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A study of the self-help groups as women empowerment mechanism in Indian context

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Abstract

The Indian banking system despite the wide network could not reach to the bottom of the pyramid serving the rural poor and the formal banking system was not accessible by the needy. The access was a limitation to the poorest in the rural areas. The women households were not in the fold of the monetary system. The Government of India had to search an alternative mechanism, policies, systems and procedures to fulfill the requirements of the poor and the women members of the rural households. The SHGs in this context emerged as the effective ways of providing the financial services. The SHGs as a capacity building mechanism was a major financial experiment in the Indian context. The present study unfolds extensively the SHG movement in the Indian context.

Keywords: Micro finance, SHGs, Rural areas

Introduction

In the early decades, the concept of women development was totally out of mind and the condition of women was miserable since they were subject to many socio-economic, political and cultural constraints. The situation was more critical in the rural and backward areas. The role of women in economic development is related to the goal of comprehensive socio-economic development. Due to the development of new policies and programmes, the status of women has totally been changed as they provide assistance to the needy women. The empowerment approach is the most recent and it is aimed at to empowering women through self-reliance and internal strength. Self Help Group- Bank-Linkage Programme has also emerged as an effective mechanism to help reach financial services to the unreached poor women segment of the society (Rosary Ramona Fernando A. and Dr. R. Azhagaiah, 2015) ^[11].

SHGS- an Indian perspective

In India, self-help groups (SHGs) play a significant role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in the rural areas. Self-help groups function with the prime objective of lending money to the rural poor and it is also observed that SHGs are organized by Non-Government organizations, Government bodies and individuals. Prior to the emergence of SHGs in 1990s, rural poor, especially women, suffered severely from the clutches of high interest rates and the money lenders. While Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is comprehensive of active citizenship enabled with democracy and governance at the micro, meso and the macro levels of the economic structure, self-help groups address the economic empowerment of poor rural women who are vulnerable to divergent factors.

India's Self Help Group (SHG) movement has emerged as the world's largest and most successful network of community-based organizations (CBOs). It is predominantly a women's movement. As some experts have pointed out, it is a development innovation in its own right. The SHG bank linkage program (SBLP), which is the India's own innovation has proved to be one of the most effective poverty alleviation and women empowerment programs. The SBLP had a modest beginning with 255 credit linked groups and loan amount of Rs.29 lakh in 1992-93. Since then the program has grown exponentially. In the process, SHGs emerged as a mass movement across the country and largest community-based microfinance model in the world. As per NABARD's microfinance report by March 2012, 79.6 lakh SHGs, with an estimated membership of 9.7 crores, have savings accounts in the banks, with aggregate bank balance of Rs. 6,551 crores.

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Over 43.54 lakh SHGs have loan accounts with total loan outstanding of Rs. 36,340 crores. However, there remain regional disparities in the growth of the SHG movement with limited progress in eastern and western regions (K. Raja Reddy and C.S. Reddy, 2012) [7].

Brief history of microfinance in India

The post-nationalization period in the banking sector, circa 1969, witnessed a substantial amount of resources being earmarked towards meeting the credit needs of the poor. There were several objectives for the bank nationalization strategy including expanding the outreach of financial services to neglected sectors (Singh, 2005). As a result of this strategy, the banking network underwent an expansion phase without comparables in the world. Credit came to be recognized as a remedy for many of the ills of the poverty. There spawned several pro-poor financial services, support by both the State and Central governments, which included credit packages and programs customized to the perceived needs of the poor. While the objectives were laudable and substantial progress was achieved, credit flow to the poor, and especially to poor women, remained low. This led to initiatives that were institution driven that attempted to converge the existing strengths of rural banking infrastructure and leverage this to better serve the poor. The pioneering efforts at this were made by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), which was given the tasks of framing appropriate policy for rural credit, provision of technical assistance backed liquidity support to banks, supervision of rural credit institutions and other development initiatives.

In the early 1980s, the GoI launched the Integrated Rural

Development Program (IRDP), a large poverty alleviation credit program, which provided government subsidized credit through banks to the poor. It was aimed that the poor would be able to use the inexpensive credit to finance themselves over the poverty line.

