

Role of Government Policies and Programs in Supporting Women's Self-Help Groups in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of government policies and programs in supporting women's self-help groups (SHGs) and their impact on women's empowerment in India. SHGs have proven to be effective mechanisms for improving the socio-economic status of women, particularly in rural areas. This research examines various government initiatives aimed at promoting and sustaining SHGs, including financial support schemes, capacity-building programs, and legal frameworks. Through a combination of literature review, policy analysis, and case studies from different states, the study assesses the effectiveness of these interventions in enhancing the operational capabilities and outreach of SHGs. The findings highlight the critical role of government policies in providing the necessary infrastructure, financial resources, and regulatory support to SHGs, thereby enabling women to achieve greater financial independence, social status, and political participation. The study also identifies challenges in policy implementation and offers recommendations for improving the design and delivery of government programs to maximize their impact on women's empowerment through SHGs. This research contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality and economic development, emphasizing the need for robust and inclusive policy frameworks to support grassroots women's organizations. This article explores how government policies and programs have supported SHGs in Karnataka, contributing to women's empowerment and community development.

Keywords: Government Policies, Women Empowerment, Self-Help Groups.

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment has been a focal point of development policies worldwide. In India, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have been pivotal in fostering economic and social empowerment among women, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Bangalore district, known for its technological and economic advancements, also presents a dynamic landscape for SHGs. This article explores how government policies and programs have supported SHGs in Karnataka, contributing to women's empowerment and community development.

This study aims to examine the various government policies and programs that support SHGs, assess their effectiveness, and explore the extent to which these initiatives contribute to the empowerment of women. Through a comprehensive analysis of policy documents, program evaluations, and case studies from

different states, this research seeks to provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current government efforts. Additionally, it aims to offer recommendations for enhancing the design and implementation of policies to better support SHGs and maximize their potential as instruments of women's empowerment and socio-economic development.

Understanding the role of government in supporting SHGs is crucial for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in gender equality and rural development. By highlighting successful strategies and identifying areas for improvement, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on creating inclusive and sustainable development pathways for women through effective policy interventions.

SHG's in Karnataka

Self-Help Group (SHG) is a village-based financial intermediary consisting of 10 to 20 local women from the same socio-economic backgrounds and it involves primarily in savings and credit activities. Women play an important role in Indian Economy, both at the national and the household levels. They make 1/3rd of the national labor force. Compared with their menfolk, Indian women contribute a much larger share of their earnings to basic family maintenance with the result that women's earnings positively and immediately affect the incidence and the security of poverty. SHGs function on the basis of co-operative principles and provide a forum for members to extent support to each other. It is considered as a means of empowerment. SHGs organize very poor people who do not have access to financial system in the organized sector. In groups, normally transparency and accountability are lacking. There are over 2,57,148 (as on 2023) self-help groups (SHGs) in Karnataka under various departmental programs, majority of which are women's self-help groups. It can be all-women group, all men-group or even a mixed group. However, it can be seen that over 90 per cent of these groups have only women members. Karnataka's Self-Help Groups (SHGs), which are formed for empowerment of women, spend 60%-70% of money borrowed as loans for personal/family purposes. "*One for all and all for one*" i.e principle of sharing responsibility and benefits together is the concept behind SHGs.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is a multifaceted concept encompassing various social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions. It refers to the process of increasing the strength, confidence, and autonomy of women, enabling them to achieve their full potential and participate fully in all spheres of life.

Women Empowerment Contents

Social Empowerment of Women: Education, health, nutrition, drinking water and sanitation, housing and shelter, environment, science and technology, women in different circumstances, violence against women, rights of the girl child, man media.

Economic Empowerment: Poverty eradication, micro credits, women and economic globalization, women and agriculture, women and industry, support services.

Political Empowerment: Decision making, leadership, administration capacity building, international cooperative, Panchayat Raj institutions, action plans, legislations, judicial legal system.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The role of government policies and programs in supporting women's self-help groups (SHGs) has been the subject of extensive research and analysis, underscoring the significant impact of these interventions on women's empowerment and socio-economic development. This review of literature synthesizes

findings from various studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of how government support influences the effectiveness and sustainability of SHGs.

