

Seventh Gender Samvaad emphasises strengthening women's leadership and agency in livelihoods

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The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana– National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Ministry of Rural Development, in collaboration with the Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality (IWWAGE), organized the seventh edition of Gender Samvaad on the theme “Participation to Leadership: Enhancing Women’s Agency in Livelihoods.”

The dialogue witnessed participation from over 6 lakh stakeholders across the country, including SHG women, State Rural Livelihoods Mission staff, policymakers, gender experts, and practitioners, providing a platform for exchange of experiences and to deliberate on strengthening women’s participation, leadership and decision-making in rural livelihoods and economic institutions.



In his keynote address, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Shri Rohit Kansal highlighted the Gender Samvaad’s journey from 1,400 participants in April 2021 to nearly six lakh in September 2025, reflecting the growing voice and leadership. He emphasised the strength of the SHG movement with over 10 crore women being exemplary across the world as a women-led movement. Highlighting state-led innovations, he shared about Maharashtra’s Women Farmers’ Empowerment Bill recognising women

farmers without formal land titles, Odisha's Bhubaneswar Declaration advancing women's land rights and representation in agricultural institutions, and Andhra Pradesh's RySS natural farming model, driven at scale by women's SHGs.



He also highlighted that over 3.46 crore Lakhpati Didis earning more than ₹1 lakh annually is equally strengthening women's economic aspirations. He underscored the need to identify, adapt and scale such innovations across States and strengthen women's role as producers, entrepreneurs, decision-makers and leaders in building a Viksit Bharat.

Welcoming the participants, Joint Secretary-RL, Ministry of Rural Development, Shri Amit Shukla highlighted the evolution of gender integration under DAY-NRLM- from mobilisation to institutionalising gender as a mainstream concern in programme design and implementation. He noted that initiatives such as the Gender Advisory issued in December 2021, Nayi Chetna as the Annual National Gender Campaign, the Gender Integration Workshop, and the Practice Guide for Gender Integration in Livelihoods have progressively strengthened this approach. Emphasising the next frontier of women's collective economic institutions, including CLFs, Producer Groups, Producer Enterprises and FPOs, he called for stronger governance and managerial capacities, financial record-keeping and credit-readiness, particularly in the context of the UN International Year of Women Farmers 2026.

Smt. Swati Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, highlighted the ongoing National Campaign on Entrepreneurship-II (21 August–21 November 2026) as an important step towards strengthening entrepreneurship among SHG women through enterprise development, value chains, digital platforms and market access. She emphasised that collectivisation through SHGs, federations, Producer Groups, FPOs/FPCs and Producer Enterprises, supported by financial inclusion, skills, technology, market linkages and asset ownership, is critical to strengthening women's economic agency and leadership. She called for a whole-of-government and convergence approach, bringing together Ministries and Departments, technical and research institutions, academia, civil society and development partners to mainstream gender across livelihood and entrepreneurship initiatives.

Other speakers enriched the dialogue with diverse insights and approaches. Smt. Garima Sai Sundaram, SPM–Non-Farm Livelihoods, Madhya Pradesh, highlighted how economic empowerment and access to resources strengthen women's bargaining power and sustain their leadership. Smt. Seema Kulkarni, MAKAAAM, emphasised the need for social protection and support systems to enable women's

participation and leadership. Prof. Nitya Rao, Gender and Livelihoods Expert, underscored convergence, institutional support, addressing unpaid care work and gaps in resource ownership, and access to appropriate tools and technologies to strengthen women's economic identity, representation and sustainable leadership.



Women leaders from Assam and Maharashtra shared their journeys from SHG membership to entrepreneurship, leadership and decision-making. Smt. Niharika Bhuyan from Sonitpur, Assam, progressed from an SHG member to a leader in a women-led FPC, highlighting how collective action, training and institutional support enabled women farmers to strengthen their economic participation and decision-making. Smt. Kirti Tai Deshmukh from Akola, Maharashtra, moved from being a homemaker to an entrepreneur, demonstrating how SHG-based training and access to government schemes helped her establish her enterprise, build confidence and inspire other women to pursue entrepreneurship.





The Seventh Gender Samvaad, aligned with the UN International Year of Women Farmers 2026, provided a national platform to recognise and amplify the contributions of women farmers and their livelihood institutions to rural livelihoods, food systems and local economies. Launched in April 2021 as a joint initiative of DAY-NRLM and IWWAGE, Gender Samvaad has evolved into a national platform for knowledge exchange and policy dialogue, reaffirming gender equality as a key driver of women's economic empowerment and inclusive rural development.

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