



APPROACHES OF COMMUNICATION AMONG THE SELF-HELP GROUP MEMBERS OF LOWER SUBANSIRI DISTRICT IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH, INDIA

Yami Landi

PhD Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh

ABSTRACT For any developing country, its asset lies in the development of the rural masses by providing equal economic, social and educational opportunities to both men and women. With clear emphasis on rural development, there has been a plethora of developmental programmes launched in an intensive and coordinated manner. One of them being Self Help Groups. SHGs across the nation has created a platform for sharing experience, collecting knowledge, having collective decision-making and enabling the members of the group to gain socio-economic benefits out of united and mutual responsibility. But, it needs to be also considered that the effectiveness of such programmes or schemes greatly rely upon several combinations of factors, of which effective communication system being one of the very crucial factors. It is a vital element that can help in creating awareness about technologies and to mobilize people in creating links between government agencies and the rural masses as well as amongst each other. As a matter of fact, inputs from the communication aspects are being progressively undertaken by the various developmental programmes and initiatives. This paper aims at studying the approaches of communication adopted by the members of SHGs of Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh.

KEYWORDS : Self Help Groups, communication, Mobilisation, Rural, Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rural development has received an overriding priority from governments all across the world and the challenges are equally significant in both developed and developing nations. Numerous programmes are being formulated and implemented to address impediments in the growth of rural section of the society, yet great deal remains to be done. In a report of Census 2011, 83.3 crore of the 121 crore Indians resided in rural areas and their quality of life, by many indicators showed that it is worse than the urban masses. An overwhelming proportion of people below poverty line live in the rural areas of India, which is alarming as the economy of any nation relies significantly on the development of the rural masses.

Rural development is national development (Nyerere, 1980). This is especially true in the case of a developing country like India, where rural population out-numbers the urban population. Development of any society cannot take place at the desired pace unless almost the half the population i.e., women remain backward. In India, of the total female population, 77 percent live in rural areas under poverty, where in gender inequality further magnifies the difficulties faced by various government policies to alleviate poverty. To tackle the problems comprehensively, an ample amount of importance was given to a self-sustaining concept of development and one such strategy is Self Help Groups. Over the years, it has shown how it plays a tremendous role in uplifting the women and help them in overcoming their vulnerability by making them self-sustainable and giving them a feeling of self-efficacy. Self Help Groups represents an opportunity for social participation of its members by providing a platform in which they can actively take part in social deliberations and in transformative decision-making process in the village. It is pertinent to mention that the need for empowerment of women becomes more essential in a country like India where the society is patriarchal in nature.

When we look into the term 'empowerment', it has the most noticeable attribute to it with the word 'power'. The word power suggests, to have the control over material holdings, ideological and intellectual resources. It is also termed as the process by which existing relations with regards to power is challenged and thus a larger control upon the base of power is known as empowerment. In the context of women, the term empowerment indicates to the process where in women have more control over their lives and also showed the increase in control by them around their environment (Kumar, 2008). A process where women are enabled to organise their own potential, know their rights, make life choices on their own, control the resources around them and increase self-reliance is widely known as women empowerment.

Factors like equal representation and involvement of women in socio-political discourse has driven the approach of SHGs amongst the women in our villages. But the fact cannot be negated that these forces, which motivate the formation of SHGs, are often external and not necessarily be within the community. Of the various components of empowerment, cognitive and psychological component has a vital role to play in the formation of an organization, particularly in the formation of a voluntary group like Self Help Groups. These

component states that in order to form an SHG, women has to first realize and understand the different layers of gender relations. In doing so, they must further comprehend that women can actually come together, work to improve their socio-economic conditions and that their efforts could bring a change in the old structured gender ideologies.

And so, various communication strategies are being employed as a collaborative effort by implementing agencies like NGOs and government sectors in order to mobilize the formation of SHG and actively involve with the member of SHGs not just in bringing about economic changes but also change in attitude and bring out progressive outlook. It is further felt that if Self Help Group approach has to be sustained, a better understanding of the communication pattern needs to be explored as it plays a an essential role in facilitating desirable transformation in the society as well as in expanding the knowledge base of its members. These transformations mostly encompass the sharing of innovative ideas that spread across the social system. Further, communication between members of Self Help Groups furnishes a learning opportunity which is continuous in nature and facilitates a better understanding to them of how new knowledge and innovation can be applied in the fullest aspect.

