

**WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:
A STUDY OF SELF HELP GROUPS IN THIRUVALLUR DISTRICT**

**Thesis submitted to the
UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

IN

ECONOMICS

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DECEMBER 2014

CHAPTER - VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In India, entrepreneurship has been recognized as an essential force of development in rural areas. Women entrepreneurship has emerged as a strategy designed to improve the social and economic life of a specific section of people, i.e., the rural poor women. It mainly focuses extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. Rural entrepreneurship is also integrating the low income segments with the rest of rural community by ensuring them a better participation in a more required share in the benefits of developments. Rural entrepreneurship not only speed up economic growth but also provides jobs and improve the quality of rural life towards self- sustenance.

Empowerment literally means 'becoming powerful'. 'Empowerment can refer to user participation and to the self-help movement generally in which groups take action on their behalf either in corporation with or independently.' SHG is a homogenous group of poor people, women etc. This group is a voluntary one formed on areas of common interest to organize and operates for their development. SHG function on the basis of co-operative principles and provides a forum for members to extent support to each other. It is considered as an empowerment tool. SHGs organize very poor who do not have easy access to financial system in the organized sector, normally transparency and accountability are lacking. However, in a group like SHG, they are ensured through collective action of the members. SHGs that are in existence for about 6 months and have demonstrated the potential of a viable group

cohesion enters the third stage, where in it receives the revolving fund of Rs. 20,000 from banks as cash facility and also embarks on further capacity of its entire team. DRDA will arrange to provide the revolving fund to such groups, meeting their share from out of the SGSY fund of this a sum of Rs.10, 000 will be given to the DRDA. Banks may charge interest only on the sum exceeding Rs.10, 000 and the subsidy of Rs.10, 000 released by DRDA will be adjusted as the loan at the end of cash credit period on the request of the group. After getting the approval of district SGSY committee the concerned bank may adjust the subsidy against the swarozgaris dues, if the bank is able to realize amount due to it, the same may be returned to the DRDA.

The most needed and critical training input is the product opportunities guidance. Women have shown a tendency to select their home-made products without conducting a detailed market survey. Training inputs include development of special skills to survey the market and assess products feasibility. Training should include interactions with support and funding agencies to develop their knowledge and confidence, these interactions should be structured so that SHGs women derive real benefits from it.

In order to remove the fear of development technology, they should also be exposed to survey these technology development further they should also meet existing women entrepreneurs to understand their entrepreneurial role and decision-making processes. Training inputs should take care of these aspects. In rural areas, the women micro entrepreneurs continue to produce the traditional designs for local markets. Women in SHGs produce a large variety of essential products such as milk, food products, village crafts and homemade snacks. Many are engaged in retail trading of groceries and textiles. These enterprises represent a substantial supply resource for semi urban and urban market. SHGs are also viable organized setup to disburse micro credit to the needy

entrepreneur women and encouraging poverty alleviation activities and programmes.

Suryamani (1996) has observed that the key to success of SHGs are small group size, informal structure, demand driven objectives to form the groups, homogeneity in character of members, simple guiding principles and operational principles, election of office bearers for fixed terms. Puhazhendi (2000) asserted that participation of women in SHGs made significant contribution on their empowerment both in social and economic aspects. The women members were able to increase their income level manifold and contribute to the development of the family. In the process, many women members expressed that they were participating in the financial decisions of the family, which they were not allowed during the pre-SHG linkage period. The connection between poverty and women's lack of power over resources and decision-making has now caught the attention of policymakers in government and mainstream development all over the world.

Women empowerment issues perceived nationally or locally are being addressed by both state and non-state agencies. Beside the government intervention, NGOs are implementing various types of economic empowerment programmes including income-generating programmes. Income generating programme delivered by the NGOs enhances women empowerment through decision making capacity in personal and family life.

