

# Overcoming Women Empowerment Challenges Through Self-Help Group Interventions in Salem District, Tamil Nadu

Mr. B. Arul Kumar<sup>1</sup>, Dr. R. Tamilarasi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D., Research Scholar (Part Time), Department of Economics, Periyar University, Salem

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Salem Sowdeswari College, Salem

**Abstract**—This study examines how Self-Help Group (SHG) interventions address women empowerment challenges in Salem District, Tamil Nadu. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 150 SHG members to understand their experiences, obstacles, and achievements. The research identifies key barriers to women's empowerment including limited financial access, restricted decision-making autonomy, and inadequate family support. Results demonstrate that SHG participation significantly enhances women's self-confidence, management capabilities, and communication skills. Members gained improved access to credit facilities, adopted better financial management practices, and diversified their income sources, leading to measurable poverty reduction. However, persistent challenges remain: difficulty in group formation and sustainability, insufficient market linkages for SHG products, and continued resistance from family members. The study recommends strengthening SHG institutional frameworks, establishing direct market connections for women entrepreneurs, and implementing gender-sensitive awareness programs targeting families and communities. These interventions can maximize SHG effectiveness in promoting women's economic independence, social empowerment, and sustainable livelihood development in Salem District.

**Index Terms**—Self-Help Groups, women empowerment, socio-economic development, gender equality, poverty alleviation, livelihood enhancement, and gender-responsive development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Salem District of Tamil Nadu, the notion of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has taken root over the past two decades, evolving into a pivotal movement aimed at catalyzing the region's economic development.

Primarily comprising women, these SHGs have emerged as a transformative force, not only bolstering the economic standing of individual members but also contributing significantly to the upliftment of their families and communities. The involvement of women in SHGs has facilitated their integration into the mainstream economy, thereby propelling the nation towards comprehensive development. Indeed, the empowerment of women has emerged as a central tenet in the pursuit of societal progress, with recognition of their agency being imperative for holistic development. By empowering women, societies tap into a potent source of advancement, leveraging their capabilities to drive lasting change across various spheres. The economic empowerment of women, underscored by their active participation in SHGs, serves as a barometer of a nation's developmental trajectory, signaling a shift towards inclusive growth. However, despite strides in economic development, the empowerment of women remains a pressing concern, with disparities persisting in various facets of life. Addressing these constraints necessitates a multifaceted approach, with SHGs emerging as a vital instrument for mitigating the challenges faced by women in Salem District. Through collective action and mutual support, SHGs provide a platform for women to address systemic barriers and access resources that were previously beyond their reach. Furthermore, SHGs serve as catalysts for social change, fostering solidarity and resilience within communities. By pooling resources and expertise, women in SHGs are better equipped to confront socio-economic challenges and advocate for their rights. Moreover, the formation of SHGs has

revolutionized the landscape of credit delivery in Salem District, offering a lifeline to the most marginalized segments of society, including small farmers and landless agricultural laborers. In essence, SHGs represent a beacon of hope for women in Salem District, offering not only economic opportunities but also a platform for collective empowerment and social transformation. Through their concerted efforts, SHGs are breaking down barriers and paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for all. Now, the present research work attempts to analyse the problems faced by the SHG women and handling different techniques to solve issues through self-help group in Salem district of Tamil Nadu.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the commendable efforts by the Government of India to enhance the status and role of women, challenges persist in achieving meaningful empowerment for women in society. While women's participation in various organizations has undoubtedly increased their visibility and influence, systemic barriers continue to impede their full integration into socio-economic spheres. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as a vital mechanism for empowering women and addressing these challenges, offering a platform for collective action and transformation. The strength of SHGs lies in their grassroots approach, recognizing that those facing problems are often the most committed to solving them. However, the inability of formal credit institutions to adequately reach rural women due to the high costs of administering small loans has necessitated the intervention of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in facilitating access to credit through informal group structures. Understanding the attitudes, perceptions, and socio-economic backgrounds of women beneficiaries within SHGs is crucial for identifying and addressing the barriers they face. Empowering women is not only instrumental in poverty eradication but also essential for the overall economic development of society. Women's participation in both remunerative and non-remunerative work is a cornerstone of economic progress, and the formation of SHGs has instilled confidence and self-reliance among members. In India, SHGs represent a unique avenue for financial

