



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal Homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Empowering Self-Help Group Women Through Income-Generating Skill Development: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Women's economic empowerment can be strengthened through skill development, livelihood opportunities, and participation in income-generating activities. This study examines a week-long income-generating skill-development programme conducted for Self-Help Group (SHG) women at Sri Padmavathi Mahila Abhyudaya Sangam, Akkarampalli, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, commencing on 10 September 2025. Approximately 60 SHG women participated in practical training in wool handicrafts, toy making, pencil flowers, flower looms, wall frames, door decorations, and related products. A descriptive case-study approach was adopted, and five successful cases were purposively selected for detailed analysis. Data were gathered through programme observations, participation records, discussions with programme organizers and the resource person, and observations of participants' practical involvement and perceived benefits. The five case studies illustrate how women applied acquired skills through home-based production, exhibitions, local sales, and SHG-based collective marketing. The findings indicate improvements in practical skills, creativity, confidence, financial awareness, and interest in income-generating activities. The income generated was used for household needs, children's education, reinvestment, and savings. The study concludes that skill-development programmes can serve as an important pathway towards women's economic empowerment; however, sustained support through market linkages, digital marketing, financial assistance, mentoring, product development, and collective marketing is necessary to convert acquired skills into sustainable livelihoods.

Introduction

Women's economic empowerment is an important component of sustainable development, particularly for women associated with Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Skill development and income-generating activities provide women with opportunities to acquire new skills, strengthen their existing abilities, contribute to household income, and participate more actively in economic decision-making. SHG-based livelihood programmes are widely recognized as an important mechanism for promoting self-employment, entrepreneurship, and economic self-reliance among women.

Women's economic empowerment is an important component of inclusive and sustainable development. Access to productive skills, livelihood opportunities, financial resources, and decision-making can strengthen women's ability to contribute to household income and participate more actively in economic and social life. In India, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as important community-based institutions for promoting savings, credit, collective action, livelihood development, and women's empowerment. Research has shown that SHG participation can contribute to women's control over income, decision-making and participation in collective activities.

Approximately 60 women from Self-Help Groups participated in the programme. The training therefore served not only as a skill-development intervention but also as an opportunity to promote confidence, self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment among women. The training focused on practical and potentially marketable skills including wool handicrafts, toy making, pencil flowers, flower looms, wall frames, hair bands and door decorations. The programme sought to enhance women's existing capabilities, encourage self-employment and create opportunities for supplementary income generation.

Need for the Study

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as an important platform for improving women's economic and social empowerment through savings, credit, collective action and livelihood activities. The reviewed studies indicate that SHGs can enhance women's financial inclusion, confidence, decision-making, entrepreneurship and participation in household and community activities.

Methodology

The present study adopted a descriptive case-study approach to examine the implementation and immediate outcomes of a week-long income-generating skill-development programme conducted for women members of Self-Help Groups. The programme was organized at Sri Padmavathi Mahila Abhyudaya Sangam, Akkarampalli, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, commencing on 10 September 2025. A total of 60 SHG women participated in the training, of whom five successful cases were purposively selected for detailed case studies. The training covered practical skills such as wool handicrafts, toy making, pencil flowers, flower looms, wall frames, hair bands, and door decorations. Data were collected through programme documentation, participation records, observation of training sessions, discussions with programme organizers and the resource person, and observations of participants' practical involvement and perceived benefits. The study focused on the nature of the training, skills acquired, perceived benefits, contribution to women's economic empowerment, and opportunities for strengthening livelihood activities.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the nature of the income-generating skill-development programme conducted for SHG women.
2. To identify the practical skills provided during the training programme.
3. To assess the perceived benefits of skill training among participating women.
4. To understand the role of skill development in promoting women's economic empowerment.
5. To suggest measures for strengthening livelihood opportunities among trained SHG women

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Case Study 1: From Homemaker to Wool Handicraft Entrepreneur

Mrs. Lakshmi Devi, (Name changed) aged 35, is a member of a Self-Help Group. She belongs to a lower-middle-income household and lives in a nuclear family with her husband and two children. Her husband is engaged in daily-wage work, and the family's income is irregular. She had completed secondary education and had no previous experience in organized income-generating activities. She received training in wool handicrafts and related decorative products. Before the programme, she had limited knowledge of making marketable handicraft products. The training helped her acquire practical skills and increased her confidence to produce woolen decorative items independently. She began making small products at home using locally available materials. The training provided her with an opportunity to contribute to household income without leaving her family responsibilities. She also became more confident in discussing financial matters and planning small household expenditures. Her participation in the SHG helped her explore collective marketing opportunities. The income generated from the sale of the products was utilized for household needs, reinvestment in the handicraft activity, children's educational expenses, and savings.

