

Unit 21

Understanding People's Behaviour in Groups



General Objective

After studying this Unit, you should be able to help participants in your training session to describe the importance of the role of women's groups in the generation of microenterprises.

Specific Objectives

This Training Unit will help you to enable trainees to:

- identify elements, which contribute to the success of groups;
- describe the contribution and relevance of groups to the empowerment of women;
- integrate the roles of women in microenterprise activities of the group; and
- help identify the types of activities when groups are effective.

Planning

- Time** : Two hours
- Training Methodology** : Group discussions, games and exercises.
- Training Materials** : Flip charts, chart papers, markers, gunny bags, scissors, plastic bags, pieces of wood, rope.
- Trainer's Preparation** : Read and prepare the charts on advantages of working in groups. List constraints women have in working individually and strengths of groups.

Background Material

Introduction

Self help groups have several nomenclatures – from 'thrift' and 'credit' societies to microfinance institutions. They are now acknowledged as key agents in the lives of rural women.

For centuries, in villages around the world, people have lived sustainably. They have taken only what they needed from the earth. However, with increasing modernization and now globalization, traditional ways of living have to be necessarily interlinked with modern, appropriate technology. People everywhere are now exploring new ways of working, which will rebuild a sense of community and greater self-reliance. There has been a perceptible shift from “development as charity” to the potentially more profitable “development as business” model.

Individual poor women, face multiple problems in initiating, managing and sustaining microenterprises. The reasons may be social, economic or lie in their psychological makeup. However, it may be safely assumed that once they join hands and form a group they derive not only strength from this organization, but also gain a voice to address gender specific concerns. In economic terms too, pooling of individual resources leads them to some meaningful figure. In addition pooling of other resources like knowledge, labour, skill and competence transforms into a functional nature. It, therefore, can be concluded that groups can be a very effective medium of functioning for individual poor women.

The implications of facilitating the formation of homogeneous groups are:

- They provide a measure of relief from exploitative usury (money lending) arrangements in villages.
- They result in the empowerment of its members.
- They can be used as a medium to learn and teach, disseminate information.
- They also serve as a medium for generation of sustainable livelihoods through involvement in community development projects, through regular jobs or through self-employment.

Building a Strong Group

In order to build a strong group, women need to understand the functioning of a group. They need to be able to answer questions like — What is a group? How can it perform effectively and how can a group raise meagre individual resources to an operational / functional level? Women need to understand the structure of a group.

What is a Group?

A group is not just a collection or gathering of people, but it is a collection of people who have:

- A common purpose and a common interest;
- A common understanding;
- A common goal;
- Equal participation towards the attainment of this goal;

- A common and agreed set of norms and regulations, procedures and rules; and
- A unanimously chosen leader.

Why Work in Groups?

1. *Reasons for Groups:* Microenterprise activity involves procurement of raw material, organizing production, supervising for quality control, costing and pricing the product, establishing links with the market, and recovering the money by effective sales. For these activities you need to have face-to-face contact with various stakeholders in the village or even outside the village. They may have to deal with officials of the Government, banks. Extension workers may have to be contacted for some inputs related to technology, or traders may have to be dealt with in the market place or elsewhere outside the village. Even when there is no opposition, often rural women do not have adequate skills to deal with such issues. Working together in groups is advantageous. Here is a list of reasons.
 - There is greater strength in unity.
 - Women gain confidence in being together.
 - Resources can be pooled.
 - Work load can be shared.
 - Activity does not require full time management.
 - All members have a vital personal interest in the enterprise.
 - Activity does not require individual decision making.
 - Lesser risks are involved in being together.
 - Strategy of group formation aims at improving women's access to basic services such as health, childcare, nutrition, water, sanitation and education.
2. In contrast the individual enterprises may be best when:
 - there is an emergence of other competitors that may lead to exploitation;
 - the activity needs instant decisions on issues such as prices;
 - the community will not benefit equally;
 - activity involves high risks;
 - activity demands very hard continuous commitment; and
 - nature of activity does not permit shared work.

How can a Group Perform Effectively?

In establishing and managing an enterprise the poor women face multiple and complex social and gender-specific problems. These may be outlined as follows:

1. *Lack of support from family:* Very often it has been observed that in the rural context participation of women in enterprise activities is not permitted. Social barriers do not accept women going out to the market place or even talking to people of the opposite sex. Also, once women take on enterprise activity they have less time available for household activities, and are forced to face opposition from elders/male members of the family and community. Women are seen as being inside the homes and the task of earning a wage is strictly a male domain. In this situation participation of women in enterprise functions related to earnings, investment, expenses, etc. are met with opposition.
2. *Opposition from vested interests:* Local traders, money lenders and feudal lords who were earlier exploiting women as cheap labour, or were offering lower prices for their products or were charging exorbitant rates as interest on loaning money to them, suddenly feel threatened by women desirous of starting enterprise related activities. Women have to deal with these forces too.
3. *Lack of self-confidence and self worth:* Lack of education, exposure, experience combined with or as a result of male domination in a patriarchal society result in women not having self-confidence and self worth.

