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SELF HELP GROUP SCHEME: A CATALYTIC AGENT TO PROMOTE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

P.NAGESWARI ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN COMMERCE SRI PARASAKTHI COLLEGE FOR WOMEN COURTALLAM

ABSTRACT

It is good to feel and witness the fruits of growth in the economy. Meanwhile, it is disheartening that there are growing social problems affecting us in our everyday life. Growth in standard of living without peace is meaningless. Hence, there arises the need for proactive measures to identify, to tackle and to end the social issues. For this to happen, we need an entirely new set of entrepreneurship viz., Social Entrepreneurs. Many individuals by themselves are turned into social entrepreneurs out of sheer anger due to the injustice caused to the downtrodden. The number of such individuals turned into social entrepreneurs is not sufficient when looking into the quantum of issues in our society. Hence, efforts must be taken to involve many people. Self Help group scheme is the one which is successful in turning its members not only into business entrepreneurs but also social entrepreneurs. This article outlines how social issues can be successfully tackled by self help group women.

KEYWORDS

self help group, social entrepreneur, social issues.

INTRODUCTION

ational prosperity is not inherited – but created – said Michael Porter. Prosperity of a nation or a state or a village largely depends upon competitiveness of its economy. Competitive economy cannot be created in isolation; it has to be created through a well-planned process aided by flawless execution. Planning aspect will always be superb as far as India is concerned. But the well defined plans are not yielding desired results due to their poor execution. In order to execute the plans aiming to bring about prosperity of poor, to fix accountability, to provide incentives to performance, to complete tasks on time and within budgeted cost and to the satisfaction of the beneficiaries, the awareness level of people should be raised. To raise the awareness of people, a new bandwagon of entrepreneurs viz., Social Entrepreneurs are required.

CONCEPT OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Social Entrepreneurship refers to the activity undertaken by individuals with innovative solution to society's most pressing social problems. Social Entrepreneurs are mass recruiters of local change makers. They are the role model proving that citizens who channel their passion into action can do almost anything.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

A social enterprise or the social dimensions of the initiatives should have following features:

- An initiative launched by a group of citizen.
- A decision making power not based on capital ownership.
- A participatory nature, which involves the persons affected by the activities.
- Limited profit drive.
- An explicit aim to benefit the community.

CONCEPT OF SHG

Self Help Group is a group with an average size of about 15 people from a homogeneous class formed to save and mutually agree to contribute common fund to be lent to its members as per group decision for their socio-economic development.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SELF HELP GROUP

Well functioning SHGs should have the following structural features.

- An ideal SHG comprises 15-20 members.
- All members should belong to the same socio-economic strata of society
- Group should have strong band of affinity.
- Rotational leadership should be encouraged for distribution of power and to provide leadership opportunities to all.
- To provide gainful employment to involve the poor in productive activities.
- To involve women in decision making to promote leadership qualities among women.
- SHG should be socially viable institution.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHG SCHEME AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There is a close linkage between SHGs and Social Entrepreneurship on looking into the common characteristics both of them viz., Group activity, participatory decision making, benefiting the community, limited profit drive etc.

SHG SCHEME AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The members of SHGs can be termed as Social Entrepreneurs since their participation in the scheme has helped in addressing various social problems. The rural women who were mere spectators of social problems were turned into specialists in tackling the social issues through the constant encouragement of NGOs, Government Departments and follow groups. The issues that can be tackled successfully are:

- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Social Injustice
- Communal disharmony
- Inadequate Infrastructure
- Exploitation by politicians

The following pages discuss how SHG scheme laid a ground to tackle the above social problems through inculcation of social entrepreneurship among its members.

SOCIAL ISSUES AND SELF HELP GROUPS

a) POVERTY

SHG Scheme form groups among poorest of the poor and induce them to save very small amount thus a corpus fund created internally is in turn utilized to meet the immediate financial needs of its members. Thus the habit of savings and availability of cheap loans from the corpus fund they create brings the households out of poverty. They are saved from the clutches of money lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates and keep borrowers as borrowers always. Micro finance, banking the unbankables, granting credit to millions of people without collateral also is a financial service available to members of Self Help Groups. With micro credit they can start micro enterprises and can uplift their economic status.

Thus the members of the Self Help Group can be termed as social entrepreneurs due to their initiative to be part of SHG schemes and thereby tackling the social issue "Poverty".

b) UNEMPLOYMENT

SHG Scheme aim at imparting skill training, entrepreneurial development training etc... Liberal bank loans and marketing assistance are also provided to them. Thus ground work is laid through self help group scheme to enable members to take up entrepreneurial ventures. Thus women who were home makers are turned into job-creators. The employment avenues become more and the family members of the group and the villagers stand to gain employment.

Thus the members of SHG started tackling the social issue "unemployment" by undertaking ventures through the assistance by SHG Scheme.

c) SOCIAL INJUSTICE

The Self Help Group Scheme aims at forming groups amongst women residing in the same locality. Hence, there is every chance for women to come out in open and discuss their problems. Women are exposed to torture by their spouse and family members, pressure under the custom of dowry, Social harassment at workplace, denial of basic facilities like water and misuse of benefits meant for their benefit introduced by government. Synergy in ideas, strategy and action plans to tackle social injustice caused to them, emerge in the meetings held periodically at village and block levels. They can put pressure through their joint effort on authorities viz.,government officials, police, and panchayats to execute their duties. SHG members are not showing hesitation to take weapons like filling petition, staging rallies and blockades and skillful negotiation to fight against social injustice.

Thus the members of SHGs act as social entrepreneurs.

d) COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Indian society is plagued with caste system. The SHG scheme reduces communal tension. The NGO's having wide development focus make participation across castes a condition of their programme. As part of a deliberate strategy, this takes persistence, time and a lot of convincing by field staff. It leads to some degree of interaction across castes including SCs and different sub-castes. Such a group when formed and have its strong base will aid in social harmony. The marginalized will gain confidence and certain prejudices will be broken. Thus the traditional attitudes and divisions are bridged by SHGs having mixed caste membership and through joint action across groups of different castes.

Thus the members of SHGs shoulder the responsibility to maintain communal peace, harmony and amity in the villages and be termed as social entrepreneurs.

e) DENIAL OF POWER

Women who were confined within the four walls of a house are not given their due share in decision making in family, community etc. This issue is solved through Self Help Group scheme. Self Help Group women have more chances to acquire political power by contesting elections. The exploitation by politicians and government officials will be put to an end if the credible and hardworking member of a group gains political power with the support of other members. The political status may improve the importance of the women in the community and family. Further, Self Help Group women acquire in- house decision making power because they add to the income of the family by involving themselves in economic activities.

Thus the scheme helps the women members to acquire power in the family and society.

f) POOR INFRASTRUCTURE

SHGs have been involving in uplifting the infrastructure of the village by contributing finance and labour. As a result, the following developmental work takes place in the village community without government intervention.

- Improvement in water resource through construction of water tanks and installation of hand pumps.
- Laying village roads
- Construction of Community Halls.
- Setting up parks

Thus Self Help Group members can be termed as social entrepreneurs bringing about improvement in infrastructure in their own place of dwelling.

CONCLUSION

Social Entrepreneurs created in huge members through Self Help Group scheme are sure to bring about a turnaround growth and development in the society with ever lasting peace and harmony.

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