

## **CHAPTER – VII**

### **CONCLUSION**

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. Empowerment of women is a holistic concept. It is multi-dimensional in its approach and covers social, political, and economic aspects.

In the last five decades, the concept of women empowerment has undergone a sea change from welfare oriented approach to equity approach. It has been understood as the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives.

It is also widely recognized that apart from managing household, bearing children, rural women bring income with productive activities ranging from traditional work in the fields to working in factories or running small and petty businesses. They have also proven that they can be better entrepreneurs and development managers in any kind of human development activities.

Therefore, it is important and utmost necessary to make rural women empowered in taking decisions to enable them to be in the central part of any human development process. The empowerment of women is also considered

as an active process enabling women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life.

One of the powerful approaches to women empowerment and rural entrepreneurship is the formation of Self-Help Groups especially among women.

Women Self-Help Groups are increasingly being used as tool for various developmental interventions. Credit and its delivery through Self-Help Groups have also been taken as a means for empowerment of rural women.

Self-Help Groups have been instrumental in empowering grass root women in several areas. Evidences from different regions revealed that there are positive improvements realized in terms of all the group members becoming literate; mitigating village disputes, improving health and education of children and keeping the village roads clean and giving exposure to all the members of the group to carry on the bank's transactions.

The Self-Help Group approach has proved successful not only in improving the economic conditions through income generation but in creating awareness about health and hygiene, sanitation and cleanliness, environmental protection, importance of education and better response for development schemes.

There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Poverty, the reality of life for the vast majority of women in India, is an important factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment.

Lack of awareness about legal and constitutional provisions and failure in realizing it, is another factor that hinders the process of empowerment. Most of the women are not aware of their legal rights.

It is observed that the formal sector credit was very limited and hardly available for small borrowers. Self-Help Groups have broken this trend.

The Self-Help Groups associated micro financing is targeted to mostly women. The experience has shown that the economic activities have not been crossed beyond the micro scale. The women who have been taken up economic activities, hardly promoted to produce products of global importance.

The present research work entitled "WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SELF-HELP GROUPS – A Study with Reference to Virudhunagar District, Tamilnadu" provides the following findings that are summarized below.

## **7.1 DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-HELP GROUPS**

The emergence of the concept of Self Help Groups in India is an outcome of several experiments conducted at the Savings and Credit Management Groups (SCMG), sponsored by Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA).

On the basis of this MYRADA project, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) framed the pilot project for the development of the Self-Help Group system in India.

The first official interest in informal group lending in India took shape during 1986-87 when NABARD supported and funded an active research project on “Savings and Credit Management of Self-Help Groups”. In 1987, NABARD first put funds into the Self-Help Group movement (in response to a proposal from MYRADA submitted in 1986). In 1987, it provided MYRADA with a grant of 1 million Indian rupees to enable it to invest resources to identify affinity groups, build their capacity and match their savings after a period of 3-6 months.

In 1988-89, NABARD undertook a survey of 43 NGOs spread over 11 States in India to study the functioning of the Self-Help Groups and possibilities of collaboration between the banks and Self-Help Groups in the mobilization of rural savings and improving the credit delivery to the poor.

As a result of the feedback from this initiative, in 1989, NABARD launched an action research project in which similar grants were provided to other NGOs. After an analysis of this action research, in 1990, RBI accepted the Self-Help Group strategy as an alternative credit model.

In July 1991, RBI advised the banks to participate in the pilot project and to extend finance to Self-Help Groups as per the norms and guidelines of NABARD.

In 1992, NABARD issued guidelines to provide the framework for a strategy that would allow banks to lend directly to Self-Help Groups. On the basis of these initial experiences, the Self-Help Group - Bank Linkage Programme was launched in 1992.

During 1991-92, NABARD launched 92 pilot projects on linking Self-Help Groups with Banks, in various parts of the country. In February 1992, detailed guidelines were issued to the commercial banks, explaining the modalities of the pilot project. Later, the scheme was made applicable to RRBs and Cooperative Banks in May 1993.

