

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN MEMBERS OF SHGS IN THE REGIONS OF DROUGHT-PRONE DISTRICTS OF WEST BENGAL

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### **Abstract**

The present study analyses the role of SHGs in improving the socio-economic status of women and to delve into the impact of such group-formation on the decision making powers of the women members in their respective families in the context of most backward and drought-prone districts West Medinipur, Purulia and Bankura. One of the escape routes to solve the problems of drought prone areas is the formation of SHGs. The formation of SHGs and the flow of microfinance has been generating hope to the most vulnerable section of the society, particularly the women of backward and poor community, who have the ability as well as willingness to rise out of the poverty and become economically self-sufficient. The percentage of illiterate members in both drought-prone areas and non-drought-prone areas was seen to have decreased to some extent after the formation of SHGs. The overall mean monthly per capita income for the SHGs households in the non-drought prone areas was also higher than that in the drought-prone areas.

**Key words:** *Socio-economic status, decision-making role, microfinance, Self-help group*

### **1. Introduction**

The formation of Self-help Groups (SHGs) and the flow of microfinance has been generating hope to the most vulnerable section of the society, particularly the women of backward and poor community, who have the ability as well as willingness to rise out of the poverty and become economically and socially empowered. These SHGs are supposed to ameliorate the status of such woman as participants, decision makers and beneficiaries in the democratic, economic, social and cultural spheres of life.

West Medinipur, Purulia, Bankura district of West Bengal are the most backward and drought-prone districts (so called Jangalmahal). The inhabitants of this area are mostly from the primitive tribes, scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and other backward communities. The most

backward section of the people are from the primitive tribes such as Lodha, Sabar, Kerisetc. who still live in forests and locations far from the main stream. The process of rural development in the drought prone areas is particularly constrained by both unfavorable agro-climatic conditions and poorly developed infrastructural facilities, viz., transport and communication, electricity and irrigation, marketing and warehousing facilities etc. Moreover, in these areas, the benefits of the percolation effects, if any, are often appropriated mainly by the rural elites, which further accentuate the inequality in the rural areas. One of the escape routes to solve the said problems of drought prone areas of West Bengal is the formation of SHGs.

There are some institutional factors include the rules and regulations under which the government-linked SHGs function and evaluated in the process of upgradation. That is, the SHGs are assessed through a grading process whereby they are being graded as Grade I and Grade II by the local self-government (viz. through panchayat and the bank) on the basis of some definite criteria. The second elevation (Grade II) is made after six months of receipt of revolving fund and then the groups become eligible to get the facility of credit linkage scheme. These institutional factors are shown in Table 1 against the status of SHGs (whether they are performing very good, good or unsatisfactory on the basis of marks allotted for each factor). It is to be noted that for a SHG to be qualified for Grade I the minimum mark to be secured has been fixed at 70 and for Grade II it is 80.

**Table 1 Institutional factors required for SHGs for qualifying Grade I and Grade II**

Sl No.	Factors to be Checked	Very good	Good	Unsatisfactory
1	Group size	15 to 20 (5 marks)	10 to 15 (3 marks)	Less than 10(2 marks)
2	Type of members	Only very poor members(5marks)	2 or 3 not very poor members(3 marks)	Many not poor members(2 marks)
3	Number of meetings	Four meetings in a month (5 marks)	Two meetings in a month (3 marks)	Less than two meetings in a month (no marks)
4	Age of group	More than two years (10 marks)	1 to 2 years(7 marks)	5 to 1 years(5 marks)
5	Attendance of members	More than 90% (10 marks)	70 to 90% (5 marks)	Less than 70% (2 marks)
6	Participation of members	Very high level of participation (5)	Medium level of participation (3 marks)	Low level of participation(2 marks)

