



Department
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Policy convergence options for maximizing climate change adaptation benefits to community accruing from MGNREGA

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Infrastructure for Climate Resilient Growth in India (ICRG) Programme

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Summary

This policy brief outlines the process followed under the Infrastructure for Climate Resilience Programme (ICRG) to demonstrate convergence across departmental schemes for beneficiaries of Climate Resilient Works (CRWs) under the programme. This is designed as a 'learning brief' based entirely on the ICRG programme. While convergence is not a new concept, ICRG's approach of intensive community engagement and mobilization and follow up with government departments has facilitated successes of convergence. ICRG has demonstrated three strategies in the project states maximizing the available opportunities to demonstrate convergence. The policy brief highlights the success factors at the ICRG project sites and lists some of the enabling factors. This policy brief is proposed as a guide to help decision makers at various levels of government as well as other practitioners to operationalize convergence following the ICRG strategies.

Key Recommendations

Based on the experience of ICRG, the policy brief proposes four recommendations that have shown results in the intervention areas as follows:

- Institutional mechanisms at the decentralized level
- Facilitation of inter-departmental coordination
- Mode of convergence
- Demonstrable benefits for all stakeholders

Introduction

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) aims at enhancing economic security by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment, in a financial year, to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. With its rights-based approach and a legal framework, MGNREGA provides employment to those who demand work and is a paradigm shift from earlier programmes. While the primary objective of the Act is wage employment, the choice of permissible works suggested in the Act addresses the causes of chronic poverty; such as lack of irrigation, forest cover, ground water. These factors are further exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. Therefore, in order to improve the durability and productivity of assets and enhance the resilience of rural communities that depend on such assets, it is imperative that climate change concerns, particularly incidences of droughts and floods are considered in the planning and design of MGNREGA assets.

Infrastructure for Climate Resilient Growth (ICRG) is a bilateral cooperation project with the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India, and UK's Department for International Development (DFID), supported by the International Climate Fund of the UK Government. In India, it represents the only conscious effort to mainstream climate change into a national social protection scheme under the Act - MGNREGA.

The methods for mainstreaming include the use of climate information in the planning and design of assets, and an integrated natural resource management approach. One important feature of this mainstreaming approach, and indeed one of MGNREGA right from its inception, has been to bring about inter-sectoral convergence in the planning and implementation of MGNREGA schemes as the focal entry point for convergence with other development programmes. Convergence brings in synergies between different government programmes/schemes, and therefore has a multiplier effect on the beneficiaries of such programmes.

While at inception, MGNREGA pursued convergence largely as an advisory to the States, more recently the convergence has been made the central tenet of MGNREGA and has three clearly listed levels of operationalization of the convergence. These include: (i) macro convergence with agriculture; (ii) convergence at micro-level planning level under the Integrated Participatory Planning Exercise (IPPE); and (iii) convergence at the level of resources (Pankaj 2017, p. 63). This approach of linking MGNREGA assets with livelihood opportunities for the beneficiaries has been particularly emphasized in the ICRG programme, and all the 736 Climate Resilient Works (CRWs)¹ demonstrated under ICRG have components of convergence embedded in the detailed project reports of the CRWs.

This paper reviews the varying approaches to convergence followed by the three ICRG States – Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, the progress made in each of the three States, and finally examines the factors that promote or hinder convergence. This has been done by analyzing all the CRWs planned and implemented under ICRG, gathering insights from the ICRG team based on their experience with planning and implementing convergence activities, and discussions with government officials at state, district and gram panchayat levels.

Modes of Convergence and Approaches within ICRG

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) has developed and disseminated guidelines for convergence of MGNREGS with different schemes and specific programmes viz. Indian Council of Agricultural Research, National Afforestation Programme, Green India Mission and other schemes of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), schemes of the Ministry of Water Resources, Prime Minister Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY of Department of Rural Development), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY of Department of Rural Development), watershed development programmes (Department of Land Resources, MoRD), National Horticulture Mission, Total Sanitation Programme, Central/State Finance Commission Grants, National Rural Livelihood Mission, Backward Region Grant Fund. It is apparent that most schemes targeted to rural areas have the possibility of convergence with MGNREGS.