The Self Help Groups have become a component of the Indian financial system after 1996. They are small, informal and homogenous groups of not more than 20 members each. The size of 20 has been made mandatory because any group larger than this has to be registered under the Indian legal system.

The SHG-Bank Linkage Programme was slow to take off, but has been speeding along since 1999. It has received unstinting support from Reserve Bank of India, the central and several state governments of India – notably Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka – and thousands of NGOs and the banking sector, as well as multilateral agencies, notably International Fund for Agricultural Development.

By March 2005, the programme had provided credit to 1618456 Self-Help Groups with a membership of over 24 million poor families or about 120 million poor people, making it the largest microfinance initiative in the world.

The Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women Ltd., was incorporated on December 9, 1983 under Companies Act 1956.

The objectives of Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women Ltd, are promoting socio-economic development and empowerment of women. The Corporation was under the administrative control of Social Welfare Department from inception till July 2006.

The Tamil Nadu Women's Empowerment Project, an International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) -supported project implemented through the Tamil Nadu Women's Development Corporation, was the first project in the country to incorporate the Self-Help Group concept into a state-sponsored programme.

“Mahalir Thittam” is a socio-economic empowerment programme for women implemented by Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women Ltd.

“Mahalir Thittam” is based on Self-Help Group (SHG) approach and is implemented in partnership with Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Community based organizations.

The Self-Help Group scheme was started in a small way in Dharmapuri district in the year 1989 by [Social Welfare and NMP Department](#) with the assistance of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Later the scheme was extended to the erstwhile Salem and South Arcot districts in the year 1991-1992 and further extended to Madurai and Ramanathapuram in the year 1992-93.

Following the success of the IFAD project, “Mahalir Thittam” project was launched with State Government funding from 1997-1998 by [Social Welfare and NMP Department](#) and was progressively introduced in all the districts of the State.

The Self-Help Groups that complete 6 months become eligible for credit rating. Credit rating is a bench marking exercise to grade the group and ascertain its credit worthiness.

Regularity of savings, frequency of meetings, proper maintenance of registers, internal loaning and repayment are some of the key parameters for rating of groups.

The groups also undergo a second credit rating after the lapse of another six months to ascertain their readiness and suitability to undertake an economic activity. The groups which pass the second credit rating are provided financial assistance to start an economic activity through SGSY / TAHDCO schemes along with bank funding.

After the groups in rural areas pass the first credit rating, Revolving Fund (RF) subsidy of Rs.10,000/- is provided under Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) to facilitate credit linkage with the banks. In addition to the subsidy given by the Government, the Banks provide cash credit upto Rs.30,000/- per group.



The growth of Self-Help Groups during the study period both at Tamilnadu level and Virudhunagar district level reveals the following position.

At the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, there were 3,54,783 Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu as against 4,41,311 Self-Help Groups at the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 registering a growth of 24.39%.

At the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, there were 57,10,628 women members in Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu as against 69,91,366 women members in Self-Help Groups at the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 registering a growth of 22.43%.

At the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, there were Rs. 1,58,211.13 lakhs savings of Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu as against Rs.2,56,800.99 lakhs savings of Self-Help Groups at the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 registering a growth of 62.32%.

At the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, there were 2,52,051 rural Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu as against 3,02,092 rural Self-Help Groups at the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 registering a growth of 19.85%.

At the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, there were 1,02,732 urban Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu as against 1,39,219 urban Self-Help Groups at the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 registering a growth of 35.52%.

At the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, there were 40,94,669 rural women members in Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu as against 48,33,472 rural women members in Self-Help Groups at the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 registering a growth of 18.04%.

At the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, there were 16,15,959 urban women members in Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu as against 21,57,894 urban women members in Self-Help Groups at the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 registering a growth of 33.54%.

At the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, there were Rs.1,21,487.58 lakhs rural savings of Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu as against Rs. 1,84,342.92 lakhs rural savings of Self-Help Groups at the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 registering a growth of 51.74%.

At the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, there were Rs. 36,723.55 lakhs urban savings of Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu as against Rs.74,770.12 lakhs urban savings of Self-Help Groups at the end of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 registering a growth of 103.60%.

