

Women Empowerment Through Self-help Group: A Case Study of Sobh Village of Piprali Tahsil, Sikar District, Rajasthan

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Introduction

Sobh is a small village of Piprali tahsil in Sikar district, at a distance of 35 km. from district headquarters. Most of the families in the village are either OBCs or SCs with 15.69%, 11.38% and 72.78% population be SC, General and OBC, etc. The main source of livelihood in the village is agriculture but since ownership of land is limited and water insufficient for irrigation people work as labourers in agricultural fields or other sectors. The socio-economic and political life of the village is such that the women are always confined to the four walls of a household.

The primary source of income for people in Sobh is agriculture, animal husbandry and daily-wage labour. Given the limited nature and being uneven in providing support to the families in the village, the men are often compelled to migrate to nearby towns and cities to find work to support their families. However, migration is not an option for the women of Sobh. Even when the male members of the family are away, and find it difficult to earn enough money, the women struggle regardless of the immense stress that it brings.

With the efforts of Jankidevi Bajaj Grameen Vikas Sasthan, a woman's meeting was organised with the aim of bringing women together on a single platform and help them realise the advantages of Self-help Groups (SHGs). JBGVS felt that the women needed to be made aware of benefits of credit linkages as well as other government schemes. This meeting led to the formation of a SHG in the village which started a new chapter in the life of these women.



A New Beginning

The SHG **Laksh** was built in the month of November 2019, with the noble initiative of Foundation with eleven women. Most of the women of the small village of Sobh had never attended school before and the others had only 29.2 literacy rate. The group sat through discussions and deliberations to identify the opportunities available within their reach through which they could enhance their skills and also provide economic support to their families, (which was otherwise very difficult in the male dominated social fabric of their village life). It was decided that they would learn the art of lac bangle making.

Bangles are a central part of women's cultural life in Rajasthan and are always in high demand. For them, an initiative such as this meant the opportunity to make bangles, learn skills to market them and

the chance to further their skill by becoming future entrepreneurs. Having decided, each member of the SHG group soon began to deposit Rs. 100 as savings every month and spent 4 to 5 hours every day at the training centre to learn bangle-making.

The Struggles

In the beginning it was difficult for the women to even attend SHG meetings as they faced opposition from their families. The male members of the families were especially against the idea of women going out and attending meetings of the SHG and take part in the training. The women had never stepped out of their homes this way but after seeing the constructive work the SHG was doing in helping them come together to learn bangle-making and other skills, they decided to carry on despite all the hurdles. With time, the families started to recognize the dedication of the women and most importantly the true value of SHG formation which led them to start supporting the women.

Training of Lac Bangles

On 30th December' 2019, the women of Laksh SHG started training on bangle making which as a matter of fact is not an easy task. But with their focus and hard work the women within a span of 10 days learnt the skill. In the process they sometimes got burnt, faced difficulties to sit on the knees for long hours (4-5 hours every day) and even got scolded by their husbands, but they never gave up.



New Hopes

The training which was provided to the SHG has infused new hopes and dreams among the women involved. They now enthusiastically speak about their wish to learn to make other Lac ornaments. The SHG has provided women the space to discuss new ideas and their aspirations. They not just want to learn new skills but also want to start a shop in the village where they can sell bangles and other accessories of lac made by them. To strengthen the SHG and develop it into an enterprise they would put the earnings from the business in a joint SHG account. The savings are very crucial for the success of the SHG as well as to meet the financial needs of the members when required. The savings can also help start other businesses in the village.



The First Step Towards True Independence: The Story of Bulkesh Devi a Home Maker

Bulkesh Devi, a post-graduate by education is a member of self-help group (Laksh Sewaim Sahayta Samuh) formed in 14th of November 2019, that stands as the product of a project funded by the Bajaj Group of companies. She is a mother of 3 and the wife of yet another post graduate degree holder who has failed to earn modest incomes despite his high educational qualifications. The societal structure and regressive mindsets of

the people in her community has forced her to accept the burden of patriarchy where she must follow all rules imposed on the womenfolk to serve as an “ideal woman”. She must cover her face when outside, must not raise her voice beyond a certain level and must always eat her food last in the family. The dos and don’ts list are so long that it is not hard to imagine that women in her community are not allowed to work outside of home. They live a life of dependence and low self-esteem pushing them towards darkness and depression by the day.

The Jakidevi Bajaj Gram Vikas Sanstha (the social responsibility arm of the Bajaj group of companies) was primarily grounded on the philosophy of uprooting the womenfolk from the clutches of patriarchy by teaching them simple livelihood techniques that would not only help them to earn incomes but would also help them build up on their self-respect.

With such intentions in mind, the organization with the help of its implementing partner **Dhulandevi Pardhi Bahuuddeshiya Research and Development Sansthan Samiti (DDBRD)** approached the women in the community. The women who had been waiting for an opportunity like this, jumped at the idea of economic independence.

Followed by some intense brainstorming (respecting the dos and don’ts imposed on them alongside the potential of a business) the women decided upon the using the concept of patriarchy to their own advantage. They unitedly decided upon the idea of lac bangle making which deemed to them a profitable source of income given that the demand for it will never die. Girls whether a victim of patriarchy or not will always wear bangles.

As decided, 55 interested women from the community were encouraged to form self-help groups and they were given orientation on how to run them. Among the 55 interested women, **20 women were provided with hands on skill building training on lac bangle making and financial book-keeping.**

The project that has been ongoing since the last 2019 was tailored with repeated training and support directed towards breaking societal stereotypes and helping the women to earn a livelihood for themselves. **At the end of the 1st project year the Bajaj Group feels proud to state that these women SHGs from the intervention district have managed to earn a bulk order of making 1000 bangles worth Rs. 1 lakh that would fetch them a minimum income of Rs. 3000/head/month.** From zero to earning some money, as a fruit of *their* hard labour has instilled a sense of confidence in them.

So much so, that today, **Bulkesh Devi happily testifies that her life changed completely after she joined the Self-Help Group (SHG).** This new role as an entrepreneur has earned her new respect within the family structure and has given her, and other women, the hope and the dream to kickstart their personal businesses by starting a bangle shop for the local village women... something that they had never imagined was possible. She is now focused on developing her marketing skills so that she can utilize them in the shop that she would start soon.
