

Role perception about empowerment of farm women in agriculture in Western Rajasthan

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■ **ABSTRACT** : For removing gender inequality, an effective approach is to mobilize farm women through Self Help Groups coupled with interventions for capacity building. An impact study of socio-psychological attributes of empowerment was conducted. This study was connected under NAIP mission mode project entitled "Empowerment of women in agriculture" where 300 farm women were mobilized to form 20 SHGs. A series of awareness camps, training programmes and related interventions were carried out and data were collected for 'before and after' experiences of becoming SHG members and under going capacity building interventions. The study conducted in 11 villages of three blocks of Pali district revealed an enhancement shift in confidence, self-esteem, decision-making pattern, capacity enhancement, social empowerment and a favourable attitude towards entrepreneurship development and improved agriculture and animal husbandry practices.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Self-help groups, Women empowerment, Attitude, NAIP

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Even today, rural women with their considerable contribution to food security, remain as the most disadvantaged section of the society. Several programmes were envisaged to uplift their present status but most of them lacked sustenance. Significance of the concept of Self Help Groups (SHGs) comes in this context, where rural women join hands to help themselves. Human civilizations have witnessed that exploited people joined together to alter the unsatisfactory situation and form groups with others who have something in common with them. Self Help Groups are formed by the underprivileged section of the society to fight the poverty, thus altering their socio-economic condition. The term Self Help Group is used to description a wide range of financial and non-financial association. SHG is a group of about 10-20 persons from a homogenous class who come together for addressing the common problems. They collect voluntary savings on a regular basis and use the pooled resources to make small interest bearing loans to their members. The process helps theme and improving the conditions and helping in accounts keeping (Rangarajan,

2005). In order to achieve the ultimate goal of gender equality, gender issues need to be mainstreamed to support women with information, training and technology. In the changing scenario, the need for endeavors are being redesigned to focus on women through appropriate sensitization towards their contribution to the agriculture system. The major thrust is their empowerment through capacity building, greater opportunities, access to resources and appropriate interventions. An effective approach is mobilization of farm women towards self-employment by organizing them into Self Help Groups. Empowerment is a multidimensional process which enables individuals or groups the realization of their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Empowering women socio-psychologically is a crucial decisive step. In fact, the core elements of empowerment have been defined as the agency (the ability to define one's goals and act upon them), awareness of gender power structures, self-esteem and self-confidence (Kabeer, 2001). Impact assessment has emerged as an important aspect of development interventions to measure the impact of programmes on people's live in order

to bring a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment. The focus of concern of social impact assessment is a productive stance to development outcomes, not just the identification or amelioration of negative or unintended outcomes. Social impact assessment for empowerment of women needs to consider the various ways in which empowerment has been conceptualized. It has been viewed as a process through which women, individually and collectively, become aware of how power relations operate in their lives and gain self-confidence and strength to challenge gender inequalities. Keeping the above in mind an impact study of socio-psychological attributes of farm women through Self Help Group formation and other project interventions like capacity building and drudgery reducing technological interventions is imperative. The objective of the study was the impact assessment of the socio-psychological empowerment of women in agriculture through SHG formation, capacity building interventions and micro finance.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted under NAIP mission mode project entitled 'Empowerment of Women in Agriculture'. As an endeavor towards social, psychological and economic empowerment, 300 farm women were mobilized to form 20 Self Help Groups with 15 members in each group. A series of awareness camps, training programmes and related interventions were carried out among them and data were collected before and after experiences of becoming SHG members and undergoing capacity building interventions. The study was conducted in 11 villages of 3 blocks of Pali district of Rajasthan viz., Sojat, Jaitaran and Sumerpur. Data were collected by means of specifically developed interview schedule which was semi-structure encompassing socio-psychological parameters like self-confidence, self-esteem, decision-making, capacity enhancement, social empowerment and attitude.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings obtained from the present study have been discussed under the following sub-heads:

Confidence building:

The socio-psychological impact assessment of SHG members is given in Table 1 in terms of confidence building, self-esteem, decision-making, capacity enhancement and social empowerment.