There were 9687 Self-Help Groups in Virudhunagar district at the end of year 2007. The number of Self-Help Groups in the district went up to 12250 at the end of 2010 registering a growth of about 27% in a period of 3 years.

There was tremendous growth (about 15%) of Self-Help Groups in the year 2010 alone.

The number of Self-Help Groups in rural part of Virudhunagar district had been more than thrice the number of Self-Help Groups in urban part of the district during the study period. However, the number of Self-Help Groups in rural part of the district had registered a growth of about 25% at the end of 2010 when compared to 2007 while the number of Self-Help Groups in urban part of the district had registered a growth of about 34% at the end of 2010 when compared to 2007.

There was about 25% growth of women members in Virudhunagar district by taking 2007 as base year. Especially, the increase in number of women members is noted more in the year 2010.

The number of women enrolled in rural part of Virudhunagar district had been more than thrice the number of women enrolled in urban part of the district during the study period. However, the number of women enrolled in rural part of the district had registered a growth of about 23% at the end of 2010 when compared to 2007 while the number of women enrolled in urban part of the district had registered a growth of about 33% at the end of 2010 when compared to 2007.

There was about 30% growth of savings of Self-Help Groups in Virudhunagar district by taking 2007 as base year.

The savings of Self-Help Groups in rural part of Virudhunagar district had been more than thrice the savings of Self-Help Groups in urban part of the district during the study period. However, the savings of Self-Help Groups in rural part of the district had registered a growth of about 30% at the end of 2010 when compared to 2007 while the savings of Self-Help Groups in urban part of the district had registered a growth of about 29% at the end of 2010 when compared to 2007.

## **7.2 SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH SHGs**

As members of Self-Help Groups, women can save money and invest. They can also use money at the time of their needs. As they can have money in their hands, they get some status in their family. It has resulted in developing self-confidence, self esteem and self respect also.

The findings of the analysis of the social impact of Self-Help Groups on their members in Virudhunagar District in Tamilnadu are summarised below.

40% of the Self-Help Group members belonged to the age group of 35-45 represented by responsible and matured housewives.

Majority (52.50%) of the respondents had educational qualification above secondary school level. However, it is discernible to note that as many as 25% of the members of the Self-Help Groups are illiterates.

Majority (72%) of the members of the Self-Help Groups were married.

Majority (75%) of the respondents were earning members employed in agriculture and allied fields, casual labourers in private companies and match works, and self-employed. Only 25% of the members were housewives.

The two main leading sources of information in respect of the activities of the Self-Help Groups as revealed by the members were the NGO staff and the peer group (about 71%).

Savings and internal lending had constituted main reasons (66%) for joining Self-Help Groups.

In order to test whether there is any significant difference in self worth among the sample members before and after joining the Self-Help Groups, Mc Nemar test setting the level of significance at 5% is used.

The test shows that remarkable improvement is noticed after joining Self-Help Groups in three out of six variables governing self-worth: general confidence level, recognition in the family and communication. In all these cases, the P value is less than the level of significance and hence, the null

hypotheses are rejected implying that there is a considerable improvement in respect of these variables as a result of joining the Self-Help Groups.

In the case of other three variables – confidence to face financial crisis, helping tendency and decision making – the P value is more than the level of significance and hence, the null hypotheses are accepted implying that there is no considerable improvement in respect of these variables as a result of joining the Self-Help Groups.

In order to test whether there is any significant difference in social evils among the sample members before and after joining the Self-Help Groups, Mc Nemar test setting the level of significance at 5% is used.

The test shows that remarkable improvement is noticed after joining Self-Help Groups in all the six variables governing social evils: harassment of women, alcoholism and gambling, child labour, female infanticide, dowry and children's education. In all these cases, the P value is less than the level of significance and hence, the null hypotheses are rejected implying that there is a considerable improvement in respect of these variables as a result of joining the Self-Help Groups.

The impact of the Self-Help Groups on social changes on the part of the members was found to be encouraging.