According to Amartya Sen women empowerment as an approach is concerned with the basic development ideas, namely advancing the richness of human life rather than the richness of the economy in which human being live, which is only a part of it. The emancipation of women is an essential pre-requisite for economic development and social progress of the nation. The SHGs

had inculcated a great confidence in the minds of rural women to succeed in their day to day life. As observed by Amartya Sen, a number of evidences exist to substantiate the argument that whenever social and economic arrangements depart from the standard and traditional practices of male ownership, women can seize business and economic opportunities and initiatives with much success. Further, it is also evidently clear that the result of women's enhanced and empowered position and participation are not only generate income from women and their family but also provide way for many other social and economic benefits such as awareness, better education, health, sanitation and environmental conditions. In this context, the remarkable success of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh must be noteworthy, which has been replicated with necessary modification to suit the local conditions in several countries including India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Mozambique, and Zambia etc. In these countries, the women empowerment programme has expanded with more awareness, literacy, women's involvement and participation at greater level in social and economic activities outside the home. Similarly in India, Tamil Nadu took a lead in implementing a number of poverty alleviation programmes particularly MahalirThittam to economically empower the women folk.

Earlier, the SHGs faced a major challenging problem of finding the market for their goods. But this problem is now solved in many ways. On the one side, diversification of training in different skill and trade as well as enterprises has proved much worth as it has put an end to producing similar goods by many groups. So, number of goods and services produced by SHGs have increased in number and found viable markets. Again, at various levels starting from taluks and at district headquarters and state level SHG market complexes have been established to market the SHG products. Further, by utilizing information technology, Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of

Women Ltd has started a web site, i.e. www.ruralbazar.com in which all the SHG products have been catalogued and e-mail address of the project implementation unit is given. As a result, direct interface with customer and SHG producer has been made possible through on line which increased the marketability of SHG products.

It is true that Tamil Nadu Women's Development Project has made a humble beginning in 2 blocks of Dharmapuri district in 1989 as an IFAD assisted project. When initiated, the principal objective of this pilot project has been the empowerment of rural women by socially mobilizing them into organization of self-help groups. The tremendous success of this pilot women empowerment project resulted in extending it to all the parts of Tamil Nadu in a phased manner including Chennai city. Due to this enhanced awareness of women in Tamil Nadu, it is claimed that a silent socio-economic and cultural revolution is going on, which would soon ensure that "there will be no poor women in Tamil Nadu, but only women in the process of enriching themselves". Self-Help Group has brought new opportunities for work and earnings, coupled with enhanced skills in the economic spheres as well as created opportunities for leadership, control and decision-making, and women can now lay claim to a space of their own in the economic arena. Women are able to cross boundaries across caste and class and pose a challenge to the state in its delivery of services. Political interests are also recognizing the potential power of women's collective and seek their patronage.

For the better understanding of the women entrepreneur, the impact of self-help group on their economic empowerment and other such related issues an attempt has been made to review the existing literature on this subject. The available literature shows that women entrepreneurship is area specific. As such Nalini. A and Suja Chanamban has studied North-Eastern Region and she has

observed that different types of women entrepreneurs are doing business according to the local conditions, availability of raw material and according to the state government policies which promotes entrepreneurship. Similarly Anil Kumar Thakur and Rahman have studied women entrepreneurs in the urban context. They observed that death of the bread winner of the family seems to be one of the pushing factor and women desire to start an enterprise in want of equality and economic independence seems to be the pulling factor for the women to start the enterprise. These authors have also categorically described changing dimensions of women entrepreneurship starting from 1950s to the dawn of 21st century.

In yet another study Minitriti .M Koppal have studied the market processes and enterprises. In their study the authors have emphasized that the entrepreneurship must be studied in a multi-disciplinary and comparative perspectives as it touches all the human behavior. Similar attempt has been made by Lalitha to study the success of grass root entrepreneurship particularly the women self-help groups. She has suggested that the women self-help group must be engaged in adoption of new scientific methods and available technologies for income generation activities which will improve their economic wealth.

Now we will discuss the dynamics of economic empowerment activities undertaken by self-help groups in Thiruvallur district. There are more than 5000 Self Help Groups in Thiruvallur district. Among them 3700 groups have been linked through Mahalir Thittam and Pudu Vazhvu Thittam with the banks. There have been 300 block level groups which have been trained for mobilizing women for entrepreneurship. The women groups after acquiring skill training for the entrepreneurship development have engaged in various entrepreneurial activities such as manufacturing of paper cup, jute bags, leather and Rexene goods, catering activities, embroidery and tailoring works, brick making, herbal

products, candle and phenol making, washing powder and agarbathimaking, screen-printing, note book making, involving in handloom and power loom activities, producing of artificial jewellery, running provisional stores, running canteen at various public offices on contract basis, producing palm leaf goods and decorative toys and paper products.

