

WOMEN ASSOCIATION, SELF HELP GROUPS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN EMPOWERING WOMEN OF CHAKMA AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL IN MIZORAM: A STUDY

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Abstract

By fostering resourcefulness and hard work, particularly in rural areas, local government, self-help groups (SHGs), and women's associations have been recognised as effective tools for women's empowerment and poverty alleviation across the country. Through these organisations, women have demonstrated their strong entrepreneurial spirit and ability to generate income for both their families and the communities in which they live. Even though women have made great strides, their inferiority complex toward men still exists, and they continue to experience a dramatic uptick in violence and atrocities, while the majority of girls are still not receiving equal opportunity in education. Women's organisations, particularly those in local governance, play a crucial role in empowering women to fight for their rights socially, economically, and politically, mobilising the community and helping female youth in developing their socioeconomic status. With 33% and 50% of the seats in Panchayati Raj institutions reserved for women, women in India gained constitutional status. However, under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, village councils, a type of local government, only have one reserved seat but have the option of adding more. In defining their obligations and rights to improve the socioeconomic position of themselves, youth, and other women, the female village council members collaborate with the Self-Help and Women's Association. Therefore, this paper is to understand better how Mahila Samiti, the only women's organisation in the Chakma Autonomous District Council, Self-Help Groups, and local government work together to empower the women in Kamalanagar Village, as well as how their cooperation and association with one another as human resources and components contribute to improving the socioeconomic condition of the society in general and the vulnerable groups, such as women and youth, for sustainability through a descriptive analytical method on the basis of interview schedule.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Upliftment, Association, Opportunities, Vulnerable Groups, Local Government.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality, according to the World Bank (2005), is a form of inequality that spawns additional inequality in society and has negative repercussions on not only women, their families, and communities, but also nation-states, their economies, and ultimately the well-being of their population. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are an international effort to address key development concerns. It promotes gender equality and considers the empowerment of women to be a key development objective on the grounds of both justice and efficacy (economic and social). Furthermore, there is convincing evidence that gender equality and poverty reduction (MDG1) go hand in hand, and that women's empowerment and gender equality are crucial steps in achieving other MDGs, such as universal primary education and a reduction in child mortality, as well as the obvious links to enhancing maternal health and ensuring environmental sustainability. In India, a number of initiatives have been launched to lessen gender inequality, such as the Panchayati Raj System, which was implemented through local government and initially included 33% seat reservations for women, but has since been increased to 50% in the majority of states for both political and governmental offices. For the benefit of women, self-help groups have also been founded in India, and there are several women's associations with different branches working for women's empowerment in every state in the country.

Women from every region of India have benefited from the local government, particularly those in rural areas. This includes those in panchayats, village councils, and other organisations. Their economic, social, and political status have all changed as

a result, which also raises the possibility of a mass movement. All Indian women have the option of joining a SHG to receive the training and development necessary to become future business owners and competent workers. The goal of the government's assistance for SHGs is to provide Indian women with the tools they need to launch their own companies. Banks must set up financial assistance to carry out manufacturing and trading activities and set up marketing facilities, while governments will buy the SHGs' products, set up ways to improve the leadership skills of women, and set up ways for SHGs to be managed independently so that they have administrative capacity. This is because SHGs in India are primarily women-owned. Self-help groups and All Women's Associations are small, unorganised groups of the poor that were established locally with the intention of enabling members to gain from solidarity, shared responsibility, and economic, social, and political advantages. Self-help groups and women's associations are voluntarily formed by both the rural and urban community. The self-help group movement is recognised as a rural financial innovation in many developing countries today, including India. It is considered a way to reach the underprivileged and marginalised groups, which typically cannot access bank credit facilities. The most well-known women's organisation in Mizoram, Mizo Hmeicche Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), which stands for "tying women together," was established in 1974 by B. Sangkhumi to encourage and empower women. Self-help groups are defined as a collection of individuals who, either directly or indirectly through their family and friends, have first-hand knowledge of a certain problem or circumstance. In Mizoram, an Indian state in the country's northeast, women's associations were established as revolutionary organisations. By learning how to collaborate in order to support underprivileged women in their struggle against patriarchal and conventional social standards, women can share experiences and build a specific type of understanding and support for one another through women's associations and self-help groups. They can also establish common funds in order to work for the social and economic advancement of their families and communities.

