

Self Help Groups and Skills Development of Rural Women in Meghalaya

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Abstract—Self Help Groups (SHGs) are seen as the vehicle that brings changes and development in the lives of the marginalized population. As the aim and function of the SHGs is to enable the poor to improve their socio-economic status. Hence, SHGs organize people in particular to women in the rural areas to form into groups so that they are able to improve their living condition by having better socio-economic status through collective efforts. It believes that collective endeavors can bring changes and development in the lives of the poor. Women in rural areas fare poorly on human development indicators as compared to urban women due to the fact that they face socio-economic constraints and also women's potential development remained far from fully utilized. So, through the participation in SHG its members get to develop some skills related to various aspects of their lives. As the engagement in SHGs the members get exposure to different trainings organized by the Self help group promoting institutions (SHPIs) on various aspects oriented towards their development. Besides this, the members also get to share their knowledge and ideas during the group meetings and activities which enhances their skills that are handy for them to put into practice in their day to day life. Thus, this paper attempts to probe into the roles of the SHG on the skills development of the women in rural areas who engaged in SHG movement. The methodology employed for the study was qualitative method and descriptive in design. The study found out that through the engagement in SHG, women in rural areas in one way or the other have gained or developed their skills which are effective and important for improving their socio-economic status that lead to development and empowerment.

Keywords: Self help groups, skills development and empowerment.

“1. Introduction”

In the process of development the government has taken many initiatives since decades. It is observed that in the recent past rural development and women participation in any developmental programme is of the most concerned that the government and NGOs are focusing at. This is due to the fact that rural development is known to be one of the pillars on which the future of our country stands and women do also contribute significantly to the development and economy of the country. Hence, for women especially those in rural areas who have less educational level as compared to women in urban areas skill development is crucially essential to enable

them to participate effectively in any development programme. Some of the government initiatives to encourage or provide opportunities to women to take part in various developmental programmes include the Swarnajayanthi Grameen Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) in the past and National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) at the present. Through these programme or schemes women in rural areas are encouraged to form into SHGs where they can engage themselves to improve their skills which translates into better living condition by improving their socio-economic condition.

Self help groups (SHGs) have emerged as popular method of working with people in recent years. They have become the vehicle for uplifting the livelihood of the poor and marginalized group of our society in particular transforming the lives of the marginalized in rural areas. It believes that problems cannot be solved alone, or by a single agency. Thus it encourages people to form into small voluntary groups in order to get together to pool their resources, skills and talents to better their lives. This method of forming people into groups has been used by the government and the Non Government Organizations in achieving several goals particularly in poverty alleviation [1]. Hence, SHG is understood as a small and informal association of normally consisted and mainly for poor people having the similar socio-economic back ground. These people come together to realize some common goals based on the principles of self-help and then work collaboratively and responsibly to achieve their goals and aims [2].

The achievements of women through the engagement in SHGs are noticed through a sense of security, confidence and encouragement, increasing the income of the SHGs members which results in meeting the increasing family expenditure to meet their needs, increasing in saving and independent in income earning, increasing in the socio-economic development resulting in empowerment and sustainable development, helps women to be aware of their legal and political rights, educates them on the matter of bank linkages and lastly it empowers them in bargaining powers in all the fields of their life [3]. Further, the involvement of women in

self help groups especially those in the rural areas where unemployment is a big issue would help them to combat against this big pertaining disease in the society. Another unique characteristic of SHG is that it provides the advantage of working in group by cooperation and mutual support which enhances the member to be able to express their feelings, increasing confidence and decision making. Thus they are able to convert their ideas and perceptions about the social participation of women at societal level gradually that result in fostering and promoting towards empowerment of women [4].

Empowering the rural women is very important because it helps them to become conscious of their abilities to bring change in themselves and to their community. There are several factors that affect the living condition of rural women such as education, health, employment, opposition to family planning, sex discrimination, water and sanitation, environment, etc. Thus, if they are sensitized and developed their skills in various fields of their lives they will become aware and recognize their abilities and strive towards empowerment [5]. Therefore, it is pertinent to recognize that skill development of women is of paramount importance in a developing economy like India. As higher the level of skill development higher would be the employment opportunities available for women and this will result into the alleviation of their socio-economic condition. It is observed that in India SHGs are playing crucial roles in women skill development which translates into providing job opportunities that enhances the rural women to elevate their socio-economic condition. Skill development provides opportunities to engage in other activities other than the traditional agricultural activities which enhance better income [6]. In particularly the skill development through SHG has a positive impact on social and economic empowerment of the women members [7].

“2. Methodology”

The methodology employed for the study was quantitative in nature and descriptive in design. Multi stage sampling procedure was employed and the data was collected through structured interview schedule. The study was carried out in West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya among the women Self Help Groups registered under National Rural Livelihood Mission and Nongstoin Social Services Society (NSSS). The unit of the study included 400 women individuals who are members of the women SHGs in the said district registered under the two mentioned Self Help Group Promoting Institutions (SHPIs). The data was processed with the help of Ms Excel and SPSS package and analyzed using statistical tools such as simple averages, mean and standard deviation.