In recent times, Self Help group has emerged as a movement which has gained the status of sustainable innovation in the process of development across the nation including Arunachal Pradesh. It can be seen to facilitate the rural community as a medium to extend its reach in the most inclusive manner throughout various economic sections. With the objective of upholding inclusive progress and engage the community in sustainable livelihood approach, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), a governmental implementing agency of India has come to be the World's largest scheme towards alleviating poverty. The need for visualising the prospect of welfare and finding out innovative ways to practically apply the same through such mission is of the utmost importance for the vulnerable section of the population. In this context, an effort has been made to study approaches of communication adopted by the members of SHGs of Lower Subansiri in Arunachal Pradesh with the following objectives:

- Study the types of communication employed in formation and mobilization of the SHGs.
- Assess the various approaches of communication adopted by the SHG members for organizing and strengthening the SHG.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In India, the women SHG model primarily, started with NGOs' search for institutions, which were community-based and could further assist the poor to be able to tackle their vulnerability and manage limited resources. The Self Help Promoting Agencies (SHPAs), realized that the financial management through SHG could help its members to stay dynamic for longer periods and seek after their very own motivation. With the launch of SHG Banking Pilot Programme by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), the SHGs got a

big push to grow in the year 1992. RBI permitted banks to open savings accounts in the name of informal groups – 'SHGs' and lend to those (informal) groups without collateral and without asking the loan purpose. Since 1996, SHG banking has been reorganized as a regular banking activity.

Manjula (1995) in her study on SHG, reported that majority of members in SHG were middle aged, married, primarily dependent on spouse, lived in a joint family, were functionally literate, belonged to a medium income category, had low mass media exposure and received training for various income generating activities.

According to (Mayoux, 2000), the role of women folk in making household decisions may increase with their economic contribution towards the family. Out of the many transformations made with the engagement of SHGs, a high impact was observed in the social status of the members especially, the increase participation in decision-making process, staying updated and aware of the various programs and schemes for their welfare, effective expenditures on events related to health and society. The study also reported attitude change in the male members of the families towards their counterpart and related matters. It was found that while they had apprehensions regarding SHGs in the past, they were now confident about SHG and its concept. The women were encouraged to take out time for the SHG activities and participate in the group meetings.

Bala Swamy (2006) in his study on the significance of group communication amongst Rural Women found that, group communication played a major role in order to bring about any change in outlook in them. The study indicated that group communication assisted in facilitating empowerment amongst the rural women. According to him, members of Development of Women in Rural Areas (DWACRA) groups felt that rural women had found significant change in their livelihood or living conditions through DWACRA. Rural Women had been imparted with modern livelihood skills through them which further encouraged to have a change in their outlook by interaction with other rural women.

Pandey G.P. (1999) felt that the communication activity plays an important role in the process of development and that it would help people to accept and work towards development. Development communication can be seen as a tool for community mobilization and can be more effective if the objective of the communicator is clear without operating just on the periphery. According to him communication is equally important as an input in the whole development activity as other inputs.

In his study on "Television for Rural Development", Rao B.S.S. (1992) found out that greater part of the respondents felt that interpersonal communication channels were the main medium of communication. Further, it was observed that to a great extent the villagers delivered useful information through interpersonal communication. The prospective of effective communication and deliverance of information through the medium of Television was rather minimum and the viewers with no ideas of what television could offer to them resulted to apparent minimum interaction with the medium.

With similar findings, Jaiswal et al. (1978-79) stressed upon the significance of traditional media and found that a major role was played by the informal channel of communication in terms of discussion and final utilization of information than the mainstream channels such as mass media. It was also found out that even discussions on topics such as agriculture were highly dependent on communication amongst friends, relatives and neighbours.

III. METHODOLOGY

A multistage sampling method has been followed in the study. Considering the objectives of the study, a detailed list of SHGs has been procured from the promoting government department in the study area. At the time of sampling for the study, there were 1700 Women Self Help Groups (SHG) in about 13 Districts of Arunachal Pradesh with more than 15000 Women SHG members, as accounted by the Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSRLM). This comprised of the sampling framework for the study from which sample units were selected.

The study was purposively conducted in Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh, as the district has the high participation rate and is one of the most successful in terms of the Self Help Group movement.