In 1999, the GoI merged various credit programs together, refined them and launched a new programme called Swarnajayanti Gram Swarazagar Yojana (SGSY). The mandate of SGSY is to continue to provide subsidized credit to the poor through the banking sector to generate self-employment through a self-help group approach and the program has grown to an enormous size. MFIs have also become popular throughout India as one form of financial intermediary to the poor. MFIs exist in many forms including co-operatives, Grameen-like initiatives and private sector MFIs. Thrift co-operatives have formed organically and have also been promoted by regional state organizations like the Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) in Andhra Pradesh.

In 2005, the GoI introduced significant measures in the annual budget affecting MFIs. Specifically, it mentioned that MFIs would be eligible for external commercial borrowings which would allow MFIs and private banks to do business thereby increasing the capacity of MFIs. Also, the budget talked about plans to introduce a microfinance act that would provide some regulations on the sector. It is clear from the previous that the objectives of the bank sector nationalization strategy have resulted into several offshoots, some of which have succeeded and some have failed. Today, Self-Help Groups and MFIs are the two dominant form of microfinance in India (CS Reddy and Sandeep Manak, 2005) [2].

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Micro-finance Services offered to the poor

Parameter	Money Lender	Commercial Banks	Government Sponsored Programs	Financial products of MFIs
Ease of Access	High	Low	High	Low
Transaction cost of Access	Low	Very High	Very High	Low – Medium
Lead time for Loans	Very Short	Extremely Long	Extremely Long	Short
Repayment Terms	Fixed and Rigid	Fixed and Easy	Fixed and Easy	Flexible
Interest Rates	Exorbitantly High	Low and very Affordable	Low, Affordable and Subsidised	Reasonable and Affordable
Incentives	None	None	None	Repeat and larger loans, Interest Rebates
Repeat Borrowing	Possible	Possible but not likely	Possible but not likely	Stream of credit is assured
Loan Access Procedures	Very Quick	Extremely Time Consuming and complicated	Extremely Time Consuming and complicated	Simple and Quick
Loan Application Procedures	Informal but exploitative	Exhaustive and Complex	Exhaustive and Complex	Simple and Informal
Collateral and Demand Promissory Note	Mandatory	Required but hypothecation of asset may suffice	Not required although a charge on the asset becomes automatic	Not required-social collateral is used for physical collateral

Source: R. Arunachalam - Alternative Technologies in the Indian Micro- finance Industry

Description of self – help groups.

Self – help groups are voluntary gatherings of persons who share needs or problems that are not being addressed by existing organizations, institutions, or other types of groups. The broad goals of a self – help group are to bring about personal and social – economic change for its members and society. All of those groups emphasis face to face interaction among members and stress a set of values or ideology that enhances a member’s personal sense of identity.

According to Rajkumar self – help groups (SHG) is a group of rural poor who have volunteered to organize themselves

into a group for eradication of poverty of the members. They agree to save money regularly and convert their savings into a common fund known as the group corpus. The members of the group agree to use this common fund and such other funds that they may receive as a group through a common management (H. M. Chandrashekar and Lokesh M. U, 2009).

The concept of self-help group

For a multi-pronged and concerted attack on the poverty, the Government of India launched an integrated program for self-employment of the rural poor, with effect from 1 April

1999, known as Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). The scheme is an amalgamation of six earlier programs, viz.

1. Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP)
2. Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM)
3. Supply of Improved Tools for Rural Artisans (SITRA)
4. Ganga Kalyan Yojana (GKY)
5. Million Wells Scheme (MWS)
6. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA). The objective of the scheme is to bring the assisted poor families above the poverty line by organizing them into Self Help Groups (SHGs) through the process of social mobilization, training and capacity building and provision of income generating assets through a mix of bank credit and government subsidy.

The SHG model

Structure of SHG

A SHG is a group of about 10 to 20 people, usually women, from a similar class and region, who come together to form savings and credit organization. They pooled financial

resources to make small interest bearing loans to their members. This process creates an ethic that focuses on savings first. The setting of terms and conditions and accounting of the loan are done in the group by designated members.

SHG Federation

As mentioned previously, SHGs have also federated into larger organizations. In Figure 1, a graphic illustration is shown of a SHG Federation. Typically, about 15 to 50 SHGs make up a Cluster / VO with either one or two representatives from each SHG. Depending on geography, several clusters or VOs come together to form an apex body or an SHG Federation. In Andhra Pradesh, the Village Organizations, SHG Clusters and SHG Federations are registered under the Mutually Aided Co-operative Society (MACS) Act 1995. At the cluster and federation level, there are inter-group borrowings, exchange of ideas, sharing of costs and discussion of common interests. There are typically various subcommittees that deal with a variety of issues including loan collections, accounting and social issues.

