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Finding, Suggestions and Recommendations
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FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Indian women in general have proved in recent years that given the opportunity, they can conic up on par with men and some times even excel them in many walks of life. It is Interesting to note that rural women have not lagged behind their urban counter parts in establishing their credential to be reckoned in future programmes of development. The establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in rural areas to promote the empowerment of rural women is an additional support and a step further in the right direction. These Groups have helped many rural women become entrepreneurs and develop several rural enterprises.

The present study has been undertaken to assess the performance of the new generation of women entrepreneurs functioning under the protective care of women Self-Help Groups. It has identified the socio-economic factors, which have contributed to the evolution entrepreneurs. It has also identified the problems faced by women entrepreneurs with a view to offer solutions which are likely to mitigate their intensity, It is a micro level study covering four Panchayat Unions in Tiruchirappalli District of Tamil Nadu. Earlier studies took into account only the problems and prospects of the women entrepreneurs, but this present study evaluates the performance of rural women entrepreneurs who are associated with the women Self-Help Groups. In this regard this study is different from earlier Studies.
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Gender inequality is a problem felt by Indian Society, especially in rural areas, from time immemorial. Any step towards attaining gender equality must be in the line of inculcating and developing women entrepreneurship and thereby ensuring women empowerment.

Keeping this view in mind, this study intends to evaluate the performance and i faced by the women entrepreneurs for which the analysis of social and economic factors of the respondents is important. Following are the significant findings of their socio-economic background, which paves the way for the investigator to understand the performance and problems faced by the women entrepreneurs of four selected Panchayat Unions.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

The present study has clearly shown that a majority (84.8 per cent) of the women entrepreneurs in the sample area belong to the age group of 25 years and above, which is a welcoming feature as it reveals that they are mature enough to take independent decisions and better suited to venture into entrepreneurial responsibility. This age group also realises its responsibility towards family and society.
A large proportion i.e. 81.3 per cent of the respondents belong to the Hindu Religion, which at one time had forbidden women from performing anything except household chores. It is significant to note that the absolute majority of the rural women entrepreneurs (91.6 per cent) belong to backward and scheduled communities, branded as depressed sections of society. In recent times there is a progressive change in the attitude and orientation of these communities which were once kept under shackles for no fault of theirs. Nearly 80.4 per cent of the respondents are married women. It is heartening to see that their husbands, despite being accustomed to mate chauvinism, have encouraged them to assume the role of entrepreneurs.

Nearly 67.6 per cent of the respondents belong to the nuclear families. The study has revealed that the decay of the joint family system is one of the contributory factors to the emergence of rural women entrepreneurs.

It is inferred that in the small and compact families, women who have a lot of leisure are ideal for the development of entrepreneurs. Around 38.4 per cent of respondents have a family size of 4-5 members and a majority of them (34.4 per cent) have 3 children. The children in their family have not stood on their way while undertaking entrepreneurial ventures.
The study has shown that 71.6 per cent of the respondents are literates. The literacy rate of their husbands is 77.1 per cent which is an encouraging factor to motivate the activity of their spouses.

There is not much to cheer about the economic background of the family members of the respondents, because a higher percentage, 48.4 of respondent’s family members are agricultural wage earners, 34.2 per cent of them run a small business with meagre income, Lesser percentage of them (17.4 per cent) are employed in lower cadre of government jobs.

A majority, i.e., 53.7 per cent of the family members of the respondents, earn an annual income which ranges from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 20,000/-. Their expenditure pattern shows that the major portion of their income is spent on food. The respondents spend annually around 72.2 per cent of their income on food and the remaining 27. per cent of the income on non-food items which also include lottery tickets, gambling and liquor. It is observed from the collected information that a large proportion of the respondents (42.8 per cent) own assets worth less than Rs. 10,000/-. It is observed that none of the family members of the respondents are land owners. Therefore to support their families financially women have been compelled to take up entrepreneurship.
MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

Motivation plays a major role in the better performance of the women entrepreneurs. There are a number of motivating factors enabling rural women to become entrepreneurs and to be successful in entrepreneurship. These have been highlighted as follows.

