

## **Enabling Convergence: Coordinated Efforts to a Common Goal**

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### **Introduction**

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2010, with a view to ensure that the benefits of the numerous Government programmes are effectively accessed by women. The Mission plans to achieve this by strengthening coordination and convergence of schemes/programmes of all various Ministries/Departments. The objective is to create an enabling environment which is conducive to social change and empowerment of women.

NMEW has identified a three pronged strategy to achieve this objective through intervention at the policy level by reviewing studies/evaluations/impact assessment of programmes/schemes for gender equality, strengthening the implementation and delivery mechanism, and empowering women to demand their entitlements. Attempts are being made to bridge the gap between the demand and supply of the services related to women by undertaking realistic estimate of the demand, bringing greater awareness about the women based schemes and programmes of the Government and augmenting the supply for various services/schemes for women, by connecting them with the service providers through a single window. This single window approach requires a high level of convergence and coordination between the various stakeholders involved in the process.

It is important, thus, to come to a common understanding of what the terms convergence implies when used in context of service delivery for women and how it can be achieved.

### **Understanding Convergence**

Broadly speaking, convergence is erosion of boundaries among previously separate service providers (Departments), delivery channels/networks and mechanisms/process. For the purpose this discussion three main forms of convergence can be highlighted. The first is intra-sectoral convergence which implies more connectivity between the various arms of each of the Departments. The second is inter departmental convergence, which calls for greater coordination between different Departments which are working towards the same outcome or whose

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outcomes are dependent on the success of each other. The third is a greater interaction and interface between the Departments and the Community or the client groups which use the services of the Departments. Table 1 summarizes and illustrates these forms of convergence and associated benefits and limitations.

Table 1: Forms of Convergence

|                    | <b>Intra-Sectoral Convergence</b>                                                                                                                      | <b>Inter-Sectoral Convergence</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Service Provider and Client Convergence</b>                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Meaning</b>     | Between various arms of a single Department                                                                                                            | Between various concerned Departments                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Between Departments and Communities                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Example</b>     | Liasion between STEP and RMK functionaries of MWCD to ensure that those who get trained under STEP are provided access to loan from RMK and vice versa | Liasion with NRLM (MoRD) to ensure that there is no overlap between beneficiaries. Liasion with MSME or M/o Agriculture to ensure benefits of processing and marketing facilities reaching trained beneficiaries or those provided with credit. | Participatory Planning Process for beneficiary identification, User Group Formation, etc.                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Benefits</b>    | Department resources are put to better use<br>Beneficiaries get more than one support which is required                                                | Government Resources put to better and efficient use.<br>Reaching larger target group<br>Varied expertise increased chances of success                                                                                                          | Community is empowered to understand their needs and demand their entitlements.                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Limitations</b> | Limited Coverage of beneficiaries<br>Limited Expertise of Departments means limited success in the endeavours<br>Lack of beneficiary interface         | Lack of discussion with beneficiary could mean that desired results are still not achieved<br>Lack of common planning and monitoring mechanism (the same cannot be created administratively but needs to be through the beneficiary groups.     | Unless supply side is geared up building the demand side would only add to friction with Government as also could be demotivating the community as they are being pushed from one Department to another to solicit response. |

As can be seen from above, not any one approach to convergence is self sufficing. What is required is that all three forms are pursued in order to achieve the desired results of the NMEW. *Convergence for NMEW would this mean a process which facilitates different Government Departments or Service providers and Community to work together for efficient service delivery.*

### **Importance of Convergence**

We know the multiplicities of deprivations faced by poor and women that deny them equal opportunities of skill as well as lack of access to assets, capital and market. There is always the possibility that any one of the deprivation could be so high that her whole livelihood system could collapse. To site and example, if we have a programme with women to provide her with credit facilities for setting up an enterprise, provide assets and skill training for the same and also market access. However, if there is no social security net for her particularly for medical reasons and ill health in her family could mean that her cash income or credit or assets is used for meeting the medical expenses. The aim of income generation for the women would never be fulfilled.

Dealing with such issues thus requires a multi-pronged approach targeting each level of deprivation. As skills, expertise, programmes and resources of each Government Department are limited, convergence would result in efficient service delivery to the client as also achieving of the desired outcomes. Ensuring unity of purpose for the various Departments and keeping focus on the final outcome means that both the time and workload of dealing with externalities if reduced. This economy of efforts increases efficiency. Further pro-active convergence calls for rapport building between the various involved groups thereby ensuring speedy and timely action to any problem. This further increases the chances of success of the programmes.