- S.P. Naganagoud (2011) according to his study Stree Shakthi programme at Ballery district absorbed that Stree Shakthi Programmes are trying to empower rural women and make them financially sound, socially and politically skilled. Here it is observed that few women of the poor category they are not participating in Stree Shakti Programme due to socio-economic condition. Government should take initiation that poorest poor women would participate in Stree Shakthi Programme by providing lower rate of interest.
- Datta and Gailey, 2012, To address these challenges, researchers recommend a more decentralized approach to policy implementation, greater involvement of local governments, and enhanced monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Additionally, there is a need for better market linkages and support for product development to ensure that SHGs can achieve economic sustainability
- A research paper by Manjunatha S (2013) concludes that it evaluates the connection between SHGs and socio-economic progress of rural communal by decreasing the rural poverty and evaluates the influence of SHG bank linkage programme resulting in employment creation to individual and group and improves asset holdings of rural women. The study justifies the role of SHGs in making women self-reliant and increasing empowerment of women, by making them economically potential, as well as it facilitated rural women to hoard some fund and capitalize that in other developmental activity.
- Sangappa S Rampure (2014) in their study revealed that few business activities that women can carry out in Hyderabad-Karnataka Region for women empowerment. Author suggested that Hyderabad Karnataka Region rural women can take up agro based or micro based enterprises for starting up their business. Financial assistance can be taken up by Micro Finance Institutions which are ready to lend financial assistance to women SHG's. Financial stability of women can make stable of her family along with society which will lead to overall empowerment.
- A Study by Vijayalakshmi R (2016) reported that SHGs shaped various programs that has provided good opportunity for women to empower herself. Weekly once SHG meetings, discussions on it, credit facilities, participation in all developmental activities of groups which is conducted under SHG's have boosted the confidence and capability of rural women to stand on her individual decision.
- Ravikala & B. Srinath (2016) according to their study, that SHGs has given a stage for rural women to converse and solve their personal and communal problems and to develop their conditions but women empowerment has not fully attained due to group characteristics and women who joins SHGs should have their interest in understanding objectives as well developing themselves through SHGs. Along with this society should take initiatives to create opportunities to women by participating in social, political and economic life.
- Dr. Vidya. K & Dr. R. N. Kadam (2017) their study reveals that directly or indirectly women are contributing for the growth of economy. In the process of development informal sector has not given much of importance, as importance given to formal sector. Policies should be reframed because informal sector is contributing for the development of economy. Well designed and effectually implemented SHG activities can help rural women not only to come out of financial problems but also it empowers women at their grass roots.
- Dr. Atik-Ur-Rahaman. S.M (2017) in their paper concluded that the study is conducted in the area of Chittapur Taluk, Gulbarga District on Self Help Groups. Under the SHG's women are borrowing loan which is not utilized for said reason. Majority of them know about the available schemes under SHG's for their betterment but only few of them have got benefited out of it. Awareness among rural women about

the benefit of schemes should be increased and it should be carried out by government and non-government organizations which plays important role in development.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To study the schemes available for development of SHGs.
2. To evaluate the extent to which these policies and programs have contributed to the economic empowerment of women involved in SHGs.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the secondary data sources. The necessary information about the women Empowerment programmes in Karnataka and its various components are collected from various books, journals, internet source of related topics.

Government Policies and Programs Supporting SHGs

National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)

The NRLM, also known as Aajeevika, is a flagship program of the Ministry of Rural Development aimed at promoting self-employment and organization of rural poor. In Bangalore district, NRLM has played a significant role in the formation and strengthening of women's SHGs. The program provides financial assistance, capacity building, and market linkages to SHGs, enabling them to undertake various income-generating activities.

Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Promotion Society (KSRLPS)

The KSRLPS is the nodal agency for implementing NRLM in Karnataka. It has been instrumental in facilitating the formation of SHGs, providing training, and ensuring access to credit. In Bangalore, the KSRLPS has partnered with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and financial institutions to enhance the outreach and impact of SHGs.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

MGNREGA, which guarantees 100 days of wage employment to rural households, has indirectly supported SHGs by providing a stable source of income. Women members of SHGs have utilized MGNREGA earnings to invest in their group's activities, thus promoting financial sustainability and growth.

Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)

To provide access to finance for micro-entrepreneurs and small businesses through Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA). It provides loans up to Rs. 10 lakhs under three categories (Shishu, Kishore, and Tarun) to SHGs for income-generating activities. Encourages women SHG members to avail MUDRA loans for starting or expanding their businesses.

Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP)

To support rural entrepreneurs by providing them with skill development, financial support, and market linkages. Provides support to SHGs for starting and managing micro-enterprises. Offers seed capital and loans to SHGs to initiate entrepreneurial ventures. Provides training and mentorship to SHG members to enhance their entrepreneurial skills.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)

To ensure access to financial services such as banking, savings and deposit accounts, remittance, credit, insurance and pension in an affordable manner. Facilitates the opening of bank accounts for SHG

members, promoting savings and financial management. Enables SHG members to access credit facilities through their bank accounts.

Women's SHG Development Fund

To support the creation and strengthening of women SHGs in rural areas. Provides funds to SHGs for capacity building, training, and income-generating activities. Helps women SHGs in setting up and managing micro-enterprises.

Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

To provide microcredit to poor women for various livelihood and income-generating activities. Provides loans to SHGs for starting and expanding small businesses. Offers training and support to SHGs for effective utilization of loans and sustainable business practices.

