institutions, formed under the NRLM programme, will be the vehicle to address the underlying causes of and forms of gender discrimination that prevent women from gaining control over production resources. The NRLM strategy for social mobilization³¹ is spelt out in the mission document as "universal mobilization of poor households into affinity-based thrift and credit groups of women. Organizing all poor households would allow formation of aggregate institutions of the poor that will provide them with voice, space and resources." The roots of the Self Help Groups lie in the work done by the early women's unions in India such as SEWA and Working Women's Forum to set up financial services for women through the process of Self Help based on principles of building women's solidarity groups. Thrift and credit was a small part of the work of these solidarity groups as they continued to organize women workers from the unorganized sector for the recognition of their work and rights. By the turn of the century however the micro credit movement gained strength and soon enough the Self Help Groups only performed minimalist microfinance. The investments in the empowerment approach remained only in name, and micro credit started being touted as a quick route to end poverty.

³¹ <http://www.aajeevika.gov.in/nrlm/Briefing%20book%20V%202-%20for%20print.pdf> accessed on 30 November, 2014

NRLM and MKSP do not explicitly state the goal of women's empowerment for gender equality, nor do they carry any gender analysis in their strategy unlike say the education for women's equality programme. It was only in some of the civil society organizations linked to women's movements and a few state programmes such as Mahila Samakhya, Tejaswini, Kudumbashree, and IKP/SERP that substantial investments were made in building women's solidarity for gender equality in the Self Help Groups/Sanghas/Sanghatans.

Another important gap in MKSP is that it rests on the assumption that a lack of knowledge of agriculture technologies among owners of resource poor lands and households is primarily responsible for their inability to reduce costs of investments. The programme thus relies heavily on providing women with information, demonstration, proof of concepts (farmer field schools), for adoption of these technologies at the household level. There is a stark absence of thought in the current strategy regarding how women would negotiate the adoption of these technologies within the household as also on the time and labour cost of these technologies.

2.2 Scale and Outreach of the Programme

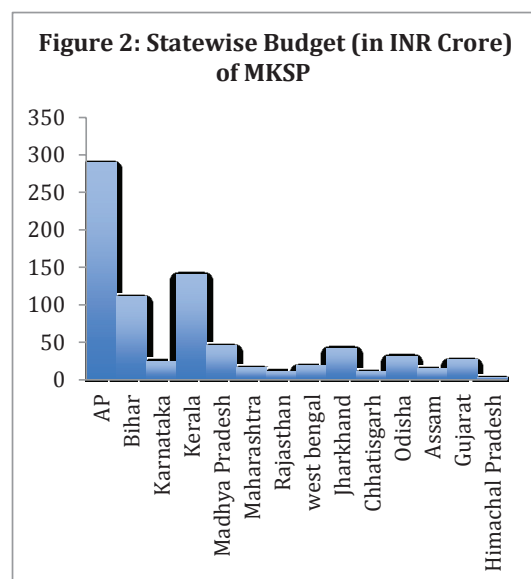
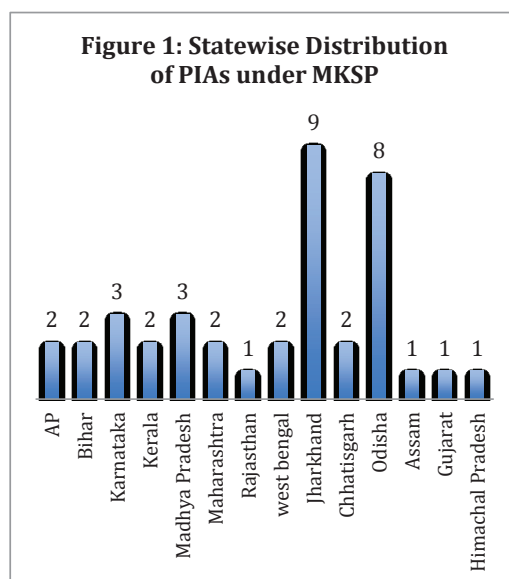
In 2013-14 the central share for the total funds for MKSP has gone up to 548.78 crores. Its present coverage is in 14 states, 117 districts, 983 blocks and 17,000 villages, with 57 PIAs. Under the programme, the total number of proposals approved from 2011 to 2014 is 65. Figures 1 and 2 provide a detailed description of the number of PIAs across the states where the programme is operations and the corresponding state-wise budget. Project summaries of all projects till date are placed in Annexure 1.

MKSP's investments are largely concentrated in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. In AP, 39.6% of the central share of MKSP is allocated to the state where 22 Zilla Samakhyas of the Indira Kranthi Patham are implementing a project to promote community-managed sustainable agriculture and create a pool of Community Resource Persons (CRPs) and agricultural extension workers. In comparison, Jharkhand with 8 PIAs and an outreach of 7 districts has an investment of .02% of the budget, and Odisha with 10 PIAs in 8 districts has an investment of 5.8% of the budget. This extensive concentration in a few projects misses the opportunity to identify women's local technologies and nurture local women leaders and best practitioners.

