

**Workshop n°54 - Microfinance**

**SELF-HELP GROUPS IN INDIA - A CATALYST FOR WOMEN  
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION**

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**INTRODUCTI ON**

In India, women Empowerment is a buzz word to-day. As a nation, India is committed to the empowerment of women. Though women is regarded as “the unsung heroine who works from dawn to dusk”, yet it is unfortunate that even the ignorant and worthless men had been enjoying superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have.

So, since Independence, Government has made concerted efforts towards removing various biases. .

**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

As majority women lack assets that help contribute to their empowerment and well-being, economic independence through self-employment and entrepreneurial development must be paid attention to. So, the Government of India has provided for Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

**SELF-HELP GROUPS**

A Self-Help Group is a small voluntary association of poor people preferably from the same socio-economic back drop. The micro-credit given to them makes them enterprising; It can be all-women group, all-men group or even a mixed group. However, it has been the experience that women’s groups perform better in all the important activities of SHGs.

**STUDY AREA**

Andhra Pradesh is India’s fifth largest State with a population of 76 million of which 3/4<sup>th</sup> live in 26500 rural villages. Today there are more than 25 lakh SHGs in the country, ninety percent of them are women Self-Help Groups. In this context and with this backdrop, this is a modest attempt to study the impact of SHGs on women in the State of Andhra Pradesh.

. There are about 4.65 lakhs women SHGs in Andhra Pradesh covering nearly 61.70 lakhs poor women. Andhra Pradesh alone has about half of SHGs organized in the country. Since inception, an amount of Rs.1556.90 crore is mobilized as corpus by these groups.

## FINDINGS

The findings and results of the survey based on the results of questionnaire canvassed among the group members and on the interviews and discussions held with the bank officials, field workers and local Non-government organizations are as follows:

- The feeling of homogeneity is good.
- The meetings are held regularly. However, the attendance to these meetings needs to be improved.
- Eighty eight percent of the members borrowed loans from banks and repayment is 95 per cent.
- Ninety percent of them make savings regularly.
- Eighty Five percent of eligible members adopt small family norms.
- One hundred percent children of SHG members had immunization services against the six diseases.
- The financial status of households had improved due to improvement in access in a across to formal credit institutions, since SHGs are linked with banks.
- Access to credit has enabled women to undertake income generating activities.
- Additional family incomes to members range from Rs.1000 to 3000 per annum depending on the income generating activities.
- Increase in income has been spent on better nutrition of Children and on the health care for the family.
- Kitchen Gardens have enhanced the overall nutritional status of children, pregnant and lactating mothers.
- There are improvements in school enrolment, attendance, toilet facilities and Access to electricity and GAS.
- The political process picks momentum with the SHGs being federated and also establishing links with local-self government bodies. In fact, 10,000 SHG members were elected to the local bodies in 1997 Elections.
- Increase in awareness levels about the society led to laying roads, planting trees, conserving environment, construction of water harvesting structures, donations to the victims of natural calamities, campaign against eradication of social evils like dowry, child marriages, crime against girls and women, untouchables, Aids and support to widows and destitute.

## CONCLUSION

Impressed by the remarkable success of women Self-Help Groups in Andhra Pradesh, the World Bank said that the model could be replicated in other States in India and in other countries. The former President of USA, Bill Clinton, the present President George Bush, the Micro Soft Wizard Bill Gates and important political leaders of country have visited the State and held discussions with the women Self-Help Groups. To quote Paul D. Woolfitz “this is a great learning experience. We can tell others about the model. I have visited places in Africa, and Indonesia, but I found the Self-Help Group movement in Andhra Pradesh to be the biggest one”.

Thus, a land where women have been discriminated for generations, thousands of poor illiterate women are spearheading a silent revolution.