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ROLE OF SELF-HELP GROUP IN PROMOTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREA: A CASE STUDY OF DHEKIAJULI REGION

Dr. T. KAYE

PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY

DOIMUKH

SRI K. L. BHATTACHARJEE

ASST. PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

RANGIA COLLEGE

RANGIA

ABSTRACT

A self help group (SHG) is a registered or unregistered group of micro entrepreneurs with homogenous social and economic background voluntarily coming together with an average size of 15 people. They are encouraged to make voluntary thrift on a regular basis. They use these pooled resources to make smaller interest bearing loans to their members in addition to engage themselves in productive activities. This process helps them imbibe the essentials of financial intermediation and to take part in the effort of inclusive financing. The SHG-Bank linkage scheme has proved its efficacy as a main stream programme to cater to the neglected group of society such as woman, poor and deprived sections for availing formal financial services. With a view to evolving supplementary credit strategies for reaching the unreached rural poor in the rural areas SHGs plays innovative role in giving hope to the poor through providing credit, thus furthering rural development in the society.

KEYWORDS

SHG-Bank linkage, financial inclusion, microfinance, microcredit, poverty alleviation, rural area, self help group.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusion of economically poor and weaker section of the society under the system of economic and financial empowerment has remained as an area of big challenge in India since the beginning of the first five year plan that was initiated in 1952. Various schemes and programmes were formulated and introduced for alleviation of the economic fortune of the socio-economically downtrodden people of the society since the national independence. But, any such programme rarely succeeded in establishing socio-economic equity in our country. Poverty is a product of socio-economic inequality, lack of percolation of economic benefit achieved by a nation up to the lowest strata of the society. In all the developing countries of the world including India poverty is considered as the biggest social problem that deters them from their targeted developmental programmes. In the highly populous South-East Asiatic countries of the world which constitute one-third of the world population, the countries are struggling for removal of poverty and the great sunk of their annual budget aim at providing food, shelter, and education and health facilities to their poverty-stricken masses.

Microfinance is an institutional finance provider to the micro-enterprises, small enterprises, and poor households in the rural and informal sectors of developing countries. The inability of the formal banking system to cater the significant demand for financial services in the rural areas including the basic financial services such as safe savings and short – term credit for both productive activities and consumption has led to the emergence of microfinance as an innovative and experimental tool.

For operationalisation of microfinance and credit institution in the rural areas required formation of institutions within the easy reach of the poor. To fulfill such a need the concept of Self- Help Groups (SHGs) came up. A SHG is defined as- a voluntary group valuing personal interaction and mutual aid as means of altering or ameliorating problems perceived as alterable, pressing and personal by most of its participants. Over the last few years, the self help approach has been utilized in a growing number of projects and programmes. As Kirsches report in their study, the World Bank as the main source of finance for SHGs in the field of rural development. The SHG serve as both financial service institutions cum micro level employment generation units. Interestingly, the SHGs are the smallest financial institutions that serve a variety of support facilities for economic up liftmen of the poor people. The parametric and non- parametric support areas of a SHG are-

1. Helps the poor to save small amount of money on monthly basis and deposit in the SHG account helping them to develop saving habit and to utilize the fund collection for productive and income generating activities.
2. To inculcate a collective or co-operative mind set along with interdependency for fund, creativity, designed market etc. within their area of living. Such an intention of the SHGs also enhances social bonding.
3. Helps the poor people to identify their skill and the way to contribute to their personal and to the national economy.
4. To provide scope to make effective use of public aid provided in the form of collective government contribution for community economic activities.
5. To make the SHG a democratic institution to be created, contributed and managed by the contributors themselves through a policy instrument created by them. Such mode of operation makes the contributors, public members to realize their community responsibility and rule.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study is designed and preceded on the basis of the following objectives:

1. To assess the different activities of Self-Help Groups in socio- economic welfare of its members.
2. To study the role of Self- Help Group in promoting microfinance activities in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

In the present study data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Collection of primary data was made by personal interview with the office bearers and the members of various self-help groups of Dhekiajuli sub- division. The secondary information was collected from the published annual reports of NABARD, DRDA, Banks, NGOs and various journals, articles etc. concerned with the study area.

