

DEPARTMENTAL CONVERGENCE

CASE STUDIES FROM ASSAM



PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS - COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS CONVERGENCE PROJECT



Aajeevika
National Rural Livelihoods Mission
Government of India



Kudumbashree
Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission
Government of Kerala

Kudumbashree-National Resource Organisation

PUBLISHER

This edition is first published in 2023
by Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation (NRO)
Government of Kerala
Carmel Towers, Vazhuthacud
Trivandrum, Kerala
www.kudumbashreenro.org

WRITTEN & EDITED BY KUDUMBASHREE NRO

This document is a product of the efforts of Elizabeth Soby, Akanksha Mishra, Benazir Nawaz, and Harshita Jha, -NRO professionals. In addition, the document was only possible with the back-breaking work done by the Mentor Resource Persons (MRPs), Community Members, and our very own Community Cadres.

Edited and Compiled By Harshita Jha

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Travelling Tripod Films
www.travellingtripodfilms.com | info@travellingtripodfilms.com

COPYRIGHT

Kudumbashree National Resource Organization (KS-NRO)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any way or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright holder.

DISCLAIMER

While we have made every effort to give authentic information and seek permission to use related photographs, the publisher wishes to apologize for any inadvertent error or omissions caused.

CONTENT

Acronyms and Abbreviation

4

About ASRLM

6

About Kudumbashree NRO

7

PRI-CBO Convergence Project

8

Background

12

Departmental Convergence in Assam

13

Case studies

18

Conclusion

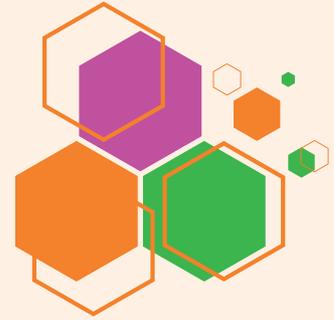
40

ABBREVIATIONS

ARTFED	Assam Apex Weavers & Artisans Co-operative Federation Ltd.
ASRLM	Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission
BMMU	Block Mission Management Unit
CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
CLF	Cluster Level Federation
DAY-NRLM	Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihood Mission
DLSA	District Legal Services Authority
EC	Executive Committee
FIR	First Information Report
FY	Financial Year
GP	Gram Panchayat
GPDP	Gram Panchayat Development Plan
IM	Internal Mentors
KVK	Krishi Vigyan Kendra

LP	Lower Primary
KS-NRO	Kudumbashree NRO
LRG	Local Resource Group
PMJJBY	Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana
PMSBY	Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
PRI - CBO Convergence	Panchayati Raj Institution - Community Based Organization Convergence
SHG	Self Help Group
SMC	School Management Committee
SRLMs	State Rural Livelihood Missions
SPEM	State Poverty Eradication Mission
VDC	Village Development Council
VPRP	Village Poverty Reduction Plans
VO	Village Organisation
VOCC	Village Organisation Coordination Committee

ABOUT ASAAM STATE RURAL LIVELIHOOD MISSION

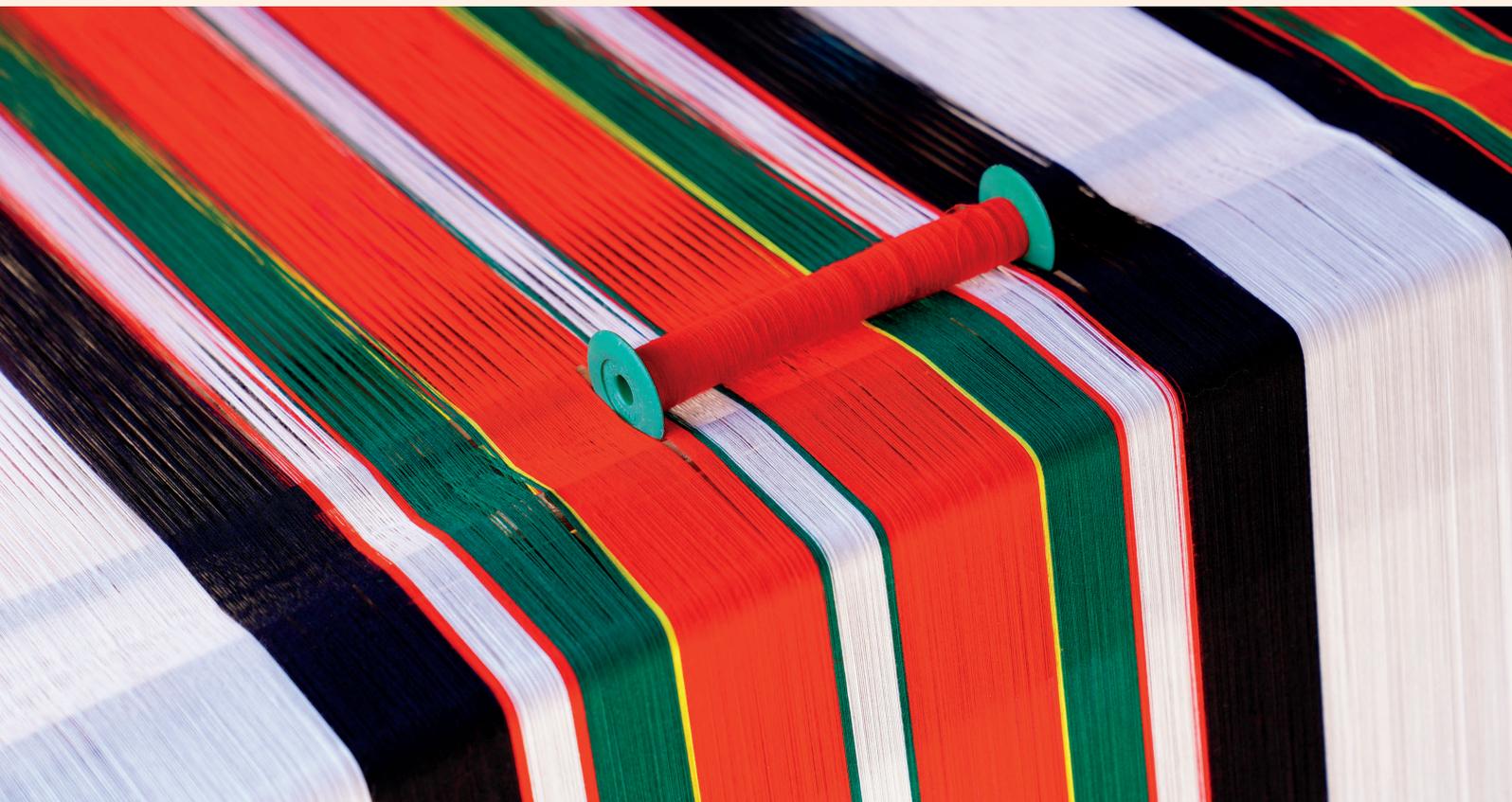


Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM) is a flagship program of the Ministry of Rural Development. It supports the Self-help Groups to improve their socio-economic status through collectivization, access to credit, and strengthening their livelihood activities. Youth skill development is another aspect of the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission.

