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A Study on the Effectiveness of Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana in Promoting the Socio-Economic Development of PVTG Communities in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY) was launched for the first time in the year 2018 to create sustainable livelihood opportunities for tribal communities across India by establishing Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs), promoting value addition and marketing Minor Forest Produce (MFP). This study focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of the PMVDY in its help in promoting the socio-economic development of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. This study adopts a mixed method design with importance to secondary data analysis, taking information from government reports, scheme documents, academic literature, and interviews from key informants.

The findings show that the PMVDY has achieved a substantial implementation in the Nilgiris, with 8 VDVKs, 120 Self- help groups and 2400 beneficiaries. It has resulted in an 85% increase in the average monthly household income, a 167% increase in MFP-based income and a 300%

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Increase in household savings. It has also had several positive social outcomes including enhancing women's participation in decision making, improved children's school enrollments (from 60% to 85%), and higher access to formal banking services (from 30% to 70%).

However, this study also identifies persistent constraints and challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, weak market linkages & sustainability issues beyond the starting stages of the grant. The paper highlights the need to support PVTGs and provides policies for the constraints faced by the PMVDY and VDVKs. It aims to help the PVTGs have long-term sustainable growth and maximize the schemes impact on their livelihoods.

Keywords: ***Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, Minor Forest Produce, Tribal Livelihood, Socio-Economic Development***

1. INTRODUCTION

Adivasi, in a general term, are the indigenous tribes of India, the list of the ethnic minorities, and the communities dependent on forests.Tribal Communities are significantly playing an important role in preserving Indian culture, diversity, a peaceful environment, and strong traditional values. Traditionally, they attained their sustenance through agricultural and allied activities and they live in harmony with nature. So, with the income from farming dwindling, the majority have diversified their activities to include wage labour, horticulture, migratory labour, and small businesses. Although this change helps earn money for households and remove some uncertainties, but it also has a negative effect on children's access to formal education.Six PVTGs of Tamil Nadu are Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Paniyas, and Kattunayakas are mostly concentrated in the Nilgiris with population counts remaining quite stagnant or decreasing.

To empower and improve the livelihood of these communities, the Government of India has launched the **Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY)** in 2018. This scheme aims to create sustainable livelihood opportunities for the tribal groups by establishing **Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs).** Van Dhan is an initiative targeting livelihood generation for tribals by harnessing the wealth of forest i.e. Van Dhan. The programme aims to tap into traditional knowledge & skill sets of tribals by adding technology to upgrade it at each stage and to convert the tribal wisdom into a viable economic activity.

The present study undertakes a secondary data analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of PMVDY in promoting the socio-economic development of PVTG communities in the Nilgiris. By analyzing existing reports, government documents and available data, this study tries to understand the extent to which the scheme has achieved its objectives and identify areas requiring policy intervention.

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2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 PVTG Communities in the Nilgiris

The Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu is domicile to six Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), each of them are having their own unique culture, language, traditional occupation, and lifestyle. These tribes are dependent on the forest and natural resources for their livelihoods. Todas, are one of the smallest tribal groups among other PVTGs. They reside in small hamlets called Munds, barrel shaped house. Their main occupation is buffalo rearing and they sell milk, butter, ghee and other dairy products to community people. It's their culture and religious practice. Todas are known for their beautiful embroidery which has acknowledged as Geographical Indication status.

The Kota tribe known as the artisan tribes, has a rich cultural heritage deeply inherited in artisan craftsmanship like pottery making and singing ethnic music and following rituals. The newer generations are moving away from ancestral professions to employment in agriculture, government services, and small-scale businesses.In exchange for food and clothing; they offered services such as blacksmithing, music, leatherworking, and ceramics. Traditionally, women gave birth in secluded huts. A youngster is given a name ten days after birth. This ritual is often seen as more essential than a wedding ceremony. During the ceremony, a local elder names the infant while feeding him or her water and a few crumbs of rice Kurumbas are experts in medicinal plants, herbs from forest and they understand behaviours of animals in forest ecosystem. They collect honey; fruits and minor forest produce and sell it to outsiders as well.

