NATIONAL RURAL LIVELIHOOD MISSION (NRLM) AND ITS ROLE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN NORTH LAKHIMPUR SUB-DIVISION OF ASSAM

Dr. Diganta Kumar Das
Assistant Professor, Deptt. of Accountancy Lakhimpur Commerce College North Lakhimpur, Assam
diganta.das1981@gmail..com

ABSTRACT

Microfinance to Self Help Groups (SHGs) may be considered as a vital option for meeting financial needs of the poor. The present research paper is an attempt to study the role of Micro-Finance under NRLM for the socio-economic development of the tribal community in the Lakhimpur sub-division of Assam. A survey on the social and economic impact of SHGs of the selected respondents was conducted at all the four development blocks of Lakhimpur sub-division. Primary and secondary data have been considered for the present study. For collecting primary data 10 numbers of Tribal member SHGs from sample development blocks have been selected by using stratified random sampling method. Again from each SHGs 5 tribal members have been randomly selected to make the total respondents as 200 (4X10x5=200 respondents). From the study it has been found that after joining the SHGs the poor tribal people have improved their living standard by performing various economic activities independently. The result of the data analysis revealed that the SHGs have been playing an important role in social-economic development at the study area.

Key word: Micro finance, NRLM, Self Help Group (SHG), Socio-economic development and Tribal Communities.

INTRODUCTION

In most of the developing countries, the tribals living in the rural areas are engaged in agriculture or other allied rural activities. Moreover they have remained ignorant and relegated from the main streams of national life. Many of the poor tribals living in the rural areas are still deprived of their basic needs of life today. These people are socially and economically not upgraded. Thus their development is to be very much concentrated in the process of socio-economic development. In India the tribal are considered as an integral part of social fabric (*Awais & et al 2009*). It is seen that more than 50 percent of rural tribal still live in below the poverty line and they comprise a large section of agricultural, informal, plantation, industrial labourers etc. (*Hazra, 2010*). The prominent tribal areas constitute about 15 percent of the total geographical area of the country (*Sukai, 2010*). Although a vast majority of rural tribals are dependent on their livelihood on farm and non-farm activities, even it does not provide strong financial position and employment opportunities throughout the years. Agriculture is a seasonal and the existing farming is also primitive, which provides for low land and low labour productivity to the rural tribals. Due to slow industrialisation, alternative employment opportunities cannot always be created for the rural tribals. The tribal population are still deprived of adequate access in the basic needs of life such as health, education, housing, food, security, employment, justice and equity.

On the other hand, it has been seen that women in general are the most disadvantaged group in Indian society. Similarly, tribal women are the most vulnerable group among the tribal population. Economic empowerment of tribal women is considered as an important part of any social or community development; otherwise, they become marginalised and get down from the society. A lot of changes can be possible through SHG movement in the process of empowerment of tribal women community particularly in Lakhimpur district of Assam. All these factors show the way to research on the present topic that how microfinance was contributing for development in low income tribal communities of Lakhimpur district and how microfinance through Self-Help-Groups (SHGs) specially under National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) was supporting in socio-economic upliftment among the tribal communities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

a. To study the demographic background of the respondents;
b. To understand the involvement of the tribal communities in income generating economic activities;
c. To study the socio-economic impact of microfinance through SHGs on the tribal communities under the study area;

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

For the purpose of the study the primary data were collected through field survey. The primary data were supplemented by the data collected from secondary sources like District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), District National Informatics Centre (DNIC), Office of the Block Development, Office of the Gram Panchayat, records of Banks, SHGs etc. Some secondary data were also be used for the present study which had been collected through various books, journals, magazines, relevant documents, brochures, reports and newspapers. For the purpose of the study four development blocks (namely Boginadi, Telahi, Bihpuria and Karunabari development blocks) have been selected according to their highest number of ST member SHGs. By using stratified random sampling method 10 tribal member SHGs from each sample blocks and from each sample SHGs 5 tribal members were selected. Thus, the total respondents for the present study were 200 (4X10x5=200). For analysing the data simple average method and percentage analysis have been used.

RESULTS FROM THE STUDY

Demographic background of the respondents:

The analysis on socio-economic background of the tribal members under the study area revealed that:

i) 54.0 percent of the tribal members were belonged to middle aged (31 -50 yrs.) group category, while 44.0 per cent were young (18-30 yrs.) and remaining i.e. 2.0 per cent were old aged (above 50 yrs.) group.

ii) 35.0 percent of the respondents were belonged to Mising caste followed by Kochari (30.0 percent) and only 5 percent were Bodo community.

iii) 20 percent of the tribal members were found illiterate, 26.0 per cent of them were functionally literate, 24.5 per cent of the respondents had education upto primary school, 15 per cent had received high school level education, 10 per cent received middle school education and only 4.5 per cent of them received college level education.

iv) 75.5 percent of the respondents were married, 12.0 per cent were separated, 6.5 per cent of the respondents were unmarried and 6.0 per cent were reported as widows.

v) 85.5 percent of the respondents had nuclear family while 14.5 per cent had belonged to joint family.

vi) Economic position of the family of the respondents indicated that 35.0 percent of the respondents were belonged to semi-medium income category (₹ 10,000- ₹. 30,000) followed by 29 percent respondents belonging to medium income category (₹.30,001- ₹ 50,000), 26.0 per cent of the respondents belonged to high income category (above ₹ 50,000), and only 10.0 per cent of them belonged to low income category (less than ₹ 10,000).