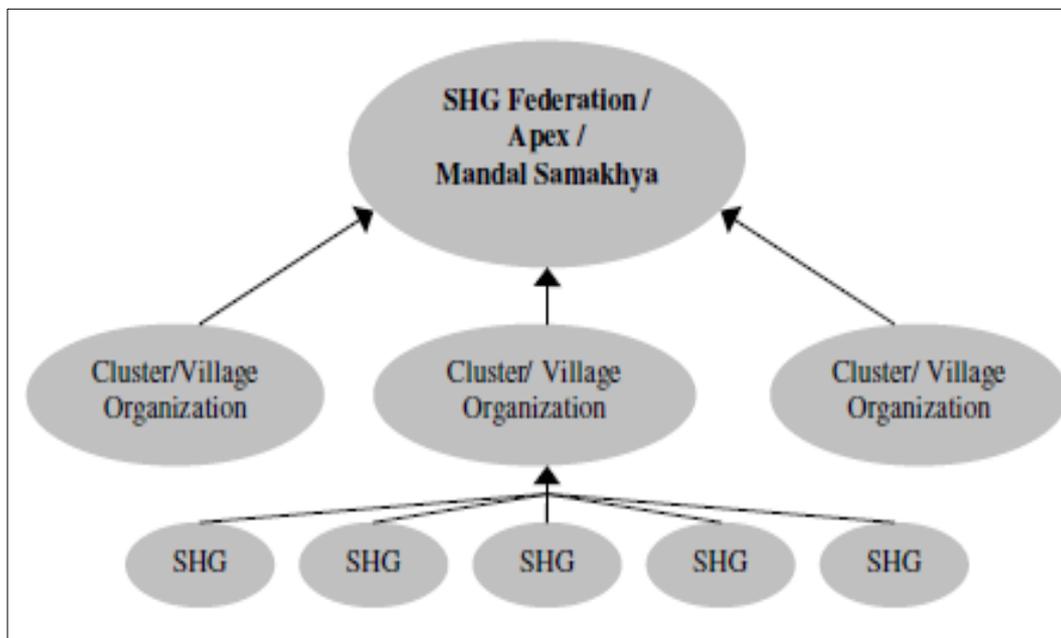


Fig 1: Illustrative SHG Federation

SHG Federations have presented some key benefits to SHGs as a result of their greater scale. Increasingly, SHG Federations are being seen as a key interface with the SHG movement because of their formal registration under the MACS and recognition from bankers. But, in addition to the benefits of SHG Federations, there are some drawbacks, or constraints, that should be noted. An SHG Federation is a formal group of informal common-interest groups.

As a result of its rather informal members, there are internal constraints that it faces. Namely, it has a poor capacity for self-governance, average to low quality managers and systems and process are poorly defined. Further, there is significant financial cost to organizing and registering a SHG Federation which has been estimated to be about Rs 7,000 per SHG member. To bridge these internal constraints requires savvy external assistance and there are few good quality NGOs to provide this assistance to a burgeoning number of SHG Federations.

Importance of self-help groups

Farmers require institutions which can help meet their requirements – farming or non-farming. To have such needs fulfilled, they approach the institutions and individuals which are closest to them. These generally are the cooperatives and the moneylenders. They can even approach their relatives and friends to borrow some money to purchase their requirements from the market, or even from the cooperative society. Self-Help Groups are, however, such institutions where members with their own collective small savings try to help the group members. A small group moves forward towards self-empowerment. The needy persons, the group members, are mostly poorest of the poor and have determination to strengthen themselves economically and socially. Usually these people individually have no access to formal banking system. Moneylenders exploit them in the hours of their needs. To overcome both these situations there is a felt-need to create

Self-Help Groups. Members with their collective resource take up some income-generating activities which will bring additional income to their household. These institutions thus become powerful tools for poverty alleviation and social cohesion at the grassroots level.

Reasons for SHGS in India

- a) To alleviate poverty
- b) To increase employment opportunity
- c) To accelerate economic growth
- d) To raise status in society is the prime reason for respondents joining the SHG
- e) To promote income generating activities

Functions of self-help groups

In order to achieve the main objective, the SHGs undertake various activities. These activities are:

Small Savings Mobilization: howsoever small they may be should be made in order to mobilize financial resource. The idea is to generate the habit of saving from whatever income is earned in the household.