The Irula tribe**,** a Scheduled Tribe in northern Tamil Nadu and the Nilgiri Hills, is a blend of tribal and southern Indian beliefs. They hold animist views as well as conventional Hindu teachings. To avoid any pollution, their treasured things are preserved in hidden caves. They are thought to be an ancient society located around historic megalithic structures. People of the Irula tribe live in villages with wooden huts, mango and jackfruit trees, and ancestral temples. They are honey collectors, hunters, and millet harvesters. Tea and coffee plantations have taken over traditional land. Irula musicians, inspired by other tribes, make funeral flutes and drums. Priests trance the corpse and execute rituals before burial, with their dwelling being a stone put in a temple. Paniyas are employed in agricultural farming activities and as daily wage worker. They are economically deprived among other PVTGs.

Kattunayakan lived in forest and dependent on forest produce. They collect honey, beeswax, medicinal herbs, bamboo products and other minor forest produce. They concentrate more on sustainable use of forest products.

The Kurumbas, a community of 15,000 people in the Nilgiri Hills, are divided into seven major groups, that each has their own dialect, religious beliefs, and cultural characteristics. A third of them dwell in the Nilgiri District and elsewhere in southern India. They are the poorest of the Nilgiri Hills tribes. Kurumbas, hunters

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and gatherers who had been displaced from their ancestral communities, lived in rock shelters, produced fruits, and worked on tea and coffee plantations.

Population of Scheduled Tribes (PTGs) in the Nilgiris district

S. No.	Name of the PTGs		Male	Female	Total	Grand Total (in percent)
1.	Toda	No.	798	810	1608	6.05
		%	49.63	50.37	100.00	
2.	Kota	No.	991	1033	2024	7.62
		%	48.96	51.04	100.00	
3.	Kattunayakan	No.	1261	1219	2480	9.33
		%	50.85	49.15	100.00	
4.	Irular	No.	2974	3046	6020	22.66
		%	49.40	50.60	100.00	
5.	Kurumbas	No.	3179	3373	6552	24.66
		%	48.52	51.48	100.00	
6.	Paniyan	No.	3881	4001	7882	29.67
		%	49.24	50.76	100.00	
	Total	No.	13084	13482	26566	100.00
		%	49.25	50.75	100.00	

Sources: Compiled and calculated from various reports of Tribal Research Centre, Ooty.

2.2 Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY)

The Van Dhan initiative shall promote and leverage the collective strength of tribals to achieve a viable scale to take on the predatory market forces in the areas where these are still prevalent. Proposition is to set-up tribal community owned Minor Forest Produce (MFP)-centric multi-purpose Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in predominantly tribal districts. About 6000 Van Dhan Kendras are proposed to be set up in span of 2 years i.e. 3000 Kendras to be set-up in each year, which will be further continued based on evaluation of their performance and also expanded every year. It is a cluster of 15 Self Help Groups (SHGs), each comprising of 20 Minor Forest Produce group, MFP includes all non-timber forest products of plant origin such as fruits, flowers, seeds, roots, gums, resins, and medicinal plants. The scheme focuses on value addition, branding, packaging, and marketing of forest produce, through thisPVTGs to earn better returns from their traditional knowledge and resources.

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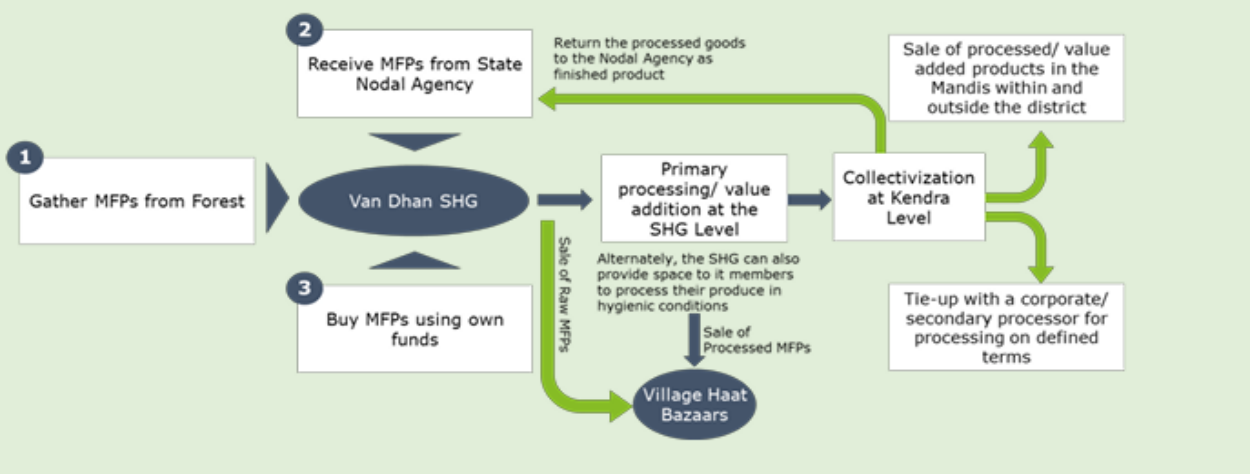