“3. Results and discussion”

The skills development in the present study refers to the impact of SHG in the skills development of the respondents such as in personal, domestic, social, economic and political skills once a member of SHG. Therefore in order to assess the impact on the skills development of the respondents twenty

items were identified which were drawn from previous studies and these items were further categorized into personal, domestic, social, economic and political. The rating was assessed in terms of *highly increased*, *moderately increased*, *slightly increased* and *same*. These ratings were converted into scores respectively assigning 3, 2, 1 and 0. Thus, the maximum or the highest score is 3 whereas the minimum or lowest score is 0. Further, the statistical tools such as mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data.

Table 1: Skill Development

Sl. no	Skills	Mean	STD
1	Personal		
	Enhance ability to make decision	1.66	0.64
	Increasing the level on self-reliance	1.63	0.62
	Confidence level in problematic situations	1.46	0.65
	Improving information and communication skill	1.39	0.61
	Total	6.14	2.54
2	Domestic		
	Providing better education to children	1.06	0.68
	Ability to discuss Family planning	0.66	0.63
	Meeting household requirements	1.28	0.59
	Increasing bargaining power in the family	0.96	0.63
	Total	3.96	2.55
3	Social		
	Improving relationships with others	1.92	0.56
	Enhance public speaking ability	1.33	0.63
	Improved social status in the community	1.94	0.55
	Improving leadership quality in the community	1.41	0.69
	Total	6.6	2.45
4	Economic		
	Improving the economic condition	1.49	0.59
	Inculcates saving habit	1.70	0.61
	Having choice for investments	1.75	0.58
	Improving management skill in economic matters	1.53	0.62
	Total	6.47	2.41
5	Political		
	Inculcates political rights and awareness	0.43	0.57
	Increasing political participation	0.32	0.51
	Improving skills in the participation in the development programme	0.55	0.67
	Better skills during election campaign	0.30	0.59
	Total	1.6	2.35

Source: Computed

The data as given in table 1 presents that in terms of total mean score among the skills development of the respondents which have been categorized into five types namely, personal, domestic, social, economic and political skills shows that among these the skill development in social related matters has the highest mean score (6.6). The social skills was assessed in terms of improving relationship with others, enhancing public speaking ability, improving social status in the community and improving leadership quality in the community. The economic skill ranks the second with the total

mean score of 6.47. In order to assess the economic skill four indicators were used namely, improving the economic condition, inculcates saving habit, having choice for investments and improving management skill in economic matters. The personal skill ranks the third among the skills development with the total mean score of 6.14. The personal skill was assessed in terms of enhancing ability to make decision, increasing the level on self-reliance, building the confidence level in problematic situations and improving information and communication skill. The domestic skill ranks the fourth with the total mean score of 3.96. The indicators to assess the domestic skill development include providing better education to children, ability to discuss family planning, meeting household requirements and increasing bargaining power in the family. Lastly, the political skill ranks the last with the least total mean score of 1.6 among the skills development. The political skill was assessed in terms of inculcates political rights and awareness, increasing political participation, improving skills in the participation in the development programme and better skills during election campaign.

Thus, it shows that the engagement of women in SHGs has increased more in the social skills, followed by economic skills, the personal skills then the domestic skills and lastly the political skills. However, the overall development as regards to the skill development of the respondents in terms of highly increased, moderately increased, slightly increased and same as shown in the table 2 presents that nearly half (49.8%) of the respondents have reported that they have slightly increased their skills after joining the SHG, nearly one third (32.3%) reported that they have not increased their skills, more than one tenth (15.8%) reported that they have moderately increased their skills and lastly a minimum of less than one tenth (2.3%) have reported that they have highly increased their skills after joining the SHG. Hence from the study it can be observed that in one way or the other SHG has provided them the skill development in improving and managing on various aspects and issues in their lives. It is pertinent that the engagement of women in SHG has great impact in improving the social and economic skill than the other skills. This resonates with the study carried out by Angelalalhmingangi (2018) where it was found out that the skill development through SHG has a positive impact on social and economic empowerment of the women members [7].

Table 2: Frequency table

Sl. no	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Highly increased	9	2.3
2	Moderately increased	63	15.8
3	Slightly increased	199	49.8
4	Same	129	32.3
Total		400	100

Source: Computed

“4.Conclusion”

From the study it can be concluded that the engagement in SHG has in one way or the other has helped women to develop their skills in personal, economic, social and domestic matter. However, it is observed that in terms of development in the political skill the engagement of women in SHG has not contribute much or has less impact as compared to other skills development. This is due to the fact that women do not engage much in the political matters in the study area and also due to the fact that their participation in the political matters is limited as it is mainly managed by the their male counterparts. Therefore, the engagement in SHG provides a platform for women in rural areas to develop their skills in various fields which will enhance them to better off in their socio-economic condition. It is desirable that the SHPIs or those who engage in promoting women to form into SHG should properly channelize and sensitize women in rural areas so that they can effective participate in the SHG movement in order to develop their skills in various fields and be empowered so that they can improve their living condition a sustainable manner.

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