

Ways in which SHGs actively promote women empowerment World wide

Introduction:

Across the globe, SHGs are used as effective tools to stimulate women empowerment individually and collectively. These institutions contribute significantly to the rise of women in their social, psychological, economic and political spaces. Their participation in community groups unveils a level of mutual support and enhancement of human and social capital, which in turn enable transformations through the access to credit and skills training.

Countries in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America have witnessed the rise of SHGs in the fight for gender equality and women empowerment. Although India is historically the leading country in SHG activity, successful cases also emerge from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Thailand, Bolivia and Haiti, and Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Tanzania and South Africa. The report on Economic self-help group programmes for improving women's empowerment study analysed the impact of programmes across these countries to show effective ways in which SHGs actively promoted women empowerment with relevant impact in economic, social and political empowerment.

Background:

Wealth, choices and opportunities for women are significantly unequal across the globe. Poverty among women follows the current status of inequality women bare socially and structurally. Emblematic barriers to empowerment faced by women in such countries include a range of limitations in their state of economic freedom, including access to credit and assets. To address such inequalities, the programmes analysed emerged in the areas of collective finance, enterprise and livelihoods through the creation of economic SHGs. Evidence of the aforementioned interventions across the globe demonstrated a variety of SHG components, predominantly credit, savings and social participation strategies. In general, they are created based on the theory of change that empowerment can be obtained with the involvement of individuals to take collective action to overcome social issues and achieve their desired social change.

Details of the Intervention:

The SHGs analysis demonstrated to have a variety of approaches to women empowerment according to their respective cultural and social context. They use different strategies adapted to local needs to achieve similar objectives in gender equality. Programmes vary from a wide range of initiatives, such as health education, business or entrepreneurial skills, awareness of women's rights, basic education, community-development training, among many others. These programmes are implemented by different stakeholders in different countries. They can be national and state governments, research institutes, community-based organisations, banks, or local NGOs, among others. Some examples of the encompassing elements which emerged from the initiatives identified are demonstrated in the Table below:

Country	Component of SHG
Rajasthan, India	Business skills, childcare services, employment and leadership training
Andhra Pradesh, India Bangladesh	Exclusive focus on microfinance
South Africa	HIV prevention, training
Bolivia	Training on financial and microfinance related knowledge
Nepal and Tanzania	Training to handle money
Ethiopia	Family Planning

Analysis of the participation in SHGs in the aforementioned countries shows positive impact in women empowerment. They witnessed economic, social and political effects of their participation in community institutions. Economically, women enjoyed better access to and control over resources by being exposed to handling money and accumulating capital. Socially, women enjoyed higher levels of mobility and decision-making on family size of household, and successfully accumulated social capital through group support. Politically, women developed a public voice, participating in decision-making regarding resources, rights and entitlements within their communities.

Impact:

The positive impacts of SHGs in women empowerment seemed to be larger in interventions which offered an effective training component, combined with access to finance, enterprise and livelihoods. Evidence of economic empowerment from India, Nepal and Tanzania demonstrated the positive impacts of training in the self-confidence of women in handling money. Contrariwise, emphasis on microfinance without a training component did not show positive effects in women economic empowerment in Andhra Pradesh.

Evidence of social empowerment followed the same pattern. South Africa showed positive effects of HIV prevention components in SHGs on the decision-making power of women in their family size. Similarly, women of SHGs in India started interacting with high caste community members and meeting with government officials and bank staff, gaining more community respect. Oppositely, sole emphasis on microfinance in Bangladesh showed no impact on family size decision-making power.

Finally, evidence of political empowerment showed that awareness and participation in local politics increased due to social action being catalysed in SHGs in Bangladesh. Similarly, women in India started interacting with officials from local government institutions and attending meetings. These evidence combined show that livelihoods programmes need to be comprehensive in its strategic approach, encompassing carefully designed interventions which complement and reinforce each other. Training is demonstrated to be an essential feature of such interventions, deserving presence in both the design and implementation to enable the achievement of objectives.

Source: Brody, C., De Hoop, T., Vojtkova, M., Warnock, R., Dunbar, M., Murthy, P., & Dworkin, S. L. (2016). Economic self-help group programmes for improving women's empowerment: a systematic review, 31e Systematic Review 23. London: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie).