

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS: A CASE STUDY IN KAKODONGA BLOCK OF GOLAGHAT DISTRICT OF ASSAM

Dr Manoj Kumar Sarma
Assistant Professor
Department of Statistics,
D.K.D. College, Dergaon, Golaghat, Assam, India.

Abstract: Women empowerment is a process in which women challenge the existing norms and culture, to effectively promote their well being. The participation of women in Self Help Groups (SHGs) made a significant impact on their empowerment both in social and economical aspects. SHGs are a viable alternative to achieve the objectives of rural development. SHG plays a pivotal role in social transformation and social economic betterment of rural women. Assam is a flood affected area where people cannot depend purely on agriculture all through the year. Moreover Assam is based on its agro-economic climate conditions. Thus non-form activities like handicrafts, rope making, embroidery, catering services, repair shops, cattle farming, fisheries etc., give immense scope for women to earn their livelihood when they do not have income through agricultural activities. Banks in association with NGOs give training to SHG members in all these activities. The Government of Assam encourages the SHG activities and marketing of their products.

In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the role of SHG in developing socio economic status of rural women, and to identify the satisfaction level of self-help group members in SHG activities. There are 4949 SHGs in Golaghat district of Assam consisting of 8 blocks. Among the blocks, Kakodonga Block was selected for this study; of which 18 groups are selected at random. From these selected SHGs, 200 members have been selected to collect the necessary primary data. The Chi-square test and average method is used as statistical tools for analyzing the data and testing the hypothesis. The conclusion of this paper is that Self Help Group is an important tool which helps the rural women to acquire power for their self supportive life and nation building efforts. The study has been carried out in the lines of the work by A. Angel Anila (2012).

Key words: Women Empowerment, Women Entrepreneurship, Unemployed, Satisfaction Level, Self- Help Groups.

INTRODUCTION: The concept of Self Help Groups serves to underline the principle “for the people, by the people and of the people”. The Self Help Groups is the brain child of Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which was founded by Prof. Mohammed Yunus of Chittagong University in the year 1975.

The empowerment of women through Self Help Groups (SHGs) would lead to benefits not only to the individual women, but also for the family and community as a whole through collective action for development. Self Help Groups have linkages with NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) and banks to get finance for development. In turn it will promote the economy of the country by its contribution to rural economy. Self Help Groups are small voluntary associations of rural people, preferably women folk from the same socio-economic background. They come together for the purpose of solving the common problems through self-help and mutual help in the Self Help Groups. Assam is a flood affected area where people cannot depend purely on agriculture all through the year. Moreover Assam is based on its agro-economic climate conditions. Thus non-form activities like handicrafts, rope making, embroidery, catering services, repair shops, cattle farming, fisheries etc., give immense scope for women to earn their livelihood when they do not have income through agricultural activities. Banks in association with NGOs give training to SHG members in all these activities. The government of Assam encourages the SHG activities and marketing of their products.

Self-Help Group: A self- Help group is a small voluntary association of poor people preferably from the same socio-economic background. They come together for the purpose of solving their common problems through self-Help. The number of members in one SHG does not exceed 20 (Surender and Manoj Kumar, 2010). The size is limited to 20 because any group larger than this would need to be registered under the India legal system. Voluntarily coming together to save small amounts regularly. They mutually agree to contribute to a common fund and to meet their emergency needs on mutual help basis. The group member use collective wisdom and peer pressure to ensure proper use of credit and timely repayment thereof. Infect peer pressure had been recognized as an effective substitute for collaterals.

An economically poor individual gains strength as part of a group besides financing through SHGs reduces transaction costs for both lenders and borrowers. While lenders have to handle only a single SHGs account intends of a large number of small sized individual accounts, borrowers as a part of a SHG cut down expenses on travel (to and from the branch and other places) for completing paper work and on the loss of workdays in canvassing for loans.

ORIGIN OF SHGS: The Origin of Self-Help Group can be traced from Grameen bank of Bangladesh, which was founded by Mohamed Yunus. SHGs were started and formed in 1975(Gunasekaran, 2010). In India, NABRAD initiated in 1986-87. Karuna Kalita of Nagaon was once an explosives expert with the terror group United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). But he got fed up with life in the jungles and surrendered in 2003. He opted for a new life by forming a self-help group (SHG). The 36-year-old former rebel, who is a father of two, is today into mechanised farming, growing paddy in an acre of land, besides cultivating cabbage, mustard, and “**bhut jolokia**” - the hottest chilli on earth - at his native Dhing village in the central Assam district of Nagaon.