Remaining passive to verbal abuse was very much reduced from about 58% (before joining SHGs) to about just 4% (after joining SHGs); instead, making complaints to the Self-Help Groups against verbal abuse was found among majority of the Self-Help Group members (78%).

Counter to physical violence was very much reduced from about 44% (before joining SHGs) to about 28% (after joining SHGs). Instead, making complaints to the Self-Help Groups against physical violence was found among 42% of the Self-Help Group members.

Remaining passive to insulting was very much reduced from 60% (before joining SHGs) to just 4% (after joining SHGs).

Remaining passive to psychological attack was very much reduced from about 54% (before joining) to about just 5% (after joining); instead, making complaints to the Self-Help Groups against psychological attack was found among majority of the Self-Help Group members (76%).

These healthy practices had prevailed since the Self-Help Groups extend their support during such adverse situations.

Out of 400 members surveyed, 62% of the members had participated in the training programmes and the remaining 38% of the members did not participate in the training programmes.

Out of the 400 Members surveyed, 54% of the members had participated in the self employment programme to run the rural enterprises.

Among the 400 members, about 77% of the members told that the group leader had maintained proper accounts and these accounts were submitted to all these group members and remaining 23% of the members told that the group leader did not maintain the proper accounts of the Self-Help Groups.

69% of the members did not face any problem after joining the Self-Help Group and the remaining 31% had faced some sort of problems after joining Self-Help Group.

Out of 124 members who had faced the problems after joining Self-Help Groups, about 21% of the members met the problems of inadequate loan; about 27% had rigid rules and regulations and the rest 52% had faced the problem of domination by animators in their Self-Help Groups.

The impact of Self-Help Groups on the social status of the members was found out by taking into account seven factors: Mobility, Exposure, Awareness, Leadership skills, Social security, Creativity and Integrity. 'Leadership skills' with the highest Weighted Arithmetic Mean score of 5.01 was found to be the most important factor that has received the impact followed by 'mobility' with 4.92, 'social security' with 4.03, 'integrity' with 3.95, 'exposure' with 3.69, 'creativity' with 3.19 and 'awareness' with 3.06.



### **7.3 ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH SHGs**

The growth in the number of savings bank accounts opened by Self-Help Groups clearly shows that the Self-Help Group bank linkage had progressed tremendously during the study period. In fact, the number of Self-Help Groups with savings bank account had increased by about 67% at the end of 2010 when compared to such Self-Help Groups at the end of 2007.

Commercial Banks (55-58%), Regional Rural Banks (26-28%) and Co-operative Banks (15-16%) are the major banks preferred by the Self-Help Groups for maintaining their accounts.

The women Self-Help Groups with savings bank account had constituted for 76% - 80% of the total number of Self-Help Groups with savings bank account in India during the study period.

The savings by the Self-Help Groups with banks were phenomenal (about 47%) in the year 2008-09 when compared to 2007-08. In other years in the study period, the year on year growth ranged between 8-12%.

The savings of Self-Help Groups exclusively for women had formed the overwhelming share of 73-82% of the total savings of Self-Help Groups.

However, it is heartening to note that the share of savings of women Self-Help Groups had taken a continuous downtrend (from 82% in 2008 to 73% in 2010) during the study period.

The Self-Help Groups availing bank loan had grown enormously during the study period. In fact, the number of Self-Help Groups which availed bank loan had increased by about 44% at the end of 2010 when compared to 2007.

The commercial banks took a lead in providing loan to the Self-Help Groups. Commercial banks consistently had a major share (52-62%) in serving the Self-Help Groups during the study period, followed by Regional Rural Banks (24-35%) and Co-operative banks (12-15%).

The Self-Help Groups exclusively for women had formed the overwhelming share of 82-85% of the total number of Self-Help Groups availed bank loans.

The number of Self-Help Groups having outstanding bank loan had increased year after year during the study period.

The Self-Help Groups exclusively for women had formed the overwhelming share of 78-81% of the total number of Self-Help Groups with outstanding bank loans.

