

Gender Sensitivity Approach towards Women's Economic Empowerment :A Case Study

Bibhuti Bhusan Patro

Faculty, Khalikote Autonomous College, Berhampur, Ganjam, Odisha, India

Abstract

Gender dimension of development and the role of NGOs has acquired a wider public debate and discussion in recent years. The approach towards Women's development has been drastically changed from the welfare oriented approach to empowerment approach in the present century. In the new paradigm the planner, policymakers and the public at large have accepted the role of NGOs in the transformation of rural societies and considered them as a force for change. The programmes undertaken by the NGOs proved to be more successful than government organization. In this context the present paper examines the role, responsibilities and accountability of the NGOs in women's development in Odisha with following objectives:

1. To evaluate the role of NGOs in development process.
2. To examine the status of women in Odisha.
3. To assess the NGOs role towards economic empowerment of women.
4. suggestions and conclusion.

KEYWORDS : Development, Empowerment, women, Gender sensitivity .

Introduction

Our past experiences show that most of the economic development programmes based on technocratic approach failed to give desired result due to neglect of human dimension in the process development. The programmes are designed and implemented without taking into account different needs of women, identifying their. Different biological and sociological differences even though the contribution of rural women is maximum to their family incomes. Therefore, what is required is a humanistic approach, which ensures the participation of women at every stage of development process from planning to evaluation. This fact has been realised by our planners and a number of economic development programmes for emancipation of women has been initiated to fulfil their needs and aspirations.

Economic empowerment as an approach to development and gender equality has acquired greater importance in India and abroad over the last decade. It has two aspects. One is income or livelihood and the other part is whether or not women have effective control over this income/livelihood. There is a special opportunity offered by this approach to change the lives of many people including the poorest women because livelihood is a primary concern for everyone.

Finance, being an entry point to development, non-accessibility and non-availability of credit to rural women has been aggravating gender inequalities in the rural areas. Financial resources, if effectively delivered to women can help them make a meaningful improvement in their economic and social conditions. Funding towards women's empowerment is an essential component of any organised efforts of the government (Das, Vidya. 1991).

Micro Finance: Traditional Approach

The experience of the last several decades particularly in financing the poor women for self-employment and income generating activities in rural areas does reveal that a number of factors prevent. These women for securing adequate finance from credit agencies. These factors are:

- Lack of awareness among beneficiaries regarding the availability of credit and its proper use.
- Lack of coordination among the officials those are associated with the rural credit delivery system.
- Cumbersome lending procedure.
- Wrong identification of beneficiaries. Inadequate monitoring and supervision.
- Defective loan policies and procedural delay.
- Misutilisation of loans.
- Failure of rural credit delivery system etc.

The credit needs of the poor women reveal that they require small but regular and urgent loans for consumption whereas their options are restricted to programmes designed and approved by the government which do not cater to their needs.

Micro- Finance- The New Approach

To bridge gap between demand and supply to funds in the lower rungs of the rural economy the formal sector took initiative to develop a supplementary credit delivery mechanism by encouraging institutional arrangement outside the financial system. With the launching of NABARD's pilot scheme, Micro-finance- the development buzzword of the nineties, to cure the illness of rural poverty gained concepts like self-reliance, self-sufficiency and self help at its core. Micro-credit has now emerged as a financial strategy to meet the economic needs of the poor, particularly rural women. Over the years it helped rural women in starting up (ME). It is in this regard Self-Help groups (SHGs) have provided strength to micro system.

Micro- Credit

It is financing procedure catering to the needs of poor people on rural and urban area which creates self-employment opportunities and helps in promoting income generating activities. Besides providing credit for self-employment to their clients, micro-credit programmes offers a contribution of services and resources like savings, training, networking and peer support. One of the important reasons for the underdevelopment of women is their non-involvement in income generating activities and their activities there is hardly any chance for them to gain economic independence.

Further, the economic dependence leads to dependence in all other spheres of life. The formal credit system of banks by and large is beyond their reach.

Women in rural areas engage in different activities at various times of the year for survival. Simultaneously they engage themselves in agriculture, animal husbandry, poultry, manufacturing, trade and service etc. But anyone of these single activities could not able to [provide a sustained livelihood to poor women round the year. In this regard, any economic intervention to raise the standard of living of the poor women is urgently required as their contribution towards the nation is all most equal with their counterparts.

Bangladesh is one of the pioneering countries is successful implementation of micro-credit system. During the seventies several developing countries in Asia and Latin America taken the initiative in this regard. India has adopted this system by suitable modifications in accordance with its socio-economic and political conditions.

Role of NABARD in Promoting Micro credit

In order to meet the credit requirements of agriculture sector and rural poor the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) was established in 1982 through an Act of Parliament. It now functions as an Apex development Bank for supporting and promoting agriculture and rural development in an integrated manner. NABARD plays an important role in the rural credit delivery system as well as providing micro credit to rural poor women in accordance with their needs and skills. For more than two decades of its existence, it made a remarkable service t the rural women through its innovative credit delivery mechanism. It also recognised the role of NGOs and involves and provides assistance to them to work in the field of rural development.

NABARD defines SHG as “a small, economically homogeneous and affinity group of rural poor, voluntarily formed to save, and mutually agree to contribute to a common fund to be lent to its members as per group decision”. These groups are called as “solidarity groups” as they provide monetary and moral support to individual members in times of difficulties. The SHGs can be composed of either male or female members consisting of 20 members with a leader. The leader is responsible of conducting meeting every month. The group members save a regular amount of Rs. 20 to Rs. 100 every month. The group rotates the money to the needy members for various purposes at a specified interest rate. As the repayment is 100 per cent and recycling is very fast the savings amount increases faster owing to the accumulation of income from interest. After the group stabilise over a period of six months or more in the management of its own funds, it conducts regular meetings, maintain savings and give loans to members on interest. The SHGs are being linked with banks for external credit.

Characteristics of SHGs

- Accountability and transparency in operations.
- Flexibility and responsiveness.
- Democratic functioning.
- Mutual trust and confidence.

- Simple documentation.
- Minimum external intervention (NGO/Bank)

Conflict resolving through collective discussion leadership and mutual during meetings Groups solidarity, self- help, awareness, social and economic empowerment (NABARD, 1997).

Functions of SHGs:

A typical rural women's SHG perform a number of functions such as:

1. Enabling members to become self-dependent and self-reliant.
2. Providing a forum for members for discussing their socio economic problems.
3. Developing decision-making capacity and leadership qualities among members.
4. And equipping women with basic skills required understanding monetary transactions (NABARD, 1998).

SHGs in Micro- Credit Delivery System

The failures of the past development efforts are largely attributed to the lack of people's participation. In response to it, the emphasis shifted to local development with the people's participation. It has come to be recognised as an absolute imperative for development. Some even argue that development, in fact is participation (Prasad, 2002). It has been recognised that economic development of women is possible through their active participation in the development process. In this regard, SHGs (Self- Help Groups) are considered as available alternative to achieve the development and to get the community participation in all round development programmes. From humble beginning micro-finance has come to occupy a pivotal position in rural credit. The Indian micro-finance scene is dominated by self-Help Groups and their linkage to banks. Credit delivery through thrift and credit groups (SHGs) emerge an. Alternative to the existing system of credit disbursement by the banks, unlike most government in thrift based self-help groups.

SHG- Bank Linkage: Role of NGOs

NABARD launched its SHG-Bank linkage programme in 1991-92. It is operational in nearly 20 states in India and is actively channelizing credit to the poorer sections of the Society for mainly non-farm activities. During its inception it started with 255 SHGs and it has reached to 94,645 groups by March 2000. Approximately 8.25 million families are benefited by the linkage programme by 1998. In all the 85 per cent of the groups linked with banks are formed exclusively by women (NABARD 2000).

A total of 26 commercial Banks and 46 Regional Rural Banks have been participated in the linkage programme. The experiments of the linkage programme were conducted through different models as mentioned below:

- a) Model- I: Banks lend directly to the ultimate borrowers without having NGOs/Self-Help promoting Institutions (SHPIs) and SHGs as intermediary.
- b) Model- II: Banks lend directly to the borrowers by forming SHGs.
- c) Model-III: Banks lend to SHGs to lend to borrowers with NGOs/SHPIs as non-financial intermediaries.

- d) Model-IV: Banks give credit to NGOs/ SHPIs to lend to SHGs to lend to the ultimate borrowers.

The past experience shows that rural populations particularly those who belong to poor and weaker sections and women, could not avail the benefits of development due to illiteracy, social conflicts etc. In order to create awareness, educate and motivate among these people the NGOs, play very crucial role. In order to assess the role of NGOs in the micro credit delivery system as well as for the overall economic empowerment of women the researcher has taken PREM (a local NGO) for the study purpose.

Profile of the Organisation under Study

The genesis of People's Rural Education Movement (PREM), a local NGO started in the year 1984, in Ganjam and Gajapati district of Odisha. They have undertaken various developmental activities catering to the needs of the poor, downtrodden and weaker sections of the society. With its humble beginning, now the organisation extended its activities to about 5,000 villages and covers approximately 8,40,000 population most of whom belong to tribal, dalit, women and other backward sections of the society. The main activities of the organisation are:

- Socio-economic empowerment of oppressed, downtrodden rural masses.
- Providing education, adequate healthcare and sanitation facilities to the rural poor.
- Encouraging women to participate in the decision-making process.
- Promoting thrift and saving activities.
- To motivate and organise people towards income generating activities for selfreliance and promoting indigenous groups.