An example of this can be seen in dealing with victim of Domestic violence. Such a women, as we all know would require multiple services provided by multiple agencies: First of all that on awareness that she can voice her resent to it and where to approach for support. This is provided either by NGOs supported by MWCD or Media (but can also be provided through MGNREGA, NRLM, Police, Hospitals, Educational Institutions, Panchayats, DALSA, etc within their programmes). Then she requires support to be able to approach the Protection Officer. Currently there is no such mechanism available, which hinders her from approaching the PO, but there are Departments with schemes for supporting women's groups, there are Departments having local level functionaries appointed to provide such emotional support, Hospitals could have crisis centers to help women identify their problems and seek support. Convergence is required to rope in such mechanisms, so provide

the missing link for ensuring relief to victims of domestic violence. Unless this happens whatever infrastructure is put in place for Protection Officers and Other relief the number of women benefitting will remain less thereby defeating the whole purpose of such Acts and infrastructure. Then again once the women approaches the Protection Officer there are numerous agencies required to provide her support, medical facilities, counseling support, legal aid, short stay home and many times economic rehabilitation. All these programmes are operated by different Departments. Unless, there is a mechanism to ensure coordination and convergence between these, the women will not be able to get the desired stability in her life which is the intention of such Acts and infrastructure. Hence convergence is required from all Departments to come towards the common cause of protecting women from Domestic Violence, a service which is required of all the Departments concerned above either implicitly or explicitly.

### **Prerequisites for Convergence**

Such type of convergence cannot, however, be assumed to have been there or will be there. Convergence requires dedicated efforts and striving to ensure the desired degree of coordination and a directionality to guide the whole process. The NMEW will play such a role in the Centre. However, it is also important that similar mechanisms are there at State and District levels.

Further, to ensure convergence one also requires a high degree of willingness among the Departments involved and to put in place certain mechanisms. Some of these are outlines below:

- ✓ Developing and sharing of a common vision and perspective. This should be accompanied by a joint spelling out of strategies, procedures as well as outputs.
- ✓ Clear defining of roles and responsibilities of the participatory agencies with setting of time lines is also very necessary.
- ✓ Acceptability to a participatory decision making process. This is very important since overpowering by one agency could mean that the other are put off by the process as they see that their goals are being subsumed into the goals of this agency. It is very important that the common goals are placed the highest importance.
- ✓ Developing formal and informal contacts within involved groups. While formal channels of communication and interaction would need to be defined and systems put in place to ensure that, it is also important that the people touch is not lost in the process. Else another bureaucratic channel or red-tapism could be added to the system.

- ✓ Promoting a joint and overarching feedback, monitoring and evaluation system with specific involvement of the user groups is very essential to the success of the process. This group should be developed by a pro-active forum for taking remedial measures for problem solving rather than for placing of responsibilities for failure and a followed blame-game.

## Opportunities and Mechanisms

Convergence provides opportunities for both service providers and users to widen their horizon and scope of action. However, often there has been observed a resistance to the whole process of convergence, or even when that is not there is a wait and watch policy. As discussed earlier Convergence is a process and like any other process it requires an enabling environment to be successful. Table 2 below gives an example how our response of resistance or wait and watch could hamper the whole initiative and what can be done to seize the opportunity for better performance.

Table 2: Moving from Resistance to Enabling Convergence (Problem: Aasha and Anganwadi Workers do not work together)

|                   | <b>Resistance</b>                                                                           | <b>Wait and Watch</b>                                                               | <b>Enable</b>                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Perception</b> | The Department of Health thinks it is the issue with ANW and ICDS thinks it lies with AASHA | Both Departments agree there is a problem                                           | It is an issue which has to be jointly solved                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Action</b>     | The Department of Health blames it on ICDS and vice versa                                   | Each is waiting for the other to raise the issue and handle their functionary first | One Department decides to be proactive and calls for a joint meeting to develop an action plan for future without delving into what has not happened in the past |
| <b>Outcome</b>    | No work happens on the ground                                                               | No Coordination                                                                     | If there is a joint order issued for both the functionaries and a mechanism to review the same, the possibility of action is much higher.                        |

To begin with an enabling mechanism could be put in place which includes:

- ✓ Listing out programmes with common/interlinked objectives
- ✓ Identifying areas which require proactive convergence
- ✓ Mapping of available human and physical infrastructure and identifying cross usage.
- ✓ Developing Joint action Plan and Joint Operation teams to enable cross usage
- ✓ Forming Joint Coordination Committee (with community participation) to monitoring and problem solving.
- ✓ Having an adequate technical backup on women's issues to enable gender scan of desired outcomes.

