

IMPACT OF SELF-HELP GROUPS (SHGs) ON CHANGING SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCENARIO OF BOLPUR-SRINIKETAN BLOCK, BIRBHUM DISTRICT: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The rapid population growth and poverty have brought about a situation when the means available with the rural poor are not sufficient for living a well to do life. During last decades, considerable efforts have been made to overcome widespread poverty and economic stagnation of the nation. Majority of the population in rural areas has less access to the market economy and depend highly on agricultural activities. In many countries, self –employment programmes have succeeded in providing access to small capital to people living under poverty line. In India, the implementation of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and Self – Employment Programmes were restructured under the *Swaranjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY)* launched in 1999-2000 by merging IRDP and allied programmes. The SGSY is envisaged as a holistic programme aimed at setting up micro-enterprises in the rural areas targeting both individuals and Groups living Below Poverty Line (BPL). The programme encompasses all aspects of self-employment, viz. organizing the rural poor into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and their capacity building, planning of the activity of the clusters, infrastructural support, technology, credit and marketing of the products of SHGs. It seeks to integrate various agencies like District Rural Development Cells (DRDC), Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). In this light, it can be said that SHGs under SGSY were launched to mitigate the twin basic problems of rural areas i.e. poverty and unemployment. The SHGs programmes under SGSY not only aim to introduce self –employment in rural areas but it also deals a very vital issue i.e. empowering women folks in rural areas. The SHGs are considered as a vital organization of rural poor, particularly women for delivering microcredit in order to undertake Income Generating Activities (IGAs). Thrift and credit activities within a SHG act as glue for the groups and promote economic well being of the members. Presently, most of the SHGs are working under the SHGs –Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP) of National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) and SGSY. In the present case study, it has been found that these groups are not only engaged in IGA but also in community development activities like, giving health care to villagers in general and women and children in particular, campaigning for low–cost safe and clean sanitation, awareness towards education. The present paper also reveals the problems faced by these groups, and major policy implications are also discussed.

Key Words: SHGV, NABARD, Living Standard, Expenditure, ICDS, Money Lender

Introduction

Poverty alleviation has been the central objective of developmental planning in the developing world. As per available literature, the problem of poverty and unemployment is still a formidable challenge before the policy makers. All the approaches implemented earlier across different regions were centered on two basic policy strands: expanding the asset base of resource-poor people and reducing the extent and magnitude of vulnerabilities. Despite some positive effects of developmental programmes on the poor, poverty is all pervasive around the developing countries. Over the years of self-Help Group's introduction by National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) and subsequently by *Swaranjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY)*, a tremendous achievement in the field of poverty alleviation has been seen. Government has launched several poverty alleviation and employment generating programmes and among those SGSY is worth mentioning. In 1992, NABARD has launched the programme of Self-Help Group to mitigate the vulnerability of poverty, generating employment as well as covering a very vital issue i.e. women empowerment. Afterwards, SHGs were also formed under the scheme of SGSY in the rural areas. The SHG programme under SGSY stresses the role of women in the society by involving them in economic activity as well as reducing the effects of poverty for overall development. It seeks to bring forward the backward classes like scheduled tribes (ST), scheduled caste (SC), Other Backward castes (OBC) and minorities like Muslims in the society.

A Self-Help Group may be defined as a small informal association of members who have come together voluntarily with the objective of obtaining socio-economic benefits on the basis of self-help and collective responsibility. The members of a SHG are expected to be homogeneous in their socio-economic characteristics and should be inducted into the group on the basis of self-selection. These informal groups are mutually agreeing to contribute to a common fund and to meet emerging needs on the basis of mutual help. In terms of size, a SHG under SGSY is recommended

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to have a maximum of twenty members who are exclusively either males or females. The homogeneous nature of the members is expected to promote cohesiveness within the group as well as help members know each other better. The present study has been based on the impact of SHGs on the socio-economic scenario of Bolpur-Sriniketan block of Birbhum district and all these SHGs are formed and working under SGSY. Here overall, in nine Gram-Panchayets of the block, it has been found that earlier the progress was insignificant but during 2008-09 the rate of progress is accelerated covering backward classes as well as women folks. Thousands of members of SHGs are engaged in Income Generating Activities (IGAs). The registered groups under SGSY are linked with a formal Financial Institution (FI) from where the groups are provided with credit according to their needs. This linkage of the Self-Help Groups with the formal financial institutions for getting loan to start any IGA is known as Self-Help Group Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP). When any group is able to pay back the first installment of loan they are considered to be passed the first grading and provided with the second installment of loan to continue with the existing job they are presently performing or start up a new one.

