

## **Social Exclusion of Women and Inclusion by Third Sector through Self Help Groups**

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### **Abstract**

*The vital objectives of 10th Five Year Plan were equitable, sustainable and inclusive growth. This actually was prompted by the revelation that growth and development process in the country has been exclusive. Social exclusion is the societal and institutional process wherein different groups of people or communities are excluded from full participation in socio- economic activities. The exclusion has its roots in the caste, communities, economic inequities, and also in gender. In any excluded group the most marginalized is the women community. The third sector includes Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Not For Profit Organizations and other Voluntary Organization (VOs). These organizations have been working day and night, towards highlighting the plight of women and also in bringing them to the mainstream. In this context, the present paper attempts to highlight the concept of social exclusion with special reference to women. It also examines the role of third sector in underscoring the issue of social exclusion of women and bringing them into mainstream through Self Help Groups in the villages of Periyapatna Taluk in Mysore district.*

**Key words :** *Social exclusion, Social inclusion, Third sector. Self help groups.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The grand objectives of 12th five year plan (2012-2017) include faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth. The planning commission started thinking in terms of inclusive growth since the 11th five year plan (2007-12) wherein the objective was faster, more broad-based and inclusive growth. It openly acknowledged that the process of economic growth and development in the country has excluded many sections of the society. There are many marginalized sections that are neither part of development process nor receive benefits of growth and development process. The poverty ratio, malnutrition and income inequalities continue to bog India's polity.

Social exclusion is the social and institutional process where in different groups of people or communities are excluded from full participation in some economic activities. The exclusion sociologically is happening on the grounds of caste, community, and economic inequality and gender. Thereby, the most excluded ones in the Indian society include, schedule castes, schedule

tribes, other backward communities and people from minorities. Women are the most marginalized among the excluded community. Given such a scenario the major focus of inclusive growth is to get the excluded ones into the mainstream of the development process. In other words, it is about including excluded community into the manifolds of developmental activities.

Traditionally, as the process of development is non-inclusive in nature, there was need for external interventions from different sections of the society. It may be the Government, Private or the so called Third sector. The third sector includes Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Not for Profit Organizations and other Voluntary Organizations (VOs). These organizations have been working hard highlighting the plight of women and also in bringing them to the mainstream. In this context, the present paper tries to examine the role of third sector in underscoring the issue of social exclusion of women and bringing them into the mainstream. One of the most important interventions by the third sector has been creation of Self Help Groups (SHGs).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hedayat Allah Nikkhah et al (2011) in their article "**The Effect of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)'s Approaches on Women's Empowerment in Shiraz, Iran**" attempt to determine the impact of Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) approaches on the empowerment of women in Shiraz, Iran. They define and analyze empowerment at two levels, namely, 'individual' and 'community' levels. The study based on 195 women participants in NGOs activities showed moderate level of empowerment. This means they are neither disempowered nor empowered adequately. The study indicates that bottom-up approach is the most effective approach in the empowerment of women.

**Empowerment of Women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs): A Case Study of Viswa Santhi Balananda Kendram (VSBK)** -The study by K. Prabhakar (2010) focuses on the effects of the SHGs (VSBK) on women's participation and exercising control over decision-making, both in family matters and in group activities.

Iniobong Aniefiok Akpabio (2009) in her study **Women NGOs and Rural Women Empowerment Activities in the Niger Delta, Nigeria** attempted to document beneficiaries' perceptions on the contributions of Women NGOs (WNGOs) to the socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study included: an assessment of WNGOs contributions to improvements in beneficiaries' socio-economic activities and constraints affecting beneficiaries' participation in WNGOs activities.

Findings reveal that WNGOs cater to a broad spectrum of rural women. WNGOs were revealed to affect beneficiaries' socio-economic status through increased income generation, health awareness and acquisition of food processing skills. The study also identified constraints affecting beneficiaries' participation in WNGOs activities which include: inadequate credit facilities, and poor utilization of credit advances, resulting in poor loan repayment levels. The study concludes that WNGOs are capable of more effective inputs into human and community development activities.

The study **Accountability for Empowerment: Dilemmas Facing Non-Governmental Organizations** by Patrick Kilby (2006) discusses the accountability of NGOs, particularly their "downward" accountability to their beneficiaries, affects NGO effectiveness in the process of empowerment of the poor and marginalized in developing countries. The paper looks at evidence from a number of case studies of NGO programmes with poor women in India on the role of accountability in empowerment outcomes, and the role NGO values play in these outcomes.

Lotsmart Fonjong (2001) in his study **Fostering Women's Participation in Development through Non-governmental Efforts in Cameroon** examines case studies of NGOs and women's empowerment in Cameroon, and highlights their successes, with regard to improved access and welfare and their limitations, with regard to conscientisation, participation and control.

