



Role of Cooperatives in Women Empowerment: Case study of SJSM and AWARD

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Abstract

Without cooperation and cooperative enterprise women empowerment is impossible. Cooperation gives strength to women not only to deal with family issues but also to cope up with social and economic issues. In rural India cooperation has proved to be the wonderful tool of development. Millions of women are connected with one or the other form of cooperative enterprise in India. Self Help Group movement is remarkable example of women empowerment through cooperation. This paper deals about role of cooperatives in women empowerment with special reference to two organizations Action for Women and Rural Development (AWARD) Satara and Shramajivi Janata Sahayak Mandal(SJSM) Satara. Both these organizations have established cooperative enterprises for women empowerment in hilly regions of Satara district in Maharashtra State. The major resources used by these organizations are available local agricultural resources. Think Globally Act Locally and Do Personally this principle been used by both these organizations in the field of women empowerment.

Key words: AWARD, SJSM, Cooperation, Women empowerment.

Introduction:

Action for Women and Rural Development (AWARD) and Shramajivi Janata Sahayak Mandal (SJSM) both these organizations are working in the field of cooperation and women empowerment. SJSM is working in this field since last 4 decades especially in Koyana Dam back water area and in Raigad district of Maharashtra. Whereas AWARD is working since last 2 decades in Urmodi dam area of Satara and Sangli district, the basic aim of these two organizations are women empowerment and making them self reliant economically.



The Director of AWARD is Master of Social Work (MSW) professional and is making use of her professional knowledge and skills to empower women in every field of their life. Women who were caught in the clutches of Poverty are now free from poverty and are living very happy and successful life. The intervention strategies used by AWARD are having organic relation with their life.

1. **Cooperative Farming:**

Means voluntary joint cultivation without leaving right of ownership pool their land, livestock, for getting higher produce according to land share and work performance. People from hilly area are marginal and small farmers and owners of pieces of land they don't own acres of land at a stretch hence the production cost of agricultural product is very high and does not match with the profit hence large number of farmers leave their pieces of land uncultivated and move to Mumbai and nearby city and work in unorganized sector to sustain their life. When this scenario was examined by AWARD they started discussion with the farmers regarding cooperative and joint farming activities. Looking at the results and retaining the land ownership farmers accepted the proposal and established cooperative farming organization affiliated with AWARD. They formed Rice, Wheat and Pulses cooperative farming projects. The best quality organic Indrayani rice is produced by these farmers in joint cultivation project. People were not in a position to consume rice even though they are residing in heavy rainfall region and own fertile land but now they don't just consume Indrayani best quality rice even sell in the market with very good price being organic product it is having heavy demand in the market. With Indrayani they produce even local breed of rice and sell in the local market. Even wheat and pulses are produced by these farmers through cooperative farming project. Till now 270 farmers are associated with this project and getting good financial source to sustain their life.

2. **Cooperative Marketing:**

After achieving success in cooperative farming AWARD entered into cooperative marketing project. The limitation for good price for the agricultural product was observed and to provide sustainable market cooperative marketing organization are established to provide better price for the produce. Every year



AWARD is organizing a fair of agricultural products in the month of May. AWRD is getting overwhelming response for this fair. Farmers come with their all kind of productions like food grains, fruits, seeds, processed agricultural products and earn good amount of money. AWARD is providing them space in the heart of city and technical support.

3. Cooperative women dairy

In the hilly region of Satara taluka people own livestock to support their family income. They rear buffaloes and indigenous cows. The milk price for village level distribution was very much minimal and was not sufficient even to meet the production cost of milk. To understand the issue regarding income source through livestock AWARD conducted a survey and focused group discussions with women and put across the proposal of dairy cooperatives with women. In the initial stage one dairy cooperative Padmavati Milk Cooperative was established at Debewadi village near to Satara. This Dairy within a short span of time reached to success without any malpractices and corruption. Nearly 400 liters of milk is collected daily which is sold to another processing unit. It is been observed now a day people have become more health conscious, due precaution is taken by people while consuming milk. Milk of indigenous cow is in more demand and also good market is available for milk of indigenous cows. Looking at this market demand Gir cow (indigenous breed of India) project is started by AWARD in the remote village of Satara taluka. Where not just milk dairy activities are initiated but even other by products are produced like cow dung cakes, organic fertilizers, collection of urine for converting it into various kind of natural medicines. Daily twice one milk collection van reaches at the door step of house hold and collects milk. It has developed as a role model and at many places its replication is undertaken.