Stree Shakthi Program

The Stree Shakthi Program, an initiative by the Karnataka state government, aims to empower rural women by forming SHGs and providing them with financial assistance. In Bangalore, the program has facilitated the creation of numerous SHGs, offering revolving fund assistance and skill development training to enhance their income-generating capabilities.

Santhwana Scheme

It provides support and relief to women in distress through financial assistance, counseling, legal aid, and rehabilitation services. Provides immediate financial aid to women in distress to help them meet their basic needs. It also offers professional counseling and legal assistance to women facing domestic violence, dowry harassment, and other forms of exploitation. It provides long-term rehabilitation support, including vocational training and employment assistance, to help women rebuild their lives.

Udyogini Scheme

The Udyogini Scheme, implemented by the Karnataka State Women's Development Corporation (KSWDC), is a government initiative aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. The Udyogini Scheme in Karnataka has been instrumental in promoting women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. By providing financial assistance, training, and market linkages, the scheme has enabled many women to start and sustain successful businesses. Addressing the challenges and implementing the recommended measures can further enhance the impact of the Udyogini Scheme, contributing to the overall development and empowerment of women in Karnataka.

Income Generating activities (IGA): SHGs have taken up various IGA programmes available in other Government Departments namely, Animal Husbandry, Nirmithi Kendras etc., A few of these groups have been given training and technical support under Giriraja Scheme of Animal Husbandry Department. The department has also assisted the SHGs to procure Giriraja birds. The different activities taken up are as follows;

1. Dairying
2. Production and sale of readymade garments
3. Blanket marketing
4. Marketing of seeds and manure
5. Production and sale of a Papad making
6. Sambar Powder
7. Agarbathi etc.
8. Production and sale of composite manure
9. Production and sale of soap and detergent.

Saviruchi Mobile Canteens

To promote entrepreneurship among women by supporting mobile canteen operations run by SHGs. Provides financial assistance to SHGs to set up and operate mobile canteens. Offers training in food preparation, hygiene, and business management. Facilitates access to markets and customers through strategic locations and partnerships.

New Swarnima Programme

SHGs who belong to backward classes are given financial assistance from Backward Class and Minorities Development Corporation for taking up income generating activities.

Construction of Marketing Complex

To encourage SHGs to take up more income generating activities and provide marketing facilities for their products, the department initially was given sanction for the construction of marketing complex at the district level.

Exhibition and Marketing Melas

Exhibition and marketing meals are a big attraction for public in the districts and boon for SHGs for marketing of their products locally. Rs.75, 000/- was released to each district for conducting exhibitions and marketing meals at District and Taluk Level.

Block Society Federation

In order to strengthen the functioning of SHGs and federate them at taluk level federations have been formed in all taluks and registered. An amount of Rs.30,000/- for each and a total of Rs.54.60 lakhs was released for the strengthening of these societies.

Karnataka Mahila Abhivruddhi Yojane (KMAY)

The Karnataka Mahila Abhivruddhi Yojane (KMAY) is a government initiative aimed at promoting the socio-economic development of women in Karnataka. This scheme focuses on empowering women through various support measures, including financial assistance, skill development, entrepreneurship promotion, and social welfare programs. KMAY seeks to address the diverse needs of women, particularly those from marginalized and economically weaker sections, to enhance their quality of life and ensure their active participation in the state's development process. The scheme promotes the formation and strengthening of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to foster collective action and mutual support among women. SHGs are provided with training, financial assistance, and market linkages to enhance their effectiveness.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The Government of Karnataka has implemented several key policies and programs aimed at supporting SHGs. Prominent among these are the Stree Shakthi Program, Udyogini Scheme, National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), and the Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Promotion Society (KSRLPS). These initiatives focus on financial assistance, capacity building, skill development, and market linkages. SHGs in Karnataka have significantly benefited from improved access to microfinance and credit facilities. Programs like the NRLM and the Stree Shakthi Program have facilitated the provision of low-interest loans and revolving funds. Financial assistance under schemes such as the Udyogini Scheme has enabled women to start and expand their own businesses, leading to increased household incomes and economic stability.

Training programs and workshops organized by government agencies have equipped SHG members with entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and business management capabilities. This, has resulted in the

successful establishment of micro-enterprises in sectors like agriculture, handicrafts, dairy farming, and retail. Many SHGs have reported substantial growth in their businesses, contributing to local economies. Government programs have fostered social empowerment by encouraging women's participation in decision-making processes both within their communities and SHGs. The collective nature of SHGs has strengthened social bonds among women, fostering a sense of community and mutual support. SHGs have been instrumental in addressing social issues such as gender-based violence, dowry harassment, and child marriage through awareness programs and collective action.

CONCLUSION

The literature on government policies and programs supporting SHGs underscores their pivotal role in promoting women's empowerment and socio-economic development. While significant progress has been made, ongoing challenges necessitate continuous refinement of policies and programs. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of these interventions and explore innovative approaches to overcome existing barriers.

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