

## Features of Self Help Groups (SHGs) of Burdwan District, West Bengal

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### Abstract

Self-help groups (SHGs) are playing a major role in rural India today. The group-based model of self-help is widely practiced for rural development, poverty alleviation and empowerment of women. It intends to mobilize people, to give them voice and build people's organizations that will overcome barriers to participation and empowerment. Central to the idea of self-help is the formation of groups, concept of a community and the development of egalitarian relationships that will promote people's well-being. The self-help model in India facilitates institution-building in the form of people's organizations, groups, clusters and federations. Most of the SHGs of Burdwan district, West Bengal are female groups. Most of the members take up only a single economic activity. Some important factors behind the group formation are thrift and credit, income generation opportunity and some social opportunities. Neighborhood and gender are the most vehemently used criteria for association of the members to form different groups in the study area. Savings and credits are the most centered agenda of the meetings for most of the groups.

**Key words :** Self help groups, Burdwan district, Economic activities, Motivating factors.

A SHG is a group of about 20 people from a homogeneous class, who come together for addressing their common problems. They are encouraged to make voluntary thrifts on a regular basis. They use this pooled resource to make small interest bearing loans to their members. The process helps them imbibe the essentials of financial intermediations including prioritization of needs, setting terms and conditions accounts keeping. The self help groups (SHGs) were introduced as a way to reduce poverty and to promote capacity building, to assist rural communities in their efforts to utilize resources, to access information and to gain better access to savings and credits. The self-help model in India facilitates institution-building in the form of people's organizations, groups, clusters and federations. The poor, however, seldom organize themselves. It is an assisted self-help process where the State, the financial institutions and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role in mobilizing and assisting the poor and the needy (1—4). Though the concept of self-help groups and its workings have not been employed much ago in India, but a good amount of evaluation and finding about the groups functioning could take

our attention. It has been conceived that the self-help groups can be used as a sophisticated weapon against poverty and un-employment effectively in developing and underdeveloped counties. In the poverty-ridden and resource-lacking economies, this concept can do much in building resources along with confidence among the poor and hence the groups have gained considerable momentum in operation over the years since its inauguration in 1992. So, several research studies have been taken to find out the shortcomings and prospects of self-help groups concentration functioning all over the world. The present study has been taken up to study some features of SHGs of Burdwan district, West Bengal. The specific objectives of the paper were to study the status, date of formation, number of current and initial members, age-wise distribution pattern of members and level literacy of the members of the sample SHGs; to study the monthly savings and number of economic activities taken up by the members of the sample SHGs; to analyze the motivating factors, response of members to the functioning of the SHGs and criteria for selection of group members.

**Table 1.** Distribution of SHGs on the basis of date of formation and number of members (April 2006—March 2007).

	Name of the group	Status	Location	Date of formation	No. of members	
					Current	Initial
1	Jhupoma	Female	Word No-16, Katwa Municipality	Jun 2005	11	10
2	Maaganga	„	Word No-1, Katwa Municipality	Feb 2007	16	11
3	Aagamani	„	Sudpur, Katwa-1	May 2005	8	8
4	Rakshamata	„	Bandhmura, Katwa-1	Jun 2006	9	11
5	Saroda	„	Word No-3, Katwa Municipality	Nov 2004	15	15
6	Sri Laxmi	„	Word No-15, Katwa Municipality	Jan 2005	10	9
7	Binapani	„	Word No-3, Katwa Municipality	Oct 2004	8	8
8	Ambika	„	Durgagram, Katwa-1	Oct 2002	11	11
9	Amra Kajan	Mixed	Durgagram, Katwa-1	Jun 2002	12	11
10	Shiba Durga	Female	Word No-9, Katwa Municipality	Jul 2006	13	13
11	Durgamata	„	Word No-9, Katwa Municipality	Jan 2007	8	8
12	Mahamaya	„	Durgagram, Katwa-1	Apr 2002	7	6
13	Beli	„	Ramakrishnapur, Katwa-1	Oct 2003	8	10
14	Mahila Mangal	„	Gopalpur, Katwa-1	Jul 2003	9	9
15	Saraswati	„	Durgagram, Katwa-1	Oct 2003	6	6
16	Taj	„	Ramakrishnapur, Katwa-1	Aug 2003	9	10
17	Golap	„	Durgagram, Katwa-1	Jun 2004	10	10
18	Manasa	„	Bandhmura, Katwa-1	Aug 2003	10	6
19	Netaji	Male	Ramakrishnapur, Katwa-1	Jun 2000	7	7
20	‘Sirajddola	„	Sudpur, Katwa-1	Jun 2005	13	13
21	Jaimatadi	„	Durgagram, Katwa-1	28 Dec 2004	6	6
22	Baba Panchanan	„	Bandhmura, Katwa-1	Oct 2003	8	8
23	Rose	Female	Bandhmura, Katwa-1	Oct 2003	14	12
24	Nibedita	„	Word No-1, Katwa Municipality	Jun 2005	11	11
25	Lokenath	„	Word No-1, Katwa Municipality	Sep 2005	11	11
	Pooled				250	240

