CHAPTER VI

CHALLENGES FACED BY AGENCIES IN APPROACHING RURAL WOMEN

There are innumerable challenges which the agencies face in empowering rural women. For its proper understanding and to have an approach, interviews were conducted with the governmental officials. The ground level workers, the sathins of DWCD, NGO field officers were contacted to provide the exact picture of the challenges, they face while contacting rural women and mobilizing them for the formation of SHG. Overall 20 interviews were taken at different verticals.

6.1 Patriarchal Social Structures – Though our country has been liberalized, but it did not have a positive impact on Indian women. The societal norms “power overs” the rural atmosphere. The generations old feeling that the household activities are the responsibility of women and outside work is the responsibility of men have imbibed the mind frame of rural people. The women are not independent. For any decision making, they have to depend on their in-laws and their husband. Even when women join the SHG group, for minute things like attending a meeting, or going for a training programme, they have to depend on the decision being provided by their in-laws. This system hampers the overall enthusiasm of the agency people working for a social cause.

6.2 Race and Ethnic Diversity-There exist structural, economic, social, spatial dissimilarities among rural women. Moreover, racial boundaries are very much significant in Indian rural community. The loss of social support disproportionally affects women of backward class. The same is the case with women belonging to minority class. These women live in the state of trauma. Their situation is even worse than that of women belonging to a General category. Illiteracy is main cause of this widespread evil which is persistent in the Indian society. It has also been found out that women belonging to General category does not join the group in which backward class women have joined. Also women who are a better-off make their own group. These groups are highly influential and are active in participating in exhibitions/ melas. But, the group belonging to minority class or backward class have to make a lot of effort. Agencies have to face a lot of problem in approaching and convincing women belonging to these groups due to the mindset of the society.
6.3 Transient Employment- Women belonging to rural communities spend long hours in their agricultural fields and the remaining time, they spend at home taking care of the household chores. Farming is the main occupation of rural people. Farming is the only source of their livelihood. They grow crops for their own consumption and some part of the farming of crops for sale. This entire harvesting is done by mainly by hand which involves a lot of toil. Mostly, women in the houses do this work. This is their schedule for almost 7-8 months. When agency people approach them during this tenure, women have no time left to understand the concept of SHG.

6.4 Lack of Political Mobilisation and Activism- Rural women are bounded with the ties of political mobilisation and activism. They are largely underrepresented in the political activities. They are not able to get ground at local level and increasingly they are pushed to their traditional roles. Though women are being provided the reservations to contest the election of the Panchayat Samitis, but still lack of awareness and willingness on their part, makes women largely underrepresented in the political system. The women, for centuries, have been confined to household works and their farms. So, activism on their part, be it participation in the campaign or attendance of any meeting, women, themselves, are not willing to participate in it. Moreover, if they are willing, they are not allowed to join any political forum as it is men’s area.

6.5 Lack of Social Support Services- Women in rural settings find limited opportunities to work outside their home. There are no day care centers where they can keep their children. They mostly have to depend on their family members. When the family members are unsupportive, which is generally the case, the women find it difficult to go outside and work. This holds true in the case of SHG membership also. Women lack support. Even the government agencies are also not able to provide these social support structures to them. Though the concept of creche have come to the urban areas, but still this concept is far sighted in case of rural set up. Women shy away in taking additional responsibility.

6.6 Dual Responsibility- One of the common problems which the rural women encounter is role overload. Women, while, performing their role as a homemaker, also have many other responsibilities linked with the family. They are also responsible for farm maintenance, caring of the livestock. They have not time left for any other activities. Women are overburdened with work. In case of Indian scenario, looking after the in-laws is also the responsibility of the married women
who have come to their house. Hence, performing all the duties makes it difficult for the younger women in joining SHG activities.

6.7 Economic Challenge- There is a gender division of labour. Women are supposed to do their bit of household work, taking care of the elderly and raising their children. They are limited to their families and furthermore, even if they are permitted to move out, they undertake those accomplishments which produce low returns. Villages are predominantly occupied with gender division. Whereas, men can work for offices and get salaries, women of their houses are not allowed to work in offices. Moreover, women are not allowed to get literate. At the most, they can go to school till secondary or senior secondary level. As a resultant, women get low paid jobs and often end up doing farming only. Farming is mostly unorganized sector. When the agencies approach them, the women cannot understand the fact that they can also be a part in income generation activities at par with men. The age-old tradition of taking care of the household activities makes them hesitant in joining SHG.

6.8 Lack of Awareness-. One of the biggest challenges in marketing SHG is the lack of awareness among women belonging to rural areas. The insufficient information which women have is just that SHG delivers loans, of which they are already scared of. The women do not have any idea as far as the benefits are concerned after joining the SHG. They do not understand that after joining the SHG, they will be exposed to various trainings and employment generation activities which, further can become a source of their livelihood. SHGs also generate in them the confidence level as they are exposed to meetings, various exhibitions. But, women consider SHG as only loan providing vehicle and so they are afraid for joining SHG.

Overall, it was found that though the NGOs, the governmental agencies are trying their level best in raising the awareness level of rural women and helping them out in every form, but they cannot overlook the fact that there is a lot social stigma encircling rural society, and every time, the agencies, face a new challenge. Though, on their part, they take a lot of effort in approaching and convincing the people, but it is a big challenge. The agency people also feel that they have not been able to set up SHG network in far-flung remote areas. There is a lack of basic infrastructure facilities like roads connectivity. At the same time, customs and cultures are so much predominant in the rural set that breaking those norms will take years. Clearly, generation of awareness among rural women is the main task.