Do self-help groups affect women’s economic empowerment in South Asia?

Early insights from a systematic review of policy evaluations

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**Systematic Review**

- **Goal:** systematic review of literature to understand impact on women’s economic empowerment in South Asia
  - Experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations
  - Outcomes: labor market, income, empowerment (social, political, psychological etc.)

- **Self Help Groups:** 10 to 20 individuals from a community voluntarily convening with a common purpose. Involves member participation in group governance, regular face to face interactions, internally generated resources (Brody et al. 2015; Biscaye et al. 2019)
  - 125 million households linked to 10 million SHGs across India (NABARD 2019)

- Filtration of 2 million studies ➡️ current list of **31 studies**
Self-help Groups

• Leverage group platform to address restrictive norms and social barriers faced by women in South Asia

• Mechanisms for change:
  - Economic (access to finance, assets and livelihood training)
  - Social capital (network size and depth, peer interaction, soft skills)
  - Agency: Information, mobility, decision making within group (saving amounts, loan approvals, interest rates)

Programs: PRADAN, JEEViKA, SEWA, Indira Kranthi Patham, District Poverty Initiatives Project, Mahila Samakhya, National Rural Livelihoods Mission, Odisha Rural Livelihoods Project (TRIPTI), Safe Cities Initiative, Pudhu Vaazhvu Project, Do Kadam Barabari ki Ore
RESULTS: Social Capital

- Measured after 3-6 years of membership (average 4.5)
- 8 studies
- Effects range from 2-30% (average 16%) where measured
- Measured after 3-6 years of membership (average 4.5)
RESULTS: Civic Inclusion

Measured after 2-6 years of membership (average 4)

Effects range between 5-160% where measured

14 studies
Conclusion

- Evidence for changes in some outcomes, but not all

- Change takes time
  - Community resistance to self-help groups reduced