

Role of Self - Help Groups in Women Empowerment

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Abstract

Women in India are a mixed lot: some women are well in control of their destinies, others depend to a large extent on their husband, father, and brothers. Even they are denied even the freedom of thought. If seen the women conditions in past, it was found that women had no right to decision in the family affairs. But the history of women's participation in India's development thinking and practice over the last 150 years. It can be traced thought many strands. However, development of women empowerment came in to mainstream after the 1960's, especially after the first UN announced international women's year 1975. Self- Help- Groups are playing a big role in empowerment of women. Formation of women into Self- Helps- Groups paved a way to develop their economic standard. They are now become self dependent and more efficient in their work. Women in SHGs have been encouraged by the Government to undertake Self-employment ventures with locally available resources. SHGs has been empowered women to become more assertive, more likely to take part in family and community decision. This paper deals with the field work on empowerment of women through self help groups.

Introduction

Women in the past were denied equal access to resources. They had restricted mobility and were considered as lifelong dependents on men. Women in India are a mixed a lot: some women are well in control of their destinies, others depend to a large extent on their husband, father and brothers. Even they are denied even freedom of thought. If seen the women condition in past, it was found that women had no right to make decision in the family affairs. Major decision like children's education and their marriage was also decided by their husband. But the history of women's participation in India's development thinking and practice over the last 150 years. It can be traced thought many strands. The importance of women to the economic development of India was first recognized during the country's struggle for independence. However, development of women empowerment came in to mainstream after the 1960's, especially after the first UN announced international women's year 1975. Our Ex-President Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil had been said "Empowered Women-Empowered Nations". She said in her speech that a country will become powerful develop, when the women will also become powerful. In the same way India will also develop and progress, when women of India will become self reliant and self dependent. Empowerment of women, equipping women to be economically independent and personally self

reliant with a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation in her life. Moreover, they should be able to contribute to the developmental activities of the country. In other words women empowerment is a dynamic process that consists of an awareness-attainment-actualization cycle. All possible steps are being taken to strengthen them to achieve their economic, social, cultural and political growth and welfare.

Though the Government has continued to allocate resources and formulated policies for the empowerment of women. Self Help Groups are considered as one of the most significant tools adopt participatory approach for the economic empowerment of women it is an important tool for improving the situation of women on various social components.

Meaning of Self Help Groups

The origin of SHG is from the brainchild of Grameen bank of Bangladesh, which was founded by Mohammed Yunus. SHG was started and formed in 1975. The establishment of SHGs can be traced to the existence of one of more problem areas around which the consciousness of rural poor is built and the process of group formation initiated. Self help group both by definition and in practice is a small, economically homogeneous and affinity group of 10 to 20 poor persons which comes together for a common collective purpose to save small amounts regularly, contribution for a common fund, emergency needs resolve conflicts through collective leadership and mutual decided by the group at market driven rates. SHG are considered a new lease of life for the women in villages for their social and economic empowerment. The SHGs are formed and groomed by a non-governmental organization (NGO) or a bank branch or a government agency acting as a self-help promoting institution (SHPI).SHG is a suitable means for the empowerment of women. The group consists of either only men or of only women. Women's groups are generally found to perform better. Main functions of SHGs are the amount may be small but saving have to be a regular and continuous habit with all the members saving 'first credit later' should be the motto of every group member. Every meeting the group will discuss and try to find solutions to the problem faced by the members of the group. Main objectives of SHGs are saving, income generation and gradually become self-reliant and external lending, discussion on common problems, social and economic development of women.

Need of Self Help Groups in Women Empowerment

Self help groups are necessary to overcome exploitation, create confidence for the economic self reliance of rural poor people, particularly women, who are mostly invisible in the social structure. Self Help Groups enables women to come together for a common objective and gain strength from each other to deal with exploitation

which they are facing in several forms. Formation of self-help-groups for rural unemployed women would ensure the best satisfaction and become self dependent. The membership in a group activity gives him a feeling of cooperation and protection. The organization holds the powered and provides strength and act as an anti-dote to the helpless women. SHGs have been increased women's income level and control over income lending to greater level of economic independence.

Objectives of the Study

The present paper is a modest attempt to study the role of SHGs in women empowerment. The specific objectives of the study are:

- (1) to study the role of Self help groups in economic empowerment of women in Kullu block of Kullu district,
- (2) to identify the various problems of Self help groups and to make suggestions according.

Sources of Data and Methodology of the Study

Survey method was applied for the study. Primary data deals with the field work on empowerment of women through SHGs in Kullu block of Kullu District in Himachal Pradesh. 17 SHGs were selected randomly. Out of these groups 4 members were selected from each 15 SHGs and 5 members were selected from each 2 SHGs. All these members added up to 70 members from different SHGs. All members were women. Out of 17 SHGs, 10 SHGs were promoted by Non Government Organization (NGOs) and 7 SHGs were promoted by Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). A schedule was canvassed on each selected member of the sampled households in order to understand role of SHGs in economic empowerment of women. Simple percentage method has been used to analysis the data.