Arrangement of funds: in smaller quantities but in time. As a micro-finance institution the SHG should be able to provide credit to the members. It is also expected that the members return the money borrowed in time, in full, and with interest so that other members also benefit.

Records and Account: Is the most crucial aspect of management of the SHG as well as of confidence building among the members. The SHG has to ensure that all accounts and the books of account are up to date and maintained to ensure transparency and accuracy. Good accounts reflect the goodwill of the organisation and ensure its credibility. Properly kept records are not only of reference value but also useful in future planning and decision-making

Training and Development Activities: Self-Help Groups need constant support, assistance, guidance and advice from the promoters and other development agencies. They need constant monitoring, training and education support in order to help them improve their working capacities and capabilities. The members might need some exposure and interaction. They might also need some equipment and technology support. SHGs need to continue improve their capacities.

Members-oriented Action approaches: Members-oriented action Pappaches are conceived and implemented which are recommended and demanded by the members. Most of these programmes are social and economic and even cultural. Such programmes are also usually the agenda of the development projects which promote SHGs. Programmes can be educational, additional income-generation, off-farm activities, labor-intensive activities, watershed-related and public works construction activities, harnessing water resources for drinking and irrigation, health, education, vocational training etc. etc. Development programmes can be directed at women, youth or farmers;

Linkages with financial institutions

Liaison and Linkages with financial institutions /Government Organisations and other agencies. The SHG considers developing relationship with the financial institutions e.g. cooperative bank or the rural branch of a commercial bank, or others, and also relationship with the governmental organisations and other development agencies (Dr. Manisha, 2016) ^[5].

Principles of SHGS

The concept of SHG is based on the following principles

- Self-help supplemented with mutual help can be a powerful vehicle for the poor in their socioeconomic development;
- Participative financial services management is more responsive and efficient;
- Poor need not only credit support, but also savings and other services;
- Poor can save and are bankable and SHGs as clients, result in wider outreach lower transaction cost and much lower risk costs for the banks;
- Creation of a common fund by contributing small savings on a regular basis;
- Flexible democratic system of working;
- Loaning is done mainly on trust with a bare documentation and without any security;
- Amounts loaned are small, frequent and for short duration;
- Defaults are rare mainly due to group pressure; and
- Periodic meetings non-traditional savings.

Self-Help Group refers to a group of 10-20 people who come from similar socio-economic backgrounds for various development programmes or to solve common problems. Such groups are recognized by the governments and banks and can open bank accounts in the name of the SHG. These groups tend to be autonomous and tend to involve themselves in various activities, including social causes. So if a group of fifteen women in a village would like to apply for a loan start a small enterprise selling bags and cushions, they would be considered an SHG. These SHGs, by way of enterprise tend to create more employment opportunities and inspire others to get involved in small enterprises as well (Mrs. M. L. Shailaja, Dr. Venkata Subrahmanyam C. and Dr. K. Nirmala, 2016).

Characteristics of SHGS

1. The number of member to form SHGs is 5 to 20.
2. All members have not met regularly.
3. The SHGs will have office bearers like president and secretary, group members will elect them.
4. SHGs itself with the help of NGO makes assessment of individual credit needs of its members and submits to the bank for sanction of collective loans in its name.
5. NGO helps the SHGs in procuring raw materials and also marketing of the product.
6. SHGs collectively ensure repayment of bank loans.
7. Entire loan amount disbursed to SHGs is refinanced by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) to the financing bank (H. M. Chandrashekar and Lokesh M. U, 2009).

SHG Bank Linkage – 2009-2013 Five year data trends**Table 2:** SHG Bank Linkage – 2009-2013 Five Year Data Trends

Year	Savings Balance (in lakhs)	Loan Disbursed (in lakhs)	Loan Outstanding (in lakhs)
2008-09	5546	12254	22680
2009-10	6199	14453	28038
2010-11	7016	14548	31221
2011-12	6551	16535	36340
2012-13	8217	20585	39375

Source: (Secondary data) NABARD Annual reports and SHG Bank Linkage Data of Different Years

The SHGs in India have come a long way, since its inception in 1992. The decadal growth of SHGs in India is shown in the Table 2.

Progress of SHG-bank linkage Programme

NABARD introduced an effective SHG-Bank Linkage Programme in order to provide credit to very small borrowers. The introduction of the SHG-Bank linkage Programme is to discard the general perception of bankers that customers with no formal education or source of income are of no use to the bank and thus are not welcome. Detailed analysis of the SHG-Bank Linkage Programme across the geographical spread of the country is being presented in this section. The analysis covers the broader components of the programme, namely inclusive growth, savings, loans and the recovery performance.

