

Short Research Article**Whether Modular Capacity Building Tools are Effective in Empowering Self Help Groups (SHGs) in Rural India?****V. Sangeetha^{1*}, Nishi Sharma², Monika Wason¹, Premlata Singh¹ and R. N. Padaria¹**¹Division of Agricultural Extension, ²CATAT, ICAR-IARI, Pusa campus, New Delhi (110 012), India**Article History**

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Abstract

Self Help Groups (SHGs) have become the most important grass root level institutions in India. Capacity building of these groups in different areas is increasingly becoming important to make these institutions potential means for economic development of the country. Financial education and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is most important for the SHGs as it will lead to positive change towards their financial attitude, strengthen their financial capabilities to make sound decisions, lead them to greater financial access and aid in utilizing and sharing knowledge for socio-economic development of the group members. With this background, an attempt has been made to analyse the role of ICT and Financial Management (FM) modules in empowering rural women SHGs. In the present study, modules on ICT and FM were designed and then validated among fifty women SHG members and their change in knowledge level was assessed. It was found that average knowledge score of the members on ICT was 9.26 before and 16.94 after training and for financial management, it was 21.32 and 39.80 respectively. The results showed that an overall assessment score was 3.8 for ICT module and 4.2 for financial management. In both the modules, an overall utility was rated highest with mean score 4.3 and 4.9 for ICT and FM modules respectively. The study indicated the importance of capacity building modules and also the training which played a critical role in knowledge enhancement of rural women in using ICT tools and understanding financial management.

1. Introduction

In India, whether it is the problem of malnutrition or illiteracy; women, particularly rural women, are the most vulnerable compared to other segments of the population. Among several innovative steps for reducing the inequality, the Self Help Group (SHG) concept for microfinance advocated by the noble laureate, Mohammad Yunus, has brought a sea change in the socio-economic welfare of women. There are literatures which suggest that SHGs have played a critical role in women empowerment (Sangeetha et al., 2013; Sharma et al., 2014) and they are viable-organized set ups to disburse micro credit to the rural women and encouraging them together into entrepreneurial activities (Raheem, 2007). A SHG is a group of about 20 people from a homogeneous class, who come together to address their common problems, to make voluntary thrift on a regular basis and to get small interest bearing loans to their members. It helps them to build financial discipline and credit history for themselves, as the money involved in the lending operations is their own hard earned money saved over time with great difficulty (Harper, 1996). It helps in improving the living

and working conditions of the rural women by providing the much needed access to working capital and credit for initiating income generating activities (Kumar and Kalva, 2014). The group based approach not only enables the poor to accumulate the capital by way of small savings but also help them to get access to formal credit facilities (Shylendra, 1998). Satyam (2014) in his study reported that SHGs also enhanced the status of women as participants, decision makers and beneficiaries in democratic, economic and social spheres of life.

Today, SHGs are the most potential and influential grass root level social institutions in the country. No one ever imagined the success of SHG movement. There are, approximately 7.4 million SHGs in India (NABARD, 2013–14). Two important factors that have contributed to the success of SHG movement in India are strengthening of social capital through strong mobilization and organization process and capacity building. Apart from social capital, capacity building is of utmost important in order to bring these institutions as most potential ones for the economic development of the country. The study conducted by Hussain and Zafar (2012) reported that access



to credit enabled women to undertake income generating activities and this in turn had improved the financial status of households. Presently, various development organizations including Governmental and Non-Governmental organizations, and private sector institutions are involved in capacity building programmes realizing that SHGs can be a promising tool in empowerment of rural poor especially rural women. However, SHGs still face some problems like collection of money and repayments of loans (Singh et al., 2008) and very low awareness about capital, not able to manage finance (Dhanya and Sivakumar, 2010), lack of managerial abilities, lack of confidence etc. (Vatta and Singh, 2001). One of the best ways to solve this problem is financial education blending with information and communication technology (ICT) tools i.e. computer, internet and mobile phones that will positively change their financial attitude and behaviors, enable them achieve financial capabilities, help them to make sound financial decisions, have confidence in financial matters and lead them to greater financial access by effectively utilizing and sharing knowledge that is necessary for socio-economic development of the population especially rural women. Developing skills on using ICT tools help SHGs to strengthen their organizations, their own capacities for better negotiation skills, to interact with others, to increase transparency etc. Therefore, a systematic effort was made in this study to understand the role of capacity building programmes by using ICT and FM modules and their impact on knowledge of the SHG members. Specifically, the objective of the study was to design modules in the form of teaching learning materials on ICT & FM and to validate these capacity building modules in enhancing effectiveness of SHGs for gender empowerment.

2. Materials and Methods

This study was carried out under a research project on “Capacity Building of SHGs for Gender Empowerment”. The paper covers two phases i.e., development and validation of training modules. The modules were developed by the scientists involved in the project and then validated by the SHG members. Module is one of the learning objects, which tackles a single concept, information, procedure or fact that can be delivered independently. It has materials to deliver the needed learning or skill, and assessments to ensure skills have been acquired (Dodani, 2002). Validation is an assessment to determine whether the participants in a training session learned what the facilitator intended for them to learn. It helps to know what type of additional training and material may be needed to achieve skills. It also allows reflection and revision of training module to increase its effectiveness (Sara, 2009).