III. GENDER RESPONSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS OF GOOD PRACTICES

In this section we present cases where women farmers have been involved in different programmes across the states. These cases show evidence of the empowerment elements of MKSP as stated in the policy documents and offer early evidence to the potential they hold in different aspects of the empowerment strategies. Empowerment is understood as a transformative process and not just as a programme goal and the emphasis therefore is on substantive equality and not just

formal equality. This is in keeping with the principle of substantive equality as elaborated in the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979), which recognizes that women are in an unequal position and need to be treated differently from men so as to overcome structural and systematic discrimination, strategies should be aimed at ensuring not only equal opportunities for women but moreover equal outcomes.



In other words, securing women farmers' right to livelihoods implies that women will be in a position to achieve their livelihood potential only when they enjoy security and freedom from violence, and have enhanced capabilities to exercise their choices with dignity. Towards this end, there ought to be recognition of the fact that on the one hand, women remain in an unequal position within their household, where they need to mediate and negotiate for their rights and entitlements, and on the other hand, there are pervasive structural factors that perpetuate gender discrimination, such as caste, class, asset gaps, market and trade factors and other institutional biases. In addition, it is important to consider that some groups of women have traditionally suffered extreme gender inequalities perpetuated historically over generations³².

Of the six cases that are presented here five are being implemented as part of the MKSP projects. One case of the Tejaswini project from Madhya Pradesh has been presented as it is a large state programme and offers lessons on the relationship between women farmers and food security. All cases offer lessons in the following four key areas of empowerment.

3.1 Building Women's Collective Strength

All women's empowerment theories promote collective action which requires creation of membership based organizations which will promote democracy, transparency, participatory decision making especially among the marginalised and vulnerable women.

Mobilising the most vulnerable such as landless, farm labour can be challenging as the women from these categories often also face time poverty over and above the income and resource poverty. Extra efforts need to be made to reach out to these women and develop mechanisms that are appropriate for them.

The MSSRF case study brings out the significance of targeting women who are landless, wage workers, from socially excluded communities. Building autonomous women's organizations that can deal with state institutions, markets builds strength and lends itself to empowering outcomes. The Jeevika - Bihar Rural Livelihood Programme presents how women have created mechanisms to access the markets and created checks and balances to avoid vested interests.

3.2 Designing Spaces to Create Voice and Agency

Forming collectives have an intrinsic value for women and not just an instrumental value from a programme efficiency point of view. Spaces where women can share and support one another are important for them to express themselves, create 'voice', and define their priorities. This requires enabling the tools that will allow for critical analysis of their reality and where required taking up of action. These actions lead to an increase in self-esteem and awareness, decision making, participation in institutions and collective action. The case of ANANDI- UN Women project presents possibilities of how participatory action earning tools can trigger critical thinking and action.

³² Subhalakshmi Nandi (2014). Women Farmers and Gender Disparities: The Long Journey for Identity Citizenship and Entitlements. Empowerment of Rural Women in Developing Countries. Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi)

3.3 Acknowledging and validating knowledge and information of women farmers

Gendered stereotypes about women incapable of intelligence often lead to patronizing attitudes and a denial of what the women know and what they want. Programme interventions must make an effort to listen to women and base their strategies on women's needs. It is important for programmes to ensure that women's access to technologies is not coupled with an increase in their drudgery. Investment in research and technologies must be in tasks that women most commonly do. Furthermore, the evidence on impact of introduction of technologies has been mixed - with men taking over tasks once mechanization is introduced, including sharing of tasks by men if mechanization brings with it elements of prestige and ease. The case of Indira Kranthi Patham highlights how community women have led the transfer of knowledge as extension workers.

3.4 Enhancing women's access, control, ownership to productive resource Rights

From the women's livelihood rights point of view one of the key aspects is that women have access and control over productive resources. Women are most often engaged in laborious tasks that are invisible and underpaid. Gendered division of labour and notions of power have created a situation in almost all the natural resource management systems such that all critical assets are in the name of men. Ensuring that assets like land, equipment, water sources, animals are in the name of women puts formal decision making in their hands. Without essentializing, it may be added that women do tend to prioritise food security and sustainable livelihood options when given a real choice. Options such as collective land ownership, land leasing should therefore be promoted. The case of Kudumbashree is an example of how state policies have enabled resource rights for women and the Tejaswini example of Madhya Pradesh demonstrates how women farmers chose to improve food security by continuing to grow the traditional nutritious millets despite learning modern ways of agriculture.

IV GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICES IN LIVELIHOODS

4.1 Collectivizing Women Farmers: Learnings from MKSP and MSSRF

This section has two dimensions: identification of marginalized women farmers for collective mobilization and maintenance of women's autonomy for decision making regarding their own paths of development

4.1.1 Principles of Intersectionality and Multi-Dimensional Poverty³³

The *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana* initiated by MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in the year 2007 in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra specifically targeted villages with recorded instances of farmer suicides. In every group that was formed in such villages, at least one member was the widow of a male farmer who had committed suicide. The majority of its members today are from the most marginalized and vulnerable sections of the community. The programme has 3,265 women members across 215 farmers' groups

in 60 villages of Wardha and Yavatmal districts. Of these, 15% are single or widowed women, 55% are from Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. 62% of women farmers in the groups are small and marginal farmers with landholdings of less than 5 acres, and 13% are landless.