inclusion, with microfinance activities not only providing access to loans but also fostering savings habits, credit management skills, and investment in micro-insurance and money transfer services. The Kudumbashree program in Kerala exemplifies the transformative potential of SHGs in poverty alleviation and women's empowerment, highlighting the role of micro-credit activities in lifting families out of poverty traps. However, in Salem District, significant constraints continue to hinder women's empowerment and the effective functioning of SHGs. These constraints may include socio-cultural norms, limited access to resources and education, lack of support networks, and inadequate institutional frameworks. Addressing these constraints requires a holistic approach that combines targeted interventions, capacity building initiatives, and policy reforms aimed at fostering an enabling environment for women's empowerment and the sustainable development of SHGs.

### Research Objectives

1. To examine the attitudes of SHG members regarding the social impact of their participation.
2. To identify and assess the challenges encountered by women members within Self-Help Groups in Salem District, Tamil Nadu.

## III. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The methodology employed in this study aimed to examine the attitudes of women beneficiaries within Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Salem District, Tamil Nadu, regarding their social impact, as well as to identify and assess the challenges encountered by them. A convenience sampling technique utilized to gather data from 150 respondents, comprising women actively participating in SHGs. Both primary and secondary data sources utilized for this study. Primary data collection involved structured surveys and questionnaires administered to the sampled respondents, while secondary data obtained from relevant literature and existing records. To analyze the primary data, several statistical tools were employed, including Simple Percentage Analysis to gauge the prevalence of various attitudes and perceptions among SHG members, Chi-square analysis to determine the association between different variables, Friedman rank test to assess any

significant differences in attitudes over time or across different factors, T-TEST Analysis to compare means between different groups, Descriptive Statistics to summarize and describe the data, and One-way ANOVA to analyze variance among groups based on different factors. By employing this comprehensive array of statistical techniques, the research aimed to gain a nuanced understanding of the attitudes and challenges faced by women beneficiaries in SHGs within Salem District. The utilization of both quantitative and qualitative methods enabled a holistic exploration of the constraints hindering women's empowerment and the efficacy of SHGs in addressing these challenges. This methodology provided valuable insights into the dynamics of women's participation in SHGs and their potential for fostering socio-economic empowerment in the region.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

TABLE 1  
TYPE OF SKILLS IMPROVED BY THE SHG RESPONDENTS

Improving which type of skills	Respondents	Percentage
Communicating Skill	35	23
Management Skill	56	37
Self - Empowerment	59	39
Total	150	100

Source: Primary data

Table 1 presents data on the types of skills improved by Self-Help Group (SHG) respondents in Salem District, Tamil Nadu. It indicates that a significant portion of respondents reported improvements in various skill areas. Notably, the highest percentage of respondents (39%) identified self-empowerment as a skill that has been enhanced through their participation in SHGs. This finding underscores the transformative impact of SHGs in fostering self-confidence, assertiveness, and self-reliance among women members. Moreover, 37% of respondents reported improvements in management skills, indicating that SHGs serve as platforms for developing organizational and leadership capabilities. Additionally, 23% of respondents highlighted improvements in communication skills, suggesting that SHGs facilitate effective interpersonal

interactions and the exchange of ideas among members. Overall, the data reflect the multifaceted benefits of SHG participation, extending beyond economic empowerment to encompass personal and professional growth. By equipping women with a diverse set of skills, SHGs empower them to navigate various challenges, advocate for their rights, and contribute meaningfully to their families and communities. Thus, the findings underscore the integral role of SHGs in promoting holistic development and women's empowerment in Salem District.

TABLE 2  
REPAYMENT OF SHG LOAN

Repayment of loan	Respondents	Percentage
In Advance	38	25
On Time	82	55
Late	30	20
Total	150	100

Source: Primary data

Table 2 insights into the repayment behavior of Self-Help Group (SHG) respondents in Salem District, Tamil Nadu. It reveals that a majority of respondents, constituting 55%, adhere to timely repayment of loans obtained through SHGs. This observation indicates a strong sense of financial discipline and responsibility among the members, reflecting positively on the efficacy of SHG lending mechanisms in promoting financial accountability. Additionally, 25% of respondents repaid their loans in advance, underscoring their proactive approach towards meeting financial obligations and potentially signaling improved financial stability. However, it is noteworthy that 20% of respondents reported late repayments, suggesting potential challenges or constraints faced by a segment of SHG members in fulfilling their loan obligations promptly. Understanding the reasons behind late repayments, such as unexpected financial hardships or inadequate support mechanisms, is crucial for designing targeted interventions to support vulnerable members and ensure the sustainability of SHG lending initiatives. Overall, the data suggest that SHGs play a pivotal role not only in providing access to credit but also in fostering responsible financial behavior and promoting a culture of timely loan repayment among members in Salem District.

TABLE 3  
ECONOMIC ACTIVITY TAKEN BY THE SHG RESPONDENTS

Economic activity taken up	Respondents	Percentage
Sheep/Goat nurture	15	10
Milk Animals	12	8
Agriculture investment	40	27
Fruits/Flowers/Vegetables retailing	21	14
Weaving	10	7
Tailoring	26	17
Petty shop	15	10
Hotel/Tiffin center	11	7
Total	150	100

Source: Primary data

Table 3 illustrates the diverse economic activities undertaken by Self-Help Group (SHG) respondents in Salem District, Tamil Nadu. It highlights the entrepreneurial endeavors and livelihood opportunities pursued by SHG members, showcasing their initiative and resourcefulness in driving economic empowerment. Agriculture investment emerges as the most prevalent economic activity, with 27% of respondents engaged in agricultural ventures, underscoring the significance of agriculture as a primary source of livelihood in the region. Additionally, tailoring and fruits/flowers/vegetables retailing emerge as popular choices, with 17% and 14% of respondents, respectively, involved in these activities. This diversity in economic pursuits reflects the adaptability and versatility of SHG members in leveraging their skills and resources to generate income and improve their economic well-being. Moreover, the table indicates the uptake of traditional occupations such as weaving and animal husbandry, with 7-10% of respondents involved in these activities, highlighting the preservation of local livelihood practices within the community. The data suggest that SHGs play a pivotal role in facilitating access to markets, training, and financial support, enabling members to diversify their economic activities and explore entrepreneurial opportunities. By engaging in a range of economic endeavors, SHG respondents in Salem District demonstrate their resilience and commitment to enhancing their socio-economic status and fostering sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families.

TABLE 4  
BENEFITS OF SHG – RANK WISE

RANKS			
S.NO	VARIABLE NAME	MEAN SCORE	RANK
1	The standard of living	4.02	3
2	Availing loan for house hold	3.60	7
3	Availing loan for Education	3.97	4
4	Complete knowledge of their rights	3.71	6
5	Self-reliance, Self respect and Dignity	3.93	5
6	Opportunities from the government group	4.04	2
7	Decision making in obtaining loan	4.73	1

Source: Computed Data

Table 4 presents the perceived benefits of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) among respondents in Salem District, Tamil Nadu, ranked according to their mean scores. It reflects the positive impact of SHG participation on various aspects of the members' lives, shedding light on the tangible advantages experienced by participants. Decision making in obtaining loans emerged as the most highly ranked benefit, with a mean score of 4.73, indicating that SHG members value the autonomy and empowerment afforded to them in accessing financial resources. Furthermore, opportunities from government groups received the second-highest mean score of 4.04, suggesting that SHGs serve as conduits for accessing government schemes and programs, thereby enhancing members' access to resources and opportunities for socio-economic development. Additionally, aspects such as the standard of living, availing loans for education, and self-reliance, self-respect, and dignity were also highly rated by respondents, with mean scores ranging from 3.60 to 3.97, underscoring the multifaceted benefits of SHG participation in improving quality of life, promoting education, and fostering personal empowerment. Overall, the data indicate that SHGs play a significant role in enhancing the socio-economic well-being and agency of their members in Salem District, reflecting the effectiveness of SHG initiatives in addressing the needs and aspirations of the local community.

