

A Study of Self Help Group Dynamics of Women in Malabar Fisheries Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study undertaken in Malabar areas of Kerala state in India, was to assess the group dynamics of the Self Help Groups of women fisher folk to identify the important dimensions contributing to their effectiveness and to identify the constraints faced by the women so as to develop a strategy for mobilizing an effective SHG. From each of the four districts, of Malabar namely Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikkode and Malappuram, 3 SHGs of women fisherfolk at random were selected and the group dynamics of each SHG was quantified by developing an index called group dynamics effectiveness index (GDEI), consisting of 12 dimensions such as participation, influence & styles of influence, decision making procedures, task functions, maintenance functions, group atmosphere, membership, feelings, norms, empathy, interpersonal trust and achievements of SHG. The results showed significant variation in group dynamics and the most important dimensions affecting GDEI are achievements of SHG, participation and group atmosphere. Among the personal and socio-psychological characteristics, education, income, socio-economic status, extension orientation, scientific orientation, mass media participation, social participation, cosmopolitanism, knowledge, attitude towards SHG, attitude towards intervening agency, attitude towards other members of SHG and information source use pattern had positive and significant influence on GDEI. Empowerment programmes were undertaken based on the preference ranking on suitable micro enterprises in fisheries and diversified sectors and success case studies on economic empowerment of women's SHGs' also were elucidated. The constraints were ranked and a strategy for mobilizing an effective SHG for women fisherfolk was also developed.

Key words: Dynamics; Self Help Group; Empowerment; Dimensions; Micro enterprise; Constraint; Strategy;

The Self Help Groups (SHGs) organized by women fisherfolk do play a vital role in fisheries sector of maritime states of Indian coastal belts. It is a matter of great concern that, despite the economic and socio cultural significance of fishing in Kerala state, the women fisherfolk at large are outside the mainstream of the society in the economically disadvantaged category without accruing the benefits from fishing industry. Malabar areas of Kerala always stand backward and less progressive than the rest of Kerala and about half of the coastline of Kerala state is of Malabar. (MCITRA, 2006) But fisherfolk especially women rarely gain the benefits even when there is tremendous consideration for fish production because fisheries development was most often discriminated from the development of fishing community. Out of the total 2,38,851 fisherfolk of Malabar, 19,782 families are in BPL and 37,387

households belong to the traditional fisherfolk families (CMFRI, 2010). The sex ratio in Malabar was observed to be 987 females for 1000 males (CMFRI, 2012). The Self Help Groups of women fisherfolk play a pivotal role in these traditional fisherfolk households in Malabar areas (Kudumbashree, 2010). It would be pertinent to have a look into the group dynamics of the existing Self Help Groups mobilized by the development agencies for empowerment of women fish workers in Malabar fisheries sector. The SHGs', whether is a temporary phenomenon, or would continue on a sustainable basis needs to be analysed and probed. The constraints have to be addressed and empowerment should be brought about by adopting suitable economically viable micro enterprises in fisheries and allied sectors by strengthening of these SHGs.

This case study in Malabar essentially focused on

the following objectives.

- Assessing the Group dynamics of the SHGs' of women fisherfolk and identifying the important dimensions contributing to their effectiveness and assessing the influence of personal and socio psychological characteristics on Group dynamics.
- Assisting in empowerment of women's SHGs' through training and adopting economically viable micro enterprises in fisheries & diversified sectors and elucidating success cases of SHGs'.
- Identifying the constraints faced by the women fisherfolk and thereby developing a strategy for mobilizing and strengthening an effective SHG.

METHODOLOGY

Group dynamics refer to interaction of forces among group members in a social situation. It is the internal nature of the group as to how they are formed, what their structures and processes are, how they function and affect individual members, other groups and the organisation (*Van and Schaller, 2008*). The study was undertaken in 4 districts in Malabar of Kerala state namely Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikkode and Malappuram. From each of the district, 3 SHGs' of women fisherfolk at random were selected, comprising a total of 12 SHGs'. From each SHG, 15 women were personally interviewed by a pre tested interview schedule. The Group dynamics of each SHG was quantified by developing an index called Group dynamics Effectiveness Index (GDEI), consisting of 12 dimensions (*Vipinkumar and Singh, 2007, Vipinkumar and Asokan, 2008, 2011*) such as Participation, Influence & styles of influence, Decision making procedures, Task

functions, Maintenance functions, Group atmosphere, Membership, Feelings, Norms, Empathy, Interpersonal trust and Achievements of SHG. For the present study, GDEI was operationally defined as the sum-total of the forces among the member of SHG based on these dimensions.