Women's participation in Mizoram society is quite obvious economically and socially as a result of women's associations and self-help groups over the years, but it is absent politically because so many disadvantaged women, especially those in rural Mizoram, keep silent and lack confidence. The purpose of this paper is to better understand the effects of women's associations, self-help groups, and their connections to the local government of the Chakma autonomous district council, which includes the states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram and is home to a micro-minority community. The study focuses on the Sole Women's Association in the District Council and SHGs operating in Kamalanagar Village, as well as their contributions to society, vision, and the relationship between these two women's associations and the political and socioeconomic advancement of rural women.

2. OBJECTIVES

- 1) To study the role of Mahila Samiti and Self-Help Group in empowering women of the study area.
- 2) To analyse the challenges and achievements of Mahila Samiti and Self-Help Groups in the district council.
- 3) To analyse the co-relation between the Self-Help Group, Mahila Samiti and the Local Government in the study area.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on descriptive analytical method. The primary data has been collected from the respondents through interview schedule and the secondary data includes related articles, related websites, documents, journals, books, components report on schemes and available records

4. WORKING OF SELF-HELP GROUPS AND WOMEN ORGANISATIONS IN MIZORAM

Self-Help Groups and Mizo Hmeicche Insuihkhawm Pawl are two primary sources of women's organisations in Mizoram that are primarily connected to one another and bring about improvements in women's social and economic standing in cities, towns, and villages.

4.1. IMPACT OF WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS IN MIZORAM

Mizo civilization has historically been patriarchal. In this society, women and children were often regarded as inferior to men. However, modernization has made this kind of thought controversial. Women are routinely left out of society and the economy, compelled to use any means required to make ends meet, and unable to care about morality or ethics, which has obvious negative effects. In order to confront the patriarchal standards of society, groups of women organise organisations and associations and engage in revolutionary actions. Several NGOs and associations are now working in Mizoram to advance the interests of women and give them more power. Goodwill Foundation, Open Doors, Vanapa Society (Panchayati Raj), Shalom, Cod Nerc, Mission Foundation Movement, Child and Women Foundation, Spastic Society of Mizoram, Light for Comprehensive Development, Society for Community Care, Mizoram Young Women's Christian Association, and Central Young Mizo Association are a few of these organisations and associations (CYMA). A programme related to the Department of Information and Communication Technology on women's empowerment has also got under way to establish an IT Resource Center in order to develop skilled manpower in the ICT sector, focusing on Open-Source Technology, Networking, Internet/Intranet, Website Development, and IT Applications in Fashion and Textile Design, among other things, as well as to provide free IT education to 10,000 women and rural youths for a period of five years. The most important and only women's organisation is Mizo Hmeicche Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), which was established by B. Sangkhumi in 1974. MHIP successfully works to uplift women and fight for their rights in all aspects of life with 700 branches, seven headquarters, and 16 blocks of space. It also provides family counselling to the oppressed and underprivileged women, with a concentration on both urban and rural locations. The cornerstone of the MHIP is charitable social service with no expectation of compensation. They devote the majority of their efforts to empowering women and children. They work with grassroots self-help groups and are affiliated with the association, which aims to give Mizoram's women better access to business training in order to raise their status in society and the economy.

