
**EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF UTTAR PRADESH STATE
RURAL LIVELIHOODS MISSION (UPSRLM) IN MIRZAPUR
DISTRICT, UTTAR PRADESH: AN ASSESSMENT**

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ABSTRACT

The National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), implemented in Uttar Pradesh as the Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (UPSRLM), is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, aimed at reducing rural poverty through sustainable livelihood promotion and social empowerment of the rural poor. The present study evaluates the effectiveness of UPSRLM in Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh, with particular emphasis on its impact on women beneficiaries associated with Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design and is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected from 150 randomly selected women members of SHGs formed under the NRLM framework in selected villages of Shikhar block of Mirzapur district. Secondary data were obtained from government reports, official documents, and relevant academic literature. The findings of the study reveal a noticeable and positive change in the availability, continuity, and sustainability of livelihood opportunities among women participants. Membership in SHGs has facilitated improved access to institutional credit, enhanced savings practices, skill development, and participation in income-generating activities. These improvements have contributed significantly to the enhancement of women's socio-economic status, increased self-confidence, and greater involvement in household and community-level decision-making processes. The study also identifies certain challenges such as inadequate market linkages, variations in programme implementation, and the need for regular capacity-building and monitoring support. Overall, the study concludes that UPSRLM has been effective in

promoting sustainable livelihoods and women empowerment in the study area. Institutional strengthening and convergence are essential.

KEYWORDS: NRLM, UPSRLM, Self-Help Groups, Women Empowerment, Rural Development,

INTRODUCTION:

Since Independence, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India, has introduced several programmes aimed at promoting rural development and alleviating poverty. One of the early initiatives, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), launched during the 1980s, sought to generate assets and create self-employment opportunities for the rural poor. However, despite achieving limited success, the programme largely failed to accomplish its intended objectives and adequately reach the target population. The shortcomings of IRDP were primarily attributed to two major factors. First, the resources earmarked for the rural poor often failed to reach the intended beneficiaries and were instead misappropriated due to collusion among government officials, Panchayati Raj functionaries, and local political leaders. Second, the programme was unable to ensure effective utilization and capitalization of resources in a manner that could generate sustained and long-term livelihood benefits.

In response to these limitations, a significant policy reform was undertaken in 1999, leading to the transformation of IRDP into the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). The revised strategy emphasized self-employment through the collective mobilization of the poor into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), which became the central pillar of the programme. Building on this approach and recognizing the need for a more comprehensive and sustainable livelihood framework, the Government of India approved the restructuring of SGSY into the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) during the financial year 2010–2011. The NRLM aims to enhance sustainable income opportunities for below-poverty-line rural households by promoting income-generating activities and strengthening community institutions, thereby enabling them to overcome poverty on a long-term basis.

The National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) is designed to bring all economically disadvantaged households within its ambit by connecting them with viable and sustainable livelihood options and by extending continuous institutional support until they achieve economic stability and a dignified standard of living. In this process, institutions function as

key facilitators by initiating collective organization at the initial stage, delivering necessary livelihood support services, and ensuring the continuity and sustainability of livelihood outcomes over time. (Yunus, 2004)

Self-Help Groups (SHGs), their federations, and livelihood collectives provide the rural poor with a platform for collective action based on self-reliance and mutual cooperation. These institutions make NRLM a demand-driven programme by enabling the poor to collectively articulate their livelihood needs. They establish linkages with government departments, local self-governments, NGOs, banks, and the corporate sector to address livelihood challenges and broader aspects of poverty. Additionally, they facilitate access to savings, credit, and other financial services while strengthening members' skills, assets, infrastructure, and resources. As a result, NRLM becomes a programme shaped, owned, and implemented by the poor themselves, while continuously learning from both successful practices and past limitations in poverty alleviation efforts. (Ministry, 2010)

In Uttar Pradesh, the National Rural Livelihoods Mission is implemented through the Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (UPSRLM), which operationalizes NRLM objectives at the state level. UPSRLM strengthens the institutional structure of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), their federations, and livelihood collectives to promote collective action based on self-help and mutual cooperation among the rural poor. Through these institutions, UPSRLM facilitates a demand-driven approach by enabling beneficiaries to collectively identify and address their livelihood needs. The mission establishes convergence with government departments, Panchayati Raj institutions, non-governmental organizations, banking institutions, and private sector agencies to tackle livelihood constraints and multidimensional poverty. It also promotes financial inclusion by ensuring access to savings, credit, and other financial services, while enhancing members' skills, productive assets, infrastructure, and organizational capacities. Consequently, UPSRLM transforms poverty alleviation from a welfare-oriented intervention into a participatory and community-owned process, while continuously learning from best practices and implementation experiences across the state.

The Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (UPSRLM), as an initiative aimed at promoting social inclusion and building community-based institutions of the poor, is characterized by several key features, which can be summarized as follows:

- Universal Social Inclusion:** UPSRLM aims to reach all poor and vulnerable rural households, with special focus on women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, and other marginalized groups.
- Institution Building of the Poor:** The mission prioritizes the formation and strengthening of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), village organizations, and cluster-level federations as community-owned institutions.
- Women-Centric Approach:** UPSRLM places women at the center of its strategy, recognizing them as key agents of socio-economic change and household-level decision-making.
- Demand-Driven Framework:** The programme encourages collective identification of needs by beneficiaries, making interventions responsive to local priorities rather than externally imposed solutions.
- Financial Inclusion:** UPSRLM promotes regular savings, access to institutional credit, bank linkages, and responsible financial behavior among SHG members.
- Livelihood Promotion:** The mission supports farm and non-farm livelihood activities through skill development, capacity building, and access to productive assets.
- Capacity Building and Skill Development:** Continuous training and handholding support are provided to enhance managerial, technical, and entrepreneurial capacities of members.
- Convergence and Partnerships:** UPSRLM facilitates convergence with line departments, Panchayati Raj Institutions, NGOs, banks, and the private sector to maximize development outcomes.
- Community Resource Persons (CRPs):** The use of trained community members as resource persons strengthens peer learning and ensures sustainability.
- Participatory Governance:** The programme promotes transparency, accountability, and democratic functioning within SHGs and their federations.
- Sustainability and Graduation from Poverty:** UPSRLM focuses on long-term livelihood security and gradual graduation of households out of poverty.
- Learning and Adaptive Mission:** The mission adopts a learning-based approach by incorporating best practices and lessons from field-level experiences.

| Component | Financial Assistance / Norms | Purpose / Usage |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| SHG Formation Support | Rs. 10,000 per SHG to NGOs/CBOs/Animators for group | To facilitate the establishment and nurturing |

| Component | Financial Assistance / Norms | Purpose / Usage |
|--|--|---|
| | Formation and development | of new SHGs. |
| Revolving Fund (RF) | Rs. 10,000 – Rs. 15,000 per SHG (corpus), provided once to eligible SHGs that follow 'Panchasutra' norms | Strengthens institutional and financial management capacity and builds credit history.) |
| Capital Subsidy (CS) | Discontinued under DAY-NRLM / NRLM (no direct capital subsidy to SHGs) | Focus shifted to Revolving Fund and Community Investment Fund. |
| Community Investment Fund (CIF) | Financial support routed through federations for socio-economic activities; maintenance in perpetuity | Provides SHGs and federations with working capital for collective livelihoods activities. |
| Interest Subvention | Subsidy on interest rates above 7% for eligible SHG loans up to specified limits | Reduces borrowing costs for SHGs and promotes sustainable credit linkage |
| Training & Capacity Building Support | Allocations for training beneficiaries, staff, NGOs, and PRI actors (e.g., normative amounts like Rs. 7,500 per beneficiary) | Enhances skills, financial literacy, and institutional capacity. |
| Federation Grants | One-time support for strengthening SHG federations (village, block, district levels) | To strengthen governance, planning, and operational sustainability. |
| Administrative & Infrastructure Support | Portions of allocations reserved for mission management, marketing, and infrastructure (vary by state/central share) | Supports monitoring, technology systems, and market linkages. |

Source: NRLM/UPSRLM Mission Guidelines and Financial Norms (MoRD, Government of India)

Methods and Methodology:

