

Empowerment and Capacity Building of the Rural Women through forming Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

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Best Practice

1. Title of the Practice:

Empowerment and Capacity Building of the Rural Women through forming Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

2. Objective of the Practice:

SHG approach is followed to improve the socio-economic condition of the rural people particularly rural women. Spirit of self-reliance and self-sustenance is developed through SHGs of rural women. It inculcates the habits of savings among the rural women and enable them to pool their own resources to use for their income generation. It also intends to develop the spirit of co-operation and self-help in the rural community.

3. The Context:

The Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension (REC), Visva-Bharati has reach extension wing from inceptions and it has been playing the role of advocacy for the co-operative way of living with integration, local initiatives, local leadership and local self-governance in every aspect of public life as envisaged by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. On the basis of ideology of cooperative principles of rural reconstruction, REC has taken initiative to form SHGs since the year 1999 in surrounding 33 villages of Sriniketan including tribal hamlets for small savings, creation of assets and income generation particularly among women of backward communities.

4. The Practice:

SHGs have been taking various entrepreneurial initiatives for improving socio-economic condition of the members apart from their regular

meetings, savings, linkages with banks, etc. Out of these activities, fish farming, small business, agriculture and livestock are important. During past years, SHG members have also participated in different awareness programme organised by the Department such as 'Swachha Bharat Avijan', and awareness programme on 'health, hygiene and cleanliness' and awareness against COVID-19. A total of 80 SHGs are formed in the villages and 20 SHGs are formed in the tribal hamlets of Santiniketan.

5. Evidence of Success:

The success SHGs may be conceptualised on the basis of their sustainability, utilization of local resources and self-reliance. SHGs are developing important institutions in village life to promote confidence among backward women in different aspects of life in decision making. Members of the SHGs are more organised in terms of small saving, transaction with banks, and group lending on regular basis. They are invoiced in agriculture, livestock, handicrafts and different types of small business activities to add value in their family income and creation of different assets in their family. Most of the SHGs are involved in managing and cooking mid-day meal in schools, kitchen gardening, fisheries, vermin compost, horticulture, etc. activities in the villages.

SHG of tribal hamlets of Santiniketan area has taken initiative to form *Mahadal* - a cluster of SHGs and members of *Mahadal* are involved in campus cleaning activities and they are also providing different multi-tasking services to the University. Tribal SHGs are getting regular job which help them for improving their

standard of living. More than 100 women from 100 families are employed on a regular basis and they have been uplifted to the APL category from BPL. This practice is very unique and innovative, which may be replicated in other parts of the country.

6. Problems Encountered:

Utilization of accumulated funds in SHGs in a systematic way is one of the problems due to lower level of awareness and standard of education among rural women. Sometimes, conflict arises in group mechanism due to ignorance and political interference in village life. Problems of marketing of agricultural and handicrafts products are another area of concern for members of SHGs.