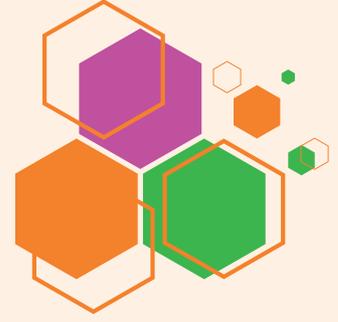
The Mission for Poverty Reduction is an extensive program with an implementation structure at the State, District, Block, and the Panchayat level toward women's empowerment.

The Mission completed a decade last year; it has come a long way.

Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM) had partnered with Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission, Kudumbashree-NRO for implementing the PRI-CBO (Panchayati Raj Institutions - Community Based Organisations) Convergence Pilot Projects in Assam. In 2019, the pilot projects were initiated in 19 blocks across ten districts of Assam.



ABOUT KUDUMBASHREE NRO



Kudumbashree is Kerala's state poverty eradication mission implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala. Having proven its stint in Kerala, Kudumbashree was recognized as a National Resource Organization by the Ministry of Rural Development in 2012. Kudumbashree NRO (KS-NRO) provides technical and implementation assistance to the State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) in two major domains, one of which is the PRI-CBO Convergence Project. Since its inception, KS-NRO has provided technical support to eleven states in the country, namely, Assam, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Mizoram, Rajasthan, Tripura, and Uttar Pradesh. Presently, the project is operational in four partner states, including Assam.



ABOUT PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT



The PRI-CBO Convergence piloted under DAY-NRLM and supported by KS-NRO focuses on enabling the working together of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to strengthen access to entitlements, improve livelihoods, enable social inclusion and enhance overall community participation in local governance. It is based on the premise that a synergy between these institutions can be mutually beneficial in addressing the issue of poverty for the larger goal of the socio-economic development of the village.

The Convergence project focuses on strengthening the capacities of the women-led SHG network and Panchayat Raj Institutions through various training and field-based engagements to ensure that the needs of the poor and marginalized are addressed effectively. It aims to focus on enhancing women's involvement in participatory planning processes for local development by increasing their participation in democratic platforms like Gram Sabhas. The project also facilitates the SHG members in preparing community-based demand plans, known as the Village Poverty Reduction Plans (VPRP), to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable. It also supports the PRIs and Line Departments in making their annual action plans. The Panchayat thus makes the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) more inclusive and participatory by integrating demands from the VPRP into GPDP.

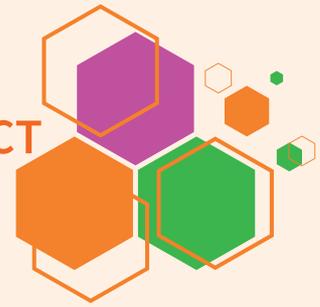
A significant focus area of the project is to initiate convergence among line departments, panchayat institutions, and the SHG network to increase the community's access to welfare schemes, promote better livelihood opportunities and improve service delivery of public goods. One of the ways departmental convergence is undertaken is as a follow-up step of the demands generated in the Village Poverty Reduction Plan. Even after implementing the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, many states have not devolved all the powers to their Gram Panchayats. Working in the field, it was evident that the Gram Panchayat could fulfill only a few welfare schemes and infrastructural demands directly through their integration into GPDP. Other demands do not directly fall within the Panchayat's control, so support from other line departments is sought for their fulfillment.

Keeping these field realities in mind, a conscious attempt was made to converge with the Line Departments like the agriculture department, animal husbandry and veterinary department, handloom department, and social welfare departments to fulfill some of the community's demands and strengthen the Local Governance Initiatives/

This booklet aims to document the process of departmental convergence undertaken within the purview of the PRI-CBO Convergence Project in the state of Assam, highlighting some of the best practices and initiatives of departmental convergence.



PRI-CBO CONVERGENCE PROJECT IN ASSAM



Kudumbashree NRO entered into an MoU with Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission for the convergence project in 2014. In the pilot phase, the project was initiated in two Blocks - namely, Laharighat and Bajjagaon Blocks of Morigaon and Nagaon Districts, respectively.

The project's initial phase had Mentors (community resource persons from Kerala) establish relations with all stakeholders. The mentors also helped select and provide handholding support to the first set of cadres - LRGs. Post the first phase, and the project expanded to two other Blocks in Nagaon and Sonitpur in the second phase of 2017. It expanded to Barhampur and Lawkhowa Block in Nagaon, Sonitpur District, Dhekiajuli, and Borcholla Block. The significant activities remained the same, but the handholding support from the Kerala Mentors was reduced, and the Internal mentors took center-stage. A significant achievement in this phase was the active role played by the VOCC in establishing an efficient and effective relationship with the Panchayat and Line Departments. It spearheaded various innovative activities, such as the model kitchen garden initiative, the female Literacy campaign, and the re-enrolment of dropout students, to name a few from the field, which gave extraordinary results. In addition, the second phase focused on the GPDP and the preparation of poverty reduction plans by the CBO fold- for this, more than 3000 SHG members were trained. Many demands from the SHG fold were consolidated by the VOCC and submitted strategically during the three GPDP Gram Sabhas. Much of the work got incorporated and materialized in fields such as demand for roads, culverts, community halls, and even Children's Parks. Under this phase, the processes and strategies of materializing and using the Line Department funds were also explored.



As a result of all these attempts, the project underwent an expansion to 19 Blocks of 10 Districts across Assam. 2 of these Districts are under the purview of Schedule VI. Alongside the significant activities, activities like VPRP have already happened in the field for integration into the GPDP. An exclusive part of this project phase was to utilize the data collected through VPRP or other data collection drives into convergence activities with the Gram Panchayats and Line Departments. For the GPDP Plans of 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, a vast pool of data was collected from entitlements, livelihood, Public Goods Services, and Social Development plans. With the experience of doing VPRP and GPDP for consecutive years, it was well understood that only Panchayats and VDCs fund is insufficient to fulfill all the community's demands and result in the sustainable development of a Panchayat. Hence, since the beginning of the Project, conscious and persistent attempts were made to involve Line Departments as significant stakeholders. The report will highlight these aspects and show the processes that led to successfully conducting many Innovative camps in Panchayats and VDC areas for social security schemes and GPDP success in convergence with the Line Departments.



