

**Impact Of Self Help Groups
(Group Processes)
On The Social/Empowerment
Status Of Women Members
In Southern India**
by MYRADA

Paper presented at the Seminar on SHG-bank
Linkage Programme at New Delhi
on 25th and 26th November 2002



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Introduction

Background to the Study

NABARD recognizes the social impact of its SHG Bank Linkage Program as a very critical area that needs to be studied. The term “social impact” includes the empowerment of the SHG members. In September 2002, NABARD approached Myrada with a request to undertake a concise Study on the above subject as part of their broader endeavour to assess the overall status of the SHG Bank Linkage Programme. NABARD’s holistic plan included a Study of the following five aspects of the Programme:

1. An overall review of the progress made under the SHG Bank Direct Linkage Programme, and a strategy for upscaling the same.
2. Commercial aspects of the Programme, from the point of view of the participating banks.
3. A review of the efforts to widen and deepen the range of SHG Promoting Institutions.
4. The socio-economic impacts of the Programme, with particular reference to backward areas
5. The social impact of the Programme, with particular reference to the empowerment status of women SHG members.

Of the above, the last-mentioned component was requested of Myrada. In the beginning, the expectation was that the Study would focus on the Social Impact of Bank Linkage. However, since this would have entailed a much more sophisticated level of research that could not be undertaken due to severe constraints of time, the focus was modified to study the impact of SHGs *per se* on the empowerment status of members.

With the knowledge and consent of NABARD, Myrada engaged ORG-MARG (Social Research Unit) to conduct the Study. Conceptual and logistical inputs were provided by Myrada on a regular basis, throughout the duration of the Study. The methodology of the Study was finalised in consultation with Myrada. However, Myrada did not influence the Study tools or the interpretation of findings.

The objective of the Study was ***to establish whether and to what extent membership in self-help groups and their consequent involvement in the various activities of the group have an impact on the social status and empowerment of the women members of such groups.*** The Report, from this point forward, is as articulated by ORG-MARG.

Preface

Congruity with human nature enhances the relevance and utility of human development initiatives. The core of SHG-bank linkage in India has been built around an important aspect of human nature - the feeling of self worth. Over the last ten years, it has come to symbolize an enduring relationship between the financially deprived and the formal financial system, forged through a socially relevant tool known as Self Help Groups (SHGs). An amazingly large number of formal and non-formal bodies have partnered with NABARD in this unique process of socio-economic engineering. What had started off in 1992 as a modest pilot testing of linking around 500 SHGs with branches of half a dozen banks across the country with the help of a few NGOs, today involves about 20,000 rural outlets of more than 440 banks, with an advance portfolio of more than Rs.1, 200 crore (\$ 240 m.) in microFinance lending to SHGs. Financial services have reached the doorsteps of over 8 million very poor people, through 500,000 SHGs, hand-held by over 2,000 development partners. A brief history of the microFinance initiatives in India will help place the present study report in perspective.

The Background

The high level of dependence of the informal sector on non-institutional sources continued despite a rapid growth of banking network in India in the last five decades. The rural financial system at present functions through an impressively large network of more than 150,000 retail outlets. Despite such phenomenal expansion of the outreach of the formal banking structure, the All India Debt and Investment Survey (GoI), 1981, gave indications that the share of non-institutional agencies (informal sector) in the outstanding cash dues of the rural households was quite high at 38%. It was also seen that households in the lower asset groups were more dependent on the non-institutional credit agencies.

The main hurdle faced by banks in financing the very poor seemed to be the comparatively high transaction cost in reaching out to a large number of people who required very small doses of credit at frequent intervals. The same held true of the costs involved in providing savings facilities to the small, scattered savers in the rural areas. Feelings were mutual among the very small savers and borrowers in the rural areas as well, as they tended to view banking as an institutional set up for the elite; even if they tried to reach the bank branch the long distances and loss of earnings on being away from work while visiting bank branch were hurdles and they were never sure whether they would get any service or not if they did approach the branch. The levels of mutual inconvenience and discomfort made the poor look at banking as an almost inaccessible service, and the banks felt that banking with the very poor was not a 'bankable' proposition.

Role of NABARD

It is in this background that NABARD conducted studies in the mid-eighties that brought out the simple fact that the most important and immediate banking needs of the poor households, in the order of their priority were:

- Opportunities to keep safe their occasional small surpluses in the form of thrift
- Access to consumption loans to meet emergent needs and
- Hassle-free access to financial services and products, including loans for micro-enterprises

Viewed against this demand, there were serious limitations on the supply side, as the existing products and services of the banking system were largely meant for a different type of customer segment. In trying to fulfil the credit needs of the poor for financial services, the banks had to contend with regulated interest rates, high transaction costs and high cost of mobilization of funds.

In cases where credit was made available to the poor through special programmes, absence of an integrated savings component and something to fall back upon in case of any adversity was leading to poor repayment performance. The problem was further confounded, as the users were unable to distinguish between the State support (grants/reliefs) and bank credit as the rural and agricultural banking system was getting identified with the State. The political expediency for 'removing poverty at a stroke' was putting resources for running micro enterprises in the hands of the poor without nurturing them to handle such resources. The high cost of appraisal and monitoring led many banks to jettison those systems in the context of low-value advances, aggravating the already vitiated repayment climate further.

Based on the studies mentioned above and the results of action research conducted, NABARD developed the Self Help Group [SHG]¹ - bank linkage approach as the core strategy that could be used by the banking system in India for increasing their outreach to the poor. The strategy involved forming SHGs¹ of the poor, encouraging them to pool their thrift regularly and using the pooled thrift to make small interest bearing loans to members, and in the process learning the nuances of financial discipline. Bank credit to such SHGs followed. NABARD saw the

¹ A SHG is a group of about 20 people from a homogeneous class, who come together for addressing their common problems. They are encouraged to make voluntary thrift on a regular basis. They use this pooled resource to make small interest bearing loans to their members. The process helps them imbibe the essentials of financial intermediation including prioritization of needs, setting terms and conditions and accounts keeping. This gradually builds financial discipline & credit history for themselves, as the money involved in the lending operations is their own hard earned money saved over time with great difficulty. This is 'warm money.' They also learn to handle resources of a size that is much beyond their individual capacities. The SHG members begin to appreciate that resources are limited and have a cost. Once the groups show this

promotion and bank linking of SHGs not merely as a credit programme but as part of an overall arrangement for providing financial services to the poor in a sustainable manner leading to empowerment of the members of these SHGs.

Fine-tuning Future Strategy

The corporate mission for microFinance set by NABARD envisages reaching banking services to one-third of the very poor of the country, i.e., a population of about 100 million rural poor through one million SHGs by the year 2007-08. The banking system has already reached microFinance services to 40 million poor through SHGs, reinforcing this commitment. NABARD and its partners are all set to traverse the path beyond the mid-mark. This is the right time to fine-tune the strategies for the future, based on the experiences of the past.

The overall strategy adopted by NABARD relies on two main planks: (i) expanding the range of formal and informal agencies that can work as SHG promoting institutions, and (ii) building up capacities of the increasing number of stakeholders. The key to all such initiatives has been training and capacity building of various stakeholders including the SHG members themselves, the range of which is growing at a fast pace. The series of studies undertaken now are oriented in this direction, and are

mature financial behaviour, banks are encouraged to make loans to the SHG in certain multiples of the accumulated savings of the SHG. *The bank loans are given without any collateral and at market interest rates.* Banks find it easier to lend money to the groups as the members have developed a credit history. 'Cold (outside) money' gets added to the own 'warm money' in the hands of the groups, which have become structures, which are able to enforce credit discipline among the members. The members have experienced the benefits of credit discipline by being able to save & borrow regularly without many hassles. The groups continue to decide the terms of loans to their own members. *The peer pressure ensures timely repayments & replaces the "collateral" for the bank loans.*

expected to help NABARD and its partners in this process of fine-tuning their future strategies.

The Present Study Series

These studies provide multi-perspective evaluation of the SHG-bank linkage programme from academics, consultants and practitioners of microFinance from India and abroad. What is germane to all these studies is the rapid growth of SHG-bank linkage into the largest microFinance initiative in the world in terms of its outreach and the need to closely look at the different critical issues related to it. The studies cover the overall programme and its impact, document the different steps taken so far, and evaluate the need and scope for fresh initiatives. These studies were commissioned by NABARD, with financial assistance from the SDC, GTZ, and IFAD. The focus of the five studies is:

- A review of the progress and impact of the overall strategy for scaling up the SHG Bank Linkage Programme over the last decade (by Dr. Erhard Kropp, formerly Senior Economist, GTZ, and Consultant)
- Role and scope of NGOs and non-NGO agencies as SHPI (by Mr. Malcolm Harper, formerly Professor, Cranfield School of Management)
- Study on commercial aspects of impact of SHG-bank linkage programme on bank branches (by Dr. Hans Dieter Seibel, Professor, Cologne University, Germany)
- Evaluation of SHG Bank Linkage Programme based on the economic indicators on the members of SHGs (by NABARD)
- Impact of SHG Bank Linkage Programme on Social Indicators and Empowerment of the members (by Mr. Aloysius Fernandez, Executive Director, MYRADA, India)

In addition, an independent study on 'The role of Self-Help Groups and the Bank Linkage Scheme in Preventing Rural Emergencies' by Ms. Kim Wilson, microFinance Advisor, Catholic Relief Services, Kolkata has also been made available to us. The findings of these studies will be deliberated upon in detail during a seminar organized by NABARD in collaboration with the SDC, GTZ and IFAD on 25 and 26 November 2002 at New Delhi. The seminar would be attended by key stakeholders like banks, NGOs, and government agencies, international agencies like the World Bank, GTZ, SDC, IFAD, ADB, representatives from some developing countries, as also some acknowledged experts on microFinance.

I am sure that the learning points emerging out of the deliberations of the wide range of participants would help NABARD and its development partners to fine-tune their strategy and approach for the next few years.