The rate of increase in the bank loan outstanding was higher at 38% in the year 2007-08. In subsequent years also the amount of bank loan due from the Self-Help Groups had increased but at a lower rate at 33% in 2008-09 and 24% in 2009-10.

The economic impact of Micro-Credit Programmes on the members of the Self-Help Groups in Virudhunagar District in Tamilnadu is given below.

A great majority of the members (76.75%) did not have individual savings account in any bank before joining Self-Help Groups. However, the members with individual savings bank accounts had formed about 80% of the total number of members after joining Self-Help Groups.

The chit money was collected every week by about 47% of the Self-Help Groups, once in 15 days in the case of 28% of the Self-Help Groups and once a month in the case of the rest 25% of the Self-Help Groups.

The amount of chit money collected per member was below Rs.20 in the case of about 60% of the Self-Help Group members.

The internal lending was present in the case of 92% of the Self-Help Group members. Only in 8% of the cases, the practice of internal lending was conspicuous by its absence.

Out of the 368 members of the Self-Help Groups who had obtained internal loan, 83% had received internal loan to meet emergency expenses. 13% of the members had availed the internal loan to meet previous small loan. A small 4% of the members had used the internal loan in income generation activities.

The internal loan was given to the members on the basis of their need in 41% of the cases; lot system was followed to distribute the internal loan in about 33% of the cases; 26% of the Self-Help Group members had stated that there existed auction system to give away the loan to their members.

About 88% of the members had taken loan from local money lenders before joining the Self-Help Groups. About 43% of the members had taken loan from local money lenders after joining the Self-Help Groups. The number of members taking loan from local money lenders had been reduced considerably after they joined the Self-Help Groups. Still, this is not up to the expectation in the context of poverty alleviation task of Self-Help Groups.

Out of the 170 members of the Self-Help Groups who had taken loan from money lenders, 29.41% had obtained the loan to meet emergency expenses. About 66% of the members had availed the loan from money lenders to meet previous small loan. A small 5% of the members had used the loan in income generation activities.

The reasons for taking loans from money lenders even after joining the Self-Help Groups included ‘insufficient internal loan’ (41%), ‘delay in internal loan disbursement’ (32%) and ‘non payment of internal loans’ (27%).

Bank linkage was found in about 72% of the Self-Help Groups in the study area. In rest of the cases (28%), bank linkage was absent either due to shorter period of existence or unawareness on the part of the Self-Help Group members.

Out of the 287 members of the Self-Help Groups who had taken bank loans, 36.24% had obtained bank loan to meet emergency expenses. 16.37% of the members had availed the bank loan to meet previous small loan. It is to be noted that 47.39% of the members had used the bank loan in income generation activities.

In order to test whether there is any association between the source of loans obtained by members of Self-Help Group and the purpose of loans, Chi-square test is used setting the level of significance at 5%. Since the P value (4.77616E-89) is less than the chosen level of significance (0.05), the null hypothesis is rejected indicating that there is significant association between the source of loans obtained by members of Self-Help Group and the purpose of loans.

Out of 400 Self-Help Group members surveyed, about 28% did not apply for bank loan since their formation. 30% of Self-Help Group members stated that their groups had taken 7-9 months from formation to approach for bank loan. 24% of Self-Help Group members stated that their groups had taken 9-12 months from formation to apply for bank loan. The rest 18% of the Self-Help Group members stated that their groups had gone for bank loan after a period of one year of their formation.

In Virudhunagar district, Pandian Grama bank had taken the lead with the highest number of credit linked Self-Help Groups (about 53%).

About 70% of the Self-Help Group members had obtained bank loans once or twice during the study period.

Of the 287 Self-Help Group members who had obtained bank loans, about 69% did not face any difficulty in receiving the loan; only about 31% had stated that they met some problems in getting bank loan.

The indifferent attitude of bank official was the most important difficulty faced by about 48% of the Self-Help Group members in Virudhunagar district.

The loan was promptly repaid by about 84% of the Self-Help Group members while default of loans was found in the case of 16% of the Self-Help Group members.