Literature Survey

- People organize themselves into self-help groups/organizations (SHGs/SOs) and through these groups people with few resources start to change their conditions of productions and consumptions at a micro level. It may steer the development of a village economy. The social scientists who have worked on this matter are Ghate, Prabhu. (2007); Devasa, L. and Antony, J. (2004); Katz.A.H. (1993); Kay, Thelma. (2002).
- One of the objectives of the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is to bring out the poor from the evil clutches of poverty through building of self capacities of the poor. Social capital formation is very important in the groups. Social capital is defined as the institutional relationships, norms, association among the people, social networks which affect community productivity and well-being. SHGs are putting emphasis on the educational profile of the members which will help in forming social capital. This matter has been discussed in the writings of Fukuyama.F. (2002); Meenai, Zubair. (2003); Shrivastav, A. (2004); Buch, Nirmala. (2002); Jain, Devaki (1997); Premchandra, S. (2003).
- The performance of the SHGs are often slowed down by various constrains. These may be infrastructural, economic and social problems. This is discussed by Shylendra.H.S., (1996); Premchandra, S. (2005); Ranadive, J.D. and Rajini, K.M. (2005).
- The group members of the SHGs are marginal farmers and agricultural labourers and they belong to socially and economically backward communities of the society. There is an upliftment in the economic and social conditions of these members after joining the SHGs. On this matter important writings are of Amutha.R, (2006); Kabeer, Naila (1995); Bhatt, E.R. et.al. (1993).
- SHGs are always linked with government banks and higher the linkage of the SHGs with the formal financial institutions, higher will be the progress of the groups and members. It is better to mention that the SHGs' progress depends on the saving habits and repayment habits within the time frame given by the financial institutions. In South Indian states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, the rate of progress of the SHGs is quite high and one of the reasons is that these groups are linked with banks and they have excellent repayment records within the given time frame. Shetty.S.L. (2001); Punithavathy, P. and Eswaram, R. (2002); Matrin, P. (1999); Rani, G.S. (1986); Punitha, M. et.al. (1999), work on this field.

Objectives

- The main aim of the papers is to understand and analyse how the concept of SHG has evolved under SGSY and in what ways SHGs are able to help the poor in obtaining access to savings and credit facilities from formal financial institutions that can help to improve their economic and social conditions.
- The present paper also aims to analyse how the backward classes in different gram panchayets of Bolpur-Sriniketan block are linked with the SHGs under SGSY and thereby, with Income Generating Activities (IGAs).
- A comparison has been drawn from developmental aspect of the backward classes by comparing the involvement of these people in the SHGs programme in 2003-04 and 2008-09.
- Another objective is to know about the Income Generating Activities (IGAs) of the SHGs of the study area which is the back bone of the SHGs. IGAs are the main factor on which the economic development of the members depend and thereby, their social development. Even, sometimes the

repayments of loan also depend on the IGAs of the groups. Moreover, the paper aims to seek how far dependence of the poor people on the moneylenders are being minimized after joining the SHGs.

- This paper aims to show how women in the study area are actively participating in the programme and their progress over years. The developmental and empowerment aspect of women help in reducing extreme poverty.
- The study also aims to find out the major problems of these groups in reference to the study area.

Database and Analytical Procedure

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Data regarding monthly income and expenditure of the SHGs members and education have been collected through primary survey in year 2009, whereas data related to the IGAs and linkages of the SHGs with SGSY and financial institutions and SHGs passed grade-I have been collected from the Bolpur-Sriniketan block office and panchayet offices. These data have been processed and statistical calculations like percentage calculation, rank correlation and chi-square test have been applied. Besides these, some qualitative aspects have been also dealt in the present paper like health immunization programmes and sanitation.