In the present study the level of confidence prior to the SHG formation was measured on a five-point scale covering items on ability to talk freely in the family, public meeting and Self Help Groups. On the basis of 'before' and 'after' mean scores of the groups a shift of 1.64 and 1.78 points was

observed (on a 1-5 point scale) for confidence to talk within family and SHG meetings, respectively. Women expressed a feeling of heightened confidence to talk and express their views openly because of group interaction. Amongst the five parameters, the overall shift was the greatest in this area thereby making a great impact in terms of increased confidence level (Singh *et al.*, 2005).

Self-esteem:

Self-esteem of group members was measured to assess how they perceived their own image within the family and community. After the SHG formation, the data revealed on the whole 0.95 shifts on a 1-5 point scale showing thereby that participation in SHG and its activities which has refined their worth in their own eyes. Greater change was seen in case of their image in community. This indicates that SHG membership and project intervention gave a sense of enhanced status feeling to the rural women (Gupta and Rahman, 2011).

Decision-making:

Decision-making was considered for certain chosen areas, which have significance for rural house holds. On the whole, a shift of 0.50 points (on 1-5 point scale) was observed in the members post SHG formation, and project interventions. A negligible shift was observed in terms of decisiveness for those who were taking decisions themselves and jointly. A minor shift was observed in this area due to the embedded social systems (Vashishtha and Santoki, 2005).

Capacity enhancement:

Capacity building measures strength group approach. The five major components for capacity enhancement were measured on five point continuum prior as well as after SHG formation. The comparison of average scores on the basis of the parameters pooled together revealed a positive shift of 0.92 points because of SHG exposure. Further variation among group members was studied with respect to hopes and aspirations and overall satisfaction with life. It was seen that there was a shift of 1.5 points in hope and 1.0 point shift for satisfaction with life. Optimistic attitude towards life leads to more active participation, which is an essential component for group organization. However, a group to what extent can remain psychologically knit depends upon its group composition, cohesion and group dynamics (Singh, 2007).

Social empowerment:

Social empowerment holds a crucial significance in close knit societies especially the farm household. There was a minor shift in all the social attributes taken into consideration. As far as empowerment is concerned (leadership, communication skills, assertiveness, coordinating member activities), it was found that mutual supporting coalition results in more cohesion activities among the group members and greater

Table 1 : Means scores of parameters of impact assessment for empowerment of women in agriculture				
Sr. No.	Parameters	Before MS	After MS	Shift MS
Confidence building				
1	Confidence to talk within family	2.78	4.56	1.78
2	Confidence to talk in SHG meeting	2.48	4.68	2.20
3	Confidence to talk in public(in Pachayat/Gramsabha/Kisan ghoshti)	2.34	3.98	1.64
	Average	2.53	4.41	1.87
Self-esteem				
1	Self-esteem	3.45	4.54	1.09
2	Self-image in the family	2.50	3.22	0.72
3	Self-image in the community	2.68	3.87	1.19
4	Self-reliance/independence	2.78	3.70	0.92
5	Feeling of security(economic, general)	2.94	3.60	0.66
	Average	2.87	3.79	0.86
Decision-making pattern pertaining to:				
1	Children's education	3.49	4.21	0.72
2	Family planning	3.40	4.32	0.92
3	Buying and selling land, property and households goods	3.56	3.78	0.22
4	Daily households	3.62	3.97	0.35
5	Family and social functions	3.16	3.68	0.52
6	Animal husbandry/agriculture	3.30	3.89	0.59
	Average	3.42	3.98	0.55
Capacity enhancement				
1	Ability to take risk	2.69	3.75	1.06
2	Ability to understand and solve problems	3.37	4.10	0.73
3	Ability to try new ventures	2.78	3.64	0.86
4	Ability to take criticism	3.30	3.89	0.59
5	Conflict resolution	2.67	3.98	1.31
6	Hope	2.89	4.43	1.54
7	Overall satisfaction with life	3.45	4.56	1.11
	Average	3.02	4.05	1.03
Social empowerment				
1	Leadership aspects	2.65	3.79	1.14
2	Team spirit	3.77	4.34	0.57
3	Communication skills	2.79	4.26	1.47
4	Assertiveness	3.90	4.64	0.74
5	Participation in group activities	3.23	3.30	0.07
6	Participation in village/community	3.65	4.11	0.46
	Average	3.33	4.07	0.67

MS = Mean score

participation in group. Furthermore, an analysis of the individual categories of the five major parameters revealed the greatest shift was observed in case of confidence to talk in SHG 'meetings' and 'hope' followed by 'self-esteem' and 'communication skills'. All these qualities are important for empowerment to take place (Mehra *et al.*, 2010).