The paper on **Towards Realistic Strategies for Women's Political Empowerment in Africa** by Sara Hlupekile Longwe (2001) highlights that all development organisations supporting women's empowerment must recognize the true obstacles women face in gaining political power, and develop programme strategies to overcome them. In addition to focusing on the need to get women into government, NGOs could also usefully support women's organizations that are engaging in direct action - a key strategy which enables women to push for policy changes from outside government.

The study on **Women's Empowerment through NGO Interventions: A Framework for Assessment** by Smita Mishra Panda (2000) uses a seven-step process of assessment of women's empowerment within the system framework. The steps are assessments of the macro environment, the external agency environment, the external agency, the target group environment, the target group, the development programme / project and lastly integration of the assessment process. Such a framework will help the organizations in the design, implementation and evaluation of development projects from the point of view of understanding, incorporating and assessing empowerment related issues at the grassroot level.

The article on **Nongovernmental Organizations, Micro-credit, and Empowerment of Women** by Jude L Fernando (1997) critically evaluates the approaches used in studies on micro-credit and empowerment. It informs that most of the studies have focused on the final outcomes of micro-enterprises rather than the process through which they are achieved. The field research in Bangladesh, demonstrates that the widely documented successes of micro-enterprises are a result of the activities of the very institutions that are considered to be oppressive to women. Claudia Neura, in her article "**Leading the Way for Social Inclusion**" highlights how NGOs can bring women into the mainstream by example of "*Themis*" an NGO in Latin America. She also mentions as to how "*Themis*" has become another word for "justice" by training women community leaders on law and protecting human rights.

There are numerous studies focusing on the role of NGOs or broadly the third sector, in bringing women into centre of development process at global level and national level. The present paper is an attempt in the same direction, trying to document the efforts of NGO in the remote villages of Periyapatna taluk in Mysore district.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Following are the objectives of the present study;

- \* To examine the aspect of Social Exclusion with special reference to women.
- \* To examine the role of third sector in underscoring the issue of social exclusion of women.
- \* To analyse the impact of NGO interventions on inclusive development of women with main focus on SHGs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology that has been employed is focus group interview, unstructured interview and observation method. In the focus group interview, the researcher interacted with the group members of SHGs to elicit necessary information. The common or shared responses of the respondents to the questions raised were documented. Unstructured interviews were employed to gather necessary information from NGO representatives and few elected women members of local bodies, that is., Gram Panchayats and Zilla Panchayats. Additional information was gathered by observing the behavior of the SHG members during meetings and Social Audit process. As most of the responses to the questions raised by the researcher were unanimous, there was no scope for using quantitative techniques. The study mainly depends on information collected from the members of SHGs in the study area, interactions with the Non-Governmental Organization representatives working in the area and women representatives of local bodies.

**Sampling Technique:** Multistage random sampling method was followed to select the taluk and villages for the study. Proportionate random sampling was followed to select SHGs within the selected villages. More number of SHGs were selected in villages that had more number of SHGs. All members of the selected Self Help Groups in the selected villages participated in the focus group interviews barring few who were unable to attend on personal reasons. The sample size is 200 selected from 20 SHGs in the study area.

### Study Area

The study was taken up in the villages of Hunasawaadi, Doddaharave, Doddahosur and Koppa villages of Periyapatna taluk. Following SHGs were selected in these villages;

Sl. No.	Name and Address	Date of Establishment	Members	Supporting Bank
1	Sri Saraswati Women SHG, Hunasawaadi	27.01.2003	11	Agricultural Cooperative Society, Nandinathapura
2	Sri Masanikamma SHG, Hunasawaadi	10.02.2003	20	- do -
3	Sri Vinayaka Women SHG, Hunasawaadi	05.08.2003	19	- do -
4	Sri Shakthi Basaveshwara SHG, Hunasawaadi	14.02.2003	20	- do -
5	Sri Basaveshwara Women SHG, Hunasawaadi	24.12.2003	19	- do -
6	Sri Nanjundeshwara Women SHG, Hunasawaadi	30.06.2003	20	- do -
7	Sri Manjunathaswamy SHG, Hunasawaadi	05.10.2003	19	- do -
8	Sri Rangaswamy SHG, Hunasawaadi	03.04.2005	18	- do -
9	Sri Venkateshwara Women SHG, Doddaharave	26.08.2003	20	- do -
10	Sri Annapoorna Women SHG, Doddaharave	26.08.2003	19	- do -
11	Sri Women SHG, Doddaharave	30.06.2006	20	- do -
12	Sri Saraswati Women SHG, Doddaharave	16.04.2003	18	- do -
13	Sri Dhanalakshmi Women SHG, Doddaharave	09.09.2003	11	- do -
14	Sri Basaveshwara SHG, Doddaharave	14.12.2002	20	- do -
15	Sri Basaveshwara SHG, Doddahosur	15.07.2003	15	Syndicate Bank
16	Sri Sneha Women SHG, Doddahosur	09.02.2006	20	State Bank of Mysore
17	786 Women SHG, Doddahosur	14.01.2003	17	Syndicate Bank
18	786 Dadapeer SHG, Doddahosur	14.10.2003	20	Syndicate Bank
19	Sri Shakthi Women SHG, Doddahosur	11.12.2002	17	Syndicate Bank
20	Sri Doddamma Taayi Women SHG, Koppa	03.01.2005	20	Syndicate Bank