Our objective is to evaluate the functioning of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and to analyze the effectiveness of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) in the selected area. For this purpose, **Mirzapur district**, one of the relatively backward districts of Uttar Pradesh, was chosen as the study area. The district presents a mix of hilly terrains and fertile plains, with significant socio-economic challenges such as low literacy rates, limited access to quality education, inadequate infrastructure, and high dependence on agriculture and traditional livelihoods. These conditions make it an appropriate context to assess how SHGs under NRLM have contributed to improving livelihoods, promoting financial inclusion, and enhancing women's participation in socio-economic decision-making. By focusing on this district, the study aims to understand the extent to which NRLM interventions have addressed

the issues of poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion, and to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the successful implementation of the programme in a rural and semi-urban context.

Geographical Profile:

Mirzapur is situated in the southeastern part of Uttar Pradesh, India, between **latitude 24°52' N to 25°45' N** and **longitude 82°9' E to 83°0' E**, and is part of the **Varanasi division**. The district is bordered by **Sonbhadra district** to the east, **Chandauli and Varanasi districts** to the north, and **Allahabad (Prayagraj) district** to the west. It lies largely in the **Vindhyan plateau region**, with hilly terrain in the south and fertile plains in the north. The **Ganga River and its tributaries** support irrigation and agriculture. Northern plains have **alluvial soils** suitable for paddy, wheat, and pulses, while southern hilly areas have **rocky and less fertile soils**.

The district experiences a **subtropical climate**, characterized by hot summers, cool winters, and a monsoon season from June to September, with an average annual rainfall of **1,000–1,200 mm**.

Administrative Profile:

Mirzapur district covers an area of approximately **4,521 km²**. Administratively, it is divided into **4 Tehsils**, with **12 blocks**:

1. Sadar Mirzapur Tehsil

- Blocks: Chhanbey, Kon, Majhawa, City and Pahari.

2. Chunar Tehsil

- Blocks: Narainpur, Jamalpur, Rajgad, and Shikhar

3. Marihan Tehsil

- Blocks: Patehara.

4. Lalganj Tehsil

- Blocks: Hallia, Lalganj

The district also has **urban local bodies**, including **Mirzapur Municipal Corporation** and multiple **Nagar Panchayats**, which manage civic administration. Rural areas are governed through **Panchayati Raj institutions**, ensuring decentralized administration.

Economic and Cultural Highlights:

Mirzapur is well-known for **carpet weaving, brassware, and other handicrafts**, which significantly contribute to the local economy. The district is well-connected by **road and rail**

networks to nearby cities such as Varanasi and Allahabad (Prayagraj), supporting trade, commerce, and cultural exchanges.

After identifying **Shikhar block** in Mirzapur district as a region with relatively low numbers of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), we purposively selected six villages—**Adalpura, Bagaha, Basaratpur, Bidapur, Bithalpur, and Lalpur**—where SHGs have been formed under the NRLM initiative. These SHGs were chosen as the focus for the present empirical study. Typically, an SHG comprises **15–18 women members**, although in practice the number may range from less than 10 to as many as 25 members per group. In this study, **all members of the SHGs from the six selected villages were included**, resulting in a **total sample of 150 women**. The SHGs covered were named **GANGA PRERNA SHG, GUNGUN PRERANA SHG, JAY MAA SANTOSHI SHG, MOHINI PRERNA SHG, LAXMI PRERANA MAHILA SHG, MAA PARVATI PRERANA MAHILA SHG, DEVI MAHILA SHG, EKTA AJIVIKA SHG, GAURI AJIVIKA SHG and AGAMAN SHG**, respectively. Some members of these SHGs were also participants in higher-tier structures, namely the **Village Organization (VO)** and **Cluster Level Federation (CLF)**.

Data were collected from **both primary and secondary sources**. Primary data were obtained through a structured **interview schedule**, which included questions regarding respondents' personal and family profiles, socio-economic status, types of livelihood and income-generating activities undertaken as SHG members, earnings and savings, utilization of income for consumption and reinvestment, and perceptions of NRLM in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Secondary data were drawn from publications of the **Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India**, including policy frameworks, annual reports, and prior studies on NRLM implementation.