		marks)		
7	Savings collection within the group	Four times a month (10 marks)	Three times a month (7 marks)	Less than three times a month(5 marks)
8	Beneficial of members from internal loan	Above 50% members (5 marks)	20% to 50% members (3 marks)	Less than 20% members (2 marks)
9	Interest on internal loan	Depending upon the purpose (5 marks)	2 or 3 rupees per hundred per month (3marks)	More than 3 rupees per hundred per month (2 marks)
10	Utilization of savings amount by	Fully used for loaning to members (7 marks)	Partly used for loaning (5 marks)	Poor utilization (3 marks)
11	Loan recoveries	More than 90% (10 marks)	70 to 90% (7 marks)	Less than 70% (3 marks)
12	Maintenance of books	All books are regularly maintained and updated (15 marks)	Most important registers (minutes, savings, loans etc.) are updated (8 marks)	Irregular in maintaining and updating books (5 marks)
13	Accumulated savings	More than Rs. 5,000 (10 marks)	Rs. 3,000 to 5,000 (7 marks)	Less than Rs. 3,000 (5 marks)
14	Knowledge of the rules of the SHG	Known to all (5 marks)	Many members know the rules. Some have little knowledge of it. (3 marks)	Most of the members do not know the rules (2marks)
15	Education level	More than 30% of members can read and write (5 marks)	20 to 30% members can read and write (3 marks)	Less than 20 members know to read and write (2 marks)
16	Change the leader of the group	One time in a year (5 marks)	One time in 1 to 2 year (3 marks)	One times in above 2 year (2 marks)

Source: Office of DRDC, PaschimMedinipur

Following the above criteria, the features of SHGs i.e, the number of SHGs passed Grade-I and Grade-II, the number of groups received revolving fund, they involved in credit-linkagescheme and frequency of availing loan during 2000-01 to 2011-12 based on primary survey is shown in table 2.

**Table 2 Distribution of SHGs by the Features of SHGS in drought prone vis-à-vis non-drought-Prone Areas, 2000-01to 2011-12**

Features	SHGs in drought-prone areas	SHGs in non-drought-prone areas
Passed Grade I	91.7	100
Revolving fund received	85.4	100
Passed Grade II	58.3	59.5
Credit linked	18.8	16.7
Frequency of availing loan:		
(a) Once	39.6	38.1
(b) Twice	37.5	42.9
(c) Thrice or more	14.6	19
Total	100	100

*Source: Field Survey (2011-12)*

## 2. Review of the existing literature

In respect of socio-economic status, women empowerment we reviewed some existing literature. We got some positive effect as well as some negative effect in the decision making role of the members of SHGs. Katz (1981) observed that the members of SHGs acted differently after becoming members of SHGs to improve their socio-economic status. Hulme and Mosley (1996) indicated that the microfinance could reduce the isolation of women. When they came together in groups they had an opportunity to share information and develop their ideas which were not there previously. Shrestha (1998) indicated that women members were only able to make decisions regarding small purchases of necessary items like groceries independently after their participation in SHGs; otherwise they depended on their husbands. Nedumaran, Palanisami, and Swaminathan (2001) measured the economic impact of socio-economic status of SHGs in Solan District of Himachal Pradesh in terms of an increase in annual incremental income and they showed that all SHGs recorded an increase in their income. Jain (2003) showed that the SHGs enhanced equality in the status of women as participants, decision makers and beneficiaries in the democratic, economic, social and cultural sphere of life. Progress of women as a result of SHG formation could be ascertained by examining various indicators. Pitt, Shahidur and Cartwright (2003) examined the effects of men's and women's participation in group-based micro-credit programme. They showed that women's participation in micro-credit programmes helped to increase women's empowerment. However, Johnson (2004) stated that having women

as key participants in microfinance projects did not automatically lead to empowerment. Sometimes negative impacts could be witnessed. She referred to increased workloads, increased domestic violence and abuse.

### **3. Objective of the study**

- (a) To analyze the pattern of literacy among the women before and after the formation of SHGs
- (b) To look into the matter of level of poverty among the members
- (c) To analyze the income and savings of the members
- (d) To delve into the impact of such group-formation on the decision making powers of the
- (e) women members in their respective families.

### **4. Methodology and Sample Design**

The present study is based particularly on primary data. Interview schedules had been used as the main tool for data collection. We have chosen two sample draught prone districts of west Bengal, viz., PaschimMedinipur and Bankura. The blocks of these sample districts (PaschimMedinipur district consists of 29 blocks and Bankura district consists of 22 blocks) are treated as first stage sample units. We have chosen eight drought-prone blocks (Binpur-II, Gopiballavpur-II, Jhargram, Jambani, Chhatna, Khatra and Saltora) and seven non-drought prone blocks (Kharagpur -II, Salboni, Binpur - I, Debra, Bishnupur, Kotolpur and Indus) respectively. The sample SHGs have been chosen from both drought prone (48 sample SHGs) and non-drought prone blocks (42 sample SHGs). Our sample SHGs in drought prone areas consist of 552 members( all of them are female members) and the sample SHGs in non-drought prone areas consist of 455 members out of which about 97 per cent of members belong to female category. The socio-economic variables chosen for this study are education (years of education, level of education, gender preference in providing educational opportunities), children enrollment and poverty level before and after group formation, changes in decision making pattern of the female members in their respective families.

