

SDC 2019 Annual Meeting Abstracts

Kumar, Neha; International Food Policy Research Institute
justneha@gmail.com

Authors: Neha Kumar, Kalyani Raghunathan, Alejandra Arrieta, Amir Jilani, Shinjini Pandey, and Agnes Quisumbing

Title: The power of the collective empowers women: Evidence from self-help groups in India



In the past three decades, women's groups have rapidly gained prominence as important rural financial and social institutions in South Asia. Their role has expanded to include creating health and nutrition awareness, generating demand for government programs, ensuring transparency in the implementation of government schemes and tackling social issues ranging from dowry and domestic violence to gender and caste-based discrimination. In India, a large majority of women's group-based programs are implemented through self-help groups (SHGs).

While there is evidence that shows women's SHGs have positive effects on economic and political empowerment, there is none on their effect on women's empowerment in agriculture. Understanding the impact of SHG membership on women's empowerment in agriculture is important in the Indian context for several reasons – SHGs cover approximately 48 million households, women are subject to many forms of discrimination and agriculture is the largest sector. Therefore, studying the impact of SHGs, on women's empowerment in agriculture will have wide-ranging policy implications in India. Finally, the recent expansion of women's groups, the importance of empowering women, and the predominance of agriculture as a source of employment and income – are relevant to much of the developing world, especially the rest of South Asia and parts of Africa.

This paper uses panel data of 1470 women from five states in India to study the impact of SHG membership on women's empowerment in agriculture, using the abbreviated Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index. We use nearest neighbor matching (NNM) to identify the impact of SHG membership on women's empowerment outcomes. We find that becoming an SHG member causes overall women's empowerment scores to increase and reduces the gap between men's and women's empowerment scores within a household. We also observe, compared to similar nonmembers, SHG members have greater control over income, credit access and participation in credit decisions, are active members of a group, but have more workload. SHG membership, however, does not affect respect among household members or tolerance towards domestic violence. We conclude that SHG membership can empower women in domains related to agriculture, but long-standing gender norms may take longer to change.

Quisumbing_panel