



Research Article

Market-led extension for empowerment of farmers

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SUMMARY : The concept of empowerment is given great focus in any rural development effort. To enhance the standard of living of the Indian farming community, they need to be empowered both at personal level and social level. Market-led extension activities taken up by the public and private extension system helps to empower rural people to a great extent through the self-help group movement. The present study examined the empowerment attained by vegetable farmers of Kerala through various market-led extension activities. The study revealed that the self-help group approach brought about commendable empowerment among the rural farmers at all the four main levels *i.e.*, personal, social, technological and economic.

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KEY WORDS:

Empowerment,
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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Agriculture, the most fundamental sector of Indian economy, provides food security, generates employment and also contributes to the country's exports. But, lack of proper linkages between the production and marketing sector make the Indian agriculture less effective. Since a vast majority of the agricultural producers constitute the small and marginal farmers of rural areas, they need to be supported with relevant information and skills to adopt newer technologies. Farmers receive most of the production technologies from the extension system and so it needs to be more farmers friendly. Market-led extension is a new dimension of agricultural extension and this devises interventions for the farmers from planting to final market transaction.

In India, several organizations are promoting market-led extension among farmers through the formation of self-help groups (SHGs). Self-help group movement strives to empower rural farmers through their efforts to better utilize resources, access information, enhance savings and also to avail credit (Mandal, 2005). Marketing is an important area of functioning of SHGs that helps farmers to realize reasonable returns from the produce, minimize the transportation cost and

improve the product value and marketability. Thus, the market-led extension activities through SHGs are aimed to empower rural farmers personally as well as socially. This study was an attempt to analyze the inter-linkages between the SHG movement, the market-led extension approach and the empowerment of rural farmers.

RESOURCES AND METHODS

Two districts of Kerala state namely, Thrissur and Kasargod were purposively selected for the study since they had the highest number of actively functioning SHGs. Two Panchayats were randomly selected from each district and three well functioning SHGs were selected at random from each of them. From each SHG 10 members were randomly selected. For the non-member group 15 farmers were randomly selected from each panchayath. Thus, the total sample size was 120.

In order to study the empowerment of SHG farmers, 12 variables were identified under four dimensions of empowerment through judges rating (Table A). The data collected were analysed with the help of statistical tools like percentage analysis and Mann – Whitney U test.

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Table A : Variables for measuring empowerment

Sr. No.	Dimensions	Variables
1.	Personal empowerment	Innovativeness Communication ability Proactive attitude Leadership ability Self-confidence
2.	Technological empowerment	level of knowledge in crops and equipments Market awareness Information source utilization
3.	Economic empowerment	Income generation Credit utilization
4.	Social empowerment	Social participation Social recognition

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Data collected on different variables were analysed using Mann-Whitney U test except for three variables *viz.*, credit utilization, information source utilization and social participation where percentage analysis was used. The mean individual rank obtained through Mann-Whitney U test and the percentage score obtained through percentage analysis on different variables selected are presented in Table 1.

Personal empowerment:

It was observed that the SHG groups of farmers had produced high level scores in all the selected variables compared to non-SHG group of farmers except for self confidence. This reveals that because of SHG based market-led extension; there were obvious evidences of positive changes among the rural farmers. They had become more expressive, outgoing and had less apprehension about innovations. This finding is in line with the opinion of earlier

workers like Gupta and Gupta (2006).

Technological empowerment:

It was evident from the result that the SHG group of farmers were technologically more empowered and produced high scores in case of all the three variables. It can be argued that the SHG group of farmers had the edge here because of the interrelatedness of the three variables selected. The proper use of the available information sources would produce an increase of knowledge in crops and equipments and would also make them more aware of market demand and status. This would have led them to have more bargaining power. Pillai and Harikumar (2006) in their study had also observed that marketing is an important area of functioning of SHGs.

Social empowerment:

The high scores produced by SHG group of farmers on the two variables selected showed that the SHG group of farmers had more involvement in various social activities. It is

Table 1 : Score of two groups of respondents for various empowerment indicators

Empowerment indicators	Variables	Score	
		SHG (n = 60)	Non SHG (n = 60)
Personal empowerment	Innovativeness	75.80	45.20
	Communication ability	73.62	47.38
	Proactive attitude	73.26	47.74
	Leadership ability	64.88	56.13
	Self-confidence	60.21	60.75
Technological empowerment	Level of knowledge in crops and equipments	74.38	46.63
	Market awareness	36.70	3.30
	Information source utilization	78.03	42.97
Economic empowerment	Income generation	90.00	31.00
	Credit utilization	41.70	51.70
Social empowerment	Social participation	78.30	39.58
	Social recognition	75.63	45.37

also clear that they had become more acceptable by the members of the same society. This finding is in accordance with that of Murugan and Dharmalingam (2000). Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building, leading to greater participation and decision making power. It is also a transformative process.

Economic empowerment:

The results of the study revealed that income generation was more among the SHG group of farmers whereas credit utilization was less in this group compared to the non-SHG group. Through the activities of SHGs, most of the respondents of this group could produce a reasonable income and this generates additional profit to their farm family compared to earlier times. As a result, most of the SHG group of respondents did not need any credit support and also could repay the borrowed credit in time compared to non-SHG group of farmers.

Conclusion:

With regard to empowerment, the SHG group of respondents produced positive results in the measurement of personal, social, technological and economic empowerment. However, economic empowerment scenario was higher in comparison to the other three. It can be safely concluded that

the prime change brought about by market-led extension efforts through SHGs is of higher income status. In the measurement of personal empowerment, out of the five variables, four variables showed positive results, indicating that considerable personal empowerment was brought about among SHG group members. The results of the study point to the unequivocal role of SHGs as rural institutions contributing to the much needed rural development in India.

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