Location of the Study area

Bolpur-Sriniketan Block is a Community Development Block of Birbhum District of West Bengal. The study area is located in between 23° 40'00" north to 23°45'00"north latitudes and 87° 40'00"east to 87°45'00"east longitudes. The southern boundary is demarcated by the Ajoy River which runs as the boundary line between the study area and the Burdwan district.

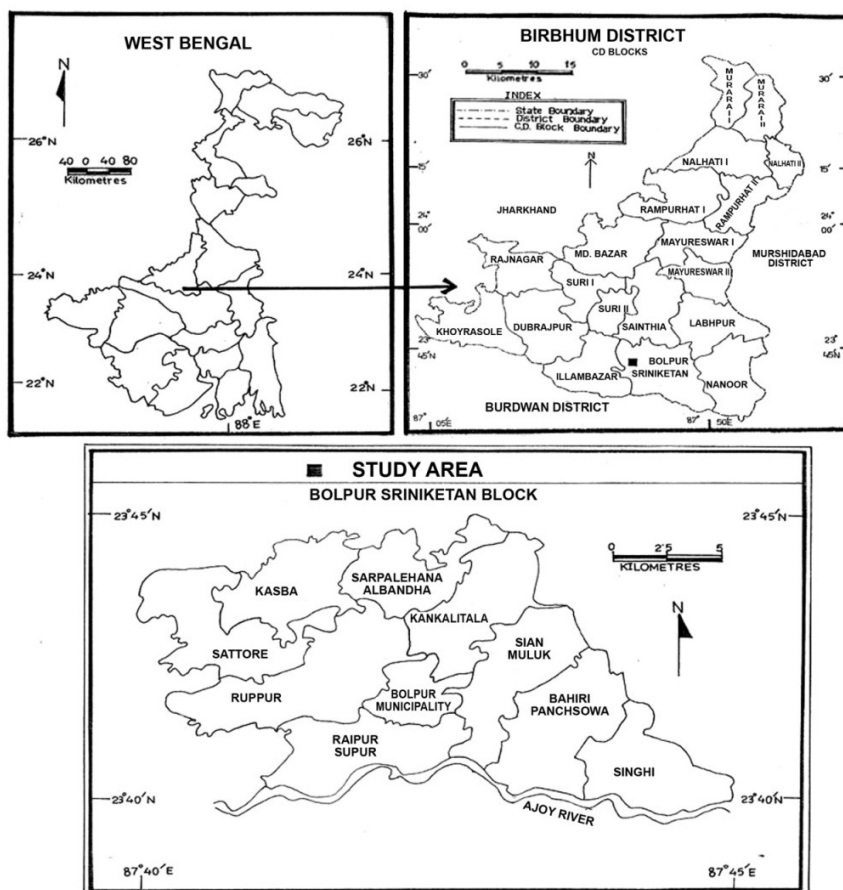


Fig. 1 Location map

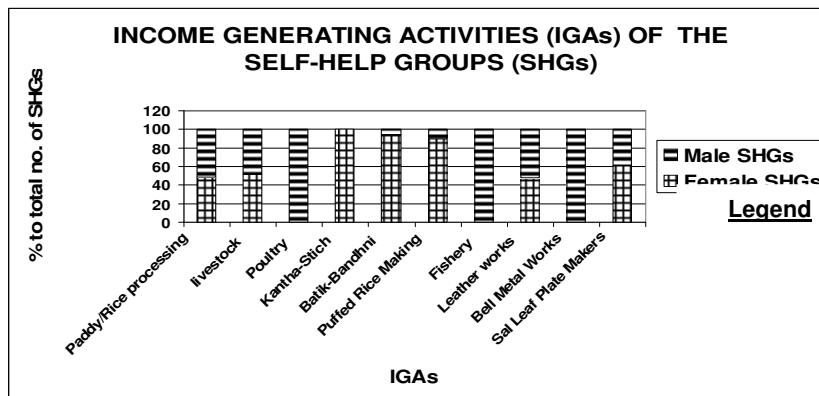
Income Generating Activities (IGAs)

