

GROUP CHARACTERISTICS OF SELF HELP GROUPS

For any sustainable development of agricultural sector farmer has to be the focus and the system should be built around him. Here comes the relevance of self help groups (SHGs). A self help group is a homogenous gathering of usually not more than 25 persons who join on a voluntary basis in order to undertake some common activity through mutual trust and mutual help (Anon., 1996). It is mainly concerned with the poor and it is for the people and of the people. Apart from inculcating socially desirable habits and ethics among members, SHGs serve the purpose of a moneylender, a development bank, a co-operative and a voluntary agency (Singh, 1995). Keeping the above points in view, the study was undertaken to identify the group characteristics of self help groups and compare the group characteristics of different SHGs.

The study was conducted in Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala adopting an ex-post facto research design. Six SHGs, three each from Kerala Horticulture Development programme (KHDP) and Intensive Vegetable Development Programme (IVDP) both involved in vegetable production were selected for the study. Twenty farmers were selected from each of these SHGs, making a total of 120 farmers. A structured interview schedule was developed to collect the responses. The collected data were scored, tabulated and analyzed using the appropriate statistical procedures namely, frequencies, percentages and 't' test to compare the group characteristics of the SHGs of KHDP and IVDP.

Based on the objective, review of literature, discussion with experts and the pilot study conducted, 20 group characteristics were identified along with their operational definitions and sent to 30 judges for eliciting their relevancy on a five point continuum ranging from most relevant to least relevant. The judges were drawn from the officials of KHDP and Department of Agriculture, Govt. of Kerala. The scoring pattern was 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 from 'most relevant' to 'least relevant'. The total score obtained for each group characteristics was worked out. The variables having a score of 75 per cent and above were selected. Thus

the group characteristics selected for the study were group cohesion, group interaction, group leadership, transparency, need satisfaction, interdependence of members, team spirit, accountability, group co-operation and equity. These 10 group characteristics were measured using the schedule developed for the purpose. Group co-operation, group cohesion, group leadership, transparency and accountability were measured on a three-point continuum and the remaining five characteristics were measured on a five-point continuum.

The study revealed that majority of the respondents of KHDP SHGs were in the high category for the variables such as group cohesion, group interaction, group leadership, interdependence of members, team spirit and group co-operation while for the variables need satisfaction, accountability and equity, majority of the respondents were in the medium category. Maximum number of respondents in the high category was observed for the variable group cohesion (77%). Majority of the respondents under medium category was observed for the variable need satisfaction (47%) and maximum number of respondents under low category was reported for none of the variables. It is also clear from Table 1 that majority of the respondents of IVDP SHGs were in the high category for the variables group cohesion, group interaction, group leadership, transparency, interdependence of members and group co-operation. For the variables need satisfaction, team spirit, accountability and equity, the distribution of respondents under medium category was fairly high. It is also clear that none of the variable had maximum number of respondents under low category.

Maximum number of respondents under high category was observed for the variable group leadership (57%). Under medium category, maximum number of respondents was observed for the variable equity (50%).

It could be seen from Table 2 that the two groups did not significantly differ with respect to variables such as group interaction, transparency, inter-dependence of members, accountability and group co-operation. But

Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on group characteristics (KHDP & IVDP)

| Sl. No. | Characteristics | Category (Mean \pm SD) | KHDP | | | IVDP | | |
|---------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------|----|----|-------|----|----|
| | | | Score | f | % | Score | f | % |
| 1 | Group cohesion | Low | <2 | 03 | 05 | <3 | 08 | 14 |
| | | Medium | 2-8 | 11 | 18 | 3-7 | 20 | 33 |
| | | High | >8 | 46 | 77 | >7 | 32 | 53 |
| 2 | Group interaction | Low | <14 | 08 | 13 | <16 | 15 | 25 |
| | | Medium | 14-20 | 12 | 20 | 16-20 | 15 | 25 |
| | | High | >20 | 40 | 67 | >20 | 30 | 50 |
| 3 | Group leadership | Low | <3 | 10 | 16 | <4 | 06 | 10 |
| | | Medium | 3-8 | 16 | 27 | 4-8 | 20 | 33 |
| | | High | >8 | 34 | 57 | >8 | 34 | 57 |
| 4 | Transparency | Low | <6 | 17 | 29 | <7 | 17 | 27 |
| | | Medium | 6-8 | 14 | 23 | 7-9 | 20 | 33 |
| | | High | >8 | 29 | 48 | >9 | 23 | 40 |
| 5 | Need satisfaction | Low | <18 | 14 | 23 | <15 | 15 | 25 |
| | | Medium | 18-22 | 28 | 47 | 15-22 | 26 | 44 |
| | | High | >2 | 18 | 30 | >22 | 19 | 31 |
| 6 | Interdependence of members | Low | <17 | 09 | 15 | <16 | 04 | 06 |
| | | Medium | 17-22 | 20 | 33 | 16-20 | 26 | 43 |
| | | High | >22 | 31 | 52 | >20 | 30 | 51 |
| 7 | Team spirit | Low | <13 | 10 | 14 | <12 | 14 | 09 |
| | | Medium | 13-18 | 16 | 28 | 12-17 | 30 | 50 |
| | | High | >18 | 34 | 58 | >17 | 16 | 41 |
| 8 | Accountability | Low | <5 | 16 | 27 | <6 | 18 | 30 |
| | | Medium | 5-7 | 24 | 40 | 6-8 | 24 | 40 |
| | | High | >7 | 20 | 33 | >8 | 18 | 30 |
| 9 | Group co-operation | Low | <7 | 04 | 07 | <7 | 09 | 16 |
| | | Medium | 7-9 | 20 | 33 | 7-9 | 23 | 38 |
| | | High | >9 | 36 | 60 | >9 | 28 | 46 |
| 10 | Equity | Low | <13 | 11 | 23 | <9 | 14 | 23 |
| | | Medium | 13-18 | 25 | 41 | 9-14 | 30 | 50 |
| | | High | >18 | 24 | 36 | >14 | 16 | 27 |

Table 2. Comparison between KHDP & IVDP SHGs with respect to group characteristics

| Sl. No. | Group characteristics | Mean score (KHDP) | Mean score (IVDP) | 't' value |
|---------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Group cohesion | 8.73 | 6.35 | 4.66 |
| 2 | Group interaction | 22.01 | 21.81 | 1.99 |
| 3 | Group leadership | 10.40 | 8.33 | 4.28 |
| 4 | Transparency | 7.09 | 6.83 | 1.89 |
| 5 | Need satisfaction | 20.46 | 16.08 | 10.06 |
| 6 | Interdependence of members | 21.01 | 20.97 | 2.00 |
| 7 | Team spirit | 17.76 | 13.98 | 5.48 |
| 8 | Accountability | 7.17 | 6.93 | 1.22 |
| 9 | Group co-operation | 9.17 | 8.97 | 1.92 |
| 10 | Equity | 17.01 | 12.02 | 6.76 |

more satisfactorily than IVDP, which is a governmental programme. This may be due to the presence of group marketing centres, market

information center (MIC), field visit by the members of SHGs, technical guidance by staff, group purchasing of inputs etc.

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