



Review Paper

Social mobilization and sustainable livelihood: a case of the self help groups in North East, India

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Abstract

Self help group (SHG) is the vehicle to fight against poverty and provide employment opportunities to the lives of the poor and marginalized section of the population. The north eastern part of India is considered as one of the backward parts of India in terms of development. Agriculture is the prominent employment provider in the region. The slow – down of socio-economic and infrastructure developments are responsible by the political situation, ethnic conflict and insurgency. Therefore, the present paper attempts to highlight on the importance of strategic intervention of social mobilization through SHGs for the promotion of sustainable livelihood as it serves as one of the effective approaches to enhance people's participation towards development. Thus, the government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) recognized SHGs as the means to eradicate poverty, promoting sustainable livelihood and enhancing empowerment. As sustainable livelihood is being one of the key factors that tackle poverty particularly in the rural areas and it is also a strategy that ensures the continuance of managing present demands for livelihood without compromising the future generation. This paper gathers its information from the secondary sources such as books; reports and journals related to social mobilization, sustainable livelihood and self help groups.

Keywords: Social mobilization, sustainable development, sustainable livelihood and self help groups.

Introduction

In India, the self help groups (SHGs) movement is seen as a vehicle for change that transforms the living conditions of the marginalized population of the country. The SHGs organize people into groups to get together to pool their resources, skills and talents to better their lives. This technique of organizing the poor and marginalized to solve their problems is seen as an effective tool and is successful one. So as, it is being adopted by governmental organizations and the non-government organizations in achieving several goals oriented towards development¹. Further, people's engagement in SHGs movement provides them an opportunity to start off their income generating activities (IGA) either collectively or individually due to the fact to easy access and avail to bank loans through the SHG. Thus, SHGs are being facilitated by various Governmental organizations and NGOs by organising various programmes such as capacity building, skills development, empowerment, etc., besides the economic aspects it also enhances the personal and social aspects of the SHG members as well.

The various government schemes oriented towards people's participation such as SGSY in the past and NRLM in the present are carried out through the platform of the SHG movement are solely focus on the SHGs. These schemes are being facilitated by Government organizations as well as the NGOs and being

implemented in the North Eastern region as in other regions of the country. This is because the government recognizes that involvement and engagement of people in various programs and schemes enhances their capacity building, skill development, participation and economic upliftment, etc, which translates into better status and better living condition. Comparatively people in rural areas have attained lower literacy rate and lesser employment opportunities as to those living in urban areas. Hence, social mobilization plays an important role in sensitizing people to be aware of the different schemes provided by the government for development and employment. People in rural areas will be able to enhance their skills and capacity building oriented towards improving their livelihood activities. As 'livelihood' connotes to an activity which provides self-employment in order to meet the needs and requirements for day to day living in people's lives.

In this purview, it is possible for people to enhance their livelihood endeavours through a proper channel of social mobilization. The present scenario lays a great emphasis on people's participation and engagement in terms of development which is inclusive nature for self supporting through income generating activities (IGA) in order to improve their living conditions². Hence, social mobilization is an effective means for the promotion of sustainable livelihood.

The North Eastern part of India consists of the state of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya Tripura, Sikkim, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The 8th report of 'Committee on Empowerment of Women' noted that the North Eastern part of India is a financially excluded part owing to many factors such as difficult terrain, socio-cultural climate, lack of adequate bank branches, etc³. While NERCORMP highlights that North East India is rich natural resources but paradoxically it remains as one of the most economically backward regions in India. Various factors that responsible for the slow - down of socio-economic and infrastructure development includes the political situation, ethnic conflict and insurgency⁴.

Thus, considering the development status of the North Eastern part of India it suggests and desirables to have an approach of social mobilization through the SHGs for better growth and development. Therefore, at present, SHGs serve as a good platform to engage in various income generating activities (IGA) which is sustainable in nature rather than agricultural activities which appears to be the sole source of income provider of the region.

