



WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN CREDIT COOPERATIVE AN EMPOWERMENT IN TAMIL NADU, INDIA

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ABSTRACT The question of women empowerment consists of numerous nuances. Though the primary perspective continues to be the empowerment of the self, yet the process of self-actualization is largely dependent on a number of other factors including the complex interplay of societal forces and factors. "Empowerment of women is a multi-dimensional process, which should enable the individuals or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It also provides incisive and rare insights to the process of women empowerment. Studied from the perspective of a women led cooperative society (Self Help Groups) that sought to provide increased income to its members through number of works, the study provides a fascinating glimpse to the subsequent changes in the inter personal relationship and self-esteem among the women members.

KEYWORDS : Empowerment, Cooperative, Association, and Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

INTRODUCTION

"Train a man and you train an individual, Train a woman and you build a nation"

- Mahatma Gandhi.

He states that the position of women in the society is an index of its civilization.

"To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves."

-Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process which should enable individuals (or) a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It consist of greater access to knowledge and resources greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives (or) have greater control over the circumstances that influences their life and free them from shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice (Pillai, J. K., 1995).

Empowering women does not mean to give women the power to control on others (or) dominate others rather in reality it is to empower themselves. According to the country report of Government of India (1995), in the Fourth World Congress on Women, Beijing 1995, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to own power. It would promote women's inherent strength and positive self-image."

Empowerment is multi-faceted; multi-dimensional concept empowerment of women begins when she became aware of socio-psycho-cultural injustice that is being done to her and economic and political forces that are affecting her adversely in every sphere of her life. It starts when she became fully aware of her positive self-image, self-esteem, positive rights and duties, of her capabilities (De, U. K., & Ghosh, B. N., 2004). "Empowerment in the real sense not only includes improvement in quality of life, quality of life doesn't necessarily follow with rising money incomes, longer life spans (which form the conventional yardsticks of progress and development). A Women may live in the midst of material comforts in a luxurious palace, and yet to be powerless in terms of self-assertion or autonomy over her own life. It is therefore not so much the percentage and statistical figures that I want to spot light but also evidences of the kind of increasing autonomy that empowers women as individual in their own right, with entitlements in terms of dignity and decision-making prerogatives."

Also, women empowerment is not only ensuring power, it is about realizing the power which is already found within women. Empowerment is received broadly as increasing poor people's freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives (Narayan-Parker, D. (Ed.), 2005). It is the process of enhancing an individual's (or) groups capacity to make effective choices and transform those choice into desired action and outcome.

Empowerment is multi-dimensional and refers to the expansion of

freedom of choice and actions of all spheres (socio, economic, and political) to shape one's life. It also implies control over resources and decisions. On the other hand, "Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life."

In the words of C.B.Asphy & D.S.Sandhu, (1999), "Empowerment is defined as the process of gaining control over one's own life while supporting and facilitating others' control over their lives". The World Bank also defines the term 'empowerment' as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcome".

Health becomes an important factor to achieve total development of human beings. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) a positive health status is defined as, "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Women's empowerment means that women no matter where they are healthy, have enough for their needs, their own survival and that of their family and community, to be able to live with dignity, live and work in safe and caring environment, which allows their growth and holistic development i.e., physically, emotionally, socially, economically." (Shiva, 2001). "The key to women's empowerment is recognition and enforcement of women's human rights (Sujata Manohar, 2001)." In the light of 'equality before the law' and 'equal protection of the law,' the legal experts want to bring down all kinds of legal discrimination against women. Without the establishment of women's legal rights and human social order women's real empowerment will be a distant dream "being able to make a contribution at all levels of society and not just in the home (Griffin, V, 1987)."

Central to this process is actions which both build individual and collective assets and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets (World Bank). It may be recalled that the year 2001 has been declared as the "International Women's Empowerment Year" by the United Nations. Simultaneously the Government of India has also recognized the same year as Women's Empowerment year. The issue of women empowerment no doubt is closely associated with women's development. In UNDP South-Asia Human Development Report (2000), empowerment have been defined in women context, at compromising increased power in economic, social and political realms and consider this in conjunction with women identification of their own problems and needs. Empowerment of women has been recognized as the key route for development of any society. This is true in case of agrarian societies where women have often be neglected and their potential has remained untapped. The paradigm shift from women as recipients of state bonanza to agency approach where women are considered equal to men capable of contributing to the economic development is the recent occurrence in the development area. Women empowerment has become an important aspect in present scenario. Women play a major role in urban area and rural area development. Government of India has also taken many steps to empower women in India. Government policies and Regulation alone cannot make any difference in improvement of status, power,

enforcement of women in rural India and urban. It is in individual aspect of acceptance and motivation of women to empower themselves in socio- economic and cultural field. Empowerment of women has now been an essential objective of economic development. However, empowerment of women now can be categorized into five main parts – social, educational, economic, political and psychological which are further discussed as follows:

