

## **DYNAMICS OF WOMEN'S SELF HELP GROUPS IN MALABAR FISHERIES SECTOR: A CASE STUDY**

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The Self Help Groups (SHG's) organised by women fisherfolk play a vital role in the fisheries sector of India's maritime states. It is a matter of great concern that, despite the economic and socio cultural significance of fishing in Kerala state, the women fisherfolk are generally outside the mainstream of the society, and are economically disadvantaged, not accruing the benefits from the fishing industry. In particular, the Malabar areas of Kerala, forming about half the Kerala coastline, are more backward and less progressive than the rest of Kerala. Indeed, fisherfolk, especially women, rarely gain good benefits even when fish production is of local priority because fisheries development is often distinct from the development of the fishing community. To understand this disconnect, therefore, the present study examined the group dynamics of the existing SHG's mobilised by the development agencies for economic empowerment of women fish workers in the Malabar fisheries sector. The study undertook an analysis of whether the SHG's were a temporary phenomenon, or whether they would need to be sustained. Constraints have to be addressed and economic empowerment is needed in order to allow the SHG's to develop suitable, economically viable micro enterprises for income generation.

This Malabar area case study assessed the Group Dynamics of the SHG's of women fisherfolk, to identify the important dimensions contributing to their effectiveness, and to assist in economic empowerment of women's SHG's through training and adoption of economically viable, income-generating micro fisheries and allied enterprises. An attempt was made to identify the socioeconomic and technical constraints faced by the fisherfolk and assist in developing a strategy for mobilising and strengthening an effective SHG.

The study was undertaken in 4 districts in Malabar of Kerala state, namely Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikkode and Malappuram. From each of the district, three SHG's of women fisherfolk at random were selected, comprising a total of 12 SHG's. 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 sub-dimensions, namely, participation, influence and 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 revealed that all 12 dimensions were positively and significantly associated with GDEI. The most important dimensions affecting GDE are group atmosphere, participation and achievements of SHG. Among the personal and socio-psychological characteristics, variables such as education, income, socio-economic status, extension orientation, scientific orientation, mass media participation, social participation, extent to which cosmopolitan, knowledge, attitude towards SHG, attitude towards intervening agency, attitude towards other members of SHG and information source use pattern, had positive and significant influences on the GDEI of selected SHG's. Intensive empowerment programmes were undertaken, based on the needs of the SHG's for suitable micro enterprises in fisheries and allied sectors. Successful case studies on economic empowerment of women's SHG's were elucidated. The constraints on gender disparities were ranked and a 40 step strategy for mobilizing and strengthening an effective SHG for women fisherfolk was also developed.

The findings of the case study serve as a model for mobilising Self Help Groups for group action on a sustainable basis. The scale of GDEI can be used in similar future research in allied sectors. The identified interrelationships between the variables can act as catalytic points for promoting group empowerment, which might give useful insights into the plausibility of using the group dynamics network for strengthening the functioning of women's SHG's.