The collected data were analyzed using **histograms, bar charts, pie charts, scatter plots**, and other statistical tools. Findings include a **SWOT analysis** of NRLM at the grassroots level. While the results are **not intended for generalization**, they provide valuable insights into the alignment of theoretical objectives with the actual functioning and impact of NRLM as a rural development programme in the selected region.

Empirical Findings:

To examine the personal and family characteristics of Self-Help Group (SHG) members, information was collected on key socio-demographic variables, including **age, caste, religion, type of housing, availability of drinking water, source of lighting, and**

educational attainment. These indicators provide essential insights into the living conditions and social background of the respondents and form the basis for analyzing their participation in SHGs and the effectiveness of NRLM interventions.

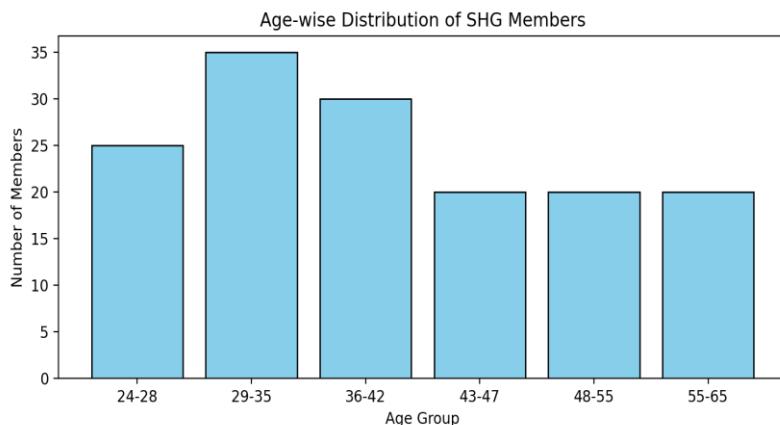
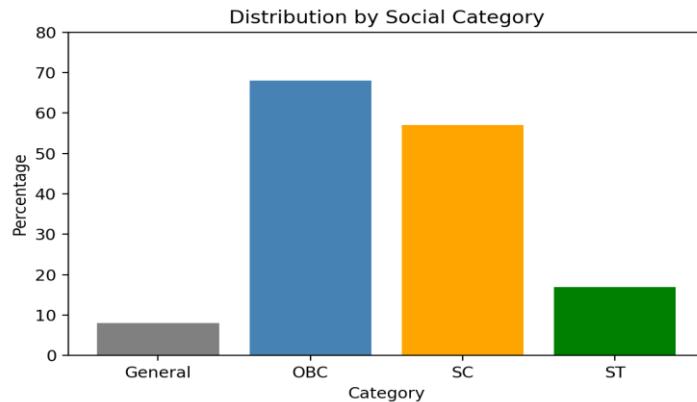


Chart - 1

The present study examined the age composition of 150 members enrolled in the self-help group. Participants were grouped into six age categories to understand the generational profile of the group. The distribution (see Figure: Chart -1) shows that the highest participation comes from the 29-35 age group, which includes 35 members (23.3% of the total). This age bracket forms the core of the self-help group, likely because individuals in their late twenties and early thirties are actively seeking peer support to address financial stress, family responsibilities, and emotional challenges during this life stage.

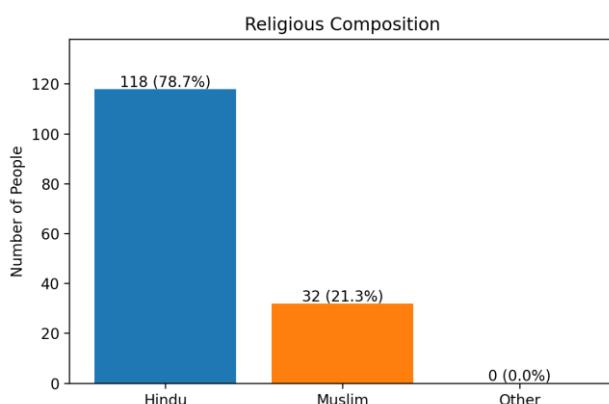
The lowest participation is observed in the three oldest categories: 43-47 years (20 members, 13.3%), 48-55 years (20 members, 13.3%), and 55-65 years (20 members, 13.3%). The consistently lower numbers in these mature age groups suggest that older women may face greater barriers to attending regular meetings (mobility issues, care giving duties, or lower perceived need for group support). The 24-28 age group (25 members, 16.7%) and 36-42 age group (30 members, 20.0%) fall in between, indicating moderate representation from younger and mid-adult members.

