
ROLE OF SHG'S IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN ENHANCING WEALTH CREATION OF ECONOMY: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: Women who consist half of the population of the world have equal rights, duties and responsibilities like the male counterpart. Even if they are vulnerable group, they can get strength collectively. One forum of strengthening women collectively is through Self Help Groups (SHGs).

Women empowerment is possible if they are having the freedom of choices and even a voice in taking decisions in families and societies. For this she needs to be independent and self reliant. SHGs are one way in which a woman is encouraged to do more. With the zeal to do more for self and family, the society also benefits. Thus women become core contributors in the wealth creation process.

This paper emphasizes the above linkage as to how women through SHG's get empowered and with this empowerment how these women actively participate in the wealth creation process of the economy.

The paper studies rural women who are the members of SHGs which are recently formed in the year 2014 under the banner of 'Sanjivini' and tries to identify the factors that encourage women to be a member of an SHG. An effort is also made to identify the positive and negative empowerment indicators which empower women being a member of SHGs.

Key words: Self Help Groups (SHGs), Women, Empowerment, Empowerment indicators.

Introduction: Over the past decades, India is been facing the problem of rural poverty where about 70% of Indian poor population live in rural areas. Hence, poverty remains an unceasing condition for majority of India's rural population. Poverty is very deep among the members of scheduled castes, tribes and women in the country's rural regions. A major cause of poverty among both individuals and communities is lack of access to productive assets, financial resources, high level of illiteracy, inadequate health care and extremely limited access to social services (Aiyar Swaminathan, 2008). Rural people often have just hand to mouth existence and have very few reserves for major expenses. Majority of cases they need to save or borrow to meet expenses, but, borrowings have serious limitations in terms of cost, risk, and convenience.

Rural women play a significant role in the domestic and socioeconomic life of the society and therefore, national development is not possible without developing this segment. This segment in general is the most disadvantaged group even though the women largely participate in economic activities, mainly agriculture, their work is not considered economic. Primarily poverty has lot of disadvantages on this group. Mainly providing economic support to the rural women, has been proved very successful to reduce the poverty in rural India. Providing economic support or loans to the rural women helps them to empower, not only economically but also socially, further this strengthens the whole society in general. Nowadays, in India, Self Help Groups (SHGs) represent an exclusive approach to financial intermediation. This combines access to low-cost

financial services with a process of self management and development for the women who are SHG members (Manjunatha, 2013). The success of the rural development depends upon the active participation and willing co-operation of the rural people through SHGs. These in many ways, have gone beyond the means of delivering the financial services as a channel and turned out to be focal point for purveying various services to the poor.

2. Self Help Groups (SHGs): In past decades, credit schemes for rural women were largely negligible. But today, Self Help Groups (SHGs), play a major role in improving lives of womenfolk and alleviating rural poverty. Formation of Self-help groups (SHGs) in India gained momentum in the early 1990s when Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) including National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) got involved in their formation and promotion. Recently SHGs have increased in considerable number, acquired greater importance and significance and put up many new experiments in the field of rural development. However, the significant success of several SHGs shows that the rural poor are indeed efficient to manage credit and finance making efforts to mitigate poverty in the country.

SHGs plays a prominent role in assimilation and dissemination of knowledge about health, nutrition, literacy, women's rights, child care, education, adoption of new agricultural practices, farm and non-farm sector economic activities, etc., and pave the way for increased participation of women in decision-making in households, community and the local democratic setup besides helping to prepare women

to take up leadership positions. It helps rural women in empowering their knowledge to produce a wide range of products such as handicrafts, food products, handlooms and textiles, herbal products and artificial jewellery.

Rapid progress in SHGs formation has now turned into an empowerment movement among women across the country (Tiyas biswas, 2007). SHGs by mobilizing women around thrift and credit activities have resulted in economic self reliance there by changing their social attitude and status in the family and society SHG has emerged as a key programming strategy for most of the women development activities (Laxmi, 2012).