Background

Every state has its line of departments and institutions through which different government schemes, policies, investment, and support are provided to strengthen the rural economy and livelihood base of institutions, and agencies have also provided exceptional services and institutions.

It is observed that these departments have been working in Assam within their self-developed structures. Although each body's initiatives and efforts effectively address poverty alleviation, there is a need to optimize efforts through inter-sectional approaches. The convergence of different departments will ensure the proper delivery and completion of the task, and the larger vision of rural development will fulfill the ultimate objective of benefiting the beneficiaries in all ways. Additionally, this will be a way forward for sustainability where the community will have to take up efforts for its self-development by following the footprints laid down during the implementation and continuation of the project.

The intervention of departmental convergence as part of the PRI-CBO Convergence Project in Assam was initiated, considering that departments and community-based organizations (CBOs) should work together to foster a collaborative and inclusive approach to community development. The mandates from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) and the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) highlight the importance of line departments' participation in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) planning and their presence in Gram Sabhas. By converging with CBOs, line departments have ensured a more comprehensive outreach and avoided duplication of efforts in reaching out to the right beneficiaries. The collaboration between departments and CBOs enabled a two-way exchange of knowledge and resources. Departments provided valuable support to CBOs in terms of schemes, training, and expertise, while CBOs, with their grassroots presence, enhanced the department's understanding of community needs and priorities. Through this partnership, CBOs were empowered to advocate for their entitlements, thereby improving the awareness of the self-help group (SHG) network and identifying the right beneficiaries for various programs and schemes. Ultimately, the synergy between departments and CBOs led to more effective and targeted community development interventions, ensuring that resources were utilized efficiently and the benefits reached those who needed them the most.

Departmental Convergence in Assam

The departmental convergence initiative in Assam followed a structured approach to promote collaboration and synergy between different departments for effective community development. The specific steps involved in this process are as follows:

Collection of Data from SHG Network through PAE and VPRP: Data collection was carried out in a participatory manner, involving self-help groups (SHGs) as key stakeholders. This step ensured that the community's perspectives, needs, and demands were accurately captured in specified formats.

Segregation of Demands: The collected data was then segregated and analyzed to identify the specific demands and requirements of the community. This step helped categorize the demands according to the respective departments responsible for addressing them.

Orientation to Line Department at district and block level: To facilitate effective collaboration, orientation sessions were conducted to familiarize line departments with working with community-based organizations (CBOs). These sessions aimed to build understanding, promote partnership, and enhance coordination between the departments and CBOs at the district and block levels.

Sharing the Type of Demand with Each Department: The demands raised by SHGs were shared with the respective departments responsible for addressing those demands. This step ensured that the departments had a clear understanding of the specific requirements and expectations of the community.

Discussion on Current Schemes with Departments: Departments discussed with SHGs, cadre representatives, and village organization (VO) representatives regarding their existing schemes and programs. These discussions helped to align the schemes with the demands raised by the community, ensuring better responsiveness and utilization of resources.

Cadre and VO Representatives Meeting Line Departments with a List of Beneficiaries: Cadre representatives and VO representatives held meetings with line departments to submit a list of beneficiaries eligible for specific schemes. This step facilitated the identification and selection of the right beneficiaries based on the criteria set by the departments.

Collecting the Application Form for Schemes from Departments: Cadre representatives collected application forms for various schemes from the respective departments. This ensured the necessary paperwork was completed accurately and followed the department's requirements.

Cadres Collecting Required Documents of Selected Beneficiaries: Cadre representatives assisted the selected beneficiaries in collecting and organizing the required documents and paperwork necessary for availing of the schemes. This step aimed to streamline the process and ensure beneficiaries had all the necessary documentation.

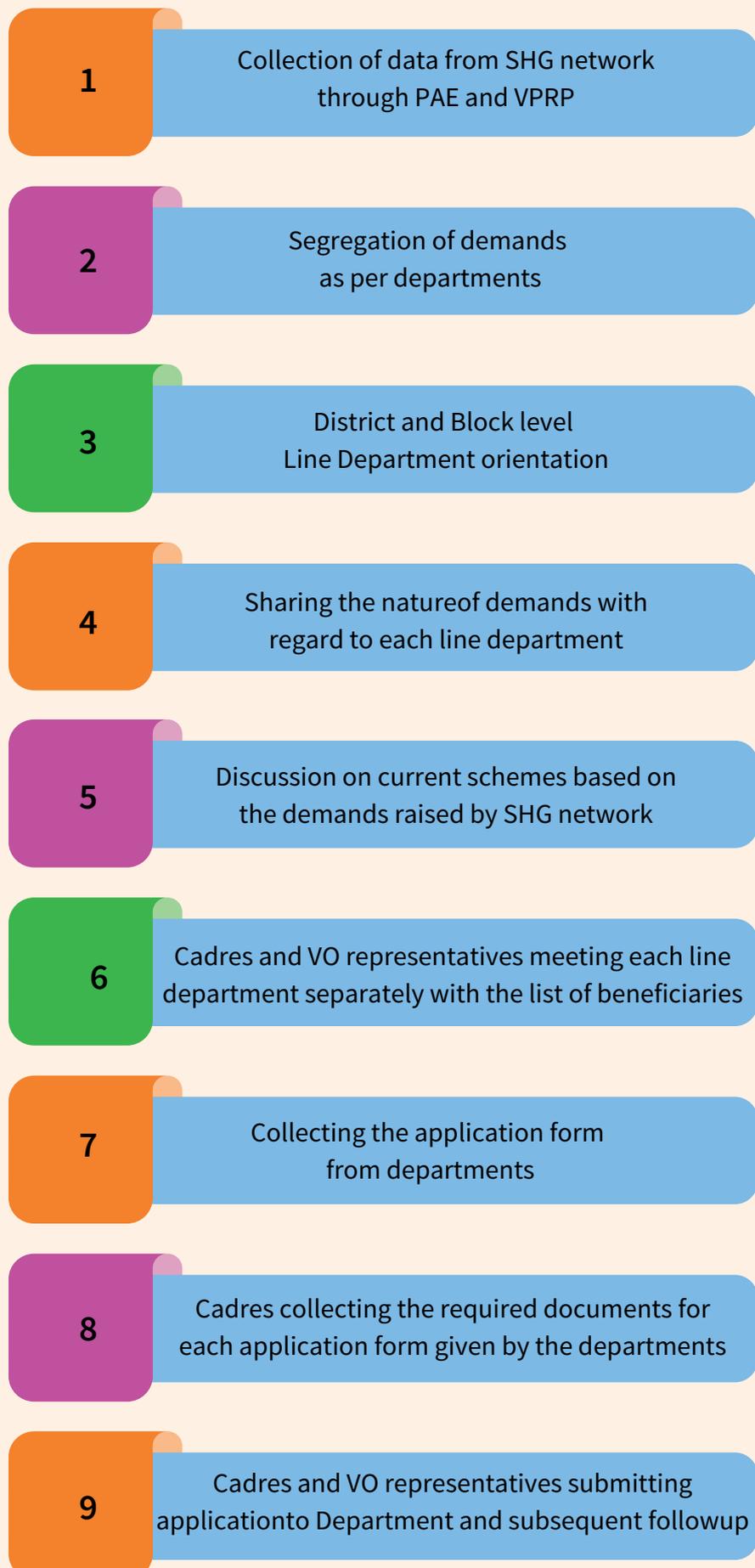
Cadres and VO Representatives Submitting Applications to Departments: Cadres and VO representatives submitted the completed application forms and supporting documents to the departments. This step marked the formal submission of applications for the schemes on behalf of the eligible beneficiaries.