Overall, the self-help group is predominantly composed of women in early-to-mid adulthood, with the 29-35 age group showing the strongest presence and the 43-65 age range showing the lowest engagement. This age skew has important implications for the topics discussed in meetings, the leadership roles assigned, and the types of support most needed by the majority of members. Future sessions may consider targeted outreach strategies to increase participation from the 43-65 age segment.

**Chart -2**

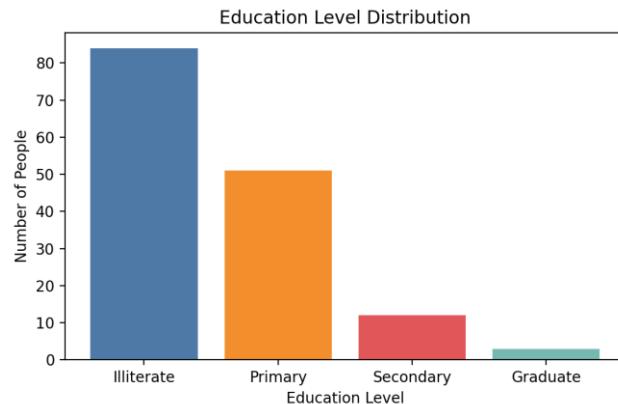
In a Self-Help Group of 150 members, the caste breakdown shows OBC as the majority with 68 members (45%), followed closely by SC at 57 members (38%), then ST with 17 members (11%), and General category with just 8 members (5%). This means more than 94% of the group belongs to marginalized communities.

To strengthen the group, leadership roles should be rotated among members from all categories to ensure everyone feels included. The SHG can make the most of government schemes and skill-building programs aimed at SC, ST, and OBC members, while encouraging those from the General category to share their connections or knowledge. Regular sessions on unity and caste awareness will help build stronger bonds, and keeping track of progress through simple data visuals during meetings can keep members motivated. If the group plans to expand, reaching out to include more ST members could create even better balance.

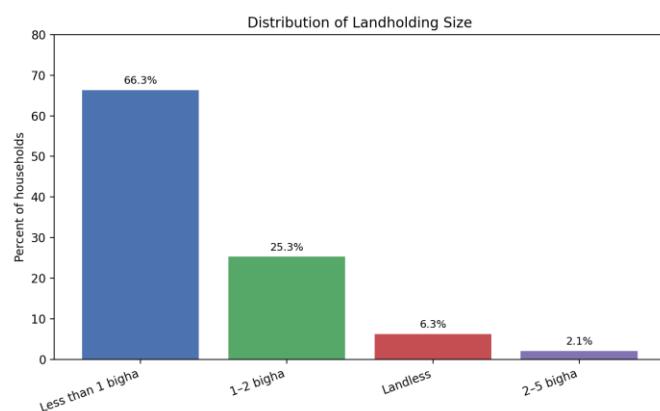
**Chart -3**

This bar chart clearly shows that the majority of self-help groups fall under the Hindu category, with a smaller portion in Muslim, and none in Other.

The histogram chart reveals the religious orientations of SHG members. It is evident that the majority (78.7%) follows the Hindu religion, while a minority (21.3%) adheres to Islam. There are no members from other religious beliefs (0.0%). The predominance of Hindu beliefs, customs, and practices is reflected in the composition and can also be observed in their way of life.

