

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS (SHG's): A VIEW

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ABSTRACT

The major form of Micro Finance in India is based on an evaluation of women's Self Help Group's. The present study attempts to show the impact of SHG's on improved lifestyle of poor women in Andhra Pradesh. The awareness and business opportunities for women in that society. Groups were evaluated in relation to their contribution to gender development. The study evidenced that women perceived changes in their identity towards working collectively to influence for change at the village and Panchayat levels. Savings in micro finance has been seen as a beneficial option both from a social and financial standpoint "Self Help Group" is a tool to remove poverty and improve the rural development Sabyasachi Das (2003).

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is a multi dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. Empowerment can therefore be described as a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important the system was pioneered by Professor Yunus (Bangladesh) in 1976. where micro finance originated, female empowerment has spurred higher women's education. Even if micro finance does not create instant poverty reduction it creates profound social and gender changes. Micro finance is the term used for funding poor families with very small loans to improve their livelihood but its activities grow more than providing small loans and it discusses a broad range of services which includes credits savings, insurance etc., since poor families are not accustomed to the traditional form of financial institutions and hence they hesitate to approach and by that they are lacking in financial support and hence the scope of micro finance is very wide and its scope is highly essential to the welfare of poor family.

Micro finance refers to the provision of financial services to low income clients including consumers and the self employed. The term also refers to the practice of sustain ably delivering those services. More broadly, it refers to a movement that envisions a world in which as many poor and near poor households as possible have permanent access to an appropriate range of high quality financial services including not just credit but also savings, insurance and und transfers. Those who promote microfinance generally believe that such access will help poor people out of poverty.

A type of banking service that is provided to unemployed or low income individuals or groups who would otherwise have no other means of gaining financial services, ultimately the goal of

micro finance is to give low income people an opportunity to become self –sufficient by providing a means of saving money and borrowing money.

The SHG model used by MFI was originally developed at the former Bank of Madurai. Each group consists of 15 to 20 women, from the same village but each from different families. Immediately after formation the women choose a representative who will maintain the accounts and take charge of handling cash transactions. Before they can be deemed credit ready each group must go through a one year training program that involves two meetings each month. The first meeting of each month is spent in training the women in accounting practices book keeping basic banking and saving methods. The second meeting of each month is utilized to build the concept of self help and community involvement. These sessions are varied and are divided between training related to entrepreneurship and business and social issues such as health and education. While some of these meetings are less structured many of the sessions utilize fictionalized films followed by discussions. After six months of training the groups are graded and if found satisfactory become eligible for a short term loan with a repayment period of six months, This loan is used to assess the ability of the group members to make the monthly payment. At the end of the second six months the groups are graded once more to determine their eligibility for the larger activity term loans with a repayment period of four or five years. The grading is an extensive process that assesses various factors including their handling of money over the past year their knowledge of accounting and banking processes their intentions for use of the loan and most importantly the cohesiveness of the group pan important factor that strongly influences repayment success MFI views its SHG members as integral to the overall development of the rural economy and maintains a relationship with the groups well past the repayment of the loan. The emergence of women entrepreneurs and their contribution to the national economy is quite visible in India. The number of women entrepreneurs has grown over a period of time, especially in the 1990's. Women entrepreneurs need to be lauded for their increased utilization of modern technology, increased investments, finding a niche in the export market, creating a sizable employment for others and setting the trend for other women entrepreneurs in the organized sector. While women entrepreneurs have demonstrated their potential, the fact remains that they are capable of contributing much more than what they already are. Women's entrepreneurship needs to be studied separately for two main reasons. The first reason is that women's entrepreneurship has been recognized during the last decade as an important untapped source of economic growth. Women entrepreneurs create new jobs for themselves and others and also by being different. They also provide the society with different solutions to management organization and business problems as well as to the exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. The second reason is that the topic of women in entrepreneurship has been largely neglected both in society in general and in the social sciences. Not only have women lower participation rates in entrepreneurship than men but they also generally choose to start and manage firms in different industries than men tend to do.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Review of Literature is the mirror of earlier studies which enriches the researcher and helps to identify the gaps for further research. The present paper is concerned with the theoretical framework on women empowerment through SHG's. Here, few pertinent papers review is presented for the better work done earlier:

