

# Self Help Groups as an Empowerment Model: Perceptions of Direct Stakeholders

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**Abstract** Self Help Groups (SHGs) emerge as an important strategy for empowering women and to alleviate poverty. India's SHG movement has emerged as the world's largest and most successful network of Community Based Organisations (CBOs). However, quality is the major challenge that the SHG movement is confronted with at this point of time in the country. The main objective of this paper is to assess the opinion of the direct stakeholders of SHGs regarding the issue whether SHG is an empowerment model. The study is conducted by using multi-stage random sampling method to collect primary data from the selected Development Blocks of Nagaon districts of Assam comprising promoter, donor, financial institutions and group members. From the ANOVA on overall score of variables on empowerment model, we conclude that at least one of the groups is not significantly different from the others. It is further observed from the descriptive statistics on item wise perception of stakeholders about SHG as empowerment model, out of forty (40) elements of empowerment, in thirty four (34) elements relating to Empowerment construct relating to SHGs whose mean value is positive are considered as the main elements of the respective construct.

**Keywords:** direct stakeholders, empowerment model, micro finance, perceptions of stakeholders, self help groups

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## 1. Introduction

Economic and social marginalisation of poor by formal credit agencies including co-operatives led to the emergence of Self Help Groups (SHGs). SHGs are an outcome of the neo-liberal paradigm of development (Chitagubbi et al., 2011 [1]), where the poor take charge of their lives and fashion new improved future through self-reliant and socially sustainable efforts.

SHGs emerge as an important strategy for empowering women and in alleviating poverty. SHG is a "people's scheme" and its organisation is a significant step towards empowering women. Women SHGs represent a form of intervention that is a radical departure from most current programmes. They are an effective strategy for poverty alleviation, women development and social empowerment. The women SHGs have enhanced the status of women as participant decision makers and beneficiaries on the democratic, economic, social and cultural spheres of life and sensitised the women members to take active part in socio-economic progress of rural India. SHGs in social change imply not only the change of outer form of a community or a society but also in the social institutions as well as ideas of the people living in that society.

SHGs have been instrumental in empowerment by enabling women to work together in collective agency. A

good number of researchers including MFIs claimed that this movement helped in empowering women. Further, SHGs are effective in reducing poverty, creating awareness and ensure sustainability of environment which finally results in sustainable development of the nation. SHGs are now emerging as the predominant model for poverty eradication, women empowerment and development agencies (Panda, 2005 [2]). The application of the strategy through UN's Millennium Development Goals has made provision of financial support to the poor or low income people by realising the fact that instead of targeting individual development, it would be more useful to apply this idea in case of group development and interestingly the result found in most cases is very positive. In India, the SHGs constitute a widely accepted development strategy for poverty reduction as they are perceived as powerful vehicle for the promotion of micro-credit and micro-finance especially for women (Chen et al., 2007 [3]). SHG programme has emerged across India as one of the most popular strategy for empowering women (Chidambaram, 2004 [4]). The SHG model was introduced as a core strategy for empowerment of women in the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) in India (Planning Commission, 2002 [5]). The Ninth plan directed both states and the centre to adopt the 'women's component plan' through which not less than 30% of funds and benefits are earmarked to the women related sectors. This strategy was continued during Tenth Plan (2002-2007)

and even in the Eleventh plan (2007-12) with the government commitment to encourage SHGs to act as agents of social change, development and empowerment of women. It is the largest and fastest-growing micro-finance programme in the developing world (Seibel & Khadka, 2002 [6]; Bali Swain and Floro, 2008 [7]).

## 2. Operationalising the Concepts: Measuring Empowerment

There is no dearth of literature that examines targeting accuracy in micro-finance programmes, reduction in the transaction costs of borrowing by and lending to SHGs, micro-enterprise development and capacity-building in SHGs. In this study, an attempt has been made to identify a few key indicators that impinge on aspects of social capital and empowerment of the poorest people (including women and indigenous peoples). It was observed that the indicators used to measure empowerment in different studies are familiar and easy to construct (Hulme and Mosley, 1996 [8]; Seibel and Dave, 2002 [9]). Gaiha and Nandhi, 2005 [10] articulated a list of indicators to measure empowerment which are refined from earlier studies and extended through systematic application.

In this study when developing the questionnaire and interview guidelines, the notion of degrees of empowerment introduced by Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinsohn, 2005 [11] and other researchers were used. The domain of empowerment will be limited to that of society, with its sub-domains family and community, as this is where the SHGs operate. The degrees of empowerment in the domain of society were measured in combination with the three dimensions of empowerment, namely economic, social and political. Further, to analyse the dimensions of empowerment, the Luttrell et al., 2007 [12] identified four dimensions of empowerment which are also duly considered in this study, viz. a) Economic empowerment—getting skills, capabilities, resources and access to secure and sustain incomes and livelihoods; b) Human and social empowerment— getting control over one's own life and have the power to act; c) Political empowerment— being able to organise and mobilise collective action needed for collective change; and d) Cultural empowerment—being able to redefine rules and norms and create new cultural and symbolical practices.

