

Impact of Self-Help Groups on Socio-Economic Development of Women in Assam: A Review of Studies

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Abstract: Poverty in India is rampant with one-third of world's poor. Impact of SHGs had been proposed as a pilot but now it has become a revolution in rural economy and has been playing an important role for alleviation of poverty in rural poor especially the disadvantageous sections of the society namely women, small and marginal farmers and landless farmers. As a measure of financial inclusion India's world rank is 4th with 135 million people. NABARD, in 1992 launched a scheme to organise poor people into a group of 10-20 persons and linking the group with the banks. The idea of SHG was originally conceived and implemented by Bangladesh Grameen Bank but now the concept has been adopted by almost all the third world countries that has boosted the rural economy of their countries. The scheme covers only the marginal group of people with equal economic status and deposit a monthly equal share into the bank in a regular interval to form the habit of banking, small savings and being acquainted with banking and financial policies. The banks under SGSY schemes sanctioned loans to the groups with government subsidy to undertake different income generating schemes to boost their economic conditions. The present paper intends to explore and review the various aspects and impacts of SHGs on socio-economic development of women, studied under different renowned researchers.

Keywords: Financial Inclusion, Self-Help Group, SHG, Women Empowerment, Marginal Section

Introduction

SHGs are believed to be the vehicle for women empowerment and poverty alleviation. In words of Planning Commission of India SHGs is a self-governed, peer controlled small and informal association of the poor, from socio-economically homogeneous families who are organised around savings and credit activities. Members of SHG, meet regularly to discuss the relevant issues of their members and share information to overcome the same collectively and the undertake different income-generating schemes in a collective manner for the upliftment of their livelihood. The concept of SHG in India was piloted by NGO namely MYRADA in mid 80's but until NABARD's intervention in 1992 the progress was slow. Although the programme was proposed as a pilot project but now it has become an integral part of rural economy. The number of SHG linked to banks has increased to 500 in the early 1990's to more than 1.6 million in 2006. The SHG strategy has become an integral component of Government policies and programmes and Government's overall thrust to mitigate poverty lot of research work have been undertaken to measure the impact of SHG on socio-economic development of women which have been reviewed below.

Objectives

To study the socio-economic background of the members of Self-Help Groups in Assam the following objectives are to assessed:

- To know the prime reasons of joining SHG.
- To examine the activities of Self-Help Groups that has created employment generation in different field.
- To evaluate the political and entrepreneurial empowerment of SHG members.

Methodology

The present paper is mainly based on some secondary data that have been collected from different sources and tried to analyse and relate with the concerned topic.

Review of Literature

Vidyanthi (2000) conducted to explain the process of women's empowerment and find out the levels of awareness creation, decision –making for self and group. Empowerment among women from Self-Help Groups under comprehensive community development programme implemented in five slum areas of Chennai. He has found that members of SHGs are found to be more active in controlling social evils and they are involved in different income generation scheme and through which economic empowerment can be achieved.

Puhazendi and Satyasai (2000): A study on the NABARD's impact evolution of SHGs covered by the Bank Linkage Programme reveals the changes in socio-economic conditions of 560 members of 233 SHGs in 11 states before and after (Spanning of three period) their association with the SHG. The study findings also reveal that social impact was found to be the strongest in case of groups promoted by NGOs than in groups promoted by banks. Other positive activity experienced by SHG members related to increase in self-worth, communication skills and desire to protest social evils, improved response to problem situation and a decrease in family violence. A consistent increased access to various amenities such as water, health and sanitation, schools and markets is also indicated.

Alka Srivastava (2005) published a study on data collected from micro-sample of women members of SHGs in four Indian states – Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, which shows that through micro-finance based entrepreneurship, these women have been able to contribute to house hold finances, which led to some (though limited) decision making role for them in the house hold. It has shown that after being involved in SHGs the women get more aware about their basic rights and duties that make them more empowered.

Panda S M (2000): A study conducted by Panda on women's empowerment through SHG revolution in Orissa, had demonstrated that the provision of credit for the rural poor leads to increase in self-Help Groups are the option which fulfils their need based activity. And the study concludes that how SHGs are successful in eradicating poverty by engaging themselves in different income generating schemes and micro credit facilities.