### Methods

The study is carried out in Katwa-I Block, comprising rural and municipal area, in the district of Burdwan, West Bengal. This study was conducted on 25 SHGs which are randomly selected with the help of simple random sampling method without replacement. Out of these SHGs, 18 are maintained under two co-operative societies (viz. Bandhura SKUS Ltd. and Sudpur SKUS Ltd.) which are further linked to the District Central Co-operative Bank, Burdwan (Katwa Branch); one group is maintained by an NGO (Sri Sanchari NGO) which links that group to the State Bank of India; and the rest six SHGs are directly linked to the bank. An individual schedule and a group schedule have been prepared for the purpose of thorough data collection regarding several aspects of the study concerned. Selection of the individual respondents were done randomly on the basis of availability of responses that could be available depending on the time and chance factors of the respondents. For the collection of group-related data as a whole, only

the group leaders were approached. Emphasis was given on tabular method of analysis. However various formulae were used to fulfill the objectives. The reference period for the study was from April 2006 to March 2007.

### Results and Discussion

This paper presents the analysis of several characteristic features of the SHGs as a whole. This consists of those criteria of the SHGs which are not directly related to the credit linked features of the groups.

Table 1 gives the name of the sample SHGs, which were surveyed during the collection of data in the study area covering their status, location, date of formation, and both current and initial number of members. Out of total 25 groups, there are only 4 male groups, 1 mixed group and 20 female groups. This indicates that the study area is dominated by female groups. Netaji is the oldest group which has been formed in 2000. Another group named as Sirajuddola

**Table 2.** Age-wise distribution of self help groups (April 2006—March 2007). (a), (b), (c), (d) columns represent percent of the number of the members in that specific age category in relation to total number of members of the respective group.

Name of the SHGs	Status of the SHGs	Age wise group distribution								Total	
		18—25	(a)	26—35	(b)	36—50	(c)	Above 50	(d)		
1	Jhupama	Female	1	9.09%	7	63.64%	1	9.09%	2	18.18%	11
2	Maa Ganga	„	5	41.67%	7	58.33%	—	0.00%	—	0.00%	12
3	Aagamani	„	2	20.00%	4	40.00%	2	20.00%	2	20.00%	10
4	Rakshamata	„	6	42.66%	6	42.86%	2	14.29%	—	0.00%	14
5	Saroda	„	—	0.00%	7	77.78%	2	22.22%	—	0.00%	9
6	Sri Laxmi	„	7	46.67%	4	26.67%	4	26.67%	—	0.00%	15
7	Binapani	„	—	0.00%	7	77.78%	2	22.22%	—	0.00%	9
8	Ambika	„	—	0.00%	4	50.00%	4	50.00%	—	0.00%	8
9	Amra Kajon	Mixed	1	9.09%	2	18.18%	8	72.73%	—	0.00%	11
10	Shibadurga	Female	2	16.67%	8	66.67%	2	16.67%	—	0.00%	12
11	Durgamata	„	2	15.38%	8	61.54%	2	15.38%	1	7.69%	13
12	Mahamaya	„	2	25.00%	5	62.50%	1	12.50%	—	0.00%	8
13	Beli	„	1	14.29%	6	85.71%	—	0.00%	—	0.00%	7
14	Mahila Mangal	„	—	0.00%	7	87.50%	1	12.50%	—	0.00%	8
15	Saraswati	„	—	0.00%	8	88.89%	1	11.11%	—	0.00%	9
16	Golap	„	2	25.00%	6	75.00%	—	0.00%	—	0.00%	8
17	Taj	„	1	11.11%	8	88.89%	—	0.00%	—	0.00%	9
18	Manasa	„	—	0.00%	2	22.22%	6	66.67%	1	11.11%	9
19	Rakshakali	„	2	20.00%	5	50.00%	2	20.00%	—	0.00%	10
20	Rose	„	2	14.29%	6	42.86%	3	21.43%	3	21.43%	14
21	Lokenath	„	2	20.00%	5	50.00%	2	20.00%	1	10.00%	10
22	Netaji	Male	1	14.29%	6	85.71%	—	0.00%	—	0.00%	7
23	Sirajuddoulla	„	3	23.08%	8	61.54%	2	15.38%	—	0.00%	13
24	Jai Matadi	„	1	16.67%	5	83.33%	—	0.00%	—	0.00%	6
25	Baba Panchanan	„	3	37.50%	5	62.50%	—	0.00%	—	0.00%	8
Total			46	18.40%	146	58.40%	48	19.20%	10	4.00%	250