FORMATION OF SELF HELP GROUP: The concept of SHGs got a major impetus after New Delhi launched the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) - a programme aimed at bringing families above the poverty line by ensuring a sustainable level of income over a period of time.

Under the programme, SHGs can avail themselves of assistance in the form of bank loans, supported by back-ended government subsidy - a group can avail itself of a Government subsidy up to Rs 1, 25,000. From dairy to mechanised farming, weaving, poultry, food processing units and mushroom cultivation, people in Assam's countryside are busy setting up micro-enterprises by forming SHGs. There are more than 90,000 SHGs working in diverse fields in rural Assam - the whopping number being an indicator of the success of the central government-aided venture in working towards development and boosting the rural economy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- (i) To examine the role of SHG in developing socio-economic status of rural women
- (ii) To identify the satisfaction level of self-help group members in SHG activities

HYPOTHESIS

Ho: There is no association between age and level of satisfaction with the activities of SHGs.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY: The present study is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire. Secondary data were collected from Kaakodonga Block. A pilot study was conducted with the help of secondary data. There are 4945 SHGs in Golaghat District, consisting of 8 blocks. Among the blocks, Kakodonga Block, under Golaghat district of Assam was selected for this study. 20 groups were selected at random from 5 randomly selected villages. From these Selected SHGs 200 members have been selected to collect the necessary primary data. The Chi-square test and average method is used as statistical tools for analyzing the data and testing the hypothesis.

AREA PROFILE: Golaghat District is an administrative district in the state of Assam in India. It attained district status in 1987. The district head quarter is located at Golaghat. The district occupies an area of 3502 km² and lies 100 metre above sea level. Golaghat district is surrounded by the river Brahmaputra to the north, the state of Nagaland to the south, Jorhat district to the east and Karbi Anglong and Nagaon district to the west. Dhansiri is the principal river, which originates from Laisang peak of Nagaland. It streams through a distance of 352 km from south to north before joining the Brahmaputra. Its catchment area is 1220 km². Doyang, Nambor, Doigrung and Kalioni are the four rivulets of the Dhansiri. The river Kakodonga marks the border between Golaghat and Jorhat districts. According to the 2011 census Golaghat district has a population of 1,058,674; this gives it a ranking of 430th in India (out of a total of 640). The district has a population density of 302 inhabitants per square kilometre (780 /sq mi) . Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 11.88%. Golaghat has a sex ratio of 961 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 78.31%.

Hindus 813,263, Muslims 74,808 (7.9%), Christians 52,277. The main communities of the districts are the Ahoms, Kalita, Assamese Brahmins, Tea-tribes, Mising, Sutiya and Kachari. There is also a small population of Turung and Aiton people living in the district. Migrant communities like Marwari and Bengali live in the townships. Recently there has been settlement of suspected Bangladeshi immigrants in the bordering areas of Nagaland.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: Vinaya Gamoorthy (2007) noted that the self help group members saving habit are increased through SHG. Selvaraj (2007) pointed out that the SHG women has a major role to play in decision making and the middle age group women are highly empowered in comparison with other age group members. Geeta Manmohan et al., (2008) views that Micro finance is such a tool, which directly hits the poverty by helping poor or enabling them not only to survive but also to improve their standard of living. Chittaranjan Mishra (2005) noted that by joining a co-operative society. Women acquire collective bargaining power and at the same time, they get an institution of their own which is managed by them. A. Angel Anisha (2012) observed that women in the rural areas are highly empowered with the activities of SHGs and became active to take part in socio-economic progress of the nation.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: The present study is concerned with the women empowerment through Self Help Group members in Kakodonga Block, of Golaghat District of Assam.

Table-1: Age wise Classification

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Below 20 years	4	2
21 years to 40 years	121	60.5
41 years to 50 years	65	32.5
Above 50 years	10	5.0
Total	200	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Age is an important factor which determines the efficiency of an individual. The analysis of the age wise classification of the respondents reveals that most of the members of the SHG belong to the age group of 21-40 years.