Kappa Kondal (2014) conducted a study of women empowerment through SHGs in Gajwel Mandal of Medak district in Andhra Pradesh. Based on the analysis of women through Self-Help Groups in Gajwel, the major findings of this study revealed that, there is positive impact of SHGs on women empowerment in the women in terms of their self esteem, self involvement in house hold decision and other minor decisions of family which were previously not part of them in Gajwel Mandal of Medak district of Andhra Pradesh.

Malhotra et. al. (2003) conducted a pioneer study of measuring and analysing women empowerment. Here six commonly used dimensions viz economic, legal, political and psychological including their potential operationisation in the house-hold, community and broader arenas has been put forth. The study has found that if women are given proper training their situation can be improved as they possess all the potential for being empowered.

Parveen et. al. (2004) quantitatively measures rural women empowerment of Bangladesh at house hold level. Education, training and exposure to information media have the potential to increase women's empowerment to a large extent. The study has explored that women of the area can be empowered in all the possible ways only through quality education and training.

Khan T M et. al. (2008) studied women's empowerment in Faisalabad district of Pakistan based upon socio-cultural context of study area. The study suggests voluntary changes in female education that will support gender awareness and self-esteem among women. It has found that situation of socio-cultural activity also plays major role in women empowerment.

Varghese (2011) made a study of women empowerment in Oman based upon five independent variables and total women empowerment as development variable. It shows that women in Oman are better in house hold decision making and economic decision making than social empowerment.

Bharathamma (2005) in his study of rural women empowerment in Gadag district of northern Karnataka found that education, land holding, income of the family, social participation and mass media participation have highly significant association with women empowerment. As per rural women's perception, lack of education, over burdened with dual responsibilities, lack of proper training, family restriction from mobility and lack of sufficient finance is the root constraints of poor women empowerment.

Deininger K (2005) in his study of women empowerment in rural India evaluated Andhra Pradesh District Poverty Initiatives Project (APDPIP) upon women empowerment found that APDPIP not only improved access to credit and risk diversification but significantly increased women's empowerment. After being involved in SHGs the women get more exposure in different situation and thereby they get more opportunity to influence in some major decision making process of their house hold where they were deprived earlier.

NFHS (National Family Health Survey), Tripethi (2011) attempts to draw a comparison, based on variables of empowerment and autonomy, and mapping of empowerment in fifteen major states of India using the technique of Displaced Ideal. The states of South India (Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka) experience higher access to resources for women are poor in terms of indicators of autonomy. Similarly, the states of north-east India and Bihar high in autonomy are poor in empowerment. The study has demonstrated that the women of north eastern states are found to be more active and empowered in terms house hold decision.

Das S (2011) has identified various constraints of women empowerment among Karbi tribes of Assam, viz. Social, political, economic, technological and psychological constraints. He further argues that lack of knowledge about new technology and information was the main reason behind poor empowerment of such tribal women. The study finds that the women should imparted training in different income generating schemes so that they can get more opportunity to explore better towards empowerment.

Nanda (2004) studied the institutionalisation of micro-credit and difficulties faced by banking institutions to reach the rural poor, development of micro-finance and Self-Help Groups and the progress of SHGs through Bank Linkage Programme. The result of the study revealed that concluded that higher income and employment generation in rural areas is possible through the implementation of SHG strategy.

Chandramani M (2005) revealed that women's empowerment is the first step towards social change, which begins with the awareness about their rights and capabilities and the understanding as to how powerful means to empower women and to promote

their income generation and bargaining power and improve the quality of life. This can be possible only through making them more aware about their basic rights and privileges.

Pandey J K (2014) has revealed that women's participation in SHGs has altered the lives and situation of many of them, and these women can be future prospective leader of the locality. The basis of this changes are empowerment, self- assurance, political consciousness and assertion of identity. With respect to the control of resources, positive changes are being taken place in their behaviour which finally makes themselves empowered in economic, political, social etc.

Islam M et. al (2014) have found through their study that 57.2 % of sampled women are found to be engaged in animal husbandry through the groups which is followed by weaving and handicraft, food processing, petty shops etc. After being involved as the members of SHGs the women's income have been risen considerably and making them independent in terms of house hold decision making, business planning etc.

