



Empowerment Of Rural Women Through Skill Development Training: A Study Of Women Self Help Groups In West Jaintia Hills District Of Meghalaya

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Abstract

Women empowerment and gender equality have gained significant attention in the context of sustainable development and Self-Help Groups have emerged as an effective instrument for empowering women by providing them with opportunities for socio-economic growth and skill development. The present study is a descriptive in nature. This study explores the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in women's empowerment and skill development, focusing on Thadlaskein and Laskein blocks in West Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya. This study aims to comprehensively examine the impact of training on empowerment and skill development of Women Self Help Groups keeping in view the impact on social, economic, political and technical aspects. A sample of 12 Women SHGs (120 members) was selected using a multistage purposive-cum-random sampling method. Data was gathered through structured interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary sources like government reports and academic literature. The findings reveals that training programs conducted by Self-Help Promoting Institutions (SHPIs) significantly improved the socio-economic conditions of SHG members, enhancing their confidence, skills, and knowledge. Further, the study thus highlights the multifaceted impact of training on empowerment and skill development of Women SHG members in the respective area. However, continuous training is essential for sustained empowerment and development.

Key words: Empowerment, Self -Help Group, Skill Development, Training.

Introduction

Women play a crucial role in the development of both families and society. Over the past few decades, they have actively engaged in economic and social activities, yet their contributions often go unrecognized. In a male-dominated society, women continue to face discrimination in social, economic, and educational spheres, despite managing households and contributing to societal growth. Raising awareness about women's rights and instilling confidence in them remains a key issue.

Women empowerment involves granting them the freedom and authority to make their own choices, enabling them to recognize their skills, knowledge, and abilities. It is a continuous process of awareness, skill acquisition, and self-actualization. For any society's socio-economic progress, empowering women is essential, and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have proven to be effective in fostering socio-economic growth and skill development. Participation in SHGs has significantly contributed to the social and economic empowerment of marginalized women. Various facilitating organizations, including NGOs and Self-Help Promoting Institutions (SHPIs) provide training to enhance the skills of SHG members, ensuring sustainable development.

SHG is a small, cohesive group of 10-20 individuals who come together to address common issues through mutual support and cooperation. It is a powerful participatory tool for women's socio-economic empowerment, improving their quality of life across various social dimensions. SHGs serve as a platform where members support one another, fostering teamwork and collaboration. In India, SHGs have emerged as a unique financial intermediation model, supported by NGOs, government agencies and banks. These groups are not only linked to financial institutions but also integrated into broader development initiatives providing both economic and social benefits.

Before the introduction of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in India, rural women had minimal economic participation. However, SHGs have emerged as a transformative system, significantly improving women's lives and alleviating rural poverty. These groups empower women not only as individuals but also within their families and communities. Through regular meetings, SHGs facilitate financial transactions, discussions, and capacity building, enabling women to voice their concerns and address social and economic challenges. By fostering dialogue and decision-making skills, SHGs enhance women's confidence and promote equality in democratic, economic, social, and cultural spheres.

The 9th five-year plan of the government of India had given due recognition on the importance and the relevance of the self-help group method to implement developmental schemes at the grassroots level. The 10th, 11th and 12th Five Year Plans of India prioritized the empowerment of women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) through initiatives promoting their formation, financial inclusion and skill development. These plans facilitated access to micro-credit, linked SHGs with banks and integrated gender-sensitive approaches into rural development programs particularly benefiting marginalized communities like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Key schemes supporting SHGs during these periods included the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) in the 10th Plan, which aimed at promoting self-employment through SHG formation and bank linkages. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) under the 11th Plan encouraged SHG participation in community health initiatives while the Rashtriya

Mahila Kosh (RMK) provided microfinance to women entrepreneurs. The 12th Plan further strengthened these efforts with the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), which focused on poverty alleviation through SHG mobilization, financial literacy and sustainable livelihood promotion. Additionally, schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) played a vital role in providing economic security to SHG members. These initiatives collectively enhanced women's financial independence, decision-making power and socio-economic empowerment.

Microfinance, training, and capacity building are vital for the sustainability of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Continuous training is essential and it falls into two main categories. The first is general training provided to all SHG members covering group formation, linkage methods, basic literacy, bookkeeping and group dynamics. While primarily aimed at group management, it also influences economic aspects. This training is standardized and given to all members. The second category focuses on skill formation and is primarily administered by Self-Help Promoting Institutions (SHPIs) for more mature groups. It enhances income-generating activities and SHG members can request specific training based on their needs. Overall, training and capacity-building initiatives are key tools for addressing the challenges faced by women equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge for sustainable development.