One of the major objectives of initiating SHGs for the poor, specially for the women and people belonging to backward classes, in Bolpur-Sriniketan Block is to help them to take up and manage their own productive activities which could supplement their household income and employment leading to improved living standards. At the same time, these IGAs were also expected to serve as instruments which can bring about economic awareness and empowerment among the members, specially the women members. The idea of IGAs had raised a lot of hopes and expectations particularly among women belonging to the poorer sections. One of the major issues the members of the SHGs used to discuss in their monthly meetings was the way and means of promoting IGAs by the groups. In the study area, as many as eleven different types of IGAs have been found (Table No.1). From the Table No.1, it can be said that except four kinds of works i.e. poultry, *katha* steach (a kind of sewing), fishery and bell metal works, all types of works are performed both by male SHGs and female SHGs. Poultry, fishery and bell metal works are exclusively done by male SHGs, whereas, *khata* stich is exclusively done by the female SHGs. Most of the members are used to be agricultural labourers or still some of them are work as agricultural labourers. Hence, third highest concentration of female SHGs are engaged with paddy/ rice processing but male SHGs are more in number in doing this job. A high concentration has been noted in the *batik- bandhni* work where female SHGs are more in number than the male SHGs. In case of vegetable cultivation, number of male SHGs is more than the female SHGs. The members of the SHGs have chosen these works of their own and in most of the cases they select that particular work in which they are expertise or that particular work is a traditional one in the member’s family.

Table No - 1, INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES (IGAs) OF THE SELF- HELP GROUPS (SHGs)

Income generating activities	No of female SHGs	% to total no of SHGs	No of male SHGs	% to total no of SHGs
1.Paddy/Rice processing	97	48.29	104	51.74
2. livestock	18	51.43	17	48.57
3. Poultry	-	0	34	100
4. <i>Kantha-Stich</i>	375	100	-	0
5. <i>Batik-Bandhni</i>	206	94.93	11	5.07
6. Puffed Rice Making	164	90.11	18	9.89
7. Fishary	-	0	31	100
8. Leather works	13	48.15	14	51.85
9. Bell Metal Works	-	0	8	100
10. <i>Sal</i> leaf plate makers	11	61.11	7	38.89

Source: Bolpur-Sriniketan Block Development Office



Education

Education has always been a major thrust in SHGs programme as this helps the members to understand economic activities as well as different social issues like illiteracy, dropout children, health care, safe sanitation, etc. The

education profile of the members in the study area has been divided into six literacy levels and percentages of members in respective levels have been computed in three ranges of age groups. Overall, a satisfactory impact of SHGs programme on literacy has been seen when the result reveals that 26.14% of the SHGs members are illiterate and as many as 73.86% members are literate. About 19.4 % members fall in only literate category. These members before joining a SHG used to be illiterate and after joining a group, they are now able to write their name and to do simple mathematical calculations also.

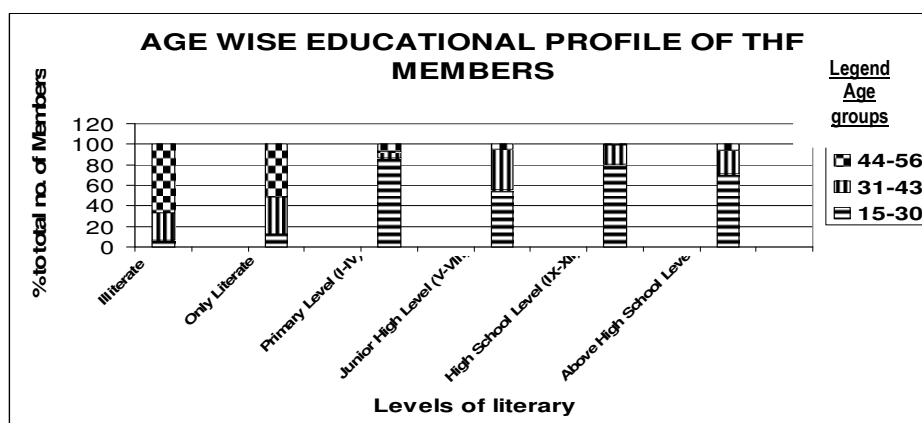
In the 18 -30 years age group, lowest percentage of illiterates are present as well as highest percentage of members who have passed higher secondary level are also found in this age group. The following table further illustrates this. (Table no.2)