Of the 46 default cases, warning was given to 13% of the defaulters; Penalty was imposed in the case of about 59% of the defaulters; and in the case of about 28% of the defaulters, no further loan was sanctioned.

Out of the 400 Self-Help Group members surveyed, 26 members (6.5%) had stated that their Self-Help Groups received Revolving Fund.

Of the 26 members who had received Revolving Fund, about 8% of members expressed that they had used it to purchase raw materials/equipments; about 38% had used it in income generation activities and about 54% of the Self-Help Groups had distributed it as loans to their members.

Out of the 400 Self-Help Group members surveyed, only 3% had received Economic Assistance.

The perception of the sample members on the economic impact has been ascertained using five point scale by taking into account the opinions of members on the economic variables like the capacity to spend more, increase in value of assets, rise in income, improvement in the savings habit and provision of employment opportunities. It clearly exposes the fact that the Self-

Help Groups have to go a long way to make their members self sustained in terms of increasing assets and providing employment opportunities.

#### **7.4 POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH SHGs**

Besides social and economic empowerment, political aspects also were looked into by the present study. Some of the indicators for the political empowerment looked into were willingness to contest elections, assuming leadership, willingness to vote, and frequency of attending meetings of Grama sabha.

After joining the Self-Help Groups, the proportion of women willing to contest elections had increased to 64% from 49% before joining Self-Help Groups. Thus, Self-Help Groups are found to be effective means for encouraging poor women to participate actively in Grama Sabha.

As to actual contesting elections, only 21.25% of the 400 members surveyed had contested the elections before joining the Self-Help Groups while 65% had contested the elections after joining the Self-Help Groups.

Before joining Self-Help Groups, 85 women contested the local body elections and only 8 women (9.41%) had won the elections to the post of ward membership. It is to be pointed out that after joining Self-Help Groups, 260 women contested the local body elections and 87 of them (nearly 33%) got



elected. It clearly manifests the impact of Self-Help Groups in enhancing the political empowerment of their women members.

The assumption of leadership before joining Self-Help Groups was found among just 8% of the members surveyed. After joining Self-Help Groups, about 71% of the members had expressed that they gained leadership traits.

As to actual voting in elections, about 71% of the 400 members surveyed had exercised their voting rights before joining the Self-Help Groups while about 93% had exercised their voting rights after joining the Self-Help Groups.

After joining the Self-Help Groups, there was marked improvement in attending the meetings of Grama Sabha. In fact, 54 out of 87 members (about 62%) had attended the meetings regularly; 22 members (25%) had attended the meetings occasionally and 11 members (13%) had never attended such meetings.

In order to test whether there is any significant difference in political participation among the sample members before and after joining the Self-Help Groups, Mc Nemar test is used setting the level of significance at 5%. Remarkable improvement is noticed after joining Self-Help Groups in all the four variables governing political participation: willingness to contest

elections, actual contest in elections, assuming Leadership, and willingness to vote. In all these cases, the P values are lesser than the level of significance and hence, the null hypotheses are rejected implying that there is a considerable improvement in respect of these variables as a result of joining the Self-Help Groups.

The perception of the members of Self-Help Groups under study regarding the political impact showed that the experience of “going to government office/police station” and “handling matters with government officials/police” as perceived by the Self-Help Group members was at the low ebb.

## **7.5 ROLE OF ANIMATORS**

The considerable numbers of animators (42%) are in the age group of 35-45 years followed by 28% of animators with the age group of 25-35. All the animators surveyed are literates.

Most of the animators (86.5%) of the Self-Help Groups in Virudhunagar District were housewives.

Majority of the animators (65%) were selected on the basis of their experience in the Self-Help Groups.

The selection of assistants for Self-Help Groups takes into account 'confidence' (43%) and 'educational qualification' (33%) as prime bases.

80% of the Self-Help Groups in the study area have the existence of more than 2 years.

The self-awareness is conspicuous by its absence in the case of 92% of the animators. In all these cases, some type of motivation that came from NGOs (55.25%), other groups (20.75%), and banks (16.25%) had inspired the animators to form the Self-Help Group.