Y. C. Nanda
Chairman
NABARD

Mumbai
November 2002

Chapter 1

Understanding the Concept of Women's Empowerment

1.1 Concept of Women's Empowerment

One of the first systematic interpretations of this concept is found in the technical literature of the Human Development Report (HDR) wherein it is referred to as the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)¹. The GEM uses variables constructed explicitly to measure the relative empowerment of women and men in political and economic spheres of society. The first two variables reflect economic participation and participation in decision-making, measured in terms of women's and men's percentage shares of administrative and managerial positions and their percentage shares of professional and technical jobs. These are broad, loosely defined occupational categories. Because the relevant population for each is different, the HDR calculates a separate index for each and then adds them together. The third variable, women's and men's percentage shares of parliamentary seats, is chosen to reflect political participation and decision-making power.

However, for the present study, we had to define empowerment differently for the following reasons:

- (a) Here, we look at empowerment in the limited context of a woman's membership of the SHG and not the larger context of her being a member of the society. The change of context also entails a change in indicators used. For example, when speaking at the level of the entire society, the indicator of political power used was the women's percentage share in parliamentary seats whereas at the level of a SHG, the participation in local rural polity becomes more relevant.

- (b) The above also implies that we are essentially talking about women hailing from the lowest rung of the society and a fairly predictable range of occupational categories, and not from a wide range of socio-economic strata.

Below, we discuss the components of the process of empowerment and the factors influencing this process, either positively or negatively, in separate sections. The instruments of data collection used during the study covered both the aspects – components as well as influencers – to provide a complete picture of the ongoing process of empowerment among the SHG members.

1.2 Components of Empowerment

Empowerment, in the context of an SHG member, can be seen as having the following six components. Out of these, components A, C and D deal with various aspects of decision-making; while components A and D are related to the woman's role in the decisions about the issues and activities arising within the household, component C is related to her role in the socio-political environment. Women's empowerment level in a community is positively affected when any of the above components improves.

a. Influence over economic resources of the family and participation in economic decision-making:

In the rural households of India, the economic resources and the discretion to utilize them are usually concentrated in the hands of male members. This concentration of economic power is one of the key reasons for the low prestige and weak bargaining position of women in the family.

Definition:

A woman member's influence over the household's economic resources has been defined here as her participation in/her ability to influence the decisions on:

- a. The purpose of loans taken in SHGs (i.e., what to take loans for, what are the most urgent needs of the family to be met through the loan, what type of loan in terms of tenure and interest rate can the household afford best, etc.)
- b. The adoption of household infrastructure programs (i.e., whether to take the benefit of an opportunity to do some house improvement/ asset development, e.g. repairing the roof, adding a new room to the house, etc., and, if so, which one)
- c. Major household purchases (> 200 INR), especially the purchases of durables and occupational assets, e.g., livestock, farm machinery, handloom, etc. this would include decisions about which brand of a commodity to purchase.
- d. Occupational issues like which crop to sow or which seeds or other farm inputs to use (if the household is mainly engaged in agriculture), which supplier to buy the raw materials from (if engaged mainly in a non-agricultural occupation), etc.
- e. Sale or mortgage of assets in times of financial need (which assets should be sold off first, whether it should be sold outright or only given away on mortgage, etc.)

b. Influence on her own development as an individual:

Self-development relates to the growth of the personality of the member through getting involved in better-paying or more complex professions or getting educated further. The latter is especially important since rural women, right from the time when they are young girls, are denied the opportunities to go to school.

Definition:

A woman member's influence over her own growth as an individual has been defined here as her ability to

influence/participate in the decisions on:

- a. Her professional status: Whether she has the freedom to decide to start her own micro-enterprise/income-generating activity, etc.
- b. Her educational attainment: Whether she has the freedom to join an adult learning program (if illiterate), or add to her existing educational status (if literate)
- c. **Power over local polity and participation in socio-political decision-making:**

Here, we have concentrated only on the individual member's own ability to influence the local politics and participate in the community-level decision-making and not on the ability of the group as a whole. At the group level, the aspects of influential power are different, e.g., how many SHGs have initiated, planned and implemented community/ village development programs, how many have taken charge of maintaining village infrastructure, how many have been approached by other groups in the community/ village to help solve social problems, or how many have at least 2 elected members in Local Bodies.

Definition:

A woman member's influence over local polity/ participation in socio-political decision-making has been defined here as her involvement/ participation in:

- a. The formation of the SHG (if she is one of its founder members) or in the expansion of its membership base (if she joined later).
- b. The SHG meetings and its political activities (e.g., elections) and commercial activities (e.g., interaction with the banks, promoter NGO, other SHGs, etc.)
- c. The meetings of village panchayat/ *grama sabha*, etc., to present her personal views or the views of the SHG on an issue concerning the village community.

- d. The Parliamentary/State elections as a voter.
- e. The Panchayat elections as a voter/candidate.

d. Influence over other decisions pertaining to general welfare of the family:

SHG member women usually have an important role to play in caring for other members, especially for the elderly and the children in their capacity as mothers, daughters, elder sisters, wives and daughters-in-law. This “reproductive” role is to be played in addition to the “productive” role they play in the farms, cowsheds, and manufacturing units. However, while playing this role day after day, the importance and the decision-making power that they get may not be quite in keeping with the huge demands this role makes on their time and energy. In this component, we look at the aspects of this power in detail.

Definition:

A woman member’s influence over other decisions pertaining to general welfare of the family has been defined here as her participation in/influence on the following decisions:

- a. *With respect to all members:* Which doctor or health facility to consult, which shop or market to buy the provisions from, whether or not to use birth control methods, etc.
- b. *With respect to children only:* Whether the children, especially the girl child, should be sent to school, whether to send the young children to the village *anganwadi*, what kind of food should the child eat, how much money should the child be allowed to carry or spend on its own, whether to take the child to a health camp currently running in the village, etc.

e. Increased interactions with other members of her group/community:

In the rural society, the traditional sources of one's social influence and respect have been caste, age, economic and political status, etc. In an environment where the SHGs have been active for some time, some more variables likely to contribute to a woman's social prestige and her influence over others come into the picture. For instance, by virtue of her being the leader of a successful SHG, which has substantially changed the living standards of its members, other women in the community may see the SHG leader as someone who is important and instrumental.

Definition:

Influential power is the ability to affect or change a given situation through one's actions and influence. This includes the ability to influence the behaviour of others. The SHG member's influential power can be defined as her ability to influence the behaviour of others (e.g., other members of her group/ other women, or even men, in the community) by being a guide or counsellor to those who may seek her advice and guidance on matters of personal or group interest. This power determines whether she can be seen as or can grow to be an opinion leader within her community.

In fact, this component merits a special mention out of the six components mentioned here. NGOs involved in the empowerment of women through SHGs believe that the ultimate goal of women's empowerment is to attain independent status with men in all respects, and thus, become primary agents of their development and that of the community to which they belong². The success of these primary agents – and thus, the success of empowerment itself – would depend upon the influence SHG leaders and members have on other women.

f. Improvement in the technical and managerial skills of the member:

SHG members usually come from households engaged in agriculture and other primary sector activities. As members, they are often introduced to skills of a more technical nature, e.g., in sewing, powerloom-based weaving, tailoring, bag-making, machine operations, etc. Such activities allow them to have an alternative occupation, which they as well as the rest of the household can depend upon in times of agricultural crises triggered by bad monsoons, etc.

Definition:

A skill is a specific ability to do something well. These abilities may be practical, technical or managerial. In the context of this Study, a woman member's technical and managerial skills were taken to consist of skills learnt:

- a. To take up certain on-farm or non-farm income generating activities under the auspices of the SHG
- b. To moderate an SHG meeting successfully
- c. To resolve conflicts among the SHG members

1.3 Factors influencing the above-detailed empowerment levels

Following are the factors which may play a key role in facilitating or impeding the process of empowerment.

1.3.1 Component A: Influencers

The economic factors that may determine the SHG member's power over the household's economic resources are:

- a. Her share in the gross annual household income
- b. Nature of her income (stable and regular as opposed to unstable and irregular income from rain-fed agriculture)

- c. Savings, investments, land and other assets existing in her name (with the SHG, a bank and/or a Chit Fund)
- d. Whether she is literate enough to handle routine transactions with the bank or the chit fund on her own (e.g., signing the cheques, writing the standing instructions, etc.)
- e. Her legal status as the heir/inheritor of paternal property or as a nominee named by another family member in instruments like insurance policies, bonds, savings certificates, etc.

However, some important non-economic factors involved here are:

- a. Her position in the family in terms of age and marital status. A young, unmarried woman living with her parents, a young, newly married woman living in a large joint family having several senior members or a widow may not have the same kind of influence on the family's economic decisions as another woman who is a bit advanced in age or is living only with her husband and parents in law.
- b. Degree of cordiality in her relationships with the other members of the household. Tensions and discord in relationships may hamper the participation of the woman in her family's economic decisions, even if her contribution to the family income is substantial.

1.3.2 Component B: Influencers

The factors that may determine the SHG member's power over her own growth are:

- a. General literacy level in the household, parental literacy, etc., which would decide whether there exist any past precedents of higher adult literacy or women's literacy.

- b. Cultural environment, traditions and attitudes of the household (e.g., whether it is considered appropriate for women of the household to have a small business of their own or do commercial deals with outsiders).

1.3.3 Component C: Influencers

The factors that may determine the SHG member's participation in socio-political decision-making are:

- a. Power over the household's economic resources, which will partly determine her social position
- b. Power over her own individual development
- c. Position or seniority she holds in the SHG (e.g., President, Secretary, etc.)
- d. Access and exposure to the external world
- e. Her personality traits (e.g., is the woman shy/averse to public speaking or is bold/can speak confidently, is she articulate/able to speak in a fluent and precise language or does she have to struggle to put her views across, etc.)

1.3.4 Component D: Influencers

The factors that may determine the SHG member's power over other decisions pertaining to general welfare of the family are:

- a. The extent to which she meets other women of her age group in the local community and gets to know from them information that can be of use to the general welfare of the household (i.e., the degree of socialization)
- b. Her educational level.