Embedded in these dimensions are high levels of marginalization and vulnerabilities. By specifically reaching out to these categories of women the programme acknowledges that women farmers would need support to overcome several barriers.

Within the women farmers' programme, the organization mainly focuses on building institutions at the grassroots, promoting sustainable agriculture practices and enabling household food security. It facilitates the formation and management of women's farmer's groups and federations, builds skills and capacities of women and groups to engage with officials at different levels, effects linkages with line departments and creates awareness on different socio-

³³ This section is based on 'Breaking Ground: Initiative towards Empowering Women Farmers' by R Rukmani, Kishor Jagtap and Sonali Phate, a case study submitted to ACCESS Development Services for the Sitaram Rao Livelihoods Competition, 2014 and R, Rukmani. "Reflections of Women Farmers: Programme for the Empowerment of Women Farmers." MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, 2014.

political issues and rights including local self-governance. It also focuses on sustainable agricultural production, through practices like soil and water conservation, land preparation, seed management, Integrated Nutrient Management, Integrated Pest Management, harvesting and post-harvest handling of produce. This is especially significant in the Vidarbha region which predominantly grows cash crop in poor agronomic conditions.

The key learning for MKSP (within NRLM) is in the targeting of women farmers that the MSSRF consciously takes on. MSSRF's MKSP is a membership-based organization where women farmers organized into village level groups called '*Jagrit Mahila Shetkari Samitis*'. The organization defines the criteria of membership thus:

"Membership into a women farmers' group in a village requires that she should be a resident of the same village and should be actively engaged in farming, with or without ownership of land holdings. In addition to these basic requirements, the criteria for membership in groups ensure that farmers from the most marginalised sections of the society are included. Single women (in particular, the wives of farmers who had committed suicide), the small and marginal farmers, the landless and women from the most deprived castes, become members of women farmers' groups in MKSP.³⁴"

In this context, the MSSRF focuses on addressing the self-development of each farmer within the empowerment framework and also facilitates access to entitlements from the government. They also create forums for lateral

learning amongst women, through initiatives like community feasts or 'vanbojan'. These events allow women identified as 'best practitioners' to share their experience and knowledge, and for other women farmers to observe in detail the agricultural practices of such women. Also, larger gatherings of women farmers 'Mahila Melawas' are organized at the district level once or twice a year for women across the district to learn from each other and share their experiences.

4.1.2 Building Autonomous Women's Organisations³⁵

The implementation of MKSP by Bihar's BRLP-Jeevika has brought notable changes in the lives of women farmers. Detailed focused group discussions and personal interviews with members of the Sakhi and Suraj Village Organisations (VO)³⁶ in Wazirganj Block of Gaya District, Bihar revealed that the programme has given opportunities to rural women to break many a barriers, learn numerous new skills and perform new tasks. Of particular significance among the many achievements of MKSP in Bihar is enabling women farmers to procure seeds and food grains, and engage with market structures through dedicated committees. Every VO has a 'procurement committee' (*kharidari committee*) with nominated members who are responsible for bringing samples from the market, bargaining and negotiating for the best rates and making purchases on behalf of other members prior to distribution. This is accompanied by training of all members on seed technology, market prices and plantation techniques by Village Resource Persons (VRPs),

³⁴ ibid

³⁵ This case study is written by Ajita Vidyarthi, UN Women based on her field interactions with Jeevika Bihar at Wazirganj block, Gaya district.

³⁶ Sakhi VO has 11 SHGs with 10-12 members each. It was started in the year 2011. Suraj VO has 18 SHGs with 10-12 members each and has been running since 2009.

who then use this knowledge to make informed decisions about their purchases.

It is evident that the objective behind training women farmers in procurement is not restricted to enhancing their market knowledge alone, but is oriented towards transforming gender as well as social relations in the village society. For example, majority of the procurement committee members had no prior experience in procuring directly from the market. Sita Devi of Sakhi VO puts it succinctly when she asserts that *“Hum aage badhenge to humara bhi maan badhega”* (When I advance in skills and knowledge, my respect too will increase). She explains that *“at first, my husband did not like the idea of my going to the market. He would ask whether I thought he was failing in his duty and tasks. But I believed that if I learned new skills and shouldered responsibility equally then I too would be respected. Now, thanks to the government programme, I am confident about seed technology and often guide my husband regarding what to purchase.”*

Benefits from the procurement committee, as expressed by respondents, ranged from monetary savings to convenience in purchases. This was also expressed as true for older members of the VO who would otherwise find it difficult to complete market transactions. Members also referred to new found confidence in being able to make purchases and negotiate in the market, skills that they had only recently learnt.

“My whole world (“sansaar”) changed after membership into the VO. My crop yields and family income have increased. But most importantly, my importance in the family has increased.”-Bindu Devi



“My husband always seeks my advice and permission before working on our fields. He recognises me as a partner and a farmer of equal, if not more merit. It is through interactions and discussions that we have learnt so much. The more we get exposed, the more we will learn and progress. Marketing and transacting in the VO is only one among the numerous things that we now believe ourselves capable of achieving.”- Meena Devi, VRP.