Some other commonly used dimensions of women's empowerment developed by Malhotra et al., 2002 [13] and Basu, 2006 [14] to analyse the empowerment indicators which are reflected on six dimensions like economic, socio-cultural, legal, political, psychological, and familial or interpersonal, are also duly considered. Some other studies are also consulted while chalking and framing out the different characteristics of empowerment, namely Beijing conference, 1995 [15], Hashemi et al., 1996 [16]; Mayoux, 2000 [17]; Oakley, 2001 [18]; Malhotra, Schuler and Boender, 2002 [19]; Holland and Brook, 2004 [20]; Gaiha and Nandhi, 2005 [21]; and Angus Buchanan, 2006 [22]. In this way a list of forty (40) indicators relating to empowerment are included in this study to access the perceptions of different stakeholders of SHG whether SHG is an empowerment model?

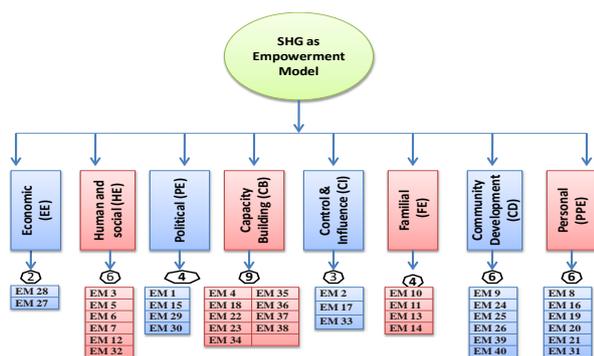
In fine, a lot of studies are reviewed and different elements/indicators of empowerment are identified.

However, it is observed that the following are the key areas where each and every study through some lights while explaining the features of empowerment.

- a) **Self Confidence:** To assess the self-confidence level of SHG members, the researcher collected information on those actions that indicate confidence levels of a person such as ability to sign; confidence to approach bank, confidence to speak to others; improvement in communication skills; ability to make judicious purchases, awareness of rights and procedures; expressing opinions freely; improvements in courage; confidences to talk within family and outside by women; enhancement of managerial abilities of women; community members seek the help of the groups, helps in other's problems; enhancement of social responsibility drives; and confidence to start new SHGs etc.
- b) **Family Support:** To assess the support that the family members provide to SHG members includes to attend SHG meetings, overcoming the resistance from husband and other members of the family to join the SHG pay savings, repay loan installment; enhancement of girls' attendance at school, ability to transform institutions, enhancement of ability to organise struggle, inducing participation in politics, participation in democratic institutions etc. are also used by different researchers.
- c) **Access to Family Income:** To understand how far the SHG members access family income, data was collected by different researchers on 'sale of household produce', 'raising of hand loans', 'enhancement of women's financial contribution to household', 'repayment of hand loans' and 'need based medical support' etc.
- d) **Control on Resources/Assets:** To understand the control of SHG member's over household resources/assets, data was collected by different researchers on 'use of earnings from income generating activity', 'increases the capacity to spend more', 'use of SHG loans', 'personal savings', 'members can dispose of their own income according to their choice', 'enhancement of creation of assets in rural areas', 'enhancement of control of use of credit' and 'sale/mortgage of jewelries' etc.
- e) **Mobility:** To understand how far the SHG members have free mobility regarding whether members go alone or take the help of family or the group members to visit shops outside the village, the Public Health Centre/hospital, to do SHG work outside the village, to visit banks and Govt. offices at block level; this helped to assess the growth in self confidence and negotiating skills.
- f) **Role in Decision-making:** To understand who decides in the household, data was collected on 'purchase and/or sale of household assets', 'family savings', 'children's education & marriage', 'occupational change', 'casting of vote', 'purpose of loan' and 'adoption of household infrastructure' etc.
- g) **Changes in Women Roles:** To assess whether there were changes in the roles of men and women, different researchers collected information on some of the roles performed by men and women such as 'attending meetings', 'participation in village meetings', 'non-domestic roles', 'enhancement of

help government in immunisation programmes', 'enhancement of ability to participate in non-family group', 'enhancement of campaign against social evils', 'enhancement of action to bring gender equality', 'work burden on women', 'husband sharing in the household work' and 'women taking up non-traditional activities'.

The present study takes forty indicators into consideration under different domains of empowerment including women empowerment which measures economic, socio-cultural, familial, political, psychological aspects of empowerment (Figure 1). In order to quantify the degree of perceptions of different stakeholders whether SHG is an empowerment model, five point scales are used.



**Figure 1.** Components of SHG as Empowerment Model (Source: Designed based on Survey of Literature)

### 3. Statement of the Problem

Different organisations have promoted or supported SHGs from a different perspective and agenda. It is observed that different stakeholders have promoted SHGs with different expectations and understanding, and have sorted different parameters of quality of SHGs. One modest effort in this context has been initiated by Sa-Dhan (2003 [23]) in preparing and publishing a discussion paper on "Quality Parameters of SHGs", wherein a lot of issues sets out in the quality assessment of SHGs. Moreover, this paper also set out some unresolved key issues for further discussion and research to develop quality indicators for SHGs. Thus, the present study is limited to one of the unresolved issue of Quality Assessment of SHGs as raised by Sa-Dhan.

### 4. Objective of the Study

The study is pursued keeping in view the following main objectives

- To examine the opinion of the direct stakeholders (i.e. Promoters, Donors, Financial Institutions and the Group members) of SHGs regarding the issue whether SHG is an empowerment model.
- To forward conclusion based on the findings of the study.

### 5. Research Hypotheses

Given the survey of literature and objectives, the study is pursued to test the following statistical hypothesis:

**Ho:** There is no significant association in the opinion of the direct stakeholders (i.e. Promoters, Donors, Financial Institutions and the Group members) of SHGs regarding the issue whether SHG is an empowerment model.

