



# Understanding gendered empowerment through a government-run microfinance programme:

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*The case of Stree Shakti in Karnataka*

**Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS)  
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## Contents

List of Tables.....	3
List of Figures.....	3
Acknowledgements .....	4
Abbreviations.....	5
Executive Summary.....	7
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	10
Chapter 2: Background to the <i>Stree Shakti</i> Programme.....	11
2.1 The influence of microfinance.....	11
2.2 The origins of the <i>Stree Shakti</i> Programme.....	12
Chapter 3: Purpose and Methodology of the Study.....	16
Chapter 4: Concept, Processes, and Functioning of the SSP .....	18
4.1 The concept of the SSP.....	18
4.2 The operational structures and processes of the SSP.....	19
4.2.1 Group composition and formation process.....	21
4.3 Modes of functioning.....	22
4.3.1 Activities of the SSG.....	22
4.3.2. Federations of the SSP .....	24
4.3.3. Training within the SSP.....	26
4.3.4 Summary of the benefits and assistance provided by the SSP.....	26
Chapter 5: Review of the literature on the SSP .....	28
5.1 Credit and savings profile .....	28
5.2 Composition of the groups.....	29
5.3 SSG Meetings.....	31
5.4 Income-generating activities .....	31
5.5 Marketing complexes .....	32
5.6 Training .....	33
5.7 Community activities and political participation.....	34
5.8 Federations.....	34
5.9 Relationship with the state.....	36
Chapter 6: Summary of Recommendations.....	38
Chapter 7: Analysis of the Evaluation and Recommendations.....	42
7.1 Functioning of the SSGs.....	42
7.2 Governance of the SSGs.....	44
7.3 Defining economic empowerment .....	46
7.4 Dimensions of Empowerment.....	48

7.5 Concepts of collectivisation .....	49
Chapter 8: The way forward .....	51
References .....	52
Annexure 1: <i>Stree Shakti</i> Progress Report January 2017 .....	54

## List of Tables

Table 1: A brief profile of women SHGs in Karnataka.....	15
Table 2: List of Assistance and Benefits to SHGs.....	26

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Stree Shakti: Sanctioned Staff, Authorities, Details of Posts .....	20
Figure 2: District and Block-level functionaries associated with the SSP.....	21
Figure 3: Federating process of Stree Shakti Groups .....	24

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## Abbreviations

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CDPO	Child Development Project Officer
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DFID	Department of International Development
DRDAs	District Rural Development Agencies
DWCD	Department of Women and Child Development
DWCRA	Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas
EC	Executive Council/Executive Committee
GBM	General Body Meeting
GoI	Government of India
GoK	Government of Karnataka
GS	Gram Sabha
HDR	Human Development Report
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGAs	Income-generating activities
KDP	Karnataka Development Programme
KSWDC	Karnataka State Women Development Corporation
MMR	Monthly multi-level reviews
MPIC	Monthly Programme Implementation Calendar
MYRADA	Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency
NABARD	National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development
NABCONS	NABARD Consultancy Services
NRLM	National Rural Livelihood Mission
OBC	Other Backward Castes
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RDPR	Rural Development and Panchayati Raj
RRB	Regional Rural Bank
SC	Scheduled Caste
SGSY	Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana
SHG	Self-help Group
SHPIs	Self-help group-promoting institutions
SLBP	SHG-Bank Linkage Programme

SS	Stree Shakti
SSB	Stree Shakti Bhawan
SSGs	Stree Shakti Groups
SSP	Stree Shakti Programme
ST	Scheduled Tribe
WCD	Women and Child Development

## Executive Summary

The *Stree Shakti* programme (SSP) was conceptualised in 2000-2001 as a women's empowerment programme to strengthen their access to financial resources. TSSP was based on the principles of self-help groups (SHGs), wherein skill development and other incentives are provided to rural women through micro-credit and savings to enhance their opportunities for economic and social mobility. The primary reason for creating a large-scale SHG programme was the documentation of widespread discrimination against women and girls reported by the Karnataka Human Development Report (HDR) in 1999. The report indicated a widespread stagnation of women's work participation in poorer districts, a narrowing of their work, income, prospects and opportunities, growing wage differentials between men and women and rising regional inequality in the state (Karnataka HDR, 2005). In response, the strategy taken by the Government of Karnataka (GoK) included several measures, prominent among which was a strong emphasis on the SHG model, a clear and focused targeting of poor, Dalit, and tribal women, a focus on regional disparities in poverty levels in the state, especially in the districts of Hyderabad-Karnataka and Bombay-Karnataka. One of the most prominent measures launched and inaugurated by the then Chief Minister of Karnataka, Sri S.M. Krishna, was the *Stree Shakti* (Women's Power) programme.