Result and Discussion

It is evident from the Table 1 that there was a upward shift in the income groups and average annual income of the sampled members after they joined the SHGs and undertake some economic activity. There was not a single member whose income fell in the range of below Rs.20000 after becoming member of SHGs. After starting economic activity they shifted to the income group of Rs. 20,001 ton 40,000 having an average income of Rs.37,245. There were 21 members i.e. 30 percent falling in the income group of Rs. 40,001 to 60,000 and earning an average income of Rs.51,013 per annum. Maximum members i.e. 27 which formed 38.57 percent earned an income of 60,001 to 80,000. Their average annual income came out to be Rs. 76,488. Eleven members were able to shift to the higher income group of Rs. 80,001 to 1 lakh and average income increased to Rs. 90,650 as

compared to Rs.85,360 after joining SHGs. There was also increase in the number of member earning more than Rs.1 lakh from 4 to 7 i.e. 10 percent.

The average income increased from Rs.53,559 to Rs.73,238 per annum, after becoming members of SHGs. This clearly indicates that after joining SHGs, members are able to start new economic activities and thus supplement their income.

Table 1 : Average Annual Income of Sampled Members Before and After becoming Members of SHGs

S	Income Group (in Rs.)	before becoming member of SHGs		after becoming member of SHGs	
		No. of Members	Average Income	No. of Members	Average Income
1	Below - 20000	4	18200	-	-
2	20001-40000	15	31345	4	37245
3	40001-60000	27	46474.1	21	51013.33
4	60001-80000	14	69162.86	27	76488.78
5	80001-100000	6	85360	11	90650.18
6	Above 100001	4	117745	7	120580.28
	Total	70	53559.93	70	73238.13

Details of product marketing of sampled members after formation of SHGs are presented in table 2. The table shows income of the members, expenditure of members, while producing product and shows profit gained by the member after selling their product.

Table : 2 Details of Product Marketing of Sampled Members of SHGs

S	Group range (in Rs.)	No. of Members		
		Income	Expenditure	Profit
1	Below 3000	4 (5.7)	34 (48.57)	21 (30)
2	3001-5000	17 (24.28)	21 (30)	20 (28.57)
3	5001-7000	9 (12.86)	10 (14.30)	14 (20)
4	7001-9000	15 (21.43)	3 (4.28)	4 (5.71)
5	9001-11000	11 (15.72)	2 (2.85)	5 (7.16)
6	11001-13000	6 (8.57)	-	4 (5.71)
7	Above 13000	8 (11.43)	-	2 (2.85)
	Total	70	70	70

From table 2 it is evident that 48.57 percent members had expanded below Rs.3000 for producing products, and only two ladies has expanded Rs.11000 because these ladies has been open a shop for the selling of products that will produce under SHGs. But all these women have been earned money more than their expenditure on producing products. There are 17 ladies who have earned Rs.3000 - 5000. And 8 women have been earned above Rs. 13000.

Column of profit revealed that 21 per cent members had earned profit below Rs.3000 by selling their products. Another 20 i.e. 28.57 per cent members had earned between RS.3001-Rs.5000 in term of profits. Maximum numbers of women has earned between Rs, 3000–5000. It is possible only after joining the SHGs.

Details of Saving of Sampled Members of SHGs after becoming a Member of SHGs

Women are now able to save their money in banks after spending their money in their daily needs and repaid the loan taken in the banks. It is also possible after becoming the part of SHGs. There are 12 members had saved Rs.2000. these women had joined the group recently. Maximum women had saved between Rs.3001 to Rs.4000. There are 4 women who had saved more than Rs.6000. This amount is a big amount for the women who are economically weak.

Group Loaning by the Sampled Members of SHGs

Information regarding members who are interviewed regarding loans taken repaid and outstanding shown in table 3. As is evident form table 87.14 per cent members had taken loans from the affiliated banks. All members had used this loan in productive and domestic work. A loan of Rs.577500 was taken by these members during the years they have involved in SHGs Rs.556900 have been repaid and only Rs.20600 amount is outstanding.

Table 3 : Group Loaning by the Sampled Members of SHGs

S.No.	Particular	No. of members	Percentage
1	Members of SHGs taking loan from bank	61	87.14
2	Average loan taken by members		Rs.577500
3	Average repaid		Rs.556900
4	Average outstanding		Rs.20600

Problems faced by members and Suggestions given by members for Better Functioning of SHGs:

While interviewing the members, they told some problems that they had faced. These problems are related to marketing, price, transportation, climate disturbances and storage problems. In all these problems, mostly marketing turned out to be the major problem. The members of SHGs had given some suggestions for better functioning of SHGs.

