

Perception of effectiveness of group functioning by the members of women self-help groups in goat farming

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Abstract

Kudumbashree, launched by the Government of Kerala in 1998 for wiping out absolute poverty from the state through concerted community action under the leadership of Local Self Governments, is today one of the largest women-empowering projects in India. This is a study on the perception of effectiveness of group functioning by the members of women self-help groups in goat farming, operating under Kudumbashree, in Thrissur district, Kerala. Majority of the respondents (76%) perceived the effectiveness of functioning of their groups as medium. The functioning of the group in terms of official procedures (mean score 1.96) was perceived most effective by the members followed by that of interpersonal relationship (mean score 1.93) and entrepreneurial activities (mean score 1.76). As for attitude towards group activity, majority of the respondents (64.67%) expressed high level of favourableness. Also, there was significant positive correlation between the members' perception of effectiveness of group functioning and their attitude towards group activity ($b = 0.265$). The findings of the study provide valuable feedback to the policy makers of the SHG strategy to improvise appropriate strategies for enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of WSHGs. The study suggests the imperative need for imparting entrepreneurial training to the respondents in goat farming along with provision of resources such as good quality breeds, grazing land, feed, market and veterinary care.

Key words: Kudumbashree, women self-help groups, perception of effectiveness of group functioning, attitude towards group activity, goat farming

Introduction

Women Self-Help Group (SHG) movement has gathered momentum as a powerful instrument for socio-economic transformation of poor women in India. SHGs are small informal groups those enable women to come together, discuss and analyze their issues and problems and reap economic benefit out of mutual help, solidarity and joint responsibility (Anand, 2002). The group-based approach enables the members to accumulate capital by way of small savings and get access to formal credit facilities. Regular meetings strengthen relationship among the members through sharing of experiences and informal discussions.

Kudumbashree is a multifaceted programme organized by Government of Kerala and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in cooperation with Panchayat Raj institutions through Community Based Organizations (CBOs) of poor women based on self-help strategy backed by thrift-linked credit. The micro enterprises in Animal Husbandry sector have considerable

potential as sustainable income generating activities for the rural women in SHGs. Especially, goat farming as a micro enterprise has special advantage for women since the management of goats is comparatively less labour and input intensive. Entrepreneurial ventures in goat farming are being embarked on by some SHGs under Kudumbashree.

As quality of team work is a critical component of SHG functioning, it is essential to give adequate emphasis to this realm. A legitimate assessment of quality of group functioning and partakers' team work attitude is crucial to rectify defects if any. Keeping this in view, the present study has analysed members' perception of the effectiveness of functioning of their groups and also their attitude towards group activity. The issues brought out by the study may help the policy makers in improvising appropriate strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the entrepreneurial units under Kudumbashree.

Materials and Methods

The members of women SHGs engaged in goat farming for at least one year, operating under

Kudumbashree in Thrissur District of Kerala State were studied. At the time of data collection, the members comprised a total of 300 in 30 SHGs. Among them, 150 were selected for the study using proportionate stratified random sampling. The data were collected mainly through questionnaire method. However, interviews were also conducted whenever necessary.

Attitude towards Group Activity: This was operationalised as the respondents' attitude towards teamwork in women SHGs.

A scale to measure the attitude towards group activity used by Vipin Kumar (1994) was adopted with verbal modifications to suit the situation. The scale consisted of six statements out of which four were positive and two were negative. The respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement towards the statements. Accordingly, the statements were rated on a three point continuum viz., agree, undecided and disagree with scores five, three and one respectively for positive statements. The scoring pattern was reversed for negative statements. The attitude score for each respondent was the sum of the scores assigned to all the statements by the respondent. Based on the attitude scores obtained, the respondents were categorized as High (28 to 30), Medium (25 to 27) and Low (22 to 24).

Perception of Effectiveness of Group Functioning: In the present study, effectiveness of group functioning was operationally defined as the effectiveness of group activities in terms of the quality of official procedures comprising of discipline, accountability, transparency and equity; quality of interpersonal relationship and that of entrepreneurial activities.

Official procedures meant the formal and mandatory/prescribed procedures in the group functioning. Discipline was operationalised as the orderliness and regularity with which official procedures were carried out by the group. Accountability meant the extent to which the members were responsible to the group for its functioning. Equity was defined as the extent to which members of the group were treated equally in terms of participation in the group activities and benefits received. Transparency was operationalised as the extent to which the decisions, status and activities of the group were open and clear to the members.

Interpersonal relationship meant the extent of association/attachment between the members of the group. Entrepreneurial activities meant the activities related to the micro enterprise of goat farming.

A scale was developed to measure the SHG

members' perception of the effectiveness of functioning of their own groups. Items for the test were identified after referring to literature and discussing with experts. Initially the test comprised of 54 items; 25 on official procedures, 17 on interpersonal relationship and 12 on entrepreneurial activities. For the final selection, the items were subjected to relevancy rating by a panel of ten judges comprising of one District Mission Coordinator and two Assistant District Mission Coordinators from Kudumbashree, Thrissur; five community organizers from Kudumbashree Office, Thrissur and two subject matter specialists from the Kerala Agricultural University. The judges were asked to rate the relevancy of the items on a four point continuum viz., very relevant, relevant, somewhat relevant and not relevant with scores 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The midpoint of the four-point continuum ranging from 10 to 40, the minimum and maximum possible scores was 25. The items with scores above this were selected. The final scale comprised of 54 statements out of which twenty-eight were positive and twenty-six negative. The scale was administered to the women SHG members, who were asked to rate the items on a two point continuum viz., agree and disagree with scores two and one respectively for positive statements. The scoring pattern was reversed for negative statements.