Self Help Groups (SHGs)

Women constitute about 50 per cent of the world's population; perform nearly two third of its work hours; receive one tenth of the world's income, and own less than one hundredth of the world's property. "Mahatma Gandhi", the Father of the nation has stated that women are the noblest of God's creation, supreme in their own sphere of activity". One of the powerful approaches to women empowerment and rural entrepreneurship is the formation of Self-Help Groups especially among women. This strategy has fetched noticeable results not only in India and Bangladesh but also all over the world. Credit and its delivery through Self Help Groups have also been taken as a means for empowerment of rural women. SHG approach has proved successful not only in improving the economic conditions through income generation but also in creating awareness about health and hygiene, sanitation and cleanliness, environmental protection, importance of education and better response to developmental schemes. This paper analyses with the Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu, number of group members, Revolving Fund and Bank Credit Linkage.

"All for all" is the principle behind the concept of Self-Help Groups. It is mainly concerned with the poor, and it is for the people, by the people and of the people. SHGs are mini voluntary agency for self-help at the micro level. It has been a focus on the weaker sections particularly women for their social defense. SHGs have got great potential in creating awareness on day- to-day affairs. It promotes saving habit, developing self and community assets, increasing the income level and increasing the social power. The concept of SHGs generates confidence, self- scrutiny and self-reliance. A SHG can be defined as a voluntary association of the poor with the common aim of social and economic empowerment. The purpose behind the formation of SHGs may be to pool the resources of members to meet their needs. The habit of thrift enables the development of common funds mobilized to mitigate the urgent needs of the members.

Tamil Nadu Afforestation Project has taken note of this new tool in rural development. It has encouraged formation of Self Help Groups in all villages during the year from 1997 to 2002. A tie-up has been arranged with the Tamil Nadu Women Development Corporation to link Mahalir Thittam (MT) in the programme villages. At the state level, Mahalir Thittam is organizing SHG rural poor. Mahalir Thittam is a socio- economic empowerment programme for women. It is implemented by Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women Limited.

Table 1 Details Of SHGs as on 31.12.2017 In Tamil Nadu

Sl. No.	Particulars	Groups/ Members/ Amount
1.	Number of SHGs	5,38,283
2.	Number of SHGs Members	82.92 Lakhs
3.	Number of Rural SHGs	3,62,488
4.	Number of Members in Rural SHGs	55,25,960
5.	Number of Urban SHGs	1,75,015
6.	Number of Members in Urban SHGs	27,67,040
7.	Total Savings	3,440 Crores
8.	Number of SHGs Revolving Fund Provided	6,03,852
9.	Number of SHGs Revolving Fund provided – Rural	4,58,118
10.	Number of SHGs Revolving Fund provided – Urban	1,45,734
11.	Number of SHGs Credit Linked	4,93,330
	Total Credit Linked	16,730.71

Source: www.tamilnaducorporationfordevelopmentofwomen.com.

Table 2 Year-wise Details Of Revolving Fund Disbursed In Tamil Nadu

Year	Number of SHGs			Financial Assistance (in Crores)		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Subsidy	Credit	Total
2005-06	11,009	--	11,009	11.01	16.51	27.52
2006-07	14,830	--	14,830	14.83	22.25	37.08
2007-08	13,750	--	13,750	13.75	20.63	34.38
2008-09	28,153	--	28,153	28.15	42.23	70.38
2009-10	19,024	5,000	24,024	24.02	36.04	60.06
2010-11	18,563	25,000	43,563	43.56	65.34	108.90
2011-12	1,06,047	43,953	1,50,000	150.00	739.69	889.69
2012-13	54,446	14,861	69,307	69.31	346.54	415.85
2013-14	38,144	14,599	52,743	52.74	263.72	316.46
2014-15	51,063	13,937	65,000	65.00	324.99	389.99
2015-16	51,247	14,018	65,265	65.12	330.32	395.44
2016-17	51,842	14,366	66,208	65.78	332.67	398.45
Total	4,58,118	1,45,734	6,03,852	603.27	2,540.93	3,144.20

Source: www.tamilnaducorporationfordevelopmentofwomen.com.