Involvement of tribal members in income generating activities:

The involvement of the tribal members on the income generating economic activities in pre-SHG and post-SHG period were analyzed in Table 1 as follows.

Table-1
Economic activities adopted by tribal members in pre-SHG and post-SHG stage

Activities Engaged	Before Joining SHG	After Joining SHG
No activity	49 (24.5)	Nil
Piggery	35 (17.5)	57 (28.5)
Goatery	19 (09.5)	21 (10.5)
Duckery	17 (08.5)	24 (12.0)
Weaving	12 (06.0)	19 (09.5)
Food Processing	Nil	04 (02.0)
Fishery	04 (02.0)	11 (05.5)
Poultry	06 (03.0)	20 (10.0)
Bee keeping	Nil	Nil
Dairy	02 (01.0)	08 (04.0)
Mushroom	Nil	Nil
Petty Business	02 (01.0)	10 (05.0)
Agricultural Farm	54 (27.0)	08 (04.0)
Other income generating activities	Nil	18 (09.0)
Total	***200(100)***	***200 (100)***

Note-( ) shows the percentage.

Source: Field Survey

Table 1 revealed that 24.5 percent of the respondents have no activity before joining the Self-Help Groups but in the post-SHG stage there has not a single person without any activity. Another significant aspect is that during the post-SHG period agricultural firm activities have reduced from 27.6 percent to 4.0 percent. From the Table 1 it has been observed that 28.5 percent of the respondents involved in Piggery business followed by Duckery (12.0 percent), Goatery (10.5percent), Poultry (10.5percent), weaving (9.5 percent), other income generating activities (9.0percent), Fishery (5.5percent), Petty Business (5.0 percent), Dairy (4.0 percent) and only 2 percent were engaged in food processing activities. It has also been observed that the food processing activities were started by these 2 percent of the respondents only after joining the groups which was nil at pre-SHG stage. As far as the bee-keeping and mushroom cultivation was concerned there was not a single respondent who has started the activities before and after joining the SHGs. From the Table 1 it can be concluded that the piggery activity emerged as the major activity started under SHGs by the respondents followed by Duckery, Goatery, Poultry, weaving, other income generating activities, Fishery etc.

Social impact of SHG activities on the respondents:

The social impact of SHG activities on the respondents after joining the group has been presented in Table 2 as under:

Table 2
Social impact of the respondents (Multiple Responses)

Sl. No.	Social Factors	SA	A	U	D	SD
i.	Better Social acceptability	132(66.0)	48(24.0)	10(5.0)	06(3.0)	04(2.0)
ii.	Well recognition in the family	131(65.5)	55(27.5)	10(5.0)	4(2.0)	0(0.0)
iii.	Equally participated with husband in family decisions	101(50.5)	79(39.5)	4(2.0)	14(7.0)	2(1.0)
iv.	Well recognition in the community	114(57.0)	80(40.0)	4(2.0)	2(1.0)	0(0.0)
v.	Active participation in social services	120(60.0)	74(37.0)	4(2.0)	2(1.0)	0(0.0)
vi.	Self dependence	133(66.5)	64(32.0)	2(1.0)	1(0.5)	0(0.0)
vii.	Improved in Literacy (e.g. able to read, sign etc.)	177(88.5)	20(10.0)	3(1.5)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)
viii.	Provided better schooling to my children	143(71.5)	23(11.5)	6(3.0)	18(9.0)	10(5.0)
ix.	Improved inter-personal relationships	155(77.5)	37(18.5)	4(2.0)	4(2.0)	0(0.0)
x.	Better contact (network) with outsiders	108(54.0)	74(37.0)	16(8.0)	2(1.0)	0(0.0)
xi.	No prejudice or class biases	181(90.5)	15(7.5)	4(2.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)
xii.	Little Improved standard of living	85(42.5)	67(33.5)	20(10.0)	16(8.0)	12(6.0)
xiii.	Gender inequalities	110(55.0)	78(39.0)	6(3.0)	6(3.0)	0(0.0)
xiv.	Better access to health services	131(65.5)	55(27.5)	10(5.0)	4(2.0)	0(0.0)
xv.	Better access to sanitation facility	101(50.5)	79(39.5)	4(4.0)	14(7.0)	2(1.0)

Source: Field Survey

Note:- 'SA'- *Strongly Agree*, 'A'- *Agree*, 'U'- *Undecided*, 'D'- *Disagree*, 'SD'- *Strongly Disagree*

- ( ) Shows the percentage.