The difference between drought-prone areas and non-drought-prone areas in respect of per capita savings, per capita income, per capita income from SHG activities has been tested by using equality of variance (F-test) and equality of mean (t-statistic).

(a) **F-test**

The null hypothesis  $H_0: \sigma_1^2 = \sigma_2^2$  against the alternative hypothesis

$H_1: \sigma_1^2 \neq \sigma_2^2$  where  $s_1$  and  $s_2$  = sample standard deviation of sample 1 and sample 2 and  $\sigma_1^2$  and  $\sigma_2^2$  = population variance.

$$F\text{-test} = \frac{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} \div \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} \div \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}$$

If the calculated value of F ( $F_0$ ) is higher than the table value of F ( $F_{n_1-1, n_2-1, \alpha/2}$ )

where  $n_1-1, n_2-1$  are degrees of freedom and  $\alpha/2$  is the level of significance. Then null hypothesis is rejected, i.e, population variance is unequal.

(b) **t-test**

If  $\sigma_1 \neq \sigma_2$  then to test  $H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$  against  $H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$ . We use t-test.

$$\text{Here t-statistic} = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}}$$

Where  $s_1$  and  $s_2$  = sample standard deviation,  $\bar{x}_1, \bar{x}_2$  = sample means and  $n_1$  and  $n_2$  = sample sizes

If the calculated value of t ( $t_0$ ) is greater than the table value of t ( $t_{n_1+n_2-2, \frac{\alpha}{2}}$ ), then the null hypothesis is rejected.

$$\text{If } \sigma_1 = \sigma_2, \text{ then t-statistic} = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{S \sqrt{\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}}}$$

Where S is combined variance i.e.  $S = (n_1 - 1)s_1^2 + (n_2 - 1)s_2^2$

## 5. Demographic Characteristics of Sample Households

The majority of our sample SHG's are run by female members. Now, the caste wise division of these members shows the dominance of SC and ST category. Out of 552 members in drought prone areas, 24.3percent belong to general category, 34.6 percent belong to SC category, 37.1

percent to ST category and the rest 4 percent belong to OBC category. This composition in non-drought prone areas also indicates similar picture. Out of 455 members in non-drought prone areas, 36.5 percent belong to general category, 37.6 percent to SC category, 19.1 percent to ST category and the rest 6.8 percent belong to OBC category.

## **6. Analysis and Findings:**

The analysis and findings which follow from this study are discussed in the following sub-sections. Section 6.1 analyses the literacy level of the members of SHGs in drought prone area and non-drought prone area. Section 6.2 discusses the incidence of Poverty of the members of Self-help groups, Section 6.3 analyses the income and Savings of the members of SHGs and Section 6.4 analyses the decision making roles of the members of SHGs and Section 7 makes concluding observations.

### **6.1 Literacy level**

Education is vital for improving the living conditions of human beings and for the promotion of social progress. According to the definition given in Population Census, all those persons who can read and write a single sentence with comprehension is treated as literate irrespective of the numbers of classes passed [Sing, 2012]. Education and women empowerment are closely interconnected since educational attainments enable them to respond, to appreciate, to challenge their traditional roles and to raise their voice for a positive change in their lives (Banerjee, 2009). The majority of our sample SHGs are run by female members. Now, the caste wise division of these members shows the dominance of SC and ST category. Out of 552 members in drought prone areas, 24.28 percent belong to general category, 34.6 percent belong to SC category, 37.14 percent to ST category and the rest 3.98 percent belong to OBC category. This composition in non-drought prone areas also indicates similar picture. Out of 455 members in non-drought prone areas, 36.48 percent belong to general category, 37.58 percent to SC category, 19.12 percent to ST category and the rest 6.81 percent belong to OBC category.

The level of education of the members of sample SHGs can be indicated on the basis of the following categorization: Illiterate, Up to Primary level, Up to Upper Primary level, Up to Secondary level, Up to Higher Secondary level, Up to Under Graduate Level and Post Graduate Level.