2.1. Phase I

Two set of training modules on ICT and Financial Management

were designed to develop the capacity of members of SHGs.

The major learning objectives of the module on ICT was on understanding the basic operations of a computer, how computer can be used to manage accounts of SHG members, its operating methods, how best mobile phones can be used and the operating mechanism of internet etc. This module was divided into three sections namely computer, internet and mobile phone. First section on computer covered the basic operations of a computer, how computer can be used to manage accounts of SHG members, its operating methods etc. Second section covered about opening of an internet account, composing and sending mails, surfing for information etc. and third section covered about the use of mobile phones, Short Message Service (SMS), Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS), video recording, voice recording etc. The modules on financial management were subdivided into five sections viz an introduction to financial management, record keeping and loan management, savings, managing inter-lending and linking with banks. First section on introduction of financial management was further divided into five sessions. Second section on record keeping and loan management contains two sessions; one on record keeping and other on record books. Sessions on saving stresses upon importance of saving in groups and how to save in groups. Managing inter-lending focused on ways to manage inter-lending and loaning. Section on linking with banks deals with need to open bank account, important criterion before opening a bank account and method of opening bank account.

2.2. Phase II

Validation and assessment of the training modules designed for their utility in capacity building of SHG members.

These modules were validated in the year 2014 with the purposively selected fifty women SHG members of Hapur district of Uttar Pradesh as it has over many SHGs mentored by a Non-Governmental Organization and Apna Tech Tree (ATT), an initiative by Connecting Dreams Foundation to impart digital literacy to women and youth, has been installed. And also according to the ICT diffusion index, Uttar Pradesh is one of the poor performers. Off campus training sessions were conducted based on the contents and methodology of the modules to the members of SHGs. The methodology of teaching was interactive based on experiential learning. To assess the impact of module on knowledge of the members about ICT and financial management, pre and post knowledge test were conducted between a gap of a month. For these tests, statements were developed based on the modules, which included fifty objective type questions from each module. For the right answer, the score was ‘1’ and for the wrong answer, it was ‘0’. The relevancy of the contents of modules were judged on the basis of eighteen parameters on a self rating scale on a three-point continuum comprising of disagree, neutral and

agree categories with the score value of 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The responses were elicited from 50 SHG members and the mean score was calculated for all the eighteen parameters such as quality of content, sufficiency of content, sequencing of content, usefulness of content etc. The 't'-test was employed to analyze the difference of means of knowledge score of SHG members due to capacity building programmes. The contents of the modules were finalized based on the results and feedback of the group members.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Profile of the respondents

The baseline survey revealed that a majority (42%) of the SHG members had never attended school. And around 58% of these women were in the middle age group of (35–45 years). These groups were less than three years old. They also had initiated some income generating activities involving minimal processing of agri-produce.

3.2. Assessment of change in knowledge

The knowledge level of SHG members before and after the training was measured to study the impact of training modules on knowledge level of SHG members. Before giving training to the members regarding ICT and financial management, a pre knowledge test containing fifty objective questions on each module was conducted. The total score was 50 for each module. The pre knowledge test score for ICT was 9.3 and for financial management, it was 21.3 (Table 1). After a gap of one month, a hands-on training programme on ICT and FM by using the modules was conducted. The members took active participation in the training programme. Immediately after the training programme, post knowledge test containing same questions was conducted and the score was 16.9 and 39.8 for ICT and FM respectively.

3.3. Validation of modules

To validate, relevancy of each module was judged on the eighteen parameters such as ease of understanding, simplicity of language, quality of content, motivation for learning etc. Each parameter was judged on a scale of three point continuum; the minimum score was one and the maximum

was three. The mean validation scores of each parameter of modules on ICT and financial management were worked out and are depicted in Table 2 and 3. The overall score on ICT module was 1.9 indicating module was relevant in imparting training to members of SHG in ICT. For ICT module, out of the eighteen parameters, the overall utility of the modules was given maximum score (2.3) followed by new learning taken place (2.2) implying high utility and importance of the module for the women SHG members.

The overall score of financial management module was 2.3 indicating that module was relevant in imparting training to SHG members for managing their finances. In FM module, respondents adjudged that the module was useful as highest score (2.9) was given to utility of the modules. They could feel that new knowledge had been acquired and language was easy to comprehend (2.8) followed by relevancy of the content and methodology of teaching and teaching approach (2.7). The 't' test clearly indicates that difference between mean scores of pre and post training of both these modules is highly significant (Table 3).