Figure: 1 Operating Model of a Van Dhan Kendra & Van Dhan SHGs

S. No.	Description of Expenditure	Total (Rs.)
1	**TRAINING & FACILITATION EXPENSES**	
a.	Hiring of Master Trainers (2 No.s)	2667
b.	Lodging and Boarding Charges for the Master Trainers	1333
c.	Arrangement for training (such as training board, banners, posters, etc.)	667
2	**TRAINEE EXPENSES**	
a.	Wage compensation to the trainees/ members (20 trainees X 4 days x Rs. 150/ day)	12,000
b.	Food & Refreshment Expenses (Breakfast, Lunch, Tea / Snacks) (Rs. 100/ trainee/ day X 20 trainees X 4 days)	8,000
3	**ADVOCACY EXPENSES**	
a.	Advocacy materials, photography etc.	3000
4	**COST OF RAW MATERIAL** *@ about 14 kg per person @Rs.20/- per kg*	5667
I	**Total cost of training (excluding supply of toolkit)**	33,333
II	**TOOL KIT***	66,667
III	**Total cost for one batch (excluding working capital) (I+II)**	**1,00,000**
IV	**WORKING CAPITAL****	**50,000**
	Total Cost for setting up 1 Van Dhan Vikas SHG (III+IV)	**1,50,000**
	Cost for 15 Van Dhan SHGs i.e. One Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (Rs. 1.5 lakhs x 15 SHGs)	**Rs. 22.50 Lakhs including Rs. 7.5 Lakhs Working Capital.**

Sources: Compiled and calculated from various reports of Tribal Research Centre, Ooty.

2.3 Vision of PMVDY:

The Scheme PMVDY has the vision to facilitate and promote livelihood opportunities and entrepreneurship to the tribal population by putting in place an efficient and transparent mechanism for production, procurement, processing and marketing of tribal produce / products through establishing backward and forward linkages.

2.3.1 Steps to Approach to VDVK

The tribal beneficiaries can also approach the local Tribal Welfare Department, Forest Department, VDVK or implementing agency to understand the eligibility requirements and available support under PMVDY. Community-level awareness meetings and SHG meetings can help beneficiaries understand the scheme, identify suitable Minor Forest Produce and participate collectively. This approach is particularly useful for tribal communities as it reduces individual risk and promotes collective production, savings and better decision-making and allows for entrepreneurship**.**

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After receiving training and support, beneficiaries can work together to improve the quality, processing, packaging and branding of their forest products. They then explore several marketing channels like fairs, events, etc. to sell their products at better prices. The constant monitoring of sales, income and savings can help the SHGs assess the benefits received from PMVDY. In this way, the scheme can contribute not only to income enhancement but also to employment generation, women's empowerment, financial inclusion and long-term livelihood security among tribal communities.

2.4 Monitoring of PMVDY:

Reporting of operations of Van Dhan Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs) which are funded by TRIFED shall be closely monitored by District Collectors (DIUs) OR State Implementation Agencies (SIAs) under information to State Nodal Departments. TRIFED shall be establishing a centralized Web and Mobile application for the same. In the initial stage, the spreadsheet-based dashboard (already shared with all nodal officers of SIA or DIUs) will be used for monitoring progress with Post sanction activities.

2.5 Preparation of business plans

The VDVKs to develop business plan for the allocation of funds for the processing, value addition, branding and packaging of products matching to the world export and retail standards. Besides MFPs the Business Plan may include Agri based item, medicinal plants cultivation, Floriculture etc also as the technical support and inputs for the same are also available from convergence partners. The VDVKs shall also make proper transportation and Warehousing arrangement for storage of these products.

2.6 Implementation of Business plan by undertaking value-addition activities, packaging, branding:

After imparting training or otherwise, the members of the Van Dhan Vikas SHG shall procure forest items and undertake value-addition activities for production of various value-added products as decided earlier. Thereafter, the same shall be packed in attractive Retail Packaging with proper branding, etc.