Review of Literature

Jain (2011) conducted a study on the impact of Self-Help Group (SHG) training on the empowerment of rural women in Udaipur District, Rajasthan. The findings revealed that 60% of SHG members were capable of handling group conflicts, while 56.3% had acquired financial management skills. The study concluded that the training programs significantly improved the awareness levels of the women. It recommended organizing such training sessions at regular intervals to enhance the quality and sustainability of SHGs. Similarly, a study by **Thileepan and Soundarajan (2014)** in Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu, examined the impact of training programs on women SHG members. The results indicated that the women SHG members who had undergone training demonstrated a higher level of knowledge about agricultural and allied activities compared to those who had not participated in any training. The trained SHG members possessed accurate knowledge of nearly all agricultural practices, whereas the untrained women SHG members had comparatively lower awareness. The study highlighted a significant difference in knowledge levels between trained and untrained women SHG members. Furthermore, **Mann and Randhaw (2015)** conducted a study among women SHG members in Punjab to assess the type and effectiveness of training programmes they attended. The study revealed that more than 50% of women SHGs had not received SHG orientation training which is a crucial requirement for their effective functioning and accelerated empowerment. The researchers emphasized that Self-Help Group Promoting Institutions (SHPIs) have a primary responsibility to provide training and orientation to women SHG members. This includes educating them about the concept and objectives of SHGs, enhancing their capacity and ensuring adequate linkage support for their growth and sustainability.

Banerjee and Borhade (2016) in their study on the importance of training programmes for women SHG members in Pune City, India, found that the various training programs provided by Self-Help Group Promoting Institutions (SHPIs) had significantly enhanced the members' exposure across social, economic, political, educational, and technical domains. **Similarly, Sankaran (2016)** examined the effectiveness of training programs for women SHG members Tambaram region of Chennai city and found that trained members developed qualities of self-reliance and decision-making. Through participation in various skill training programs, they acquired business skills that contributed to their social and economic empowerment.

Additionally, a study by **Krupa (2017)** among women SHG members in Shimoga District, Karnataka, explored the impact of skill development trainings on capacity building and economic empowerment. The findings indicated that most of the women SHG members who attended skill development training engaged in various income-generating activities. The study also highlighted that such training programs significantly improved communication skills, marketing skills, risk management skills, and financial decision-making abilities, ultimately leading to the social and economic empowerment of women SHG members.

Furthermore, **Nirmala (2017)** in her study among women SHG members in erode district of Tamil Nadu found that after undergoing training programmes, the women SHG members were able to establish networks and connections with various markets, government officials, and financial institutions. This exposure helped them build confidence and acquire skills in different trades, enhancing their businesses and income. Additionally, they became more aware of their rights, entitlements and community development programs leading to improved confidence and decision-making abilities. They also developed strong management skills and actively participated in decision-making at the group, family and community levels.

Bera et al. (2018) in their study on the impact of training on the skill development and sustainable livelihoods of rural women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Tamluk Block, West Bengal, India, observed significant positive changes among the women SHG members after training. Before participating in skill development programs, these women SHG members had no stable employment or fixed income and faced persistent poverty. However, after joining SHGs and attending skill development training, they gained access to various income-generating opportunities. As a result, they were able to secure a stable monthly income and progressively increase their earnings each year. Moreover, they developed confidence, adopted a positive outlook, engaged in social and political activities and earned both self-respect and recognition within their communities. **Similarly, Sandhyarani (2022)** in a study on the effectiveness of training programmes among the women SHG members in Mysore city of Karnataka found that 96% of the women SHG members reported increased confidence after joining SHGs. The study emphasized the need for continuous follow-up on women SHGs after training to ensure that they become employable both individually and as a group.

Regarding the empowerment of women SHG members, **Sahu and Singh (2012)** in their study in Rural Pondicherry on the perceptions of women found that after joining Self-Help Groups, the women SHG

members experienced both economic and social empowerment. The study recommended that capacity-building programmes should be conducted to further enhance the capabilities of the women SHG members. Similarly, **Sarangdevot et al. (2018)** in their study on the role of women SHGs in the socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Udaipur region of Rajasthan highlighted that SHGs have emerged as an effective platform for improving women's socio-economic status. Participation in SHGs had also contributed to increased knowledge and awareness of various social and financial issues. Furthermore, the study revealed that women SHGs have played a crucial role in generating and enhancing the income of the women SHG members.