Table 1 shows the full status of SHGs in Tamil Nadu. It exhibits the total number of SHGs and members enrolled both in rural and urban areas, total savings kept by the SHGs, revolving fund provided to both rural and urban SHGs, total number of SHGs linked with banks.

Revolving Fund

Revolving Fund (RF) is provided to SHGs to augment their group corpus and create credit discipline by enhancing their financial management skills. Proper utilization of therevolving fund will help in making SHGs credit worthy and access to bank loans. SHGs become eligible for revolving fund after passing the first credit rating which is undertaken six months after the date of formation of the SHGs. After passing the first credit rating, SHGs in rural areas are provided with revolving fund subsidy of 10,000 under schemes like SGSY. In addition to the subsidy given by the government, the banks provide cash credit upto 30,000 per group. But RF subsidy was not available to SHG in urban areas which restricted their access to credit from banks. Prior to 2006-07, there was no scheme to provide RF subsidy to urban SHGs. Therefore, the government announced a scheme to provide RF subsidy to urban groups from the year 2006-07. The year-wise details of revolving fund subsidy provided to SHGs are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows the total amount of revolving fund and bank credit disbursed to both rural and urban SHGs from the year 2005-06 to 2016-17. The revolving fund (RF) subsidy of 135.39 crores along with the bank credit of 203 crores has been disbursed to a total of 1,35,329 SHGs. The last six years from 2011-12 to 2016-17, show a tremendous growth in extending RF subsidy and the bank credit to a large number of rural and urban SHGs. During the period, the RF subsidy of 467.95 crores along with the bank credit of 3,424.16 crores has been disbursed to a total of 4,68,523 SHGs.

BANK CREDIT LINKAGE IN TAMIL NADU

Bank credit is one of the most critical inputs for empowering SHGs and to reduce rural indebtedness. Banks normally extend cash credit of 10,000 to 30,000 to SHGs along with RF subsidy of 10,000 provided by the government. But the quantum of credit extended by banks to SHGs was not adequate to meet the credit requirements of all the SHG members. Therefore, government has taken special efforts to increase the quantum of credit to SHGs and ensure credit is made available to SHGs in multiple doses. Due to the efforts taken by government, banks in the state have started providing minimum 50,000 as first linkage and maximum of one lakh and 1.5 lakh as second and third linkages respectively. Table 3 provides the year-wise details of credit linkages made between the SHGs and banks from the year 2005-06 to 2016-17.

Table 3 Year-wise Credit Linkage Details In Tamil Nadu

Year	Achievements (in Crores)	Cumulative (in Crores)
2005-06	184.65	184.65
2006-07	271.32	455.97
2007-08	490.62	946.59
2008-09	600.42	1547.01
2009-10	593.45	2,140.46
2010-11	800.70	2,941.16
2011-12	2,173.57	5,114.73

2012-13	2,791.65	7,906.38
2013-14	2,457.65	10,364.03
2014-15	2,189.76	12,553.79
2015-16	2,087.34	14,641.13
2016-17	2,089.58	16,730.71

Source: www.tamilnadu corporation for development of women. com.

It is inferred from Table 3 that from the inception of Mahalir Thittam, SHGs have been assisted with the cumulative credit linkage of 2,941.16 crores only upto March 2011. But during the last six years alone credit linkage to SHGs has touched 16,730.71 crores due to the positive interventions made by the government and the whole hearted co-operation and support received from the banks in the state.

CONCLUSION

The Grameen Bank Model of Bangladesh has been transformed into SHGs to suit the Indian conditions. The functions of the SHGs are micro financing, subscription fees, collection, generating internal savings, maintaining common fund and organizing meetings. The success rate of SHGs are high at many places in India. The SHGs are considered as the real path finder's in the life of rural Indian women. In Tamil Nadu, there has been a substantial growth in the project of SHGs in respect of the number of SHGs formed, women enrolled and amount of savings. In Tamil Nadu, there are 51,82,180 SHGs with the total savings of 3,440 crores upto 31.12.2017 and the 82.92 lakhs of women are on the role as members of the scheme, Mahalir Thittam of Tamil Nadu has been introduced to improve the conditions and status of women especially in rural areas. In this process, Non- Governmental Organizations have been acting as a bridge between the government and the SHGs in order to achieve an empowered society.

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