Subsequent Follow-up until the Beneficiary Receives the Inputs: Cadre and VO representatives continued to follow up with the departments to ensure that the applications were processed and the beneficiaries received the inputs or benefits as per the schemes—this involved monitoring the progress, addressing any issues or delays, and advocating for timely implementation.

By following these steps, the departmental convergence initiative in Assam aimed to streamline the process, enhance coordination, and ensure that the demands and needs of the community were effectively addressed through various schemes and programs implemented by the respective departments.



STEPS FOLLOWED FOR DEPARTMENTAL CONVERGENCE



Process Followed for Departmental Convergence

❑ Cadre Training on Departmental Convergence

Since the beginning of the project, the cadres have been trained in the importance of working with the Line Departments and building a cordial relationship with them. The cadres are also specifically trained and handheld to plan activities department-wise. Post the VPRP activity, the cadres are trained to segregate the VPRP Data Department wise with the list of beneficiaries which can be further submitted to departments and followed upon.

❑ Orientation/Training on State Level Line Department Meeting

Since the beginning of the project, attempts have been made to conduct a state-level Line Department Meeting. This meeting is conducted to orient the Line Departments regarding converging with SHGs and their demands. Special emphasis is given during the training on VPRP. In detail, there is a detailed explanation of the steps to be followed to ensure maximum achievement of VPRP demands through Line Departments.

❑ Orientation/Training on District and Block Level Line Department Meeting g

Once the state was oriented, the professionals with the teams organized the district, and the Block team organized the Line Department Meetings. In these meetings, they are introduced to the project concept and how convergence can be facilitated through the CBO network. During this meeting, the District and Block team are presented and submitted with the demands related to each department.

❑ One-Day District and Block Level Line Department Meeting

The BMMU and DMMU organized one Block Level and District Level meeting to which all the Line Department officials were invited. On this day, they went through presentations that explained the entire process of VPRP and how Line Departments can contribute to its achievement and draw from it. The VPRP booklet was also shared with the Line Departments.

❑ Individual Meetings with the Line Department Officials

The Professionals and Mentors from the Kudumbashree-NRO team also ensure meeting the Line Departments individually along with the CBO leaders. During these meetings, it is discussed what are the protocols for demand submission and how village-level camps can be conducted for entitlement achievement. In these meetings, CLF/VOCC leaders are introduced personally to the LRGs and IMs, and contact numbers are shared for further follow-up. These meetings help orient VPRP demands to the Line Departments to ensure better clarity on VPRP demand achievement with the Line Department officials.

❑ Handholding support to LRGs/IMs and VOCC

Mentors further hand-held the LRGs and VOCC leaders to meet the Departments with verified data, get clarity on the application process, and conduct GP-level camps. The Mentor assists them in battling bottlenecks and writing letters.

❑ Document Collection and Application through LRGs and VOCC

The LRGs, IMs, and mentors ensured that the applications for each department were collected in the prescribed format and verified before submission.

❑ Follow up by VOCC and LRGs for the Application submitted

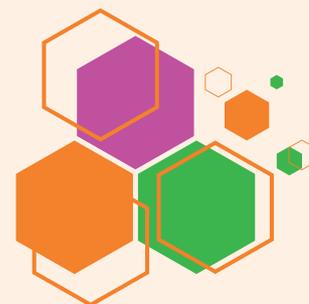
The LRGs with VOCC leaders, Mentors, and professionals engaged in rigorous follow-ups with Departments after application submission. Special Stakeholder meeting.

❑ Organizing day Camps and Melas for maximum distribution

The Departments were also encouraged to come for one-day camps organized by the VOCC with the LRGs, IMs, and Mentors where maximum distribution can be done. (Health Card Mela Camp, Yarn Pass Book Distribution Camp).



CASE STUDIES



1. Convergence with the Department of Agriculture

Agriculture Department in Assam is one of the crucial Line Departments, keeping in mind that agriculture is the primary occupation of the people. The department aims at creating profitable livelihood opportunities for people engaging in agriculture. It also tries to address crop failure due to recurring floods. The departments in agricultural equipment, crop insurance, soil testing, seeds, and saplings provide various schemes and supports. Through the initiatives under the PRI-CBO Convergence Project, 2244 beneficiaries received training and awareness sessions on various agricultural activities, and 7545 other benefits in the form of agricultural inputs were also provided to SHG members by the agriculture department:

Table: Support received from Agriculture Department

Support Received	Individual benefits	Group benefits (No. of groups)
Agricultural Input		
Seed Distribution	5897	111
Fertilizer Distribution	1016	5
Spray Machine	491	-
Other inputs	22	3
Awareness and Training sessions (e.g., Kitchen garden training)	31	2244

The following case studies from Nagaon and Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong District will try to highlight one of such initiatives.

Group farming: Providing sustainability and livelihoods by enhancing the role of SHG networks



"Finally, we started farming together. The best part is that we got training from the experts in the agriculture department. They provided us with seeds as well. The farm does not so burden us since we work as a group. There is always another person to help us. This farm will help us to contribute financially to our family. After this season, we also plan to expand to another land."



Women collectives have the potential to act as key agents for development. They play a catalytic role in transformational, economic, environmental, and social changes required for sustainable development. One of the major ways to do it is by creating livelihoods through farming. The agriculture/Farming sector remains fundamental for economic growth, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability.

Dholongghat Development block is a PRI-CBO Convergence intervention block under the Nagaon District of Assam. The project is ongoing in five Gram Panchayats in the block. Special cadres named LRGs and IMs are part of the project as foot soldiers. An informal structure called VOCC (federation of SHGs at GP level) is also created in all five intervention GPs to catalyze the convergence process.

The discussions about group farming among the SHG members sparked with the VPRP preparation exercise. During the VPRP process, demands 34 group farming came from the SHG network of five intervention GPs in the block. As the first step towards creating livelihood, VOCC decided to provide necessary handholding support for women interested in group farming. The whole approach of VOCC for the same can be divided into four steps - Coordination with women interested in farming, Coordination with the agriculture department, initiation at the field, and follow-up.