The change, if any, in their educational level before and after Group formation in drought prone areas and non-drought prone area has been indicated in Table 3. Before the formation of SHGs, out of 552 members in drought prone areas, 47.3 per cent members of SHGs are found to be illiterate and out of 455 members in non-drought prone areas, about 47 per cent i.e., 212 members are found to be illiterate; 16.7 per cent i.e., 92 members in drought prone areas and 19.3 per cent i.e., 88 members in non-drought prone area have studied up to Primary level (we assume that those who are literate, i.e., read and sign their names, fall in the category of Primary level education i.e., literate and class I passed have been clubbed into same category). Again, 25 per cent members in drought prone area and 22.64 per cent members in non-drought prone areas have studied up to Upper Primary level. Only 8.7 per cent members in drought prone areas and 8.13 per cent members in non-drought prone areas are within the category of secondary education level before Group formation. However, this situation has changed after group formation. Out of 552 members in drought prone areas, 13 per cent members are illiterate and out of 455 members in non-drought prone areas, 10.3 per cent members remain illiterate.

**Table 3 Level of Education of the members of SHGs in drought prone area and non-drought Prone area before and after Group Formation**

Level of Education	Before Group formation		After Group formation	
	Percentage of members in drought prone area	Percentage of members in non-drought prone area	Percentage of members in drought prone area	Percentage of members in non-drought prone area
Illiterate	47.3	46.7	13.0	10.3
Primary Education	16.7	19.3	51.0	55.7
Upper Primary Education	25	22.6	25	22.6
Secondary Education	8.7	8.1	8.7	8.1
Higher Secondary Education	1.8	2.0	1.8	2.0
Under Graduate Level	.5	.9	.5	.9



Post Graduate Level	-	.4	-	.4
Total	100	100	100	100

*Source: Field Survey (20011-12);*

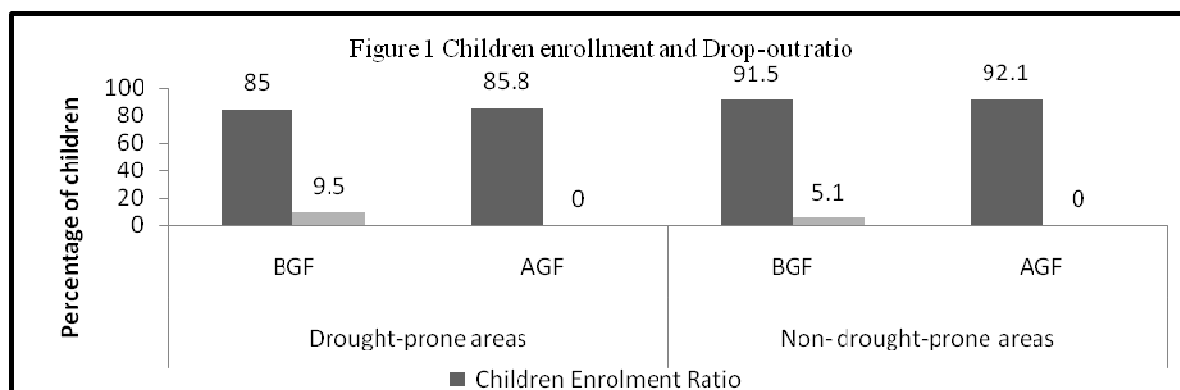
Further, about 51 per cent members in drought prone areas and 55.6 per cent members in non-drought prone areas have studied up to Primary level. Again, 25 per cent members in drought prone areas and 22.6 per cent members in non-drought prone areas have studied up to Upper Primary level. Only 8.7 per cent members in drought prone areas and 8.1 per cent members in non-drought prone areas have studied up to secondary level after Group formation. Therefore, there has been a drastic fall in the number of illiterate members (most of whom are women) both in absolute and relative terms. Table-1 shows that the number of illiterate members has decreased from 261 to only 72 in drought prone areas, i.e. the illiterate members who constituted about 47 per cent of total members of SHGs in drought prone areas, has been reduced to about 13 per cent. A similar trend has been observed in case of non-drought prone areas also. In many cases the group members have learned how to sign only after joining their respective SHGs and thus, it can be safely said that learning opportunities before the illiterate women can be widened through their participation in SHGs. In fact, they did not feel any necessity to sign their names or acquire the capability to read and write before group formation. The female members, before Group formation, had to remain busy in domestic works and child care activities and they had no opportunity to acquire this capability.

