

## SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS

Minaxi K. Bariya<sup>1</sup>, Kiran Chandravadia<sup>2</sup> and Hansa Gami<sup>3</sup>

1 Asso. Professor, College of Agriculture, JAU, Mota Bhandariya (Amreli) - 365535

2 Assistant Professor, College of Agricultural Information Technology, AAU, Anand - 388110

3 SMS (Home Science), KVK, Ambuja Foundation, Kodinar - 362720

Email: minaxibariya@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*The relationship between women's empowerment and social development has been a major theme in studies of any nation's overall development. The United Nation (UN) claims that improving women's status is not only beneficial to themselves but also for overall social and economic development of the nation. The present study was carried out in Amreli district of Gujarat state. Three talukas were purposively selected where SHGs formed under Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP). Two villages were selected purposively where SHGs are working from last three years. Nine SHG members were selected randomly in each of SHG and nine non SHG members were selected in same villages for comparative study. A total of 180 respondents were selected for the study. The Ex-post facto research design was adopted. Data were collected through personal interviews using the pre-tested structured interview schedule. The result revealed that the independent sample 'Z' test showed that there was highly significant difference in the mean values of SHG members and Non-SHG members in case of communication ability, mass media exposure, extension contact and social status.*

**Keywords:** IWMP, SHG and Non SHG members, social empowerment, self help groups, women

### INTRODUCTION

Women are an integral part of every economy. All round development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered as equal partners in progress with men. "Investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development" (United Nations, 1995). However, in most developing countries, women have a low socio and economic status. In such countries effective empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labour in the main stream of economic development.

Social empowerment of women is the emerging concept which makes a balanced and sustainable growth of the country. Government has taken various initiatives to promote the social empowerment of women through various schemes and programmes. Development of the country is not only measured by the high GDP, attractive currency value, moderate contribution in world market, and innovative technological sophisticated instruments, but also social empowerment of the women. Therefore there should be a social relevant, local people concentrated and need based programme is essential to overcome this kind of drawbacks. India will be super power country in very soon not only

by economic strength but also by the social fulfillments and achievement. Hence the government may think about the social empowerment of women and it will leads to emancipations of the people in all aspects (Muruganandam and Sundara 2013).

Forming and nurturing small, homogeneous and participatory self-help groups (SHGs) of the poor has today emerged as a potent tool for human development. This process enables the poor, especially the women from the poor households, to collectively identify and analyze the problems they face in the perspective of their social and economic environment. Hence the present study was carried out to know the social empowerment of women through Self Help Group.

### OBJECTIVE

To know the social empowerment of women through self help groups

### METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Amreli district of Gujarat state. Among the villages adopted under IWMP only 10 villages from Amreli, Lathi, Lilia, Kukavav and

Dhari talukas were selected for convenience of the researcher and limited resources. Two villages from each taluka were purposively selected where SHGs women have conducting their livelihood activities more than four years under IWMP. IWMP adopted villages, which were in Amreli district were obtained from the principal investigator of the project and were selected for the study. Villages having effective and coordinated working of SHG were also one of the criteria to select. In addition, from each village nine women who were not members of SHG were studied for comparative purposes. Thus, total 180 respondents were selected for the present study. SHG members and Non-SHG women's was the unit of analyses. A scale was developed to measure the dependent variable social empowerment of women through SHGs. Data was collected through use of structured interview schedule and descriptive statistics Frequency, Percent, Mean, Mean Difference and Z test were used for tabulating and interpreting the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Indicators of social empowerment

#### (1) Communication ability

The data given in Table 1 illustrated that exactly half (50.00 per cent) of the SHG members were from high level of communication ability followed by 42.22 per cent and 7.78 per cent of them were with medium and low level of communication ability, respectively. No SHG members were from the categories of very low and very high communication ability. In case of Non SHG respondents slightly less than three-fourths (72.22 per cent) of the respondents was low level of communication ability followed by 27.78 per cent respondents with medium level of communication ability. No one was from the categories of high, very high and vary low. The independent sample Z-test showed that there was highly significant difference in the mean values of SHG members (9.42) and Non SHG members (6.41) in case of communication ability.