87% of the animators had regularly participated in the meetings of animators. Only 13% of the animators had occasionally participated in the meetings of the animators. 85% of the animators had attended their meetings 3-12 times per year.

Out of 400 animators surveyed, 83% of the animators had participated in the training programmes and the remaining 17% of the animators did not participate in the training programmes.

Majority (68.98%) of the animators had participated in the training programmes with the time interval of seven days.

Locality and poverty are the two important considerations (80%) for selecting the members of Self-Help Groups. Little importance was given to the caste factor.

The mean score of size of the Self-Help Group worked out to be 16 members per Self-Help Group.

100 per cent of the animators conduct meetings regularly for their Group members. Weekly meetings are very common (60%) among Self Help Groups.

The members of 43% of the Self-Help Groups attend all the meetings regularly. In other cases, regular attendance by the members is not found. Lack of interest on the part of members of Self-Help Groups was the main reason (45%) for not attending the meetings.

Out of 228 animators, 178 animators (78%) told that the action was taken against the irregular members, and 50 animators (22%) told that action was not taken by the group.

Out of 178 animators, 47.19% stated that the irregular members were warned; fine was imposed in 33.15% of cases, and in 19.66% of cases, no priority was given in sanctioning of loans to these irregular members.

The importance given to the various matters discussed in the meeting of the Self-Help Groups is found out using Weighted Arithmetic Mean for each matter discussed. 'Extending inter group loan' with the highest weighted arithmetic mean of 3.84 was found to be the most discussed matter followed by 'repayment of bank loan' with 3.68, 'mode of conducting business activities' with 3.34, 'discussion about participation in meetings' with 2.16, and 'reading magazines related to Self-Help Groups' got the least rank with 1.99.

All the 400 animators of Self-Help Groups under study maintained books of accounts. In as many as 90% of the cases, attendance and minutes book, savings register, loan ledger, and bank pass book are maintained. However, overdue register is not maintained by nearly 39% of the animators of Self-Help Groups. Majority of the animators (61.25%) had submitted their accounts to the NGO officers.

The decisions in the meeting of the Self-Help Groups are taken either on consensus of all the members (54%) or by majority (42%) members.

Majority of the animators (74%) had stated that the loyalty level of the members was 100%; the rest 26% of the animators had expressed that some of the members are leaving the groups for various reasons.

Majority of the animators (75%) had stated that they conducted special training to run the rural enterprises.

Most of the animators (63.25%) had received subsidy from the government.

Most (70%) of the animators of Self-Help Groups do not show any interest in carrying out any of the self employment activities.

As many as 65% of the animators of Self-Help Groups expressed that their groups concentrated on product making and the rest 35% concentrated on providing services.

Absence of Self Help Group federation or Cooperatives (41%) and inadequacy of loan amount (30%) are the major problems faced by the animators of Self-Help Groups engaged in income generation activities.

Out of the 120 Self-Help Groups, 60 groups (50%) were doing their marketing activities only at village level; 35% at the town level and the remaining 15% at District level.

Most of the animators (68.33%) had stated that there was adequate demand for their products.

Out of 120 Self-Help Groups doing self employment activities, about 29% did not under take any promotional measure. The promotion activities

adopted by the rest 71% include 'personal canvassing' (35.83%), 'exhibition' (19.17%), and 'price reduction' (15.83%).

"Fierce competition" was felt to be the major marketing problem faced by the Self Help Groups as stated by as many as 67% of the animators.

Most of the animators (66.75%) had organised the social welfare programmes.

Of the 400 animators surveyed, 293 animators (73.25%) expressed that they had availed of micro credit from banks. About 70% of the animators who had availed micro credit stated that they faced problems in some form and the rest 30% of the animators did not have any problem in this respect.

Of the 205 animators who experienced problems in obtaining micro credit for their Self-Help Groups, 46.34% of the animators stated that the credit was not sufficient to start any income generating activity; 24.88% of the animators felt that the existing Micro-finance institutions were inadequate to deal with Self-Help Group movement; 18.05% of the animators had felt that there was no uniform credit policy for Self-Help Group as a whole; and 10.73% of the animators had expressed that the bank staff was not cooperative.

