

Self-help Groups and Entrepreneurship: An Insight from Literature

Asad Kareem Usmani, Mohammad Anees

Department of Management, University of Lucknow

ABSTRACT

The use of collective advantages and group-based problem-solving is not new; it has been practiced since time immemorial, sometimes consciously and deliberately, while at other times unconsciously. The well-known proverb "Unity is strength," which we have heard since childhood, aptly emphasizes the benefits of working in groups. Similarly, the proverb "United we stand, divided we fall" highlights the importance of collaboration in overcoming challenges. The concept and functioning of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are based on the idea that people can come together to find solutions to their social and economic issues. An SHG typically consists of 10-20 individuals from similar socio-economic backgrounds who unite to address common challenges. Since their inception, SHGs have played a crucial role in mobilizing funds, leading to economic and social upliftment, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas of our country. Entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth, requiring both funds and manpower. SHGs can serve as a vital source of these two critical resources. Members pool their savings to generate funds, earn interest from internal lending, and may receive grants or donations from various sources. Once a group accumulates sufficient savings, it can approach banks for loans, often receiving amounts ranging from one to four times its savings. These funds can be utilized for entrepreneurial ventures, leading to employment generation and contributing to GDP growth. While SHGs primarily address socio-economic issues, with focused efforts, they can effectively leverage their collective savings, competencies, and skills to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This would not only strengthen their financial sustainability but also enhance their contribution to economic development.

Keywords: Self-help Groups, Entrepreneurship, SHG-based entrepreneurship, Microfinance.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of advantages and benefits of groups to resolve problems and issues is not new, it has been used since time immemorial, sometimes consciously and deliberately while unconsciously other times. The well know proverb 'unity is strength' that we have heard since childhood days also aptly emphasis what are the benefits of groups. Other common proverb like 'United we stand divided we fall' also indicate the importance of taking people along if we desire to withstand difficult times. The concept and working of SHGs or Self -Help Groups also based on the aspects of how people can come together to find solution to their social and economic issues. Ever since the concept of self-help groups was introduced, the SHGs have played critical role in mobilization of funds that resulted in economic and social upliftment especially in rural and semi-urban region of our country. Self-help groups are a means of micro financing that help people in managing savings and getting financial assistance that can be used for

Corresponding Author: Asad Kareem Usmani, Department of Management, University of Lucknow, e-mail: asadkusmani@gmail.com

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some purpose (Kumari, 2013). The primary goal of SHG is to encourage its members to save money, but other advantages of joining a SHG may include the ability to mobilise funds, access to credit, and the pursuing of group entrepreneurial activities. SHGs have taken a shape of a movement and has successfully contributed to country's socio-economic development. A self-help group is a group of around 10-20 individual from a similar socio-economic background who come together to find solutions to some problem that they are facing. The concept was popularised by Mohammad Yunus,

a social entrepreneur, banker and an economist who started working on a micro-financing project in 1975 and later formed Grameen Bank in the year 1983 using this concept to help rural poor to meet their financial needs. The members by utilising the saving pooled in by the members can undertake entrepreneurial activities.

As we have seen that entrepreneurship is a critical factor that has potential to promote economic growth. The basic requirement for entrepreneurial activity is funds and manpower. The SHGs can become a source of these two critical resources for entrepreneurship. The funds are pooled in by members to generate certain savings, SHGs also have earnings through interest that it earns through loaning to its members, and it can also get some donation or grant from various sources. Once the group have sufficient saving amount it can approach bank for loan. These funds may be used by the groups for some entrepreneurial activity. This help in generating employment and will add up to GDP. In most cases the fund with SHGs is utilized to tackle some socio-economic problems. However, if concentrated efforts are made SHGs will be able to use group's savings and competence and skills of members to take up some entrepreneurial tasks.