An overall decline in the number of SHGs linked to banks for their savings accounts under the SHG-Bank linkage programme noticed during 2012-13 – first time since the programme was launched two decades back – has been reversed during the current year though with a marginal increase of 1.53% with 74.30 lakh SHGs savings linked to Banks as on 31.3.2014 as against 73.18 lakh during the previous year. Another highlight of the year's performance under the programme was the spurt in the number of SHGs being sanctioned fresh loans by banks during the year. 13.66 lakh SHGs were sanctioned fresh loans during the year 2013-2014 – a 12% increase over 12.20 during 2012-2013. SHGs getting fresh loans during 2012-13. The quantum of fresh loans issued by banks also rose by nearly 17% during the year 2013-2014 (24017 crore). This is indicative of increasing confidence in lending to SHGs by banks. Number of SHGs credit linked with banks, however, showed a decline of nearly 6% to 41.97 lakh during 2013- 2014 as against 44.51 lakh a year back though the amount of loan outstanding has gone up by 9%. The total loan outstanding by SHGs stood at 42928 crore as on 31.3.2014 (Ms. Sarita Thakur, 2016).

Schemes initiated by the government of India

The following are the important recent schemes initiated by the government of India:

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme

Since coordinated and convergent efforts are needed to ensure survival, protection and empowerment of the girl child, Government has announced Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative. This is being implemented through a national campaign and focused multi sectoral action in 100 selected districts low in CSR, covering all States and UTs. This is a joint initiative of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development. The objectives of this initiative are --

Prevention of gender biased sex selective elimination, ensuring survival & protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child

2. One Stop Centre Scheme

Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), has formulated a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for setting up One Stop Centre. The One Stop Centre will provide support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces. In case girls under 18 years of age are referred to the Centre, they will also be served in coordination with authorities/institutions established under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offence Act, 2012.

3. Women Helpline Scheme

The scheme of Women Helpline is exclusively designed to support women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces, including in the family, community, workplace and the like. The Women Helpline will provide 24-hour emergency response to all women affected by violence both in public and private sphere. All the existing emergency services are integrated with this women helpline.

4. Ujjawala

Government of India, Ministry of Women and Child Development formulated a Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation since 1st April 2016. The new scheme has been conceived primarily for the purpose of preventing trafficking on the one hand and rescue and rehabilitation of victims on the other.

5. Working Women Hostel

The Government of India being concerned about the difficulties faced by such working women, introduced a scheme in 1972-73 of grant-in-aid for construction of new/expansion of existing buildings for providing hostel facilities to working women in cities, smaller towns and also in rural areas where employment opportunities for women exist. Based on an evaluation, the existing scheme has been revised to promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women who need to live away from their families due to professional commitments.

6. SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances)

Recognizing the need for transitional shelter, the Swadhar Greh Scheme is run by the Ministry of Women & Child Development in order to provide temporary accommodation, maintenance and rehabilitative services to women and girls rendered homeless due to a range of difficult circumstances. The

Scheme envisions transitional shelter to women in need by creating an institutional framework that enables their empowerment and provides necessary access to support services. It envisages that shelter, food, clothing, and health needs as well as economic and social security are assured for such women.

7. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) Scheme

The Scheme is intended to benefit women who are in the age group of 16 years and above across the country. The grant under the Scheme is given to an institution/organisation including NGOs directly and not the States/ UTs. The assistance under STEP Scheme will be available in any sector for imparting skills related to employability and entrepreneurship, including but not limited to the Agriculture, Horticulture, Food Processing, Handlooms, Tailoring, Stitching, Embroidery, Zari etc, Handicrafts, Computer & IT enable services along with soft skills and skills for the work place such as spoken English, Gems & Jewellery, Travel & Tourism, Hospitality.

8. Nari Shakti Puraskar

The Ministry of Women and Child Development announce national level awards for conferring on eminent women, organisations and institutions in order to recognize the efforts made by women & institutions in rendering distinguished services for the cause of women, especially vulnerable and marginalized women. These awards will be called “Nari Shakti Puruskars”.

9. Mahila Police Volunteers

Government of India engage/nomination of Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs) in all States and UTs who will act as a link between police and community and facilitate women in distress. MPVs are empowered, responsible, socially aware women for fostering leadership in local settings to facilitate police outreach on gender concerns. They will be an interface between the society and police.