3. A case study: sanjivini –a social service organization in Kinnigoli, Dakshina Dannada (d.k) district, Karnataka.: ‘Sanjivini’ is the most renowned and active social service organization in Kinnigoli. ‘Bethany’ sisters started this organisation. It organizes a wide range of developmental programmes for all the needy in our society. Sanjivini’s dynamism and involvement in the development of poor and downtrodden has been recognized by people belonging to all social and economic groups. The main aim was to help poor from rural background in medical and health related issues. ‘Sanjivini’ was continued under the leadership of Sr. Agnesia not only to take the hospital to the doorsteps of rural people but also for preventive care and empowering women. She sustained the project with mission statement “Women for health”. These SHGs have strived to educate people about their rights and responsibilities. Thus Sanjivini plays a vital role in nation building. The camps arranged with this purpose mostly cover ‘Free Legal Association’, ‘Shramadan’, ‘Globalization’, ‘Human Rights’, ‘Fundamental rights’.

Sanjivini’s major achievement in recent years has been its success in mobilizing large number of "Self Help Groups". They have set up a whopping 50 SHG’s (Self Help Groups) which are performing actively. In an era when even international monetary organizations have recognized the role of micro financing and micro credit, Sanjivini has ensured that Kinnigolian villages are not deprived of this modern tool of economic progress. A large number of poor, mainly women, have found a means of economic freedom through these SHG’s. Leadership training for women, children and people from backward classes are another feather in Sanjivini’s cap.

In this modern global economic era, poor people are forced to experience stressful situations both economically and emotionally. Hence, recently Sanjivini has focused on another core issue, counseling. Professional counseling often helps women to cope up with their situation. Presently

Sanjivini is conducting following programs for the villagers : Daily Yoga Classes, Tailoring classes, Spoken English classes, Neurotherapy , Zardoshi work training awareness camps, Summer vocational camp ,Women’s camps, Medicinal plantations , Embroidery , Self-employment , Agricultural training, Information about Government facilities and Jasmine cultivation.

Hence the present study is placed in this context to examine the socio-economic profile of SHGs women belonging to Sanjivini and the study was extended to explore the reasons for joining SHGs. The major objective for carrying out this research was to find the impact of SHGs in empowering women who belonged to SHGs of Sanjivini in Kinnigoli, D.K in Karnataka.

4. Literature review:The success of the rural development depends upon the active participation and willing co-operation of the rural people through Self-Help organizations and voluntary agencies. In recent years, the voluntary agencies have acquired greater importance and significance than before because the administration has not been able to reach the people, especially the poor and weaker sections. They have been able to make their presence felt from the local to the national level and now at the international level also. Many of them have pioneered works in areas, which were ignored by the process of national development planning (Khandelwal K Anil ,2007).

Malhotra (2010) highlights the fact that women may be empowered within one of dimensions be it economic, socio-cultural, familial, interpersonal, legal, political and psychological.

Rekha Goankar (2001) concludes that SHGs rural sector significantly contribute towards the reduction of poverty and unemployment of the economy and lead to social transformation in terms of economic development and the social change. Also empirical evidence from **Mor and Ananth (2007)** provides the role of SHG’s in alleviating poverty and expanding economic opportunities. SHG’s facilitates inclusive growth and presently NABARD is using SHG bank-linkages programs to drive the financial inclusion goals.

Dash Shridhar & Sherel Mendonsa’s (2011) study found that local institutions play a significant role in formation of SHGs and NGOs play a greater role in mobilization of SHGs and facilitation of formation of groups. The study found that wherever NGOs are involved, the SHGs have performed better in terms of saving mobilization and credit utilization.

Gladis Mary John (2008) highlights from the empirical evidence that rural women develop a great confidence with positive change in the attitude after being member of SHG.

5. Research methodology:

5.1 Statement of Problem: Many agencies like NGOs and NABARD conducted studies to evaluate the performance of the SHGs as primary tool in poverty alleviation and women empowerment. Literature review highlights that many SHG's are often in the form of credit or micro credit schemes and savings having succeeded in changing the lives of poor women by making way for enhanced income and increased self-esteem. This is obvious from the escalating growth of SHGs in the state. Hence the present study is placed in this context to examine the socio-economic profile of SHGs women belonging to Sanjivini and the study was extended to explore the reasons for joining SHGs. The major objective for carrying out this research was to find the impact of SHGs in empowering women who belonged to SHGs of Sanjivini in Kinnigoli, D.K in Karnataka.

5.2 Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the socio-economic profile of SHG women belonging to Sanjivini group.
2. To explore the reasons for joining SHGs.
3. To find the impact SHGs have in empowering women.