#### *Enrolment Status of Children*

The progress of literacy and education depends upon the propensity of children to go to school and also to complete at least the primary level. Enabling all children to obtain primary education has been the key challenge of the state government. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) are two widely used indicators to assess children's participation rates in schools. GER is the total enrolment at a given level of education regardless of age divided by the estimated child population. NER gives the age specific participation for each education level (Jana and Dasgupta, 2012).

The distribution of children of SHG members by enrolment and drop-out before and after the group formation in drought-prone areas is shown in Figure 1. We found that the children enrolment ratio was 85 per cent and the drop out rate 9.5 per cent before group formation. For

instance, the five children of Gholabhiswamata Swarnirbhar Dal dropped out from their school because their parent thought that if they could engage themselves in any motor garage, they could earn some money. The two children of Raghunath Jee Swarnirbhar Ghosthi dropped out at the age of 19 and 21 because of lack of finance for continuing their education. The five children of Rangamati Swarnirbhar Ghosthi dropped out at the age of 17 as they went to another state to earn livelihood. All groups were from Indpur block.



Source: Field survey (2011-12)

One child of Dubra Maa Tara Swasahayak Dal dropped out at the age 13 because of apathy towards education. One child of Sri Sri Maa Sitala SGSY Dal in Jamboni block could not enroll itself in a school because of lack of awareness. The children enrollment, however, increased after the group formation because rate of literacy among women could be widened through their participation in SHGs. Thus they became much aware about their children's education.

In non-drought-prone areas children's enrollment ratio was 91.5 per cent and 5.1 per cent children dropped out before the group formation whereas 92.1 per cent children got enrollment in schools and no child dropped out after the group formation in non-drought-prone areas.

## 6.2 Poverty

In our analysis, the members those who hold BPL card is considered to be under BPL (below poverty line) category and who hold Antodaya Anna Joyona card is considered to be under 'extremely poor' category. Before group formation, out of 552 members of 48 sample SHGs in the drought prone areas, the incidence of poverty was higher among the members belonging to SC and ST category. Table- 4 indicates that in drought prone areas, about 19 per cent members in general category, about 30 per cent in SC category and about 32 per cent in ST category

remained below the poverty level before group formation. Therefore, about 85 per cent members (viz. 439 out of 552 members) of SHGs were in BPL (Below Poverty Level) category in the drought prone areas before group formation. Again, out of these 552 members in DPAs, about 3 per cent members in general category, 1 per cent in SC category and about 2 per cent in ST category are considered to be extremely poor in the drought prone areas before group formation.

But this situation has changed to some extent after group formation because of their involvement in SHG activities and getting job opportunities in mid-day meal schemes. After group formation, incidence of poverty has declined among the members of all social categories except that in case of SC categories. After the formation of groups, out of 552 members, about 17 per cent members of general category, 30.9 per cent of SC category and 30.6 per cent of ST category are found to remain below poverty level in drought prone areas. Therefore, there has been a marginal reduction in the incidence of poverty among the members of SHGs in the drought prone areas after group formation, viz. from 84.6 percent to 82.25 percent. However, percentage of extremely poor members remained same as before even after group formation. Therefore, though the incidence of poverty has declined among the members of all social categories in absolute sense, but in relative sense, this has not declined in any significant way in drought prone areas.

So far as the members of sample SHGs in non-drought prone areas are concerned, it is observed that before group formation, out of 455 members of 42 sample SHGs in non-drought prone areas, about 27 per cent members in general members, 30.9 per cent in SC category and 15.8 per cent in ST category remained below poverty level. Therefore, about 80 per cent members fall under BPL category in non-drought prone areas before joining the group. Again, it is observed that before joining the group, about 1.3 per cent members in general category, 1.8 per cent in SC category and 2.4 per cent in ST category are considered to be extremely poor in Non-drought prone areas.