Conceptual Framework:

The Liberal Feminism theory developed by Mary Wollstonecraft (18th century), John Stuart Mill (19th century) and Betty Friedan (20th century), advocates for equal rights in education, employment and politics. This theory encourages women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to fight for financial resources, decision-making power and education while eliminating legal and institutional barriers. SHGs provide financial independence through savings, loans, and entrepreneurship, equipping women with financial and legal awareness to claim their rights. The Marxist Feminism theory formulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (19th century) and expanded by Alexandra Kollontai and Juliet Mitchell (20th century), highlights how capitalism and patriarchy jointly oppress women. SHG participation helps women break economic dependence through self-employment and collective economic activities like farming, dairy and handicrafts. In addition, the Radical Feminism theory developed by Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone and Andrea Dworkin (1960s–1970s) challenges male dominance and patriarchy, making it relevant to women's leadership in SHGs and local governance. It empowers women to challenge restrictive social norms and expand their economic and social mobility. The Socialist Feminism theory introduced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848) and later advanced by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1898), links women's oppression to capitalism and emphasizes economic independence. SHGs help women gain economic power by providing income-generating opportunities. The Capability Approach developed by Amartya Sen (1980s) and Martha Nussbaum (1990s), focuses on expanding women's capabilities beyond economic growth. Through SHGs, women enhance skills in financial management, leadership, and entrepreneurship while gaining access to education, healthcare and decision-making. Furthermore, the Psychological Empowerment Theory developed by Julian Rappaport (1981), emphasizes self-efficacy, confidence and internal transformation. SHGs build women's self-confidence through collective decision-making and financial independence, improving self-esteem and reducing dependence on male family members.

The Adult Learning Theory, or Andragogy developed by Malcolm Knowles (1960s–1970s) and influenced by Edward C. Lindeman, John Dewey, and Alexander Kapp (1833), differentiates adult learning (Andragogy) from pedagogy. Knowles emphasized that adults are self-directed, goal-oriented, and problem-centered learners who need relevant, hands-on training applicable to real-life situations. His theory is crucial in skill development, promoting experiential learning through case studies, simulations

and real-world applications. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1960s–1970s) expanded on behaviorist ideas, emphasizing learning through observation, imitation, and modelling. It highlights the role of reinforcement, mentoring and peer feedback in skill acquisition. His Social Cognitive Theory (1986) introduced self-efficacy and social interaction, underscoring the importance of teamwork in learning. David Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984) further reinforced the idea that learning occurs through experience, reflection and application, making it foundational for vocational training. Similarly, John Dewey's "learning by doing" model (1938) stressed hands-on, practical experience shaping modern technical education. Furthermore, Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) classified learning into cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude) and psychomotor (skills), influencing curriculum development in skill-based training. These foundational theories shaped 20th-century skill development models, influencing modern government-led initiatives like India's Skill India Mission (2015) and ILO's global skills programs. These programmes utilize competency-based models, experiential learning and social learning approaches to train SHG members and workers in various trades, leadership and technical skills. Initiatives like MGNREGA skill training and NSDC courses apply these theories for workforce development.

Need and Justification of the Study:

Trainings plays an important role in the skill development of the Women Self Help Group members as it empowering and motivating the group members by improving their skills and building their confidence through various innovative and productive programs. Training not only enables the Women Self Help Group members with access to social, economic, political, educational and technical spheres but also ensures proper utilization of their finances leading to their financial independence. With this context, the study aims to identify the types of trainings attended by the Women Self Help Groups and to examine the impact of training on the empowerment and skill development of the women Self Help Groups.

Profile of the Study Area

West Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya is one of the twelve districts of Meghalaya. It was formed on July 31, 2012, following the bifurcation of the former Jaintia Hills District into East and West Jaintia Hills, with Jowai as its headquarters. Jowai serves as the administrative and commercial hub, housing key government offices, educational institutions, hospitals, and banking facilities. The district spans an area of 1,693 sq. km and comprises one Civil Sub-Division, Amlarem, along with three Community and Rural Development (C&RD) Blocks: Amlarem, Laskein, and Thadlaskein. With a total population of 2,70,352, including 1,34,406 males and 1,35,946 females, the district has a population density of 159.69 persons per sq. km.

Objectives

- To study the socio-economic profile of the Women Self Help Groups
- To identify the types of trainings attended by the Women Self Help Groups
- To examine the impact of training on the empowerment and skill development of the women Self Help Groups

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature. This study was conducted in Thadlaskein and Laskein blocks of West Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya to examine various aspects of Women Self-Help Groups. The universe of the study shall be the Women SHGs in West Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya. As per the field reports collected from the respective District, the total number of Women Self Help Groups functioning under National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) were 3525.