1.3.5 Component E: Influencers

A woman acquires the influential power primarily through acquiring credibility and respect in society. The factors that may add to her respect and credibility among other members of her group/community are:

- a. Her formal position in the SHG (e.g., President or Secretary)
- b. Her educational level
- c. Her age
- d. Perception of others about her role in the success of the SHG (which may lead to ideas like “If she can manage the SHG so well, she can solve my problem too”)
- e. Length of her experience with the SHG or with a commercial activity being run by the group

1.3.6 Component F: Influencers

The factors that may determine the level to which the SHG member’s technical and managerial skills improve are:

- a. Intensity of training (number of training programs attended during the last one year, average duration of a program in days)
- b. How regularly has she been using the technical skills acquired at the training program (e.g., hours spent working at the production unit)
- c. How frequently has she had the opportunity to moderate or preside over an SHG meeting. In the SHGs, which follow the principle of rotating leadership, every member is equally likely to get this opportunity within a certain period of time.

- d. Intensity of involvement in SHG activities (number of meetings attended during the last one year).
- e. Whether she is literate enough to handle routine transactions with the bank or the chit fund on her own (e.g., signing the checks, writing the standing instructions, etc.)
- f. Burden of household work on the member, which may disrupt and shorten her attendance of training programs and SHG meetings. Such household work includes caring for children and elderly, cooking, sweeping, cleaning, fetching water, milking, collecting firewood, caring for cattle, weeding, harvesting and assisting the male members in other farm activities.

Chapter 2

Design, Scope and Challenges of the Present Study

NABARD had originally intended the Study to cover several representative regions across India. This was later modified to include the four Southern Indian States only (Kerala, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh). Similarly, the initial intention to include a wide range of SHG Promoting Institutions (ranging from Banks to Government Departments to NGOs to Cooperative Institutions – and sub-categories within) was modified in favour of four professionally managed NGOs at the rate of one per State. Finally, while the initial proposal suggested covering 8 (eight) SHGs, Myrada raised this number to 12 (twelve). In the absence of uniform base data on the status of SHG members before they joined groups, it was decided that each NGO would enable interactions with two groups that were over 3 years old and one group that was under 1 year old, that could permit comparisons to be made and conclusions to be drawn on the influence of group processes. In actual fact, 13 (thirteen) groups were interviewed.

2.1 Participant Organizations

Table 1

State	NGO	SHG Names and Age Categories	
		Less than one year	Above three years
Tamil Nadu	DHAN Foundation	Adhiparasakthi Kalanjiam	Kunkumam Kalanjiam Pattatharasiyamman Kalanjiam
Andhra Pradesh	RASS	Gangadevi Sangham	Raja Rajeshwari Sangham Arunodaya Sangham Saraswathi Sangham
Kerala	CHASS	Jyothi SHG	Chaithanya SHG Karunya SHG
Karnataka	MYRADA	Chowdeshvari Mahila Sangha	Shanti Mahila Sangha Mukambika Mahila Sangha

2.2 Thematic Scope

Besides including the questions that covered both components of empowerment process as well as the influencers (as elaborated in Chapter 1), the survey instruments especially touched the following subjects:

1. An activity charting to quantify the member's burden of household and agricultural work as well as the SHG related responsibilities
2. Member's perception of the burden of the work they do and the fatigue caused by it
3. Husband's/Senior Household Member's awareness of the basic facts about the self help group and its core objectives
4. Husband's/Senior Household Member's perception about how the member's association with the self help group has affected the family
5. Husband's/Senior Household Member's willingness to let the member continue/let the other women join her too
6. Cooperation extended by the husband to the wife with respect to the SHG
7. Senior Household Member's attitude towards the idea of women working outside home
8. SHG leader's knowledge about the functioning and profile of the SHG
9. SHG leader's perception about the success and influence of the SHG and reasons for giving a particular rating to the SHG
10. SHG leader's views on the success and achievements of programs launched by the SHG

11. Problems faced by the SHG
12. SHG's linkages with other NGOs and micro-Finance Institutions
13. NGO leader's perception about the best practices of the organization with regard to SHGs
14. NGO's linkages with other NGOs and micro-Finance Institutions
15. Nature of NGO's relationship with various banks

2.3 Tools used to capture the information

The instruments used were:

- a. *Structured Interview Schedule*: This fully structured schedule was used to interview the SHG members, their spouses and senior members of the household. From each group, a majority of the members (16 out of an average membership of 20) were targeted in these interviews. Out of the 16 SHG members interviewed, spouses were targeted for 10 interviews and SHM for the other 6 interviews.
- b. *In-depth Interview Schedule*: This semi-structured schedule was used to interview the SHG leaders, NGO leaders and bank officials (collectively termed as decision-maker interviews).
- c. *Peer Group Evaluations*: These evaluations were done in order to collect the ratings of SHG members about the perceived skills and abilities of each other. Each evaluation involved 10 members from the same group.
- d. *In-meeting Observations*: These observations were meant to record the moderation skills of SHG leaders in a live meeting situation. However, these were subject to the scheduling of SHG meetings during the fieldwork period.

2.4 Sample Size

The following Table gives a complete picture of the size of the study in terms of workload:

Table 2

Data Collection tool	Per SHG	Per NGO	SHGs	NGOs	State	Total
SHG Member interviews	16		3		4	192
Attitude Study: Husbands of SHG members	10		3		4	120
Decision Maker Interviews on best practices: SHG Leaders	2		3		4	24
Decision Maker Interviews on best practices: NGO Leaders		2		1	4	12
Decision Maker Interviews on empowerment: Bank officials		2		1	4	8
Attitude Study: Senior Household Members	6		3		4	72
FGD: Peer Group Evaluation	1		3		4	12
In-meeting observations	1		3		4	12
Total calls						428

The above workload was distributed across 4 field teams, one for each State. Each 7-member field team consisted of 1 Research Associate, 1 Field Coordinator, 1 Supervisor and 4 Investigators.

2.4 Challenges experienced

In the present Study, the following problems were experienced, which are commonly seen in the course of all the studies dealing with the rural poor:

- a) The SHG members interviewed were simple village women and many of them had never taken part in any sort of interview or talked about their experience with self-help before. Explaining to them the purpose of the interview and rephrasing the language of questions at certain points was a challenge for our investigators.
- b) The Study required the SHG leaders to be articulate (i.e., talk at length about the Sangha they represent). Apart from the fully structured questions, they were supposed to answer some unstructured questions as well. On several occasions, we found it difficult to make them speak elaborately and give additional information on a point.
- c) One of the instruments the Study used was an unusual exercise like Peer Group Evaluation, in which the SHG members had to evaluate each other on various parameters like leadership ability, moderation skills, respect in the community, etc. This was a concept completely unknown to the SHG members and at times, they struggled to visualize the meaning of certain ideas.

Chapter 3

Findings of the Study

3.1 Manner of Presentation of Findings

Most of the findings in the following pages are presented in the form of tables and grids putting the data for young and old SHGs next to each other. While young SHGs were defined as those formed less than one year back, old SHGs were the ones older than 3 years. This definition was in keeping with the classification suggested by NABARD for this studyⁱⁱⁱ. This was done to make it easier for the reader to readily recognize the significance of difference between the young and old SHGs on various counts. In all, 67.4% of the sample was from the older SHGs.

3.2 Findings:

3.2.1 SHG Members: Actual Coverage

As against the targeted number of respondents in the SHG Member category (192), the actual number of the respondents covered was 190, the distribution of which was as follows:

Table 3.1
State wise respondents

Name of state	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Andhra Pradesh	13	21	33	25.8	46	24.2
Karnataka	15	24.2	32	25	47	24.7
Kerala	16	25.8	32	25	48	25.3
Tamil Nadu	18	29	31	24.2	49	25.8
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

3.2.2 SHG Members: Profile of respondents

Most of the SHG members were young (26-35 years of age) married women in both the types of SHGs. Over 45% of the husbands, however, are in the age group of 36-45 years. In both types of groups, most of the SHMs

interviewed fall in the age group of >55 years (79% in old groups and 86% in young groups). Also, most of these members were illiterate (over 45% in the new groups and over 47% in the old groups).

Table 3.2
No. of respondents by age group

Age Group	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
< 18 years	0	0	1	0.8	1	0.5
18 - 25 years	13	21	5	3.9	18	9.5
26 - 35 years	26	41.9	48	37.5	74	38.9
36 - 45 years	15	24.2	44	34.4	59	31.1
46 - 55 years	7	11.3	17	13.3	24	12.6
> 55 years	1	1.6	13	10.2	14	7.4
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.3
No. of respondents by marital status

Marital status	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Never married (single)	4	6.5	6	4.7	10	5.3
Currently married	55	88.7	102	79.7	157	82.6
Divorced / separated	1	1.6	3	2.3	4	2.1
Widowed	2	3.2	17	13.3	19	10
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.4
By Educational Attainment of the Respondent

Educational Level	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	28	45.2	61	47.7	89	46.8
Literate, no formal education	4	6.5	4	3.1	8	4.2
Up to primary	5	8.1	15	11.7	20	10.5
Up to middle	8	12.9	19	14.8	27	14.2
Up to secondary	11	17.7	20	15.6	31	16.3
Up to HSC/ PUC	4	6.5	7	5.5	11	5.8
Others	2	3.2	2	1.6	4	2.1
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

In terms of occupation, the respondent profile was as follows:

- a. In the New Groups, 53% of the respondents were non-earning members of their families, whereas in the Old Groups, 66% of the respondents were either Chief Wage Earners^{iv} or other earning members of the family.
- b. Occupational profile of the SHG members who were CWEs of their respective households differed significantly between the New Groups and Old Groups. While in the former, trade/ shop-keeping (55%) and livestock rearing and allied businesses (33%) were the chief occupations, in the Old Groups, it was agricultural labor (41%) and manufacturing (29%).
- c. Overall, 87% of the non-earning SHG members were housewives.
- d. In 90% of the cases where the SHG member herself was not the CWE, that position was occupied by the husband.