Table No – 2, AGE WISE EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF THE MEMBERS

Level of literacy	Age Groups (in Years)		
	15-30	31-43	44-56
Illiterate	226 (6.49%)	943 (27.09%)	2312 (66.42%)
Only Literate	327 (12.65%)	925 (35.79%)	1332 (51.55%)
Primary Level (I-IV)	3017 (86.55%)	209 (5.99%)	260 (7.46%)
Junior High Level (V-VIII)	1423 (55.37%)	1024 (39.84%)	123 (4.79%)
High School Level (IX-XII)	940 (80.96%)	217 (18.69%)	04 (0.34%)
Above High School Level	25 (71.43%)	08 (22.86%)	02 (5.71%)

Source: Field survey, 2009

The awareness towards education has become a very vital issue among the members. This enriches the social capital as the literate members help in learning the illiterate members. Education helps them in handling the bank works, conducting group meetings, or even helps them in understanding the key points in the trainings conducted by the government.



Income and Expenditure

In the nine Gram Panchayets of Bolpur-Sriniketan block, considerable numbers of poor people have joined SHGs Programme. This has an impact on their income as well as expenditure.

Income Profile

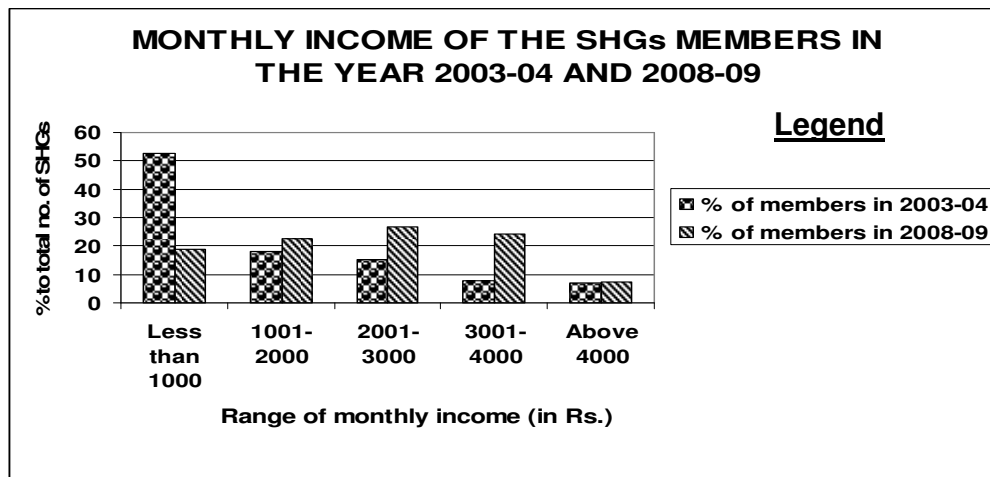
In the study, a comparison has been drawn between the monthly income of the members in the years 2003-04 and 2008-09. Many of the SHGs members interviewed in 2008-09 had joined the SHGs programme under SGSY in 2003-04 though these members then were very new in this field of job. In about five years, the SHGs Programme has a positive impact on the income level of the members. This may be because the availability of loan with very low interest rate provided by the formal financial institutions has become a very wide practice as well as they invest the capital in income generating activities which fetch them good economic returns. Form the table no.2, it can be observed that there is a huge drop in percentage of members in the first income group i.e. less than Rs. 1000 per month in 2003-04 to 2008-09.

It has been recorded that in 2003-04, 52.7% members used to earn less than rupees 1000 per month and gradually the percentage of members shrank towards the higher income groups. Whereas, in the year 2008-09 the second lowest percentage of members falls in the category of less than Rs. 1000 though still the lowest percentage of members (7.40%) can earn Rs. 4000 or more per month. The highest concentration has been found in the third income category. Overall, it can be said that, there is a slight upliftment in their income status from the year 2003-04 to 2008-09 which is certainly a good side of SHGs Programme. Table no.2 further illustrates this.

