

PROJECT EXCEL – PROGRESS OF THE MARGINALIZED IN GUJARAT

In a nutshell: The initiative aims to empower women, youth, orphans, minority communities, fishing community, scheduled castes (SCs) and other marginalized groups, to access government schemes and entitlements.

Nodal agency: Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Women and Child Development, Department of Health and Family Welfare, Department of Horticulture and Food Processing, Department of Social Welfare (Government of Gujarat)

Continuing its mission on strengthening livelihoods and entrepreneurship for marginalized communities, UNDP is implementing programme “PROGRESS” in partnership with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. Within the overall framework of the programme, a special initiative – “Excel’ is being implemented in Jamnagar and Dwarka districts in Gujarat.

The project, that is being implemented from 2021-2024, aims to enhance income and livelihoods of 10,000 households in Devbhumi Dwarka and Jamnagar in Gujarat by promoting entrepreneurship, farm value chain interventions, skilling and employment and social security and convergence. It also aims to improve awareness and increase access of the community members to various schemes and entitlements of the government.

The project focuses on a combination of social entitlements, welfare schemes and credit linkages or livelihoods related available funds, such as National Social Assistance Program (NSAP), Building or Other Construction Work (BOCW), Public Distribution System (PDS), Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) schemes, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), E-Shram, E-Nirman, COVID-19 Ex-gratia, girl child education, widow pension, support to orphans and other such schemes.

The community is mobilized and screened for eligibility under various schemes using a tech platform. Once the shortlisting of eligible beneficiaries is done, the community is made aware of various schemes and entitlements through Gram Sabhas and awareness camps in villages. Further, registration camps are organized where beneficiaries are enrolled in schemes. These forms are then submitted to the respective line departments for approval and access of schemes. This is done with the support of the village council body and a cadre of soochna sathis (Information Friends).

The soochna sathis are backbone of the overall approach and ensure sustainability of the project. They help in setting up channels, collecting and preparing relevant documentation to make sure correct documents are submitted by the community members to the relevant government departments.

Along with this, a Yojana Kendra has also been setup which serves as a walk-in center for beneficiaries to access information on any kind of social entitlement. It is a one stop solution to provide end to end information and enrollment facility on any government scheme for which a beneficiary might be eligible.

The project is funded by the CSR Trust for SDGs in India (CTSI).

Impact

The project targets to train at least 40 soochna sathis in local villages in the districts and reach 10,000 households by 2024. As of now, 15 soochna sathis have been trained, 3100+ households have been informed and 2,069 households are linked to government schemes.

A compendium listing 25 schemes, along with eligibility and documents required for application, has been developed in the local language, which has also been approved by district administration.

Challenges

- Documentation is a challenge, specifically for sensitive groups like especially abled persons, elderly and orphans. There are instances where it is extremely difficult to prepare/generate further documents due to lack of basic documents.
- Village Computer Entrepreneurs (VCEs) deployed in gram panchayat have played significant role in delivering registration services. However, there is a scope for building capacities of the VCEs and members of gram panchayats which can ensure inclusion of marginalized. Moreover, building capacities of all the actors of the eco-system would be pivotal in ensuring social protection for all.
- Efforts are required to put in place a policy which is shock-responsive and caters to livelihood needs of marginalized. Government's response to COVID-19 victims and Garib Kalyan Yojana was indeed a welcoming step, but errors of exclusion and inclusion has kept many devoid of necessities.

Scale-up

The project has been scaled up in Maharashtra under the name "Project Uddyam" where UNDP has achieved the following:

- 25,048 households informed on government schemes and entitlements through awareness sessions.
- 19,088 individuals supported to apply for schemes.
- 13,728 individuals received benefits of schemes.



Soochna Sathis working with beneficiaries in Gujarat