

Imagining Graduation Approach for the Welfare of the Scheduled Caste in Kerala

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Abstract

Graduation approach is a multifaceted program devised by a Non-Government Organization in Bangladesh to provide necessary life skills, seed capital and employment opportunities for sustainable future. This program was replicated across the globe and the studies find that this approach has proved successful in providing sustainable livelihood to the people in extreme poverty. Though Kerala model of development is world acclaimed, the model has been criticized for its apparent exclusion of SCs. The SCs are still the vulnerable and marginalized section of the society. The state led welfare programs are not multifaceted in its approach and not focused on person per se. This study imagines graduation approach instead of the existing welfare policies and evaluate the impact. The results show that adopting graduation approach will reduce the cumbersome administrative expenses in implementing the existing welfare programs and the plethora of welfare programs can be brought under one umbrella program graduation approach. This multi- layer program can effectively address the multiple issues that the scheduled caste people encounter.

Keywords: Graduation Approach, Multifaceted Program, Sustainable Livelihoods, Scheduled Caste

Introduction

The Graduation Approach is a sequenced, multi-sector intervention that supports the poorest and most vulnerable households to achieve sustained income and move out of extreme poverty within a specified period. Graduation programs provide a comprehensive package that includes consumption assistance to meet basic needs, skills training, seed capital or employment opportunities to jump-start an economic activity, financial education and access to savings, and mentoring to build confidence and reinforce skills (UNHCR, 2019). This multifaceted livelihood program was introduced by BRAC a Non-Governmental Organization in Bangladesh in 2002 called the Graduation Approach, which was evaluated through Randomized Control Trial by Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo and has proved successful across the globe in transmitting sustainable livelihoods to the households of extreme poverty. Since independence, India has been endeavoring to uplift the scheduled caste population through various welfare programs, however the status of the SCs has not improved much as the data reveals two thirds of the poor in India belong to the scheduled caste. Caste is still the structural cause of inequality and poverty in present day market led development. The SCs are bounded by various vicious circles such as low income, low education, poor health and poor life skills everywhere and that persistently make these households ultra-poor with fragile and insecure livelihoods. This paper aims to discuss the strategy of adapting, the Graduation Approach for the welfare SCs in Kerala, where the state led scheduled caste

welfare programs encompass some elements of this approach. This will provide the policy makers new insights while designing policies for the scheduled caste.

I. What Is Graduation Approach

The approach was pioneered by Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee in Bangladesh in 2002, and has been pilot tested and evaluated by Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) and the Ford Foundation in eight countries. Over 15 country governments have integrated the Graduation Approach into their social protection and poverty alleviation policies and programs. Graduation combines support to address immediate needs of participants with longer term investments in life skills and technical skills training, asset transfers, enterprise development, savings and planning for the future to transition ultra-poor families into sustainable livelihoods. By addressing the social, economic and health needs of families simultaneously, these programs provide holistic support to participants as they climb the ladder of economic self-reliance into a sustainable future.

Traditional social protection interventions, such as food aid, cash transfers, school feeding, public works programs, and the like, aim to facilitate effective access to essential goods and services, to enable the poor and vulnerable to cope with the precarious circumstances of their lives. Though impactful, these benefits, due to resource constraints often delivered as long as the intervention lasts. So Interventions must be carefully planned to build their skill sets and asset base as well as their confidence and social capital (i.e. community inclusion, gender empowerment, etc.) so they can remain food secure, lead sustainable economic lives and ultimately become more resilient. Working together, interdependent interventions lead to strong outcomes at the household level including increased or improved assets, food security, savings and financial inclusion, health outcomes, social integration and productive skills.

The Graduation approach combines six complementary interventions into a comprehensive livelihoods program for poor women. Implemented together over two years, the program provides a big push to help those living in ultra-poverty transition to more secure livelihoods. The six components of the program are:

1. *Productive asset*: One-time transfer of a productive asset such as a cow, goat, or supplies for petty trade
2. *Technical skills training*: Training to manage the productive asset
3. *Consumption support*: Regular cash or food support for a few months to a year
4. *Savings*: Savings account access or encouragement to save
5. *Home visits*: Frequent home visits by implementing partner staff to provide accountability, coaching, and encouragement
6. *Health*: Health education, health-care access, and/or life skills training

1. PRODUCTIVE ASSET

The asset transfer is the core component of the program and also one of its largest costs. Each household chose, in consultation with the field officer, one of the assets (or asset bundle options) in a list proposed by the implementing organization (often, this list was created after hiring local experts to analyze

markets and the viability of livelihood options). Common choices included raising livestock (sheep, goats, chicken, cattle, etc.) and petty trade. The asset transfer generally happens between zero and 15 months, largely depending on the site, after the identification of the beneficiaries and the baseline survey.