TABLE 5  
INCOME PROPAGATION – MEAN SCORE

S. NO	VARIABLE NAME	MEAN SCORE
1	Self-Employment	2.45
2	Increase family income	2.64
3	For children education and marriage	2.61
4	Standard of living	2.90
5	Economic development	3.97

Source: Computed Data

Table 5 presents the mean scores of various aspects related to income propagation among Self-Help Group (SHG) respondents in Salem District, Tamil Nadu. The data offer insights into the perceived impact of SHG participation on income generation and economic well-being. Economic development emerged as the highest-rated variable, with a mean score of 3.97, indicating that SHG members recognize the role of SHGs in fostering broader economic growth and development within their communities. This underscores the significance of SHGs as catalysts for local economic empowerment and poverty alleviation initiatives. Additionally, the variables of standard of living and increase in family income received relatively high mean scores of 2.90 and 2.64, respectively, highlighting the positive impact of SHG participation on enhancing household income levels and overall quality of life. Moreover, respondents identified self-employment opportunities (mean score of 2.45) and financial support for children's education and marriage (mean score of 2.61) as significant factors contributing to income propagation through SHG engagement. Overall, the data suggest that SHGs play a vital role in enabling members to access livelihood opportunities, improve their economic status, and secure a better future for themselves and their families in Salem District.

TABLE 6  
PROBLEM FACED BY THE SHG Women

S.NO	VARIABLE NAME	MEAN SCORE	RANK
1	Lack of training facilities	3.59	4

2	Improper utilization of funds	3.21	5
3	Difficulty in accounting records	3.17	6
4	No support from family members	3.63	3
5	Difficulty in group formation	3.74	1
6	Less marketing opportunities for product	3.66	2

Source: Computed Data

Table 6 outlines the problems encountered by Self-Help Group (SHG) women in Salem District, Tamil Nadu, ranked based on their mean scores. It sheds light on the challenges faced by SHG members in effectively participating and benefiting from the group activities. Difficulty in group formation emerged as the most significant issue, ranking first with a mean score of 3.74. This suggests that SHG members encounter obstacles in establishing and maintaining cohesive group dynamics, potentially hindering the effectiveness of collective initiatives. Additionally, respondents highlighted less marketing opportunities for products as a notable concern, ranking second with a mean score of 3.66. This indicates that despite engaging in economic activities, SHG women face challenges in accessing markets and promoting their products effectively, limiting their potential for income generation. Lack of support from family members ranked third with a mean score of 3.63, underscoring the importance of familial support in facilitating SHG participation and success. Other issues such as lack of training facilities, improper utilization of funds, and difficulty in maintaining accounting records were also reported, albeit to a lesser extent. Overall, the data highlight the need for targeted interventions to address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of SHGs in Salem District, ultimately empowering women and fostering socio-economic development in the region.

TABLE 7  
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FACTORS

S.NO	SOURCE	N	MEAN	SD
1	Income level	150	1.71	.617
2	Assets holding	150	1.67	.692
3	Borrowing limits	150	2.01	.823
4	Saving pattern of banking operations	150	1.88	.866
5	Knowledge of credit management	150	1.76	.833
6	Repayment capacity	150	1.82	.927
7	Income Generating Activities	150	1.67	.924

Source: Primary data

Table 7 presents the economic empowerment factors among Self-Help Group (SHG) respondents in Salem District, Tamil Nadu, indicating their mean scores and standard deviations. These factors provide insights into the financial capabilities and empowerment levels of SHG members, shedding light on their economic progress and resilience. Among the factors assessed, borrowing limits emerged as the highest-rated, with a mean score of 2.01, suggesting that SHG members have access to sufficient credit facilities, enabling them to invest in income-generating activities and meet their financial needs. Saving patterns of banking operations and repayment capacity also received relatively high mean scores of 1.88 and 1.82, respectively, indicating prudent financial management and commitment to

meeting loan obligations among SHG members. Additionally, factors such as income level and assets holding were rated moderately, suggesting that SHG members have made strides in increasing their income levels and accumulating assets over time. However, knowledge of credit management and income-generating activities received lower mean scores, indicating areas for improvement in financial literacy and diversification of income sources among SHG members. Overall, the data reflect the positive impact of SHG participation on enhancing economic empowerment and financial stability among women in Salem District, underscoring the effectiveness of SHGs as vehicles for socio-economic advancement and poverty alleviation initiatives within the community.

