

Original Research Article

Impact of Self – Help Group in case of Change in income of the Rural women in Cooch Behar District of West Bengal

Abstract

Women empowerment through self- help group constitutes an emerging and fast growing trend towards social and economic development of the nation. Self Help Group (SHG) is one of the innovative and much needed concept to accelerate the women entrepreneurship, women self-employment and women empowerment. The present study was conducted to explore the impact of women Self Help Group on women empowerment through income generation, increased communication skill, decision making ability and awareness and enhanced social status. The study was conducted in Coochbehar-I and Coochbehar-II block of Coochbehar district. The multi-stage, purposive and simple random sampling procedures were followed in the present study. The district was selected purposively and blocks, gram panchayats and respondents were selected randomly. The total number of respondents for the study was one hundred eighty (180) women SHG members. After joining SHG, changes in annual income among the members were in low level and changes in empowerment were in medium level among the members of women SHG after joining the women SHG. The prime reason for joining SHG of the women SHG members in the study area is for promoting their savings.

Key words: SHG, Empowerment, Income generation, Women entrepreneurship

Introduction

Women in general are the most disadvantaged people in the rural regions of India. According to many disciplines empowerment describes the freedom of a person in social, political and economic matters. Women empowerment is a process in which women challenge the existing norms and culture, to effectively promote their well- being. In this aspect, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are increasingly becoming very important method of organizing women to take action and transform their situation through collective way.

From recent past, several efforts were made by the Government of India to increase the role of women and to improve the status of women. Women constitute around forty percent of the total human resources in our economy. Yet women are the more poor and under privileged than men as they are subject to many socio-economic and cultural constraints. The situation is more severe

in the rural and backward areas. Investing in women brings about a multiplier effect. Senthil and Sekar (2004) stated that political interference in the selection of beneficiaries under peoples plan, lack of timely credit facilities, and lack of adequate credit, lack of adequate farm women oriented schemes and delay in operation of development programmes were the major constraints perceived by the SHG members.. Women put up with the ‘double burden’ of productive and reproductive work. Furthermore, women’s work is mainly reckoned inside the home as unpaid work; even as for men it is socially visible and economically compensated (Williams, 1994). If we put in familial and household tasks, the contribution of women in the household economy is enormous: in India, women undertake over 90 per cent of the household and farm activities (Singh, 1989). Rajan (2006) in his article women self-help groups – innovations in financing the poor, tried to analyse the significance of women empowerment and rural credit in Orissa through SHGs and also the manner of mobilization and management of thrift of SHGs in Orissa. He found out that the amount of thrift mobilized by women SHGs in Orissa is very meager. Ramesh (2006) in his article Women SHGs in Orissa – a crusade for women empowerment, highlighted the role of women SHGs for women empowerment through the provision of easy credit delivery system. He presented the meaning and genesis of SHG and its development, its working pattern, linkage with formal financial institutions and its role for uplifting the women folk.

Women involve in different types of economic and production oriented activities and shoulder the responsibility in playing the roles of different actors in social, political and economic sphere. In spite of that, women’s specific roles and responsibilities are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions. In this perspective the collective and collaborative action can play a pivotal role to empower the distress women economically, socially and politically.

Methodology:

The present study was conducted at Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. The district was selected purposively. The multistage, purposive and random sampling technique was followed in case of selecting the area and the respondents of the present study. The Cooch Behar block-I and Cooch Behar block-II from the selected district were selected with the help of simple random sampling procedure. From Cooch Behar block-I two gram panchayats namely Falimari and Chandimari were selected randomly and from Cooch Behar block-II two gram panchayats

namely Gopalpur and Takargach were selected randomly. An exhaustive list of women self- help group members from the selected gram panchayat was prepared. From the exhaustive list of women self- help group members, the forty five (45) women SHG members from each selected gram panchayat were selected randomly for the present study. In this way, the total one hundred eighty (180) women SHG members in the study area constituted the sample for this study.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1 : Distribution of the women self- help group members according to their family annual income (X₅)

Category	Income in Rs. 10000/-	Frequency	Percentage	Statistics
Low	2.60-10.40	139	77.22	Mean=8.46 S.D.= 3.62 C.V.=42.79%
Medium	10.40-18.20	36	20.00	
High	18.20-26.00	5	2.78	

This table shows that the distribution of the women SHG members according to their family annual income. The results show that the majority of the respondents are under the low income group category (77.22%) followed by medium income group category (20.00%) and high income group category (2.78%). The mean score of the total distribution, family annual income is 8.46 and standard deviation of the distribution is 3.62. The coefficient of variation value within the distribution 42.79% signifies the medium consistency level of the distribution

for the variable family annual income. It is discernable that mostly women self help group members are from the low income group family and pro-poor and economically disadvantaged and trying to sustain their livelihood through women self help group.