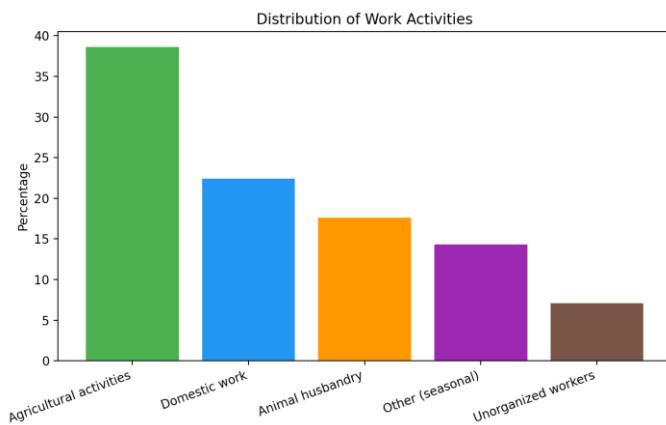
**Chart - 4**

The histogram chart (Chart 4) reveals the educational status of SHG members. It shows that the majority (56.00%) of them are illiterate; 34.00% have primary education; 8.00% have secondary education; and only 2.00% are graduates. The correlation between their age group and level of education suggests that the majority of women from the older generation are illiterate, whereas women from relatively younger age groups are more educated. Their level of education also seems to be influenced by factors such as the availability of schools in neighboring regions, accessibility to these institutions, age at marriage, parental concerns, etc.

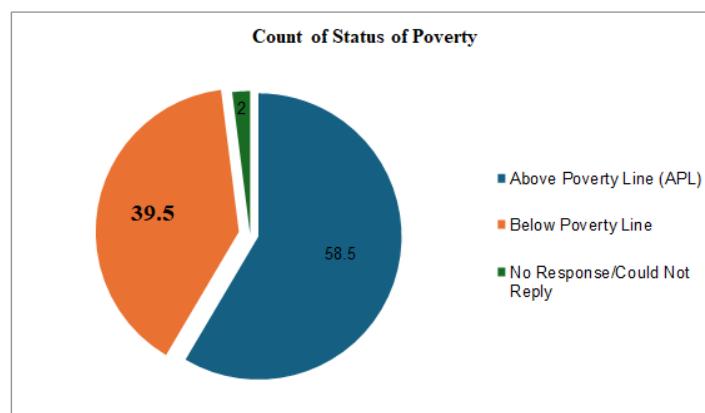
**Chart – 5**

The socio-economic profile of the respondents is obtained on the basis of their family land holdings, availability of sources of irrigation, counting of insurance coverage, land on lease, and their primary occupations.

The histogram chart depicts the landholding status of SHG families. It reveals that the majority (66.3%) possesses less than 1 bigha of land; 25.3% own between 1–2 bigha; 6.3% are landless; whereas only 2.1% belong to the medium/large category with 2–5 bighas of land ownership. The finding clearly evinces that the respondents mostly belong to marginal farmers' families, whose agricultural income is insufficient for their sustenance.

**Chart - 6**

This depiction highlights that agriculture constitutes the primary occupation for the largest share of the Self-Help Group (SHG) members' family members, with domestic work ranking second. The wide range of occupational engagements underscores the SHG families' continuous pursuit of diverse and additional income sources to sustain their households.

**Chart - 7**

We assessed the effectiveness of NRLM based on SHG members' own perceptions of poverty, their length of membership, the time taken to receive their first loan, its purpose and amount, repayment experience, and their views on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

SHG members joined as representatives of BPL families. We wanted to know if being part of an SHG has improved their socio-economic status, confidence, and outlook on life.

Pie Chart 7 shows that 58.50% now consider themselves Above Poverty Line (APL), 39.50% still see themselves as Below Poverty Line (BPL), and 2.00% did not respond.

A clear link emerged between membership duration and self-perception: 90% of those who feel APL have been members for one year or more, while 92% of those who still feel BPL have been members for six months or less.

These results show that longer SHG membership builds greater confidence and upward mobility, while even short-term members feel hopeful about positive change.