76% of the animators had stated that they did not have any problem in organising the group. Unwillingness on the part of members (48%) is the major problem faced by the animators in organising the Self-Help Groups.

## **7.6 SUGGESTIONS**

In the light of the findings of the study, the following suggestions deserved to be taken care of by the stakeholders of the Self-Help Group mechanism.

1. The share of savings of women Self-Help Groups at national level had taken a continuous downtrend during the study period. The members of the Self-Help Group should be more active, enthusiastic and dynamic to mobilise their savings by group actions.
2. The NGOs and animators should take more interest in organising social welfare programmes so that community participation will be achieved.
3. Bank linkage was absent due to unawareness on the part of the Self-Help Group members. The rural Co-operative Banking Network needs to be encouraged to lend to the Self-Help Groups, which can make credit available to them at their doorsteps.
4. The procedure of the banks in sanctioning credit to Self-Help Groups should be simple and quick. The loan amount should not be too small



and should at least serve as seed money to start the income generating activity.

5. Uniformity should be maintained in formation and extension of financial assistance to the Self-Help Groups by banks in all blocks.
6. The absence of Self-Help Group federations was stated as a major problem for Self-Help Groups. Hence, the cluster level and the block level Self-Help Group federations could be encouraged as a matter of policy in Virudhunagar district. NABARD must provide Revolving Fund Assistance to these federations and Credit Unions for on-lending to Self-Help Groups, to help them build their financial intermediation capacity and to prepare them to take bank loans in future.
7. Dependency on money lenders for loan continues even after joining Self-Help Groups. The Self-Help Groups should reduce the complications in processing of loans so that the time taken for the provision of loan would be reduced for those who require it urgently. This would help the members to get sufficient loan and dependency on money lenders would gradually get reduced.
8. Most of the animators of Self-Help Groups are not engaged in the self employment activity. Special awareness campaign should be made by the NGOs to encourage the Self-Help Groups to start their own venture.

The government and the NGOs should lend their support in product quality improvement and marketing at least in the initial stage.

9. There is fierce competition in the market for the products produced by the Self-Help Groups. To overcome this problem, the Self-Help Groups should concentrate on different line of products by not competing with the products already crowded in the market. In addition, the Self-Help Groups can concentrate on providing services as this line has viable scope for business. This would make the members self sustained in terms of increasing assets on account of viable income generating business.
10. Training on innovative economic activities by using the resources in and around the district must be given to the members of the Self-Help Groups. In such training, the members can share the experience and counseling of the experts of the District Entrepreneurship Development Cell and small scale entrepreneurs.
11. A strategic plan with the combined support from government, banks and NGOs should be made by the animators and members of the Self-Help Groups to participate in economic and entrepreneurial activities to generate regular income.

12. The members of Self-Help Groups must make use of the loan amount efficiently and productively, because majority of the members have used the loan availed to meet their personal needs.
13. The animators must ensure regular attendance by the members of the Self-Help Groups in their meetings. They must maintain a transparent system of account maintenance so that every member is satisfied with the financial and accounting activities of the Self-Help Groups. For this purpose, the work of maintaining accounts must be given to the members on a rotation basis.
14. The experience of “going to government office/police station” and “handling matters with government officials/police” as perceived by the Self-Help Group members was at the low ebb. The Self-Help Group should contain three to four members with graduation and they must be properly trained to handle matters with government officials/police. These members should share their experiences with other members of the Self-Help Groups and train them to handle such matters.

## **7.7 CONCLUSION**

On the whole, the study reveals that Self-Help Group system in India, particularly in Virudhunagar, has produced a momentum in creating women empowerment. The extent of empowerment of women is determined largely by

the three factors – her economic, social and political identity and their weightage. These factors are deeply intertwined and interlinked with many cross cutting linkages. It is only when all the three factors are simultaneously addressed and made compatible with each other the women can be truly empowered. Therefore, for holistic empowerment of the women to happen - social, economic and political aspects impacting a woman's life must converge effectively.

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