*SHGs selected for the Study*

## DISCUSSION

Various data and indicators relating to women make interesting revelations about their status in the economy. As per NSSO Survey of 2009-10, total female employment declined at an annual rate of 1.72% between 2004-05 and 2009-10, whereas male employment saw an increase at the same rate. A work participation rate of females has been around 30% in rural areas and 15% in urban areas since 1970s. In the decade of 2000s, though the number of women aged 15 years or more increased by 86.5 million only 8.9% of them joined the labour force, and only 7.5% of them were described as gainfully employed. The data on type of work of rural women workers indicate that 55.7% were self employed, 39.9% were casually employed and only 4.4% were regularly employed in 2009-10. In urban areas, 41.1% were self employed, 19.6% and 39.3% were employed casually and regularly. The distressing fact is that most of the regular work included women working as maids, cleaners and cooks which are not considered to be gainful. The NSS data on males and females in agricultural work highlights declining trends. The number of males declined from 52.96% in 1999-2000 to 45.28% in 2009-10, whereas the percentage of females declined to 65.64% in 2009-10 from 73.26% in 1999-2000 though higher than males. This again reflects the disparities wherein the burden of hard work is borne by greater percentage of women folk in rural areas.

The demographic indicators also do not reflect a different situation. The Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is still large at 212 (in 2009). The sex ratio as per 2011 census is 940 with much worse number of 914 for 0-6 years population. The literacy rate of females is 65.46 way behind male literacy rate at 82.14. The percentage of women representatives in Indian parliament is mere 9.2%. Further, only 5.9% of total budgetary allocation is allocated to women related programmes in the Union Budget of 2013-14, which would not do much in moving towards the direction of gender equity and empowerment. All the facts and figures thus show that very little has been done to make women inclusive and women still have to tread a long path to reach the goals of inclusion, equity and empowerment in almost all walks of life whether social, political or economical.

As mentioned earlier, there needs to be interventions from different agencies in the process of inclusive development. The success of NGO interventions in this direction has been documented and the most discussed issue is the role of Self Help Groups in inclusive growth of women. The self help groups are playing a major role in poverty alleviation. Almost all the states in India are supporting and promoting the growth of self help groups because of their importance in poverty reduction. The number of SHGs and membership is continuously increasing because

of the support from government and NGOs. They engage in savings and credit activities and also in other activities like income generation, childcare, literacy, natural resources management etc. But the savings and credit activities are the most prominent ones which have made the SHG movement very strong as poor women in need of money have positively accepted the concept of empowerment through SHG. This initiative has induced confidence in the lives of women members to face the exploitation both at home and at workplace. The SHGs have proved to be an effective and efficient model for empowering the poor women in poverty alleviation. The word "Microcredit" was started to be widely used only in the 70s. The general features of Microcredit are:

1. It promotes credit as a human right;
2. Its Mission is to help the poor families to help themselves to overcome poverty;
3. Most distinctive feature of micro credit is it is not based on any collateral or legally enforceable contracts or securities. It is based on "trust" and not on complex legal obligations.
4. It is offered for creating self-employment for income generating activities and housing for the poor, as opposed to consumption.

Major objectives of formation the SHGs are mutual co-operation among members, financial support, training, provision of education to children, healthcare facility, women welfare, effective implementation of government projects, village development, cleanliness, sanitation etc., SHGs have 10 to 25 members who can be either only men or women or only youth or a mix of these. The present study deals only with women SHGs which have been promoted by non-governmental agencies. The SHG's meet regularly once a week or fortnight to collect the savings from members, decide to which member loan should be given, take decision on collective activities and initiate action against defaulting members which affects the financial well being of SHG. The members who abstain from meetings or who arrive late are imposed nominal fines to maintain discipline. Fine is also collected from members who fail to pay loan installments. The SHGs have an elected chairperson, a deputy, a treasurer and other office holders.