Programme components

The major developmental programmes of the organisation are discussed below:

(i) **Education & Health:** PREM believes that education can liberate people from the dogmas of the society. To attain this objective the organisation provides both formal and non-formal system of education, vocational training (particularly agro-based). Over the year's massive child centred programmes and functional literacy centres are undertaken by the organisation. Under health activities the organisation gives due importance to infant and mother mortality rates, education on health, safe water and sanitation etc.

(ii) **Activities on Women's Welfare:** in order to boost the potentially of women group, the organisations have taken to introduce massive saving and credit programmes, community plantation and micro enterprises. PREM organises motivation campaigns towards popularisation of savings among women Self-Help Groups. There are more than 1500 SHGs functioning under PREM, which helps women to become self-reliant. The total number of members in these groups is 19,824 and the total saving comes nearly at Rs. 32,63,680 which is under 'Utkal Mahila Sanchaya Bikash' a separate registered body managed by women and governed by 15 board members. These SHGs are engaged in different income generating activities such as, kitchen garden, poultry, pisciculture, nursery raising, mat making and weaving, tailoring, dry and food making. This programme launched at first in Ganjam district, encouraged women to save small

amounts and take credit at a minimum rate of interest. International donor agencies like PLAN International, community, Aid Abroad along with NABARD and SIDBI and other commercial banks support the programme in raising the funds.

(iii) **Community Based Activities:** The organisation promoted community-based activities for the upliftment of people in general and women in particular since its establishment.

Towards Economic Empowerment of Women: The Role of PREM

Because of the close proximity with the people at the grassroots level, the organisation could able to mobilise the poorest of the poor women to participate in its development programmes actively and effectively. It acts as a facilitator of the development programmes. In order to improve the quality of life of these disadvantaged women groups, it adopts a holistic approach that is, social-economic empowerment and capacity building of women. Towards this end it sets objectives as follows:

Capacity building of women so that they can able to cross all social and economic barriers and thereby facilitate their full development into empowered citizen.

To achieve the equality of status of women as a participants, decision-makers and beneficiaries in the democratic, economic, social and cultural spheres of life.

To empower women to work together with men as equal partners and to inspire a new generation of women and men to work together for equality, sustainable development and communal harmony.

To promote and ensure the human right of women at all stages of lifecycle.

Field Observation

In order to assess the role of PREM for economic empowerment of poor women, the researcher has selected three Self- Help Groups in Gopalpur in the Ganjam district of Odisha by taking into account their socio-economic backwardness. These women were dependent on money lenders for their day-to-day needs and in turn the money lenders charged exorbitant interest rates. All most all of the group members were illiterate and ignored about the developmental programmes of the government.

Improvement of Socio-Economic Condition after formation of SHGs

The members of different groups told their living standards have been improved and also within the family their status has been raised. The members developed the habit of thrift and contributed an agreeable amount to the group fund. In the process, The PREM workers helped these illiterate women in maintaining records, organising meetings and resolving their conflicts during the initial period. They became economic independent and become free from the clutches of money lenders. In addition, they are also actively participating in various community meetings conducted in their locality. The loans are being distributed among the women to carry out different income generating activities like petty business, vegetable shops, and goat rearing and towards fishing activities. The amount of loans and number of lonees are decided by the group members depending on the savings, bank finance, need and urgency of the members, etc. The

maximum loan limit is stipulated per member is determined on the basis of group capacity and individual capacity. To extend the credit operation they follow rotational basis without any discrimination. However, for emergency cases they deviate from the rule.

Case Studies:

The following case studies are the outcome of field observation and personal interviews with the members of different groups in the PREM's area of operation.

Case I

Rama, a scheduled caste woman belongs to Gopalpur locality. Both the husband and wife depend on daily labour to sustain their livelihood. The misery of Rama is that her husband is addicted to alcohol and a major portion of it goes for liquor consumption. Life becoming very miserable for Rama with her meagre income. Before joining the SHG, she used to depend on the local moneylenders during the time of emergency like health problems, purchase of foodstuffs during lean seasons, etc. She joined the Mother Teresa SHG and contributed Rs.25 per month towards the group fund. After joining the group though her family's economic standard has not improved to a great extent, but she is now not facing much hardship to sustain her livelihood. She feels that if she will get more finance, she can undertake independently some income generating activities and supplement her family income. Regarding the benefits as a member of SHG Rama told that she is no longer dependent on moneylenders. She is availing loan from the group without any difficulty whenever there is a need of it and paying a moderate interest. She could able to send her children to schools. Besides it, she is also getting moral support from the other group members.