A sample of 12 Women SHGs comprising of 120 members was selected using a multi-stage purposive and simple random sampling method. Both primary and secondary data were utilized, with primary data gathered through structured interviews and focus group discussions with SHG members, while secondary data were sourced from government reports, academic journals, and relevant literature. The collected data were analysed to assess the impact of training on empowerment and skill development using simple statistical methods, including frequency and percentage analysis.

Limitations of the Study:

- The study is limited to 120 Women SHG members of Thadlaskein and Laskein Block in West Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis in this study is structured across three key dimensions. First, the demographic profile of respondents is examined; covering age, educational qualification, marital status, occupation, monthly income before and after joining SHGs, frequency of group meetings and factors influencing their participation in skill development training. Second, the study analyses the types of training programmes attended by the women SHG members (120). Lastly, the impact of these training programmes on empowerment and skill development is assessed across social, economic, political, and technical aspects.

Main Findings of the Study

1. Socio economic Profile of the respondents:

The study found that the majority of respondents (26.66%) were aged between 30-35 years, while only 10.83% were 45 years or older. In terms of education, 35.83% had completed primary education, followed by 18.33% with secondary-level education. Most respondents were married (81.66%), while smaller percentages were unmarried (9.16%), widowed (4.16%), or separated/divorced (5%). Regarding occupation, 50.83% were engaged in agriculture, while 39.16% worked as daily wage laborers. Before joining SHGs, 88.33% of respondents had a monthly income below ₹5,000, while 8.33% earned between ₹5,000-₹10,000. It was also found that after joining SHGs, 59.16% still earned below ₹5,000, but 28.33%

saw an increase in income, earning between ₹5,000-₹10,000, indicating a positive financial impact. The study also revealed that 81.66% of respondents attended weekly SHG meetings, followed by 9.16% who met monthly, with only a few attending fortnightly or occasionally. Additionally, 60.83% of respondents reported that their participation in skill development training was influenced by the desire to acquire marketing, communication, management, and leadership skills.

2. Types of Trainings Programmes attended by the respondents:

The study reveals that all respondents (100%) attended orientation training, while 83.33% participated in membership training. Additionally, 76.66% received microcredit training, 66.66% attended leadership training, 65.83% took communication skills training, 60.83% underwent record maintenance/bookkeeping training, 52.5% received accounting skills training, and 51.66% participated in management skills training. Furthermore, data also indicates that a majority of respondents received training in agricultural activities (80.83%), livestock rearing (67.5%), mushroom cultivation (61.66%), vermicomposting (60.83%), and turmeric and ginger processing (57.5%). Additionally, 40% attended pickle-making training, while a smaller percentage participated in training on food and fruit processing, soap and detergent making, flower making, silkworm rearing, bakery, and apiculture.

3. Impact of training on empowerment and skill development of rural women: After attending various training programmes, the majority of respondents experienced significant personal and professional growth. They developed self-confidence, improved communication and decision-making skills, assumed leadership roles, organized group meetings, fostered social responsibility, collaborated with stakeholders, and raised their voices against social issues. Through income-generating training, women have engaged in diverse income-generating activities (IGAs), contributing to increased household and group earnings. They have cultivated a habit of saving—both individually and collectively—managed household expenses, made financial decisions, and enhanced family assets. Additionally, they have acquired essential skills in bookkeeping, marketing, and budgeting. The impact of skill development training extends to the political sphere, enabling women to actively participate in local community meetings, contest elections for community bodies, make independent voting decisions, engage in local political matters and hold executive positions in women's groups. They have also become involved in various developmental activities. Moreover, training has facilitated technological empowerment, equipping women with the ability to utilize modern tools in agriculture and livestock businesses, conduct online transactions, use ATMs and micro-ATMs, operate smartphones, and promote and sell products online. This demonstrates that skill development training serves as a vital platform for empowering rural women across social, economic, political, and technological dimensions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that skill development training programmes through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have significantly contributed to the empowerment of women SHG members, enabling them to become self-reliant and confident. These trainings have helped women build self-esteem, gain control over resources, enhance decision-making abilities and develop essential skills for social and economic independence. The findings indicate that women in SHGs have achieved greater self-confidence, leading to increased self-sufficiency and financial stability. To further strengthen women's empowerment, it is crucial to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to seize available opportunities and improve their quality of life. Access to education, vocational training, and support services can alleviate household responsibilities and foster economic independence. Empowering women through skill development not only enhances their financial well-being but also grants them social recognition and greater participation in community affairs. Thus, voluntary initiatives from educational institutions, social organizations and community groups should actively contribute to providing relevant trainings with a strong emphasis on income-generating skills. The coordinated efforts of the government and other stakeholders can further enhance the impact of these programmes, ultimately improving the standard of living and overall empowerment of women SHG members.

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