

CHAPTER – I

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SHGs (Self Help Groups) are the major resource of inspiration for women's welfare. In an attempt to uplifting the women, the government has initiated Women Welfare Programmes through development centers, rural agencies, banks, NABARD etc. In India, most of the SHGs are lead by woman with benefits of socio-economic homogeneity smaller size, functionality, participation, voluntary operating mode and non political women. The SHGs in India operating from April 1999, have entered into various fields like dairy farms, fisheries, ration shops, handlooms, farm cultivation, rain water harvesting etc. Women are an integral part of every economy. All round development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered as equal partners in progress with men. However, in most of the developing countries, women have a low socio and economic status. In such countries effective empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labour in the main stream of economic development.

Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing an individual to think, behave, and take action and central work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of their lives. Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. Women empowerment enables autonomy and control over their lives. The empowered women become agents of their own development, able to exercise choices to set their own agenda and be strong enough to challenge their subordinate position in the society. Although women constitute half of world's population yet they are the largest group.

This is excluded from the benefits of social and economic development. Women constitute a strong labour force which needs to be mobilized and encouraged to make an effective contribution to the development process. In India, the work participation rate for women is less than half that of men. Despite efforts made towards economic empowerment of women, majority of the active female population continue to be

confined to micro, small scale enterprises and the informal sector. The Tenth Five-year Plan (2002-2007) adopted the strategy of Women's Component Plan under which not less than 30 per cent of funds/benefits were earmarked for all the women-related sector's and women specific programmes. The Eleventh Five-year Plan (2007-2012) also undertook steps to further strengthening of Self-Help Groups and community based organizations for the empowerment of women. Special attention needs to be given to increasing employment opportunities and productive resources of women through special financial intermediaries, building women's competitiveness and increasing economic exchanges among women entrepreneurs.

Empowerment is the phenomenon of the nineties and the term became popular in the field of development, especially with reference to women. The empowerment has become a key solution to many social problems like high population growth, environmental degradation and low status of women. " Empowerment is defined as „giving power to creating power within" and „enabling". It is a multi-dimensional process, which enables individuals and groups to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life" 22 women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of Women. Without economic empowerment, the development of women would be to its lowest level and the women empowerment is the stepping-stone for societal equality. The contribution of women towards betterment of humanity is symptomatic of contentment of life. On this basis, empowering women becomes inevitable and it is evident through entrepreneurial development that women play multiple roles in the family, community and in the economy. According to AmartyaSen, in India two social failures are found; one concerning genders inequality and the other illiteracy. Women have been deprived of many things, which their counterparts enjoy. It is applicable to every walk of Indian day to day life.

Thus, enhancing women's economic productivity is an important strategic necessity for improving the welfare of the estimated 60 million Indian households, which is still below the poverty line. Firstly, women's earnings increase the aggregate income level of these poor household. Secondly, Indian women contribute a much larger share of their earnings to the basic family maintenances than men. Increase in the income of

women would translate more directly into better health and nutrition for the children. In a short period the earnings of women have an immediate effect on the incidence of adversity of poverty at the household level, where as in the long term, important integration effects are expected to be on the quality of human capital. In India, the financial institutions have not been able to reach the poor households particularly women in the unorganized sector. Structural rigidities and overheads led to high cost in advancing small loans. Experience in implementing different antipoverty and other welfare programmes has shown that the key to success lies in starting appropriate community-based organizations with participation at the grassroot level. Moreover, the group approach may be one of the effective ways to reduce the difficulties of small businessmen and agriculturists.

The distinguishing feature of the SHGs is creating social and economic awareness among the members. The social awareness enables the members to lead their lives in a sound hygienic environment and pursue a better living. The woman members involve themselves more in taking decisions regarding the education of their children, the investment of the family, managing the economic assets of the family and bringing up cohesion among the members of the family and others for a better living. From the economic point of view both men and women work shoulder to shoulder to increase the income of the family. Every member of the SHGs has felt the need for more involvement in economic activities. The spirit for social and economic upliftment of members is the significant contribution of each and every Self Help Groups.