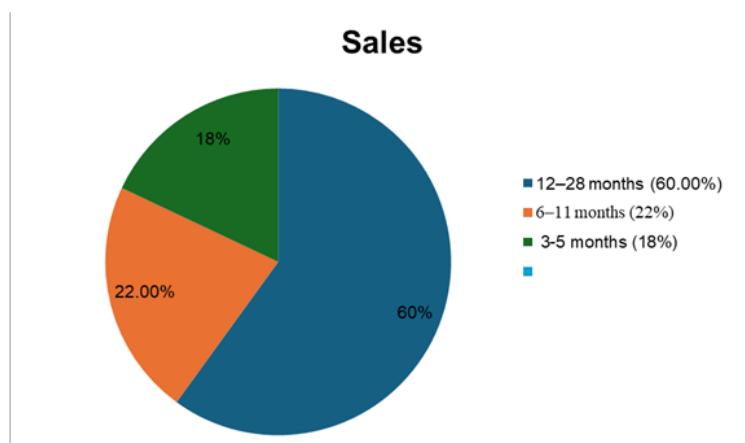


Chart – 8

Histogram Chart 8 shows when SHG members received their first loan. 60% got it between 15 and 20 months after joining. 22% received it between 8 and 14 months. Only 18% got it as early as 3 to 7 months.

This clearly tells us: the longer a woman stays in the SHG, the better her chances of getting a loan.

Repayment behaviour varies noticeably with loan size. Smaller loans (around ₹10,000) are almost always repaid on time, showing strong commitment from members. Modest loans (₹25,000–₹50,000) generally take a bit longer but are still mostly repaid within reasonable periods.

However, for larger loans (around ₹1,00,000), timely repayment becomes inconsistent—some members delay significantly, and in certain cases, they struggle or fail to repay at all.

This pattern highlights the need for stronger oversight: Village Organisations (VOs) should play a more active role in monitoring larger loans, providing timely support, and ensuring better recovery to sustain the SHG system's health.

In summation, the evaluation indicates a discernible upward mobility in the socio-economic status of the selected households, wherein the **Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (UPSRLM)** has emerged as a crucial facilitating institution. As the state-level implementation arm of the **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)**, UPSRLM operationalizes national objectives within the local socio-economic context of Mirzapur district. The observed improvements, however, are not solely attributable to programme intervention; rather, they are the result of multiple converging factors. These include the regular income contributions of family members, collective household strategies to invest additional earnings in productive and reproductive needs instead of short-term consumption, and relative stability in household health conditions.

UPSRLM's strong policy emphasis on **institution building, financial inclusion, and livelihood diversification** is reflected in the emergence of alternative income-generating activities such as animal husbandry, poultry farming, operation of sugarcane crusher units, papad making, and other micro-enterprises. These activities represent tangible success stories of a considerable number of SHG members and demonstrate the mission's focus on strengthening household-level economic resilience through both farm and non-farm livelihoods.

A significant and distinctive policy initiative under UPSRLM is the **Bank Sakhis (BC Sakhi) Yojana**, which aims to deepen financial inclusion by positioning trained women SHG members as **Banking Correspondents (BCs)** in rural areas. Under this core policy, Bank Sakhis act as last-mile financial service providers, facilitating doorstep banking services such as savings deposits, withdrawals, credit linkage support, and digital transactions. This initiative not only enhances access to formal financial institutions for rural households but also creates a sustainable livelihood opportunity for women, reinforcing UPSRLM's women-centric and empowerment-oriented development strategy.

An assessment of SHG functioning under UPSRLM, based on indicators such as regular savings, frequency of group meetings, credit access, repayment discipline, and maintenance of financial records, reveals mixed outcomes. While an increase in weekly savings and financial transactions was evident, only about **25%** of SHG households managed to accumulate savings exceeding **₹25,000** in their bank accounts during the previous six months. SHG meetings were generally held at fortnightly or monthly intervals rather than on a weekly basis. Notably, members availing smaller loans displayed greater sincerity and promptness in repayment compared to those with larger borrowings, indicating cautious financial behaviour encouraged under UPSRLM's credit discipline norms.

In terms of account maintenance, systematic record-keeping remained weak in nearly **76%** of cases. Nevertheless, a positive shift in awareness regarding bookkeeping and transparency was observed, aligning with UPSRLM's policy emphasis on **capacity building, continuous handholding, and financial literacy**. Overall, while the vision of poverty-free villages articulated under UPSRLM—within the broader NRLM framework—is ambitious, the findings highlight meaningful progress in livelihood diversification, financial inclusion, and women's empowerment. The sustainability of these gains, however, will depend on continued institutional strengthening, effective monitoring, and sustained policy commitment at the grassroots level.

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