The family members of the respondents are the cementing force for the successful entrepreneurship. The respondents are very much encouraged and supported by their family members in their business. The support received by many of them from their husbands is very significant (81 per cent). Of the outside a lie support rendered by NGOs (96.4 per cent) is worth mentioning. The motivation given by the friends and relatives (71.6 per cent) is equally praise worthy. The results of the Chi-square test also supports the finding that the co-operation extended to the respondents by their family members is overwhelming and sufficient. With these strong and solid backups, 40.8 per cent of the respondents have ventured into various entrepreneurial activities mainly to render financial support to the family.

Out of 250 sample respondents 70 (28.6 per cent) belong to women co-operatives, which have the advantage of collective wisdom, division of labour and sharing of the profits. Respondents who are members of the women co-operative society are found to contribute individually more to the
family income than the respondents who are functioning as sole proprietors or partners. The results of the logistic regression analysis, confirms the fact that the respondents who have a tie-up with co-operative societies are found to reap the maximum benefits.

PERFORMANCE OF THE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

In this study the performance of the women entrepreneurs has been analysed by taking into account four parameters, namely the amount of savings made by the respondents, the credit availed by them, income earned and the repayment of loans on their part.

SAVINGS MADE BY THE RESPONDENTS

Rural women SHGs are eligible to receive revolving fund and credits from the lending institutions, if and only if, they have accumulated constantly a record of the required level of savings. As has been observed from the study a majority of the respondents have deposited their savings with the banks and co-operative societies.

Among the four Panchayat unions, the respondents from Thiruvidaimarudur and Kumbakonam Panchayat unions have recorded the higher annual average savings of Rs. 1801.05 and Rs. 962.81/- respectively, while, Thiruvaiyaru Panchayat Union has recorded a very low annual
average savings of Rs. 804.29/-. Activity-wise, there are differences in the average annual savings of the highest annual savings of Rs. 2,85865/- and those engaged in pot making have the lowest amount of savings Rs.400/-. In the total annual savings of Rs.2,96,120.22, by all the four Panchayat unions, Thiruvidaimarudur panchayat union has 46.2 per cent of savings and Kumbakonam has 23.7 percentage of savings.

**CREDIT AVAILED BY THE RESPONDENTS**

Savings pave the way for the women respondents to avail credits to start their enterprise. Nearly 85.6 per cent of them have borrowed the amount from. Banks (Rs.7,80,300), Co-operative society (Rs. 47,500), Internal loans from SHGs (Rs. 19,425) and Money lenders (Rs. 1,66. 100). 14.4 per cent of them have mobilized their own resources to start their business. The study has revealed that next to the banks, money lenders and co-operatives are the main sources from which rural women entrepreneurs borrow money to run their enterprises. Respondents belonging to Kumbakonam and Thiruvidaimarudur Panchayat unions have received a higher amount of credit to the tune of Rs.3,54,300/- and Rs.3,07,800/- respectively because of their higher level of savings compared to the respondents from the other two Panchayat unions. The credit needs of the rural enterprises differ according to their nature of activities. Activity-wise, the respondents who are engaged in food processing borrowed the highest amount from the banks ie. Rs. 1,38,100/- and the lowest of Rs.1000/- for vegetable.
INCOME EARNED BY THE RESPONDENTS

In this study, the profit earned by the respondents is considered to be the income of the entrepreneur. Activities-wise, there are differences in the average annual income of the respondents. The respondents engaged in pot making cam the highest average annual income of Rs.14,300/-, while the lowest average income of Rs.3,250/- is earned by those engaged in vegetable vending. The average annual income of respondents engaged in activities like making milk products, mixy covers, quarrying, handloom waving, making ready-made garments and mat weaving are ranging from the Rs.12,609/- to Rs. 10,333.