Table-2: Educational Status

Educational Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	12	6
Primary	18	9
Secondary	109	54.5
Higher Secondary	36	18
Graduates	25	12.5
Total	200	100

Source: Primary data

Education leads to knowledge and self –confidence. Entrepreneurship is also determined by the education. Education plays a vital role in decision making. The above table reveals that most of the members of the SHG in the study area have Secondary and Higher Secondary level of education.

Table-3: Occupational Status

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Unemployed	51	25.5
Self-employed	127	63.5
Employed (Un organised sector)	16	8
Employed (Organised sector)	6	3
Total	180	100

Source: Primary Data

Occupation is one of the factors which determine the standard of living of an individual. Agriculture in India is considered as the primary sector and it provides the major share of employment opportunity to the Indian population. But agricultural backwardness leads to poverty and low standard of living. The analysis on the basis of the occupational status of the member's shows most of the members are either unemployed or self-employed in unorganized sector. People employed in organized sector and salaried jobs are very negligible in number.

Income is the yard stick to measure the economic condition of the society. The main objective of the SHG is to improve the income source of the rural women. To give economic freedom to the rural women it is must to provide them enough income sources. The following table explains the income level of the respondents.

Table-4: Income Level of Respondents

Income (Rs) per month	No. of respondents before joining SHG	Percentage	No. of respondents after joining SHG	Percentage
Less than 1000	47	23.5	10	5
1000-1500	87	43.5	63	31.5
1500-2500	54	27	84	42
Above 2500	12	6	43	21.5
Total	200	100	200	100

Source: Primary Data

From table-4 it is observed that the level of income of the respondents of the Self Help Groups increased from 27% to 42% and from 6% to 21.5% for the income groups Rs1500-2500 and above Rs 2500 respectively. Whereas for the income groups viz less than Rs 1000 and Rs 1000-1500, the level of income is decreased from 23.5% to 5% and from 43.5% to 31.5% respectively. This increase or decrease is noticed before and after joining of Self Help Groups.

Table-5: Level of Satisfaction with SHGS Activities

Benefits	No. Of respondents	Percentage
To greater extent	95	47.5
To some extent	85	42.5
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	20	10
Not at all satisfied	0	0
Total	200	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 5 shows the level of satisfaction of the members of SHG. From the table it is evident that 47.5% of the members are highly satisfied. 42.5% members are simply satisfied and 10 percent of the members are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The more noticeable fact is that there are no respondents in the particular study who are not at all satisfied with the activities of SHGs.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS:

Ho: There is a no significant relationship between age and the level of satisfaction with the activities of SHGs.

To find out the relationship between the age and their level of satisfaction with the activities of SHGs, the following Chi-Square test is employed.

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \text{ with } (c - 1)(\gamma - 1) \text{ degrees of freedom}$$

Table- 6: Association of Difference between Age and Satisfaction Level

Age	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Moderate	Total
Below 20	3	0	0	3
21-40	64	52	7	123
41-50	28	24	5	57
Above 50	2	7	8	17
Total	97	83	20	200

Source: Primary data

Calculated value of $\chi^2 = 16.257$ at $(4-1)(3-1) = 6$ degrees of freedom

Tabulated value of $\chi^2 = 12.59$

INFERENCE: Since the calculated value of χ^2 (16.257) is greater than the tabulated value of χ^2 at 5% probability level for 6 degrees of freedom which is 12.59, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected here and hence it may be concluded that there exists significant relationship between the age and level of satisfaction of the respondents with the activities of SHGs.

FINDINGS:

The following are the major findings of the study.

- (i) Most of the women of the SHGs in the study area are belonged to the age group of 21-40 years.
- (ii) The present study revealed that most of the women of the SHG have Secondary and Higher- Secondary level of education.
- (iii) Most of the SHGs members are either unemployed or self-employed in unorganized sector
- (iv) Income of the SHG members is increased after joining the Self Help Group.
- (v) Most of the SHGs members are highly satisfied with the activities of SHG in the study area.

CONCLUSION: Self Help Group is an important tool which helps the rural women to acquire power for their self supportive life and nation building efforts. The empowerment of women through SHGs would lead benefits not only to the individual women but also for the family and community. As a whole these SHGs have collective action in terms of development of the rural economy. Empowering women is not just for meeting their economic needs but also more holistic social development. The SHGs empower women and train them to take active part in socio-economic progress of the nation. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, "To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and nation moves." Now the women are awakened by the self help groups.

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