There is around 200 Self- Help Groups functioning in the study area. It is being a cumbersome to study the entire Self-Help Groups in the study area, 10 such Self-Help Groups are selected through stratified random sampling method for the present study. The fact and figures of the sample Self- Help Groups for the last four years from 2010 to 2016 has been considered for the present study.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF SELF- HELP GROUPS OF THE STUDY AREA

The self-help groups are mostly located in rural areas of Dhekiajuli sub- division of Sonitpur district, Assam. In the present study the self- help groups are selected exclusively from the rural areas of the study area. These SHGs were formed between 2003 to 2016. The members size of these SHGs are between 10 to 20. These SHGs are registered under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). The selected SHGs for the said study were started with main objectives of providing economic benefits to the members including creation of employment, up gradation of their standard of living. The members of these SHGs are charged from Rs.10 to Rs.50 as an admission fees during the initial period along with share money of Rs. 10 to Rs. 50 per head. The collected money from the members is deposited in the respective bank accounts of the SHGs. The Self – Help Groups of Dhekiajuli region are playing an important role in inducting positive changes in standard of living of the members. They have taken various socio- economic and welfare decisions through which they can upgrade their standard of living to a considerable extent. The following table illustrates various socio-economic and welfare measures taken up by various self help groups of the study area.

TABLE 1: DIFFERENT SOCIO- ECONOMIC AND WELFARE ACTIVITIES TAKEN UP BY THE SHGS

Sl. No.	Name of SHGs	Quantum of internal loan disbursement (in Rs.)	Total profit (in Rs.)	Association with Bank account/insurance policy cover	Category of utilization of amenity	Utilisation in other welfare activities
01	Kamala SHG	30500	17000	All have bank a/c, insurance policies taken(2)	purchase CTV(2)	
02	Mamoni SHG	21000	5000	All have bank a/c	purchased furniture	Donate for Marriage
03	Nomal SHG	11000	6300	All have bank a/c, insurance policies taken(5)		
04	Ankur SHG	31900	24000	All have bank a/c	Construct pucca house (1)	
05	Parijat SHG	22400	21600	All have bank a/c	purchased utensils(2)	
06	Maa Mahila SHG	45000	21600	All have bank a/c, insurance policies(2)	Taken Electricity line	
07	Pranati SHG	18000	16800	All have bank a/c	Purchase CTV(2)	Donate for Edn(1)
08	Trishna SHG	22000	27000	All have bank a/c	Construct house	
09	Shakti SHG	35000	12000	All have bank a/c	Purchase mobile	
10	Bina SHG	42800	3000	All have bank a/c, insurance policy (2)	Purchase ceiling Fan	Donate for temple
	Total	279600	154300			

Source: Primary

The various socio- economic welfare activities undertaken by the members of various SHGs of the study area to which loan is sanctioned and share of profit received by the members is presented in Table- 1. It is reflected from the table that the members of the various SHGs actively participate in promoting socio-economic welfare of the society as well as for themselves. All the studied SHGs taken together have sanctioned and disbursed a total of Rs. 279600 as loan and shared on average 60% of profit by its member beneficiaries for undertaking different socio-economic as well as welfare activities for up gradation of their standard of living by acquisition of durable goods for household uses like purchasing color television, fan, furniture, getting electricity connection, construct houses etc. Many member beneficiaries have contributed individually to the society by adopting various welfare activities. Some of them could also extend financial help to the needy section of the society.