2. Consumption Support

Consumption support—generally a cash stipend—was distributed typically weekly or monthly. The purpose of the consumption stipend is both to immediately improve and stabilize consumption, and to reduce incentives to sell (or eat up) the productive assets being distributed. The distribution of consumption support lasted between four and 13 months depending on the site. The transfer corresponds roughly to the monetary equivalent of between 2,400 and 5,000 calories per day (or roughly a kg of rice at local price)

3. Training

Before receiving their assets, households were provided with training on running a business and managing their chosen livelihood. For example, those selecting livestock received information on how to rear the livestock, including vaccinations, feed and treatment of diseases.

4. High-Frequency Home Visits

Households received regular training and coaching from a field office throughout the two-year program. The visits were intended to provide accountability (i.e., making sure that the households carry out the tasks necessary to maintain and grow their livelihood into a stable income-generating activity) as well as to be encouraging (e.g., helping households believe that they can have control of their lives and put themselves on a path out of extreme poverty). During the home visits field staff provided health education and financial capabilities coaching.

5. Savings

Households were encouraged (and in some sites, required) to save in order to improve their ability to cope with shocks. Households were not able to withdraw their savings from the account until they saved an amount equal to the value of the asset transfer. However, once households achieved the required savings threshold, they had full access to their deposits and could withdraw from their accounts as they saw fit. Furthermore, if they failed to make the deposits, they did not forfeit their asset.

6. Health and other services

Finally, the health component such as health, nutrition, and hygiene training were given. Some sites also facilitated access to health care, either as direct services from community health workers, referring them to government or NGO health clinics, or by enrolling beneficiaries in national health insurance. Several of the sites organized support from village assistance committees comprised of village leaders who helped advising the households, mediated problems, and connected beneficiaries with additional services.

Thus the Graduation approach is a comprehensive, time-bound and sequenced set of interventions that aim to graduate people from ultra-poverty to sustainable livelihoods. Working together, interdependent interventions lead to strong outcomes at the household level including increased or improved assets, food security, savings and financial inclusion, health outcomes, social integration and productive skills.

II. The Current Scenario of Dalit Welfare Programs in Kerala

Scheduled Castes (SCs) constitute about 16.2 per cent (166,635,700) of the Indian population. In spite of sustained and consistent efforts on the part of the government to ameliorate the condition of SCs, this social group continues to be categorized amongst the poorest and most subordinated in Indian society by any measure of human development. The deprivation of this group is associated with the historical processes of economic and social exclusion, and discrimination based on caste. Scheduled Castes mean such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races, or tribes as are deemed under Article 341 of the Constitution to be the Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the Constitution. The criteria for consideration and inclusion of a particular caste into the Schedule were based on its social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of the traditional customs related to the practice of untouchability (Thorat, 2009)

The total scheduled caste population in Kerala as per Census 2011 is 30,39,573. Out of this 18,18,281 are in rural areas and 12,21,292 are in urban areas. In terms of proportion, the scheduled caste population constitutes 9.1% of the total population of the state (Census, 2011)

The Kerala State Scheduled Caste Development Department has been implementing a lot of welfare programs which can broadly be categorized under five heads:

- Educational Programs,
- Economic Development Programs,
- Social Welfare Programs,
- Cultural Programs and
- Legal Services.

Among this Economic Development Program, is the most popular. The Economic Development Programs is further divided into

- Self Employment Schemes,
- Apprenticeships for the technically qualified,
- The distribution of tool kit for the vocationally trained,
- Financial assistance to the advocates for practicing,
- Product exhibition and sale carnival
- Self-reliant villages

The self-employment program is the most important schemes of economic development programs. Under self-employment scheme the individuals within the age group of 18-40 years can apply for self-employment project which must be recognized by the bank. The bank will provide up to Rs.3 lakhs of which one lakh is subsidy that they will get at the end of the third year. The remaining 2 lakh they have to pay back to the bank with the market rate of interest. Moreover the applicant need to pay 70,000 as initial payment to the bank and apart from that they have to mortgage a property for getting the

loan which only a few Dalits can do. It is to be noted that the situation of Kerala's Dalits with respect to land ownership at the turn of the twenty-first century was not much different from what is shown in the Travancore Census of 1931 (Yadu and Vijayasurian, 2016).