Objective

The objective of the paper is to study the literature related to self-help groups and how these may be an agent of entrepreneurship promotion. It is also aimed to identify key entrepreneurial challenges through the literature.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The self-help groups have attracted interest and attention of various researchers and scholar. Their benefits and utility have been widely studied, most of these studies focus on SHGs as a means of empowerment, poverty diminution and social upliftment. Few studies have linked SHGs to entrepreneur and entrepreneurship however these are mostly restricted to southern and western region and few in north-eastern region of India. Self-help groups, to promote entrepreneur primarily act as a medium to make funds available and provide guidance and mentoring to people who come together to start a venture.

It is critical that process of SHG formation is simplified and easy so that the groups may be formed without any hassle and perform to serve their purpose. Socio-economic background of the members is important element that needs to be assessed. Similarities in term

of social and economic characteristics of members of SHGs must be maintained to ensure success. NGOs mostly preferred to involve local youths who are usually referred to as animators for starting the process of group formation, while in case of SHGs created through banks it was reported that role of bank employee was critical in group formation. It is also suggested that whether the group is formed through NGO or through bank's initiative the process of group formation is required to be simple, clear and methodical (Sathish, 2001).

Self-help groups have potential to create micro-enterprise that play an important role in economic growth and development. In Assam that self-help groups have contributed to establishment of several micro-enterprise for the purpose of income generation. The credit and saving programme in Assam through Rastriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi have been successful due to is focused approach toward rural poor through trained staff and backing of encouraging policy without any political involvement. It thus become evident that there is importance of training not only for the members of SHGs but for people from agencies who work with self-help groups (Borbora & Mahanta, 2001).

SHGs have strong potential to encourage female entrepreneurs through their initiatives. It is found that women business owners who start modest businesses grow them into larger businesses. Self-help organisations have produced ready-to-wear items and exported them. In the Dindigal district, a women's self-help group operates an agricultural services unit with an annual revenue of at least Rs. 12 lakhs. However, most other self-help organisations are unable to live up to the standards. Some of the reasons given included a lack of investment funding, a lack of managerial and technical abilities, difficulty managing the work force, juggling many roles, a lack of professionalism, gender bias, and others (Sebastin Titus, 2002).

A crucial element for economic and social upliftment is access to credit. There have been several efforts to improve credit availability to poor however there have not been much success to these and they gradually gave way to more structured and effective means like, associating poor with self-help groups and providing them access to credit which was considered "community-drive development" (Mansuri & Rao, 2004)

Members have access to funds pooled in by the group members. These could be used by variety of purpose. (Mohanan, 2004) in his work in Trissur district of the state of Kerala reported that the average number of people associated with SHGs stood at 18, mainly from



lower to very low economic strata of the society. It was also found that high percentage of such people (about 58%) associated with SHGs primarily utilised loan for self-consumption for survival.

(Mukherjee, 2006) writes that competition, financial gain, and independence are essential to promote entrepreneurship, for which socioeconomic environment offers a foundation for people to start their own businesses. People who have a strong need for achievement delve into developing businesses of any size, which is why they take on the position of the entrepreneur. The research on the factors that drive low-income women entrepreneurs to start their own businesses is presented in this paper. The analysis is based on first-hand information gathered from two Maharashtra districts. The study also looks at the fundamental variables that may have an impact on the choices made by female entrepreneurs.

It was seen that the formal channel was unable ensure financial inclusion of rural poor and women as most of the efforts were focused only towards providing credit and ignored other financial products like savings and insurance. Banking assistance available across India is unevenly spread, a large section of rural poor and women has to rely on self-finance that is in most cases insufficient or through informal means. Even after continuous effort from the end of government to put more thrust on formal methods for providing financial assistance there is still immense dependence on the informal ways (Kumar & Golait, 2009).

Adequate training programmes may be devised and delivered to SHGs for women entrepreneurs on a regular basis to improve their success rate. Sharpening their entrepreneurial abilities through training would help them perform better. The purpose of the article is to shed light on the numerous elements of EDPs and their influence on entrepreneurial success (Vanithamani & Menon, 2012).