Case Study 2: Toy Making as a Home-Based Livelihood

Mrs. Sarswathi, ((Name changed)) aged 29, belongs to a Self-Help Group. She lives with her husband, one child and elderly parents. Her husband works in the informal sector, and the family has a modest monthly income. She completed higher secondary education. Before participating in the programme, she was interested in earning an income but lacked technical skills and financial resources to start a business. She participated in the training programme and learned toy making, along with basic decorative craft techniques. The training enabled her to learn the process of preparing handmade toys and improve her creativity and product-finishing skills. She became interested in producing toys during festival the skill gave her a potential source of supplementary income that could be managed from home. She also developed greater confidence in communicating with customers and discussing the possibility of selling products through her SHG. The training also helped her understand that small-scale production does not necessarily require a large establishment or substantial initial investment. The income generated from the sale of handmade toys could be utilized to purchase raw materials, contribute to household expenses, and maintain savings for future and emergency requirements.

Case Study 3: Pencil Flowers and Decorative Products

Mrs. Vanjamma (Name changed) aged 40, is a married woman and an active SHG member. She lives in a nuclear family and has two school-going children. Her husband is employed in a private occupation with a moderate and relatively stable income. Although her family's basic needs are met, she wanted to develop an independent source of income. She had completed secondary education and had some informal experience in household craft activities. She received training in pencil flowers, flower looms and decorative craft products. The programme helped her convert her interest in creative activities into practical product-making skills. She learned how to prepare decorative items systematically and improve their appearance and finishing. After the training, she expressed interest in preparing customized decorative products for small functions, festivals and local customers. The training increased her confidence and encouraged her to think about her skills as an economic resource. Her participation also strengthened her interaction with

other SHG members and created opportunities for collective production. She became more interested in saving money and using her skills to contribute to household expenses.

Case Study 4: Wall Frames and Door Decorations

Mrs. Rupa, (Name changed) aged 45, is a member of a Self-Help Group and lives with her husband, two children and mother-in-law. Her family belongs to a lower-middle-income group. Her husband is engaged in casual employment, while she is primarily responsible for household activities. She had limited formal employment experience. During the programme, she learned to prepare wall frames and door decorations, along with other handicraft products. The training provided her with practical knowledge of preparing decorative products that could be used for household decoration, festivals and special occasions. She reported increased confidence in making products independently. She began considering the possibility of taking small orders from neighbours and other members of the community. The activity offered a flexible livelihood option compatible with her household responsibilities. She displayed and sold her handmade products at exhibitions during festival seasons and in the local community. The income generated from the sale of these products was primarily utilized to support her children's higher education and meet their educational expenses.

Case Study 5: Cloth-Bag Making

Mrs. Revathi (name changed), aged 32, is a member of a Self-Help Group (SHG) and belongs to a modest-income household. She lives with her husband and two children, while her husband earns an irregular income from informal employment. She completed secondary education and had limited experience in income-generating activities. Through the training programme, she learned cloth-bag making and developed skills in design, stitching, finishing, and presentation. She began producing reusable cloth bags from home and explored marketing opportunities through her SHG, local customers, exhibitions, and community events. She also collaborated with other SHG members to collectively display and promote their products at exhibitions. This experience improved her confidence in interacting with customers and exploring collective marketing opportunities. The income generated from cloth-bag making was utilized to support household needs, children's education, and future savings.

Discussion

The five case studies indicate that the income-generating skill-development programme helped SHG women enhance their practical skills, confidence, creativity, and interest in livelihood activities. Training in handicrafts and decorative products created opportunities for women to undertake home-based income-generating activities while managing household responsibilities. The findings also highlight the importance of collective action through SHGs, particularly for purchasing raw materials, production, and marketing. However, continued support in entrepreneurship, pricing, packaging, financial management, digital marketing, and market linkages is needed to convert acquired skills into sustainable income. Overall, the programme served as an important step towards women's economic empowerment and livelihood development.

Policy Implications of the study

1. Government and development agencies should organize regular, need-based skill-development programmes for SHG women, with emphasis on locally marketable skills and practical, hands-on training.
2. Skill training should be connected with actual market demand. Women should receive support in product design, quality improvement, pricing, packaging, branding and customer identification.
3. SHGs can be supported to establish common production and marketing centres where women can collectively display and sell their products. Collective marketing can reduce individual marketing difficulties and improve bargaining capacity.
4. Training programmes should include basic digital marketing skills. SHG women can be encouraged to use WhatsApp and other social-media platforms to display products, communicate with customers and receive orders. The study specifically identifies digital marketing and market linkages as areas requiring continued support.
5. Women should receive guidance on costing, pricing, bookkeeping, savings, credit management and profit calculation. Access to small loans or revolving funds can help trained women purchase raw materials and expand production.

Conclusion

The week-long income-generating skill-development programme provided SHG women with practical skills in wool handicrafts, toy making, pencil flowers, flower looms, wall frames, hair bands, and door decorations. Although the programme benefited a larger group of women, the present study focuses on five selected successful case studies to highlight their experiences and outcomes. The case studies indicate that skill development enhanced women's practical knowledge, confidence, creativity, and interest in undertaking home-based income-generating activities. The programme also encouraged women to explore collective production and marketing through their SHGs. Overall, the findings suggest that skill training can contribute to

women's economic empowerment; however, continued support through market linkages, digital marketing, financial assistance, mentoring, and collective marketing is essential for sustainable livelihood development.

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