## 6. Methodology

Multi-stage random sampling method is used for the present study to collect primary data. Nagaon district of Assam being the native district of the scholar was purposively chosen out of twenty seven districts of Assam for the present study. At the next level, five Development Blocks are selected randomly. In the later stage, three revenue villages from each of the selected Development Blocks are purposively selected. From each revenue village, three SHG members, who are associated actively, are selected randomly. The study was conducted during the last part of 2012. Further, 12 Financial Institutions i.e. nationalised commercial bank and RRBs (operating in the study area); 10 Donors and 34 Promoters including banks, NGOs, NGO-MFI, Farmers Club and Government Departments are also selected randomly who are directly associated with the sampled SHGs (Table 3). Thus, the total sample size is 100 (Considered adequate by researchers like Nunnally, 1978 [24]; Comrey, 1973 [25]; Gorsuch, 1983 [26]; Oppenheim, 1992 [27]; and Coakes and Steed, 1997 [28]). Primary data was collected from the respondents using pre-tested questionnaire. Secondary data was collected from Report, Journals and literatures published by different institutions on micro-finance have been used. The important variables were formulated and the relevant data collected from the field were coded and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software. Perceptions of direct stakeholders (i.e. Promoters, Donors, Financial Institutions and the Group members) whether SHG is an empowerment model were expressed based on 5 point scale where SA= Strongly Agree (2), A = Agree (1), NAND = Neither agree nor disagree (0), DA = Disagree (-1), and SDA = Strongly disagree (-2). Further, the data collected using the questionnaire was analysed using the measure of descriptive statistics like mean, variance, standard deviation, maximum, minimum etc. Further, Cronbach alpha, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, ANOVA were applied in analysing and interpreting the data.

### 6.1. Profile of the Study Area

The Central Assam District of Nagaon (spelled by the British as Nowgong) is one of the largest districts of Assam. It sprawls across almost four thousand square kilometers of fertile alluvial plains and thickly forested hills. Nagaon extends from 250-45' to 260 -45' North Latitude and 920 -33' -6" East Longitude. The district is bounded by Sonitpur district and the river Brahmaputra in the north, West Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills in the south and East Karbi Anglong and Golaghat district in the east. The mighty river Brahmaputra flows along the northern periphery of the district. Other major tributaries meandering through the district such as Kolong, Kopili drain into the Brahmaputra. Lying at a distance of 123 Kilometers by road from Guwahati, Nagaon town constitutes a vital corridor linking the Upper Assam districts of Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh,

Tinsukia and the North Assam districts of Sonitpur and North Lakhimpur. Nagaon has covered total area of 3,993 sq. km. The map of study area (Fig. 2) and demographic profiles of the study district are briefed in Table 1.

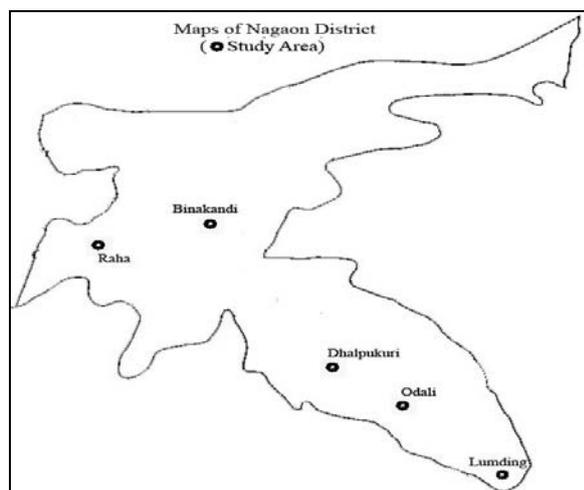


Figure 2. Map of Study Area, Nagaon District of Assam, India

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Nagaon District of Assam, India

Demographic Profile of Nagaon District of Assam, India			
Total Population	2,826,006	1,440,307 (Males)	1,385,699 (Female)
Total ST Population			89394
Total SC Population			215209
Male literacy			78.19%
Female literacy			69.21%
Population Density			711 per sq. km
Total House Holds			378778
BPL House Holds			177697
BPL P/C			46.91
No. of SHG Formed			24156*

\*Up to March 2011

Source: Census Report 2011 and Microfinance Status Report, NABARD 2010-11

Table 2. Progress of SHGs in Nagaon, Assam (As on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011)

Promoter	No. of SHG Formed	No. of SHG taken up Economic activity	No. of Women SHGs Formed
	Total*	Total	Total
SGSY	20590	5592	12630
Asomi-MFI	24	15	22
Prochesta- MFI	64	35	37
RGVN- MFI	87	56	64
NGO-MFI			
SK Human Welfare Assoc.	50	27	44
Gharoa**	50	28	38
Jana Chetana Samity Asom	62	24	48
Zeal Thrill Friendship Group**	50	10	40
Gramya US	31	11	26
Bank ***	165	56	132
Farmer Club /SHG as Cooperative society	258	123	168
Others including Govt. Depts.	2725	121	87
Total	24156	6098	13336

\*Total since 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1999; \*\*Promoted with Banks, \*\*\*Reported from SLBC Report, March 2010.

Source: Microfinance Status Report, NABARD 2010-11, and SLBC Report, March 2010

The SHG linkage approach operating in the districts of Nagaon is too some extent similar with the state structure. While we undertook pilot survey at preliminary stage in order to examine whether all models exist in practice, we found NGO as MFIs and NGO as financial intermediary did not exist separately. Therefore, Model II A and Model II B (as defined by NABARD) have been clubbed together into a single category termed as Model II (NGO as Financial Intermediary). Further, three MFI and fifty four Farmer Clubs are also promoted SHGs in the district. Besides, there are five Cooperative SHGs in the district of Nagaon (Micro Finance Status Report, NABARD 2010-11, and SLBC Report, March 2010). Further, the overall progress of SHGs under SHG-Bank linkage and MFI-Bank linkage in the study district are shown in the above Table 2.

To get rid from poverty and to increase in income are the main motivating factors to join SHGs & the process that lead to the formation of a SHG is at the desire of promoter to achieve the target oriented approach of SHG promotion. In Nagaon district, SHGs are formed and organised less than one or the other umbrella programmes of the Government, NGOs, banks and sometimes, even by the people themselves.

## 6.2. Profile of the Respondents

This section explains profile of sample respondent's who are direct stakeholders of SHGs viz. Promoters, Donors, Financial Institutions and the Group members.

### 6.2.1. Socio-Economic Profile of Group Members

**a) Gender of Group Members:** The study consists of respondents from all groups i.e. both male and female as shown in Table 4. Out of 44 respondents belonging to Group members, 24 (54.5%) are male and 20 (45.5%) are female. Sincere effort is given to cover reasonable number of members from each category so that study is free from gender bias. Further, it is observed from the field report and other secondary resources that in the study area there are ample number of women SHGs.

**b) Age Composition of Group Members:** The study consists of respondents from all age groups. Distribution of the sample respondents by age composition is furnished in Table 4. It is pertinent from the table that majority of the sample respondents belong to 40 & above age group (47.7%). At the next level, majority of the respondents are 30-40 years of age (27.3%), while study also consists of 25% of the respondents, who are below 30 years of age. Thus, it is revealed from the study that relatively aged people are actively participating in SHGs.

**c) Caste of Group Members:** Caste is the social variable. Table 4 present distributions of the sample respondents by caste. It is observed from the table that the study covers all caste groups namely General Castes, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). It is depicted from the table that 50% of the sample respondents are from general category, followed by 29.5% of the respondents from SC category, 15.9% of the respondents from ST category and the rest 4.5% of the respondents are from other categories.

**Table 3. Sample SHGs, NGOs, MFIs and Financial Institutions (Promoter, Donor, Financier and SHG members)**

Name of Development Block	Name Revenue Villages	No of Sample SHGs	NGO/ NGO-MFI/ Promoter	No of Sample	Govt. Stakeholders	No of Sample	Name of the Financier/ Promoter	No of Sample
Raha	Raha Bazar, Rajagaon, Amsoi	3*3= 9	NGO	3	Agr. Extension Officers	1	PNB, SBI	2
Binakandi	Ambari, Ruhini Pather, Pachim Jamunagaon	3*3= 9	Farmers Club	2	Agr. Extension Officers	1	UBI, SBI, AGVB	3
Dhalpukhuri	Kapilipar, Howaipur, Pachim Lankagaon	3*3= 9	Farmers Club	2	Field Officer, Dist Vet & Animal Hus, Nagaon	1	SBI, AGVB	2
Odali	No. 2 Pipal pukhuri, Lankajan, Ranipukhuri,	3*3= 9	Farmers Club	2	Village Extension officers	1	UBI, UCO	2
Lumding	3 No. Derapather, 2 No. kaki, Narayanpue,	3*3= 9	NGO	2	Agr. Extension Officers	1	Allahabad Bank, SBI, AGVB	3
District level (Nagaon)	Nil		NGO-MFI= 3 Govt. Depts.= 7		DRDA Officials= 1 Programme Officer- NERCRMP, Nagaon= 1 Field Officer, SIRD=1 Field Officer, ASFABC= 1		Financier = Nil	
State Level (Assam)	NIL		MFI = 3		NABARD = 1		NIL	
Total	45		24		10		12	
Total Sample Respondents	100 (Promoter= 34, Donor = 10, Financial institutions = 12 and Group members = 44)							
Total Sample consists of 100 since Bank and NGO have different status and one group member declined to give information								

**d) Social Status of Group Members:** The study constitutes respondents from different members from all community having different social status, namely, Most Backward Community, Backward Community and Forward Community. Distribution of the sample respondents by social status is provided in Table 4. It is delineated from the table that largest percentage of the sample respondents belong to Backward Community (61.4%), while 31.8% of the respondents belong to Forward Community and 6.8% of the respondents belong to Most Backward Communities.

**e) Economic Status of Group Members:** Table 4 presents distribution of the sample respondents by Economic status of family. It is portrayed from the table that huge proportion of the sample respondents are from 'others groups' i.e. wage earner, disguised labour, non-agricultural labourers, private employees, job seeker (44%), 34.1% belongs to 'Below poverty level, 15.9% belongs to 'Green card holder' and only 9.1% of the sample respondents are the 'Job card holder'.

**f) Duration of Membership in SHG by Group Members:** Table 4 below depicts the number of years a sample respondent being a member of the SHG. It is observed that 38.6% of the sample respondents remain a member of SHG during 1-4 years, 34.1% of the respondents are members of SHG during 4-5 years, 18.2% of the respondents are members of SHG more than 6 years while only 9.1% of the respondents are members of SHG during 5-6 years.