TABLE 2: SOURCES OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION OF SHGS

Sl. No.	Name of SHGs	Sources of fund			Utilization of fund (in Rs.)	Activity undertaken	Employment generation (in persons)
		Contribution (in Rs.)	Bank Loan (in Rs.)	Interest received (in Rs.)			
01	Kamala SHG	54000	50000	5490	56798	Monetary business	NIL
02	Mamoni SHG	36000	20000	3780	30756	Goatery	2
03	Nomal SHG	2880	20000	330	20846	Monetary business	NIL
04	Ankur SHG	12000	65000	4785	66757	Monetary business	NIL
05	Parijat SHG	28800	20000	2688	85400	Piggery	4
06	Maa Mahila SHG	21600	165000	2700	108000	Poultry Firm	2
07	Pranati SHG	6720	115000	720	62724	Monetary business	NIL
08	Trishna SHG	18000	120000	880	74376	Goatery	NIL
09	Shakti SHG	8640	170000	2100	93620	Beauty parlour	3
10	Bina SHG	14400	270000	2700	126140	Monetary business	NIL
	Total	203040	1015000	26173	725417		11

Source: Primary

Table -2 indicates that the studied self- help groups have mobilized a total fund of Rs. 12,44,213 including membership contribution of Rs. 2,03,040, loan from bank and other financial institutions of Rs. 1015000 and interest earning of Rs.26173 from internal lending during the last six years from 01-04-2010 to 31-03-2016. The fund is utilized for granting internal loan, distribution of share of profit, share of loan amount etc. It is found that the studied SHGs earned Rs. 26,173 as an interest from loan and advances sanctioned to its members. The utilization of fund is also found to be encouraging which accounts for 58.30 percent of the total fund of Rs.12,44,213. It is observed that 50% of the studied SHGs are involved with monetary business and rest of 50% appears to carry out economic activities. It is also observed that the studied 10 SHGs are able to provide employment to 11non – members indicating that an individual SHG is found to be capable to generate employment one non-member. Further, the studied self- help groups are playing an important role in rural economic development by creating employment opportunities, undertaking various economic activities and above all as a microfinance institution.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The capital base and financial position of the studied SHGs have found to be gaining strength as function as a microfinance institution;
2. The SHGs are using the fund in a very encouraging way in economic activities as also in providing loan to the group members. The total loan amount of all the studied SHGs is Rs. 2, 79,600 from 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2016. This shows that SHGs are generating micro financial character spontaneously;
3. All the groups collect substantial fund in the form of interest both from the members and the banks. The total interest received by the studied SHGs between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2016 is Rs.26, 173 which is encouraging as micro financial institutions;
4. All the SHGs have disbursed about 60% of their revenue as dividend to their members up to 31st March 2016.This dividend became helpful for the individual groups as well as for individual members. They are able to enhance their standard of living promoting infrastructural development with the help of dividend provided;

5. With the help of loan amount many group members have started various business operation like goatery, piggery, poultry firm etc. which show that many members have secured the path of economic development;
6. The most noticeable aspect of the studied SHGs is that these groups are able to provide employment opportunities to 11 persons within a time span of 7 years. As a micro financial entity such achievement is undoubtedly promising and
7. The most significant aspect is that the SHGs not only generate employment opportunity by their economic activities but 50% SHGs serve as exclusive bankers by their involvement in traditional monetary business. Such business provides self-dependency particularly to the rural housewives. Earlier they need to depend on others for their monetary requirements.

CONCLUSION

The role of Self- Help Groups (SHGs) in economic development of rural masses is highly significant as the role of all women SHGs in socio- economic empowerment and capacity building of the poorest and the most disadvantaged women-folk cannot be underrated. The healthy growth and rapid development of the SHG can be achieved through a strong partnership with banks, NABARD and NGOs. Provision of systematic training to the members, financial help through internal lending, experience sharing through federation of SHGs and sustainability through participatory approach may act as catalyst for the sustainability of women SHGs throughout the world. The development of proper mechanism for evaluation of performance of SHGs is needed to identify the reasons for non- performing or less performing groups and to take appropriate action to improve their functioning. The SHGs of the study area are found to be exemplary self-help groups in promoting microfinance institution and raising socio- economic and political status of women.

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