

An executive summary of the final report of work done on the Minor Research Project of Ms Aswita Shalet D'Souza, Department of Social Work entitled "A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION INTO VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS APPROACHES TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN DAKSHINA KANNADA DISTRICT " Vide sanction letter No: MRP(H)-0836/13-14/KAMA002/UGC-SWRO DATED: 28 March 2014

Introduction: The concept of women empowerment has its roots throughout the world in women's movement. Women empowerment means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance. It is a transformation of the structures or institutions that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination. It is becoming powerful in all spheres of life by withstanding all barriers especially the male domination. The word empowerment was first articulated in 1985 by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). In India the Central Government in its welfare programmes shifted the concept of development to empowerment in the Ninth Plan (1997-2002). Empowerment is a process by which powerless people, conscious of their own situation, and organizes collectively to gain greater access to public service or to the benefits of economic growth. Empowerment can take place at two levels, Individual and collective. Individual empowerment is a process of personal empowerment involving self esteem, dignity, self respect and self-perception. Collective empowerment aims at transforming collective consciousness values and attitudes.

During the decade of 1990-2000, the government mainly focused on the eradication of poverty and economic upliftment. Their main concern was on women. The new approach was suggested by experts that "help the women to help themselves". This approach was considered more practical in dealing with credit needs of the rural poor. Self Help Groups have emerged at the village level based on the underlying strategy of self help, collective perception, decision making and implementation of the programmes of the common benefit. Self-Help Group is a Trust, Belief and Conviction that the Community, no matter how backward, has resources that can be mobilized for meeting individual's local needs and that of the community for making local improvements and bringing about social change.

Methodology: The aim of the current study is to explore the areas of women empowerment . The universe of the study comprises of South Canara district, Karnataka. The self help group members were the respondents of the study. A sample of 100 was covered in the study using the systematic random sampling method.

Finding:The study is mainly based on primary data collected from the women members of the SHG in Puttur Taluk,Bantwal Taluk,Belthangady Taluk and Mangalore in Dakshina Kannada district There has been a constant touch with the reality for many years. Working with different groups enhanced a vast experience of the day to day know how of the people. In a male dominated society like Indian society, women are looked as lower grade citizens. Because of this narrow thinking women experience all kinds of problems in the society. This kind of thinking is still continuing in the villages. SHGs are the strongest weapon to empower women and thus to introduce equality.

30% had secondary education, 38% of the members had primary education, 16% did not have any formal education, 12% secondary education and 4% were illiterates. Majority of them were beedi-rollers, followed by homemakers, daily labourers, agriculturists, very few about six percent were self-employed and only four percent each were unemployed and belonged to any other category.

Majority 40% of the study participants expressed to have monthly income of Rs. 2001- 3000/ month, 20% having 1001-2000/month, followed by 14% each having 4001-5000 and < 1000 respectively, 10% having 3001-4000/month while only 2% having income of >Rs. 5000 /month. These figures can be an indication that efforts on improving the economic condition of the people in the rural areas need to be focused by identifying the cause of poverty.

The study subjects revealed that 38% were the members of the SHG for more than 4yrs , 30% were members since 3-4 yrs, 22% since 2-3 yrs and remaining 6% and 4% reported to have <1 and 1-2 yrs of membership in SHG respectively.

These figures can be taken as an indication that SHGs are growing with the enrollment of new members which gives a ray of hope that more of the women and their families would be benefitted from the various services of SHG.

Impact of SHG on socio-economic conditions of the respondents: This section highlights the impact of SHG on socioeconomic conditions of the members with the help of study findings. Majority of the respondents 86% were noticed to have kutchra houses, 10% Pucca houses and 4% having mixed type of houses and none of the members were having thatched houses. Improvement in the housing condition of the members was noticed from pre to post membership of SHG. More than 75% of the respondents reported to have electricity, sanitary latrine, telephone and drinking water facilities after joining SHG unlikely to that while comparing the same before being the member of SHG.

Majority 42% of the respondents revealed to have spent > 8hrs in household work and 10% reported to have spent <2hrs in household work before joining SHG while only 28% of respondents reported being spending >8hrs and 22% <2hrs in household work after joining SHG. The change in the figures indicates that women along with their routine household work are also involved in other productive activities contributing to their development after being the member of SHG. In some cases men help women in household work. There is no vast difference in the figures noted based on the respondents agreement on men helping them in their household work. One can think that the outlook of women has not changed in the eyes of the men or it can be also considered that women are capable of performing multitask with responsibility and care.

A difference is identified in the response of the members on social issues faced by the family. Most of the respondents 80% reported to have no social issues faced and a reduction in the figure is observed in relation to other problems faced from pre to post SHG membership. This response can be an indication towards women gaining awareness on social problems of the family and the measures to overcome the same.

Approximately 40- 50% of the respondents revealed their improvement in participation related to various aspects of decision making like child education, health care, mobility, investments/ loans and recognizing women's contribution within the family after joining SHG.

Most of the respondents 90% reported improvement in public relations and social interaction after joining SHG which can be considered as an indication that membership of SHG has led to an improvement in the social relationship of the members, a healthier growth towards their holistic development. Exposure to mass media activities, difference has been noted among the respondents in their exposure towards different mass media activities like reading newspaper/ magazine, listening to radio and watching TV from their prior to later membership. An increase of 10- 12 % is noted in their involvement in various mass media activities after joining SHG.

This response indicates that members of SHG have developed interest in mass media revealing their awareness towards various general information and towards importance of recreational activities.

The research findings indicate that officials of concerned development departments should make people to realize that SHG's are the main source for generation of employment opportunities in rural areas, Appropriate training modules should be developed on orientation and conduct of meetings, book keeping, gender and equity issues, social assessments and entrepreneurship development for the benefit of SHG members. Members should be given more opportunities to get involved in official and social developmental activities by training them in leadership and communication skills.