1. Luke (1991) in his research on the measurement of changes in a self help context says that SHG's comprise behaviour and community setting that have a life cycle.
2. Pathak (1992): He gives the concept of SHG's and their modes at linkages with banks. He says that the SHG linkage with banks for micro credit taken them to greater heights.
3. Kumaran (1997): In his study in An alternative to institutional credit to poor states that SHG's have empowered the rural women effectively in AP state by providing micro credit. He also says that micro credit given by the banks to the SHG's raised the socio economic status of the rural women. Women comprise half of human resources they have been identified as key agents of sustainable development and women's equality is as central to a more holistic approach towards stabilizing new patterns and process of development that are sustainable..
4. Tripathy (2004): In his article self help groups a catalyst for rural development brings out that SHG's are formed and developed under various programs. They provided an upgraded opportunity for the convergence of different programs /activities of various ministries and organizations.
5. Harendar Kumar,(2009): Experience of NIRD Action Research projects reveal that the operational aspects such as the extent of enabling that goes into the community self-help processes and sharpening the mind set of women.
6. Birendra Kumar Jha (2009): The contribution of women and their role in the family as well as in the economic development and social transformation are pivotal. Women constitute 90 percent of total marginal workers of the country. Rural women who are engaged in agriculture form 78 % of all women in regular work.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER:

The present paper aims to fulfil the following objectives:

- a) To highlight the role of SHG's in Rural Women Empowerment and
- b) To explore how SHG's are beneficial to Rural Women.

Development of the society is directly related with the Income Generation Capacity of its members with agriculture, as they income generation activity the entrepreneurship farm and home can directly affect the income of a major chunk of our population .The growth of modernization processes such as industrialization, technical change, urbanization and migration , further encourage it. Entrepreneurship on small scale is the only solution to the problems of unemployment and proper utilization of both human and non human resources and improving the living condition of the poor masses.

Kuratka and Richard 2001 in their book on entrepreneurship stated that entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of creating incremental wealth. This wealth is created by individuals who take the major risks in terms of equity, time and career commitment of providing value to some products or services the product or service itself may or may not be new or unique but value must somehow be infused by the entrepreneur by securing the allocating the necessary skill and resources. The delivery of micro finance to the poor is smooth, effective and less costly if they are organized into SHG's and SHG is promoting micro enterprise through micro credit intervention. Micro entrepreneur's is an effective instrument of social and economic development.

The micro finance is agenda for empowering poor women. Micro enterprises are an integral part of planned strategy for securing balanced development of the economy of the poor women. Rural women's participation in agro based activities is much more than what statistics reveal. This is mainly due to the fact that most of the work done by the women at farm and home is disguised as daily chores. Mechanization and easy availability of labour provide more time to energetic women to engage themselves in self employment or entrepreneur ventures. Rural women are having human and non human resources to take up an enterprise need an innovative mind and motivation. Entrepreneurship is the only solution to the growing employment among rural youth. It helps to generate employment for a number of people within their own social system. This is more beneficial for women in rural areas as it enables them to add to the family income while taking care of their own home and livestock centered task. Rural women possess abundant resources to take up enterprises. She has the benefit of easy availability of arm and livestock based raw material and other resources.

Hence she can effectively undertake both the production and processing oriented enterprises. Entrepreneurship development among rural women helps to enhance their personal capabilities to increase decision making status in the family and society as a whole.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS:

Men and the project administrators are low or critical components that determine their extent to which empowerment may or may not take place. The role of micro credit is to improve the socio and economic development of women and improve the status of women in households and communities. The micro entrepreneurs are strengthening the women empowerment and remove the gender inequalities. Self Help Groups micro credit mechanism makes the members to involve in other community development activities. Micro credit is promoting the small scale business enterprises and its major aim is to alleviate poverty by income generating activities among women and poor. Therefore, they could achieve self sufficiency.

Now a day's economic development is one of the factors that have changed the entire scenario of social and cultural environment within the country especially for the women. The rural women are engaged in small scale entrepreneurship programme with the help of Self Help Groups. Through that they were economically empowered and attaining status in family and community.

Rural women play a vital role in farm and home system. She contributes substantially in the physical aspect of farming, livestock management, post harvest and allied activities. Her direct and indirect contribution at the farm and home level along with livestock management operation has not only help to save their assets but also led to increase the family income. She performs various farm livestock, post harvest and allied activities and possesses skills and indigenous knowledge in these areas. The women were empowering themselves technically to cope with the changing times and were engaged in starting individual or collective income generation programme with the help of Self Help Group. This will not only generate income for them but also improve the decision making capabilities that led to overall empowerment.