“I am old and live alone with my aged husband. Purchasing from the village money lender or even from the market earlier used to be very cumbersome for us. Now, with the committee, we have to only make our requirements known and we get the grains on our doorstep. This is a boon for older people. Moreover, all payments have to be made only once in three months. We are not expected to pay immediately as used to be the case earlier.” - Parmila Devi

The process: Procurement as envisaged under the programme involves three stages (discussion and noting of requirements, purchase of goods and their distribution) and comprises the participation of other committees such as the inspection committee and

post holders such as the VRPs. The process involves participation and cross checks to allow for women to play different roles.

4.2 Designing Spaces and Tools for Women's Voice and Agency: Experiences of ANANDI and UN Women

ANANDI (Area Networking and Development Initiatives), an organization based in Gujarat, India, has been in a partnership with UN Women South Asia and the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. Through this partnership, UN Women and ANANDI have been seeking to strengthen gender perspectives in the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and to gear the NRLM towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

Within the present SHG model adopted by the NRLM and MKSP, women's collectives are increasingly becoming activity focused around livelihoods. These groups give women a space to acquire information, give women management experience and create visibility at the community level. The process of empowerment through collectivization, however, also requires systematic and critical reflection facilitated by skilled animators. Through the pilots in the two states of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, the State Rural Livelihoods Missions are implementing a Gender and Livelihoods Training Module developed by ANANDI and UN Women based on the Participatory Action Learning Systems (PALS) methodology has been developed.

PALS aims to empower people, particularly the very poor, as individuals and communities to collect, analyse and use information to improve and gain more control over their lives. It is a continually evolving

methodology based on diagram tools and participatory processes. Four training modules have so far been disseminated to women in SHG groups and Village Organizations in the pilot districts. These modules specifically address women's identity, social construction of gender, gender discrimination, entitlements and social protection. These training sessions are examples of guided facilitation where space for dialogue and lateral learning is created within the MKSP. Women evolve their own agendas and action points through these modules which also fosters the emergence of women leaders. What these women share in a training programme and meetings there after reflect upon their gendered realities. Certainly women are showing strength and confidence in discussing these issues when spaces are designed for them the share rather than giving messages and content which have been designed to educate them.

For MKSP-NRLM, addressing gender gaps in access to entitlements is a priority agenda. In the training module on entitlements and social protection, women shared their experiences of accessing entitlements. Data is consolidated visually through the 'Mere Haq Mere Pehchaan Patra' tool, which gives the group an understanding of the community access to entitlements. It is meant to politicize access to entitlements within the community, and allow women to collectively share and act upon it. The data emerging from 10 Village organisations comprising of 126 SHGs with membership of 1597 women in Gaya district, which is also an MKSP cluster indicates that the gap in access to basic entitlements is stark. 94.2% of women report not having job cards, 47.6% lack access to the public distribution system. Only 0.2% women farmers have access to bank credit at low interest rates through the Kisan Credit Card. The data reflects the rights

1098 block level organizations and 22 district level organizations. They also have 16 Mandal Samakhyas of fisherwomen, 125 of disabled women and 17 of Chenchu tribes.

Leveraging on its multi-tier backbone and communication structure, a key learning for MKSP through the CMSA initiative is the pedagogy and communication strategy used to share knowledge. The overt aim of the programme is to shift the focus of agriculture away from capital and energy intensive crops that are harmful to soil, to more sustainable methods and techniques that are cost effective, based on local material that are environment friendly. As an alternative technology adoption programme, it keeps women at the center of its intervention, providing technology and knowledge inputs focused on women and creating a pool of women demonstration farmers, technology trainers, extension workers and agri-entrepreneurs.

As 'Community Resource Persons' or CRPs, women become peer educators or 'demonstration farmers', who providedemonstrableevidenceonnon-pesticide management, soil fertility management, 36ft x 36ft models, poly crop models, rain water harvesting, SRI cultivation, farmers' field schools and integrated farming systems. CRPs conduct Farmers' Field Schools, or on site training for CMSA practitioners to show them how the techniques work on the ground. Each CRP adopts three villages and conducts training and hands on demonstration. There are hundreds of such women CRPs in the state, at state, district and block levels.

The pedagogy privileged women's local knowledge creation and transfer through local means and

community managed institutions. It also "successfully incorporated modern methods of communication and analysis and broke the myth that sophisticated technology can only be adopted by elites of the society and the rest will always depends on crude, traditional local empirically generated technologies, that are often perceived more like an art than a science."³⁷ It builds women's capacities to use and disseminate technology, while also valuing their knowledge systems, increasing their mobility, their voice and creates positive self-image.