Out of six blocks in Lower Subansiri district, two blocks namely Ziro-I and Yachuli were selected for the study. The two blocks recorded active SHG participation at the time of data collection and has largest number of SHGs registered under Arunachal State Rural Livelihood Mission in the district. A random sampling method was used in selecting the sample SHGs from the selected blocks. So, a total of eight SHGs were covered under this study. From each SHG, five members were included for the study. Thus, a total number of 40 members were interviewed for the study. The study has employed comprehensive interview schedule consisting of structured and unstructured questions, which is framed on the basis of objectives of the study. The women SHG members were interviewed using the interviewed schedule.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents In this study variables like age, education qualification, marital status, family size, occupation of the respondents and occupation of the husband were considered to examine the socio-personal characteristics of SHG members.

Age

As mentioned in Table 1, the maximum number of respondents belonged to middle age (50%) group, 37.5% of respondents belonged to young group and only 12.5 per cent of the respondents were from old age group category. Young and middle aged women are usually engaged in economic and social activities. Women belonging to this age group show more enthusiasm towards learning new things and have upper hand in grasping innovative ideas and information to grow economically.

Education Qualification

As regards to education, it was found that majority of the respondents (32.5%) had completed High school. 20 per cent had completed middle school and about 17.5 per cent completed primary school. Further, 22.5 per cent of the respondents were found to be illiterate. About 5 per cent of the respondents had reported that they had completed graduation and 2.5 per cent of them were post graduates.

Marital Status

As mentioned in the Table 1 most of the respondents were married (92.25%) and only 2.5 per cent respondents were found to be unmarried and 5 per cent of them were widows.

Occupation of the respondent

The study found that majority of the respondents (72.5%) had taken up agriculture as an occupation while 20.5 per cent were engaged in business. About 5 per cent relied on labour work for their earnings and 2.5 per cent had taken up other activities for their primary source of earnings.

Table 1. Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
1. Age (in years)	a. 20-35 (Young)	15	37.5
	b. 36-50 (Middle)	20	50
	c. 51-75 (Old)	5	12.5
2. Education	a. Illiterate.	9	22.5
	b. Primary School	7	17.5
	c. Middle School	8	20
	d. High School	13	32.5
	e. Graduate	2	5
	f. Post Graduate	1	2.5
3. Marital Status	a. Married	37	92.25
	b. Unmarried	1	2.5
	c. Widow	2	5
4. Occupation of the respondent	a. Household cum Agriculture	29	72.5
	b. Business	8	20
	c. Labour work	2	5
	d. Any other	1	2.5
5. Occupation of the spouse	a. Agriculture	22	55
	b. Business	5	17.5
	c. Labour work	9	22.5
	d. Any other	2	5
6. Family Size	a. Small (1-3 member)	6	15
	b. Medium (4-6 member)	25	62.5
	c. Large (7-9 member)	9	22.5

Occupation of the spouse

With a similar finding, 55 per cent of the spouse were engaged in agriculture based activities and 22.5 per cent were working as Labour. It was also found that 17.5 per cent of them were engaged in business and only 5 per cent of them reported making earnings from other activities.

Family Type

With regards to family size, it was found that majority of the respondents (62.5%) had medium size family, 22.5 per cent had large size family and 15 per cent had small size family.

Source of information and factors in formation of SHGs

As presented in Table 2, the majority of the respondents (62.5 %) had come to know about SHGs and other related information from the government agency. It was found that Arunachal State Rural Livelihood Mission through their prime facet of ensuring better and sustainable livelihood had focused on mobilizing the rural women effectively. About 32.5 per cent of respondents were informed about SHG from other SHG members who were already actively engaged in it. 2.5 per cent of respondents acquired information regarding SHG from family members and another 2.5 per cent of respondents were informed by the Anganwadi workers.

Table 2. Source of information in formation of SHG N:40

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Personnel contact	0	0
Family members	1	2.5
SHG members	13	32.5
NGO	0	0
Government Agency	25	62.5
Anganwadi workers	1	2.5

Motivational factors in formation of SHGs

The study shows that majority of the respondents (47.5 %) expressed financial problems as the prime motivational factor to join SHG, followed by Self dependency (25%). As shown in Table 1, majority of respondents had agriculture as their occupation, financial problems were common factor for most of them. About 12.5 per cent wanted to improve their social status and thus saw potential of growth in joining a SHG. Further, 10 per cent felt that joining a SHG would help them in securing them socially. Only 5 per cent of the respondents expressed employment generation as a motivational factor in formation of SHG.