By forming a group women enable themselves to overcome some or all of the constraints that women face in society. You can point out that the most important ingredients for building strong groups include:

1. *Trust:* Trust is the beginning of all relationships. Without trust life will be very difficult if not impossible. When two or more individuals get together there is a certain amount of confidence and trust between them. They believe that each will behave as expected, will not harm each other and will perform as promised. This is the beginning or the foundation of all group formation.
2. *Communication:* This is the process of giving and receiving ideas. A large part of communication is the sharing of not just ideas but thoughts and feelings too. These, however, may not be as overt as actions. Many times a gesture, an expression on the face, body movements, and eye movements do the communication.
3. *Problem solving and decision-making:* All members get together to try and solve a problem, which is perceived as a common threat. Members are assisted to arrive at decisions, a leader is chosen and a structure develops.

Group Enterprises Vs Individual Enterprises

Group enterprises are not always the best way for women to run businesses. Sometimes, agencies can do more harm than good by promoting groups when they are not appropriate, or by misdirected assistance to them when they are. Many programmes/projects fund and effectively manage activities in communities. In case of withdrawal by these programmes or projects, these activities must be owned and managed by women. It may not always be possible to start an activity under group ownership and management.

Ask participants to suggest examples of activities and prepare a list. These activities may be grouped in three categories:

A. **Individual Activities** which women can do themselves and do not require external help.

B. **Group Activities** for which women may need specific assistance, in terms of either money, skills or technology which are available with other women.

Some of the activities identified by women may include the following:

- Savings and credit programme;
- Tube well or irrigation scheme to serve small farmers;
- Crèche or balwadi;
- Tractor or threshing service for farmers;
- Storage godown;
- Shed for leaf plate making;
- Place in the market for selling vegetables;
- Pickle-making unit;
- Vehicle to transport crops and farm supplies;
- Production centre for making spices;
- Local grocery shop; and
- Tailoring / laundry shop.

Processing

Put G – for group and I – for Individual against each activity on the right side.

Ask participants to think. Allow them 10 minutes to decide which of these activities, all things being equal, would best be started and managed as an

individual and which would be more successful as group enterprises.

Ask for suggestions. Clearly there are no hard and fast rules, and each decision should be taken on its merits, in consultation with the women. Hold brief discussions on each activity. This would lead to the development of certain criteria, which favour group, or individual enterprise development.

Group Exercise

You can discuss the aspects of group dynamics and other forces, which assist group functioning. Participants are then divided into smaller groups of 3-4 women. You can inform them that each group is an owner of a vegetable farm where they are growing brinjals. Each member participates in various activities associated with growing brinjals – like tilling the soil, de-weeding, spreading manure, procuring quality seedlings, planting, watering, harvesting and marketing. However, the brinjals have to be sold in the market in order for women to generate income. The crop has been good and local consumption in the village has been declining, as customers do not relish brinjals. There are opportunities for women to market their produce in the market outside their village. However, these customers will buy only those brinjals that are completely without marks/bruises of any kind. They are provided with a gunny bag, two plastic bags, rope, scissors, some newspaper, and pieces of wood to design a device in which they could be transported to the market.

Each group is given 20 minutes to come up with ideas and the finished product.

Processing

A number of ideas may be generated by the groups. The trainer focuses the discussion on issues of problem solving and decision-making in the small groups.

Some of the questions may include the following:

- What are the steps taken in developing this product?
- What problems did you face?
- What discussions were carried out?
- What happened in the discussions?
- Did you have a leader?
- Who took the decisions?

Group Exercise

The exercise on Broken Squares also serves as a good example of understanding the setting up of norms and decision-making in the group. This exercise has been included in Unit 6 of BWEE - 007.

Individual Exercise: Tree of Life

The trainer gives each participant a clean sheet of paper, a few crayons in

different colours, and a pencil. The trainer draws a tree on a flip chart and shows it to all the participants.

Participants then draw their own tree of life. In this tree the parts have to be labeled as follows:

- **Roots:** These represent the past (e.g. parents, education, past work experience and any other strong impacts).
- **Trunk and Branches:** These show the present life (e.g. family life, current job/work).
- **Fruits:** These represent participant's achievements – (present and past successes).
- **Dried branches:** These represent present and past failures.
- **Buds:** These represent the participant's hopes, plans, and expectations for the future.

Processing

After participants have drawn their tree of life, you can ask them to choose a partner and share their tree of life with her or him. The discussions focus on giving and receiving feedback. This feedback makes a person's contribution to the group activities meaningful. Trust, communication as important ingredients in building a strong group can be discussed.