While there can be various modes of convergence within MGNREGA, ICRG has focused on two specific ones:

1. Funds made available from other schemes as the livelihood component for CRW beneficiaries;
2. Provision of technical inputs to CRW beneficiaries from concerned line department officials.

¹ Climate Resilient Work is a term used in the ICRG project to denote a set of complementary MGNREGS works (two or more) that, when implemented in the sequence recommended, enhances the durability and productivity of the core structure.

Climate resilience is a multi-faceted concept that depends not just on the provision of physical infrastructure, but also on the accrual of natural, social and financial capital. Addressing all these components was beyond the scope of ICRG, however, strengthening of livelihoods is a key element of climate resilience and therefore, convergence with schemes and programmes that strengthen livelihoods for the beneficiaries of the CRWs was a major focus in all ICRG States.

Although the Central Government lays down the broad principles and guidelines for convergence, the decentralized nature of MGNREGA implies that the way convergence activities are planned and implemented is usually determined at the Gram Panchayat, and administration at Block and District levels. Each of the three ICRG States, therefore, devised different strategies to pursue convergence activities, in line with the specific contexts under which MGNREGA gets implemented in those States.

Bihar

In Bihar, JEEVIKA – the State version of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) is the dominant rural economic development programme and gets a lot of attention and support from the State Government. ICRG's focus was, therefore, to connect the CRW beneficiaries with JEEVIKA Self Help Group (SHG) trainings and activities related to agricultural value chain. The convergence has been facilitated at various levels with different departments, district/block level authorities depending on the possibilities for specific CRWs. The key to the success of convergence is the choice of the combination of items and implementation in tandem.

Chhattisgarh

Given the low population density and the dominance of tribal population in Chhattisgarh, the focus was more on individual households and individual works rather than community structures. Each of the individual CRW beneficiary households was mapped. The ICRG programme provided information on all schemes from which these beneficiaries could potentially benefit and strengthen and/diversify their livelihoods. The focus was more on access to information as a vehicle for change. In some cases, the ICRG programme also facilitated interactions between the beneficiaries and government officials in charge of implementing the relevant schemes.

Odisha

The approach to convergence was much more structured and formalized in Odisha. A non-financial MoU was signed between the Odisha Livelihood Mission (OLM) and ICRG to facilitate convergence of OLM activities with CRW beneficiaries. Odisha also has a State Level Convergence Committee under the Development Commissioner cum Additional Chief Secretary with officials from various line departments, including Rural Development, Environment and Forest, Agriculture, Fisheries etc., as members. This Convergence Committee meets every quarter to take stock of various convergence activities and opportunities within the State. Within this overarching enabling policy framework, the ICRG programme further facilitated inter-departmental coordination and interactions between beneficiaries and relevant government officials.

Review of Convergence initiatives in ICRG

All the 736 demonstration CRWs under ICRG have elements of convergence and such activities have been included in the DPR of each of these CRWs. However, the actual implementation of such activities varies by States. Table 1 below gives some examples of typical convergence activities in the three States. In all the project states, ICRG focused on enabling beneficiaries make informed choices regarding the most appropriate combinations of crops and allied agro activities. Once the choice was made, the Block level outreach officers of different departments like agriculture, fisheries, horticulture, KVKs were the first point of contact for support. However, in Odisha, on account of the MoU with OLM the reach was easier. OLM on their part aggressively interacted with beneficiaries and roped them under various schemes that they have.