2.7 Marketing

The VDVKs shall market the same locally or through other existing offline and online Stores, including E-Marketplace being launched by TRIFED. The VDVKs shall also make advance Tie-ups for sale of value-added products.

2.8 Stage I: Establishment of 6000 Van Dhan Kendras (Phases & Timelines)

(i) Aligned with the policy to trigger the rapid transformation of 115 Aspirational districts, initial emphasis of the PMVDY shall be to set-up the Van Dhan Kendras in the aspirational districts with majority tribal population5. A total of 39 aspirational tribal districts have been identified. The setting-up of the Kendras

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would then be gradually scaled up to other Districts/States in order of percentage of tribal population and assessment of availability of MFPs with potential for value addition.

(ii) The district-wise number of Van Dhan Vikas Kendra to be set-up has also been derived based on TRIFED's consultation with the State & District level implementing agencies with regard to the district-wise capacities to host such facilities.

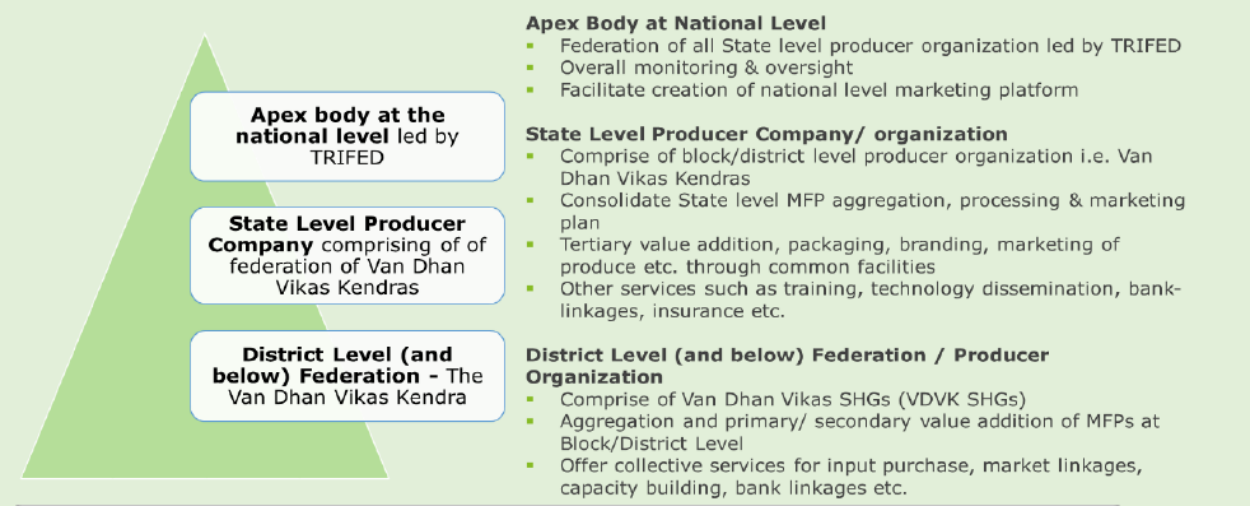
(iii) Accordingly, the tentative State-wise quarterly action plan to set-up the 6000 Van Dhan Kendra is as proposed below.

(iv)The overall fund requirement for setting up 6000 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras will be Rs. 900 Cr. over the span of 2 years.

2.9 Federation of SHGs

The whole activity would be carried out through the federation of SHGs placed in a pyramidal structure with Apex body at National level, State level producer companies comprising of Van Dhan Vikas SHGs and Kendras and District/Haat Bazaar level SHGs for procurement and value addition.

2.10 Objective of setting up SHGs and federating them into producer companies at the state and district level



Sources: Compiled and calculated from various reports of Tribal Research Centre, Ooty.