**g) Literacy Level of Group Members:** Table 4 shows distribution of the sample respondents by educational level. It is interesting to note from the table that only 45.5% of the sample respondents are above 10<sup>th</sup> Standard and the rest of the respondents are either neo-literates or literates. The study comprises 25% of the respondents, who are neo-literates i.e. 10<sup>th</sup>

Standard. It is found from the table that 9.1% of the respondents among literates have completed above primary education but less than 10<sup>th</sup> standard. Of the sample surveyed, 20.5% of them have studied up to primary education level.

**h) Annual Income of Group Members:** Distribution of the sample respondents by annual income is presented in Table 4. It is inferred from the table that annual income of the majority of the sample respondents ranges up to Rs.50, 000 (56.8%). At the next level, 43.2% of the sample respondents' annual income of the sample respondents ranges from Rs. 50,000 - Rs. 1 lakhs.

### 6.2.2. Profile of Other Stakeholder

'Stakeholders' means the persons or institutions with whom any stake or interest is vested or created to facilitate the promotion of SHG movement, which shall include the regulators, promoters, donor, financier, educators and facilitators of the SHG movement. Major stakeholders in SHGs are, therefore includes all Self Help Group Promoting Institutions (SHPIs) i.e. Promoter, Donor, Financier and the SHGs itself. SHPIs, whether Farmers club, NGOs, banks or State governments, have been playing a vital role in promoting, nurturing and sustaining the SHG movement under SBLP in Assam. It is observed that the major promoter of SHGs in the study districts are DRDA (for SGSY scheme), followed by NGOs and Banks. A few NGO-MFI are also promoting SHGs in the study district. In this study respondent as promoter includes some officials of NGOs such as ASOMI, Prochesta-MFI, RGVN-MFI, Commercial banks, SIRD, DDM-NABARD, ASFABC, Agriculture Departments, Farmers Club etc. who are engaged in SHG promotion. 'Donors and investors' encompasses a range of funding agencies, including bilateral donors, foundations, multilateral development banks, and socially oriented private investors.

While NABARD and RMK etc. remains a major donor to NGOs and SHG institutions in India and have been receiving a fraction of required funds for their development. In the study district, NABARD, State Government under SGSY and NGO-MFIs are the major donors of SHGs. In this study respondents belonging to Donor includes some officials of NGO-MFI such as ASOMI, Prochesta-MFI, RGVN-MFI, Dristi Foundation, RuTAG-NE, Srimanta Sankardeb Sangstha; Officials of District Veterinary & Animal Husbandry, NABARD, NERCRMP, SIRD, Agriculture Departments etc. In this study respondents belonging form Financial Institutions includes Officials of nationalised commercial banks including SBI, RRBs i.e. AGVB etc. In this way out of 100 respondents, 10 represented from Financial Institutions. Below section below depicts the detailed profile of Promoter, Donor, and Financial Institutions.

**a) Nationality of Other Stakeholders:** It is observed from the Table 4 below that all the respondents belong to different categories are originated from India.

**b) Nature of Promoting Organisation:** Distribution of the sample respondents by Nature of Promoting Organisation is presented in Table 4. It is observed that majority of respondents comes from other Government agencies (55.9%) and Government departments (20.6%). The share of other promoting organisation includes NGO- Universal (2.9%), NGO-Nation hood (8.8%) and NGO-Region hood (5.9%). Therefore, it may also be concluded that a large variety of institutions that are engaged in the promotion of SHGs in the study districts are basically promoted by other government agencies i.e. DRDA (SGSY) is the major promoter of SHG in the study district.

**c) Place of Location of Stakeholders:** Distribution of the sample respondents by Place of Location of Stakeholders is presented in Table 4. It is observed that majority of respondents belonging to Promoter located in Assam (52.9%), 41.2% of the respondents belonging to Promoter originated from outside North East India while 5.9% of the respondents belonging to Promoter originated from Outside Assam but within NER. Similarly, majority of respondents belonging to Donor located in Assam (60%) and equal number of respondents belonging to Donor originated from outside North East India and from Outside Assam but within NER (20% each). Further, it is observed that majority of respondents belonging to Financial Institutions have functioning at all India level (66.7%) while 33.3% of the respondents belonging to Financial Institutions are originated within Assam. However, majority of stakeholder have originated from Assam (50%), 7.14% respondents from other states of North-eastern Region of India and 42.86% respondents whose existence is situated at all India level.

**d) Nature of Programme/ Project of Stakeholders:** Distribution of the sample respondents by Nature of Programme is presented in Table 4. It is observed that majority of respondents promoting or linked with SGSY (53.33%), while 60.71% of respondents linked other programmes. Further, it is observed that majority of the respondents belonging to Promoter

and Donor connected with others programme i.e. not connected with SGSY while cent percent financial institutions are connected with Government sponsored SGSY scheme.

**e) Nature of Promotion by Stakeholders:** Distribution of the sample respondents by Nature of Promotion is presented in Table 4. It is observed that majority of respondents promoting or linked with financial assistance (53.57%), while 46.43% of respondents linked both financial & non-financial i.e. financial and training. Further, it is observed that majority of the respondents belonging to Donor category are connected with financial and non-financial assistance (90%) while 91.7% of respondents belonging to Financial Institutions are provided only financial assistance.

**f) Recovery Percentage of SHG Promoted by Different Stakeholders:** Distribution of the sample respondents by Recover Percentage of SHG Promoted is presented in Table 4. It is observed the table that majority of respondents from all categories of stakeholders (63.64%) whose recovery percentage is ranged within 50%-75%. Further, it is observed that 16.7% respondents belonging to financial institutions who reported recovery percentage is above 75%.