It is believed that for economic growth and development to be impactful it has to reach to wide section of society that includes individuals from all sections of society including women who so have been left out of the ambit of various welfare initiatives. Women, who constitute to about 50% of Indian population are often left out and have failed to attract attention of policy formulators, however in the case of SHGs this is not found to be true. There are good number of women SHGs presently active in India and engaged in contributing towards economic and social upliftment of its members. Women entrepreneurs

are believed to possess good level of business and organising skills and have been successful in creating business opportunities. SHGs are mostly found to operate in rural and semi-urban regions and thus are instrumental in taking development initiatives to places and regions that are usually left ignored. Women earlier had been socially and economically suppressed because of patriarchal society even though they have been bearing several responsibilities. Of late owing to the initiatives of government and NGOs women have also been seen to possess entrepreneurial potential. The women SHGs have also been successful in developing leadership qualities among women through the process of managing the affairs of the group. An additional change that has taken place due to SHGs is that they have been successful in transforming women as workers to women as manager who have organisations and its resources in their control. This has been made possible due to training that is made available through SHGs (Rajasekaran & Sindhu, 2013). They also suggested that SHGs with support of government and NGOs should run EDP Entrepreneurship development program and financial assistance must be available at lesser interest rate for women.

Looking at shortcoming of the formal channel NABARD increased thrust toward search for a new model or mechanism that could help in financial inclusion of rural population specially the poor rural women. It was here that the importance of self-help groups was realized to provide an informal way to cater to the financial requirement of such people. These self-help groups pooled in funds and then provided small loan to the members. These loans were mostly small owing to the financial limitation of the members and were unsecured. The meagre funds available through this means was a major hinderance in the development and growth of this method. The solution to this issue was provided in the form of self-help group-bank linkage programme that was initiated by NABARD in the year 1992 in which SHGs were linked to different banks to help them get rid of the financial constraint. The primary target of the programme was to focus on saving and then on credit. The initial progress of SHG-Bank linkage programme was slow with only one lakhs SHGs being linked to the bank in eight years from the launch of programme (Tripathi, 2013).

Although women represent half of India's population yet their involvement in different spheres of life like education, business politics is very limited. For growth and development of any community it is important that

all sections of society are given due emphasis. The researchers advocated giving all support and access to facilities that are available to male members of society. It was also seen that the SHG members were eager to learn new entrepreneurial skills and use them to earn livelihood (Roy & Bhattacharya, 2013).

(Poornima, 2013) found that SHGs are the most effective formal micro level finance organisations to generate additional source of income for needy people. In her study on selected villages of Tumkur District of Karnataka it is found that by including members in the planning, decision-making, and management of sustainable natural resource entrepreneurial engagement can be enhanced. However, it was noted that SHGs have a lot of room for growth in terms of promoting entrepreneurship.

(Kondal, 2014) while studying self-help groups in Andhra Pradesh and their potential to empower women found that SHGs have impacted life pattern and status of its members. The major reason for joining SHGs was to support the family followed by intention to get loan, only 18% of respondents joined SHG for business purpose. Here too it is evident that the earning generation activity is not the first option when it comes to reason to join SHG or reason to take loan. Though by being member of SHG the financial position of members is seen to improve the real impact may be seen if these funds are effectively utilised mainly for some business or earning generation activities.

SHGs are women centric and through their working they have been able to ensure economic empowerment of women. Self-help groups (SHGs) in India, particularly those focused on women, have been instrumental in promoting entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. These groups provide access to credit, training, and a supportive network, which have led to the establishment of successful microenterprises and increased employment opportunities in rural areas (Kumar & Joshi, 2015).

It is found that among various aspects that have an impact on entrepreneurship development innovation with respect to adopting new methods of production, information about product, desire to find means of earning, regular conduct of meeting and knowledge and awareness about business were found to be most impactful (Inbam, 2015).