10. Mahila E-Haat

The Ministry of Women & Child Development launched “Mahila E-Haat” a bilingual portal on 7th March 2016. It aims at financial inclusion and economic empowerment of women. This is a unique direct online marketing platform leveraging technology for supporting women entrepreneurs/SHGs/ NGOs for showcasing the products / services which are made/manufactured/ undertaken by them. This exclusive portal is the first in the country to provide a special, focused marketing platform for women. This was done keeping in mind that technology is a critical component for business efficiency and to make it available to the majority of Indian women entrepreneurs/SHGs/NGOs.

11. Nirbhaya Fund

The Government has set up a dedicated fund – Nirbhaya Fund – which can be utilized for projects specifically designed to improve the safety and security of women. It is a non-lapsable corpus fund, being administered by Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) is the nodal Ministry to appraise/recommend proposals and schemes to be funded under Nirbhaya Fund. MWCD further has the responsibility to review and monitor the progress of

sanctioned schemes in conjunction with the line Ministries/Departments.

Reasons for the rapid spread of the SHG movement

- There are thousands of promoting institutions involved – government, banks and NGOs – not just one or two institutions with ambitions to grow. For example, in 2004/05 there were 573 banks (commercial, regional rural and cooperative) lending to SHGs through 41 323 bank branches. Many of them were also promoting SHGs. Further, there were 4 323 NGOs and other agencies involved in training and mentoring of SHGs. This massive network of institutions supports the SHG movement, each entity in its own way. (The large number of diverse institutions also represented a weakness, which will be discussed in Section VI).
- There has been much investment in the capacity-building of SHGs. It comes from private NGO donors, multilateral agencies such as IFAD and some bilateral agencies, from NABARD, the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and state governments. Capacity-building is largely done through NGOs, whose main role is to identify affinity groups and build their institutional capacity. Identifying these groups requires close rapport with a village. It is normally done, first, by using participatory methods through which poor people are identified, then conducting a short session to explain the meaning and need for affinity as the basis for group formation and, finally, leaving poor people thus identified to form their own groups.
- Affinity exists before the NGO enters; it is the NGO's role to identify and build on it, not to destroy it. This, unfortunately, is being done by some government programmes that provide subsidies at different rates to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, even though they may be in one SHG – and by some microfinance institutions (MFIs) that break up good SHGs into joint liability groups or extend loans to individual members in an SHG without a consultative process with the groups. Once an affinity group has been identified, a major training programme is scheduled, which includes at least 23 modules spread over a year and a half.
- Training and exposure for bankers was provided. Formerly they were accustomed to assessing proposals submitted by individuals under anti-poverty schemes such as the Integrated Rural Development Programme (which, incidentally, could claim to be the first microfinance programme, as it was begun in 1980). This was relatively easy, because the unit costs and project profiles for each activity or asset were standardized. Now they had to be trained to assess SHGs as institutions – training that was supported extensively by NABARD.
- An alternative model to mainstreaming was accepted. The official system accepted the rules and regulations adopted by each SHG – related to size and purpose of loans, interest and repayment schedules – without imposing its own practices or standardizing SHG functions. The official system provided guidelines and a framework, but did not attempt to standardize practices (for example that loans should be only for assets) or to impose its own norms and procedures related to interest

rates and repayment schedules (Aloysius P. Fernandez, 2006).

Measures to make SHGS effective

- The Government should play the role of a facilitator and promoter, create a supportive environment for the growth and development of the SHG movement.
- Expanding SHG Movement to Credit Deficient Areas of the Country - such as Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, States of the North-East.
- Rapid expansion of financial infrastructure (including that of NABARD) and by adopting extensive IT enabled communication and capacity building measures in these States.
- Extension of Self-Help Groups to Urban/Peri-Urban Areas – efforts should be made to increase income generation abilities of the urban poor as there has been a rapid rise in urbanisation and many people remain financially excluded.
- Positive Attitude – Government functionaries should treat the poor and marginalized as viable and responsible customers and as possible entrepreneurs.
- Monitoring – Need to establish a separate SHG monitoring cell in every state. The cell should have direct links with district and block level monitoring system. The cell should collect both quantitative and qualitative information.
- Need Based Approach – Commercial Banks and NABARD in collaboration with the State Government need to continuously innovate and design new financial products for these groups.

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