Table 1: Examples of Convergence in ICRG

Name of the CRW	Works under MGNREGA	Livelihood Convergence Activities
Land development	Land development through earthen bunds, cashew plantation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arhar cultivation on the bund ▪ Provision of paddy, maize and lentil seeds to beneficiaries
Deepening of tanks	Deepening of tanks and construction of outlet, loose boulder check dam, dug wells	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organic crop production ▪ Provision of vegetables, paddy, groundnut and lentil seeds/plants to beneficiaries
Pyne de-siltation	Pyne de-siltation, re-excavation of pond, repair of inlet and outlet, fruit/agroforestry plantation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training and capacity building of beneficiaries on sugarcane production, vegetable cultivation ▪ Training on climate resilient agriculture
De-siltation of ponds	Re-excavation of pond, repair of inlet and outlet, fruit/agroforestry plantation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of fingerlings for fish farming ▪ Training on climate resilient agricultural practices
Loose Boulder Check Dams (LBCD) in series	Four loose boulder check dams, farm bunding, two gully plugs, plantation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of improved and drought resistant paddy seeds ▪ Training of beneficiaries on composting ▪ Provision of solar pump set
Community plantation	Block plantation, staggered trenches and cattle proof trench	Provision of saplings, beneficiary farmers trained on drought resistant cropping systems

In **Bihar**, convergence has had limited success with each department implementing their schemes in a stand-alone manner. An analysis of the trends of MGNREGA works done in Bihar in the last three years shows that there has been an increase in the percentage of NRM works. The average expenditure on works in the NRM category show that spend on water conservation works has increased by 6.91 percent; micro irrigation by 10.01 percent; drought proofing by 3.82 percent and flood control by 2.69 percent. In the ICRG districts alone, corresponding spends for water conservation works has increased by 8.65 percent; micro irrigation by 12.05 percent; drought proofing by 3.84

percent and flood control by 2.50 percent. The increased spend in NRM works has contributed to an increase in diversification of livelihoods. The analysis also shows that there has been a decrease in expenditure on rural connectivity in the ICRG districts.

In the absence of a state level strategy or push for convergence across departmental schemes, ICRG prepared convergence plans for beneficiaries at CRW level and linked them to existing government schemes. ICRG also followed up with the district and state level departments to translate the plans to reality. Of the 8337 estimated beneficiaries for all the CRWs in Bihar, around 3000 have been linked to some scheme that is operational. Linkages

Facilitating convergence: Bhawanipur Gram Panchayat, Katra Block; Muzaffarpur, Bihar

The CRW works designed by ICRG here were rehabilitation of pyne in Chanduli village (2017-18) and pond + plantation (2018-19) that would benefit 140 households. The CRW was chosen to address the issue of water logging post the rains that led to underutilization of farmlands and farmers having to look for alternate work. ICRG facilitated linkages with ATARI and respective KVKs. Farmers around the CRW were linked to the Agriculture Department through online registration at the Block Agriculture Office by ICRG and JEEVIKA mobilizers. Thereafter, experts from KVK and the Block Agriculture Office provided one-day training in the village in November 2018. The Block Agriculture Office distributed seeds to farmers who had land in the catchment of the CRW. Of the 120 farmers trained, 55 were given high yielding wheat seeds and 10 farmers moong seeds since their fields were unsuitable for wheat cultivation. Following construction of the CRW, there was no waterlogging this year and optimal utilization of farmlands was possible.

have also been done for some CRWs and schemes that are not yet operational. Most beneficiaries have been linked to seed distribution, plantation, access to kitchen garden kits, agriculture equipment, fisheries, poultry, cattle rearing and vermicomposting. ICRG beneficiaries have leveraged more than Rs. 6.5 crores from various departmental schemes. ICRG has also facilitated capacity building through ATMA, KVK and other partners to improve farmers management practices.