MKSP has adopted the strategy of identifying, training and deploying CRPs/ master farmers from within the village to disseminate community managed sustainable agriculture (CMSA) technology throughout the programme. This strategy is purportedly to overcome the problem that conventional agriculture extension programmes had in their outreach to women, where the extension worker more often than not is a male government employee from outside the village/region. The norms for identification of CRPs that have emerged from discussions in a recent review meeting with MKSP partners require the woman so identified to be the following be a member of the Self Help Group, and a progressive farmer who is preferably from a poor household. She should have received training on the practices of sustainable agriculture promoted by the Project Implementing Partner and should have successfully demonstrated the application of best practices promoted by the PIA on her farm for at least two years. She must be agreeable to travelling within the region, have good interpersonal relationships in the group, be persuasive and good communicator and have basic literacy skills.

³⁷ ibid

In a discussion with the Budner Mahila Sanghatan³⁸, members summarized the role of a women's Sanghatan (CBO / collective) "to provide women the confidence and support to fight for justice with determination." Further in the discussion on what constitutes a good CRP, they said that a CRP/ leader is someone who can help other women identify and understand the problem, mobilise other women to join the struggle collectively and fearlessly, be informed and aware about laws, programmes and institutions that would support women and be non judgemental, thoughtful and kind, enabling other women the space to speak up as also extend support to act on their concerns.

The critical difference in the guiding principles drawn up by the MKSP functionaries and the woman farmers of Budner Narmada Mahila Sangha emerge from the differences in the conceptualisation of the roles of the CRPs in building a strong autonomous women's organisation. The programme perceives the CRP to be an influencer in promoting sustainable farming practices service provider by reaching out to women farmers and providing services. The women's federation sees the role of the CRP as someone who is a facilitator who combines her knowledge and experience in a process of transformation for a gender just society.

4.4 Enhancing Women's Access, Control and Ownership to Productive Resource Rights: Following the Journey of Kudumbashree³⁹

Between 1980 and 2007, Kerala's paddy production was almost halved to 630,000 tonnes affecting food security in the state⁴⁰. Large landowners previously cultivating paddy were increasingly choosing either to leave their land fallow due to unsatisfactory returns from cultivation, or shifted their focus towards production of cash crops like rubber or pepper. This resulted in a crisis of food availability in the state and also deprived hundreds of daily wage agricultural labourers, especially women, of their primary source of livelihoods.

To address this situation, Kudumbashree designed an intervention to improve livelihoods and ensure food security of landless women in Kerala through land leasing as a part of the State Poverty Eradication Mission for Kerala in 2004. Kudumbashree is a collective of women's federations at village, block and district levels called Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs), Area Development Society (ADS) and Community Development Society (CDS). Government of Kerala and NABARD set it up as the "community wing" of local self-governments. The Kudumbashree intervention is supporting 242848 women to cultivate 123772 acres of land as a Project Implementation Agency (PIA) of the MKSP⁴¹.

³⁸ Narmada Budner Mahila Sanghatan, a federation of SHG's in Mandla district, MP promoted and supported by Pradaan. Focus Group Discussion held by Neeta Hardikar, ANANDi during the Gender Needs Assessment of MP on 15 July 2013.

³⁹ This section is based on Anand, Sonakshi, and Manish Maskara. Women Farmers: The Pillars of Food Security in Kerala. Kudumbashree, 2014 a case study submitted to ACCESS Development Services for the Sitaram Rao Livelihoods Competition, 2014; and Dand, Sejal, and Subhalakshmi Nandi. 2012.

⁴⁰ Ensuring Food Security through Group Farming in Paddy cultivation, Working Paper series No.2, Evaluation Division, Kerala State Planning Board, November 2012 in 'Anand and Maskara (2014)'

⁴¹ Data provided by NMMU on November 10th, 2014

Members of the grassroots organizations within the existing multi-tier institutional structure at the village level were encouraged to take up lease land farming as individuals and groups. After leasing land, women selected the crops to be grown in the leased lands, usually food crops such as paddy, tapioca, tuber, carrot, black-eyed beans, brinjal, bitter melon, but also crops which brought monetary gain such as bananas, ginger and turmeric. Women farmers were also trained by the Kerala Agricultural University and the sale of the produce was also facilitated by the government of Kerala. Gram Panchayats converged with the MGNREGS to facilitate the availability of labour for land development and water conservation activities.

Also, the programme gave the opportunity and incentivized a large number of women who were not from traditionally agricultural families to engage in agriculture as a livelihood. Collective farming also allowed women to look outside of the household or family for labour on agricultural land. By promoting land leasing by women's groups, they "fostered consensus building among the women regarding the decisions related to farming. The group based farming nurtured the idea of peer learning with regards to agriculture. It also accounted to the division and distribution of labour on the lands... Group farming also enabled the cultivation of different kinds of food crops at the same time depending on the amount of land leased. In many ways, group farming led to the distribution of input costs, risks and profits. The produce from group based farming met both the consumption and production for

income needs of the households of the women.⁴²"

The key learning from the Kudumbashree programme for MKSP is in the strength of collective bargaining. Women who are interested in taking land on lease forward their application to the district level federations (CDS). The Gram Panchayat then mediates the terms between landowners and the CDS for procuring fallow land from landowners on a lease basis either as a share of the crop harvested or on a fixed rent basis. This interface enables women's collectives to negotiate the terms of land leasing by making the local self-government an intermediary between the subsistence woman farmer and large landowners. The scale enables women's collectives to lease land on standardized rates between Rs. 4000-8000 per acre depending on the season and type of crop.