In Thiruvallur district, for SHGs from the initial stage onwards self-help group training is given which consist of four modules for four days. During the training period how to form the group, mobilize people, the benefit of saving, peer responsibilities, book-keeping, accounting and awareness about banking activities are imparted to them. Mostly these trainings are conducted by NGOs, Government and bank officials. The attendees are given a stipend of rupees 45 per day. After the entrepreneurship development training was given for 4 weeks for the interested women by the reputed training institutions on various trade and economic activities. Rupees 25 per days is given as stipend to the participants. Similarly, after acquiring the training in particular trade or skill, the skill up gradation is specialized training is given for two months by the training institutions to start economic activities. During these period rupees 5000 is given to the trainees. After training, the trainees are linked with bank and based on requirement loan is given to start an enterprise.

In Thiruvallur district more than 20,000 members from Self Help Groups have been trained for starting entrepreneurial activities. In Thiruttani block the self-help group members are running a public distribution shop in Thiruttani town. Similarly, in 40 places SHGs have undertaken these activities. Both the government and bank officials motivate them to undertake entrepreneur activities. Now, the Pudhu Vazhvu Thittam also encourages SHG members to start small enterprises for their livelihood.

Now we shall analyze how a SHG member after becoming an entrepreneur expressed various opinions. The empirical data collected from women entrepreneurs through field study in Thiruvallur district reveals several interesting dimensions. The socio economic background of the respondents reveals that a considerable size of entrepreneurs from SHGs is in the age group of 36 to 60 years; because, only in this stage most of the family commitments are fulfilled like children's education, construction of own house, expecting social status and so on.

As far as education level is concerned, even the illiterates are engaged in small entrepreneurial activities like vegetable vendors, grocery shop owners etc., there are 33 percent respondents fall in this category. Another 28 percent respondents are educated up to primary school level. Yet another 36 percent respondents seem to have educated up to high school level. They have been engaged in actively in entrepreneurial activity. They are higher in numbers compare to other groups. Only 3 percent highly educated i.e., up to college level education have engaged in this activities.

Another interesting fact is that more than 85 percent of the women are married and another 5 percent are coming under the category of widow or separated. Thus it seems that more married women are in the SHGs and engaged in entrepreneurial activities. At the occupational side, 59 percent of SHG members are from self-employed category, and again 37.75 percent husbands of these women are self-employed. Another 30.50 percent husbands are daily wage earners. These facts reveal that most of the self-help group women and their husbands are either self-employed or daily bread winners. Therefore, the poor family condition motivates them to join SHG and engage in entrepreneurial activities.

One more interesting fact is that, more than 52 percent respondents said that they joined SHG to save the money and become economically independent. For these women, the government and bank officials followed by non-governmental organizations and friends living in neighborhoods remained as motivating factors to join the group. Majority of the group members i.e., 76 percent save not less than 200 rupees per month which will be important source of internal lending and helps in grading the groups for bank linkages and getting loans.

Support from family and the group members are necessary for the effective functioning of SHGs. As such 87.5 percent respondents acknowledged that they always get support from group members. Another important finding is that, 36.3 respondents confirmed that the self-help group and the training given to them have provided more confidence. Similarly, another 32 percent viewed that the training has provided exposure to new ideas. And again 20.5 percent respondents viewed that training has given them specific skills. Therefore, they are engaged in entrepreneurial activities.

As far as an economic activity is concerned, 85.5 percent told that they could get loans at less rate of interest. Most of the respondents viewed that after becoming SHG member it is easy to repay the loan and money is readily available. The interaction with the respondents reveals the fact that in Thiruvallur district particularly in our study more than 96 percent women have repaid their loan within the stipulated time. To become entrepreneur it is necessary that the women must get bank loan to start an economic activity. In this context, 59 percent woman confirmed the fact that they are linked with Banks and availed loans from bank already, which helps them in economic empowerment processes.

Another dimension revealed by this study is that more than 51 percent respondent have depended on external financial sources i.e., local money lenders for their emergency needs or economic activities before joining the SHGs. Here it must be noted that they have to pay a huge amount as interest, whereas after joining self-help group this trend has inversely changed. Now 86.5 percent women self-help group members said that they depend mostly on SHG for their credit needs.