has been founded under the supervision of an NGO namely, Sri Sanchari and that group is credit-linked to of State Bank of India, Katwa Branch. All the groups are formed between the period ranging from 2000 to 2007. Most of the groups which is in the rural area have been founded earlier, which indicate that the initiation of formation of the group has occurred in the rural area firstly and then the task of forming SHGs has been shifted towards the municipal area. In terms of increment in number of the members, Maa Ganga has only shown a merked change. It has increased the number of the members by a margin of nearly 45.5%. When all the groups are considered together, it appears where initial members were 240 at the starting point, it only increases to 250 in number (4% increase). It is also realized that the groups have not done much to increase in their number of members.

Table 2 shows the age-wise distribution pattern the members of the SHGs under study. Out of total

250 members, 146 (58.4%) belong to age category 26—35 years, whereas 48 (19.20%) and 46 (18.40%) members belong to age category 36—50 years and 18—25 years respectively. But only 10 (4%) members belong to the age category above 50 years. The highest number of the members belonging to age category 26—35 years is 8 in number which is observed in each of the groups Shiva Durga, Durga Mata, Saraswati, Taj and Sirajuddola. The age group 25—35 years represent a significantly high percentage (i.e. 58.40%) of the total members.

The distribution of members of the SHGs surveyed in relation to literacy and level of education shows that considering all groups 25.20% members are illiterate, whereas 74.80% members are literate (Table 3). Most people are educated upto secondary standard (30%) and there are few people who have completed intermediate standard (i.e. 6%) and a few belong to graduation and above (1.6%).

The male groups are advanced in terms of lit-

**Table 3.** Distribution of SHGs in relation to literacy and level education (April 2006—March 2007).

Name of the SHGs	Status	No. of illiterates	No. of literates	Level of education				Percentage of literacy
				Primary	Secondary	Higher secondary	Graduation & above	
1. Jaimatadi	Male	0	6	—	—	3	3	100.00%
2. Sirajddoulla	„	3	10	4	6	—	—	76.92%
3. Netaji	„	0	7	—	7	—	—	100.00%
4. Maaganga	Female	0	12	4	6	2	—	100.00%
5. Golap	„	3	3	—	—	—	—	50.00%
6. Saraswati	„	7	2	—	—	—	—	22.22%
7. Mahila Mangal	„	5	3	1	—	—	—	37.50%
8. Beli	„	4	3	—	—	—	—	42.86%
9. Mahamaya	„	5	3	1	—	—	—	37.50%
10. Durgamata	„	2	11	7	2	—	—	84.62%
11. Shiba Durga	„	1	12	4	4	2	—	92.31%
12. Amra Kajan	„	1	10	3	3	—	—	90.91%
13. Ambika	„	5	3	1	1	—	—	37.50%
14. Binapani	„	2	7	2	2	—	—	77.78%
15. Sri Laxmi	„	1	14	4	5	1	—	93.33%
16. Saroda	„	2	7	2	3	1	—	77.78%
17. Aagamani	„	2	6	1	1	1	—	75.00%
18. Rakshamata	„	0	16	6	9	1	—	100.00%
19. Jhupoma	„	2	9	3	4	1	1	81.82%
20. Baba Panchanan	Male	2	6	2	4	—	—	75.00%
21. Jui	Female	2	7	5	2	—	—	77.78%
22. Manasa	„	3	8	5	3	—	—	72.73%
23. Annapurna	„	5	6	1	5	—	—	54.55%
24. Lokenath	„	3	8	2	4	2	—	72.73%
25. Nibedita	„	3	8	3	4	1	—	72.73%
Total		63	187	61	75	15	4	74.80%

eracy (range 75—100%). But some of the female SHGs like Maa Ganga, Durga Mata, Shib Durga, Amra Kajan, Binapani, Sri Laxmi, Sarada, Rakshamata, Jhupoma are much advanced in terms of literacy (range 75—100%). Maximum of these female groups belong to Katwa Municipal area. Muslim population lags behind (e.g. Sirajuddola, a male group and Golap, Beli female group). The overall literacy percentage for all groups as a whole is 74.8%. This may be because of literacy drive taken by the state government.