Along with the LRGs in the GPs, VOCC approached the agriculture department of Nagaon district to provide support for women interested in farming. After clearly understanding the services provided by the agriculture department, VOCC, and the beneficiaries, they decided to make a plan for the farming groups. It was understood that training - both awareness and technical training, seeds, vermin composts materials. VOCC and the beneficiaries decided to use the services to their full potential. Along with the support of BMMU, LRGs and VOCC prepared a list of vegetables that the groups like to farm based on inputs from the group members. An individual plan was made for each group - based on the land they owned and the members' interest. The plans for each group were discussed with the members and approved. The Agriculture Department also approved the group farming plan that was prepared. It was also decided to attach one vermicompost pit in each farming land so the women could produce natural fertilizers for their farms. The major demands that the VOCC put forward were training, seeds, fertilizers, and vermicompost materials.

A case study on Kitchen Gardens in Karbianglong in convergence with Agriculture/Horticulture and KVK

Kitchen Gardens in Assam is a household feature. However, still, there are a lot of children who are going undernourished. Considering this, the Department of Horticulture in Assam and KVK give a special impetus to developing nutri gardens/kitchen gardens in schools and Anganwadis. These departments have provisions for technical training, providing seeds, and if gone with Project Proposals, they also are willing to converge and provide handholding support. Considering this, the convergence project in Karbianglong District of Assam took the initiative of developing the model Kitchen Gardens.

Nutri Gardens- A story of battling malnourishment



.H.G.s work is not only thrift and credit but also to ensure social development. With the Kitchen Garden initiative, my SHG. aimed to be socially responsible. I did not know back then that this small step would help my family sail through the lockdown period when everything seemed to stand still, including my family income. I and all my SHG. bardos are now committed to continuing it."

-Archana Kosch from Prabhati



Panchayati Raj Institution - Community Based Organization (PRI-CBO) Convergence Project in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong District was initiated by Kudumbashree NRO, Kerala, in July 2019. The Convergence team and the Block team identified a few active members of SHGs who were selected as LRGs to work with the PRI CBO Convergence team. These LRGs were trained to work with the CBO network and their immediate Local Governance Systems and Departments for community development.

In 2020, when the NFHS-5 2019-20 report came, the data showed alarming levels of child stunting, which stood at 31%, with 67.5% of children between (6-59) months in Karbi Anglong. The data was supported by considerable evidence from the field conducting Health Camps. Many children were found to suffer from malnutrition. The community had also added it as an issue in the Social Development Plans of the VPRP prepared for 2021-2022. The team, however, decided to plan an intervention to strengthen the existing government interventions of school kitchen gardens and social security systems by engaging and building the capacity of the Community-Based Organisations to work with their LSGIs and the Line Departments. The team understood that to make this intervention sustainable, engaging with the Line Departments was important. As a first activity, The LRGs were asked to engage with School Management Committees in rural areas to discuss the issue of malnutrition and get data on the number of children diagnosed with malnutrition. This was done considering that these schools were mandated to conduct regular health checkups to identify students with low nutritional levels. The LRGs were then asked to meet the parents of the children studying in these schools, especially those under the malnutrition category. The LRGs tried encouraging parents of such children who were part of the CBO network to start nutrition gardens in schools with children.



One such intervention was conducted in Bithung VDC, Rongkhang block of West KarbiAnglong. With the initiative of the Internal Mentor, Local Resource Group(LRG), and through an awareness program, the idea of a kitchen garden was discussed with Atmosanjiboni VO. The discussion was facilitated by the VO President, Mrs. Archana Koch, and Secretary, Mrs. Kavita Bordoloi, and also with the school managing committee of Bikangthir LP School, Borghat, PO-Toradubi, PS-Baithalangso, Dist-West Karbi Anglong. On being oriented regarding nutrition, especially of children of the SHGs, Prabhati SHG became enthusiastic and discussed with Sri Tilak Lorom, President, and Sri Dharmendra Dekaraja, Head Master and Secretary of SMC Since the school has lots of space. After a detailed discussion with SMC, it was found that the number of students enrolled during F.Y. 2019-20 was 60; out of the 60 students, seven were found to be malnourished. The CBO network and the SMCs were enthusiastic about the intervention but did not have the resources to start it. It was then that the agriculture department was roped in. The LRGs and the Internal Mentor, Mentor, and Block Program Manager visited the department and discussed the issue in detail. The department was requested to provide training and better-quality seeds. The department, though with some initial reluctance and negotiation, agreed to provide the training. After receiving training, land development, purchase of seeds, plantation, and cleaning of the Kitchen Garden were started, and its maintenance responsibility was given to Provbhati SHG.



This initiative has benefited poor students as the vegetables available in the market are all medicated. Still, the students of Bikangthir LP School, through the initiative of Probhati SHG, are being served organic vegetables in their Mid-Day meals. It was thought that this intervention could be turned into a model for the demonstration to various other schools in nearby areas, and it did during the COVID LOCKDOWN in 2020. At this juncture, women of Probhati SHG. were thinking of alternate livelihood as an option for sustenance. They traced it back to an initiative led by them. In February, a month before the lockdown, four SHG members of Prabhati SHG from Atmasanjivni VO of Bithung VDC, Rongkhang Block, West KarbiAnglong had started a Kitchen Garden initiative with the School Management Committee of the Borghat LP schools where their children studied. They had taken loans from their Village Organisation to buy seeds, and the block-level agriculture department provided them with handholding support. The initial objective behind this initiative was to provide nutritious vegetables in the Mid Day Meal Scheme to the children of Bikangthir, Borghat LP School, where seven students out of 60 were identified as suffering from malnutrition. With two months into lockdown and no alternative livelihood for these women and their families, this initiative was a blessing in disguise. As the plants started bearing vegetables like brinjal, tio, lady's finger, and beans by March end, the SHG women sold around 30 kg of vegetables in a month which was worth Rs 927 in the local market and also donated around 8 kg to the children who were identified with malnourishment. Though insufficient to run a family, Kitchen Garden emerged as a new ray of hope which these women want to continue to post the lockdown.

Today a total of 8 Schools are actively engaging in it, providing their students with the product and acting as an alternate source of livelihood.



2. Convergence with the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary

Animal Husbandry and Veterinary is another one of the major departments of the Government of Assam. The department is responsible for matters relating to livestock production, preservation, protection from disease, and improvement of stocks and dairy development. It also looks after all matters pertaining to fishing and fisheries. The department plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of the rural mass in particular and the state as a whole. It is particularly significant for the rural masses as poultry development and vaccination of cattle are closely linked to their livelihoods. Under the PRI-CBO Convergence Project, different convergence initiatives in different intervention districts and blocks were undertaken through the department, leading to 38 awareness and training sessions being held across the ten districts with 2976 participants from the community. Apart from awareness sessions, 12776 animals were vaccinated, and SHG members received 1388 animal insurance.