Another notable point is that, more than 93 percent respondents have agreed that their social and economic status has increased a lot. As they are now economically independent, self-employed and not depend on money lenders and they could spend more money for their children, health of the family and so on. Besides, the skill training, the support from their own self-help group members, the respect they get from government and bank officials -all have boosted their morale. And they are now very confident to face any critical situation with the help and guidance of SHGs.

Yet another interesting observation is that, nearly two - third of the respondents opined that, they are not gender wise discriminated, which does not exist before they join the groups. As far as economic empowerment is concerned, nearly 92 percent respondents accepted that joining the self-help groups have enhanced their economic conditions. Among the total respondents 69.5 percent opined that due to self-help group their economic condition has improved to some extent. Similarly 22.5 percent consider that SHGs have very much improved their economic condition. More than 83 percent respondents agreed that after joining self-help group they are able to manage their credit needs in a better manner. Which means the economic condition is better now.

Formation of self-help groups and becoming member in self-help groups, going for training and attending orientation programmes – all will not improve women's' socio economic condition. They have to engage in some economically productive activities or entrepreneurial activities, which only will improve their economic condition. In our study it is found that, a considerable size of women self-help group members i.e., 71.5 percent have already undertaken entrepreneurial activities, either individually or as part of group activities. In this regard, among the total of 400 respondents 61 percent have undergone entrepreneurial training.

To be economically strong an entrepreneur must have opportunity for marketing their products. It seems that Thiruvallur district as adjoined with Chennai; most of the products produced by self-help groups find their way in the exhibitions and sales-mela of SHG products in Chennai city. Here it must be noted that, 72 percent respondents have acknowledged that they are able to market their products without much difficulties.

As far as economic activities undertaken by the self-help group members, it is found that 97 percent respondents are either fully satisfied or to some extent satisfied with the activities undertaken by their groups. Hence they are co-operative and getting benefit out of their economic activities. This opinion is reflected when more than 97 percent have opined that due to the successful functioning of self-help groups their economic condition have also improved. The women entrepreneurs of Thiruvallur District taken for the study have enterprising spirit, responsibility, deep sense of involvement and have already proved their worth by entering into business enterprises and being successful, though on a limited scale. Improvement in both quality and quantity of women entrepreneurs is the need of the hour.

Women contribution to the economy remains significantly invisible in national accounts. Although a certain degree of statistical invisibility of women in the economy is a global phenomenon, it is particularly predominant in India and other South Asian nations due to their orthodox socio cultural milieu.

By ensuring provisions of training, employment and income generation activities with both forward and backward linkages will lead the ultimate objective of making all women economically independent and self-reliant. Eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus enable women to enjoy not only de jure but also de facto rights and fundamental freedom on par with men in all spheres, viz., political, economic, social, civil, cultural etc.

Empowering women entrepreneurs' initiatives is an unabashed global celebration of microfinance, entrepreneurial culture, and economic freedom as elements of an integrated women's economic empowerment system explicitly designed to empower women around the world. We envision a world overflowing with peace and prosperity, co-generated through the entrepreneurial energy of women in developing countries, the market place and a conscious culture of communication and collaboration with women and men around the world.

Suggestions

1. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
2. Organize literacy classes for members of Self-Help Group at their locality during the leisure hours.

3. The senior-most member of Self-Help Groups must be encouraged to dissolve differences among junior-most members of Self-Help Groups.
4. Establish at least one resource center each block to conduct training programmers and create environmental building for promoting local-based products in urban markets.
5. The bankers should advise the microfinance institutions to fix a low rate of interest; defaulters must not be victimized by physical torture.
6. The women in maximum number must be encouraged to participate in village developmental activities by providing compulsory reservation in local bodies.
7. Introduction of standardized accounting practice and auditing systems for SHGs.
8. Involvement of SHGs in mass national programme like pulse polio, literacy campaign, population control, district primary education project etc.
9. Encouragement to matured SHGs having suitable resources to graduate to micro-enterprises.
10. Allocation of special fund by banks for supporting NGOs training and enterprise building for SHG members.
11. The NABARD and other financial institutions should evolve a strategy to control the harassment by microfinance institutions to recover amount from defaulting members.

12. Gender budgeting to be ensured in all departments and policies and programmes to be framed for women by considering it.
13. Use of ICT facilities to empower women must be integrated with different development agencies and to make it available at grassroots level to facilitate and to reach the unreached.