5.3 Methodology:

The present research was carried out in six SHGs belonging to 'Sanjivini' in Kinnigoli of Dakshina Kannada district in Karnataka. Out of 50 SHGs of Sanjivini, six SHG's which were established in the year 2014 have been selected. They were Baghyalaxmi, Shree Durga, Eshwari Swasahaya Sangha, Nidhi Swasahaya Sangha, Babbu Swamy Swasahaya Sangha and Sannidhi. Among each selected SHG's twenty

6. Data analysis and interpretation:

TABLE 6.1 SOCIO ECONOMIC PROFILES OF SHG MEMBERS

Age Group		Education		Marital Status		Family Annual Income	
Options	Frequency	Options	Frequency	Options	Frequency	Options	Frequency
<20 years	6(5%)	Illiterates	13(11%)	Unmarried	23(19%)	< 25,000	42(35%)
20-30 yrs	24(20%)	Up to 7 th Std	22(18%)	Married	88(73%)	25,000-50,000	47(39%)
30-40 yrs	43(36%)	7 th to 10 th Std	33(28%)	Widow	6(5%)	50,000-75,000	18(15%)
40-50 yrs	32(27%)	Up to PUC	28(23%)	Divorcee	2(2%)	75,000-1,00,000	9(8%)
50-60 yrs	14(12%)	Graduate	15(13%)	Separated	1(1%)	Above 1,00,000	4(3%)
>60 years	1(1%)	Others	9(8%)				
TOTAL	120 (100%)	TOTAL	120 (100%)	TOTAL	120 (100%)	TOTAL	120 (100%)

Source : Primary Data Analysis

Interpretation:

The study reveals that out of 120 women respondents selected for the study, majority of respondents belonged to middle aged group (36%). With respect to education, 11% of the members were illiterates and

women who were member for at least 6 months and taken at least one loan were interviewed. These samples were randomly selected from each group based on judgment sampling approach. Thus a total of 120 respondents (20 respondents of 6 SHGs each) were selected for the present study. The primary data was collected by using structured questionnaire conducting personnel interview and the secondary data was taken from various published and unpublished books, journals, and existing literature and data in websites.

5.4 limitations & implications for future research:

The present study included rural women from only six SHGs belonging to Sanjivini. Therefore the results cannot be generalized to a larger diverse population. Thus, there is a wide scope for future research to incorporate more SHGs targeting larger sample size of rural women for better derived results. Although the feedback related the direct behaviour of the respondents in accessing empowerment through designed empowerment indicators, there exists a high possibility that the respondents might actually reveal an ideal response rather than their actual behaviour to a given context.

Conducting personal interviews meeting all members of selected SHGs was little difficult as respondents of the study were spread over the geographical areas of Kinnigoli. Hence only 20 members of selected SHGs were taken based on convenient sampling. Due to the limitation of time and resources, larger sample size was not able to be targeted.

mainstream were educated till 10th standard (28%) and about 8% of the respondents have other type of education like teacher training ITI or BEd. Study showcases about 19% of women were unmarried and about 73% of them are were married. Regarding the

family annual income, about 35% of the respondents 25,000 – Rs.50,000 per annum and a low percentage of 3% respondents family annual income was above Rs.1,00,000.
 family annual income was Rs.25,000 and majority (39%) of them belonged to the income group of Rs.

TABLE 6.2 EXPLORING VARIOUS REASONS FOR JOINING SHGs.

To explore the various reasons for joining SHGs among the respondents, all members of SHGs who were identified as samples for the present research were asked to rank the specific reasons for joining the groups in the order of their importance in the structured questionnaire.

Reasons for joining SHGs	MEAN	RANK	Cronbach’s Alpha
1. To contribute to family income	4.23	2	8.12
2. To promote savings	4.19	4	8.96
3. To maintain house expenditure	3.91	3	7.98
4. To raise status of living in society	3.27	6	8.36
5. To promote income generating activities	4.31	1	9.45
6. To avail loan	2.93	7	8.10
7. To repay old debts	2.67	8	8.92
8. To upgrade Skills	3.32	5	8.82

Source : Primary Data Analysis

Interpretation:

From the above analysis, it is obvious that the prime reason for rural women to join SHGs was ‘to promote income generating activities’ (4.31) and ‘to contribute to family income’ (4.23) followed by ‘to promote savings(4.19). Statements such as ‘To repay old debts’ (2.67) stood as the last reason for joining the SHGs.