From the Table 2 it has been observed that after joining the group many people have come to know about the respondents and their activity and show more interest in interacting with them. 90 percent of the respondents were opined about their social acceptability, while 5 percent were disagreed with that. More than fifty percent i.e. 50.5 percent of the women respondents were strongly agreed that they were equally take important decisions and issues connecting with their family along with their husbands. 97 percent of the respondents were agreed about their recognition in the community whereas only 1 percent was disagreed with that. 97 percent of the respondents agreed that they were actively participated in the social services in the area under study where only 1 percent was disagreed and 3.5 percent were undecided about that. As far as the self dependence was concerned 66.5 percent were strongly agreed and only 0.5 percent was disagreed with that. After joining the group 98.5 percent of the respondents have improved their literacy position and thereby provided better schooling facilities and improved health security to their children.

The study disclosed that after joining the groups, 96 percent of the respondents were improved their inter-personal relationship and had established well contract with the outsiders in the study area. The study also disclosed that 98 percent and 94 percent of the respondents respectively agreed that they had no class bias and gender inequalities in the study area, whereas only 3 percent were disagreed and 5 percent were undecided about that. After joining the group the standard of living of the respondents had also improved in the study area as 76 percent were agreed about that. They were improved their housing and sanitation conditions upto a certain extent after joining the groups

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SHG ACTIVITIES ON THE RESPONDENTS:

The economic impact of the respondents through microfinance has been presented and analyzed in Table 3 as under:

Table 3
Economic impact of the respondents (Multiple Responses)

Sl. No.	Economic Factors	SA	A	U	D	SD
i.	Access to credit facilities	164(82.0)	24(12.0)	08(04.0)	4(02.0)	0(0.0)
ii.	Access/control of financial resources & households	133(66.5)	32(16.0)	21(10.5)	10(05.0)	4(02.0)
iii.	Improved in food consumption pattern	150(75.0)	28(14.0)	20(10.0)	2(01.0)	0(0.0)
iv.	Increased in savings per month	137(68.5)	50(25.0)	13(06.5)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)
v.	Have own premises (land) to run business	49(24.5)	44(22.0)	0(0.0)	67(33.5)	40(20.0)
vi.	Minimized family dependence to money lenders	96(48.0)	69(34.5)	11(05.5)	24(12.0)	0(0.0)
vii.	Economically independent	87(43.5)	51(25.5)	25(12.5)	27(13.5)	10(05.0)
viii.	Minimized dependence to the husband	90(45.0)	56(28.0)	38(19.0)	14(07.0)	2(01.0)
ix.	Purchased gold for the children	08(04.0)	04(02.0)	78(39.0)	70(35.0)	40(20.0)
x.	Minimized family indebtedness	87(43.5)	44(22.0)	51(25.5)	16(08.0)	2(01.0)
xi.	Better access to necessary modern	39(19.5)	19(09.5)	96(48.0)	40(20.0)	6(03.0)

	technologies					

Source: Field Survey

Note:- 'SA'- *Strongly Agree*, 'A'- *Agree*, 'U'- *Undecided*, 'D'- *Disagree*, 'SD'- *Strongly Disagree*

- ( ) Shows the percentage.

It has been observed from the above Table 3 that 94 per cent of the respondents agreed that they were better access to the credit facilities after joining the group. 82.5 percent of the respondents have control of their financial resources and households whereas 7 percent of them were unable to control of their financial resources. On the other hand 89 percent of the respondents have changed their food consumption pattern and 10 percent were remained unchanged. 41 percent of the respondents had agreed that they were access to different business trainings, 10 percent were disagreed and 49 percent were undecided on that. The study also revealed that 82.5 percent, 73 percent and 65.5 percent of the respondents had minimised their family dependence on moneylenders, dependence to husband and family indebtedness respectively. As a result 93.5 percent of the respondents had increased their savings per month after joining the group. Economic independence from the family members, relatives etc. was also found to be encouraging as 69 percent of the respondents were feeling economically independent. On the other hand the results of the study indicate that more than half of the respondents had not their own premises to run their business and unable to purchase gold for their children's as 46.5 percent of the respondents had their own premises and only 6 percent were purchased gold for their children. 29 percent of the respondents had agreed that they were access to necessary modern technologies after joining the SHGs in the area under study.

Suggestions:

Based on the study the following suggestions have been given forward:

i) Training and awareness programme should be conducted regularly on accounts keeping procedures where accounting experts should invited so that the beneficiaries can develop their accounting knowledge and learn about the procedure of maintaining the cash books etc. properly.

ii) Target should be given for educating the tribal women for better functioning of the SHGs so that they can contribute a lot in the nation building.

CONCLUSIONS

Reducing poverty and maintain the social solidity is the basic spotlight of any development activity particularly in a economically backward region. So, initiatives will be required to take care of the growing socio-economic differences among the communities, especially the tribal. In an economically underdeveloped place like Lakhimpur, where the problem of flood always takes place, finance is a key to overcome the daily needs of the tribal. Instant finance on regular basis can play a significant role for improvement in social and economic life of the people living in the rural areas. In this regard, microfinance is expected to play a significant role in poverty alleviation and rural development particularly among the rural tribals. If microfinance has grown in its faster pace, definitely majority of the weaker section of the society will be economically benefited. It can be concluded from the present study that members of the SHGs were started savings and created funds only after joining the groups which was definitely helped them benefited not only socially but also economically in the area under study.

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