



Mains Practice Question

Q. Recently, the Kudumbshree Scheme of Kerala has completed its 25 years. In the light of this, discuss the role of Self-Help Groups in promoting women empowerment and poverty alleviation in rural areas of India. (250 words)

23 May, 2023 GS Paper 2 Polity & Governance

Approach

- Start your answer with a short introduction to the Kudumbshree scheme and Self-Help Groups.
- In the body section, mention how they could play a vital role in poverty alleviation and women empowerment.
- Conclude with a positive note.

Introduction

Kudumbashree (prosperity of the family) is a self-help group scheme started by the Kerala Govt in 1988. It aims to uplift families and empower women to improve their socio-economic status and overall well-being through self-help group approach. Completing its 25 years highlights the significant role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in promoting women empowerment and poverty alleviation in rural areas of India.

SHGs are voluntary associations of individuals, primarily women, who come together to address common social and economic issues and improve their livelihoods. These groups have proven to be effective tools in empowering women and uplifting communities by providing them with access to financial resources, skill development, and social support networks.

Body

SHGs play a vital role in promoting women empowerment and poverty alleviation in rural areas of India by:

- **Economic Empowerment:** SHGs empower women by offering financial resources and income-generating opportunities. Through collective savings and loans, members support each other in starting businesses, improving skills, and achieving economic independence.
- **Social Empowerment:** SHGs empower women by providing a platform to connect, share, and support one another. They address social issues like gender discrimination, domestic violence, and health concerns. Through collective action, SHGs enable women to advocate for their rights and challenge gender inequality.
- **Skill Development and Capacity Building:** SHGs conduct training programs and workshops to improve member skills in finance, business, vocational areas, and leadership. These programs boost confidence, enabling women to engage in decision-making within the group and their communities.
- **Access to Credit and Financial Inclusion:** SHGs bridge the gap between women and financial institutions, granting access to credit and government schemes. They empower women by providing loans, overcoming collateral limitations and financial knowledge gaps. This enables them to invest in income-generating ventures, fulfil household requirements, and handle unforeseen circumstances.

- Priority Sector Lending norms and assurance of returns incentivize banks to lend to SHGs.
- The SHG-Bank linkage programme pioneered by NABARD has made access to credit easier and reduced the dependence on traditional money lenders and other non-institutional sources.
- **Improved Livelihoods and Poverty Alleviation:** Through increased income and access to financial resources, SHG members experience improved livelihoods. They are better able to meet their basic needs, invest in education and healthcare, and secure a more sustainable future for themselves and their families. By lifting women out of poverty, SHGs contribute to overall poverty alleviation in rural areas.
- **Decision-making and Leadership:** SHGs empower women through participation in decision-making, finance management, and activity implementation. As they develop leadership skills, women engage in community-level decisions, fostering empowerment and representation in local governance.
- **Awareness and Education:** SHGs empower women through awareness campaigns and workshops on health, hygiene, education, and government schemes. They share information, enabling women to make informed choices and access resources.

Conclusion

Self-Help Groups have emerged as effective grassroots mechanisms for women empowerment and poverty alleviation in rural areas of India. By promoting economic empowerment, skill development, social solidarity, and access to credit, SHGs enable women to overcome barriers, take control of their lives, and contribute to the development of their communities.

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