**Table 4 Distribution of the members of the SHGs in the drought prone areas and non-drought prone areas by their socio-economic status**

Category	Before Group formation		After Group formation	
	Percentage of members in drought prone area falling in	Percentage of members in non-drought prone area falling in	Percentage of members in drought prone area falling in	Percentage of members in non-drought prone area falling in

	APL	BPL	Extremely Poor	APL	BPL	Extremely poor	APL	BPL	Extremely poor	APL	BPL	Extremely poor
Gen	3.1	19.0	2.2	7.7	27.6	1.3	5.1	17.0	2.2	11.9	23.3	1.3
SC	3.8	29.7	1.1	4.8	30.9	1.8	2.5	30.9	1.1	7.2	28.6	1.8
ST	3.3	32.2	1.6	0.9	15.8	2.4	4.9	30.6	1.6	1.9	14.4	2.7
OBC	0.4	3.6	-	1.5	5.3	-	0.4	3.6	-	1.9	4.8	-
Male	-	-	-	0.8	2.2	-	-	-	-	0.3	2.3	-
Female	10.6	84.5	4.9	14.1	77.4	5.5	12.9	82.2	4.9	22.6	69.0	5.8
Total	10.6	84.5	4.9	14.9	79.6	5.5	12.9	82.2	4.9	22.9	71.3	5.8

*Source : Field Survey (2011-12)*

But this situation has changed after group formation. Out of the total members in non-drought prone areas, about 23 per cent members of general category, 28.6 per cent of SC category and 14.7 per cent of ST category members fall under BPL group in non-drought prone areas.

Therefore, the incidence of poverty among the members of SHGs in the non-drought prone areas has reduced from 79.5 percent to 71.4 per cent after group formation. However, percentage of extremely poor members remained same as before even after group formation. Therefore, it appears that the participation in SHGs had some positive impacts in terms of a reduction in the incidence of poverty, particularly among socially backward and economically poor people, in non-drought prone areas compared to that in drought prone areas.

### 6.3 Income and Savings of the members of SHGs

The percentage distribution of the members according to the percentage of SHG income to total household income is shown in Table 5. In the drought-prone areas the percentage of SHG

**Table 5 Percentage distribution of members of SHGs by percentage of contribution SHGs income to household income**

Contribution of SHG income to	Percentage of member in	Percentage of member in
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total household income (%)	drought-prone areas	non-drought-prone areas
0.9- 10.9	26.0	48.1
10.9-20.9	41.8	28.9
20.9-30.9	16.3	13.0
30.9-40.9	7.4	5.9
40.9 and above	8.5	4.0
Total	100	100

Source: *Field Survey (2011-12)*

income to total family income was 13.9 while it was 15.0 in non-drought-prone areas. So far as the income from SHG activities and its share in household income are concerned, it is observed that about 68 per cent members in drought-prone areas and about 77 per cent in non-drought-prone areas have contributed only about 21 per cent to their household income.

Monthly per capita income of the SHG households varied widely in the drought-prone areas. For the sample SHG households of the drought-prone areas overall mean monthly Per Capita Income was estimated to be Rs 798.5 while it was Rs 873.2 for SHGs households the non-drought-prone areas. Percentage distribution of member households of sample SHGs by monthly Per Capita Income class in drought-prone areas and non-drought-prone areas is shown in table 6.

**Table 6 Percentage distribution of member households of sample SHGs by monthly per capita income class in drought-prone areas and non-drought-prone areas**

Monthly per capita Income(Rs)	Percentage of member households of SHGs in drought-prone areas	Percentage of member households of SHGs in non- drought-prone areas
175 - 783	85.2	75.0
784 - 1383	8.4	13.6
1384 - 1983	3.2	3.3
1984 - 3583	2.5	7.6
3584 and above	0.7	0.5
Total	100	100

Source: *Field Survey (2011-12)*.

It is revealed that in respect of monthly per capita income distribution SHG households were better than non-SHG households in the drought-prone areas but in the non-drought-prone areas SHGs member households were better than those in the drought-prone areas. This is explained

by the fact that the opportunity of non-agriculture income earning (from MGNREGS, brick clines,etc.) was higher in non-drought-prone areas along with substantial income from landed proper.

Monthly per capita saving of the SHG households varied widely in the drought-prone areas. For the sample SHG households of the drought-prone areas overall mean monthly per capita saving was estimated to be Rs 157.4 while it was Rs 239.1 for SHGs households in the non-drought-prone areas. Over all saving ratio in the drought-prone areas was estimated at 19.7 per cent while it was 27.4 per cent in non-drought-prone areas. Percentage distribution of member households of sample SHGs by saving ratio in drought-prone areas and non-drought-prone areas is shown in Table 7. It is revealed that in respect of saving ratio SHGs member households were better in the non-drought-prone areas than that in the drought-prone areas.