REPAYMENT OF LOANS

This study has observed that women are more prompt in repaying the money they have borrowed from banks. The lending agencies also pleaded at the prompt repayment of loans by the respondents. Out of the total amount of Rs.10,13,325/- borrowed by four panchayat unions, Rs.4,75,650/- i.e. 46.9 percentage has been repaid within the specified the period of time. Respondents engaged in all the activities have also been found to repay their dues regularly.

The analysis on the age-wise performance reveals that the respondents belonging to the age group of above 25 years have done satisfactorily in terms of not only the repayment made, but also the amount saved and the income earned.
PROBLEMS FACED BY THE RESPONDENTS

Since the women entrepreneurs are fully involved in the production of the commodities, they find it very difficult to take additional effort to market their commodities. Naturally, they have to depend on certain middlemen and some linking agencies for selling their products. This study shows that 60.4 per cent of the women entrepreneurs sell their products through middlemen. Because of that they lose a mean income of Rs. 380.16, as compared to the entrepreneurs who sell directly to the consumers.

For any production activity adequate infrastructural facilities are very important. The foregoing study highlights the lack of transport facilities, communication links, primary health centres, storage facilities, toilet and sanitary facilities. 54 per cent of women entrepreneurs store their products only in the work spot, due to the paucity of godown faculties. Even though raw-materials and skilled persons are accessible, the lack of certain infrastructural facilities undermine the functioning of the rural enterprises.

Among the respondents 45.2 per cent feel that irregularity and bribery the financial institutions hinder the borrowing of loans on time. The lengthy procedure followed by the banks in lending loans also affects the free flow of credit to the respondents.
Literacy and training are the important backbones for the successful conduct of the enterprise. Though the literacy level is somewhat better (71.6 per cent), the percentage of entrepreneurs who attained training amounted to only 12.8 per cent. The inadequate training received by the respondents has affected the better performance of the entrepreneurs.

SUGGESTIONS

The present study mainly aims at evaluating the performance of the rural women entrepreneurs functioning under the protective care of rural women Self Help Groups (SHGs). However the study has revealed some of the problems faced by them in their trade. The following suggestions are tendered to competent authorities with the assurance that if they are carried out they are sure to mitigate their problems.

➢ There is a general grievance among many respondents that training is not imparted to all the women entrepreneurs. At present the training is provided at the Tamil Nadu Corporation for the Development of Women and District Industrial Centre functioning at Thanjavur, the District headquarters. The trainees are selected from various districts and as such the opportunities are limited to the women entrepreneurs within the Thanjavur district. It is, therefore, suggested that the government should open a training centre in each panchayat union.
with qualified resource persons to impart training to women entrepreneurs attached to SHGs. Such training should focus on the practical aspect of rural entrepreneurship.

➢ Procedure for bank loans can be made simple. Securing bank c has proved to be a tedious and time-consuming process involving a lot of formalities. As such there is scope for unhealthy practices such as corruption and favouritism. So many of the formalities can be simplified and there must be more transparency in the working of credit institutions with regard to lending of loans to women entrepreneurs. More finance for small units at lower interest rate without stress on collateral security can be provided.

➢ Support systems congenial l rural women entrepreneurship should be staffed with female workers in financial, commercial institutions, training, extension and consultancy services.

➢ Family support facilities should be provided to rural women entrepreneurs by means of starting childcare centres and preparatory schools.

➢ Role models or success stories of rural women entrepreneurs should be broadcast or projected through radio or television episodes to create a need within women to better their socio-economic status.

➢ The role of supportive agencies like District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA), District Industrial Centre (DIC), Tamil Nadu
Corporation for Development of Women (TNCDW) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) must be made more dynamic and they must become more accountable and action—oriented in fulfilling their targets.

Many respondents have expressed the view that they do not have access to information relating to their enterprise namely, about the availability of raw materials, substitutes available to their products, marketing prospects and linking agencies. In order to provide rural women entrepreneurs in SHGs better access to information an integrated system can be developed harnessing all the available communication media including newspapers, radio, TV and Internet.