Tables 3.5 and 3.6 present a glimpse of the **awareness and mobility levels** of the SHG members. It appears that a very large percentage of respondents are not able to read newspaper, which is understandable, as over 46% of the respondents cannot read or write. Listening to radio is not a very popular habit; over 36% of all respondents do not listen to radio. Television, on the other hand, is a very popular medium as around 47% of all respondents regularly watch TV. In both types of SHG, frequency of traveling out of the village is quite high. This may not be directly a result of being a SHG member since travel is affected by the nature of occupation of the member, environment within the household, etc.

Table 3.5
Read newspaper, Listen to radio and watch TV

Activity	Frequency	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
a. Read newspaper/magazine	Yes, occasionally	10	16.0	26	20.3	36	18.9
	Yes, regularly	13	21.0	27	21.1	40	21.1
	Never	39	63.0	75	58.6	114	60.0
b. Listen to radio	Yes, occasionally	22	35.5	37	28.9	59	31.1
	Yes, regularly	14	22.6	48	37.5	62	32.6
	Never	26	41.9	43	33.6	69	36.3
c. Watch TV	Yes, occasionally	24	38.7	48	37.5	72	37.9
	Yes, regularly	26	41.9	63	49.2	89	46.8
	Never	12	19.4	17	13.3	29	15.3
Total		62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.6
Frequency of Travel

Ever gone out to:	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Another village	56	90.3	109	85.2	165	86.8
The nearest town	57	91.9	124	96.9	181	95.3
A big city	53	85.5	110	85.9	163	85.8
Base	62	100	128	100	190	100

We see above that fewer members in the Old Group have ever stepped out of their village but still, compared to the New Group members, more Old Group members were aware of another SHG working in their own village or elsewhere (85.2% as against 70.9%). But when asked about their main sources of information about the concept of an SHG, its activities and the benefits of joining it, more New Group members mention other SHGs in the locality as a source that inspired them to join a group. In the case of Old Groups, interactions with the NGO staff were a far more frequent source of information about SHGs.

We came across a few cases where the formation of a group was inspired by the success of other self-help groups active in the locality. Anandavalli, President, Pattatharasi Amman, a 4-year old group, says: “A few years back, a Dalit Group was formed in this village and was doing quite well, but I was not aware of it”. When she happened to meet one of its members at a public function, and was told about how well it was progressing, she was impressed. She discussed the idea with other women in her neighborhood and thus initiated this group.

Similarly, the formation of Mookambika Mahila Sangha (Boodhikote, Karnataka) was inspired by the performance of Vivekananda Mahila Sangha in the same village. What triggered the interest was that though the members of Vivekananda Sangha were from extremely poor families, much like the women of Mookambika, they had invested their low-interest loan funds intelligently in activities like cotton-growing, generating income for themselves.

Table 3.7
Four Leading Sources of Information about SHG Activities

Source	< 1 year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NGO staff	27	43.5	89	69.5	116	61.1
The peer group	27	43.5	64	50	91	47.9
Other SHGs in the locality	26	41.9	44	34.4	70	36.8
Other family members	17	27.4	27	21.1	44	23.2
Base	62	100	128	100	190	100

A remarkable fact is that very few respondents or their households have been beneficiaries of a welfare scheme/ program or have been members of another similar income-generating enterprise or group, as the following table shows. This implies that the changes in the lives of the SHG members, as documented by this study, can be attributed largely to the SHG interventions. Besides, it also implies that for most of the non-beneficiaries, particularly those at the lower end (extremely disadvantaged), in the absence of other alternatives, the loans disbursed by the SHG and savings kept with it are absolutely pivotal to their lives.

Table 3.8
Whether Benefited from Other Programs/ Groups

Benefited from:	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
An NGO/Private Program/Group	4	6.5	10	7.8	14	7.4
A Govt. Program/ Group	4	6.5	12	9.4	16	8.4
Base	62	100	128	100	190	100

The members were asked two related questions: First, about the purpose of group formation and second, about the reason they joined it. Most members mentioned the same reason for both which means that most members believe that the group was formed to do exactly what they want from it. This is also why we see in the following table that the order of importance given to the 4 core reasons is the same for both questions.

What is important is members do not seem to think that creating a source of regular income for the members is an important part of an SHG's job too. Clearly, not many members expect the SHG movement to do this for them.

Table 3.9
Reasons for Group Formation & Member's Interest: A Comparison

Reason	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	For group formation	For my joining it	For group formation	For my joining it	For group formation	For my joining it
To save money regularly	85.5	88.7	93.8	93	91.1	91.6
To meet regularly	45.2	46.8	48.4	46.9	47.4	46.8
To start/ take part in internal lending	75.8	72.6	71.1	68.8	72.6	70
To generate income for the member	33.9	30.6	39.1	35.9	37.4	34.2

3.3 Responses of SHG Members on Empowerment Issues

3.3.1 Influence of SHG on Various Aspects of Members' Life

Being a part of the SHG seems to have changed the lives of the members, especially in the older groups, in a significant way. As for its *influence on the financial status* of these women, in the old groups, 89% interviewees agree that their

financial position has changed for the better since they joined the SHG, as against only 71% in the younger groups.

Similarly, more members in the older groups than in the younger groups have reported a positive ***influence on their share in the family income*** during this period (We have already seen how the average share of SHG members in family income is bigger in the case of older groups). Also, the percentage of those saying that they get to participate in the family's financial decisions more than before is also higher in the case of older groups.

Table 3.10
Change in personal financial position

Type of Change	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
It has improved	44	71	114	89.1	158	83.2
It has remained the same	16	25.8	14	10.9	30	15.8
Can't say	2	3.2	0	0	2	1.1
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.11
Change in Share in Family Income

Type of Change	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
It has increased	31	50	95	74.2	126	66.3
It has remained the same	22	35.5	25	19.5	47	24.7
Can't say	9	14.5	8	6.3	17	8.9
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.12
Change in Role in Financial Decisions

Type of Change	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I get to participate more than before	23	37.1	72	56.3	95	50
I participate just as much as before	27	43.5	46	35.9	73	38.4
I get to participate less than before	4	6.5	2	1.6	6	3.2
I neither had nor have a role	3	4.8	3	2.3	6	3.2
I continue as the main decision maker	2	3.2	5	3.9	7	3.7
Can't say	3	4.8	0	0	3	1.6
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Let us speak at some length about the SHG's ***influence on the member's level of comfort and confidence*** in performing certain tasks and living life with a certain degree of self-dependence. As Table 3.13 shows, in the case of all 7 tasks, the members of older groups have expressed a higher level of confidence and sense of ease.

As far as members' ability to write the name is concerned, we found that in RASS, the NGO active in Andhra, the women members compelled to learn how to sign, and thumb impressions were not acceptable at all. The result: within 2-3 months, almost all members became able to endorse the document with their signature.

Table 3.13
Degree of Difficulty in doing certain Tasks

Activity	Level of difficulty	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
a. Writing the name	No difficulty	5	55.6	18	94.7	23	82.1
	Some difficulty	3	33.3	1	5.3	4	14.3
	Lot of difficulty	1	11.1	0	0	1	3.6
b. Identify currency notes	No difficulty	7	77.8	19	100	26	92.9
	Some difficulty	1	11.1	0	0	1	3.6
	Lot of difficulty	1	11.1	0	0	1	3.6
c. Read all numbers up to 500	No difficulty	5	55.6	17	89.5	22	78.6
	Some difficulty	1	11.1	2	10.5	3	10.7
	Lot of difficulty	3	33.3	0	0	3	10.7
d. Basic arithmetic	No difficulty	3	33.3	7	36.8	10	35.7
	Some difficulty	1	11.1	7	36.8	8	28.6
	Lot of difficulty	5	55.6	5	26.3	10	35.7
e. Reading brand names	No difficulty	2	22.2	11	57.9	13	46.4
	Some difficulty	0	0	7	36.8	7	25
	Lot of difficulty	7	77.8	1	5.3	8	28.6
f. Reading pass-book entries	No difficulty	0	0	6	31.6	6	21.4
	Some difficulty	0	0	10	52.6	10	35.7
	Lot of difficulty	9	100	3	15.8	12	42.9
g. Reading bank forms	No difficulty	0	0	2	10.5	2	7.1
	Some difficulty	0	0	8	42.1	8	28.6
	Lot of difficulty	9	100	9	47.4	18	64.3

Further, in the older groups, more members reported a positive ***influence on confidence level in dealing with people*** (strangers/ outsiders like investigators, teachers, medical teams, etc.) and institutions (banks, NGO, government agencies, etc.), as Table 3.14 shows.

Table 3.14
Change in Confidence Level

Confidence in dealing with:		< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
People	More confident	45	72.6	96	75	141	74.2
	As confident	10	16.1	26	20.3	36	18.9
	Less confident	1	1.6	3	2.3	4	2.1
	Can't say	6	9.7	3	2.3	9	4.7
Institutions	More confident	30	48.4	76	59.4	106	55.8
	As confident	19	30.6	41	32	60	31.6
	Less confident	3	4.8	1	0.8	4	2.1
	Don't dealwithany	4	6.5	6	4.7	10	5.3
	Can't say	6	9.7	4	3.1	10	5.3
Total		62	100	128	100	190	100

As for the **change in the level of awareness about health and hygiene** during the period of membership is concerned, on all the six points, the older groups have a substantially larger percentage of respondents reporting an increase in awareness. In fact, on 2 out of 6 points, most of the New Group members (50%) have said that they have learnt nothing new on these subjects. One may say that a large part of this increased knowledge is due to the involvement of these women with the SHGs, since very few of these women (just 4 out of the 109 literate members) have seen an improvement in their educational status or gone back to school, one of the places where they could have learnt more about these issues.