**g) Impact Assessment by Stakeholders:** Distribution of the sample respondents by performing of Performance Assessment is presented in Table 4. It is observed from the table that 21.43% of respondents from all categories of stakeholders conducted impact assessment. Only 50% of Donor and 20.6% of respondents belonging to Promoter reported that they conducted such impact assessment.

**h) Quality Assessment Conducted by Stakeholders:** Distribution of the sample respondents by performing of Quality Assessment is presented in Table 4. It is observed from the table that 32.14% respondents from all categories of stakeholders conducted quality assessment. Only 32.4% of promoter respondents and 25 of Financial Institutions respondents and 40% of Donor respondents reported that they perform such quality assessment.

**i) Performance Assessment Conducted by Stakeholders:** Distribution of the sample respondents by performing of Performance Assessment is presented in Table 4. It is observed from the table that 57.14% of respondents from all categories of stakeholders conducted Performance assessment.

**j) Nature of Donor Organisation:** Distribution of the sample respondents by Nature of Donor Organisation is presented in Table 4. It is observed that majority of respondents comes from Government Departments (50%), while 20% respondents belong to NGO and 30% belong to Trust.

**k) Nature of Financial Institution:** Distribution of the sample respondents by nature of financial institution is presented in Table 4. It is observed that majority of respondents comes from Public Sector Financial Institutions like SBI and Other nationalised commercial banks available in the study district (75%), while 25% respondents belong to Regional Rural bank i.e. AGVB.

**Table 4. Distribution of the Sample Respondents**

Profile of Sample Respondents		
Socio-economic Profile of Group members		Number (Percentage)
Gender of SHG Member	Male	24 (54.5%)
	female	20 (45.5%)
Age	Below 30 yr	11 (25%)
	30-40 yr	12 (27.3%)
	40 & above	21 (47.7%)
Caste of Group Members	General	22 (50%)
	Schedule Caste	13 (29.5%)
	Schedule Tribes	7(15.9%)
	Others	2 (4.5%)
Social Status of Group Members	Most Backward Community	3 (6.8%)
	Backward Community	27 (61.4%)
	Forward Community	14 (31.8%)
Economic Status of Group Members	Below Poverty Level	15 (34.1%)
	Green Card Holder	7 (15.9%)
	Job Card Holder	4 (9.1%)
	Others	18 (40.9%)
Duration of Membership in SHG	1-4 yr	17 (38.4%)
	4-5 yr	15 (34.1%)
	5-6 yr	4 (9.1%)
	Above 6 yr	8(18.2%)
Literacy Level of Group Members	Primary	9 (20.5%)
	Below 10th Std.	4 (9.1%)
	10th Std.	11 (25%)
	Above 10th Std.	20 (45.5%)
Annual Income of Group Members	Upto Rs. 50 Thousand	25 (56.8%)
	Rs. 50- Rs. 1 lakhs	19 (43.2%)
Profile of Other Stakeholder		
Nationality of Other Stakeholders	Indian	34(100%)
Nature of Promoting Organisation	Govt. Depts.	7 (20.6%)
	Other Govt. Agencies	19 (55.9%)
	NGO- Universal	1 (2.9%)
	NGO- Nation hood	3 (8.8%)
	NGO-Region hood	2 (5.9%)
	NGO- Statehood	2 (5.9%)
Place of Location of Stakeholders	Assam	Promoter= 18(52.9%); Donor= 6(60%); FI= 4 (33.3%); Total= 28(50%)
	Outside Assam but within NER	Promoter= 2(5.9%); Donor= 2(20%); Total= 4(7.14%)
	Outside NER	Promoter= 14(41.2%); Donor= 2(20%); FI= 8 (66.7%); Total= 24(42.86%)
Nature of Programme/ Project of Stakeholders	SGSY	Promoter= 19(55.9%); Donor= 3(30%); FI= 12 (100%); Total =34 (60.71%)
	Others	Promoter= 15(44.1%); Donor= 7(70%); Total=22(39.29%)
Nature of Promotion by Stakeholders	Financial	Promoter= 18(52.9%); Donor= 1(10%); FI= 11 (91.7%); Total =30 (53.57%)
	Both	Promoter= 16(47.1%); Donor= 9(90%); FI= 1 (8.3%); Total = 26(46.43%)
Recovery Percentage of SHG Promoted by Different Stakeholders	Below 25%	Nil
	25-50%	Donor= 6(60%); Total= 6(27.27%)
	50-75%	FIs= 10(83.3%); Donor=4(40%); Total= 14(63.64%)
	Above 75%	FIs= 2 (16.7%); Total=2 (9.09%)
Impact Assessment by Stakeholders	No	Promoter= 27(79.4%); Donor= 5(50%); FI= 12 (100%); Total = 39(69.64%)
	Yes	Promoter= 7(20.6%); Donor= 5(50%); Total = 12(21.43%)
Quality Assessment Conducted by Stakeholders	No	Promoter= 23(67.6%); Donor= 6(60%); FI= 9 (75%); Total = 38(67.86%)
	Yes	Promoter= 11(32.4%); Donor= 4(40%); FI= 3 (25%); Total = 18(32.14%)
Performance Assessment Conducted by Stakeholders	No	Promoter= 15(44.1%); Donor= 4(40%); FI= 5 (41.7%); Total = 24(42.85%)
	Yes	Promoter= 19(55.9%); Donor= 6(60%); FI= 7 (58.3%); Total = 32(57.14%)
Nature of Donor Organisation	Govt. Dept	5 (50%)
	Trust	3 (30%)
	NGO	2 (20%)
Nature of Financial Institution	Public Sector FI	9 (75%)
	RRBs	3 (25%)

Source: Compiled from the Questionnaire

## 7. Analysis & Discussion

**a) Reliability Test on Score on Perceptions of Stakeholders of SHGs:** The result of the reliability test on the opinion of different stakeholders on 40 elements relating to SHGs as empowerment model reveals that Cronbach's Alpha is 0.750 which is acceptable and further denotes that there are the presences of internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951

[29]; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994 [30] and George and Mallery, 2003 [31]).