Development of women is possible only by means of providing education to them. The gender-gap may be successfully reduced by means of empowering women through education, self-employment and income generating activities. Self-employed rural women in SHGs should be brought within the ambit of non-formal education.

CONCLUSION - POLICY IMPLICATIONS

For the development of rural women entrepreneurs, the attitudes of rural women should be channelised towards innovative, scientific and economic thinking. Their dormant entrepreneurial qualities and their deficiencies are to be brought to the limelight to provide reinforcements in
required area. Since individuals have a natural tendency to resist change, the process should gradually be made to overcome this resistance. The task can be made easier if the trainer succeeds in instilling a sense of self-confidence in them and boosting the level of their emotional tolerance. Such a concerted action would facilitate their active participation in developmental programmes and productive activities as an individual or as a group.

In a diversified society like India, social factors are much dominant in determining even the economic well-being of the people. So any full-fledged women empowerment programmes must be multi-dimensional in nature which should encompass social as well as economic criteria.

➢ Development of women entrepreneurs in general and rural women entrepreneurs in particular, is an integral part of the economic development of India. So any prospective programme relating to human resources should include certain inbuilt specific scheme or plan to develop women entrepreneurship in rural areas. At present there is a lot of exploitation by middlemen. To put an end to the exploitation by the intermediaries, Co-operative Marketing Societies managed by trained women could be formed. These Societies should cater to the specific entrepreneurial activities in each locality. Some more linking agencies like ‘Poomalai’ can be set up to eliminate the intermediaries.
It should also be ascertained that timely payment is made by these linking agencies.

➤ Certain products of rural women SHGs such as washing powder, match box, soap, detergent powder, cleaning powder, phenyl can be compulsorily sold to the consumer through the ration shops run by the State Governments, at the time of selling the essential products like kerosene, rice, sugar, wheat, rava and maida. Thus, the women entrepreneurs could be assured of a fixed market for their products without intermediaries.

➤ Provisions can be also made to have a contact with the co-operative society functioning in semi-urban and urban areas, in order to market their products.

➤ The initiatives taken up by the TNCDW to form Panchayat Level Federation will go a long way towards marketing the produce of the SHGs. Kiosks with internet facilities should be allotted to the women SHGs to find a market for their products.

➤ Many of the respondents have complained about the inadequacy of storing facilities to store their products. The Government and NGOs functioning in those regions could provide storage facilities at cheaper cost. These godowns could preferably be located near the Co-operative Marketing Societies, which undertake the responsibility of selling the products of the women entrepreneurs.
Region-wise, District-wise and State-wise workshops and training programmes could be arranged for rural women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to enable them in acquiring adequate information which in turn infuses courage and self-confidence in them. All the information regarding training such as nature of courses, venue, duration, fee structure, outcome etc. should be made available to every SHG at a centralized location like the Panchayat Level Federation. An enterprising NGO can even host a website called rural-woman-entrepreneur.com which would provide all the necessary information regarding training, technical know-how, storage and marketing to the rural woman entrepreneur.

At present successful men and women entrepreneurs in urban areas are given awards. In the same manner the rural women entrepreneurs are also to be recognised by giving both monetary and non-monetary awards for their outstanding performance. It would be appropriate to encourage them on the International Women’s Day. Such initiative can be taken by the NGOs in collaboration with TNCDW.
SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF HELP GROUPS FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

1) The study has been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the concept of Self Help Groups in the improvement of the all round socio economic and living conditions of the rural women folk. It is well known that more than 75 per cent of the country is in the villages. It is seen from the study undertaken that the benefits of forming Self Help Groups have not reached well in the villages. It is suggested that aggressive campaign be undertaken periodically to educate the rural women on the benefits of the concept of Self Help Groups so that they will not only be benefited but they can contribute to the social and economic development of the villages. If the villages develop that will ultimately lead to the development of the country and the country can boast to be called as a developed country.