As the Cronbach’s α in the above table are all greater than 0.70, we can statistically conclude that there is a consistency or inter-reliability in measuring various items used to explore various reasons for joining SHGs. In a sense, the result ensures that the responses are not too varied across time in a summated scale.

TABLE 6.3: EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN DUE TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF SHGs

It is hard to measure empowerment and there is no particular method to measure it. However, we can evaluate this by defining through various indicators. Indicators of empowerment should

encompass personal, social and economic change. Ten indicators of the empowerment from various literature review were identified as : contribution to the family income, skill up gradation, understanding of the banking operations & knowledge on credit management, economic independence, improvement in standard of living , improved leadership qualities, improved decision making skill in the community, good public relation and social participation, knowledge enhancement with various activities, and breaking social, religious and cultural barriers were considered. These indicators were measured on 5-point Likert scale where the mean satisfaction scores on the factors among the respondents, weighted average analysis is performed assigning score 1 for strongly disagree; 2 for disagree; 3 for neutral; 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree. To find the impact of SHGs in empowering women, below table provides the details pertaining to the empowerment of women due to the membership of SHGs.

Empowerment Indicators	Mean Ratings	Rank	Cronbach’s Alpha
Contribution To The Family Income	4.54	2	0.83
Skill Up-Gradation ,	3.91	5	0.79

Understanding Of The Banking Operations& Knowledge On Credit Management	4.01	4	0.81
Good Public Relation And Social Participation	2.87	8	0.80
Economic Independence	4.82	1	0.91
Standard Of Living Has Improved	3.81	6	0.89
Improved Leadership Qualities	2.34	9	0.93
Breaking Social, Religious And Cultural Barriers	2.12	10	0.84
Knowledge Enhancement With Various Activities	4.42	3	0.92
Improved Decision Making Skill In The Community	3.74	7	0.88

Source : Primary Data Analysis

Interpretation:

Analysis of empowerment indicators from the above table reveal that the weighted average scores on empowerment after joining SHGs ranges from 2.62 to 4.82.

Observing the highest weight score for the statement ‘economic independence’ (4.82), we conclude that women after joining SHG’s felt the sense of independence. Many experiences that, after they have joined SHG’s, they were able to contribute to the family income (4.54) and through various activities of SHGs their knowledge was enhanced (4.42). Also handling banking operation independently (4.01) helped them for their better living. Thus indicators such aseconomic indicators (4.82), contribution to the family income (4.54), and knowledge enhancement (4.42) with various activities proved to be the positive indicators of empowerment of women being the member of SHGs whereas, majority disagreed to the indicators like good public relation and social participation (2.87), improved leadership qualities (2.34) and breaking social, religious and cultural barriers (2.12) which proved to be the negative indicators for promoting empowerment because of SHG’s.

As the Cronbach’s α in the above table are all greater than 0.70, we can statistically conclude that empowerment indicators used under this study are highly reliable.

7. Conclusion: Today, in India the role of Self Help Groups in the rural development has attracted

considerable amount of attention from all over the realm of social sciences. Present study among six SHG’s of ‘Sanjivini’ proved to serve the cause of women empowerment and socioeconomic betterment of the SHG’s members.

Empirical findings of research highlighted the main reason for joining SHGs is to promote income generating activities, promote savings and to contribute to family income. Study also proved that SHG’s belonging to ‘Sanjivini’ help rural women to be economically and socially empowered which were examined through analysing ten empowerment indicators. Many Members Economic indicators (4.82), contribution to the family income (4.54), and knowledge enhancement (4.42) with various activities proved to be the positive indicators of empowerment of women being the membership of SHGs whereas, good public relation and social participation (2.87), improved leadership qualities (2.34) and breaking social, religious and cultural barriers (2.12) were proved to be the negative indicators for promoting empowerment because of SHG’s.

The study emphasizes the fact that SHGs lead to empowerment of women. The message to Sanjivini is to kindle the light in SHGs and prospective members when the reasons for joining an SHG is vivid, the group ‘Sanjivini’ can focus on those areas and also find prospective women with same thinking to be a part of the big moment thought small but stable steps.

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