Ouseph V (2016) has tried to explore the perception of women regarding their empowerment in various key domains. Tremendous improve has been found in all the domains after the women joined the group than they were before. It is found that SHG utilises savings as a basis to extend credit to the needy and poor women who have no access to credit. Micro- finance and SHG intervention have brought a considerable change in their lives at the grassroots level. Women's decision in house hold and other minor family affairs has been reported positively.

Chakraborty A et. al (2019) have studied and tried to show that SHGs are contributing significantly in the upliftment of the status of women's in many aspects. SHGs have been involved in different entrepreneurial activity and that has increased their financial stability and social status. The study has revealed that if the SHGs members are trained properly about the modern marketing, branding, packaging and distribution techniques.

Sarania R (2015) has found that SHGs have served the cause of women empowerment and socio-economic betterment of rural poor women. Wicoxon signed rank test was conducted to find out the significance of difference which shows that majority of the respondent's income, employment days and amount of savings increased in the post SHG situation as compared to pre SHG situation in the study area.

Malhota S (2016) made an investigation on the effect of SHGs upon the under special houses and especially the ladies in the territory information was gathered principally from the individuals of SHGs working in Chandigarh. The study has found that SHGs are found to be more active to inspire the country poor and they exceptionally dynamic in taking an interest with government and non-government associations.

Sarmah Sri, Gunindra Nath (2012) conducted a survey in Lakhimpur District of Assam wherein 200 SHGs members were interviewed and explored various socio-economic and institutional constraints related to women empowerment of different social groups under SHGs and suggested some practical measures to overcome these obstacles.

Puhazendhi (1999) analyzed the functioning of SHGs in terms of sustainability, empowerment of women, economic impact on the members' and future potential etc. The study revealed that SHGs in Tamil Nadu are performing well in many way that has brought about a considerable change in socio-economic condition of the members of the SHGs.

Satish (2001) From the the study of this paper it is found that necessary care should be taken to ensure homogeneity of socio and economic status of the members while forming SHGs and at the time of formation of SHGs a systematic measure is to be followed for smooth functioning of the groups in future. The study emphasized on the spread of SHG experiment throughout rural India instead of regional concentration of SHGs.

N Manimekalai and G Rajeswari (2001) under this it is found that a survey was conducted in Tamil Nadu with 150 SHG members to assess the impact of SHG formation on women entrepreneurship. It was found that SHGs model have helped the rural women to start micro enterprises including farm and non-farm activities, trading and service units. It is also found that after being involved in SHGs the condition of the members have been drastically changed in terms of decision making process, awareness level about the govt. policies and programmes etc.

P K Singh (2001) compared the pre and post SHG situation on women SHGs in Uttar Pradesh. A positive impact on assets value and annual income was reported in his study. The average value of assets increased by 46% and annual income per household and annual income per household by 28% between pre and post SHG period.

V K Singh, R K Khatkar and S K Sharma (2001) has highlighted the impact of SHGs in the district of Hissar and revealed that micro finance through SHGs is a successful system as lending and recovery in this system is found to be 100% in the group members. Loan facility is also easily accessible without any excess paper work. This facility has uplifted the economic status of the members of the SHGs as they avail the credit facility for undertaking different income-generating schemes for their livelihood.

S Nedumaran, K Palanisami and L P Swaminathan (2001) conducted study in Tamil Nadu on the impact of SHGs and found that more than 60% of the SHG members were SC/STs which shows that the concept is popular among weaker sections of the society and they are inclined to social and economic upliftment with the help of Government and other subsidiary agencies.

Sheel et al. (2002) presented a case study of the Thrift and Credit Scheme developed by NGO Shramik Bharati. This NGO provided poor women an access to formal credit, training and technical help through formation of SHGs. It was found in the study that 60% of the women reported an increase in the monthly income and professional efficiency and 42.2% borrowers felt confident in running the business without further help from NGOs.

Nandini, Niti. Abhigyan (2005) In a case study of Gurgaon Gramin Bank describe the existing model of microcredit delivery used by the Bank. The study includes the Life Cycle stages of SHGs i.e. Formation, Financing and Nurturing. It explored the emphasis laid by the bank to empower the women economically and present lessons for other banks to follow.