Table: Support received from Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department

Support Received	No. of camps held	No. of beneficiaries/ participants
Animal Insurance (Number of animals)	13	1388
Vaccination (Number of animals)	64	12776
Awareness & Training Sessions (Number of people participated)	38	2296

A case study below from the Tinsukia District of Assam will highlight the initiatives the CBO network took to converge with the Veterinary/Animal Husbandry Department.

Cattle Registration and Vaccination Drive: A case study from Rajgarh Gram Panchayat, Tinsukia District, Assam

Rajgarh Gram Panchayat is one of the five panchayats in the Sadiya Block of Tinsukia District, where the PRI-CBO Convergence Project is currently being implemented. Sadiya block, including the Rajgarh Gram Panchayat, has a unique history due to its isolation from the larger part of Assam due to the Brahmaputra river flowing between them. The construction of a 10-kilometer-long bridge over the river has finally connected the Sadiya block to these parts of Assam that had earlier been cut off. Owing to the uniqueness and historical isolation of the block, any successful intervention in any of the Gram Panchayats of the block becomes particularly significant.



With the coming of the PRI-CBO Convergence Project, a Panchayat-wise community demand plan was prepared by the name of Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP), where data from the CBO network regarding access to entitlements, livelihood opportunities required, community demands for public goods and services as well as for social development was collected from the Rajgarh Gram Panchayat. The demand for vaccination, as well as registration of the cattle, came out in huge numbers across the Rajgarh Panchayat, being 378 in number. Hence while following up on the VPRP demands, the cadres of the PRI-CBO Convergence Project, mainly the Internal Mentor and the Local Resource Group (LRGs), under the guidance of an external mentor from Kerala, organized a vaccination and cattle registration drive in the Panchayat in collaboration with the Veterinary Department and the Panchayat Committee Members.

The cadres first held a preliminary discussion about vaccination and an animal tagging camp with the Village Organizations at the village level and with the Village Organization Coordination Committee at the Gram Panchayat level. After getting a positive response from these community-based organizations, the cadres approached the President of the Gram Panchayat and the Village Head (Gaon Bura) of the village wherever they were available. It was proposed that the Swarna Dhenu Insurance and Black Quarter vaccine be made available to the community members residing in the Panchayat. During this process, where a vaccination drive was being proposed to the CBO members, many new CBO members also asked for tagging and vaccination for their cattle.



The PRI-CBO Convergence Project cadre consisting of the Internal Mentor and the LRGs approached the Veterinary Department accompanied by a Village Organization Coordination Committee representative. The Veterinary Doctor promised to inform the LRGs when Black Quarter Vaccine was restocked and made available. After some days of discussion, the Veterinary Department approached the LRGs for the same.

The vaccination and cattle tagging drive were held across different Village Organizations of the Gram Panchayat, with the ward members of that particular village being consulted for the same. The entire duration of the vaccination and the tagging was held across 40 days, with 1393 vaccinations and tagging done across 337 households with the help of two doctors and two helpers from the Veterinary Department. The number of vaccinated cattle came out to be much larger than the initial demand in the VPRP due to the larger participation and ownership being taken up by the Community-Based Organizations and the project cadre.

Vaccination and tagging drive had a huge positive impact on the family members of the SHG network who owned cattle but had to frequently deal with the cattle falling ill. The improvement in health was especially marked in the case of cows, where a considerable positive change was seen in their health. Additionally, with the cows' tagging, the cows' official registration was done in the local police stations, and the records of the Gaon Bura through a registration number assigned to each tagged cow. This registration number is to be used by the owners of the cows whenever there is any buying or selling of the cows, thus preventing cow theft. Moreover, in cases of cattle being stolen, it is easier for the police station to track and catch the same due to an assigned registration number associated with each tagged cow. After completing this successful vaccination and cattle tagging drive through the PRI-CBO Convergence Project, it was followed up successfully by the community members themselves.

3. Convergence with the District Legal Service Authority

The Department of Assam State Legal Services Authority aims to promote an inclusive legal system to ensure fair and meaningful justice for the marginalized and disadvantaged. It also legally empowers the marginalized and excluded groups of society by providing effective legal representation, legal literacy, and awareness. It bridges the gap between the legally available benefits and the entitled beneficiaries through District Legal Services Authority (DLSA). The main function of DLSA is to implement various legal programs in the district. Under the PRI-CBO Convergence Project, 33 legal awareness camps were held across the ten districts of Assam, addressing issues like child marriage, domestic violence, dowry-related incidents, and overall legal knowledge. The awareness camps saw a participation of 2967 SHG members.

Table: Support received from DLSA & Police

Support Received	No. of camps held	No. of beneficiaries/ participants
Awareness & Training Sessions	33	2967



The following case study from Biswanath district will highlight one of such initiatives taken in convergence with the DLSA.

Women's collective collaborating with Departments to Address Domestic Violence



“Domestic violence is an issue many of us do not speak up about. It is mostly unheard of, even if some women try to speak about it. We could discuss this issue on a public platform through this awareness program. I attended the session with my mother-in-law, and the discussion continued within the house. In the future, if we come to know about any such incident, we will be able to suggest to the person who is affected what is to be done.”

-Momi Bhuyan (SHG member)



Social development plans are one of the most significant components of VPRP. The social development plans are based on proposals addressing specific social issues in the community. These plans are prepared after intense discussions among members of the Village Organization to identify the issues and potential solutions for the same. Collective ownership of the issue and actions is essential for the community members to change their social realities. The scope of the GPDP is not limited to the funds allocated to local governments. The plans may also include low-cost or no-cost interventions driven by the community. The Social Development plans can be classified as 'Low Cost/No Cost' demands in the GPDP.

As part of social development plans, a common issue identified across ten intervention Panchayats in the Bishwanath was Domestic Violence. The PRI-CBO Convergence Team prepared a comprehensive social development plan based on the ideas and suggestions that emerged during the VO level plan preparation. Implementing the social development plan was initiated by a CLF (Cluster Level Federation) orientation on domestic violence in Chaiduar and Pub-cheddar blocks. The orientation aimed to provide the members with basic awareness of domestic violence and its manifestations. The second step of implementing this Social Development Plan was to make the SHG/VO members aware of the Domestic Violence Act 2005, various legal rights and entitlements of women in a marital relationship, and redressal mechanisms that women can access in case of violence. To do the same, the PRI-CBO Convergence team helped the women's collective collaborate with the District Legal Service Authority officials.