4. Cooperative seed bank

We all are facing the impact of Green Revolution. High Yield Variety of Seeds (HYVs) has destroyed the local and indigenous breed of pulses, vegetables and food grains. HYVs have shown the adverse impact on health of people. Many serious non curable health problems has aroused due to HYVs and use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. To cope up with this burning issue AWARD has taken a special effort to



establish cooperative seed bank of indigenous breeds which are available in remote villages of Satara district and Konkan area. Till now AWARD has collected 70 variety of local breed of Rice. AWARD provide these seeds on loan basis to farmers after harvesting it is expected farmers will return the seeds in double quantity to the organization so that a good of stock of indigenous seeds will be available with AWARD to provide to the farmers at large scale. Even the indigenous seeds of Jawar, Wheat and Pulses are made available to farmers on demand.

Shramajivi Janata Sahayak Mandal's (SJSM) women development program coordinator is working in the field of women empowerment since last 37 years in Patan taluka of Satara district. Being a pioneering organization in the field of women empowerment through cooperation has become a role model to many newly established organizations in Satara district. SJSM has reached to international level. OXFAM, SWISS Aid is international funding organizations provide financial and technical support to carry out women empowerment activities. Special financial assistance was provided by Department of Science and Technology Government of India to establish women Technology Park at Patan taluka. Japan based funding organization has provided grants of 2.5 million for construction of a training institute to carry out women empowerment activities in remote area of Satara district.

The intervention strategies designed by SJSM were locally available resources. Patan taluka is rich with natural resources. Being a heavy rain fed taluka wealth of natural resources are available in abundance. SJSM tapped the natural resources and with the help of cooperative enterprises many women cooperatives were established.

1. Cooperative food processing units.

Rice and Ragi are major food crops cultivated in Patan taluka. Innocent villagers were selling these products at very reasonable price, even after producing huge quantity of food grains people were living a very miserable life. First units were established were production of Ragi flour; Ragi Satva and Papad after receiving good response other products like Rice Papad were produced. These products were sold in



the local market of Satara and one out let was opened at Pune -Mumbai mega highway.

2. Cooperative fruit processing units

Local fruits Amala, Jamun, Mango, Jackfruit, Black Maina (Karwand) are available in abundance being a seasonal fruits people were selling these in local market in a very cheap rate. SJSJ provided training to women to produce various products from each of these. Amala is processed as Amala powder and also used in Trifala Churna, Amala Candy, Amala Pickle, Amala Syrup are produced from Amala rich in Vitamin C fruit. Jamun (Black Berry) is processed as Syrup; its seeds are processed in powder to use in herbal medicines especially for Diabetes. Raw Mangoes are processed to produce different varieties of Pickle, Syrup and Amchur Powder. Ripped Mangoes are processed to produce mango juice, Mango poli. Jackfruits in raw form is processed to produce Wafers, and Vegatable, ripped is processed to produce Chocolates, Jackfruit Poli, Jackfruit syrup is also produced to use throughout year. Karwand is processed to produce pickle and syrup. All these products are having good market not just in India but even abroad. It has become a brand of SJSJ.

3. Herbal Cooperatives

Medicinal plants are another rich natural resource available in Patan taluka of Satara district. Behada Hirda, Amala, Jamun, Neem, Shatavari, Gulvel, Maka, Narakya, Shikekai, Hibiscus and many more herbal plants are available in Patan taluka. Women collect these herbal products from jungle and bring it to SJSJ processing units. Various herbal medicines and cosmetics are produced by women through this herbal cooperative. They make packing of different size and quantity and sell it in the market. Koyana herbal face pack produced by SJSJ is having large market in different beauty parlors.

4. Women Dairy Cooperatives

Women from hilly region of Patan taluka are having knowledge and skill to rear up indigenous cow and buffaloes. These poor women were cheated by bhaiyas and local agents. SJSJ established two women dairies at Sada Vaghapur and Sada



Bodakewadi remote villages of Patan. Both these dairies are of Dhangar community (Nomadic Tribe Community). Gradually SJSJ established many more dairies throughout Patan taluka and developed a good network of dairy cooperatives.

5. Self Help Group (SHG) Federation

SJSJ has selected as a Mother NGO (MNGO) by NABARD India and AWARD is working as a Field NGO (FNGO) to develop SHGs federation throughout Satara District. Under this SHG federation large numbers of women SHG members have developed their organization and are working for women empowerment under the banner of SJSJ.

Conclusion:

Both these organizations serve to common people and empower them to fulfill their basic human needs. Through this movement of cooperation now women have become able to cope up social issues also. One woman from cooperative society has contested Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti elections and one woman got elected as Panchayat Samiti Sabhapati. Women have become very much confident to deal their family and social issues. Even during auditor's visit woman confidently answer the questions and give satisfactory answers. Through these cooperatives not only women are empowered but they tried their better halves to develop gender sensitization. Now in the process of decision making women are equally participated. In real sense women empowerment has taken place through the intervention of both these organizations.

References:

Personal interview with Mrs. Kalpana Kalamkar from SJSJ and Mrs. Nilima Kadam from AWARD