As there is no income limit for applying for this scheme only a comparatively well off households can afford to apply for the scheme. The applicant also needs to produce a certificate showing that he/she has not received any loan from SGSY. The self-employment scheme is also provided to a group of individuals and the amount of loan is Rs. 10 lakhs and the subsidy is Rs.3 lakhs.

It is hardly possible for a dalit applicant to pay the mandatory initial payment of Rs 70000/- for getting the self-employment loan. The number of applicant for self-employment is very meager; moreover the beneficiaries hardly persist in their chosen self-employment activity. They are getting the subsidy of one lakh only at the end of the third year. The SC development officer of Palakkad said that most of the beneficiaries will quit from the self-employment activity as they get the subsidy and subsequently opt for the daily wage labour. These beneficiaries never get another opportunity to avail another loan or benefit from the SC development department. The frequency of the effective interventions is very little in this program. Moreover there is no supportive program to help the beneficiary until they reach the break even in self-employment activity. The main drawback of the self-employment program of the SC Development Department is that they consider the issue of dalit's low income status only through the angle of income. While the Dalits not only suffer from low incomes and high unemployment, but also low life expectancy, low levels of literacy and poor health. Barriers to self-employment lead many educated Dalits to withdraw into unemployment.

Even though there are various separate schemes such as health programs, educational programs, and food security for the Dalits, the beneficiaries of these different schemes are different people, thereby solving only one or two of the multifaceted issues of the Dalits.

III. Contextualizing the Graduation Approach in Kerala

Around 60 per cent of the Scheduled Caste (SC) population in Kerala lives in 26,109 dalit colonies spread across the state: all in abysmally poor living conditions (Yadu and Vijayasurian, 2016). So finding the targeted population is easier. The Kerala has been implementing various schemes to ameliorate the living condition of dalit with a multifaceted approach. But the dalit beneficiaries are not being treated in a multifaceted manner. There are different programs to tackle different dimensions of Dalits but a particular program tackle only one of the several dimensions of the dalit beneficiaries. For example the self-employment program handle only the income aspect of the beneficiary. The educational program caters to the needs of education only.

Instead of giving self-employment loans to the applicants, The self-employment program of SC Development Department can give one time asset to the poor Dalits and the program be converted into a multifaceted program of package of interventions encompassing the six components of the graduation approach. The state government can employ the department staff and give them training for imparting life skills, training on managing the livelihood, health services and educational services to the beneficiaries. Instead of providing benefits through several programs, the department can implement one composite program which comprise active intervention through health services, ensuring food and

nutrition and providing life skills on saving and managing the livelihood business etc till they climb up the ladder of poverty and help them to reach a sustainable income level. It is not the number of types of programs that will make an impact on the lives of the poor, but the quality and effectiveness of interventions through a single program.

Since Kerala has independent programs for all dimensions of poverty that a dalit faces, the implementation of graduation approach requires only an integration of these entire programs. The problem in Kerala SC development department is that they are program oriented not the Dalits oriented. Once it becomes Dalits oriented Kerala can possibly be a model in dalit development.

IV. Discussion

David Mosse (2018) observes that inherited caste identity is an important determinant of life opportunity. Low castes are sorted into work graded by low skill, insecurity, danger, toxicity or status in caste related ways. The Dalits can skirt discrimination in the primary labour market by turning to self-employment in business. David Mosse (2018) finds that there is market and non market discrimination towards Dalits in self-employment turned business activity and to remove barriers and provide support to Dalits in the informal and private sector he advocates policy intervention to the realities of caste and also calls for inclusion of caste in global policy debates on sustainable development. Banerjee and Esther Duflo (2015) find that the Randomized Control Trials have identified interventions that are tens or even thousands of times more effective than others. Thereby enable the policy makers to save or improve many lives by choosing the most effective interventions.

Adapting Graduation programs in the Kerala dalit welfare programs might be a successful exercise for the graduation approach is aware of the multidimensional nature of poverty and insecurity that the poor face, and present a composite set of carefully sequenced interventions that will address the multiple dimensions of poverty. This approach will simultaneously focus on enhancing the household's financial capital, skills and social capital. Careful piloting, problem solving, impact assessing and lesson learning increases cost effectiveness, program impacts and the likelihood of achieving scaled up operations.

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