Areas of Micro Enterprise Development:

Depending on number of factors ranging from landholdings, subsidiary occupations, agro climatic conditions and socio-personal characteristics of the rural women and her family member the areas of micro enterprises also differ from place to place. The micro enterprises are classified under three major heads:

1. Micro Enterprise development related to agriculture and allied agricultural activities like cultivating to organic vegetables. Flowers, oil seeds and seed production are some of the areas besides taking up mushroom growing and bee-keeping some more areas can be like dehydration of fruits and vegetables canning or bottling of pickles chutneys jams squashes diary and other products that are ready to eat.
2. Micro enterprise development related to livestock, management activities like Dairy farming, poultry far, livestock feed production and production of vermi composting using the animal waste can be important area in which women can utilize both her technical skills and raw materials from the farm and livestock to earn substantial income and small scale agro processing units.
3. Micro Enterprise development related to household based operations like Knitting, Stitching, Weaving, Embroidery, Bakery and Flour milling, Petty shops, Food preparation and Preservatives.

Functions of SHG's:

The SHG's are mainly aimed to promote the thrift of savings and credit among the rural women living under the below poverty line.

- i) Create a common fund by the members through their regular savings.
- ii) Flexible working system and pool the resources in a democratic way.
- iii) Periodical meeting. The decision making through group meeting.
- iv) The loan amount is small and reasonable .So that easy to repay in time.
- v) The rate of interest is affordable varying group to group and loan to loan However it is little higher than the banks but lower than the moneylenders.

ADVANTAGES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG RURAL WOMEN

Empowering women particularly rural women is a challenge; Micro enterprises in rural area can help to meet these challenges. Micro enterprises not only enhance national productivity, generates employment but also help to develop economic independence, personal and social capabilities among rural women. Following are some of the personal and social capabilities, which were developed in result of taking up enterprise among rural women.

- i) Economic development
- ii) Improved standard of living
- iii) Self confidence
- iv) Enhance awareness
- v) Sense of achievement
- vi) Increased social interaction
- vii) Engaged in political activities.
- viii) Increased participation level in Gram Sabha meeting
- ix) Improvement in leadership qualities
- x) Involvement in solving problems related to women and community
- xi) Decision making capacity in family and community.

Economic empowerment of women by micro entrepreneurship led to the empowerment of women in many things such as socio economic opportunity, property rights political representation social equality personal right family development, market development, community development and at last the nation development.

A study on Government initiatives for Women Entrepreneurs in rural areas around Hyderabad region:

Creating and highlighting all such platforms which can bring out the creativity and innovation among the women and men to grow entrepreneurship culture in society. Developing countries are definitely in dire need to encourage women entrepreneurship as women workforce is promptly available to exploit the unexploited dimensions of business ventures. Generally speaking, globally business world has realized and is working on war footing to create entrepreneurship as the final remedy to overcome all types of business and market challenges. Independence brought promise of equality of opportunity in all spheres to the Indian women and laws guaranteeing for their equal rights of participation in political process and equal opportunities and rights in education and employment were enacted. But, unfortunately, the government sponsored development activities have benefitted only a small section of women. The large majority of them are still unaffected by change and development activities have benefitted only a small section of women i.e., the urban middle class women. Women are willing to take up business and contribute to the nations' growth. Their role is being recognized and steps are taken to promote women entrepreneurship. Resurgence of entrepreneurship is the need of the hour. Women entrepreneurs must be moulded properly with entrepreneurial traits and skills to meet changing trends and challenging global markets, and also be competent enough to sustain and strive in the local economic arena.

CONCLUSION

Women's entrepreneurship is both about women's position in society and about the role of entrepreneurship in the same society. Women entrepreneurs faced many obstacles especially in market their product including family responsibilities that have to be overcome in order to give them access to the same opportunities as men. In addition, in some countries women must experience obstacles with respect to holding property and entering contracts. Increased participation of women in the labour force is prerequisite for improving the position of women in society and self employed women. Particularly the entry of rural women in micro enterprises will be encouraged and aggravated activities. The rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill potential land resources to establish and manage enterprise, Now what is the need is knowledge regarding accessibility to loans various funding agencies procedure regarding certification, awareness on government welfare programme motivation, technical skill and support from family. Government and other organization. More over formation and strengthening of rural women entrepreneurs network must be encouraged. Women entrepreneur networks are major sources of knowledge about women entrepreneurship and that are increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for its development and promotion. This network helps to give lectures, printed material imparting first hand technical knowledge in production processing procurement, management and marketing among the other women. This will motivate other rural women to engage in micro entrepreneurship with the right assistance and they can strengthen their capacities besides adding to the family income and national productivity.

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are offered to strengthen the Women entrepreneurship in Indian context:

- i) Awareness among women shall be developed partially in rural areas about the savings through micro finance and self help groups in independent earning lady shall be viewed as the backbone to the small and nuclear families.
- ii) As the work life balance starts with women she acts like a role model to the family members. Hence, empowerment through earnings makes her to think differently and act differently with innovative mindset.

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