2.11 Van Dhan Phase II(2019):

In order to make VDVKs, a round the year enterprise to provide livelihood support to the beneficiaries, TRIFED has forged convergence with schemes of other Departments/Organisations like CSIR (Floriculture), ICAR (Agriculture), NMPB (Medicinal Plants cultivation), MoFPI (Food Processing), MSME (SFURTI), IIT Delhi Unnat Bharat Abhuyan 9Capacity building/ handholding) etc.. These convergences will support

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different facets of establishing enterprises and make it round the year economic activity of the Van Dhan beneficiaries.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Even though there are different schemes launched by the government to improve the welfare of Tribes, there are many socio-economic problems of the PVTG communities in the Nilgiris. Some Of these challenges include economic marginalization and lack of income opportunities, lack of Value addition skills leading to exploitation by middlemen, lack of financial inclusion and market linkages, lack of infrastructure related to storage and processing of products, lack of convergence of government schemes at the grassroots level. These socio-economic challenges pose obstacles to the holistic development of PVTG communities. Hence, the necessity exists to analyze whether the PMVDY scheme is able to address these socio-economic challenges. Therefore, the Present study aims to fill the gap in research through secondary data analysis.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess how effectively PMVDY is being implemented, particularly in terms of forming self-help groups providing trainings, distributing equipment, and developing the necessary information
2. To understand the influence the scheme has had on the income of the PVTGs in the Nilgiris and if it has helped them gain more livelihood opportunities.
3. To understand the difficulties and challenges faced by van dhan vikas kendra and self-help groups implementing the PMVDY scheme effectively
4. To suggest practical policy measures that can improve the implementation of PMVDY and help promote the socio-economic development and livelihood opportunities of PVTG communities in the Nilgiris.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The currently available research on the Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY) gives valuable information about how it has been implemented and its impact/effect across different Tribal regions in India. The different researches show the scheme's capability to promote tribal Entrepreneurship through various methods such as collective collection and value addition of the Minor Forest Produce (MFP), as noted by Balkrishna et al. (2022) in North-East India. But, the Effectiveness of the implementation is frequently challenged by information gaps. A study from Andhra Pradesh shows that even though the beneficiaries' perceptions of the scheme are usually favorable, their awareness and knowledge of VDVK remain mild, which points towards the need for improved communication and more extensive services (Srivani et al., 2022; Andhra Pradesh, n.d.).

A repeating theme across the studies or researches is the persistent problems faced by the tribal

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Communities, particularly women, is the collection and marketing of MFPs. Major issues include the scattered distribution of the resources, the perishable nature of the products, and very informal marketing channels that create price and information asymmetries. (Netam et al., 2024;
Maravi & Modi., 2017). In order to overcome these problems, researchers continually recommended strengthening the value addition chain. Research by Saboo (2019) and Netamet al. (2025) argue that value addition is not utilized to its full extent and could be a pathway to the economic empowerment and call for stronger market linkages, improved processing facilities and betterment of institutions like the Van Dhan Kendras, Self-Help Groups, etc.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Methodological Approach

The study will follow a mixed-methodology approach with a primary focus on secondary data.
The study is mainly descriptive and evaluative in nature, using quantitative information from
Reports and qualitative information from reports as well.

6.2 Sources of Data

6.2.1 Primary Sources:

The primary sources of data collection include in-depth interviews with key informants such as assistants working in the collector office, TRIFED, and State Nodal Department officials, and VDVK teams. Besides, there is a proposal to refer to SHG members and MFP gatherers through secondary sources of information.

6.2.2 Secondary Sources:

The secondary sources of data collection comprise government reports, official schemes, and academic journals, among others. For instance, the study will use reports from the TRIFED, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and the State Tribal Welfare Department. These reports are in the form of annual reports and will be used to generate information pertinent to the study's objectives, including the progress of PMVDY.

6.3 Tools Employed

In the thematic analysis of qualitative reports, I will use reports and case studies to examine themes, patterns, challenges, and success factors.

7. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

7.1 Socio-Economic Profile of PVTG Communities in the Nilgiris

There are several PVTG communities in the Nilgiris district, each with their own socio-economic characteristics.

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Table:7.1

PVTG Group	Population	Primary Livelihood	Literacy Rate	Income per capita
Toda	1,600	MFP collection, small trade	70%	₹180-200
Kota	2,200	Agriculture, MFP	65%	₹150-180
Kurumba	3,500	MFP collection, wage labor	55%	₹120-150
Irula	4,800	MFP collection, wage labor	50%	₹100-140

Data from District-level socio-economic surveys

Analysis:

The average income for each household is around 3000-6000, which is below the poverty line in urban areas and 70-80% of the households collect MFP as their primary livelihood activity.

Interpretation:

The analysis shows that the PVTG households have low income and rely mainly on MFP collection as their main primary source of income. This shows that the scheme could help in improving the income for these communities through various ways, such as improved market linkages, value addition and diversified livelihood options.