MKSP does not identify strategies for the systemic changes it would usher in at the programme level. In Indian programmes, rural land based livelihood programmes and MKSP itself recognize households as the relevant unit in agriculture. Intra-household dynamics have also been overlooked. Households themselves are institutions in which cooperative-conflict occurs, and as a result of which individual members', including women's access to resources and credit need to be negotiated. Many rural households are female-headed households, since men migrate out for work, leaving women predominantly to manage farming. In such a scenario, it is pivotal to understand that agriculture and farming processes

⁴² Anand and Maskara, 2014

cannot be viewed from a generic household lens, but rather need to be analysed from an individual and women-centric approach.

4.5 Women Set the Agenda in the Tejaswani Rural Women's Empowerment Programme: Make Food Security a Priority⁴³

The Tejaswani programme is an initiative of the Government of Madhya Pradesh, funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). In six districts of the state including Dindori, primarily working through women's self-help groups, the programme looks to enable poor women to make use of choices, spaces and opportunities for their overall wellbeing. The project works primarily through the 'Nari Chetana Mahila Sangh', a women's federation in Mehandwani block of Dindori district, comprising 200 women's Self Help Groups and 3000 women.

The key learning from this programme for MKSP is in women setting the agenda for agriculture. In Dindori, the programme worked with Baiga women farmers who were cultivating millet (locally known as kodo-kutki), the traditional food crop. Dindori is a predominantly tribal district of Madhya Pradesh, wherein over 64% of the population belongs to the Baiga community. Baigas are mostly small and marginal farmers who customarily practice shifting agriculture and depend on collection of forest produce for their livelihoods. Through the women's federation, the programme worked with groups of women farmers for the cultivation of millet. Millets

are the preferred traditional crop for consumption in this region. They are small seeded grasses with high protein, fiber and nutritional value. It has a short growing season, and grows well in drained loamy soils.

The programme worked with 1497 women for the initiative from 40 villages. While a majority of the women were from the Baiga community, some also belonged to Other Backward Castes. Master trainers were identified in each of the 40 villages and trained to provide training to others in their SHGs. The challenge was to get the community to shift to practices that will yield higher productivity and initially there was resistance. But the women farmers did well to take to the idea as it would make them more food secure and made dramatic increase in production. The women farmers were provided training on cultivation of millets. They were trained in land/bed preparation, seed processing, sowing and transplantation, cropping system and intercultural practices and were also trained on integrated nutrient management, integrated pest management, vermi-compost, soil testing etc.

Each woman cultivated millets in half an acre of land using the practices they learnt through the programme, and the total land covered was 748.5 acres. Over the project period, from being an initiative to meet their subsistence needs and ensure household food security, and further a surplus production for the farmers and the women's federation. From total productivity of 2245.5 quintals of millet in 2012, they produced 15000 quintals of millet in 2013.

⁴³ This section is based on a case study submitted to the Sitaram Rao Case Studies Competition conducted by ACCESS development services - 'Kodo-Kutki Way: Recognizing Roles of and Empowering Women Farmers and Ensuring Food Security', Madhya Pradesh Mahila Vitta Evam Vikas Nigam 2014.

V LESSONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY OUTCOMES FROM THE MKSP REVIEW⁴⁴

5.1 Social Mobilisation: Inclusion and Identity / Voice and Agency

- MKSP is ahead of the curve as it recognizes the largely invisible role of women in farming and does not make formal ownership of land the basis for working with women farmers. On the ground, it has successfully reached out to women who are from land owning households, landless women who are share croppers, collectives who are leasing land and women within animal husbandry from economically and socially marginalised communities.
- Participation in the programme however is not adequate to bring recognition to women farmers. On the ground, given the deep rooted stereotypes around women's gender roles and division of labour, one finds that women themselves don't recognize themselves as farmers. The local administration

and officials remain resistant to challenging normative beliefs about who a farmer is. For a policy idea to translate into action which will in turn lead to outcomes towards gender equality, considerable investment in terms of time and specific inputs is imperative. Lessons learnt from investments made by PIAs in capacity building modules and the ANANDI- UN Women Project being implemented in Bihar and MP with the State Rural Livelihoods Missions- that trigger alternative thinking among women farmers combined with opportunity for collective action- need to become integral to all initial phase activities.

- Gender discrimination is lived and experienced with other social identities of caste, class religion, marital status, age, disability, religion, etc., producing multiple vulnerabilities. MKSP has successfully mobilized the marginalized women in the

⁴⁴ The lessons learnt from the MKSP programme are based on a few case studies of MKSP programmes documented by organisations for the Sitaram Rao case study completion, Landesa- UN Women documentation of best practices, and engagement of the organization in the UN Women supported pilots with Jeevika programme -Bihar SRLM and MPSRLM.

programme it requires to build measures that address these intersectionalities for transformation to occur at the community level. An example of this is from the MSSRF case study which builds-in a strategy for reducing the distress of farmer widows. Ensuring that all single women in MKSP programme areas get to participate and get priority for resources in the programme could be one programme strategy that is a design feature.