One such awareness session was organized in the Dakhin Kalabari Panchayat of Pub-Chaiduar Block in Biswanath. A letter was written to the DLSA officials requesting a legal awareness session on domestic violence at the panchayat level. The DLSA officials agreed to the request and scheduled the awareness session on 8th March 2021 in observance of the Celebration of 111 years of International Women's Day. It was for the first time such an event was taking place in the Panchayat on Women's Day. It gave the SHG members a lot of encouragement, and they pledged to participate in huge numbers.

On 8th March 2021, the DLSA secretary, retainer lawyer, and DLSA District coordinator facilitated the legal awareness session. The session mainly included awareness around legal entitlements of women in the context of Domestic Violence, such as the Right to Residence, and different institutions for addressing their grievances, such as One Stop Centres and the office of the protection officers. One hundred thirty women participated in the awareness program. The participants raised various concerns around access to the institutions of redressal mechanism based on their personal experiences after the session. Few women also shared their experiences facing domestic violence and how they responded. Many women said that it was the first time they learned that the Constitution has laid down various protective measures for women against domestic violence. It was only through the convergence with the DLSA that many women with limited access to information could receive legal awareness around domestic violence free of cost.



Also, police personnel was recognized as one of the important stakeholders in implementing the social development plan on domestic violence. Hence, a police station exposure visit was organized for SHG members of the ten intervention panchayats. The main objective of the exposure visit was to familiarise the SHG members with the Police officers, Police station, and the process of filing a First Information Report or Non-Cognisable Report in case they are faced with an incident of domestic violence, as many of them were not aware of the same. Due to a model code of conduct in Assam then, we were only allowed to take 25 participants from each block to the Helem Police Station and Hawajan Police outpost. Five SHG members from each intervention panchayat participated in the event in both blocks. The exposure visit to the police station was a new learning experience for the women. Of fifty women who went to the police station/outpost, 45 of them it was a first-time experience. The visit made women familiar with the space of the police station and clarified the various myths they held about it. Many of them said that now in their time of need, they will not hesitate to go to the police station to seek help. The police personnel also assured the women of full cooperation in addressing the issue of violence in their panchayats.



“It is for the first time I have entered the premises of a police station. I was very nervous and excited at the same time. In our community, people are always told there are two things that everyone should stay away from. The first thing is the police station, and the second one is the court. I do not know why they say so. But after this visit, my fear of facing a police officer has lessened a bit. We were sitting in front of the Inspector In-charge and asking our doubts. I have also jotted down the entire process of filing an FIR in my notebook. I always used to think that in case of domestic violence, one should not involve the police as it's a family matter, but after today's session, my perception has changed.”

-Tara Devi (SHG Member)

4. Convergence with the Department of Handloom and Textiles

Weaving in handlooms has been a common household activity and an important cottage industry in Assam. Various developmental activities for weavers in the district, such as weavers extension service unit, handloom training center, formation and registration of primary weavers cooperative society, setting up of yarn bank, economic upliftment of weavers through weaving handloom cluster is implemented through the handloom and textiles department. Through initiatives undertaken under the PRI-CBO Convergence Project across the ten districts, 1574 yarn passbooks were distributed among SHGs and their members, and 23 handloom-related awareness and training sessions were held, which were attended by a total of 1159 SHG members.

Table: Support received from Handloom & Textile Department

Support Received	No. of camps held	No. of beneficiaries/ participants
Yarn Passbooks Distribution [No. of passbooks distributed]	-	1574
Handloom related awareness and training sessions	23	1159



A case study from the Dhemaji District below will highlight how the CBO network established a convergence between Handloom Department to avail different services.

Case study- Weaving Dreams by SHGs

Khiruprabha Changmai and Papori Handique were members of the Bharti SHG registered under Joymoti VO in Hatigarh Gram Panchayat, Dhemaji Block. Both their families have been engaged in farming, and that has been their main livelihood practice. Khiruprabha and Papori used to weave Mekhela Chador and Gamosa (traditional attires) using the traditional handloom equipment and gathered a meager source of income from doing that.

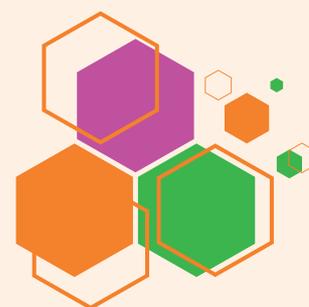
On 2nd October 2019, the first Gram Sabha with regard to Gram Panchayat Development Plan was held at Hatigarh Gram Panchayat. Besides the elected representative of the Panchayat, officials from different departments such as agriculture, handloom and textiles, fishery, sports, health, social welfare, and forestry were present in the Gram Sabha. In this Gram Sabha, the officials of various departments informed the public about the various schemes of their respective departments and how they can be implemented. The official representing Handloom and Textiles Department informed us about the various schemes implemented in the department and the importance of the Yarn Pass Book, using which weavers can avail subsidies while purchasing yarn.



Along with Khiruprabha and Papori, hundreds of SHG members participated in this Gram Sabha. Since most of them depend on handloom-related activity as a source of livelihood, the concept of a yarn passbook caught their attention. The members of the Local Resource Group understood that they required more information as to the benefits availed under this particular scheme and the process to be followed to avail of the same. A meeting was held between the Internal Mentor, LRGs, a few VO EC members, and officials of Handloom and Textiles, highlighting the importance of the Yarn Pass Book and how to receive the yarn passbook. During this meeting, the officials explained that a yarn pass book holder could avail discount on purchasing yarn from Jagaran ARTFED, a Government handloom weavers federation-run shop. The beneficiaries can purchase the yarn at a discount of 30 percent if it is Muga silk yarn, 20 percent for Tussar silk yarn, and 10 percent for other yarns. This passbook can be taken in the name of an individual and the name of an SHG, provided the SHG registration number and documents are submitted. The major advantage of applying for a passbook as an SHG is that all the members in the SHG can utilize the passbook and purchase yarn at a discounted rate. This is majorly to instill a sense of collectivism among the members and ensure that the passbook is utilized efficiently. The department also assured that the passbook holders will be given opportunities to set up stalls in the exhibitions organized by the department. The passbook holders practicing weaving as a group entrepreneurial activity would be given subsidies regarding the fund that can be used to set up weaving centers. A detailed explanation of the concerned application form was given, and a few forms were also handed over to the VO members.

After receiving the application form, Khiruprabha, and Papori applied for a yarn passbook in the name of Bharati SHG and purchased 3 kg of yarn. They began weaving with this yarn and hoped to set up a shop in Dhemaji town. They regularly purchased yarn from ARTFED and continued weaving at a large scale. They have been able to put up a stall at Subansiri Haat, a market space to sell products, in Dhemaji Town. They can earn considerable income to sustain and support their family.