The 12 identified dimensions are participation measuring the extent of involvement in group meetings and activities, influence & styles of influence measuring the leadership, decision making procedures measuring the capability of decision making, task functions representing ability to tackle a problem, maintenance functions covering extent of maintaining task functions, group atmosphere representing the extent of congenial climate, membership measuring the inclusion in SHG, feelings covering emotions, norms measuring the rules and regulations, empathy covering extent of making out other's feelings, interpersonal trust measuring mutual faith, achievements of SHG representing the level of performance of SHG including economic profit. All these dimensions were measured by a set of inventories containing appropriate questions (*Pfeiffer and Jones, 1972*). The total score of GDEI for an individual was obtained by adding the individual scores of each component together.

The details of the selected 12 SHGs, location in the four districts in Malabar, the corresponding micro enterprises and the GDEI Score are presented in Table 1. Steps were taken subsequently to empower those groups with lowest score of GDEI and success case studies on empowerment of women's SHGs' were elucidated from those groups with highest score of GDEI in each district of Malabar.

Table 1. Selected SHGs', location, micro enterprise and GDEI Score

District	Name of SHG	Location	Micro enterprise	GDEI score
Kasargod	Kavunchira Kairali	Cheruvathur	Bivalve farming	61.7
	Ori unit	Padanna	Bivalve farming	79.1
	Vedavyasa	Kottikkulam	Fish drying & value addition	57.2
Kannur	Seafood unit	Thayyil	Fish drying & value addition	68.8
	Krishnamadham	Mattul	Fish drying & value addition	59.6
	Chaithanya	Aykkara	Fish Processing & value addition	52.8
Kozhikkode	Kasthurba	Chombal	Fish processing & value addition	67.1
	Samudra	Virunnukandy	Fish processing & value addition	47.2
	Snehatheeram	Beypore	Fish drying & value addition	57.4
Malappuram	Yuvasakthi	Puthupponnani	Bivalve farming	67.0
	Arafa	Ponnani	Fish drying & value addition	65.8
	Soorya	Marakkadavu	Fish Processing & value addition	56.8

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results (Table 2) showed significant variation in GDEI between the members and different groups because of the significant variance ratio (F=18.21). Group dynamics is a multivariate phenomena influenced by a variety of interacting factors those interplay in varying strengths of individual members generated out of skills and orientations from the past life experiences. It definitely varies from person to person, place to place, time to time, situation to situation and in turn from group to group. This might be the probable reason for the differential degree of GDEI observed among respondents.

Table 2. Analysis of variance in group dynamics effectiveness of SHGs'

Source of variation	df	Sum of squares	Mean sum of squares	Variance ratio 'F'
Between groups	11	14368.06	1306.19	18.21**
Error	168	12064.26	71.81	
Total	179			

** Significant at 1% level of significance.

Influence of dimensions of group dynamics effectiveness : The relationship of dimensions of Group dynamics Effectiveness with GDEI was established in this study first by simple correlation analysis to identify the most important dimensions (Table 3). A perusal of the Table 3 indicated that, out of 12 dimensions, the degree of relationship with GDEI was maximum in the case of achievements of SHG, followed by participation and group atmosphere.

Table 3. Simple correlation analysis of dimensions of group dynamics effectiveness (N=180)

Characteristic	Correlation coefficient (r)
Participation	0.947**
Influence and Styles of influence	0.938**
Decision making procedures	0.919**
Task functions	0.907**
Maintenance functions	0.913**
Group atmosphere	0.945**
Membership	0.874**
Feelings	0.879**
Norms	0.884**
Empathy	0.869**
Interpersonal trust	0.918**
Achievements of SHG	0.949**

** Significant at 1% level of significance

Influence of personal and socio-psychological characteristics : Among the 17 identified personal and socio-psychological characteristics, it was found from the table 4 that, 14 variables viz., education, annual income, farm household size, socio-economic status, extension orientation, scientific orientation, mass media participation, social participation, cosmopolitaness, knowledge, attitude towards SHG, attitude towards intervening agency, attitude towards other farmers and information source use pattern were positively and significantly related with the dependent variable "group dynamics", at one per cent level of significance. However, it was seen that three variables namely age, occupation and fishing experience did not have any significant relationship with the dependent variable.