Table No.: 3 MONTHLY INCOME OF THE SHGs MEMBERS IN THE YEAR 2003-04 AND 2008-09

Monthly income (in Rupees)	Number of members in 2003-04	Percentage of members in 2003-04	Number of members in 2008-09	Percentage of members in 2008-09
Less than 1000	7020	52.70	2490	18.70
1001-2000	2416	18.14	3025	22.72
2001-3000	2041	15.30	3563	26.76
3001-4000	1027	07.71	3253	24.43
Above 4000	913	6.85	986	7.40

Source: Bolpur-Sriniketan Block Development Office



Expenditure Profile

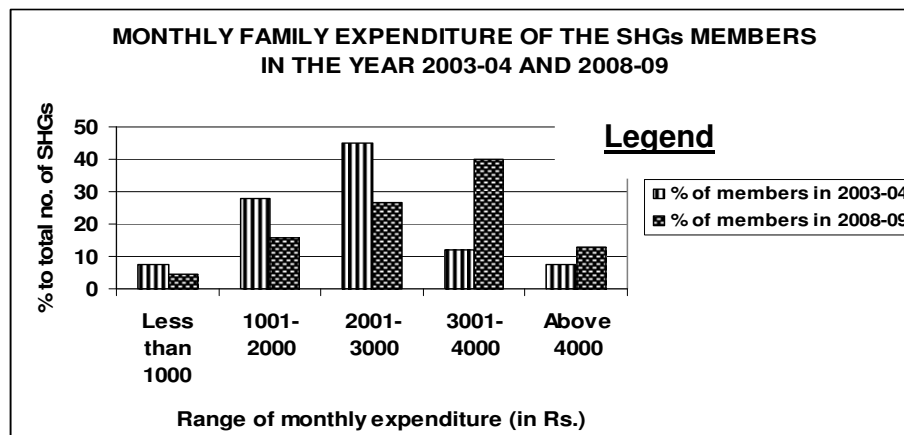
Expenditure of a person generally depends on the income of that person. Here, even it has been found that, in year 2003-04 highest percentage of members used to earn less than Rs. 1000, but in the same year, second lowest percentage of members (7.62%) have been found in the monthly income group of less than Rs. 500 and highest concentration has been found in the third monthly expenditure group i.e. Rs. 1001-1500. This clearly expresses that in the year 2003-04, the economic developmental aspect was unsatisfactory and members used to spend more than that they can earn. So, they used to borrow from the money lenders by paying high interest rate and before they could repay their earlier credit, they had to again fall in the cycle of indebtedness. Most of the members used to

hesitate in visiting the banks and as many of the members were illiterate, they could not handle the basic bank works. Table no. 3 further illustrates this.

Table No.: 4 MONTHLY FAMILY EXPENDITURE OF THE SHGs MEMBERS IN THE YEAR 2003-04 AND 2008-09

Monthly expenditure (in Rupees)	Number of members in 2003-04	Percentage of members in 2003-04	Number of members in 2008-09	Percentage of members in 2008-09
Less than 1000	1015	7.62	618	4.64
1001-2000	3714	27.89	2107	15.82
2001-3000	5991	44.99	3538	26.57
3001-4000	1624	12.19	5320	39.95
Above 4000	973	7.31	1734	13.02

Source: Bolpur-Sriniketan Block Development Office



THE SUBJECT MATTERS OF MEETINGS OF THE SHGs AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION IN RESPECT OF HEALTH AND SANITATION

Health

- Different gynecological problems of the female members.
- Anemia-mostly affects the females.
- *Anganwadi* workers (ICDS) often organize health programme for the SHGs members separately for males and females.
- SHGs members often take part in the campaign of pulse polio and immunization programmes.
- They are successful in bringing down the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) as pregnant women always visit health centers.
- SHGs are effective forum for social marketing of essential health and family welfare materials like ORS.

Sanitation

- In 2003-04, most of the members did not have proper sanitary system at their home.
- The drainage condition of the locality was poor.
- This affected their health condition leading to various diseases like – warm infection, urine infection, viral fever, skin infection, malaria, etc.
- With the upliftment of income over years and change in their lifestyle, the sanitary system also gets improved.
- In 2008-09, almost all the members could afford low cost safe sanitation at their home.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DIFFERENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SHGs (2008-09):

- In the Bolpur–Sriniketan block, there are nine Gram Panchayets where different SHGs are formulated. The present study indicates that in some gram panchayets, relatively larger numbers of SHGs are found. In these areas, larger proportion of SHGs approved by SGSY which are linked with SHGs Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP) can be found. An important information can also be provided here that the sex-wise variation of SHGs indicates that among them larger percentage of female SHGs are found approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP, whereas, the same for the male groups despite having in the positive direction it is fairly insignificant. The study further indicates that in the same gram panchayet, relatively larger numbers of SHGs have taken the loan from the bank which was subsequently returned and as a result of that, they are again considered for providing second installment of loan. The present study reveals that among the SHGs, large numbers of members belong to scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and general categories, whereas, the percentage of other backward caste members are quite insignificant. It therefore, indicates that government provided importance to form the SHGs primarily with the scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and general category of population. Among them, the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe category are really poor, both economically and socially, whereas, the general categories of members are poor economically.
- There are some SHGs which are approved by SGSY and linked with the SBLP some Gram panchayets, of Bolpur-Sriniketan block. In these gram panchayets larger numbers of total SHGs, are found. The study further observes that among the large proportion of SHGs majority are under female category that primarily belongs to SC, ST and OBC groups and general categories of members are neglected. In this respect, it can be remarked that the insignificant proportion of SHGs belongs to male category. It indicates that among female category in most cases, the members fail to repay the loan back to the banks.
- In some Gram panchayets under Bolpur-Sriniketan block, large percentage of female SHGs which are approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP can be found. Naturally, male category SHGs are small in number. These groups are successful in repay back the amount of loan to the bank and these female groups mostly belong to all the social categories of people like SC, ST and OBC communities and general category.
- An interesting point is to be noted here that Government does not feel interest to formulate male category of SHGs and as a result of that these groups sometimes belong to SC, ST and OBC female communities and other categories. In this matrix although positive correlation exists between percentage of male SHGs and SC, ST and OBC groups and negative correlation with other categories of SHGs but their correlation seems to be quite insignificant.
- Other aspect to be noted here that, the Gram panchayets where large proportion of ST SHGs are formed, there is relatively smaller proportion of OBC and other categories of groups which appears to be insignificant. Likewise, the Gram panchayets, where large proportion of OBC SHGs is predominant there is smaller proportion of general category members of SHGs. Table No. 5 further illustrates this:

NATURE OF ASSOCIATION OF DIFFERENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC PARAMETERS OF SHGs (2008-09)

Chi-square test is appropriate to get association between the two variables. Statistical analysis has been made between percentage of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SHGs Bank Linkage Programme to the total number of groups and other parameters of SHGs (Table No.6). It is observed that percentage association in between percentage of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SHGs Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP) and other seven variables. This association is significant, whereas, insignificant association can be observed between SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP and percentage of male SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP and percentage of SHGs passed first grading to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP.

Therefore, it can be summarised that the Gram panchayets, where larger proportion of SHGs can be found, male categories are insignificant there. Most of them fail to repay back the loans that are refused to provide loan for the coming years.