2) The study has revealed that the performance of the women Self Help Groups are relatively doing well when compared to Non-self Help Groups. The Government should therefore give importance to this vital aspect and reorient all the women development programmes to ensure that there is an inbuilt Self Help Group component in it, which means that all the Ministries/Departments connected with Rural
Development earmark a fixed amount every year towards the programmes of the Self Help Groups so that the desired results in the implementation of this important concept could be accomplished.

3) It is observed from the data collected that in some of the cases the importance of training has been ignore. If any programme has to succeed, the importance of the training cannot be ignored. This is further more relevant where financial and monetary matters are involved. By imparting training, the skills of the villagers can be improved and perfection could be achieved. Any skill can be mastered by giving training and once she becomes a master, she can train the other village women folk. Therefore, in order to achieve the goal of self-determination of women and for the sustained growth of the villages, the role of the women cannot be sidelined. So, by making the need based training as an integral part of the Self Help Groups, the rural women can get self confidence to start and run any trade/enterprise and to contribute for nation building.

4) The study reveals clearly the role of the Non Governmental Organisations in improving the performance of the Self Help Groups. They have been acting as a catalyst between the rural poor and the commercial financial institutions. The study has also revealed the role played by the money lenders in creating havoc in the lives of the rural poor. If the objective of the upliftment of the villages has to be
achieved, the role of the money lenders will have to be totally taken away from the rural village scene. This can be achieved in a great way by the effective role to be played by the Non Governmental Organisations in close link with the government departments so that they can play the role of a catalyst in this regard.

5) A country's real strength is in its literate population. In order to improve the literacy rate it is pertinent the rural folk especially the women who are confined to the houses are educated on their rights and duties. This calls for extensive campaign to impart in the minds of the rural women of their rights and duties. It is here that the mass media has a well-defined role to play. They can take up the task of aggressive marketing of the concept of Self Help Groups, which will show the rural women the need for their contribution to the economic and social well-being of the villages.

6) The maintenance of the required registers and account note books should be made mandatory as this will lead to greater accountability. As the Self Help Groups are dealing with public money, they become the custodian of the funds of the group. So, whatever money that has been collected has to be properly accounted for apart from keeping proper account of the expenditure made. It is necessary that at the training stage itself adequate time is spent on this aspect also. It is also essential that the officials devote some time periodically to verify
the maintenance of the registers and account books and ensure their correctness.

7) It is seen from the study that in some cases the attendance to the meetings of the Self Help Groups are poor. As important decisions concerning the functioning of the Self Help Groups are deliberated at the meetings of the group, it is important that all the members of the group attend the meeting so that the decisions taken are duly deliberated and decided.

8) If the desired objective of the all round development of the villages is to be achieved through Self Help Groups, there is an imperative need to develop the skill of the rural women in all aspects and not only in small savings. The hidden talent of the rural women will have to be identified and that talent will have to be developed and that no particular skill should be thrust on the women. New types of income generating programmes have to be identified, assessed and the choice should be on the rural women to take up the same subject to her being fit for it.

9) In order to bring out the talents in the leadership, training assumes paramount important and it includes all aspects maintaining good rapport with the other members of the group, bring out better ideas for the implementation of the group, so that the skills of a good leader
gets enhanced which will go a long way in the smooth and effective functioning of the Self Help Groups.

10) Once the Self Help Groups have been formed, there is an absolute need for them to maintain close contact and interaction between the groups in order to assess their performance. This will also enable them to discuss their problems and make it possible for them to solve them.

11) It is not only essential that merely the groups are formed. It is very essential that adequate infrastructure should be created and public transportation be made to see that the rural women get integrated into the national main stream.

12) In order to make the villages disease free, the role of Self Help Groups in creating awareness with regard to nutritional health, hygiene, family planning methods cannot be underscored. Since, they know the villages better than anybody else, they will have to play a dominant role along with the Government and Non Governmental Organisations by arranging regular health camps to educate the rural women on all these aspects for achieving this goal.