- MKSP, NRLM concern themselves with the household and not woman farmer in the household. The outcomes are being measured at the household level i.e. by measuring improvement in farm productivity, agricultural outputs. The implicit assumption is that households are neutral, and that labour on the farm is shared equally within the household as is the incomes accrued from the programme. The nature of changes in intra-household decision making, control over labour and incomes between men and women should be monitored and supported for sustainable gender-just outcomes.
- MKSP promotes decentralized planning by women's collectives. The planning itself needs to be seen as an incremental process and not a one-time activity. Capacity building on how to meet their needs will have to be made. Interface with the agriculture department, fisheries department, forest department needs to be designed at the block and district level with the women' farmer's collectives and the VO level. Moreover, women's needs will change as they gain more exposure and experience. A mechanism to follow through on how many of the women's plans actually got

approved and what was the extent of spending in the block and district level vis-à-vis the women's plans needs to be tracked. Otherwise decentralised and participatory planning will remain on paper. Examples of Kudumbashree on this count should be taken on board with the clause that a strong political will at the levels of the state government is instrumental in achieving any change.

5.2 Women's Access and Control over Productive Resources: Labour, Land and Water

- Substantive equality requires not only an equality of opportunity but equality of outcomes. Increase in assets is an important measure of reducing vulnerability. In order to fully utilize the potential of a programme like the MKSP, investments need to be made in measuring how women's roles, terms of their labour, access to and control of resources, increase in assets have changed, to mention a few parameters.
- A key programme initiative of MKSP is to promote sustainable local low cost agricultural technologies such as CMSA, SRI which do not account for cost of "women's labour" and time. The phase of upscaling and replication of technologies across board in the programme without integrating gender analysis and policies for addressing strategic gender needs are critical for women's well-being as well as the programme's success. Moreover, the programme does not address the need for water resources in agriculture.

- MKSP mentions drudgery reduction as part of objectives of the programme. This is an important outcome from the point of view of empowering women farmers. However, this does not seem to have adequate emphasis and detailing in the scheme so far. A plan needs to be in place with regard to creating awareness about existing tools available for drudgery reduction, supporting them through the adoption phase and handling the new equipment. Creation of Tool Banks for women farmers and MGNREGS workers in every collective could be one way to kick start the process.
- Ensuring the registration of all women farmers who do not own land in their name as cultivators in the land documents through systematic sensitisation of revenue department is the first step towards giving security for land use. MKSP implementation areas could also ensure that there is guided intervention in recording women's land rights during a mutation process. Capacity building of CRPs and VOs to facilitate women's land rights during mutation are implemented as per law, and could be an effective strategy to prevent dispossession and secure women's land rights.
- Over the last two decades, southern states in India have launched programmes with a clear focus on women's empowerment, involving women very centrally in the programme such as Kudumbashree and SERP. These programmes have provided different opportunities,

mechanisms to become collectivized, to negotiate with the state, the market and other resource agencies. The land leasing initiative by Kudumbashree is a way forward in creating women's access to productive assets, resources and sustainable livelihoods.

- When MKSP is launched in these states one sees that the convergence schemes work better both from the demand side (women labour collectives, joint liability groups, producer groups) at the level of the communities and also supply side (schemes run by Dept. of Rural Development, Agriculture) at the level of state allocation of resources leading to better outcomes.

5.3 Building Women Farmers' Institutions

- Women's empowerment framework promotes formation of women's collectives as an effective means to channelize women's energies towards a transformative agenda. The MKSP design takes this principle on board when it speaks of forming women farmers' collectives. But the programme becomes prescriptive in translation on the ground, with insistence of membership through only savings and credit based SHGs, which cannot be assumed to be solidarity collectives. The activity, not the principles of organising, has become the principal means of recognising SHGs⁴⁵.
- Making participation of women in MKSP conditional to savings and credit activity serves no visible

⁴⁵ Several studies examine the role of savings and credit-based self-help groups in transformative politics, concluding that they are not an effective means of including the most marginalized or vulnerable or transforming social relations. Kabeer 1994, Dand and Nandi 2012, Lingam 2008, studies by Nirantar 2007 are just a few.

purpose except probably excluding those who do not choose to engage with savings and credit activity or like many other programmes risk using the SHGs only as a conduit for programme delivery for disbursing credit/ inputs without leading to sustainable organization of women farmers.

- Women farmers require their own forums to discuss, reflect and act on their concerns. Since NRLM and MKSP have a well laid out strategy of a three tiered institutional structure, the options to choose primary membership in village level organisation (tier 2) and cluster level (tier 3) can easily be built in for those who are members of alternate collectives of women farmers. This allows women farmers to decide the forms of their organisations which best meets their needs. For credit needs, they may choose to become members of primary agricultural cooperatives or avail of the Kisan Credit Card from the bank, form or join MGNREGS workers union or an agricultural labour union, form labour collectives, organize as Joint Liability Groups for agriculture related enterprises, form producers or marketing cooperatives. The case study of procurement committees of Jeevika is an example of the opportunity for women farmers to engage with the markets and transact collectively transparently and democratically through the village level organisation.
- Increasing women's use, control and ownership of community resources such as common's, water, public institutions and services for equitable use of resources is the wider transformation that MKSP could seed. For example, mapping, enabling and monitoring

increased access to productive resources in the community such as ponds, fallow land by the landless women's collectives instead of the panchayats auctioning it to the highest bidder.

5.4 Engendering Livelihoods

- Women farmers' livelihoods are a composite of their work for production, care work and access to entitlements in cash and kind, including social protection schemes. MKSP assumes that the institutional support for these rights will be provided by forming SHG based three tiered institutions. Creating demand for services, public action and awareness of entitlements require substantial investments in creating forums for dialogue and critical reflection, facilitating and nurturing leadership using principles of collective action (self- help), such as negotiating with state institutions, public health services, food supplies, education or supporting women to resist, prevent violence.
- MKSP also needs to expand into identifying and demonstrating technologies in areas of forest produce, small ruminants, poultry and horticulture which form a significant portion of large number of women's livelihood baskets and contribute to nutrition security. Investing in projects that show promise in local small scale Agro processing units viable will also open the doors for greater opportunities for non- farm based employment.
- Piloting a registration of women farmers/women farmers' collectives in District Rural Development Agencies, Agriculture Departments,

etc. is an important contribution that the MKSP programme can make to bring recognition and leverage additional investments from the flagship programmes in these departments. The current women's allocations in these departments are not meeting their targets nor are they meeting the demands of the women farmers. MKSP can also play an important role in ensuring that women farmers get subsidized bank credit by facilitating issuance of Kisan Credit Cards in their names. Similarly, facilitation is also required for membership in other decision making forums such as Primary Agricultural Societies, ATMA programme forums at block, district and state levels.

- MKSP has an opportunity to upscale through other such large programmes which have built women's collectives, institutions such as the Tejaswini, Mahila Samkhya programme which is operational in 11 states, Tejaswini in MP, MAVIM in Maharashtra.
- While MKSP has chosen to work by building on previous work of state programmes and voluntary agencies, there needs to be a differentiated strategy to take into account the nature of women's development. One size fits all approach will dilute the eventual outcomes of a well-intentioned project like MKSP. The Scaling up of the programme activities can follow both the extensive as well as the intensive approach. Voluntary Organisations tend to engage more intensely with women in a smaller scale.

5.5 Partnerships for Scaling Up

- MKSP has been launched through voluntary organisations and select SRLMs for "proof of concepts" - Programme Implementation Agencies which have expertise in working with communities at scale in agriculture and allied sectors. These programmes are working using the "women in agriculture" approach. Similarly over the last three decades there are a large number of women's organisations that have developed expertise on working with marginalised women with an empowerment approach. Partnering with these organisations to take up livelihoods on scale in their areas of operation, will not only assist in upscaling the programme but also bring in synergy of resources in the PIAs.

Concluding remarks: Conceptually, empowerment has come to mean the transformation of unequal relations of power that determine the nature of the social structure, whether through gender, caste, class or any other axes of marginalisation. Women are also challenging the multiple patriarchies they face, evolving their aspirations and exercising agency. Yet, institutional mechanisms are slow to respond. In this regard, the MKSP is a welcome move in acknowledging and systematically investing in knowledge, technology, resources and agency of women farmers. The programme is in a privileged position to rise to the occasion and make substantive equality its long-term goal.

ANNEXURE 1

| Project Summary of All Projects till date | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Name of State | No. of Projects | No. of NGO Partners | No. of PIAs | No. of Districts | No. of Blocks | Total Budget (in Rs. Crores) | Central Share (in Rs. Cores) | No. of Beneficiaries |
| Odisha | 7 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 25 | 38.50 | 28.88 | 36307 |
| AP | 23 | 3 | 23 | 22 | 653 | 289.90 | 217.43 | 1861628 |
| Bihar | 2 | 1 | 2 | 11 | 17 | 110.77 | 80.39 | 122500 |
| Karnataka | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 24.46 | 18.34 | 19000 |
| Assam | 1 | 6 | 1 | 7 | 12 | 14.39 | 12.67 | 14000 |
| Chattisgarh | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 2.99 | 2.24 | 2200 |
| Gujarat | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 14 | 26.62 | 19.97 | 42320 |
| HP | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2.71 | 2.03 | 2500 |
| Kerala | 3 | 1 | 2 | 14 | 152 | 140.52 | 66.42 | 180000 |
| MP | 4 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 16 | 45.04 | 24.78 | 30500 |
| Maharashtra | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 5.8 | 4.37 | 3000 |
| Rajasthan | 1 | 7 | 1 | 7 | 19 | 11.24 | 8.43 | 25500 |
| WB | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 11 | 13.51 | 10.13 | 60000 |
| Jharkhand | 8 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 14 | 18.13 | 13.59 | 28630 |
| CSB Multi-state | 1 | 2 | 2 | 17 | 31 | 52.19 | 39.11 | 22038 |
| Total Projects | 58 | 53 | 57 | 117 | 983 | 796.78 | 548.78 | 2450123 |

Source: NMMU, 2014

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