Studies are not on the same ground when the potential of SHGs to arrange funds to start a venture is concerned. Few studies have found a significant impact of SHGs on entrepreneurship while some other

feel that the impact is highly variable because the entrepreneurial talent and skills required to make proper use of micro-credit for business activities varies across people (Banerjee, Duflo, Glennerster, & Kinnan, 2015). Microfinance is also supposed to give push to business creation, the borrowed money can be used to start a business or for its expansion. They also said that the microfinance organisations are selective in choosing villages due to which the impact cannot be uniformly studied.

(Zaryab, 2015) in his work published in conference proceedings advocated that SHGs and social entrepreneurship are related and thus SHGs can be a mean of livelihood by promoting social entrepreneurship. It was concluded that self-help groups were a great way of empowering women as they had immense potential in developing and promoting social entrepreneurship. They thus are an excellent means to provide earning to support living and at the same time help cater to some social cause too. Author however feels that despite great work done in the field of SHGs in India there is still lots of potential that is left untapped. He also proposed designing and implementation of training programme which aim to provide SHG members knowledge of market understanding, planning, fund mobilisation and utilisation.

The provision of microfinance and skill training has been identified as key factors in the success of SHGs in income generation through microenterprises. Training group members in basic skills pertaining to business and means of income generation (Shruti, Gowthami, & Panda, 2018).

Entrepreneurial education is an important aspect that has a positive influence on entrepreneurial attitude. It also has impact on perceived self-efficacy that have a positive impact on entrepreneurial intention; thus, training of members is an important means to develop and promote entrepreneurship (Shah, Amjed, & Jabooob, 2020)

(Prabhakar, 2020) studied women SHGs from four districts of Karnataka and attempted to assess financial management in the self-help groups along with awareness of loaning process, loan utilization and repayment. The president or the treasurer of the groups usually operated the bank account, and the finding reflected that about 96% of responding members said that the money collected from members was deposited with bank. There were several members who had borrowed more than once from self-help group. The group were also active in extending



advances to non-members also. In most of the cases loan availed was utilized for personal consumption and for help in emergencies and very few utilized it for income generation activities. It also came to front that repayment on several instances was less than 50%. SHGs were found to have more social impact than economic impact.

(Shanbhogue, 2021) while studying the work of a NGO named ADARHA from Moodbidri, Karnataka reports that the NGO has taken initiative to make information available to SHG members and people in general about various entrepreneurial activities that can be undertaken. Regular meeting by members of NGO has been instrumental in channelising people effort towards entrepreneurial cause. Regular training and sensitisation people about need of adopting income generating activities has seen bring positive change to life of several people of the region. It can thus be concluded that proper information and training is important to improve working of SHGs and motivating members to take up entrepreneurial activities.

In a study (Siddeswari & Gopal, 2021) propose that SHGs are key architect in the development of female entrepreneurs. This is an excellent platform for transforming everyday women into female entrepreneurs. Women in SHGs participate in a variety of activities, such as attending group meetings, preserving group unity, following directions, corresponding with various departmental authorities, resolving various SHGs' difficulties, being exposed to various crucial entrepreneurship events, etc. This might have encouraged them to start the firm and helped them form a favourable attitude towards entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial behaviour or orientation, market proximity and number of training programmes conducted for the group members are the most important variables that found to have a positive impact on entrepreneurship (Acharya, Battu, Manobharathi, & Haque, 2022).

It is seen that entrepreneurial promotion through SHGs is a global phenomenon witnessing close to around 10 percent growth. There are several elements that have been found to promote entrepreneurship through SHGs. Among several element few elements that are important is the desire of being financially independent, wish to improve skills and social empowerment and recognition. The study also suggests framing of better policy through government and NGOs for the improvement of entrepreneurial scenario through SHGs (Katyayani & Chaitanya, 2024).