4.2. IMPACT OF SELF-HELP GROUPS IN MIZORAM

According to the Mizoram Economic Survey 2014-15, women make up approximately 40.25 percent of all workers. The SHGs have worked in a wide range of trades, including those covered by the DRDA Lawngtlai, including the growing of chillies, betel leaves, potatoes, bananas, cow and goat rearing, beekeeping, furniture manufacturing, tailoring, pisciculture, piggery, winter vegetables, poultry farming, and shoes. Several individuals and groups have raised their standards of life as a result of these actions (APL). Each SHG is required to have an account with either SBI or Mizoram Rural Bank (MRB), and the account must have a minimum deposit of Rs. 8,500. A self-help group is defined as a "self-governed, peer-controlled information group of individuals with a comparable socioeconomic background and with a desire to jointly fulfil a common purpose." The SHG's main objective is to educate the SHG on the value of local economic independence. SHGs, especially in Mizoram, put a lot of emphasis on providing members with the resources they need to meet their families' most basic needs while also developing their mental and physical capacities, providing them with good opportunities to raise money within the group, and assisting them in developing strong bonds with one another. The State accepts and merges certain regulations created by the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) and other governmental organisations. The SHGs are instructed to work diligently toward achieving economic independence as they work on transformational growth. By giving the self-help group (SHG) resources and financial support, they are able to be stronger and have adequate funds for growth. It is also emphasised that self-help groups foster development and that this advancement can be achieved by group members cooperating to carry out shared tasks. A participatory plan known as the Vulnerable Reduction Plan (VRP) was also developed to identify and prioritise the needs of the village's most vulnerable people, as well as their collective needs and the vulnerabilities of SHG members. The Self-Help Group urges the Village Council Members of Local Government to join the group in order to reach more women in distant locations and improve their socioeconomic conditions.

Local governments in Mizoram, such as village councils and municipal councils in urban areas, contribute to the efficiency of local, state, and federal administration. The Village Council only has one reserved seat but has additional space available, in contrast to the Panchayat, where 33% of the seats are designated for women. Women's organisations and self-help groups may be unofficial forms of association, yet they have ties to the Chakma Autonomous District Council's local government.

5. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

5.1. SELF HELP GROUPS IN EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN AND ITS CONNECTION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF CHAKMA AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Chakma Autonomous District Council was formed in Mizoram by dividing the Lushai District Council into three sections. The local level of government in the district is carried out by village councils; the Chakma ethnic group makes up the majority, followed by the Tongchangya, Bong, Mizo, and Reang. Women can still occupy the remaining 86 seats on the Village Council, which has one seat designated for them, as there are more than 50 SHGs in the district. The self-help group technique was appropriately credited for its importance and application in implementing grassroots development programmes in the government of India's ninth five-year plan. SHG is a development organisation for the disadvantaged and marginalised. It is recognised by the government and does not require formal registration. The SHG aims to improve the functional ability of the poor and marginalised in the areas of employment and income-generating activities. Individuals take control of their own future by establishing SHGs. In the present, a self-help group is the most effective method of democratic decentralisation. The justification for this is that many rural homes and individuals learn about their responsibilities as citizens of the country through participation in self-help group activities. The SHG guarantees their members' financial independence by helping members get the skills and confidence to work. In fact, the SHG also serves as a group that promotes political, social, and educational awareness, and embedding this knowledge in rural residents' minds is beneficial for democratic decentralisation. Awareness is the only means by which rural inhabitants can be freed from political propaganda. Based on the gender of their participants, SHGs were split into three groups: mixed, male, and female. Each SHG included in the study maintained thorough transaction logs and had banking relationships with Rural Bank at the nearby branch. The SHG members got training on topics mostly pertaining to banking practises from their respective agencies and line departments through resource people. North East Initiative Development is present in both study districts. The president and secretary of a group were automatically members of the Primary Level Federation or Village Organization of the village council. SHGs that were only engaged in pig farming received training in pig management practises, such as housing, feeding, breeding, sanitary measures, immunisation, deworming, treatment of common illnesses, and care of sow and piglets.