Table 2 : Distribution of the women self help group members according to their family annual expenditure (X₆)

Category	Expinditure in Rs. 10000/-	Frequency	Percentage	Statistics
Low	1.92-6.28	94	52.22	Mean=8.46 S.D.= 3.62 C.V.=42.79%
Medium	6.28-10.64	82	45.56	
High	10.64-15.00	4	2.22	

This table shows that the distribution of the women SHG members according to their family annual expenditure. The results show that the majority of the respondents are under the low expenditure group category (52.22%) followed by medium expenditure group category (45.56%) and high income group category (2.22%). The mean score of the total distribution, family annual income is 6.64 and standard deviation of the distribution is 2.12. The coefficient of variation value within the distribution 31.93% signifies the medium consistency level of the distribution for the variable family annual expenditure. It is discernable that mostly women self-help group members are from the low expenditure group family and pro-poor and economically disadvantaged. As the income is low the expenditure is also very low in case of the women self-help group members and they are trying to sustain their existence through women self-help group.

Table 3 : Correlation Coefficient of Change in income (Y1) with 15 causal variables

Variables (X)	Coefficient of correlation (r)
Age (X ₁)	0.134
Education (X ₂)	-0.026
Family Education Status (X ₃)	0.025
Major Family Occupation (X ₄)	0.051
Family annual income (X ₅)	0.671**
Family annual expenditure (X ₆)	0.482**
House Type (X ₇)	0.044
Material Possession (X ₈)	-0.009
Land Holding (X ₉)	-0.008
Farm Power (X ₁₀)	0.093
Livestock Possession (X ₁₁)	-0.100
Extension Contact (X ₁₂)	-0.151*
Mass Media Exposure (X ₁₃)	-0.232**
Social Participation (X ₁₄)	-0.187*
Attitude towards formation and management of SHG (X ₁₅)	-0.003

** Significant at 1% level, * Significant at 5% level

In the present study the women self-help group members are mostly coming from the resource poor family before joining the SHG. After joining the SHG and establishment of a profitable enterprise and developing their financial saving pattern, the women SHG members has started to earn money and from the earning they have initiated to save money through resource generating activities of women SHG. As a result, the income from different established enterprises through

SHG the women members are changing their income towards a positive direction which is reflective in case of family annual income and family annual expenditure.

It is observed that due to frequent contact with extension personal more exposure on mass media and high level of participation in social organization of women SHG members generate conflicting and confusing state of mind in case of selecting a particular profitable micro-enterprise. Due to this conflicting state of mind some of the women SHG members are raising issues related to a particular micro-enterprise. As a result a decisive conclusion in favor of a profitable micro-enterprise cannot be taken and ultimately no provision has been created for changing their income towards a positive direction. That maybe the plausible reason for a negative and significant association of changing income with extension contact mass media exposure and social participation.

Table 4 : Multiple regression analysis of Change in income (Y₁) with 15 predictor variables:

Variables	Standardized Coefficients (β)	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	S.E. of 'B'	t value
Age (X ₁)	0.046	0.013	0.018	0.718
Education (X ₂)	-0.109	-0.181	0.231	1.188
Family Education Status (X ₃)	0.101	0.274	0.231	1.188
Major Family Occupation (X ₄)	0.035	0.049	0.082	0.591
Family annual income (X ₅)	0.656	0.395	0.054	7.390**
Family annual expenditure (X ₆)	0.028	0.029	0.092	0.314
House Type (X ₇)	-0.034	-0.088	0.155	-0.568
Material Possession (X ₈)	0.034	0.011	0.196	-0.011
Land Holding (X ₉)	0.076	0.091	0.076	1.203
Farm Power (X ₁₀)	0.076	0.091	0.076	1.203
Livestock Possession (X ₁₁)	-0.182	-0.138	0.045	-3.027**
Extension Contact (X ₁₂)	0.055	0.039	0.048	0.813
Mass Media Exposure (X ₁₃)	-0.1	-0.191	0.093	-2.050*

Social Participation (X ₁₄)	-0.086	-0.140	0.113	-1.238
Attitude towards formation and management of SHG (X ₁₅)	0.025	0.020	0.044	0.448

R²=0.529 **

Significant at 1% level, * Significant at 5% level

The multiple regression analysis result of change in income with other 15 predictor variables. The result shows that the variable family annual income (X₅) is positively and significantly contributing towards characterizing the variable change in income in presence of other predictor variables. The variables livestock possession (X₁₁) and mass media exposure (X₁₃) are negatively and significantly contributing towards characterizing the variable change in income in presence of other predictor variables.