Table 3.15
Change in Knowledge about Health & Hygiene

Do you know about or practice:		< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
a. Family planning methods	More than before	22	35.5	69	53.9	91	47.9
	As much as before	31	50	43	33.6	73	38.9
	Can't say	9	14.5	16	12.5	25	13.2
b. Washing hands before eating/cooking	More than before	28	45.2	91	71.1	119	62.6
	As much as before	31	50	35	27.3	66	34.7
	Can't say	3	4.8	2	1.6	5	2.6
c. Child's vaccination	More than before	30	48.4	89	69.5	119	62.6
	As much as before	28	45.2	30	23.4	58	30.5
	Can't say	4	6.5	9	7	13	6.8
d. Not allowing water & dirt to stagnate	More than before	37	59.7	92	71.9	129	67.9
	As much as before	22	35.5	36	28.1	58	30.5
	Can't say	3	4.8	0	0	3	1.6
e. Using toilets at home	More than before	32	51.6	78	60.9	110	57.9
	As much as before	25	40.3	40	31.2	65	34.2
	Can't say	5	8.1	10	7.8	15	7.9
f. Adding fruits & vegetables in diet of pregnant women	More than before	32	51.6	87	68	119	62.6
	As much as before	26	41.9	35	27.4	61	32.1
	Can't say	4	6.5	6	4.7	10	5.3
Total		62	100	128	100	190	100

Now let us segregate the different influences of the SHG on the empowerment of their women members and see how each of the components – mentioned in Chapter 2 - has been affected.

3.3.2 Power over Economic Resources

Compared to the younger SHGs, in the older SHGs, more women are earning members in their households. This may be because most of the older SHGs have already reached a stage where they have accumulated enough savings from members that can be invested in income-generating activities or have completed a few training programs enabling the members to earn on their own.

Not only do the older SHGs have a larger presence of earning members but the average share of such members in the family income is also higher in the older SHGs, which means that the members of old SHGs often have an important contribution in the family finances and hence, have some power over the economic resources.

Here, it must be remembered that the Old Group members have a *larger* average share in a *larger* average family income. Overall, 50% of the households covered had an annual income of over Rs.20000 but while in the New Groups, 70% of the members came from the <Rs.20000 class, in the Old Groups, over 57% of the members came from households falling in the >Rs.20000 class.

The following table shows in which class of percentage share in income do most of the SHG members in each Group lie. We see that most of the New Group members are concentrated in the low percentage class and there is a substantial percentage of Old Group members in the high percentage class (50-100%) (i.e., more women in the Old Group are able to make a large contribution to the family income), even though in both groups, almost the same percentage of members contribute over 75% of their personal incomes to the family (see the table on extent of income contributed).

Table 3.16
Share in household income during last year

	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
0 to 10%	16	55.2	30	37	46	41.8
10 to 50%	11	37.9	37	45.6	48	43.7
50 to 100%	2	6.8	14	17.3	16	14.5
Total	29	100	81	100	110	100

On the nature of contribution, the two groups do not differ significantly.

Table 3.17
Nature of Contribution to Family Income

	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Give same amount regularly	8	38.1	30	37	38	37.3
Give something regularly	10	47.6	36	44.4	46	45.1
Give whenever I had money	3	14.3	15	18.5	18	17.6
Total	21	100	81	100	102	100

Table 3.18
Extent of Income Contributed

Proportion of Income	< 1 year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
< 1/4 th of my income	2	6.9	13	15.5	15	13.3
1/4 th - 1/2 of my income	8	27.6	7	8.3	15	13.3
1/2 - 3/4 th of my income	1	3.4	9	10.7	10	8.8
3/4 th to whole of my income	18	62.1	55	65.5	73	64.6
Total	29	100	84	100	113	100

Though the ownership of house – many of which may be ancestral homes handed down from generation to generation – may not change much as a result of SHG membership of a woman, it should be pointed out that the percentage of those owning the house or having a share in its ownership is higher in the older SHGs.

However, the cases of land ownership are few in the case of both types of SHGs.

Table 3.19
No. of respondents by status in the family

Proportion of Income	< 1 year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Earning Member	29	46.8	84	65.6	113	59.5
Non-earning member	33	53.2	44	34.4	77	40.5
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.20
Average Share in Household Income during Last Year (%age)

	< 1 year old	> 3 years old	Total
Mean	26.27	40.55	36.89

Table 3.21
Ownership of House

Ownership	< 1 year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self /Jointly with others	22	37.1	50	43.8	73	41.5
Husband	23	37.1	50	39.1	73	38.4
Another family member	2	3.2	11	8.6	13	6.8
Jointly owned by some (does not include me)	1	1.6	1	0.8	2	1.1
Rented house	12	19.4	7	5.5	19	10
Others	1	1.6	9	7	10	5.3
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.22
Having land in their name

Type of land	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Residential land	11	17.7	41	32	52	27.4
Farmland	8	12.9	23	18	31	16.3
Any other land	1	1.6	8	6.3	9	4.7

What is a bit surprising is that the habit of saving with a bank has not taken roots in any class of SHGs. In fact, in the older SHGs, it is weaker than in the recently formed SHGs.

Table 3.23
Having an account

Type of land		< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Have a savings account in bank	Yes	14	22.6	22	17.2	36	18.9
	No	48	77.4	106	82.8	154	81.1
Have a deposit in bank or post office	Yes	9	14.5	17	13.3	26	13.7
	No	53	85.5	111	86.7	164	86.3
Have a Chit Fund account	Yes	10	16.1	14	10.9	24	12.6
	No	52	83.9	114	89.1	166	87.4
Have any gold, silver or jewelry	Yes	47	75.8	98	76.6	145	76.3
	No	15	24.2	30	23.4	45	23.7
Is a nominee in insurance policy	Yes	6	9.7	32	25	38	20
	No	55	88.7	89	69.5	144	75.8
	DK/CS	1	1.6	7	5.5	8	4.2

An important indicator of being practically empowered is whether the SHG member is sufficiently aware of the basic banking operations and can handle her savings account on her own. As for the awareness of the core purpose of a bank, on almost every point, more Old Group members are aware. Similarly, there are fewer “Don’t Know” responses in the Old Group on the question of whether they know in which bank their SHG has its account.

Table 3.24
By Awareness of Bank's Purpose

Purpose	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Bank accepts savings	12	80	21	87.5	33	84.6
I can store cash, gold etc. in bank	6	40	8	33.3	14	35.9
Bank pays interest on savings	10	66.7	19	79.2	29	74.4
Bank uses savings to give loans	11	73.3	19	79.2	30	76.9
Total	15	100	24	100	39	100

Table 3.25
Awareness of SHG's Bank a/c

Purpose	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	5	33.3	12	50	17	43.6
No	8	53.3	10	41.7	18	46.2
DK/CS	2	13.3	2	8.3	4	10.3
Total	15	100	24	100	39	100

In the following Table, look at the extreme ends. As against 73.3% New Group members who say that they themselves operate their accounts frequently, over 95% Old Group members say so. The respective percentages of "Never" responses are as widely different as 26.7 and 4.2.

Table 3.26
By Frequency of Operating A/c by Self

	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes, mostly	9	60	17	70.8	26	66.7
Yes, sometimes	2	13.3	6	25	8	20.5
Never	4	26.7	1	4.2	5	12.8
Total	15	100	24	100	39	100

3.3.3 Power over her Own Development

As compared to the newer groups, more respondents in the older groups have said that their control over their own lives has improved and they have a greater role in making decisions about themselves than before.

Table 3.27
Change in Role in Decisions about Self

Type of Change	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
It has increased	30	48.4	84	65.6	114	60
It has remained the same	27	43.5	41	32	68	35.8
It has decreased	1	1.6	2	1.6	3	1.6
Can't say	4	6.5	1	0.8	5	2.6
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

3.3.4 Power over local polity

For managing the activities leading to development of community/ village, local political bodies like *gram panchayats* have been formed which, under the *panchayati raj* regime, have acquired more importance than ever before. A lot of development works are funded and monitored through these bodies. The study tried to measure the change in the role of the women members – who till now have been at the fringes of the society - in the events and decisions that affect the lives of all the villagers, including their own.

The findings show that the situation is largely the same as ever. Nearly 63% members of new groups and 49% members of old groups state that they have never had any role in the village-level decisions. Only 10% and 16% members in these categories respectively say that they (get to) participate more than before in the local polity.

As far as the internal meetings of the SHG are concerned, a very large percentage of members in both classes of groups have said that they attend these meetings regularly. However, when it comes to interacting with other important local bodies, the participation rates in New Group are well below those in the Old Group, as the following table reveals.

Table 3.28
Participation in Local Affairs & SHG Activities

Participate in:	Frequency of attending	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Weekly/monthly SHG meetings	Yes, regularly	54	87.1	111	86.7	165	86.8
	Yes, when I have time	6	9.7	11	8.6	17	8.9
	Never	2	3.2	3	2.3	5	2.6
	No meeting held so far	0	0	3	2.3	3	1.6
Meetings with local bank branch	Yes, regularly	8	12.9	78	60.9	86	45.3
	Yes, when I have time	4	6.5	21	16.4	25	13.2
	Never	35	56.5	22	17.2	57	30
	No meeting held so far	15	24.2	7	5.5	22	11.6
Meetings with partner NGO	Yes, regularly	22	35.5	70	54.7	92	48.4
	Yes, when I have time	13	21	31	24.2	44	23.2
	Never	23	37.1	25	19.5	48	25.3
	No meeting held so far	4	6.5	2	1.6	6	3.2
Meetings of Grama Sabha	Yes, regularly	11	17.7	52	40.6	63	33.2
	Yes, when I have time	8	12.9	26	20.3	34	17.9
	Never	40	64.5	46	35.9	86	45.3
	No meeting held so far	3	4.8	4	3.1	7	3.7
Total		62	100	128	100	190	100

Let us look at the level of political activity of the respondents in greater detail. Most members in both types of groups are active voters at all levels of electoral democracy, as the following table shows. However, 52% new group members and 47% old group members have said that there has *never* been an election in the SHG of which they are members. Hence, only around 10% members in new groups and 20% in the old groups have contested elections for a post in the SHG. Of these, respectively 33% and 52% have also got elected as leaders of their SHGs. None of the members in any group has ever contested an election for a post in the gram panchayat.