Methodology

The paper adopted the descriptive design where it focused on the secondary resources of information collected from books, articles such as journals, government reports and online materials. This paper attempts to propose on the importance of social mobilization in the process of promotion of sustainable livelihood through SHGs. The search engine for the literature review includes books and Google search for online materials. The themes that have been taken from the literature for the paper are social mobilization, sustainable livelihood and SHGs.

Review of related literature

The notion of self help groups (SHGs) is connoted to a small homogeneous and a voluntary group form by individual members who come together to attain a common goal^{5,6}. Initially in India the momentum of the growth of the SHGs was at a slow pace which can be traced back in 1980s through the initiative undertaken by NGOs namely MYRADA and PRADAN. Gradually the number of SHGs increased and at present the SHGs movement has spread far and wide all across the country.

The importance of making people to form into groups (self help groups) is being recognized by the government agencies as well as NGOs. This is because through the group formation the government and NGOs can easily assist the people in various ways in terms of providing credit linkages, trainings of capacity building, skill development, etc. In India, NABARD plays as one of the main key roles in terms of financial support to the SHGs. In fact NABARD as a financial institution, in 1987 took its first initiative to provide funds for the SHGs. Further with the bank linkage project started by NABARD various

developmental projects involving SHGs have shown remarkable progress over the years. Therefore, SHGs are becoming the mechanism that promotes development and change in the country like India where the government and NGOs are implementing their developmental projects and programmes particularly in rural areas through the SHGs movement^{7,8}.

Social mobilization is an important factor in the process of engaging people's participation for social transformation. This is because social mobilization organizes people for achieving their activities or goals as Azam et al⁹ view that it is the process which connects or concerns with people's participation and engagement whereby people, communities and organizations take action in order to priorities and deal with the problems having identified for while Aishwarya¹⁰ and UNICEF¹¹ opine that social mobilization is a mass movement that engages people's participation. As a process social mobilization engages various stake holders in the societies who are oriented towards the social transformation. Social mobilization as a method of engaging people's participation is used by a wide range of social actors including government agencies, NGOs, youth, women groups, etc, in order to bring social transformation or to fight for a common cause.

Yoganand and Gebremedhin augment that awareness on the importance of sustainable livelihood approach grew up due to the fact that the agricultural production appeared to be the only focal point stressed when addressing any rural development approaches but in contrary it witnessed that it did not meet to address and tackle the livelihood needs of the poor people in the rural areas. Hence, the shift was attempted to consider other ways and means for better livelihood activities which are sustainable such as part-time trade or handicraft production, watershed development program, etc¹².

Therefore, the concept of sustainable livelihood grew wider which connotes the idea of long term of self-reliance, self-sufficiency and self-restraint. Further, sustainable livelihood connotes to the ability to cope up, recover and meet the present needs without compromising the livelihood of the next generation². Arika and Nelapudi pointed out four types of sustainability i.e., economic sustainability referring to economic and income improvement and stability, institution sustainability referring to the support system that is a policy and an institution that provides a multiple support system for livelihood, social sustainability referring to the participatory approach where people themselves take part in identifying livelihood priorities whereas external support must be in line with the needs of the people or situation and environment sustainability referring to the supporting system that is friendlier with the environment and the better management of the natural resources¹³.

Discussion

The North Eastern part of India consists of eight states namely, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya Tripura, Sikkim, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. This part of the country is

considered to be a financially excluded part of the India owing to many factors such as difficult terrain, socio-cultural climate, lack of adequate bank branches, etc. In spite of the fact that the region is rich in natural resources but paradoxically remains as one of the most economically backward regions in India³. Various factors that responsible for the slow-down of socio-economic and infrastructure development includes the political situation, ethnic conflict and insurgency⁴.

According to the report of NABARD between the year 2017 and 2018 in terms of SHGs avail to bank loans in India it is observed that the North East region is having the lowest number of SHGs as compared to other regions as shown in Table-1. The Table-2 shows on the distribution of SHGs with the saving linkage presenting that those SHGs in North East region have the lowest saving linkage as compared to other regions in the country. Further the Table-3 shows the state wise distribution on the availing to bank loan by the SHGs among the North Eastern states indicating a low percentage in terms of availing to the bank loans by SHGs in the regions. It presents that Tripura is being the lowest and Sikkim is being the highest in terms of availing to bank loan among the states in North East India¹⁴.