The monthly subscription for different SHGs ranges between rupees ten to hundred (Table 4). About 54.54% of the groups have the monthly savings amounting to rupees twenty. About 27.27% of the groups has the monthly savings amounting rupees fifty. One group namely Jai Matadi only has the monthly saving of rupees one hundred.

There are 98.40% of members, who are engaged in single economic activity, whereas only 1.6% have taken up two economic activities simultaneously. The

male respondents, due to lack of resource, are unable to take more than one activity. Those members who have more than one activity are actually engaged in seasonal activities; besides farming, they occasionally do works on daily wage basis during the off-season. None of the sample population is engaged in more than two activities.

Some of the most of important factors behind the group formation is thrift and credit, income generation opportunity and some social opportunities. Twenty three (41.82%), 19 (34.55%) and 13 (23.64%) out of 55 SHGs are in favor of the thrift and credit, income generation opportunity and some social opportunities respectively. The total number of members who are satisfied about the existence and the operation of the groups in a way or another are 242 (96.8%). Only three members (1.2%) are indifferent to the group approach, while five members (2%) responded in a negative manner. The number of meetings per month in most of the groups is two though

**Table 4.** Distribution of SHGs based on monthly savings, number of economic activities taken and economic conditions of the group members (April 2006—March 2007). Sub-columns (a) and (b) represent the respective percentage of no. of economic activities.

Name of the SHGs	Status	Monthly subscription (Rs)	Single	No. of economic activities				Total
				(a)	Two	(b)	More	
1 Jhupoma	Female	50	11	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	11
2 Maaganga	„	50	12	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	12
3 Aagamani	„	25	8	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	8
4 Rakshamata	„	50	16	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	16
5 Saroda	„	20	9	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	9
6 Sri Laxmi	„	20	15	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	15
7 Binapani	„	20	10	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	10
8 Ambika	„	20	12	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	12
9 Amra Kajan	Mixed	20	11	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	11
10 Shiba Durga	Female	50	12	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	12
11 Durgamata	„	20	13	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	13
12 Mahamaya	„	20	8	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	8
13 Beli	„	20	7	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	7
14 Mahila Mangal	„	20	8	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	8
15 Taj	„	20	9	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	9
16 Rakshakali	„	10	10	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	10
17 Saraswati	„	25	9	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	9
18 Golap	„	25	10	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	10
19 Netaji	Male	50	7	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	7
20 Sirajddola	„	50	13	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	13
21 Jaimatadi	„	100	6	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	6
22 Baba Panchanan	„	10	4	50.00%	4	50.00%	—	8
23 Lokenath	Female	25	8	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	8
24 Rose	„	10	8	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	8
25 Manosa	„	10	10	100.00%	—	0.00%	—	10
Pooled			246	98.40%	4	1.60%	0	250

there are some groups where three meetings have been conducted in a month and few group also conducts four meetings per month. But most of the groups call in more than two meetings when there emerges any special need. All the groups are maintaining proper records of the group activities along with the agenda and discussions of the meetings and several criteria related to loan disbursement and deposit and collection. Most of the groups (20) state that neighborhood is the main factor that is used for selection of group members. Besides, caste (13 SHGs), social affinity (9 SHGs) and homogeneity in socio-economic condition (13 SHGs) also play significant role for selection of members to form groups. As there is only one mixed group out of 25 groups in the study area, so we conclude that gender is important used criteria for association of the members to form different groups in the study area.

The savings and credits are the most centered

agenda of the meetings for most of the groups. Discussions on different socio-economic activities have significant importance in agenda of the meetings. About 68% among the total 25 groups assert that health and family issues are also included in their discussions, while 48% engage themselves in making aware of their members about several government sponsored programs. Only two groups (8%) take environmental issues as a serious matter of concern in their meetings.

#### Conclusion

The study area is dominated by female groups, female members constituting about 87.9% of total number of members. The number of members in an SHG ranges between 4 and 16. Members belonging to age group 25—35 years represent a significantly high percentage. Most of the members are educated up-to secondary standard. The monthly subscription

for different SHGs ranges between rupees ten to hundred. Most of the members take up only single economic activity. Some of the most important factors behind the group formation are thrift and credit, income generation opportunity and some social opportunities. Neighborhood and gender are the most important criteria for association of the members to form different groups in the study area. Savings and credits are the most centered agenda of the meetings for most of the groups.

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