Case II

Aerema is a member of Bullakama SHG and belongs to fishing community. She is the sole bread earner of her family. The illiterate poor women joined the SHG through the motivation of PREM workers. She recalls that initially they were hesitant, but after persuasion, they have agreed and formed Bullakama SHG. Now she feels happy for becoming a member of the group. Before joining the group, like the other fishing women of her locality she was dependent on village moneylenders for purchasing fish. After selling fish, she used to pay some extra money to the moneylenders. Now she is no longer dependent on moneylenders and purchased a net by availing loan from the group. She is of the opinion that the success of the group depends on the mutual cooperation and understanding within the member as well as timely repayment of the loan. She further feels that their group fund is not adequate to undertake income- generating activities and they need more financial assistance from bank for further development.

Case III

Krishnaveni, an elderly lady in her late fifties belongs to fishing community. However, unlike her other community members she is not engaged in fishing activities, instead she works as an agricultural labourer for her livelihood. With the help of PREM she became an active member of Narisakti. Regarding the benefits of SHG she told in enhanced their self-confidence and improved their economic status to some extent. They

are no longer dependent on moneylenders for their day-to-day as well as emergency needs. In addition to this, whenever a member faces any sort of problem, the group come to her rescue. They are resolving their family problems amicably through mutual-cooperation. Above all she feels that through the group the members developed leadership qualities, decision-making power and interacting ability.

Based on the field observation and interview with the personal of various SHG group members the following findings have been emerged.

The status of women in the state has been deplorable in terms of low literacy, high infant mortality, low like expectancy and negligible employment opportunities.

In creating awareness on various issues related to women in the state is not satisfactory.

The micro-credit approach towards meeting the needs of poor women seems to be more relevant and effective.

The role of NABARD in promoting coordination among SHGs, NGOs and financial institutions plays a vital role as far as the credit delivery system in the development and empowerment of women is concerned.

Majority of the members, most of the time has taken credit for consumption purposes which does not yield any further production.

Suggestions:

While implementing the development programmes government should take the local NGOs into confidence the Government should take necessary steps to develop proper infrastructure by in order to improve the women's status.

There should be s separate autonomous body at each district consisting academician's researchers, intellectuals, legal experts and representatives from NGOs to raise women related issues.

Conclusion:

Gender bias is a multidimensional problem, which imposes several discriminations on women like access to productive resources, little control over family income, and their dependence on family for social status and economic security. All these discriminations lead to feelings of subordination, powerlessness, and psychological stress. To avoid all such outcomes of gender bias it is high time to adopt a holistic approach with a special effort towards 'Psychological empowerment' of women. Towards this end, empowerment of women in social, political and economical sphere should be the target of government at each level. For the economic empowerment of women as mentioned earlier, NGOs role should not be ignored because the real development lies with the development of grass root level particularly women group within which the activities of NGOs. Government should take necessary steps to eliminate bogus NGOs after a carefully monitoring and evaluation.

Last 'but not the least; it is the people who can change their lifestyle in cooperating with various government and non-government agencies.

References:

1. Agarwal, Bina. “*Economic Participation of Rural Women in the third world*”, EPW, A-155-A-163.
2. Bhatia, Anju.(2000). “*Women’s Development and NGOs* “, Rawat Publishers, New Delhi.
3. Das,Vidya(1991). “*Bilateral Funding and Women’s Empowerment* “, EPW, Vol.XXVI, Nos.22& 23, June.
4. Das, A.K.(1995), “*NGOs and Development: Learning from Failures* “,The Forth World, No.2, P. 74.
5. George,J. (1993). “*Adjustment with Gender Equality*”, *Mainstream*, Vol.XXXI, No. 20, March 27.
6. Ghose, D.K.(2001). “*NGO Intervention in Poverty Alleviation Scope and Reality*”. Kurukshetra, Vol, 49, No.6, pp.2-10.
7. GOI, (2000).*Women in India: A Statistical Profile, Women in Partnership with Men*, Planning Commission, New Delhi.
8. Government of Odisha (1999). Report,*State commission for Women*, Bhubaneswar.
9. Patro, B.B. (2003). “*NGOs in the development of Odisha-A Gender Perspective* “, A Ph.D Thesis Submitted in Berhampur University, Odisha.
10. Prasad, K, (2002) “*NGOs and Social Development Opportunities*” (ed.) Volume.
11. *The Hindu* (1999).
12. *Various Reports from NABARD, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000.*
13. *Various Reports of PREM.*