TABLE 8  
SOCIAL AND PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT FACTORS  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

S.NO	SOURCE	N	MEAN	SD
1	Social awareness	150	1.72	.646
2	Participation in social gathering	150	1.75	.593
3	Improvement in the leadership qualities	150	1.77	.987
4	Self confidence	150	1.71	.915
5	Improvement in logical and analytical thinking	150	1.78	.950

Source: Primary data

Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics on social and personal empowerment factors among Self-Help Group (SHG) respondents in Salem District, Tamil Nadu. These factors offer insights into the extent to which SHG participation contributes to the social and personal development of its members. Social awareness emerged as the highest-rated factor, with a mean score of 1.72, indicating that SHG members have an increased awareness of social issues and their roles within the community. Additionally,

participation in social gatherings received a relatively high mean score of 1.75, suggesting that SHG engagement facilitates increased social interaction and community involvement among members. Improvement in leadership qualities and logical and analytical thinking also received favorable mean scores of 1.77 and 1.78, respectively, indicating that SHG participation fosters the development of leadership skills and critical thinking abilities among members. Moreover, self-confidence was rated moderately, with a mean score of 1.71, reflecting the

positive impact of SHGs in boosting members' self-esteem and assertiveness. Overall, the data suggest that SHG participation not only enhances economic empowerment but also promotes social cohesion and personal growth among women in Salem District. These findings underscore the multifaceted benefits of SHGs in empowering women and fostering their holistic development within the community.

#### Policy Suggestions

1. Implement measures to enhance support systems for Self-Help Group (SHG) members, including providing training and capacity-building programs to address challenges such as lack of training facilities and difficulty in maintaining accounting records.
2. Establishing dedicated support centers or resource hubs equipped with necessary infrastructure and expertise can facilitate skill development and empower SHG members to effectively manage their group activities.
3. Foster partnerships between SHGs and relevant stakeholders, such as government agencies, industry associations, and market intermediaries, to enhance market access for SHG products. This can be achieved through initiatives such as organizing trade fairs, establishing market linkages, and providing marketing support and guidance to SHG members.
4. Additionally, investing in market research and product development tailored to local preferences can help SHGs capitalize on emerging market opportunities and maximize the returns from their economic activities.
5. Expand access to financial services and credit facilities tailored to the needs of SHG members, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This may involve collaborating with financial institutions to develop innovative microfinance products, providing financial literacy training to SHG members, and leveraging technology to streamline loan disbursement and repayment processes.
6. Adopt a holistic approach to women's empowerment that addresses not only economic but also social and personal dimensions. This involves promoting initiatives that enhance social awareness, leadership skills, and self-confidence among SHG members through

targeted training programs, mentorship, and peer support networks.

7. Furthermore, engaging men and the broader community in gender sensitization and advocacy efforts can foster a culture of gender equality and support women's empowerment initiatives at the grassroots level. By fostering holistic empowerment, policymakers can create an enabling environment that empowers women to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic development of Salem District.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Salem District, Tamil Nadu, underscores their profound impact on the empowerment and socio-economic development of women. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study has provided valuable insights into the attitudes, challenges, and benefits experienced by SHG members, shedding light on the transformative potential of collective action and mutual support. The findings reveal that SHG participation has led to significant improvements in various skill areas, with a particular emphasis on self-empowerment, management skills, and communication abilities. Moreover, SHGs have facilitated access to credit, promoted responsible financial behavior, and diversified economic activities among members, thereby contributing to poverty alleviation and livelihood enhancement. Despite these successes, challenges persist, including difficulties in group formation, limited marketing opportunities, and inadequate support from family members. Addressing these constraints requires targeted interventions and policy reforms aimed at strengthening SHG governance structures, enhancing market linkages, and promoting gender-responsive approaches to development. Moreover, fostering a supportive ecosystem for SHGs through capacity building initiatives, advocacy efforts, and collaboration with government agencies and civil society organizations is essential for sustaining their impact and ensuring the long-term empowerment of women in Salem District. By harnessing the collective power of SHGs, policymakers, practitioners, and communities can foster inclusive

growth, social cohesion, and gender equality, thereby paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

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