The subject matter 7 constituencies There are 16 self-help groups in Kamalanagar Village, and there are over 50 throughout the entire CADC. The Village Council, the local administration, urges all female Village Council members to actively participate in Self-Help Groups to build community capacity and social mobilisation and to generate money for vulnerable, difficult-to-reach groups to improve their socioeconomic situation. Many of them also belong to the Mahila Samiti, a group for women in the neighbourhood. Several problems plague villages, including poverty, illiteracy, a lack of skills, access to healthcare, and others. Women and young people, in particular, require help in order to take advantage of initiatives like the MGNREGA and MSME, as well as the 60% of female council members who are illiterate and ignorant. These women can create their own enterprises and learn about microfinance by participating in loan programmes with the help of self-help groups. The Self-Help Groups that five of the eight female members of the Village Council of the Kamalanagar Local Government are a part of help them improve their financial and social standing and develop their dependability and confidence in handling issues that cannot be handled individually but are better solved through group efforts. These organisations, also known as self-help groups, are currently the primary agents of change for the impoverished and oppressed across the whole Chakma Autonomous District Council, not only Kamalanagar. A self-help group and a village council member gathered the poor and marginalised to address their specific issues; governments, NGOs, and other organisations all over the world use this tactic. The poor's savings are gathered and stored in banks. Individuals receive easy access to low-interest funding in return, allowing them to start their own micro-unit businesses. The majority of the district's poor and marginalised citizens are able to improve their lives, families, and society thanks to self-help groups. They have already been able to use the assets that have been built up among the group's members to meet the members' urgent and productive credit needs.

A specific strategy for empowering the Self-Help Group through concrete, in-kind support has been created by the Mizoram Tribal Fund. They organised a scheme where three computer sets were given to three rural schools; one SHG received a cybercafé; and kids' clubs in important Mizoram cities and regions received sporting goods in an effort to assist the SHG in becoming economically self-sufficient in the proper manner. Under their mentor's supervision, they also practised bookkeeping. The Chakma Autonomous District Council, Kamalanagar Village, and the whole Autonomous District, among other isolated places of Mizoram, do not have it, though. In these areas, there aren't enough awareness-raising campaigns, infrastructure, monitoring teams that do regular checks and keep records, or people who know the laws and regulations. Many weak women in the self-help groups in the study area have benefited more from starting their own businesses than half of the female village council members have also benefited from financial assistance above and beyond their regular salaries as members of the district council's local government. Through its numerous operations in the village, the SHG really indirectly fosters democratic decentralisation by giving women a voice and the chance to sustainably establish their socioeconomic standing. Even though a small number of self-help group members talk to the directorate and get their problems fixed, many women still have trouble getting their benefits because they don't have enough education, don't work together well, or don't speak the same language.

5.2. MAHILA SAMITI AS THE MAJOR DECISION MAKER IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE OF CHAKMA AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Chakma Mahila Samiti (CMS), an organisation of Chakma women in Mizoram, was established on August 22, 1991, at Kamalanagar, in conjunction with the first Kathin Chibar Dhan event (a Buddhist religious ceremony). The advancement of Chakma women's safety and security in Mizoram is one of its main goals. The Samiti is supported by its central, zonal, and branch offices. Nearly every neighbourhood has branches, which are in charge of overseeing the zones, which in turn are in charge of overseeing the central body for help. The government provides financial support for them. The Mahila Samiti and the Social Welfare Department (ICDS) of the Chakma Autonomous District Council work on a number of projects under the name "Integrated Child Development Services." They can suggest launching an awareness campaign regarding subjects like cleanliness, education, and health under the direction of the social welfare department. The culture of Chakma society, which is patriarchal and characterised by domestic violence, is particularly pervasive. In some cases, a boy child attends school while a girl child is compelled to work from a young age because the boy's parents prefer his education in hard times. The Mahila Samita Committee achieved success throughout the years in a range of vocations, although they resided in appalling conditions. The Mahila Samita in Village Council, which organises community gatherings, gender-sensitization programmes in schools, and investigations into allegations of domestic and intimate partner violence, was established by the Local Government of Mizoram. It also investigates cyber security-related issues and instructs police on how to deal with child sex abuse. If a woman is being abused at home and wants to stay married and work things out without violence, she can get first-level counselling and a reality check.