**Table 7 Percentage distribution of members by saving ratio in drought-prone and non-drought-prone areas**

Saving ratio (%)	Percentage of member in drought-prone areas	Percentage of member in non-drought-prone areas
Below 5	24.8	11.9
5 – 9.9	21.8	11.9
10 – 19.9	28.1	25.9
20 – 29.9	20.4	26.6
30 and above	5.7	23.7
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey (2011-12).

We calculated the mean difference of Per Capita Income, Per Capita Saving, Per Capita Income from SHG activities in drought-prone areas and non- drought-prone areas. The difference in respect of Per Capita income and per capita savingbetween drought-prone areas and non-drought-prone areas was statistically significant at 1% level. However, Per Capita Income from SHG activities in drought-prone areas and non- drought-prone areas is not insignificant.

**Table 8 Mean and variance values of PCMY, PCS, PCY from SHGs activities, 2001-2002 to 2011-12**

	Mean drought-prone area	Variance drought-prone area	Mean non-drought-prone area	Variance non-drought-prone area	t-value
PCMY	778.489	305834.6	866.183	378073.3	-2.3432**
PCS	131.706	37782.9	76.088	7077.17	6.069**
PCY from SHG activities	135.26	25660.9	129.39	15119.35	.65635

*Source: Field Survey (2001-12);*

#### 6.4 Decision making roles

The decision making role of the members of SHGs is an important criterion for women empowerment. The SHG is considered as a forum for imparting solidarity and empowerment of women, providing them the space and voice to negotiate and participate as equals both within the family and in the society in general (Thirlwall, 2003). The SHG approach aims at building self-confidence among the poor through community action, interaction in group meetings and collective decision making. This enables them to identify their needs and resources properly which will ultimately lead to strengthen the socio-economic power of the rural poor as well as improve their collective bargaining power.

**Table9 Distribution of the Members of SHG by decision making role in drought prone areas and non- drought prone areas**

Pattern of Decision making in a SHG	Percentage of member in	
	drought-prone areas	Non-drought-prone areas
Individual	42.4	44.0
Husband	43.1	45.3
Jointly	3.8	7.0
Uncertain	1.3	3.7
Does not arise	9.4	-
Total	100	100

*Source: Field Survey (2011-12)*

This study wants to show whether the members of SHGs are taking decision individually, jointly with their husband, or whether they are not in a position to take crucial decisions. The distribution of the women members of sample SHGs by their decision making role in drought prone areas and non-drought prone area of PaschimMedinipur and Bankura districts is shown in Table 9.

In drought prone areas, about 43 per cent members have taken decisions individually, about 43 per cent members have taken decisions as directed by their husbands, 3.8 per cent members have taken decisions jointly with their respective husbands, about 1.3 per cent are not certain whether the decision would be taken by the husband or the wife, and about 9.4 per cent of members did not take any decision because they could not pass Grade-I which is crucial for the initiation of economic activities. Again, in non-drought prone areas, about 44 per cent members have taken decision individually, about 45 per cent members have taken decisions based on the directions of their husbands, about 7 per cent of members have taken decisions jointly, and about 3.7 per cent members are not certain on this issue (Table9). Therefore, more than 42 percent of members in both drought prone areas and non-drought prone areas have taken group-based productive decisions independently. But in non-drought prone area, relative higher percentages of members are dependent on their husbands for taking part in the various activities of SHGs. It is important to note in this connection that before group formation, the male-dominated family heads seldom discussed with their wives while taking any crucial decision, say, regarding the education of their children, participation in any income-generating activities, purchase of lands and so on. Hence, this nature of undermining the opinions of adult female members in family decisions has changed after the participation of the female members in different SHGs.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study clearly shows that the percentage of illiterate members in both drought-prone areas and non-drought-prone areas was seen to have decreased after the formation of SHGs. A sizeable percentage of women members have learned how to sign or how to read and write only after joining their respective SHGs. In the drought-prone areas the percentage of SHG income to total family income was substantial though it was higher in the non-drought-prone areas. The overall mean monthly per capita income for the SHGs households the non-drought-prone areas was also higher than that in the drought-prone areas. In respect of saving ratio SHGs member households



were better in the non-drought-prone areas than that in the drought-prone areas. Again, the formation of SHGs has surely helped in checking the attrition of the women of the poor and backward communities in both the drought prone areas and non-drought prone areas through their participation in group-based activities. This seems to have opened a new dimension in the development process of the backward and drought-prone regions of West Bengal. We feel that proper support activities on the part of the government can further this development dynamics in right direction.

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