Table 4. Relationship of personal and socio-psychological characteristics with GDEI (N=180)

Characteristic	Correlation coefficient
Age	0.087
Education	0.310**
Occupation	0.058
Annual income	0.503**
Farm household size	0.508**
Fishing experience	0.147
Socio-economic status	0.871**
Extension orientation	0.840**
Scientific orientation	0.813**
Mass media participation	0.479**
Social participation	0.687**
Cosmopolitaness	0.678**
Knowledge	0.767**
Attitude towards SHG	0.820**
Attitude towards intervening agency	0.791**
Attitude towards other members	0.782**
Information source use pattern	0.847**

** Significant at 1% level of significance

Micro enterprises in Fisheries and diversified sectors : Empowerment programmes were undertaken in each district for the SHG with lowest score on GDEI on suitable micro enterprises in fisheries and allied sectors, based on the preference ranking of the SHGs. Preference ranking of micro enterprises according to location specific suitability in fisheries and allied sectors in all the 4 districts was done and appropriate micro enterprises were listed out as follows: (Table 5).

A perusal of the Table 5 reveals the potential of bivalve farming, processing, drying and value addition

Table 5. Ranking for priorities of fisherfolk for fishery based micro enterprises

Micro enterprise in fisheries	Rank of respondents*			
	A	B	C	D
<i>Fishery based micro enterprise</i>				
Preparation of value added products	III	V	I	I
Preparation of Dry Fish products	IV	I	III	V
Fish processing Unit	V	II	II	IV
Ready to eat fish products	VI	VI	V	VI
Ready to cook fish products	VII	VII	VI	VII
Ornamental fish culture enterprise	VIII	IX	VII	VIII
Mussel culture	I	III	IV	II
Clam collection	XI	IV	IX	IX
Edible oyster culture	II	VIII	VIII	III
Pearl culture	X	XI	XI	X
Mud Crab culture	IX	X	X	XI
<i>Agri - based micro enterprise</i>				
Vegetable farming	I	II	I	I
Ornamental gardening enterprise	III	I	III	III
Floriculture	IV	V	II	IV
Kitchen garden	VI	VI	V	VI
Orchards	VII	VII	VI	VII
Fruit products	VIII	IX	VII	VIII
Fruit processing	V	III	IV	II
Snacks bar	XI	IV	IX	IX
Catering unit	II	VIII	VIII	V
Bakery Unit	X	XI	X	X
Cereal pulverizing unit	IX	X	XI	XI
Sericulture Unit	XIII	XIII	XII	XIII
Planting mangroves & acacia trees	XII	XII	XIII	XII
<i>Allied based micro enterprise</i>				
Grocery repacking	II	I	I	I
Garment unit	I	II	II	II
Soap unit	VII	IV	III	IV
Wood – stone carpentry	VIII	IX	X	XII
Computer centre	IX	X	IV	VIII
Cattle unit	XIII	XII	XIII	IX
Poultry unit	XII	XI	XI	X
Hand weaving	V	III	XII	XI
Candle unit	III	VII	V	VII
Chalk Unit	IV	VI	VII	VI
Umbrella Unit	VI	V	VI	V
Foam bed unit	X	VIII	VIII	III
Bamboo based handicrafts	XIV	XIV	IX	XIV
Firewood	XI	XIII	XIV	XIII

A. Kasargod, B. Kannur
C. Kozhikkod D. Malappuram

*Preference Rank of assigned by respondents

as fishery based micro enterprises. In bivalve farming, mussel culture has immense potential in Malabar fisheries sector. (Vipinkumar et al, 2013). Table 5 also reveals that among agricultural based enterprises vegetable farming, ornamental gardening and floriculture are of greater preference in Malabar. Among allied sector micro enterprises, grocery repacking, garments unit etc. had tremendous potential.

Constraints of women fisherfolk of Malabar: The constraints in general as well as those faced by the women fisherfolk as members of SHG, as per their order of importance in the perception of respondents in Malabar are presented in Table 6. Rather than the general constraints such as poor living conditions, illiteracy, unemployment etc, more stress was to be given on the constraints faced by the SHGs' as it is pertinent for the present study. (Yunus, 1999, Jayaraman, 2005) Marketing aspect was perceived to be the biggest constraint of the SHGs' rather than procedural hurdles of preparing minutes, reports, meetings, banking etc. (Tripathi and Sharma, 2007) From these priorities and constraints it is obvious that it is high time for diversification of micro enterprise in additional to fishery based ones in these SHGs' for sustenance (Sathiadhas, 2009). Many SHGs' of women fisherfolk have already diversified in these enterprises in Malabar fisheries sector.