The primary ideology behind initialisation of concept of SHGs is that of welfare by promoting social entrepreneurship. SHGs have been successful in doing so by the virtue of providing members access to needed resources. The groups also provide much needed encouragement and motivation to members. Training has been found to have significant positive impact on the success of SHGs. Training has created awareness and enhanced the skills of the group members and have thus contributed in aiding entrepreneurship (Sumangala, Narayanan, & Savithri, 2024)

Governments, particularly those in the developing countries have limitations in arranging for environment that supports and promotes economic development. Conventional approaches for economic growth and progression adopted by government in majority of countries have not able to give the results that were expected from them. It is the responsibility of both public and private sector to come forward and contribute towards economic growth. A major challenge linked with economic development in emerging economies is the capability of providing an environment that encourages entrepreneurial growth. However, this leads to another challenge that is, making funds accessible for commencing an entrepreneurial venture. In case of banks there is a necessity of collateral security that is difficult to arrange for, particularly by middle class and poor who are dreaming to start some business.

(Rana, Sharma, & Raina, 2001) in their work highlighted various constrains that acted as deterrent in starting to earn activities. Major of these were insecurity, contradictory standards and values and low initiative and risk bearing ability. Lack of finances and unavailability of funds were seen as critical constraints on economic front.

(Dwarakanath, 2002) in his work of SHGs in Andhra Pradesh found that self-help groups through the Development of Women and Children in Rural Area initiative had difficulties in getting funds from state-owned banks and development department. It was found that bureaucratic barriers, poor communication and improper conduct of group meetings were major issues that were hampering the availability of funds.

Funds availability is one of the most important factors that influence the setting up and running an enterprise. Although India has a wide network of financial institutions that aims at providing financial independence to all, yet it is a fact that these facilities are out of access of rural poor and women. The formal banking sector, ever since independence had ignored

the needs of poor mainly due to the high risk and transaction associated with the small lending. The inability of the formal sector to cater to the needs of these poor was seen as a major failure of formal banking system and there were efforts to implement microfinancing schemes through SHGs, when NABARD thought to implement new means through SHG-Bank linkage model (Mansuri B. B., 2010).

Studies on existing and aspiring entrepreneurs have highlighted that acquiring sufficient finances is one of the main barriers for starting of a new venture. Looking at the important function that an entrepreneur performs it is seen that there are increased efforts across the world to reduce this problem of insufficient availability of funds. The basic reason of this increased effort is that this shortage of funds acts as a demotivating factor and a big deterrent for entrepreneurs who have wonderful ideas that have potential to change life of many people around. The important factor that affects the ability of start-up to raise funds in sufficient amount depend upon the fund's availability locally. A developed local capital market creates ease of fund arrangements. Funds availability through local means is affected by intermediaries' willingness to forward fund to entrepreneurs and, depositors' willingness to keep funds with intermediary (Kerr & Nanda, 2011). Thus, SHGs ability to provide fund for entrepreneurial activity depends upon members ability to keep their saving with SHG and SHGs willingness to offer financial assistance for such entrepreneurial activity. Therefore, it is needed that the member have confidence in SHG that it will safeguard their fund kept as saving and make it available for entrepreneurial activity when required.

Self-help groups are mostly female driven and due to this there are several challenges and limitations that they face like; women face numerous limitations and social taboos; family members do not encourage them to pursue business to a great extent, women entrepreneurs confront higher societal restrictions and are constantly viewed with suspicion, especially in rural areas, women are less self-assured and always fear failure which makes them hesitant to take chances as they risk averse, women entrepreneurs lack understanding about sophisticated technology as well as about the availability of raw materials, financial resources, government assistance, and subsidies, among other things (Ashok, 2012).

Lack of knowledge about business, marketing, advertising are some challenges that women entrepreneur face. Other challenges that women

entrepreneurs of self-help groups in Kolhapur face are dominance of male members in society, poor support from family members, lack of skill and lack of guidance (Desai & Gaikwad, 2013).