Attitude of farm women towards improved agricultural and animal husbandry technologies and entrepreneurship development:

The impact of the project on SHG members was a also

assessed in terms of change in attitude towards agricultural technologies, improved animal husbandry practices and entrepreneurship development. The results are given in Tables 2, 3 and 4, respectively.

Attitude towards improved agriculture technology:

On whole about three fourth of the women (76.67%) expressed their favourable attitude towards agriculture technology while only 13.33 per cent of those not exposed to the study were having favourable attitude towards the same. In the control group, majority (55.00 %) were undecided

whereas only 05.00 per cent of the experimental group was undecided (Table 2). A favourable attitude towards improved agricultural technologies goes a long way in increasing productivity by reducing drudgery and releasing the time of women to diversity.

Attitude towards improved animal husbandry:

The SHG members of the present study showed greater inclination towards improved animal husbandry practices (80.00%) whereas in control group only 18.33 per cent showed favourable attitude. In experimental group, 18.67 per cent were unfavourable whereas, 53.33 per cent did not have a favourable attitude towards improved animal husbandry in control category (Table 3). The positive response towards the same can be because dairy enterprises have wide avenues and due to participation of farm women in training (Renjita and Singh, 2006 and Singh *et al.*, 2010).

Attitude towards entrepreneurship development:

According to Table 4, in experimental group, 78.33 per cent favoured the concept of entrepreneurship development for moving towards economic self-reliance. In control group, 15.00 per cent were favourable whereas a major chunk fell in to the category of unfavourable and undecided. Economic emancipation through self-help approach was one of the crucial aims behind the study and positive attitude of the respondents for entrepreneurship development that can be exploited for empowerment (Narayanaswamy and Gowda, 2007).

Conclusion:

The impact of the study on the influence of SHG

membership and project interventions upon socio-psychological parameters based on "Before and After" design revealed that rural women find drastic change in their personality and self-image. A social and psychological positive impact of rural women not only brings increased efficiency but also improves their quality of life. Self-Help Group approaches can undoubtedly focus on development of rural women through appropriate interventions for capacity building and entrepreneurship development. The greatest impact was seen in case of confidence, especially confidence to talk in SHG meetings. This was followed by self-esteem and self-image about and usefulness to community. Both these factors have great influence on empowerment. Another important shift was in case of social empowerment and capacity enhancement. Alleviation of poverty, despite being on the agenda of the Government, seems indomitable. Viable comprehensive and bold initiatives should strive for concerted and collective inroads into poverty. Conceptually elaborate, integrative and holistic approach to socio-psychological parameters can produce a deep impact on sustainable development. The group approach stems from the underlying assumption that the poor will help themselves thoroughly mutual help. Building capacity to manage their own resources, decision-making capability is an effective way to empowerment. Impact studies of Self Help Groups have become indispensable because earlier initiative suffered from isolated approach, desperate thrust and lack of adequate focus on substantive issues of sustainability and social intermediation. Implications drawn from the study revealed that self-help group members stand better proven than non-SHG members in socio-psychological factors. Internal group solidarity and collective strength need to be identified as key

Table 2 : Distribution of respondents by attitude towards improved agricultural technologies

Attitude	Experimental group (n=300)		Control group (n=60)	
	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Favourable	230	76.67	08	13.33
Undecided	15	05.00	33	55.00
Unfavourable	55	18.33	19	31.67

Table 3 : Distribution of respondents by attitude towards improved animal husbandry

Attitude	Experimental groups (n=300)		Control groups (n=60)	
	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Favourable	240	80.00	11	18.33
Undecided	04	01.33	17	28.33
Unfavourable	56	18.67	32	53.33

Table 4 : Distribution of respondents by attitude towards entrepreneurship development

Attitude	Experimental group (n=300)		Control group (n=60)	
	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Favourable	235	78.33	09	15.00
Undecided	10	03.33	20	33.33
Unfavourable	55	18.34	31	51.67

points in building viable SHGs along with microfinance and capacity building interventions.

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