13) The study reveals that the rural women folk are still confined to their domestic chores and their contribution to the political process is very less. If the villages have to be integrated into the national politics, the rural women can play a better role in this regard. Here it is essential
that they are educated on the need for their participation in the overall developments of the villages and there by come out socially to contribute their mite to nation building.

14) The dissemination of health messages has helped to Self Help Groups in bringing spectacular changes in the awareness of the rural women and has brought about improved involvement in health programmes. Therefore, it is essential that dissemination of health messages should be an integral part of the Self Help Group programme.

15) The money lenders have been playing a destructive role in the development of the villages. If Self Help Groups will have to succeed in their programmes, timely and adequate credit is essential. It is here that the Banks play a very vital role, The Self Help Group members seek better treatment from banks as they complaint of inordinate in disbursal of loans. Instances of banks adjusting repayment of loans taken by the family members as a pre condition for extending fresh loans has been reported. The banks have a bounded duty to extend priority sector loans at low interest rates and they will have to realize their obligation and it is essential that all the Self Help Groups are credit linked. It is suggested that with banking going hi-tech in the cities and towns, the same can happen in the villages. Doorstep banking is common today in the cities. By this the banker comes to
the door steps of the client. Verifies his identity and disburses the money required by the client. In a similar fashion, on an experimental basis this could be tried with the Self Help Groups, thereby extended in a big way, which will go a long way in extending the need based timely credit to the rural women and pave the way for the eliminating the money lenders from the rural credit scene.

16) The Government and the Reserve Bank of India have been laying stress on hassle free rural credit by the banks. In spite of specific instructions, banks have been insisting on collateral security for extending credit facility to Self Help Groups. It should be ensured that the rural poor get credit at low interest rates without much difficulty.

17) In the midst of natural calamities, insurance of the Self Help Groups becomes very essential. The need arises for directing the insurance companies to focus their attention in insuring the groups so that the losses could be minimized and also the insurance companies will be able to get good business, out of this venture.

18) In order to improve the economic viability and accelerate the growth of the Self Help Groups, it is necessary that they should diversify into other fields like undertaking contract connected with laying of road, construction of buildings, running small canteens in schools, colleges and Government offices, run mini buses/lorries for the transportation
of passengers, goods in and around the villages. It is also essential that banks can consider liberal financial assistance to these activities in a small way.

19) The government has been announcing a number of awards to students from the towns coming out with laurels in the examinations. In the same way, in order to encourage the rural girl children of the Self Help groups, the government can consider announcing a separate award for the girl children of the Self Help Groups, which will act as a boost to bring down the school dropout ratio.

20) The various departments of the government operate different developmental schemes. It is suggested that all the Self Help Groups are aware of all the development schemes so that their benefits can be enjoyed by the women of the villages. It is here the Non Governmental Organisations can play a very useful role in disseminating the schemes among the Self Help Groups.

21) The need for keeping the villages neat and tidy needs no emphasis. A clean village is always free from environmental hazards. The task of keeping the villages neat and tidy can best be entrusted to the Self Help Groups. They can charge a small fee for the same which can be ploughed back for the betterment of the villages.

22) In order to enable the Self Help Group members to market their produce, it is essential that they are exempted from certain rigid rules
and regulations which are made applicable to the products from the other big manufacturers, without compromising on quality control. The government should also consider granting concessions and relief's in the export market, so that Self Help Groups will be encouraged to export. The co-operative societies can also help in the marketing of the produce of the Self Help Groups.

23) The Government as well as Non Governmental Organisations are conducting a number of exhibitions. The Self Help Groups can be allotted space in such exhibitions either free of cost or at concessional rent to enable the Self Help Groups to market their produce.

24) The various schemes formulated by the Government for the Self Help Groups are implemented through different departments. It is seen that some of the departments have not been playing any role in this regard. It is suggested that the Government schemes should be distributed among all the development departments so that for many schemes are not concentrated with one department but also the schemes can be better implementing.