United Nations (2006): A survey of bank managers in Madhya Pradesh revealed a perception that women borrowers were more trustworthy and less of a default risk. This can work as a benchmark for launching new schemes for women empowerment. The study further reveals that the members of the SHG may be made availed of credit facilities with low risk factors.

Aloysius P Fernandez (2007) (MYRADA) observed that SHGs are not only an instrument for the empowerment of poor and marginalized sectors but they have proved to be an effective instrument for changing oppressive relationships in the home and in the society.

MYRADA Occasional Papers (2007) found that Govt. recognition and mainstreaming of an initiative is always double edged. At one hand Govt. wants to promote group activities and on the other hand these programs discriminates on the caste basis for offering subsidies even though the family may be poor and a member of SHG which generally breaks the affinity of the group.

Patterson Jamila et al. (2008) have traced the significance of ICT on empowerment of fisherwomen of Siluvaipati fishing village in Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu by the use of ICT training. The study has found that the education level in this village is generally good. The fisher women are actively involved in SHG activities and avail credit facilities from banks to improve their existing livelihoods. The women were taught to read and write their names, simple words and finally smallsentences in Tamil/English to make available the benefits of ICT training.

Minakshi Ramji (2009) observed that SHG accounts were the most prevalent savings vehicle. It was revealed that in case of SHGs membership obligates savings on a weekly or monthly basis. Members admitted that compulsory nature of savings of SHGS have taught them financial discipline that have resulted in regular savings and asset building for the BPL households. Every account opened by SHG was surprisingly found in the name of their female members.

Sivakumar Venkataramany, Balbir B Bhasin (2009) focused on the success of the linkage between commercial banks and SHGs. The SHGs comprising predominantly women groups help in the social cause of alleviation of poverty, increased sustainability, reduction of vulnerability, improvement of capacity building and helping the weaker sections in building assets. 90% of SHGs were found women dominated hence a way ahead to women emancipation. Public sector regional rural banks offer 80% and 90% of credit facilities to the SHGs, and SHGs have served 60 million people below poverty line and concluded that success of SHGs would lead to a strong community development ensuring eradication of social evils.

Prasanthi P, Padma A. (2010) observed that at present SHGs have become an integral part of all development programmes. Earlier co-operative institutions evolved as "Self Help" among common interest group. But with the passage of time, SHGs emerged as an institution for thrift and credit. SHGs have become an acronym for women's group in Andhra Pradesh. This Paper explores the emergence of the SHG as a concept observes that co-operatives are not a practical model for providing credit services to the rural poor especially women and critically examines the concept of Sanghas promoted by Mahila Samakhya programme of Government of India.

Sri Diganta Kumar Das and Sri Dipul Boruah have studied the role of Micro Finance and Self Help Groups for the socio-economic development of poor people in Lakhimpur and Dhemaji district of Assam. The results revealed that after joining Self Help Groups the economic condition of women have not only increased but also improved their living standard by involving in various economic activities independently and it isalso found that Self Help Groups have been playing a crucial role in socio-economic development and made them aware about their savings and credit function with the help of Rural Financial Institutions.

Conclusion

The review of studies pertaining to Microfinance and Women Empowerment depicts that SHG based micro finance has contributed as a catalyst of the social change and empowerment of poor is proved to be a boon for the rural women in some states of India. Moreover it has created opportunities for promotion of income generating activities and have enabled them for their economic upliftment. There is a geographic/regional concentration of the SHG concept which needs to be scattered across the nation as poverty is a global concern. Poor people's access to formal banking system would act as a key to economic growth and sustainable development. From the review study it is observed that SHG is a powerful and necessary instrument for eradication of poverty in

this new economic era and it is paying as an upward vehicle for socio-economic development of women. SHGs have not only contributed in producing tangible assets and improved living condition of members but also helped in bringing a considerable change in the mind set and outlook of rural poor/marginalised women. Development through SHG have been reviewed in the research work of some researchers that it has not only led to benefit to the empowerment of individual women and women groups but also to the family and community as a whole through collective action in the process of growth and development.

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