The Mahila Samiti, or Self-help Groups, are further informed to proceed with the projects after receiving clearance from the Local Council President and its MDC for any awareness programmes the government delivers at the village level. In the state, it works to improve the socioeconomic standing of women, children, individuals with disabilities, and young offenders. The Association aims to inform village council presidents of the value of immediately notifying the Samiti of any instances of domestic violence. They serve as a decision-making body and coordinate village activities in conjunction with Self-Help Groups and female village council members to address issues pertaining to the advancement of women, cultural events, MGNEGA work, and child education programmes, for instance. They also collaborate to control the COVID pandemic by setting up accommodations, providing checkpoint invigilators, and organising vaccination campaigns alongside youth associations. When it comes to improving the education of girls and empowering women, they are the most significant component of the local administration of the Chakma Autonomous District Council. They work together with SHGs and village council members to eradicate poverty among women, fight crime, and promote social and economic advancement for their constituency and society at large. The Mahila Samiti becomes involved anytime there is a societal injustice in the daily family issues of their separate branches or jurisdictions. The Mahila Samiti works to bring about justice for women who are mistreated by their drunken husbands as well as for children who are neglected in terms of nutrition or other facets of family and social life. The Mahila Samiti provides financial assistance to families in exceptional circumstances when they need medical treatment outside of Mizoram but are unable to pay for it. An unmarried mother would receive the appropriate assistance and counselling, and on occasion, financial or material support would be offered to the needy mother and children. Additionally, they monitor Angandwadi activities and visit all of the district council's villages, even the far-flung and interior Kamalanagar Village, to organise awareness campaigns, workshops, and other events. They also look at local customary law, which provides very few rights and safeguards for women, and act as a court to resolve a dispute by interrogating both parties. A significant fraction of today's youth is educated because of these movements.

No of members	20
Age	28-60 yrs.
No of Educated Members	99.9%
Marital Status	100%
Training held	None
No of Members Associated with SHGs	4
Members with Govt. Jobs	12
Members with Non-Govt. Jobs	3
No of members BPL	none
No of members Above BPL	20

No of members associated with Village Council	3
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As per the data collection through interview schedule, all 20 members are educated, married, middle-aged women who are well established socially and economically, as the majority of them have jobs at government offices, schools, private schools, and as Village Council members. As a result, they banded together to assist society, particularly vulnerable groups and women, in combating atrocities against women and young girls and to uplift them through various programmes and awareness campaigns.

5.3. DETAILS OF WORK DONE BY THE INSTITUTION IN THE LAST 5 YEARS AND ACHIEVEMENT AND OUTSTANDING WORK.

- 1) Aids awareness Campaign, Workshop on sexual exploitation.
- 2) Cleanliness drive in the Village Council, Sanitation awareness programmes and awarding the cleanest village.
- 3) Workshop on Menstrual hygiene, medical awareness programme mostly on pregnancy.
- 4) Eradication programme of illiteracy among older citizen (women) and awareness programme on Child Marriage.

6. CONCLUSION

According to the study, the Mahila Samiti, the only women's organisation in the study area, the Self-Help Group, and the local government are all connected and associated with one another even though their roles and responsibilities are not officially and formally the same. We saw this when many women participated in Village Council meetings (Local Government of Autonomous District Councils). All three factors have had an impact on the advancement of women and young people in society by fostering opportunities, closing the financial gap for the most vulnerable, elevating social prestige, and enticing people to get involved in social work to stop atrocities. The difference between them is that Mahila Samita members are more privileged and influential than Village Council members and members of Self-Help Groups because 100% of them have careers, carry high social status, and set rules and regulations on social issues of the community at the grassroots level of the Chakma Autonomous District Council, which can occasionally have a negative impact on the general populace. In summary, we discovered that affirmative action does ensure more women's and youth's security through cooperation and concord. The study reveals that Mahila Samiti, Village Councils, and Self-Help Groups have led to the social empowerment of their respective members as well as many females in the area through their individual and collective contributions in the District Council, which also helped the development of the study area, but proper training and monitoring needs to be implemented among the members of both the Association and the Local Government as members often get into conflict and misunderstanding in decision-making. They need to improve their cooperation and coordination rather than projecting one superiority but as one common ground in achieving common goals and sharing ideas for innovative projects and programs. I believe there should be proper networking and monitoring systems in place so that the unreachable can easily reach the association to solve their socioeconomic issues and sanitise the society at a distinct grassroots level.

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