Table-1: Region-wise variation no of SHGs availed to bank loan¹⁴.

Region	No. of SHGs during 2017-2018
North East Region	35017
Northern Region	51800
Central Region	69295
Western Region	128973
Eastern Region	720444
South Region	1255603
All India	2261132

Table-2: Region-wise distribution of SHGs with savings linkage (%)¹⁴.

Region	Saving linkage (%) 2017-2018
North East Region	1.55
Northern Region	2.29
Central Region	3.06
Western Region	5.70
Eastern Region	31.86

South Region	55.43
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Table-3: NE state-wise of SHGs availed to bank loans during 2017-2018 (%)¹⁴.

State (North East India)	Bank loan (%) 2017-2018
Tripura	1.90
Arunachal Pradesh	1.98
Manipur	2.54
Meghalaya	3.54
Mizoram	6.64
Assam	8.25
Nagaland	11.13
Sikkim	11.72

Thus the above figures depicted that people in the region are needed to be mobilized and encouraged to join SHGs as engagement in SHGs brings employment through the income generating activities (IGA) that translates in to the upliftment of the economic status in order to provide them a better livelihood. So, in this regards social mobilization plays an important role in mobilizing people to engage in the SHG movement for the promotion of sustainable livelihood. To availability of bank loan is one of the important aspects of the engagement in SHG which helps the people to start off their income generating activities or micro finance. In addition, saving also is one of the core functions of SHG. Hence in order to make people realize in all these aspects it is important that a proper social mobilization is required. Therefore, it calls for better organization and strategy for effective and greater participation of people in the promotion of sustainable livelihood in the region. It is desirable that proper social mobilization through SHGs should be carried out by government and NGOs to enhance people's participation to achieve a common goal. This is in line with the view given by Aishwarya¹⁰ as regards to social mobilization that it a process to engage various people, organizations and institutions for giving awareness to a particular programme, helping people to avail to resources, services and to make the community participation stronger to achieve their goals or activities which are sustainable in nature.

Thus, in order to make more effective of livelihood promotion, social mobilization is one of the key factors and people in rural areas in particular are needed to be mobilized and sensitized on various aspects to make their livelihood more effective and sustainable channelizing people the right direction to carry out their livelihood activities which can be beneficial for them.

Moreover, the process of social mobilization will enhance the rural people to be able to priorities their livelihood activities that could sustain them. Apart from all these social mobilization also enhances empowerment where people are able to decide and participate effectively in their livelihood promotion according to what they feel most important, according to their capacity and choices. With an adverse effect, the increasing in participation will lead to effective efforts and finally on the over development towards better living condition of the people and the development of the country by at large which is in accordance with the UN report on Sustainable Development Goals 2017¹⁵. Thus the utilization or implementation of social mobilization through SHGs in the process of sustainable livelihood promotion will be seen as an important and effective means to destiny.

Conclusion

In conclusion, SHG as a tool of social mobilization serves as an effective means in the process of promoting sustainable livelihood particularly in rural areas people requiring help and support from expert to make right choice in their livelihood with their limited knowledge and skills. It is imperative to suggest for the North Easter part of India that people's engagement in SHGs movement will enhance them to start other income generating activities besides agricultural activities through enhancement of their capacity and skills. Finally, people will be able to bring about change and sustainable development in the region and their livelihood promotion will be oriented toward sustainability that is assuring tackle of economic crisis and to also overcome poverty. Indeed, the adoption of effective methods and strategy of social mobilization through SHGs by both the government and NGOs agencies oriented toward the promotion of sustainable livelihood for rural people of North East India will highly implicate for sustainable development of the nation. Therefore, social mobilization and sustainable livelihood are interlinked and having bidirectional affects at all the levels of development.

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