In **Chhattisgarh**, following the preparation of livelihood plans for beneficiaries of CRWs, ICRG facilitated the training of beneficiaries in 42 gram panchayats on improved paddy cultivation practices through the Agriculture Department and KVK. 157 demonstration sites for improved paddy cultivation were set up by the beneficiaries of the CRWs post the training. The Horticulture Department facilitated 33 training sessions on improved methods of vegetable cultivation through raised bed method following which 62 demonstration sites were set up. The Animal Husbandry Department conducted 30 training programmes on vaccination schedules of livestock and small ruminants and shelter and feed management in the monsoons.

The ICRG programme also facilitated linkages for 419 farmers in the vulnerable category to soil health cards; 408 farmers to avail Kisan credit; 278 farmers with crop insurance in the kharif. The Agriculture Department provided 197 farmers with improved high yielding variety of paddy seeds; 20 farmers received soil improvement amendments; 28 farmer groups received paddy weeders; 281 farmers attended training programmes and participated in exposure visits organized by the KVK. The Horticulture Department provided 88 farmers with vegetable kit while the Animal Husbandry Department helped 24 goat rearing farmers access vaccination and 380 families received support for vaccination on their cattle.

In **Odisha**, linking farm-based livelihoods with all CRWs was one of the key strategies adopted under the ICRG programme. Besides climate smart agriculture interventions like drought tolerant paddy varieties, promoting organic farming; introducing water saving technology and promoting multiple farm-based livelihood activities in a CRW patch was the key focus under ICRG. The ICRG programme facilitated mobilization of resources to the tune of Rs. 1.90 crores through convergence with the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDAs) in Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts; Department of Agriculture and Farmers Empowerment (Horticulture, Agriculture and Odisha Agro Industries Corporation) in all five ICRG districts; International Crop Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropic (ICRISAT); BMZ and KKS projects; Watershed Department; Animal Husbandry Department and other schemes of the Panchayati Raj Department. The ICRG programme linked 3718 households of 115 CRWs directly through integration of livelihood interventions.

Sl	District	Convergence Partners / Departments involved	Amount Leveraged (in Rs.)
1	Balangir	Department of Agriculture	8,000
2	Kalahandi	Department of Agriculture	6,96,000
3	Keonjhar	ITDA, OAIC	91,88,000
4	Mayurbhanj	OAIC, Department of Agriculture, ITDA	34,00,000
5	Nuapada	Department of Agriculture, Directorate Horticulture, ICRISAT, Watershed Development Mission, Department of Animal Husbandry	57,12,000
Total			1,90,04,000

Key learnings

This section is based on the experience of the ICRG team in implementing convergence initiatives. The lessons have emerged from a set of interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted by the ICRG teams in the three States between April to August 2019. The key informants were (a) MGNREGA Commissioners in the three States; (b) CEO Zila Parishad, Block Development Officers, Programme Officers, and other district and block level officials; (c) MGNREGS functionaries, such as Gram Rozgar Sahayaks, engineers and Technical Assistants; and (d) PRI functionaries, such as Sarpanch and Ward members. The FGDs were conducted with villagers from different Gram Panchayats.

Although it was generally agreed by all the key informants and the communities that convergence is critical to the durability and productivity of MGNREGA assets as well as to ensuring the climate resilience of rural communities, it was also clear that there are certain institutional and operational factors that enable successful convergence initiatives. This is also evident when one reviews the success rate of convergence initiatives not just within ICRG but across MGNREGS. Here we enlist some of the enabling factors for the success of convergence at the ICRG project sites:

- ***Institutional Mechanisms at the Decentralized Level:*** MoRD has laid down the broad guidelines for convergence of various schemes and programmes of Line Departments with MGNREGS. These guidelines and other operational details have been spelt out in various documents, including the Annual Master Circular (AMC), Samarthy Manual and various other

training materials. However, the very nature of MGNREGA involves decentralized planning at the Gram Panchayat level, and in the absence of institutional mechanisms at the decentralized level, intent alone is not enough. Within ICRG, the higher success rate of convergence initiatives in Odisha is on account of two factors; (i) the fact that there is a non-financial MoU in place between the Odisha Livelihood Mission and ICRG; and (ii) there is a State Level Convergence Committee, which monitors all convergence activities in the State and facilitates inter-Departmental coordination. In contrast, the absence of such platforms for convergence in Bihar and Chhattisgarh has meant that successful convergence has been slow and required more intense efforts. Institutional arrangements such as that in Odisha, provide an impetus to all stakeholders to plan and execute bottom up convergence activities.