(1) There should be some space/ building for SHGs, where member can work freely and can store products.

(2) The members of SHGs will be encouraged to produce better product if they get good price for their product.

(3) Time to time training of members of SHGs is very essential to produce good quality product. Amount of Bank loan given to SHGs should be enhanced.

Holistic analysis of the working of SHGs in the field study:

Following are some points that are found in the field work after analyzing and justifying the collected data. These point clearly shows, condition of women have been improved after joining the SHGs.

- Now maximum ladies are aware for improve their living standard. Maximum participation of women in SHGs are involves in 25 - 40 age group. It shows that young generations have more interest in SHGs.

- It is also found that through SHGs 87 per cent women has taken loan in the bank. They has taken loan for the purpose of agriculture cultivation , dairy, handloom, sheep breeding, knitting, horticulture, karyana shops, weaving and sewing machine and repairing of house.

- It is also found that after joining SHGS, members have produced many products and they have earned income by selling their products in market. Women have saved also money in banks; it is possible only after joining the group.

- SHGs have given the opportunity of employment for the women. Now they are able to give good facilities and education for their children.

- It is also found that role in the family has been increased and now they are involving in making decisions in the family affairs.

- In the field work it is also found training related to health, agriculture and sewing etc. are given time to time in the villages' trough SHGs. By this members has been produced much better products and earn good money.

- By analysis average income of sampled women before and after joining SHGs. It is found that their income has increased. They are shifted upward in income group and undertake economic activities.

- It is also found that women of SHGs are facing many problems related to marketing, raw material and storage problem etc. they has given some suggestion for the better functioning of SHGs these are mentioned as above.

Role of Self Help Groups in Women Empowerment

On the basis of finding of field study, we can clearly explain that the Self Help Groups has been played a big role in women empowerment. Women in SHGs have been encouraged by the Government to undertake Self-employment ventures with locally available resource. Followings are some points, showing importance of Self Help Groups in women empowerment.

- SHGs help the rural women in improving their socio economic status as well as status of their awareness and self dependency. It helped in creating awareness among the women about the activities happening in the villages.

- Now they were able to discuss various problems and expressed their needs in front of the officials fearlessly.
- They felt that membership in a group give them opportunity to come together. This fostered the feeling of security in them which in turn resulted in increased confidence.
- Now, women are actively participating in the meeting organized not only in the villages but also outside the village. Enhancing perceptions of women's contribution to household income and family welfare. They become aware about health and importance of education
- Women also become aware of the banking system and got acquainted with all the transaction.
- SHGs have been increasing women's income level and control over income lending to greater level of economic independence, participation in household decision about expenditure and other issues and lending to greater expenditure on women's welfare.
- SHGs give loan for the women on the low interest rate for production of goods. After marketing of these products, they generate income.
- Access to networks and markets giving wider experience of the world outside the home, access to information and possibilities for development of other social and political roles.

Problems in the working of Self Help Groups

The importance of SHGs in the process of women empowerment is well realized. After promoting SHGs, it was found that poor people had improved their living standard and their condition is now better, but they are facing some problems mention as below:

*Lack of stability and unity among the members and exploitation by the strong members.

*The training facilities given to the members of the groups are not adequate to complete with that of strong unit.

*Groups are also facing problems related with marketing. Most of SHGs are ignorant about the major raw material suppliers and there is no systematical arrangement to collect raw material. Due to this they pay high cost of material.

*Lack of strong leadership of groups and weak financial management in the villages and lack of knowledge about banking system.

Suggestions for Better Functioning of SHGs

A few suggestions are put forward for the formation and smooth working of SHGs in women empowerment.

- There should be proper advertisement regarding benefit of SHGs. Media can fulfill this task very effectively, by this more people will become member of SHGs.

- It is essential to literate the illiterate women in a minimum time frame; therefore they can understand the benefits of SHGs.

- There should be some space/ building for SHGs, where member can work freely and store their products. The members of SHGs will be encouraged to produce better product if they get good price for their product.

- Time to time training of members of SHGs is very essential to produce good quality product. If government will give proper facilities for marketing, proper space for products and better prices for the products of groups, then women of groups will work more effectively.

- Amount of Bank loan given to SHGs should be enhanced. For better functioning of SHGs, banking knowledge should be given to members of SHGs. Monthly meetings of banks functionaries should be organized in the villages.

Conclusion

SHGs has a big hand in improving condition of women who are belonging to rural area. SHGs are emerging as a new basic unit for organizing the unorganized rural women, who constitute one of the largest sections of unorganized labour force in India. Through SHGs women of the rural areas are now become powerful. SHGs has been played valuable roles in empowering and emboldening women by giving them control over assets and increased self-esteem and knowledge. It has been improving their socio-economic status as well as status of their awareness and self-dependency.

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