### Constraints and Strategies

The major constraints to convergence are at three levels (a) at knowledge level (b) at attitudinal level and (3) at practice level. To deal with knowledge level challenges NMEW and NRCW/SRCWs will have to play a major role. Attitudinal and practice level changes will require a lot of capacity building and a willingness at the highest levels to encourage and review the process. Only if the right message goes down will there be much effort to change attitudes and practices.

Table 3: Strategies for Convergence

|                              | At National Level                                                                                                     | At State Level                                                                                                                                                                                                | At District Level                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Knowledge Constraints</b> |                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>Identifying Issues</i>    | NRCW to identify key issues to be dealt with at National level with Outcome Indicators                                | SRCW to conduct workshop with key Deptt to develop common goals to be achieved in three years timeframe with monitorable targets                                                                              | District wise issue prioritization                                                                                                                  |
| <i>Strategizing</i>          | NRCW to identify cross sectoral issues and delineate bottle necks between Departments/Ministries for achieve the same | SRCW to undertake mapping of all Central and State schemes which have the ability to affect the above identified issues.<br><br>Map coverage of women and State specific bottlenecks in reaching out to women | Districts to provide data for mapping<br><br>Consultations with Women's Groups, SHGs, etc to be held to identify bottle necks and possible options. |

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| <i>Action Plan Development</i> | NMEW to develop a National Action Plan with yearly targets                                                                                                                           | State Level Action Plans to be developed with Half yearly review targets                                                                                                                                                   | District level Action Plans to be developed with quarterly review targets                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Budgeting</i>               | Ministries to identify requirements of addition budget/new budget heads if required. To be incorporated in annual Plans.<br>NMEW to monitor budgeting patterns of Partner Ministries | Prepare a budgetary action plan for each of the activities identified above with specific earmarking of which scheme/subhead of accounts the funds would be allocated. Guidelines for the same to be shared with districts | Districts action plans to include budgetary plans with guidelines for appropriating allocations.<br><br>PRIs to be allotted more budget and involved in implementation                                 |
| <b>Attitudinal Constraints</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>Capacity Building</i>       | NMEW to organise one to one meetings with Ministries for preparing Convergence proposals Handholding support for budget review and engendering budgets of select Ministries          | SRCWs to organise State level ToT programme on convergence with ATI/SIRD and announce a regular course on the same with specific instructions from GAD for all officers to undergo the module within the next three years. | Development Commissions/DDOs to review training Coverage of Officials<br><br>Conduct trainings for PRIs/User Groups                                                                                    |
| <i>Formal Networks</i>         | Cabinet Secretariat Meetings                                                                                                                                                         | A High level Coordination Committee to be set up headed by Chief Minister or Chief Secretary                                                                                                                               | Coordination Committee headed by DC/DDO/Zilla Panchayat Sarpanch (wherever women headed) with all HoDs, PRI representatives, CSOs and Members from Community (SHGs/User Groups)<br><br>Joint Operation |

|                              |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                     |
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|                              |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                             | Team to be set up with Community participation for each identified priority sector                                                  |
| <i>Informal Networks</i>     | Encourage one to one interactions/ meetings between 2-3 ministries on specific issues                                                                   | Encourage one to one interactions/ meetings between 2-3 Departments on specific issues                      | Encourage joint field visits of Joint Operation team                                                                                |
| <b>Practice Constraints</b>  |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>Guidelines</i>            | Facilitate development of common procedural codes for ensuring convergence. Strive for incorporation of these guidelines as an annex to all guidelines. | Develop a State Level Convergence guidelines including those on accounting practices/procedures             | Issue guidelines for multiple usage of infrastructure and ensure it is well understood by main Department functionaries             |
| <i>Monitoring and Review</i> | Annual Review Meeting<br>Monitoring format on processes to be developed for States<br>Monitoring format on Target Achievements for Ministries           | Half Yearly Review meetings of CC<br>Monitoring formats on target achievement for Districts and Departments | Quarterly review meetings of CC                                                                                                     |
| <i>Problem Solving</i>       |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                             | Designate nodal officer at district level for identifying problems and initiating discussions                                       |
| <i>Audit</i>                 | Conduct Gender Audit of Schemes/ Programmes                                                                                                             | Facilitate District level Gender (Social) Audits                                                            | Conduct Gender Audit of Convergence initiatives and efficiency of service delivery in line with social audit tools like Jan Sunvai. |