Family annual income and change in income

The family annual income is the economic indicator for delineating the economic status of an individual in a society. The change in income occurs due to the profit making enterprises dealt by any individual which contributes to their family annual income also. It is also worthwhile to mention that the family with a good annual income is also enjoying a better status in the society. In the present study, the women SHG members with high level of family income are attributing to economic independence, improvement of standard of living, high level of Cosmo-politeness, definite and appropriate decision making ability with a good leadership qualities, proper managerial ability developed by better communication with the family members SHG members and outsiders. The women SHG members are earning money with the help of the profitable micro-enterprises which contributes to their family annual income and also increases the purchasing power and the bargaining power to uplift the social recognition in the society. The enhancement of family annual income and change in income through SHG are the two sides of a same coin for the women SHG members as both the attributes are mutually exclusive in nature. That is enhancement of family annual income also delineates the change in income of the women SHG members after joining SHG and in other way the change in income of women SHG members after joining SHG is contributing to the change in family annual income too. That is why the variable family annual income is positively and significantly contributing towards characterizing the change in income of the women SHG members after joining SHG in presence

of other predictor variables. It is also observable that one unit change in family annual income contributes 0.656 unit positive change in income of women SHG members after joining SHG.

Livestock possession and change in income

Livestock possession is the household possession of livestock namely cattle, poultry bird etc. In the present study area the women self- help group members are rearing livestock only for consumption purpose but not for the commercial purpose in their family. As a result they don't have the knowledge to rear the livestock scientifically and commercially. Not only that but also they did not receive any training on scientific livestock rearing from any training institute. All these factors contribute to non- viability of profitable micro-enterprise on livestock through SHG in the study area. The enterprise of unscientific livestock rearing is not profitable and also not generating any income till date through SHG. Due to lack of knowledge, communication from different end related to scientific livestock rearing commercially a lackadaisical mindset has been developed among the women SHG members regarding the livestock micro-enterprise which ultimately affects the change in income through livestock enterprise after joining SHG negatively. That is why the variable livestock possession is negatively and significantly contributing towards characterizing the change in income of women SHG members after joining SHG in presence of other predictor variables. It is also observable that one unit change in livestock possession contributes 0.182 unit negative change in income of women SHG members after joining SHG.

Mass media exposure and change in income

Mass media exposure is operationalised and conceptualized as the frequency of exposure to the available existing mass media like news paper , television radio etc. In the present study, it is discernable that the mass media are disseminating a profuse number of information related to establishment of profitable micro-enterprises through SHG. But the women SHG members with a low level of knowledge and education are unable to make a definite decision in favour of a profitable micro-enterprise in study area. Due to this again conflict of interest occurs among the SHG members in a SHG and the decision making related to profitable business is becoming more complex for them. In other perspective, due to introduction of Television serial and other

entertainment programme broadcasted through different mass media women self- help group members are becoming addicted to the entertainment programmes and passing their times idly by watching those programmes without giving time to plan any profitable business for their SHG. The addicted women SHG members are reluctant to attend meeting for developing profitable business through SHG and automatically it affects on the change in income after joining SHG. That is why the variable mass media exposure is negatively and significantly contributing towards characterizing the change in income of women SHG members after joining SHG in presence of other predictor variables. It is also observable that one unit change in mass media exposure contributes 0.133 unit positive change in income of women SHG members. The R² value being 0.529, it is to infer that the fifteen predictor variables put together have explained 52.90% variation embedded with the predicted variable, change in income after joining SHG. Still 47.10% variations embedded within the predicted one remain unexplained. Thus it would be suggested that inclusion of some more contextual variables possessing direct bearing on the change in income of women SHG members after joining SHG could have increased the level of explicability.

Conclusion:

Among the several strategies the act of mobilizing the women around common concerns to harness the 'power of the group' to solve their problems through collective actions has played the key role to empower the rural women economically, socially and politically. The exact form of collective actions in a group of women can be reflected through Self Help Group (SHG) in third world countries like India. The major findings in the present study justify the greater role played by the SHGs in increasing empowerment of women, by making them financially strong, as well as it helped them to save amount of money and invest it further development. It is also found that the women SHGs created confidence for social, economic self-reliance among the members. It develops the awareness about the programmes and schemes, loan policies etc.

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