**Table 1: Distribution of the respondents (SHG and Non SHG members) according to their communication ability**

| Sr. No.                | Category  |                     | SHG Member<br>(n=90) |       | Non-SHG Member<br>(n=90) |       |
|------------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|
|                        |           |                     | F                    | P     | F                        | P     |
| 1                      | Very Low  | (0.0 to 03.0 score) | 00                   | 00.00 | 00                       | 0.00  |
| 2                      | Low       | (3.1 to 06.0 score) | 07                   | 07.78 | 65                       | 72.22 |
| 3                      | Medium    | (6.1 to 09.0 score) | 38                   | 42.22 | 25                       | 27.78 |
| 4                      | High      | (9.1 to 12.0 score) | 45                   | 50.00 | 00                       | 0.00  |
| 5                      | Very High | (Above 12.0 score)  | 00                   | 00.00 | 00                       | 0.00  |
| <b>Mean</b>            |           |                     | 9.42                 |       | 6.41                     |       |
| <b>Mean difference</b> |           |                     | 3.01                 |       |                          |       |
| <b>Z-value</b>         |           |                     | 10.81                |       |                          |       |

F= Frequency

P= Per cent

It can be concluded from the above situation that SHG members generally, got more opportunity to interact with leaders, VLWs, bankers, Government officials, political leader and NGOs volunteers, etc. as compared to Non SHG members. This interaction helped them to articulate their problems and improved their self-confidence. In case of Non SHG women exchange information but their main goal is to connect with people and also Non SHG Women's scope for conversation was limited. This finding is supported with

Mehta *et al.* (2011), Singh and Mehta (2012) and Bariya *et al.* (2020).

#### (2) Mass media exposure

Communication exposure helps people to gain general awareness as well as provides scientific and technical information and plays an important role to improve their socio-economic standards. The information regarding mass media exposure was collected as the nature and frequency

of respondent’s exposure to various mass media such as newspaper, radio, television, film, internet, whatsapp and I-kisan portal. The respondents were classified into five categories as shown in depicted in Table 2.

**Table 2: Distribution of the respondents (SHG and Non SHG members) according to their mass media exposure**

(n=180)

| Sr. No.                | Category  |                      | SHG Member (n=90) |       | Non-SHG Member (n=90) |       |
|------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
|                        |           |                      | F                 | P     | F                     | P     |
| 1                      | Very Low  | (0.0 to 10.2 score)  | 22                | 24.44 | 41                    | 45.56 |
| 2                      | Low       | (10.3 to 20.4 score) | 27                | 30.00 | 49                    | 54.44 |
| 3                      | Medium    | (20.5 to 30.6 score) | 41                | 45.56 | 00                    | 00.00 |
| 4                      | High      | (30.7 to 40.8 score) | 00                | 00.00 | 00                    | 00.00 |
| 5                      | Very High | (Above 40.8 score)   | 00                | 00.00 | 00                    | 00.00 |
| <b>Mean</b>            |           |                      | 16.10             |       | 9.87                  |       |
| <b>Mean difference</b> |           |                      | 6.23              |       |                       |       |
| <b>Z-value</b>         |           |                      | 9.18              |       |                       |       |

F= Frequency                      P= Per cent

In case of SHG members it is noticeable from the Table 2 that nearly half (45.56 per cent) of the respondents were from medium level of mass media exposure followed by 30.00 per cent with low level and rest 24.44 per cent were very low level of mass media exposure, respectively. No one respondent was in the categories like high and very high level. Whereas, in Non SHG respondents’ more than half (54.44 per cent) of the respondents belonged to low level of mass media exposure followed by very low level with 45.56 per cent. It is interesting to note that no one was from the categories of medium, high and very high level. The independent sample ‘Z’ test showed that there was highly significant difference in the mean values of SHG members (16.10) and Non SHG members (9.87) in case of mass media exposure.

It can be concluded from the above Table 2 that the probable reasons for such situation might be due to low to medium level of education, poor economic condition, medium and low level of self esteem and less availability of important mass media like radio, newspaper, television, farm magazine, internet, whatsapp, etc. in both the groups. This finding is similar with the finding of Verma *et al.* (2013) and Bariya *et al.* (2020).

**(3) Extension contact**

Extension contact refers to the frequencies of

contact made by the women with different extension agency or extension workers, whether locally or outside the village. The extension contact plays an important role to collect and understand latest information about profession and new government schemes. The data regarding extension contacts were collected and are presented in Table 3.

From this finding, it can be said that nearly half (51.11 per cent) of the SHG members were from medium extension contact followed by 41.11 per cent and 7.78 per cent were from low and very low extension contact, respectively. No respondent was in the categories of high and very high extension contact. While in case of Non SHG women more than half (52.22 per cent) of the respondents were very low extension contact followed by 47.78 per cent with low extension contact. The independent sample ‘Z’ test showed that there was highly significant difference in the mean values of SHG members (13.40) and Non SHG members (8.24) in case of extension contact.