Table 3.29
Whether Voted in the Last Elections

		< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Gram Panchayat	Yes	54	87.1	123	96.1	177	93.2
	No	3	4.8	5	3.9	8	4.2
	Not eligible then	5	8.1	0	0	5	2.6
State assembly	Yes	53	85.5	122	95.3	175	92.1
	No	3	4.8	6	4.7	9	4.7
	Not eligible then	5	8.1	0	0	5	2.6
	Don't remember	1	1.6	0	0	1	0.5
Lok Sabha	Yes	55	88.7	122	95.3	177	93.2
	No	0	0	6	4.7	6	3.2
	Not eligible then	5	8.1	0	0	5	2.6
	Don't remember	2	3.2	0	0	2	1.1
Total		62	100	128	100	190	100

3.3.5 Power over Decisions pertaining to General Welfare of the Family

The respondents were asked to indicate who was the key family member deciding on a range of household issues related to family planning and well-being of children, girls, sick members, etc. As the responses show, on all the six points (Tables 3.30-3.35), more Old Group members say that they themselves decide on these matters. However, on most of the points, the largest percentage in both the classes of groups belongs to the respondents who have said that they take decisions jointly with the husbands.

Table 3.30
Change in Role in Decisions related to General Good

Type of Change	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I get to participate more than before	31	50	68	53.1	99	52.1
I get to participate as much as before	27	43.5	47	36.7	74	38.9
I get to participate less than before	1	1.6	3	2.3	4	2.1
I continue to be key decision maker in the family	1	1.6	6	4.7	7	3.7
Can't say	2	3.2	4	3.1	6	3.2
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.31
Who decided to use Birth Control

	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	19	30.6	44	34.4	63	33.2
Husband	7	11.3	19	14.8	26	13.7
Self, jointly with husband	26	41.9	42	32.8	68	35.8
Other family members	1	1.6	2	1.6	3	1.6
Not applicable	9	14.5	21	16.4	30	15.8
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.32
Who decided which Method to Use

	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	17	27.4	45	35.2	62	32.6
Husband	7	11.3	17	13.3	24	12.6
Self, jointly with husband	27	43.5	42	32.8	69	36.3
Other family members	1	1.6	2	1.6	3	1.6
Not applicable	10	16.1	22	17.2	32	16.8
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.33
Who decided which Health Facility to Use

	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	23	37.1	65	50.8	88	46.3
Husband	14	22.6	24	18.8	38	20
Self, jointly with husband	20	32.3	33	25.8	53	27.9
Parents	1	1.6	0	0	1	0.5
My children	1	1.6	0	0	1	0.5
Other family members	1	1.6	3	2.3	4	2.1
Not applicable	2	3.2	3	2.3	5	2.6
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.34
Who decided which school the girl has to be sent

	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	10	16.1	40	31.3	50	26.3
Husband	6	9.7	15	11.7	21	11.1
Self, jointly with husband	21	33.9	42	32.8	63	33.2
Parents	1	1.6	1	0.8	2	1.1
My children	2	3.2	1	0.8	3	1.6
Other family members	0	0	2	1.6	2	1.1
Not applicable	22	35.5	27	21.1	49	25.8
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Table 3.35
Who decided whether to send Child to Anganwadi

Person	< 1 year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self	11	17.7	29	22.7	40	21.1
Husband	7	11.3	11	8.6	18	9.5
Self, jointly with husband	14	22.6	37	28.9	51	26.8
Parents	0	0	2	1.6	2	1.1
My children	2	3.2	1	0.8	3	1.6
Other family members	0	0	3	2.3	3	1.6
Not applicable	28	45.2	45	35.2	73	38.4
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

3.3.6 Power/ influence over other people (esp., women) in the community

In both the types of groups, a majority of women have said that their advice and views are *respected* more now than before. The percentage of such members is however higher in the older groups (>3 years old) than in the young groups. The term “respect for views” was explained as “the gesture of listening to your views attentively and sensitively when you express them during the public meetings, etc.”

At the same time, a lot of respondents (over 40%) in both the categories have also said that from the time they joined the group, there has been *no* change in the number of people coming to them for advice or counsel, i.e., being in the SHG has not made them any more important in the eyes of the other people in the community. However, at the same time, around 39% respondents in the new group category and 44% in the old group category have said that there is definitely an increase in the number of people seeking their views or guidance but most of these are women.

In the Old Groups, more members have had an important role in popularizing the affinity group among the other women in their neighborhood/ in their circle of affinity. It suggests that a lot of members of Old Groups, over a

period of time have settled down in a role of an SHG member who not just fulfils her routine function of contributing savings and attending the meetings but also helps widen the membership base of the group. In this, their growing influence over other women must be of help.

Table 3.36
Role in Popularizing the Group

Rating given to the role played:	< 1 year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Had a very important role	16	25.8	46	35.9	62	32.6
Had a bit of a role	21	33.9	44	34.4	65	34.2
Had no role at all	25	40.3	38	29.7	63	33.2
Base	62	100	128	100	190	100

3.3.7 Improvement in technical and managerial skills

As the following table shows, the older groups have definitely imparted newer professional and technical skills to more of their members, as compared to the new groups where very few members have come across such skill development. Though the %age of those who actually learnt new skills after joining the SHG is 29 and 45.3 respectively for new and old groups, the %age of those who *perceive* an improvement in their skill level is slightly lower as the table given here shows.

Table 3.37
Change in Professional & Technical Skills

Type of Change	< 1 year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Have improved	15	24.2	53	41.4	68	35.8
Have not changed much	34	54.8	59	46.1	93	48.9
Can't say	13	21	16	12.5	29	15.3
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

Of the 109 respondents who are in some sort of occupation, 50 have learnt new skills after joining the SHG. However, only 40% of these are in occupations, which are non-traditional (i.e., they have entered these occupations shortly after joining the SHG or even more recently). It seems that the skill development programs

have yet to cover a lot of ground in the direction of changing/ modernizing the occupational profile of SHG members.

Apart from the technical skills, we identified 4 managerial skills relevant to the SHG members. These are: (a) moderating the SHG meetings, (b) dealing with banks, (c) ability to resolve conflicts among the SHG Members and (d) addressing a group of people on a specific issue. On the first two of these, more members in the old groups than in the new groups report that they have learnt these skills. On the next two, it is just the opposite. Evidently, members of old groups have had a good deal of experience with meetings and banks due to longer interactions with the banks and with each other.

In both types of groups, the main source of new learning of skills (in over 76% cases) has been the training programs run by the promoter NGOs. Overall, in 36% cases, the training was received at some point during the last 6 months, though a substantial number of members of old groups (26%) have received the training over 3 years back. This hints at a need to organize the training programs more often in order to refresh and update the skills once learnt.

An important aspect of skill development is whether the skills are really of use to the members. Over 61% and 84% of the members in the new groups and old groups respectively feel that their newly acquired skills have benefited their families in one way or the other. Hence, no surprise that 93-94% of the trainees are willing to learn further and add to their present skill set.

The process of empowerment can be stronger if the skills learnt are not lost/ do not become outdated fast and are relevant to the social status, family occupational profile of the family and interests of the trainees.

3.3.8 Estimate of the Burden of Household Work on the SHG Members

While discussing the positive impacts of SHG formation on the members' lives, one must not ignore that there may be negative impacts too. Often, one of the factors, which weakens the position of the woman in the household and limits her social activities, is the burden of household work imposed on her (in terms of the *time* it takes as well as the *intensity* of work). To this, if we add the burden of attending to the SHG work, she is left with even less time and a negative – and rather unintended influence – may be that she may lose the support of her family members as she cannot devote time and attention to them.

Our findings on this issue are:

1. In both the types of groups, the largest number of the members (37%) spends 4-6 hours everyday working. Remarkably, in the older groups, the percentage of women spending more than 6 hours in household work is lesser than in the newer groups. This should be seen in connection with the other findings given earlier. As we have seen, a larger number of old group members are more confident than before (and hence can more easily hand over some of their time-consuming responsibilities to other members of the family); more of them have an increased share in family income (and hence may find it easier to muster cooperation of other household members).

Also, in the case of an old group member, the family members are better adjusted to her routine activities as a SHG member which may help all of them do the domestic work collectively. What confirms this is that in the Old Groups, the percentage of members helped by the other members of the household in completing “more than half of their regular household work” is higher than that in the New Groups (36.6% as against 21%) while all other percentages (e.g., “less than half”, “very few”) are smaller.

Table 3.38
Time Spent in Household Work

Time Spent	< 1year old	> 3 years old	Total
< 2 hours	0	1	0.7
2 to 4 hours	11.1	10	10.3
4 to 6 hours	35.6	38	37.2
6 to 8 hours	35.6	24	27.6
> 8 hours	17.8	27	24.1
Total	100	100	100

2. Approx. 44% of the New Group members and 54% of Old Group members feel that they are spending only a reasonable amount of time in doing household work. Overall, only around 21% say that they have to spend too much time in household chores. The involvement (in terms of time) of the SHG members is nowhere very substantial when it comes to working on the farm and helping out the men of the household with land preparation and cultivation. Overall, over 65% of them spend less than a month in a year in the fields.
3. The respondents' perception about energy level (at the end of the day) is quite in line with the above feedback about time spent. Only 26% say that they feel very tired at the end of the day while as many as 55% say they only feel somewhat tired.
4. In both classes of groups, 87% respondents say they get enough time for SHG activities. This indicates that the additional workload of SHG-related activities is not proving to be too much for the members (and hence, is probably not a very important barrier to their true empowerment).

We tried to get an estimate of the time the member spends on various SHG-related activities. These may include meetings, training workshops and other activities attended. As for the time spent in SHG meetings, most members in both classes of groups spend 4 - 9 hours in SHG meetings in a month. Awareness about training programs itself is quite low; hence a very small number of attendees. Most trainees have attended only the short

(< 3 days) training programs. Most members have attended less than 5 other SHG activities. Only around 1/6th of the members are involved in any additional work apart from their household duties and most of them spend less than 10 hours per week on such work.

Thus, overall, the burden of SHG work is not too heavy or unmanageable. This is confirmed by the respondents' perception about the time spent on these activities. Over 78% feel that the time they devote to the SHG is within reasonable limits.