7.2 Implementation Status of PMVDY in the Nilgiris

Table:7.2

Implementation Aspect	Status in Nilgiris
Total VDVKs established	8 Kendras
Total SHGs formed	120 SHGs
Total beneficiaries	Approximately 2,400 persons
Grant disbursed	₹10 crore
Training sessions conducted	50+ sessions
Value-added products developed	Honey, spices, herbal products, medicinal plants

Analysis:

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The target of having 15 SHGs per Kendra has been met, with some having even more than 15. Most of these SHGs have contributed the minimum working capital of 20,000 per group, even though some groups are smaller. The training programs have primarily focused on value addition and packaging.

Interpretation:

The chart shows that the scheme had been implemented significantly in the Nilgiris, with 8 VDVKs and 120 SHGs connecting with almost 2,400 beneficiaries, but the development of the MFP such as honey, spices, herbs, etc. was still not showing consistent progress towards diversified livelihoods.

7.3 Impact on Economic Outcomes

Table:7.3

Economic Indicator	Before PMVDY	After PMVDY	Percentage Change
Average Monthly Household Income	₹3,500	₹6,500	+85%
Income from MFP (per household/month)	₹1,500	₹4,000	+167%
Savings (per household/month)	₹200	₹800	+300%
Diversification of Income Sources	1-2 sources	3-4 sources	+100%

Analysis:

On average, the households have an increased income of over 85%, with some even doubling it.
The income from MFPs has increased to nearly three time due to the value addition and Initiatives, which have also led to an improvement in market linkages. The regular savings have
Also increased, which helps families to have emergency funds and invest in health and education.

Intrepretation:

It shows a significant improvement in the household incomes, mainly due to the value addition and the market linkages provided by the scheme. This increase in the income has also led to the increase in the regular savings of the PVTGs, which allows them to invest more into their health education.

7.4 Impact on Social Outcomes

Table: 7.4

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Social Indicator	Before PMVDY	After PMVDY
Women's Participation in Decision-Making	Low	High
Children's School Enrollment	60%	85%
Access to Banking Services	30%	70%
Participation in Community Meetings	40%	80%

Analysis:

Women SHG members have become more involved, participating actively in household and community decisions. The increase in their income has resulted in higher school enrollment and reduced dropout rates among the children. A significant number of SHG members have also opened their own bank accounts and are accessing formal banking services.

Intrepretation:

It shows that the women SHG members have gotten more active and have more opportunities to take part in their household and community decisions as the increase in income has greatly affected them in a positive aspect. The increase in income has also helped in the increase of children being enrolled into schools for education and reduced their drop-out rates. More members of the SHG have also created their own bank accounts and are now accessing formal services that they did not have knowledge of before. Thus, the scheme has helped them in all social, educational and financial literacy aspect.

8. LIMITATIONS:

Despite the success of the scheme there are some shortcomings and limitations which might affect the sustainability of the scheme. These include inadequate skills and knowledge among the SHG members especially on value addition products and market development. Inadequate and proper storage, processing and packaging facilities as well as permanent Kendra for Value Addition activities limit the potential of the enterprises throughout the year. Though high percentage of women participates in the SHGs, their leadership and decision-making abilities needs to be enhanced. Sustainability of the scheme requires continuous innovation and product development to support market linkage. The issue of branding and quality control also needs to be addressed.

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9. THE RELEVANCE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

The PMVDY helps in achieving several SDGs:

SDG 1 (No Poverty): It helps in increasing income and savings, which help in reducing poverty.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality): It allows for the empowerment of women as they are able be involved in SHGs and be involved in decision making as well.

SDG 8 (Decent Work): It creates sustainable livelihood opportunities for the tribal groups.

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption): It helps in the sustainable use of forest resources.

SDG 15 (Life on Land): It also helps in the conservation of the forests through sustainable methods of harvesting.

10. Conclusions

It may be concluded that PMVDY has had a positive socio-economic impact in terms of enhancing household income and savings, promoting livelihood diversification and sustainable sources of income, through SHGs and value addition activities. Besides, it has had a positive effect on women's empowerment. However, while the phased approach to implementation and convergence has been appropriate; there is a need to enhance coordination at the departmental level. In addition, the lack of infrastructure such as permanent facilities and storage and processing units is a concern. Hence, there is a need to continuously build the capacities of VDVKs and ensure market linkages and sustained enterprise development to ensure long-term sustainability.

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