Seventeen years later, the importance of the programme in changing in the lives of millions of women is acknowledged by various sources and there has been a large-scale effort to pool both human and material resources to empower women in rural areas. However, evaluation reports as well as annual reports indicate that some aspects of the programme are not fully functional. For example, there appears to be a lack of training of the Stree Shakti Groups (SSGs) in critical aspects of marketing and an absence of infrastructure that could help in the marketing efforts. This has led to a downturn in of some of the activities and functions of the SSGs.

Given that it has been over seventeen years since its inception, it is useful to get a holistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, especially in relation to the economic empowerment of women. While several research and evaluation studies have been completed in Karnataka, a systematic analysis of these evaluations and research studies has not yet been undertaken. The present study is a review of the research studies, evaluation studies, recommendations, and the realities of the implementation of the SSP. It enables an understanding and evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and points to ways to improve it.

The findings of our review indicate that there are five areas that require specific attention:

**Savings and SSGs:** One of the major sources of concern is that after a specific period of time, the group formation for SSGs has been closed. It appears that if one is unable to join in the first iteration of the group, one is likely to be left out of the programme entirely. This contradicts the stated objectives of the programme which is to benefit all the women in a village, especially marginalised women. The selection criteria as well as the subsequent closure to new membership or new groups influences the fundamental demographics of who is being serviced in the village by the SSP and who is not, and this is a cause of concern. Another point of concern is a focused but blinding view of

the savings. While many documents, including the *Antarala*, indicate the ways in which savings have been used to increase income, there has been no systemic or systematic measurement of how this income generation has helped other social outcomes, such as increase in family income, better educational prospects for children or the building of infrastructure.

**Federation and SSGs:** One of the prominent problems documented in the evaluations is the federation and the relationship it has with SSGs. Because the idea of the federation is new, its roles and responsibilities are ill-defined and the resources required to strengthen it have not been fully utilised. Given these circumstances, the stability of new SSGs is in question. According to suggestions provided by some of the literature, federations should have the following characteristics: federation staff should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, the staff should be chosen from the SSGs instead of other programmes, training and capacity-building for the staff in their new roles must be regular, support from the local communities, especially with respect to member SSGs, has to be actively fostered and there should be an optimal number of already well-functioning and mature SSGs that become models for other SSGs.

**Governance of the SSGs:** One of the prominent problems addressed with respect to governing SSGs, especially related to new livelihood ventures, is a combination of very little background research into the realities on the ground, a lack of preparation for a new enterprise, and little or no marketing training provided to women planning to undertake new ventures. Part of the problem rests with the kind of documentation that has been done within the department. While it is clear that there have been tremendous success stories, as documented by the case studies, no move has been made to understand why these were successes or why others failed. In fact, there appears to be minimal investigation on why programmes failed in some areas of the state. More investment into the self-assessment of the systematic problems that affect the programme is required and action has to be taken.

**Role of the *anganwadi* worker:** One of the primary problems identified in almost every report (and yet no action has been taken) is with regard to the role of the *anganwadi* worker. Most reports we reviewed indicated that local officials as well as *anganwadi* workers were often stressed handling multiple programmes at once which creates a bottleneck with respect to the proper administration of schemes and services. In order to engage with this problem, there are two potential interventions. Given that there is a very strong link between knowledgeable *anganwadi* workers and the performance of SSGs, it is possible to officially recognise that *anganwadi* workers continue to play an important role and ensure that their presence is officially recorded and financially rewarded. The other option is to ensure that other trained individuals, responsible for building and providing support to SSGs, are incorporated into the administration of SSGs. These individuals can then handhold SSGs and federations into creating more self-sustaining and independent models of functioning, in relation to the social context in which they function.