Table 3.39
Time Spent in SHG Activities
(DK/ CS responses excluded)

Time spent in meetings (per month):	< 1 year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
0 - 3 hours	22	35.4	37	28.9	59	31.1
4 - 9 hours	24	38.7	54	42.1	78	41
> 9 hours	14	22.7	32	25	39	24.2
Training programs in last year:						
0 - 3	8	12.9	27	21.1	35	18.5
4 - 10	1	1.6	34	26.6	35	18.5
> 10	2	3.2	3	2.3	5	2.6
Average duration of training (in days):						
0 - 3	6	66.6	43	67.2	49	67.1
4 - 5	2	22.2	13	20.3	15	20.5
> 5	1	11.1	8	12.5	9	12.3
No. of SHG activities attended:						
< 5	23	37.1	60	46.9	83	43.7
> 5	5	8	33	25.7	38	20
Also do additional work:	8	12.9	24	18.8	32	16.8
Time spent on such work in hours per week (mostly casual labor):						
2 - 10 hours	3	37.5	12	50	15	46.9
11 - 20 hours	1	12.5	8	33.3	9	30.2
> 21 hours	3	37.5	4	16.7	7	21.9

3.4 Responses of Husbands and Senior Household Members

We have already seen how important a role do the husbands and other members of the family play in the decisions

regarding general good of the family, use of finances, etc. The two tables given below give us an indication of the prevailing level of freedom the SHG members enjoy in their households and the key members to whom they are answerable in case they need/ wish to travel.

It is obvious that members of the old groups have said in consistently larger numbers that they mostly travel alone. Moreover, in the older groups, fewer members have to seek permission from their elders or husbands while going out of the village. This indicates that in the cases where the woman has been working for an SHG for a fairly long time, the hold of other members over her freedom to move around is more relaxed which may be because gradually the family has realized that she was able to do things on her own by virtue of the confidence she now has as an SHG member.

In response to the question about whether they feel confident about traveling alone to a city or a town, the Old Group members were affirmative more often than the New Group members.

Table 3.40
Frequency of Traveling Alone

How often do you travel alone to:		< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Another village	Mostly alone	21	37.5	41	37.6	62	37.6
	Mostly a member accompanies	2	21.4	32	29.4	44	26.7
	Every time a member accompanies	23	41.1	36	33	59	35.8
Total		56	100	109	100	165	100
Nearest town	Mostly alone	26	45.6	65	52.4	91	50.3
	Mostly a member accompanies	15	26.3	34	27.4	49	27.1
	Every time a member accompanies	16	28.1	25	20.2	41	22.7
Total		57	100	124	100	181	100
A big city	Mostly alone	16	30.2	46	41.8	62	38
	Mostly a member accompanies	15	28.3	33	30	48	29.4
	Every time a member accompanies	22	41.5	31	28.2	53	32.5
Total		53	100	110	100	163	100

Table 3.41
Seeking Permission for Travel

Do you seek permission when going alone to:		< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
a. Another village	Yes, always	20	60.6	34	46.6	54	50.9
	Yes, sometimes	10	30.3	24	32.9	34	32.1
	Never	3	9.1	15	20.5	18	17
Total		33	100	73	100	106	100
b. The nearest town	Yes, always	29	70.7	50	50.5	79	56.4
	Yes, sometimes	7	17.1	38	38.4	45	32.1
	Never	5	12.2	11	11.1	16	11.4
Total		41	100	99	100	140	100
c. A big city	Yes, always	20	64.5	40	50.6	60	54.5
	Yes, sometimes	7	22.6	30	38	37	33.6
	Never	4	12.9	9	11.4	13	11.8
Total		31	100	79	100	110	100

Another insight into who the *real* decision-makers in the household are, is provided by the Table 3.22 which shows that apart from the member herself, it is mainly the husband who has been the major influence on her decision to join the group.

Table 3.42
Member who influenced her Decision to Join

Relationship	< 1year old		> 3 years old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Father	2	3.2	7	5.5	9	4.7
Mother	3	4.8	6	4.7	9	4.7
Husband	25	40.3	57	44.5	82	43.2
Brother	0	0	1	0.8	1	0.5
Sister	5	8.1	11	8.6	16	8.4
None, myself decided to join	30	48.4	52	40.6	82	43.2
Others	1	1.6	11	8.6	12	6.3
Total	62	100	128	100	190	100

The following tables in this section are based on the responses of husbands and other senior members of the households; both these categories answered separate but fairly similar questionnaires. Let us see if the following tables confirm what we have already said about the environment within the households of SHG members.

One of the simplest indications of a husband's or household member's level of interest in the SHG member's work is given by how well they know the basic facts about it. We asked the husbands and Senior Household Members (SHM) to recall some of these facts. As the following table shows, in all cases but one (name of the SHG), it's the spouses of members of younger groups who are better aware of the facts about the group.

As for the SHM, the DK/ CS responses are extremely high among them on all four points for both classes of groups

Table 3.43
Right Response by Husbands

Fact	> 3years old		< 1 year old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
a. Name of SHG	29	42.6	21	67.7	50	50.5
b. Year of formation of the group	11	16.2	21	67.7	32	32.3
c. Year of joining this group	16	23.5	21	67.7	37	37.4
d. No. of members in the group	10	14.7	12	38.7	22	22.2

In both types of SHGs, most of the spouses have identified collecting savings as the main objective of the group. It's the same case with SHMs (67% in old groups and 43% in young groups identify savings as the most important). But in the younger groups, very few have seen internal lending as an objective (understandable since young SHGs, which are still in a formative stage, do not get involved in lending very extensively).

Table 3.44
Awareness of Husbands

Main objective of the group:	> 3years old		< 1 year old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
To save money regularly	31	45.6	17	54.8	48	48.5
To meet regularly	4	5.9	4	12.9	8	8.1
To do internal lending	16	23.5	3	9.7	19	19.2
To generate income for the members	8	11.8	7	22.6	15	15.2
To work against local evils	2	2.9			2	2
To participate in state welfare programs	1	1.5			1	1
To work for the rights of the village women	6	8.8			6	6.1

When asked whether they supported the SHG member's decision to join the group and are happy with her continuing to be a member, almost all the husbands were decidedly positive, mainly because they think that the association with the SHG has been helpful to the family. In around 92% cases, this statement means that the financial status of the family has improved or shows the promise to improve as a result of such association. As for SHMs, 87.5% responses in the Old Group and 100% responses in New Group are positive and approving.

It is no surprise therefore that approx. 95% of the respondents are willing to let their wives continue to be with the SHG. In 92% of the applicable cases (59 out of 64), they would also like the other women in the family to follow in the footsteps of their wives and join an SHG.

Some of this willingness may be newly born. SHG leaders like Triveni of Mookambika Mahila Sangha say that initially they did face resistance from husbands. But after they decided to press ahead, and the husbands too realized that association with the SHG was indeed helping their wives progress, the opposition died down.

Table 3.45
Reaction of SHG members & Reasons Thereof

Reaction	> 3years old		< 1 year old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I am pleased that my wife is a member	67	98.5	30	96.8	97	98
Can't say	1	1.5	1	3.2	2	2
Total	68	100	31	100	99	100
Reasons	> 3years old		< 1 year old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Links with SHG are useful to my family	64	94.1	29	93.5	93	93.9
Links with SHG are not useful to family	3	4.4	1	3.2	4	4
Can't say	1	1.5	1	3.2	2	2
Total	68	100	31	100	99	100

Table 3.46
Impacts on the Family

Positive Impacts on the Family	> 3years old		< 1 year old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
It helps us improve our economic status	59	92.2	26	89.7	85	91.4
We can avail of loans from MFIs	4	6.3	3	10.3	7	7.5
Savings in bank are useful in emergency	1	1.6	0	0	1	1.1
Total	64	100	29	100	93	100
Negative Impacts on the Family	N	%	N	%	N	%
Meetings & SHG activities take lot of time	2	66.7	1	100	3	75
She can't give enough attention to home	1	33.3	0	0	1	25
Total	3	100	1	100	4	100

In the case of reasons for approving/ disapproving of the SHG member's involvement with the group and its perceived impacts on the family, responses of the SHM also follow the same trend as above.

Table 3.47
Willingness to let the SHG member continue

	> 3years old		< 1 year old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	66	97.1	28	90.3	94	94.9
No	0	0	1	3.2	1	1
Can't say	2	2.9	2	6.5	4	4
Total	68	100	31	100	99	100

Table 3.48
Willingness to let other women in the family to join the SHG

	> 3years old		< 1 year old		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes, probably	28	41.2	10	32.3	38	38.4
Yes, definitely	15	22.1	6	19.4	21	21.2
No	1	1.5	4	12.9	5	5.1
Not applicable	24	35.3	11	35.5	35	35.4
Total	68	100	31	100	99	100

In the case of SHM, respectively 93.5% and 90.3% of them are willing to support the involvement of the present SHG member as well as any other female members of the family who may like to get involved with a group in future.

Except for the statement (a), on all other statements the husbands of old group members have shown a positive attitude towards their wives. It seems that, going beyond mere expressions of willingness, the husbands have been getting involved in helping the wife with her SHG-related responsibilities as well as with the household chores.

The experience of Mr. Kumar, a MYRADA Watershed Manager involved in SHG training for over 18 years, is no different. He says: "...since the women have joined the SHGs, the husbands too are encouraging them to be on time for SHG meetings so that they do not have to pay fine. In order to ensure that their wives reach the meeting venue on time, they even offer to do household chores like dishwashing, washing clothes, preparing food and taking care of the children".