The score for each respondent was the sum of the scores assigned to all the statements by the respondent. The mean score of the respondent was calculated using the formula:

$$\text{Mean score of the respondent} = \frac{\text{Score of the respondent}}{\text{Number of items}}$$

Based on the mean scores obtained, the respondents were categorized as High [Above (Mean + S.D.)], Medium [(Mean + S.D.) to (Mean - S.D.)] and Low [Below (Mean - S.D.)]

Also the mean score of each item was calculated using the formula:

$$\text{Mean score of the item} = \frac{\text{Score of the item}}{\text{Number of respondents}}$$

Further, the mean scores of the major domains were worked out using the formula:

$$\text{Mean score of the major domain} = \frac{\text{Sum of the scores of all the items under the domain}}{\text{Number of items in the domain}}$$

The major domains were ranked based on the mean scores.

Results

Attitude towards group activity: As for attitude towards group activity, majority of respondents (64.67 per cent) expressed high level of favourableness and 28 per cent, medium level of favourableness. Only 7.33 per cent of the respondents had low level of

favourableness (Table 1).

Table-1. Distribution of respondents based on attitude towards group activity. n= 150

Sr.	Attitude towards group activity	Frequency (f)	Percentage
1	Low (22 to 24)	11	7.33
2	Medium (25 to 27)	42	28
3	High (28 to 30)	97	64.67
	Total	150	100

Perception of effectiveness of group functioning: As evident from Table 2, majority (76 per cent) perceived the effectiveness of functioning of their groups as medium, whereas, 14 percent perceived low level of effectiveness. High level of effectiveness of group functioning was perceived by 10 per cent.

Table-2. Distribution of respondents based on perception of effectiveness of group functioning

Sr.	Perception of effectiveness of group functioning	Frequency (f)	Percentage
1	Low (Below 1.86)	21	14
2	Medium (1.96 to 1.86)	114	76
3	High (Above 1.96)	15	10
	Total	150	100

Mean=1.91 S.D. = 0.05

Table-3. Members' perception of effectiveness of functioning of SHGs in various domains of group functioning

Sr.	Domains of group functioning	Mean score	Rank
1	Official procedures	1.96	I
2	Interpersonal relationship	1.93	II
3	Entrepreneurial activities	1.76	III

Table 3 shows that as for the members' perception of effectiveness of group functioning, the domain of official procedures scored first with a mean score of 1.96 followed by interpersonal relationship (1.93) and entrepreneurial activities (1.76).

Relationship between perception of effectiveness of group functioning and attitude towards group activity: Kendall's tau-b intercorrelation showed that perception of effectiveness of group functioning was significantly and positively correlated with attitude towards group activity ($b = 0.265$).

Discussion

As for attitude towards group activity, almost two third of the respondents had highly favourable disposition. This finding is similar to that of Saravanakumar (2000). Since attitudes are acquired through direct personal experience, the results indicate that the members enjoyed working in groups. This finding is of profound implications since attitudes guide behaviour toward valued goals and away from

aversive events (Baron and Byrne, 1993). The groups probably have enough potential to emerge as successful entrepreneurial units. However, considerable persuasion and motivation are essential to get them act in accordance with the attitude held. The affective and cognitive components of the attitude should be strengthened further through adequate training, especially, to promote the entrepreneurial behaviour.

The findings brought out by the study regarding the perception of the women self help group members about the effectiveness of functioning of their groups call for serious attention of the policy makers. More than three-fourth of the respondents perceived only medium effectiveness. Only ten percent perceived the group functioning highly effective. The perception analysis highlights the realms of official procedures and interpersonal relationship as scoring high in terms of effectiveness whereas entrepreneurial activities in goat farming performed least. Probably, the members were contended with the orderliness, regularity, accountability, equity and transparency with which the official procedures were carried out by the group. Of course, these are pertinent factors impinging on the success of group functioning as observed by Jaya. S. Anand (2004), who in her case study on addressing Poverty through Self Help Groups in Kerala, observed that 69% of the members, irrespective of the groups they belonged to, remarked that good leadership, co-operation among the members and transparency in decision-making were essential for the group's smooth functioning and sustainability. The finding that the functioning of the group in terms of entrepreneurial activities was perceived least effective, calls for serious attention since quality of entrepreneurship is considered as the major factor behind successful running of any enterprise. This finding implies that there should be concerted efforts and action on the part of the authorities concerned to ensure the SHG members' adequate access to the required resources such as goats of good quality breeds, grazing land, quality feed, veterinary aid, marketing facilities and training. Information, especially, that of recommended technologies in goat rearing being one of the important resources, the need for training in this aspect should not be left out.

Another observation of the present study, which deserves attention, is the positive correlation between the members' perception of effectiveness of group functioning and their attitude towards group activity. It is quite natural that the favourable attitude of the respondents towards group approach would eventually lead them to think high of the performance of their group and vice versa.

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