A 'ONE STOP MELA' FOR CONVERGENCE



Akashiganga Gram Panchayat in District Hojai is surrounded by lush green forest cover and borders the Karbi Anglong District. The Panchayat is home largely to the Assamese Hindu, with the Muslim community in the minority. It also has a substantial population of the Kasari, Boro, Karbi, and Tiwa tribes, a few of which still reside in the forests and are generally landless. The geographical area is vast, with a few wards enclosed within the Forests, which are distinctly remote with no accessibility to roads or public transport. Hence, the information, accessibility, and awareness among the tribes residing in Forest areas are very low.

The Village Poverty Reduction Plan was prepared by each Self-help group, which ensured the inclusion of demands from the most vulnerable sections. This was evident during the Panchayat level consolidation and prioritization process when tribal women from within and outside the SHG network attended the process to ensure they were prioritized to receive entitlements and other infrastructure facilities. Once the VPRP was successfully integrated into GPDP by January, persistent efforts from Local Resource Groups (LRGs) and active CBO women began so that the community's demand could be met. Simultaneously, Assam was gearing up for the next State assembly elections in early March, making it difficult for the Panchayat and the Line Departments to engage with the community daily. Additionally, it was inconvenient for the community, particularly those living in distant areas, to attend various programs by Line Departments regularly. Hence, the idea to organize an event/fair where the Panchayat and schemes of Line Departments would be available at a single place pitched in, calling it the 'One-stop Mela.'



The first step was to finalize a convenient date for the Panchayat and the Line Departments. Earlier, through constant negotiations with the PRI, the LRGs and members from VOCC had managed to convince them to provide a room for the VOCC office in the Panchayat premises. A date was finalized for the inauguration, and it was decided that the 'One-stop mela' would be held on the same day. Various Line Departments like the Agriculture Department, Handloom Department, and Bank for schemes like PMJJBY, etc., were approached to hold pre-awareness sessions in the Panchayat, participate in the mela, and ensure that they are not occupied with any pre-engagements.

Once the list of participating Line Departments was ready, the next step was to create awareness among the community. The VOCC, LRGs, and I-mentors divided responsibility amongst themselves. Apart from a few traditional livelihood skills such as weaving, bamboo, and cane making, the population largely depends on agriculture and livestock. Therefore, awareness sessions were conducted on the documents required for the yarn passbook by the Handloom department and for the procurement of spray machines, tractors, and medicines for crops at a subsidized rate by the agriculture department. The bank also held sessions on schemes like PMSBY and PMJJBY. Not only did the VOCC arrange for pre-awareness sessions with the line departments, but they also participated regularly in the VO meetings. Word-of-mouth publicity was done, and from each VO, a team of active volunteers was formed who would inform every SHG and even women at the household level about the upcoming mela. The Block development officer, Binnakandi block, was invited to the inauguration, and local news channels were also informed. The next step was to arrange resources for the set-up. Arranging funds could have prevented organizing the One-stop mela since the Panchayat had no funds for such affairs. In this case, the VO women took the initiative and willingly contributed a sum of one thousand rupees for arranging logistics and setting up stalls.



There were stalls for the agriculture department, handloom department, and bank, and a separate stall for the Panchayat to distribute Job cards. Some SHG women set up stalls to sell handmade products, clothes, and food stalls. The purpose was to provide line departments with a platform to bring about awareness regarding different schemes, take applications with concerned documents from the beneficiaries and distribute medicines. The Agriculture Department distributed medicines to 125 beneficiaries and took applications for spray machines, tractors, and power tillers. The handloom department accepted verified applications for 50 yarn passbooks. Forty-five applications were accepted for PMJJBY, and 30 were accepted for PMSBY. The Panchayat also distributed 48 new job cards to the women and presented the VOCC with two dustbins as a gift for their newly inaugurated office. Simultaneously, various cultural performances were also held, which attracted a huge crowd. A small fair such as 'One-stop mela' became beneficial and an interactive experience for women, specifically women from distant wards who did not return home disappointed but with hope to benefit from various schemes they are entitled to.



CONCLUSION



In this booklet, multiple best practices of departmental convergence have been highlighted. Convergence with different departments is important for holistic poverty eradication interventions. Under the PRI-CBO Convergence Project, various initiatives have been taken up through departmental convergence. The schemes and programs of various departments and Panchayati Raj Institutions are designed to work together. Still, there is a limited understanding of the nature and extent of coordination in place and needed at the various administrative levels. Through this booklet, we have documented how intersectoral convergence for poverty eradication routed through State Rural Livelihood Mission is operationalized between various departments from the districts to village levels in Assam and the convergence process in implementation and service delivery.

In this comprehensive booklet, we delve into the numerous best practices of departmental convergence, highlighting its significance in fostering holistic poverty eradication interventions. Recognizing the importance of collaboration between different departments, the PRI-CBO Convergence Project has undertaken various initiatives to facilitate departmental convergence. The schemes and programs implemented by both departments and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are designed to complement and work in tandem with one another. However, there remains a need to enhance our understanding of the nature and extent of coordination required at different administrative levels.



Through the compilation of this booklet, we aim to document and shed light on the operationalization of intersectoral convergence for poverty eradication, particularly through liaising with the line departments in Assam. We focus on the intricate process of convergence that takes place between various departments, spanning from the district level down to the village level. By exploring the convergence process in implementation and service delivery, we aim to provide valuable insights into the mechanisms and strategies employed to effectively coordinate efforts and resources across departments.

The booklet highlights successful case studies and exemplifies instances where departments have effectively combined their efforts, leading to impactful outcomes in poverty eradication and social development. These case studies demonstrate the potential of interdepartmental collaboration in addressing the multidimensional aspects of poverty and maximizing the reach and impact of development interventions.

The booklet also emphasizes the role of PRIs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) as key stakeholders in facilitating departmental convergence. Their active participation, local knowledge, and grassroots presence are instrumental in bridging the gap between departments and communities, ensuring that interventions are community-driven and responsive to local needs. The engagement of PRIs and CBOs in the convergence process enhances ownership, accountability, and sustainability of poverty eradication initiatives.

In conclusion, this comprehensive booklet provides a detailed exploration of departmental convergence, shedding light on its importance, operationalization, and impact in poverty eradication efforts. By highlighting successful case studies we aim to foster a deeper understanding and promote effective departmental convergence for holistic and sustainable poverty reduction. Through enhanced coordination and collaboration, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society, where the benefits of development reach all segments of the population, leaving no one behind.



Kudumbashree National Resource Organization
III Floor, Carmel Towers, Cotton Hill, Vazuthacaud, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala - 695014