Most SHGs start by saving regular contributions by the members and not with the help of any external financial capital. The contributions are very small, say Rs.10 per week. After a period of consistent savings the SHGs give loans from savings in the form of small internal loans for micro enterprise activities and consumption. The SHGs that have utilized their own funds are further assisted by banks and other financial intermediaries. With the success of Grameen bank in Bangladesh, the Micro financing has been the most important means of women empowerment

provided through SHGs promoted by NGOs. The present study endorses the observations of the earlier studies.. The important activities by the NGOs are:

- Encouragement for the creation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) by women and becoming members facilitating access to Microcredit / Microfinance.
- Women from Below the Poverty Line (BPL) families were made members of the SHGs.
- Create awareness through Jaatha, road shows and informal meetings. The voluntary organizations have done tremendous job in creating awareness regarding Banking activities, Health issues, Management of resources, Importance of Potable drinking water, Sanitation, Women's rights, Legislations like Right to Information (RTI), Domestic Violence Act, Government programmes on Social Security and Social Protection.
- Training for income generating activities like tailoring, candle making, homemade food, phenyl production and other articles.
- Many members have taken up income generating activities. Encouraging savings habits among members.

## **FINDINGS**

Women from Below the Poverty Line (BPL) families were made members of the SHGs. The micro financing through SHGs has directly resulted in the upliftment of these BPL families. The exploitation of poor women by money lenders and pawn brokers has stopped, as members are no longer depending on them for their financial needs. The awareness created and information provided by the NGOs is solving the problem of asymmetric information of the rural women. The banking activities of SHGs are having direct impact on the achievement of Financial inclusion. Apart from having SHG accounts, many women have opened personal accounts in the banks positively affecting the process of financial inclusion. Voice the concerns: Some of the women members of SHGs are active enough to take up the issues of deprived women. With the awareness created, they take up the matter (like depriving benefits of a government programme) and discuss with necessary government officials. Most interesting development is that members are able to tackle the apathy of government officers through RTI Act. Empowerment: The confidence gained from earning income and increased savings has empowered women members to take decisions about their lives and of their children and also guide other members of the society. Women are able to address their health problems without waiting for other members of the family to take decisions.



Community Participation: By enabling members to monitor the functioning of the ration shops, take up issues like safe drinking water, sanitation, education, violence against women, prohibition, early childhood care and timely payment of widow pension, the NGOs are promoting community participation.

Creation of Social capital: The most important impact of NGO intervention has been the creation of social capital. By developing Leadership qualities, increased interactions among inter and intra groups, peer members, motivating for collective action, information sharing among members and active participation in development issues, the NGOs are making decentralised democracy a reality.

### **Forward Linkage effects**

Children to schools and Reduction in Child Labour: With the newly gained economic independence and increased savings, the women members boldly take decisions to send their children to better schools. This has drastically brought down the problem of child labour in the area. Reduction in alcohol abuse and domestic harassment: Awareness and empowerment have helped women effectively face abuse and harassment leading to overall reduction of such incidents. Active political participation: There has been great change in the attitude of members towards political participation. With necessary information, awareness and interactions, they know the importance of voting, contesting elections, and getting elected. Thereby members never miss voting; few of them though from very poor background have stood for election and also have won the elections. The SHG members are very active in Social Audit or Jamabandhi which earlier was a routine process.

### **Is Everything Fine?**

The roses bloom but there will be thorns. Likewise, there were few constraints which are related to the following:

Lack of Income generating activities: Many SHG members still have not taken up income generating activities. Few of them use the funds from micro financing for unproductive activities and few lend the money to others at higher rates of interest. Members have to be made more aware of the importance of income generating activities which is the most important objective of SHG formation;

Still many members left out from the purview of SHGs: Strengthening the participation of poorest of the poor in SHGs through effective targeting mechanisms is the need of the hour which will strengthen inclusion process;

Intensive capacity building: Much needs to be done towards capacity building of the members and augment the process of inclusive development;

## CONCLUSION

The NGO interventions have thus created huge benefits for the society, especially the women living in the rural areas. There is a direct movement towards inclusion of excluded community, the women from BPL families, within the purview of development by taking up income generating activities largely supported by microfinance in SHGs. With the newly gained economic independence, the women members are empowered to take important decisions relating to their lives, fight harassment at home and outside, educate children and take care of their health and that of family members.

Community participation component is supported with women members actively involving in important issues concerning their villages like alcohol prohibition, monitoring ration shops (Public Distribution System), sanitation facilities etc. The third sector is jotting success story of decentralized and development governance, with women from deprived background actively participating in governance by getting elected to local bodies. With the increased awareness, economic independence, empowerment, political participation, health and educational benefits the NGOs/ Third Sector are leading a meaningful inclusion of excluded community in the society in all dimensions.

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