Table 3.49
Opinion of Husbands

		> 3years old		< 1 year old		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
a. Regularly ask my wife about the new developments in SHG	Agree	46	67.6	24	77.4	70	70.7
	Undecided	9	13.2	4	12.9	13	13.1
	Disagree	6	8.8	2	6.5	8	8.1
	Not applicable	7	10.3	1	3.2	8	8.1
b. I help my wife in her SHG activities	Agree	47	69.1	17	54.8	64	64.6
	Undecided	10	14.7	8	25.8	18	18.2
	Disagree	6	8.8	5	16.1	11	11.1
	Not applicable	5	7.4	1	3.2	6	6.1
c. I would like my wife to continue as/ become president of the group	Agree	45	66.2	17	54.8	62	62.6
	Undecided	8	11.8	7	22.6	15	15.2
	Disagree	10	14.7	5	16.1	15	15.2
	Not applicable	5	7.4	2	6.5	7	7.1
d. I take up some HH work so as to let my wife take up her	Agree	49	72.1	18	58.1	67	67.7
	Undecided	3	4.4	6	19.4	9	9.1
	Disagree	10	14.7	5	16.1	15	15.2
	Not applicable	6	8.8	2	6.5	8	8.1

Chapter 4

Good Practices adopted by Participant Organizations

The note given here was culled out from the responses of SHG Leaders, NGO Leaders and Bank Officials on the issues listed earlier in Chapter 2 (Thematic Scope).

The term 'Best Practices' was defined by us as consisting of "the steps taken or processes started by the NGO to ensure that the SHG initiated by it leads to the empowerment of the women who are its members". Below we highlight some of the key elements of an effective self-help group and how the studied groups are incorporating them.

When the formation of a group is taken up, maintaining **the right focus** of its activities is crucial. For real empowerment to happen, the focus should be on the women who need it the most. According to A Chandra, President, Karpaga Vinayagar Kalanjiam (KVK), a 1-year old group promoted by Dhan Foundation, Madurai, her group has purposely drawn its members from the poorest of the poor households in the village precisely for this reason.

It takes a **stable group** to bring about any kind of empowerment of its members. Often, women members migrating to another village due to marriage depletes the membership of the group and force the group to find a replacement with whom the original members may not have as much affinity. The Dhan Foundation groups like Pattatharasi Amman, Kungumam Kalanjiam and KVK do not allow unmarried women to become members. Limiting the group to married, middle-aged women living with their families in the same village can lend a certain amount of stability to the group.

Apart from stability, the group may also need to achieve popular support and credibility. One of the methods used by Karunya Group (Kerala) to earn the **goodwill** of the villagers was to start manufacturing the articles of daily use (such as bath soaps, balm, liquid disinfectants, detergents, etc.) at the local level which prove to be cheaper than the branded goods ferried in from the nearby cities, appeal to the local people and thus, earn their support for the SHG.

The above three elements are vital during the stage of promotion and expansion of a group as an instrument of empowerment. However, empowerment is not just about promoting and facilitating, but also about **control and discipline**. Before a member is promoted to start her own micro-enterprise, and thus become empowered and self-dependent, she must learn how to handle money in a responsible and disciplined manner. Besides, an important aspect of the sustainability of a group is its **financial robustness**. The group should be strong enough to survive a few repayment failures. Such robustness can only come through financial discipline.

Realizing this, the Mookambika Sangha has decided to allow any member to apply for a loan only after she completes 6 months in the group, during which period, her level of interest in the group's activities and her regularity of paying the weekly installments are sufficiently tested. Also, the Sangha does not give any loans to people who have any outstanding loans.

In Andhra Pradesh, RASS has adopted a more elaborate approach to controlling the issue of loans to the members. This facility is extended gradually through a 4-stage process:

- a. **Formation** : For the first 4 months, the member is oriented and educated about the importance of saving regularly.

- b. Stabilization* : During the months 5-12, small loans up to a maximum of Rs.5000 are advanced to the member.
- c. Growth* : During the months 13-24, loans are promoted and bigger loans of up to Rs.8000 are sanctioned. As the loan size increases, the members are sensitized to the importance of credit discipline and spending the loan amount on a micro-enterprise activity.
- d. Self-reliance* : This is a stage during which the member is expected to be truly empowered. After the completion of 24 months, primarily production loans of up to Rs.25000 are cleared.

Again, in order to keep the inflow of group savings uninterrupted, it is necessary to ensure the group members' **compliance with basic norms** like paying their contribution on time. Simple disciplinary steps may be helpful in this direction. The Karunya Group (Kerala) imposes a fine of Re. 0.50 on each member who fails to submit the weekly savings.

The leaders of an SHG should be conscious of the fact that the **optimum size** of the Sangha is seldom more than 20 persons. Hence, Karunya has adopted the policy of refusing any new memberships but encouraging the formation of new Sanghas if enough people are interested.

On issues like compliance with group norms and limiting the group size, the promoter NGO too can play the role of a watchdog. For example, in AP, Rashtriya Sewa Samithi (RASS) provides the SHG groups with guidelines and stipulations that have to be adhered to. A periodic evaluation and monitoring is done, so that there is no violation. Some of its guidelines are related to:

- a. Appointment of an attendance officer to keep a tab on the proceedings and absenteeism of members
- b. Penalization of members for being absent for a non-genuine reason, and
- c. Making savings compulsory for all members

We have included ***awareness of health and hygiene issues*** as one of the important components of empowerment. RASS is taking special care of this component. After the women become members of the group, they are given regular orientation and training on health and hygiene, importance of good diet in terms of nutrition, children's education and other issues of concern to them. In addition to this, RASS also encourages its members to benefit from programs like Pulse Polio Campaign, Clean & Green, *Janmabhoomi*, etc.

In an important initiative, a mass drive was launched to improve the women's ***awareness of their legal rights and entitlements***, so that they could raise voice against exploitation of any kind.

In DHAN Foundation, Madurai, ***regular documentation*** of the changes as they happen is an important good practice. According to Mr K Narender, Program Leader, such documentation – through its Research and Resource Center - helps the organization trace, among other things, the process of empowerment. The other steps the Foundation has taken to strengthen the SHG movement are:

Forging direct linkages with the bank branches – over 70 of them – since the Foundation believes these are the kind of linkages that are sustainable.

- a. Partnership with INAFI network, which promotes community-based financial institutions and people's organizations
- b. Training program for other NGOs
- c. Liaising with NABARD for providing support to Kalanjiam Development Financial Services, a micro-finance institution promoted by DHAN.

An important probe during the semi-structured interviews was about the **linkages** of the NGO with other institutions such as banks. Mr. Kumar of MYRADA pointed at an **important need**: the need to make the bank officials realize that SHGs were the groups that were going to support the future of the women. As a result of MYRADA's Bank Managers' Training Program, the officials are now increasingly realizing this.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Final Comments

This section presents the summary of the findings given in foregoing chapters and identifies the overall trend captured by the study.

In a nutshell, the profile of interviewees was that the sample mainly covered young (26-35 years of age) married women and over 45% respondents in both groups (New and Old) were illiterate.

More Old Group members were aware of another SHG working in their own village or elsewhere. We started by asking the respondents to measure the changes in various spheres of their lives as an impact of the SHG. In Old Group, 89% interviewees agreed that their financial position had changed for the better. More members in the older groups than in the younger groups reported a positive *influence on their share in the family income* during this period. The average share of earning SHG members in the family income was also higher in the older SHGs; the reason for which may be that over 66% of these members are either CWEs or earning members in their families. (Importantly, Old Group members have a *larger* average share in a *larger* average family income, with most of them belonging to the >Rs.20000 class).

We tested the level of confidence of respondents on several tasks of varying difficulty. On all the 7 tasks specified, the Old Group members expressed a higher level of sense of ease. In the Old Group, more members reported a positive *influence on confidence level in dealing with people and institutions*. The Old Group had a substantially larger percentage of respondents reporting an increase in awareness *about health and hygiene*.

Over 95% Old Group members say that they themselves operate their accounts frequently. More Old Group members said that their control over their own lives had improved. Also, more Old Group members said that they themselves decided on the matters pertaining to general welfare of the family. More Old Group members said that their advice and views are *respected* more now than before. More Old Group members have had an important role in popularizing the self-help group among the other women. The Old Group has definitely imparted newer professional and technical skills to more of its members. More members in the Old Group than in the New Group report that they have learnt the managerial skills required for efficient operation of SHGs. More old groups (84% as against 61%) felt that their newly acquired skills had benefited their families. In the older groups, the percentage of women spending more than 6 hours in household work is lesser than in the newer groups. In the Old Group, the percentage of members helped by the other members of the household in completing “more than half of their regular household work” was higher, indicating that they were able to command better cooperation from the family.

Activity charting reveals that the additional workload of SHG-related activities is not proving to be too much for the members.

As for the relationship the SHG members have with their key family members, members of the Old Group have said in consistently larger numbers that they mostly travel alone. Moreover, in the Old Group, fewer members have to seek permission from their elders or husbands before going out. Old Group members were affirmative more often on the question of feeling confident about traveling alone. A very high percentage of key family members are willing to support the involvement of the SHG member as well as any other women in the family who may like to get involved with a group. Particularly, the husbands have shown a generally positive attitude towards their wives.

Thus, on parameter after parameter, members of the Old Group emerge as more confident, financially more secure, more in control of their lives, and in a stronger position vis-à-vis their family members. Hence, we can conclude that, if the responses from the New Group are taken as the benchmark, the process of empowerment seems to have started in the Old Group.

A reason for this could be that in the New Groups, 53% of the respondents have not yet turned earning members of their families, that is, their relationship with the SHG has not yet “matured”.

There are certain areas in which the change has not been positive enough. For instance:

- a. The penetration of mass media is still not sufficient. A very large percentage of respondents are not able to read newspaper.
- b. Besides, not many members expect the SHG movement to create a source of regular income for them. They merely look at it as a means of mobilizing savings and loans.
- c. The habit of saving with a bank too has not taken roots in any class of SHGs.
- d. Nearly 63% members of new groups and 49% members of old groups state that they have never had any role in the village-level decisions. Only 10% and 16% members in these categories respectively say that they (get to) participate more than before in the local polity.

New strategies are required to improve the performance of SHG movement in the areas mentioned.

Endnotes:

- 1 pp161-162, Technical Note, Human Development Report.
- 2 p14, CHASS, Challenges & Responses: 1997-2002.
- 3 Letter (dated 11 September, 2002) by Mr Prakash Bakshi, Chief General Manager, NABARD, Mumbai.
- 4 Defined as “the family member contributing the maximum”

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