The results of the study show that there is a significant difference in knowledge score of the respondents for both the modules of ICT and FM and it clearly indicate the role of

Table 2: Validation score on different parameters of ICT modules

| Sl. No. | Parameters for ICT module | Mean score | Rank |
|---------|---|------------|------|
| 1. | Overall utility of modules | 2.3 | I |
| 2. | New learning taken place | 2.2 | II |
| 3. | Experiential learning approach used | 2.2 | II |
| 4. | Motivated for learning | 2.1 | III |
| 5. | Overall satisfaction with the modules | 2.1 | III |
| 6. | Quality of content | 2.1 | III |
| 7. | Interest created | 2.0 | IV |
| 8. | Sufficiency of content | 1.9 | V |
| 9. | Sequencing of content | 1.8 | VI |
| 10. | Application of content | 1.8 | VI |
| 12. | Relevancy of the content | 1.7 | VII |
| 13. | Participative approach | 1.7 | VII |
| 14. | Ease of understanding | 1.7 | VII |
| 15. | Recommendation of this training to other SHGs | 1.7 | VII |
| 16. | Language | 1.5 | VIII |
| 17. | Training met the expectations | 1.5 | VIII |
| 18. | Implementable/practicality | 1.0 | IX |
| | Overall score | 1.9 | |

Table 1: Change in knowledge due to training

| Training section | Average knowledge score (maximum score 50) | | Mean difference <i>t</i> -value |
|----------------------|--|---------------|---------------------------------|
| | Pre-training | Post-training | |
| ICT | 9.3 | 16.9 | 7.5* |
| Financial management | 21.3 | 39.8 | 18.5* |

Note: * indicates significant at $p=0.01$



Table 3: Validation score on different parameters of FM modules

| Sl. No. | Parameters for financial management module | Mean score | Rank |
|---------------|---|------------|------|
| 1. | Overall utility of modules | 2.9 | I |
| 2. | Language | 2.8 | II |
| 3. | New learning taken place | 2.8 | II |
| 4. | Application of content | 2.7 | III |
| 5. | Experiential learning approach used | 2.7 | III |
| 6. | Relevancy of the content | 2.7 | III |
| 7. | Overall satisfaction with the modules | 2.6 | IV |
| 8. | Ease of understanding | 2.3 | V |
| 9. | Interest created | 2.2 | VI |
| 10. | Quality of content | 2.2 | VI |
| 11. | Motivated for learning | 2.1 | VII |
| 12. | Participative approach | 2.1 | VII |
| 13. | Recommendation of this training to other SHGs | 1.9 | VIII |
| 14. | Sufficiency of content | 1.9 | VIII |
| 15. | Implementable/practicality | 1.5 | IX |
| 16. | Sequencing of content | 1.5 | IX |
| 17. | Training met the expectations | 1.5 | IX |
| Overall score | | 2.3 | |

trainings and importance of modules. Singh and Raj (2012) concluded that training was effective if messages were simple, familiar, understandable and real in educating the farm women while assessing the video compact disc in knowledge dissemination. There was an increase in knowledge level in case of ICT, however, it was not very high, perhaps, due to less exposure of SHG members to such ICT devices. Lalljee and Palmer-Canton (2001) in their study mentioned that knowledge may well be a necessary condition for changing behaviour but it is by no means a sufficient one. Burman et al. (2013) also reported that while 81.6% farmers had mobile phones whereas only 3.3% of farmers had owned computers.

Singh et al. (2011) in their study reported that overall appropriateness of developed e-module was scored higher than the rest of the parameters. Sharma et al. (2012) also concluded that trainees evaluated practical sessions as very effective in learning new skills. Kaur and Neena (2014) in their study mentioned that even though ICT has brought immense opportunities in all the sectors of the economy, it required more hands-on experience on a continued basis, infrastructure development and human capital investments and overcoming these bottlenecks will be a challenging task.

It is worthy to mention that United Nations Conference on

Trade and Development (2014) emphasized that ICT tools play a major role in helping women entrepreneurs to obtain improved access to basic information on financing and on their financial rights. ICT tools i.e. computer, internet and mobile phones play an important role in utilizing and sharing knowledge development of the population especially rural women. And thus improve access to financial information and thus increase women's financial literacy including learning and understanding on credits, savings, loan conditions and how to maximize their chances of obtaining loans (Paxton, 2014). Modern ICTs have lot of potential to create new employment opportunities and to improve the livelihood security of the SHG members. Information and knowledge, the important factors in bringing about women empowerment, will not be of much use unless these tools are utilized in a constructive way. Capacity building is necessary to make the most appropriate use of new ICTs (Michiels and Van Crowder, 2001; Richardson, 1997). However, it takes considerable long period of time to be adopted by those who seem most likely to benefit from their use. The penetration of ICT in rural areas remains at very low levels in comparison to urban areas. It is well known that the full benefit of this technology will be reaped only when there is availability of information about how to use these technologies effectively. Then only there is a chance for likely adoption of these technologies by different groups and segments of the economy, with their diverse preferences and abilities.

4. Conclusion

Skills in ICT tools and understanding financial functions are important for successfully running the activities of SHGs. The most important thing is that modules as teaching learning materials may be adapted in local situation to provide financial, technical and managerial support. Hence, capacity building by using modules especially ICT tools and understanding financial management is very important in knowledge enhancement in order to empower women especially rural women.

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6. References

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