The observed findings might be due to the fact that SHG members have opportunities to contact with extension functionaries as compared to Non SHG respondents. Majority of the beneficiaries have medium level of extension contact which may be because of frequent visits made by DWDU staff to the villages, regular meetings, and interest on the part of beneficiaries to gain knowledge or learn new skills. They

might have been also assured that these extension contacts are for their own welfare from which they can get recent information, clarify their doubts, etc. Some beneficiaries and

Non SHG members had low extension contact; the possible reason could be lack of interest, their ignorance, etc.

**Table 3: Distribution of the respondents (SHG and Non SHG members) according to their extension contact**

(n= 180)

| Sr. No.         | Category<br>F |                      | SHG Member<br>(n=90) |       | Non-SHG Member<br>(n=90) |       |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|
|                 |               |                      | P                    | F     | P                        | F     |
| 1               | Very Low      | (00.0 to 08.0 score) | 07                   | 07.78 | 47                       | 52.22 |
| 2               | Low           | (08.1 to 16.0 score) | 37                   | 41.11 | 43                       | 47.78 |
| 3               | Medium        | (16.1 to 24.0 score) | 46                   | 51.11 | 00                       | 00.00 |
| 4               | High          | (24.1 to 32.0 score) | 00                   | 00.00 | 00                       | 00.00 |
| 5               | Very High     | (Above 32.0 score)   | 00                   | 00.00 | 00                       | 00.00 |
| Mean            |               |                      | 13.40                |       | 8.24                     |       |
| Mean difference |               |                      | 5.16                 |       |                          |       |
| Z-value         |               |                      | 9.97                 |       |                          |       |

F= Frequency

P= Per cent

This finding is somewhat agreement with the findings of Sowjanya (2007) and Bariya *et al.* (2020).

#### (4) Social status

Perusal of the Table 4 indicated that nearly half (46.67 per cent) of the SHG members were medium level of change in social status followed by low and high level with 28.89 and 13.33 per cent, respectively and only 7.78 per cent and 3.33 per cent of the respondents were very low and very high level of change in social status, respectively. More than three-fifth (66.67 per cent) of the women in case of Non SHG group were from low level of social status followed by 26.67 per cent were from very low level of social status and

only 6.67 per cent were from medium level of social status. No one was from the categories of high and very high. The independent sample 'Z' test showed that there was highly significant difference in the mean values of SHG members (4.52) and Non SHG members (3.04) in case of social status.

As per findings, it is revealed that vast majority of the SHG members were medium to low level social status and in case of Non SHG women were low to very low level of social status. This might be due to the medium and low level of education, poor and medium economic condition, medium & low level of risk orientation and innovativeness and also in both of the groups some of the respondents had living below poverty line.

**Table 4: Distribution of the respondents (SHG and Non-SHG members) according to their social status**

(n= 180)

| Sr. No.         | Category  |                    | SHG Member<br>n= (90) |       | Non-SHG Member<br>n=(90) |       |
|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|
|                 |           |                    | F                     | P     | F                        | P     |
| 1               | Very Low  | (0.0 to 1.8 score) | 07                    | 07.78 | 24                       | 26.67 |
| 2               | Low       | (1.9 to 3.6 score) | 26                    | 28.89 | 60                       | 66.67 |
| 3               | Medium    | (3.7 to 5.4 score) | 42                    | 46.67 | 06                       | 06.67 |
| 4               | High      | (5.5 to 7.2 score) | 12                    | 13.33 | 00                       | 00.00 |
| 5               | Very High | (Above 7.2 score)  | 03                    | 03.33 | 00                       | 00.00 |
| Mean            |           |                    | 4.52                  |       | 3.04                     |       |
| Mean difference |           |                    | 1.48                  |       |                          |       |
| Z-value         |           |                    | 8.17                  |       |                          |       |

F= Frequency

P= Per cent

The similar finding was also confirmed by Anonymous (2002), Shambharkar *et al.*(2012) and Bariya *et al.* (2020).

## CONCLUSION

The present study confirms that self-help groups under IWMP enhanced the communication ability, mass media exposure, extension contact and socio-economic status of women. The SHG women members were more socially empowered as compared to Non SHG members. Majority of the respondents felt that they have improved their economic status with the help of self-help programme and that's why their social status was also improved. They have equal control over their lives, are able to take important decisions in their lives, and have equal opportunities. Thus through the activities of self help groups rural women became empowered in all areas. Therefore such local organizations should be promoted.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This is to declare that there is "No conflict of interest" among researcher.

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