**b) Validity of the Instrument Measuring Perceptions of Stakeholders of SHGs:** Content validity was assessed after considering the findings of an extensive review of the literature on empowerment of SHGs member, and then discussing it with experts in the field (two academicians and two micro finance practitioners). Some items of the sub-scales were revised according to appropriate demographic circumstances of the study district.

c) **Descriptive Statistics on Score on Perceptions of Stakeholders of SHGs:** Further, the descriptive scale statistics on the perception of different stakeholders of SHGs regarding the issue whether SHG is an empowerment model denotes the mean is 17.05, variance 70.674 and standard deviation 8.407 (Table 5).

**Table 5. Descriptive on Overall Score on Perception of Stakeholders about SHG as Empowerment Model**

		Statistic	Std. Error
Overall Score on Empowerment	Mean	17.050	.84068
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	15.382
		Upper Bound	18.718
	Median	15.000	
	Variance	70.674	
	Std. Deviation	8.4068	
	Minimum	-2.00	
	Maximum	40.00	
Source: Compiled from the Questionnaire			

d) **Normality Tests on Score on Perceptions of Stakeholders of SHGs:** Further, to evaluate the normality of distribution of data on the perceptions of different stakeholders on different variables relating to SHGs as empowerment model, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted on the total score obtained on Perception of Stakeholders about SHG as Empowerment model (Table 6).

**Table 6. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test on Perception of Stakeholders about SHG as Empowerment Model**

		Overall Score on Empowerment Model
N		100
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	17.050
	Std. Deviation	8.407
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.135
	Positive	.135
	Negative	-.066
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.350
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.052

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

Source: Compiled from the Questionnaire

Since the p-value is 0.052 for overall score of variables on SHGs as Empowerment from Table 6, there is no reason to doubt that the data come from population with a

normal distribution (as we fail to accept the null hypothesis). Given the hypothesis & methodology, ANOVA Test is applied to test the main hypothesis.

e) **ANOVA Test on Score on Perceptions of Stakeholders of SHGs:** Further, from the ANOVA output (Table 7) which is the key table because it shows whether the overall F ratio for the ANOVA is significant or not. In case of overall score of variables on SHGs as SHGs as Empowerment model, F ratio (2.115) is significant ( $p = 0.103$ ) at the 0.05 alpha level. Hence, we fail to reject null hypothesis that all four groups' means are statistically equal, since  $p \geq 0.05$  and conclude that at least one of the group means is not significantly different from the others (or that at least two of the group means are not significantly different from each other).

**Table 7. ANOVA on Perception of Stakeholders about SHG as Empowerment Model**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Empowerment Model	Between Groups	433.758	3	144.586	2.115	0.103
	Within Groups	6562.992	96	68.364		
	Total	6996.750	99			
Source: Compiled from the Questionnaire						

Further, the stakeholder wise descriptive statistics (Table 8) on overall score on SHGs as Empowerment Model depicts that donor shows highest mean value followed by Promoters on overall score on Empowerment Model.

Since in the overall score of variables on SHGs as Empowerment, it is statistically proved that the mean form all four groups are equal hence, we resorted to find out item-wise analysis on variables relating to empowerment model to find out wherein the means are equal from the descriptive statistics tabulated as below Table 8 which are self explanatory. It is observed from the perceptions of direct stakeholders that Financial Institutions does not perceived to consider SHG as Empowerment Model of development as the mean value on the score of perception is only 15.08, Promoter and Group member perceived to consider SHG as Empowerment Model of development as the mean value on the score of perception is 17.12 and 16.18. Further, Donor strongly perceived to consider SHG as Empowerment Model of development as the mean value on the score of perception is too high (23).

**Table 8. Descriptive on Perception of Stakeholders about SHG as Empowerment Model**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
					Promoter	34		
Donor	10	23.00	10.198	3.225	15.705	30.295	7.00	40.00
Financial Institutions	12	15.083	5.775	1.667	11.414	18.753	3.00	23.00
Group Members	44	16.182	8.467	1.276	13.608	18.756	-2.00	40.00
Total	100	17.050	8.407	.841	15.382	18.718	-2.00	40.00

Source: Compiled from the Questionnaire

It is observed from the Table 9 that the direct stakeholders have negative perception on the statements which does not recognise SHGs as Empowerment model viz. Participation in public protests and campaigning (EM

1), Ability to make judicious purchases (EM 2), Reduction in domestic violence (EM 3), Overcoming the resistance from husband and other members of the family to join the SHG (EM 5), Some women can actively engage in the

decision of their marriage with the elders in her household i.e. freedom in choosing life partner (EM 14), and Campaign against social evils (EM 32).