In research on opportunities and problems of women entrepreneurs with a focus on dalits ladies in Tamil Nadu's Tirupur district mainly working in tailoring, phenyl production, chicken farms, and grocery stores was found that out of the 17 motivating factors for entrepreneurship promotion the top factor were desire to earn money and be self-sufficient. The group faced challenge in getting finance and non-cooperation from family (Bhuvaneshwari & Annapoorani, 2013).

Women entrepreneurs face several challenges in their entrepreneurial journey. Women face difficulty in getting finance as they, in most of the case are unable to present any collateral because in Indian scenario, women, particularly in small towns and rural area do not have property in their name and bank do not think them to be credit worthy. Other notable challenges are scarcity of resources, competition, restricted mobility, lack of support from family, poor education level, low risk-taking ability, and dominance of male members in the society (Kumar V., 2023).

Literature points out that elements that have been found to significantly affect entrepreneurship promotion are entrepreneurial orientation, innovation, risk taking, knowledge and understanding of business operations and training. It also shows that there are several challenges that adversely affect entrepreneurial efforts of SHGs in Uttar Pradesh. Major entrepreneurial challenges faced by self-help groups in Uttar Pradesh are scarcity of funds, ignorance about sources of funds, unawareness about policies, lack of managerial skills, poor support from family, insufficient knowledge and understanding of business process and issues related to conflict and disagreement among members.

There have been several studies on self-help groups. Most of these works have been done have studied SHGs as a means of self-empowerment, self-reliance, and social inclusion. They have focused on how self-help groups have been able to bring in social and economic upliftment of women belonging to rural areas. SHGs by promoting entrepreneurship has improved household and individual income and have generated employment. Additionally, it has also been instrumental in promoting community development by promoting teamwork, creating local job, promoting local products. The studies on self-help group as a tool to promote entrepreneurship are found to be



restricted to mainly southern and western region of India. Majority of these work are restricted to southern India particularly in selected districts of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu. Few studies covering north-east states are also found. Notwithstanding their acknowledged potential, SHGs also face many hindrances when it comes to promoting entrepreneurship. Their performance is often hindered by limited market access, poor training, and a lack of institutional backing. SHGs potential to promote entrepreneurship is still well not understood, especially in Uttar Pradesh.

CONCLUSION

SHGs are an effective means of promoting entrepreneurship. Promoting of entrepreneurial activities through SHGs helps in generating employment, utilizing resources, contributing to nation's productivity, providing goods and services to satisfy needs, improving life quality and standards of living. As SHGs are mostly concentrated in rural, semi-urban and small cities entrepreneurial activities promoted through SHGs can help in ensuring development of these areas. Thus, SHGs can be seen as a means of dispersal of development measures across areas of our country. With the increase in government's support measures and initiatives for promoting small and local business the chances of survival and growth of business initiated by SHGs has increased several folds. Self-help groups are driving a variety of developmental activities, particularly in rural regions. These groups play a crucial role in empowering rural women by giving them access to finances and providing them with knowledge about business operations and confidence required to successfully managing and controlling their enterprises. Collective decision making that is an advantage of groups have helped these women to work towards common economic goals. It has also improved their financial positions and led better social acceptance. The research investigates how these groups have been successful in promoting entrepreneurship in Uttar Pradesh.

Entrepreneurship promotion through SHGs can be achieved by ensuring that the groups are able to provide its members key elements necessary for success of entrepreneurial efforts like, knowledge, skills and competencies relating to conduct of business activities. These have played special role in been crucial in developing business capabilities among rural women, thereby equipping them with skills to recognise opportunities and providing them with required skills that help them in taking good advantage of these

opportunities.

Various entrepreneurial challenges faced by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) as highlighted by literature reveal a complex landscape marked by both shared apprehensions and diverse experiences. The challenges spanned a wide range, including financial constraints, lack of awareness about government policies, inadequate training, insufficient managerial skills, and issues related to product quality, procurement, and distribution.

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