Table 3. Motivational factors in formation of SHG N:40

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Financial Problems	19	47.5
Social Security	4	10
Employment generation	2	5
Self-dependency	10	25
Social Status	5	12.5

Approaches of communication adopted among SHG members

The SHGs are identified as a collective of members of community who work in unity towards a common goal, simultaneously facilitating the growth of social capital. The term social capital here talks about the principle and system to work in collective nature. Devi Prasad (2005) in his study explains how coordination and mutual trust is brought about by social capital and further engages collective action. In this context, an analysis has been made to examine the various approaches of communication that were adopted by the SHG members for effective engagement and strengthening of their bond as a group.

i) Two- step flow of communication: According to the two-step model by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), people may not necessarily be influenced by direct exposure of the mass media rather form opinion on matters based on the information that the opinion leaders interpret and is further disseminated to them. Similar approach was seen in the context of SHGs. The information about the SHG and related matters were first gathered by opinion leaders or to say leaders of communities in the village and disseminated to other members of social system in form of informal or formal conversations.

ii) Inter-personal communication: Diffusion of information can be seen as premediated process where information is sent out, to many individuals by a source. However, in a closely knit collective group like a SHG, inter-personal communication approach has been playing

a vital role in the transmission of information among the members of SHGs. It has been observed that majority of the members preferred engaging in inter-personal communication to not just stimulate an idea but also exchange effective communication. For instance, the government cluster coordinators sharing success stories of other SHGs and informing the rural women about the features of SHGs engages in inter-personal communication. According to Peters (1999), interaction in a form of dialogue or interpersonal communication can bring out opportunities for new things to be created. It was observed in this study that, inter personal communication was very frequent in a social setting of the SHG members who mostly hailed from villages. The limitation in geographical area and proximity to each other enables them to participated in one on one conversation about their daily chores and activities. It was also found that rural women were motivated to join SHGs after having interaction with other SHG members. Similar findings were done by Kadian and Kumar (2002) where the dairy farmers from Kangra in Himachal Pradesh were appraised of useful information through discussion with friends, their relatives and other progressive farmers.

iii) Group meetings: SHG group meetings are weekly congregation of SHG members planned to enable the members to take part in interchange of ideas and information on issues within the group and outside. The SHG members usually spend the day together to understand various matters related to the functioning of the group and often evolve with strategies for the same. It was found that the respondents attended 4-5 weekly meetings in a month. Further, these weekly group meetings provided the members a platform to be informed about innovative ideas evolving better options for income generating activities as a group. It is also worth noting that the members were found to be taking all decisions in joint nature through their weekly meetings by consensus approach and democratic process.

iv) Gram Sabha meetings: Apart from the micro-finance livelihood programme, the SHG members are now seen to be heading towards the village level activities. This can be witnessed in the recent initiatives taken for the convergence between women SHGs and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It was observed that members of SHGs are primarily immersed in participatory communication and often engaged in community-driven development. It is felt that SHG plays a vital role in bridging the pre-existing co-ordination gap between the administrative personnel and the villagers. An effective approach of communication and dissemination of crucial developmental information were undertaken by the members of SHGs, like information concerning various government schemes and awareness programmes. This facet of SHGs were taken into account by the government and therefore, mainstreaming of SHG members for developmental activities and participation of SHG members in village level congregations like Gram Sabha meetings were given an utmost priority. It has been felt by various developmental schemes that SHG as an institution are in a way raising the capacity of fellow villagers as well as the administration. Since the women SHG members were already engaged in regular interaction and dialogue with villagers, it gave them higher prospect to grasp the ground-level issues in the course of planning any developmental program and effective identification of the needs and requisites of the villagers. About 92 % of the respondents had reported attending Gram Sabha meetings and actively contributing in formulation and finalization of various activities in the village. Further, the responsibility of disseminating crucial information to the villagers and becoming the mediator of the community at a large has to a large extent paved a way for empowering women.

V. CONCLUSION:

From the findings of the study, it is apparent that SHG members make use of both informal and formal sources of information and communication. It was also observed that SHG members disseminated the assimilated and valued information to other women in the village and also participated in giving feedback to the administrative bodies. Through the study, it is felt that communication is not simply an exchange of information but also an agent of facilitating social change and empowerment. As Singhal and Rogers (2003) expresses, to achieve empowerment, a collective approach has to be adopted which includes effective dialogue between stakeholders. Similarly, SHG members are being engaged in participatory communication process in village levels for ground level facilitation. Apart from the approaches of communication discussed in the study, there are possibilities that more integrated approaches to communication can be incorporated for developing SHGs as a more sustainable and holistic organization.

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