- **Facilitation of Inter-Departmental Coordination:** Successful convergence depends on close coordination between PRI functionaries, beneficiaries of MGNREGA structures, MGNREGS functionaries and officials of line departments. Such coordination usually does not happen organically because of the siloed nature of working of government departments. In all the successful examples of convergence initiatives within ICRG, the Team facilitated such inter-departmental coordination. Facilitation usually involved building capacities of line department officials on climate resilience as well as ensuring the completion of official processes and paperwork.
- **Mode of Convergence:** Initiatives that require funds for discrete parts of a project or, the pooling of funds from MGNREGA and other schemes for creation of an asset are more difficult to implement. This is because government departments are usually reluctant to let go of their funds. In contrast, the ICRG experience demonstrates that livelihood convergence that involves provision of inputs (seeds, saplings, fingerlings etc.) and/or technical expertise from the line departments has a wider acceptance across government departments on account of the win-win situation without foregoing control over financial authority.
- **Demonstrable Benefits for all stakeholders:** Replication of convergence initiatives depends on demonstrable benefits to all stakeholders involved and ensuring that the transaction costs do not outweigh the benefits. The focus in ICRG was to create early examples of successful convergence and then spreading awareness about them. ICRG also placed a lot of importance on measuring these benefits based on quantifiable indicators. While there are examples of many successful convergence initiatives across MGNREGA, most of them rely on case studies and anecdotal evidence as opposed to generating hard, quantifiable data.

Way Forward

The ICRG experience for convergence has shown success and the key learnings have been listed above. The following are some aspects that state and national governments may consider for improving convergence and therefore, the benefits and sustainability of assets constructed through MGNREGA funds.

- MGNREGA implementation is decentralized. While the Ministry of Rural Development has issued various directives on convergence, it cannot lead on overseeing implementation. The Ministry could consider making it mandatory for all MGNREGA DPRs to list convergence of

schemes from various departments that compliment any NRM asset being built using its funds.

- At the state level, unless there is an institutional mechanism that provides the platform for convergence, it cannot be achieved to scale. Given MGNREGA's nature of decentralization, an improved focus on convergence at district level and block level have a greater possibility of achieving success. District level governments have convergence committees that meet regularly and review progress of various programmes. These need to be strengthened and people identified within the government to match schemes for complementarity.
- Beneficiaries of MGNREGA are often unaware about the range of schemes that are available to help improve their livelihoods and returns on assets. There is therefore need for continuous awareness and community contact on this. NGOs could be empaneled by the states or national level civil society organizations tasked with increasing awareness.
- Benefits of convergence based on quantifiable indicators will serve to instill confidence in different government departments as well as rural communities to actively pursue the approach. The Rural Development Department could make it mandatory to report periodically on pre-determined quantifiable indicators to keep track of convergence.

While convergence is not a new concept, ICRG has succeeded in demonstrating some success on the ground. The three different strategies adopted by ICRG in the project states demonstrates the need to adapt and go with the best approach. While ICRG has had to follow up with different departments at block, district and state level in Bihar and Chhattisgarh, this is most obviously not a scalable approach. The Odisha model with support at the policy, planning and implementation levels holds out the maximum promise for sustainability.

Recent announcements of rural development programmes by the Government of India have MGNREGA as the core programme around which to build and design new programmes. Therefore, success of these programmes is highly dependent on convergence. Rural Development departments at national and state levels thus require to strategize on means of fostering this convergence and some of the lessons learnt from ICRG could serve as pointers.