Developing a strategy for the mobilization of an effective SHG of women fisherfolk: Taking in to consideration of the valid inferences and practical implications drawn from the findings of the study, a strategy for mobilizing and strengthening an effective SHG of women fisherfolk was developed by consultation with 6 specialists in social mobilization, 12 leader members of selected SHGs and 12 officials of intervening agencies. Steps in this strategy in fisheries context are prioritized by these 30 respondents through three phases of group development such as group formation phase, stabilization phase and self-helping phase with critical features at the end of each phase including norms and byelaw. A brief essence of the developed strategy is presented here.

Group initiation / formation phase (0 to 4 months): The major steps in this phase should include the initial visit to the location, rapport building, interaction, awareness creation, identification of women fisherfolk, introduction meeting, action plan, documentation of

Table 6. Ranking of constraints of women fisherfolk in Malabar (N = 180)

Constraints	Kasargod	Kannur	Kozhikkod	Malappuram
<i>General constraints</i>				
Poor living conditions & livelihood security	I	I	I	I
Educational Illiteracy	II	II	II	II
Lack of proper employment	IV	III	III	IV
Socially unorganized set up	III	IV	V	III
Gender inequality	VI	VI	IV	V
Alcoholism of men fisherfolk & exploitation	V	V	VI	VI
Health problems	VIII	VII	VII	VII
Scientifically less advanced	VII	VIII	VIII	IX
Cultural bonding, customs, traditions, conservatism	IX	IX	IX	VIII
<i>Constraints of SHG</i>				
Marketing is a tough task	I	I	I	I
Choosing Diversification difficult	III	IV	III	II
Sustenance difficult	IV	II	II	III
Hectic procedures in preparing minutes, reports, meetings, banking etc.	II	III	IV	IV
SHG became an additional burden	V	V	V	V

deliberations, mobilizing genuine members, subsequent meeting for solutions to problems, action plan for arranging raw materials for the fishery based & diversified micro enterprise, marketing information, fortnightly meetings for progress review, selection of 'leader Fisherwomen' in respect of production, credit and marketing aspects, group discussion, demonstration etc., first basic field training with need assessment for the successive training programmes on production technology and management aspects emphasizing the maintenance of SHG registers as facilitator's role.

Building up / stabilization phase (4 to 15 months): This phase must involve regular need based fortnightly meetings, maintenance of documents, practical training of women leaders on production, credit and marketing aspects, scheduled implementation of action plan, procurement of inputs based on procurement plan as per production plan prepared based on market demand, market synchronized production planning, intensive training to carry out activities of production, credit and marketing aspects, training to other members by the leaders and changing the leaders of SHG after one year so that periodic rotation gives the other potential leaders a chance by maintaining the intervening agency's role as 'enabler.'

Self helping phase (15 to 36 months): The main steps to be included in this phase are development of fortnightly action programme, meetings for sharing experiences, refinement, improvement and problem

solving for the activities under the responsibilities of the leaders, limiting the extension personnel's role to a facilitator, gradually reducing their presence at meetings, transactions fully within the SHG under the members themselves, originally active leaders giving way to new leaders after 2 year term, encouraging inter-SHG contacts, arranging contestations e.g. best member or SHG in the site etc., to develop a healthy competition spirit, initiative by leaders to create a sense of group pressure by established norms for defaulters, ensuring participation in every activity for sustenance of SHG, ensuring favorable group atmosphere, functions, empathy and interpersonal trust for significant achievements of SHG, emphasizing the dimensions of Group dynamics.

CONCLUSION

A tip of the iceberg of poverty eradication in Malabar Fisheries sector is attempted in this study on dynamics of women's SHGs'. The scale of Group dynamics with 12 dimensions can be used for similar future research in fisheries and allied sectors for different types of community based groups such as youth, labourers, extension personnel etc. The lacunae identified in GDEI give feedback for the possible improvement in SHG functioning by taking care of the dimensions contributing their effectiveness. The success case studies elucidated can be adopted as a case model for mobilizing SHGs' in other key areas like agriculture,

forestry, floriculture, agro based industries, watershed development etc. The strategy developed for mobilizing SHG can be used as a practical manual for organizing and managing SHGs' on any area on a sustainable basis. The identified constraints of SHGs' and the preference ranking of micro enterprises give an idea on the appropriateness of the location specific venture in fisheries and diversified sectors for economic empowerment of SHGs' of women fisherfolk. The identified interrelationships between the variables can

act as catalytic points for promoting group empowerment, which might give useful insight on the plausibility of using the group dynamics network for strengthening the functioning of women's SHGs'. Ultimately, poverty can only be eradicated by mobilizing women to solve their actual problems through Self Help Groups.

Paper received on : December 12, 2012

Received after revision : January 22, 2014

Accepted on : February 12, 2014

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