Table No. - 6 CHI-SQUARE TEST

Variable 1(V ₁)	Variable 2(V ₂)	X ²	Nature of significance
% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	Total number of SHGs	9.52	Significant at 5 % level
% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	% of female SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	10.45	Significant at 5 % level
% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	% of male SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	6.27	Insignificant
% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	% of SHGs passed I grade to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	8.61	Insignificant
% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	% of SC SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	9.77	Significant at 5 % level
% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	% of ST SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	11.20	Significant at 5 % level
% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	% of OBC SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	9.60	Significant at 5 % level
% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	% of others SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	13.31	Significant at 1 % level

MAJOR PROBLEMS FACED BY SHGs

Economic problems: In 2003-04, most of the members used to borrow from the money lenders as their expenditure exceeded their income. For this, the problems are-

1. Lack of capital, lack of credit ,money lenders' exploitation, low price produced goods, lack of skilled personnel in the groups, lack of raw materials, lack of preservation system in case of perishable goods (eg.milk, milk products etc.). Some of these problems still exist in 2008-09, like, lack of raw materials, lack of skilled personnel in the groups, etc. but the magnitude has decreased than earlier.
2. Social problems: Lack of education and knowledge, family problems (specially seen among the female groups), and caste conflict among the group members, female member's dropout after marriage.
3. Infrastructural problems encountered by the SHGs: Lack of a permanent market to sell their products, lack of transportation, exploitation by middle man, lack of nearby warehouse and cold storage.

Table No- 5, CORRELATION MATRIX

	Total number of SHGs	% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	% of female SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	% of male SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	% of SHGs passed I grade to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	% of SC SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	% of ST SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	% of OBC SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	% of others SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP
Total number of SHGs	1.00	0.88	0.82	0.59	0.67	0.69	0.67	0.60	0.90
SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number% of SHGs approved by of SHGs	0.88	1.00	0.71	0.15	0.62	0.73	0.69	0.83	0.53
% of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP to the total number of SHGs	0.82	0.71	1.00	-1.00	0.68	0.78	0.68	0.70	0.72
% of male SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	0.07	0.15	-1.00	1.00	0.59	0.58	0.60	0.23	-0.05
% of SHGs passed I grade to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	0.67	0.62	0.68	0.59	1.00	0.79	0.80	0.60	0.66
% of SC SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	0.69	0.73	0.78	0.58	0.79	1.00	-0.40	0.88	-0.39
% of ST SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	0.67	0.69	0.68	0.60	0.80	-0.40	1.00	-0.22	-0.61
% of OBC SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	0.60	0.83	0.70	0.23	0.60	0.88	-0.22	1.00	-0.48
% of others SHGs to the total number of SHGs approved by SGSY and linked with SBLP	0.90	0.53	0.72	-0.05	0.66	-0.39	-0.61	-0.48	1.00

N.B. SHGs: Self Help Group, SGSY: *Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojna*, SBLP: SHGs Bank Linkage Programme

Source: District Rural Development Cell, Birbhum District

Policy measures

In the study area, the self help groups are facing several problems among which, most of the constraints can be mitigated by the Government only. On the other hand, the SHGs members should also try to mitigate some of the problems they are facing. Some of the measures are discussed below:

- 1) Fixed price of the products and services can be given in the regulated market.
- 2) Large number of trainings related to their work of interest can be arranged.
- 3) Large number of developmental programmes can be organized for them. NABARD and SGSY have launched maximum number of programmes and schemes related to SHGs.
- 4) The group members should have good understanding among them so that any project they are handling is completed in minimum time.
- 5) The group members should always attend the group meetings and the trainings arranged by the Government and the NGOs.

Female groups face marketing problem significantly than the male groups. This can be eradicated by smooth transportation and regulated market. A good transportation system has always been the need of the groups, especially for the female members. Still, a large numbers of villages do not have a metalled road and during the rainy season, these groups face huge problems in collecting raw materials as well as reaching the main market located in Bolpur.

Now, good transportation system will reduce this problem and at the same time, there will be diversification of their products and services which will certainly have a positive effect on their economy.

Conclusion

The findings from the present study show that the SHGs have the potential to fight against poverty. The study reveals that there is an increase in income and expenditure over years as a result of intervention of SHGs. The study also finds that the empowerment of the poor women has increased due to participation in the SHGs programme. In the long run, sustainability of the SHGs is assessed on the basis of the strength and quality of the social capital formation of the SHGs. Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and (OBC) groups are also actively participating in this programme. It can be concluded from the present study that SHGs have a positive impact on the eradication of poverty. It not only helps in economic upgradation of the families but also helps in social development.

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