Further, from the Table 9 of descriptive statistics on item wise perception of stakeholders about SHG as empowerment model, it is observed that out of 40 elements relating to SHGs as empowerment model, on six

(6) elements where mean value is negative and on thirty four (34) elements whose mean value is positive. Therefore, these thirty four (34) elements relating to SHGs as Empowerment construct whose mean value is positive are considered as the main elements relating to SHGs as the empowerment construct.

**Table 9. Descriptive Statistics on Perception of Stakeholders about SHG as Empowerment Model**

EM - ID	Statements relating to empowerment	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
		Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
EM -1	Participation in public protests and campaigning	-2	1	-.72	.062	.621
EM -2	Ability to make judicious purchases	-2	1	-.53	.080	.797
EM -3	Reduction in domestic violence	-2	1	-1.30	.088	.882
EM -4	Community members seek the help of the group	-1	2	.39	.113	1.127
EM -5	Overcoming the resistance from husband and other members of the family to join the SHG	-2	1	-1.05	.088	.880
EM -6	Increased participation in decision-making within the household to issues that were usually considered outside the domain of woman	-1	2	.67	.062	.620
EM -7	Improved status and increase in respect within the household	-1	2	1.10	.056	.560
EM -8	Feeling fearless, open and confident	-1	1	.19	.066	.662
EM -9	All group members learn to sign their names and some have joined adult literacy programmes	-1	2	.93	.076	.756
EM -10	Freedom in deciding number of children they can have & adopting family planning measures	-1	2	1.01	.083	.835
EM -11	More mobile, can move out of the house and the village more frequently	0	2	.82	.050	.500
EM -12	Talking to the male persons in their village, which they were not confident to do before because of cultural / social reasons	0	2	.58	.052	.516
EM -13	Actively participating in the decision to send their children to school	0	2	1.31	.049	.486
EM -14	Some women can actively engage in the decision of their marriage with the elders in her household i.e. freedom in choosing life partner	-2	1	-1.62	.060	.599
EM -15	Awareness about politics and engaged in political participation by way of voting or directly, by standing as a candidate in the local elections.	-2	2	.43	.081	.807
EM -16	Sense of devotion to work	-2	2	.50	.080	.798
EM -17	Ability to manage productive resources	-1	2	.62	.072	.722
EM -18	Helps the women who lack access to banks / financial services in own right	0	2	.97	.046	.460
EM -19	Improvements in courage	-1	2	.37	.071	.706
EM -20	Self confidence	-1	2	.51	.070	.703
EM -21	Helps in self reliance/ independence	-1	2	.63	.063	.630
EM -22	Helps in acquisition of skills for income generation.	-1	2	1.03	.052	.521
EM -23	Ability to understand & solve problems.	-1	2	.84	.055	.545
EM -24	Awareness on health and sanitation	-1	1	.10	.052	.522
EM -25	Awareness on food and nutrition	-11	1	.02	.123	1.231
EM -26	Awareness about the environment	-1	1	.10	.052	.522
EM -27	Ability to develop alternative economic structures locally.	-1	2	1.13	.066	.661
EM -28	Increased income.	1	2	1.92	.027	.273
EM -29	Participation in democratic institutions	-1	2	.51	.072	.718
EM -30	Expressing opinions freely	-2	2	.33	.068	.682
EM -31	Work outside the village /locality	-1	2	.55	.058	.575
EM -32	Campaign against social evils	-2	1	-.48	.077	.772
EM -33	Members can dispose of their own income according to their choice.	-2	2	.29	.071	.715
EM -34	Helps group holds its meetings without help of NGO.	-1	2	.66	.061	.607
EM -35	Helps group to establish the linkages for successful working of the enterprises	-1	2	.65	.064	.642
EM -36	Helps group to demand services from NGO/project	-1	2	.61	.063	.634
EM -37	Helps group can maintain its record without support from NGO.	-1	2	.60	.065	.651
EM -38	Helps group to contact DRDA/ other agency for information and support.	-1	2	.61	.063	.634
EM -39	Helps women members to be aware about the rights to equitable share of resources i.e. same time of job, same wage rate etc	-1	2	.87	.058	.580
EM -40	Helps women members to be aware about rights to equitable share of inherited property	-2	2	.90	.054	.541
Valid N (list wise)				100		

Source: Compiled from the Questionnaire

## 8. Conclusion

It is worth mentioning here that SHGs emerge as an important strategy for empowering women & masses and alleviating poverty. They are an effective strategy for poverty alleviation, women development and social

empowerment. The women SHGs have enhanced the status of women as participant decision makers and beneficiaries on the democratic, economic, social and cultural spheres of life and sensitised the women members to take active part in socio-economic progress of rural India. A lot of literature are found on the role of SHGs in empowering women & masses and also have cross world evidences that SHGs are helpful in reducing poverty.

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on overall score of variables on SHGs as empowerment model is used to determine whether there are any significant differences between the means of two or more independent (unrelated) groups. From the ANOVA test on overall score of variables on SHGs as empowerment model, we conclude that at least one of the group means is significantly different from the others (or that at least two of the group means are significantly different from each other). Further, from item wise analysis on variables relating to empowerment model, it is observed that the means of variables relating to SHGs as empowerment model are not equal. Again, it is observed that out of forty elements relating to SHGs as empowerment construct, in six (6) elements where mean value is negative. Therefore, thirty four (34) elements relating to SHGs as Empowerment construct whose mean value is positive are considered as the main elements of the empowerment construct of SHGs as perceived by direct stakeholders of SHGs.

## Statement of Competing Interests

'The authors have no competing interests'.

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