**Training:** While a review of the literature suggests that training modules have been geared towards building courage and confidence among women, and along with accounts and health, gender sensitisation has also been taught, the problem of gender inequality is structural and not



only a result of the lack of information. While women might *know* that they have to work towards gender equality in their families and in their communities, forms of solidarity building and collectivisation are essential to really engage with the ways in which inequality permeates the household, in the community, and among themselves. Without this in-depth and critical engagement with the structures of gender inequality, training on gender sensitisation is unlikely to translate into the anticipated social empowerment or emancipation.

**Evaluation criteria:** The SSP must invest in evaluation and assessment indicators more pertinent to the stated objective of economic empowerment instead of engaging primarily with savings and loan behaviour. Some of the indicators should cover the purpose and use of loans for the financial health of the family or the individual, the sustainability of the new enterprises being invested in and the translation of higher incomes into social mobility (within the family and the village). While there has been a significant change in the lives of many women over the years, as witnessed and recorded by *Antarala*, it is also important for the programme to expand its current notion of assessment to a more qualitative understanding and evaluation of the economic empowerment of women.

**Expansion of the goals of economic empowerment:** Studies that examined the objectives of the programme have advised the department to look at women's overall empowerment more broadly, instead of a singular economic focus. In addition, an integrated approach to SSGs must be undertaken so that they are not merely seen as entry or end points but as long-term engagements with women's empowerment. In order to do this, the government has to consider moving from engaging with empowerment as a fixed state and move towards engaging with it as a process. It might have to shift the creation of targets from the end state to assessing targets as process-based.

**Importance of collectivisation:** When schemes, proposals and projects are implemented without taking into consideration the needs, requirements or social contexts in which SSGs work, they become recipients of government 'benevolence' instead of active participants in the governing process. It is very important for the government to engage with the articulated needs and wants of women, instead of focusing on pre-determined activities and schemes. To enable this articulation, SSGs must focus more on activities that build solidarity and collectivism, so that they are able to address the structural problems they face, especially in relation to empowerment. In general, the review indicated that in order for SSGs to become a vehicle for women's empowerment, they have to enable a process that engages with the *collective voices* of women.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Women's empowerment has been considered important for the Indian state not only in terms of enhancing social equity in the nation but as central to India's economic growth (NABARD Consultancy Services {NABCONS} Report, 2016). Government approaches to addressing poor women's access to government schemes and services have tended towards a 'welfarist perspective' (Purushothaman et.al, 2000, p. 4) which suffers from a target-based approach that does not build on the skills, activities, and knowledges of the women they are targeting. As the governance paradigm shifted from a growth-related approach to a human development approach, successive governments realised that merely providing for the 'welfare' of the women is not enough. They started to move away from treating women only as "beneficiaries of government projects" (Purushothaman et al, 2000) and viewed them as active participants in the co-creation of their own empowerment.

Working in this direction, during the 1990s, the government of India (GoI) in joint collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank, with the cooperation of a few state governments, such as the government of Karnataka, launched the *Swa Shakti* programme. The *Swa Shakti* programme was primarily a micro-finance project aimed at improving women's access to savings and credit using a group-based approach. The experience of *Swa Shakti* laid the groundwork for a state-wide programme launched by the government of Karnataka called the *Stree Shakti* (Women's Power) in 2000-2001. The programme was based on the principles of self-help groups, wherein skill development and other incentives are provided to rural women through micro-credit and savings to enhance their opportunities for economic and social mobility (Karnataka Human Development Report {HDR}, 2005). The SSP was rolled out in the entire state over a period of seventeen years, and while several research and evaluation studies have been completed in Karnataka (NABCONS, 2016), a systematic analysis of these evaluations and research studies has not yet been undertaken.

The present study is a review of the research studies, evaluation studies, recommendations, and the status of the implementation of SSP. It will enable us to understand and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and point to ways to improve it.

## Chapter 2: Background of the *Stree Shakti* Programme

In order to obtain a better understanding of the purpose for which the SSP was introduced in the state, it is necessary to have a clear idea of the major economic, social, and the policy impetuses that led to the conceptualisation of the programme. The major objective of the programme was to enable an environment conducive to the economic development of women (NABCONS Report, 2016). The primary instrument of change was conceptualised to be self-help groups which would provide opportunities for savings and access to credit to create financial mobility and self-reliance for women and their families. These self-help groups would also be provided an avenue for income-generating activities (IGAs) and would act as a base to distribute information about various departmental schemes that ensure women's welfare (NABCONS Report, 2016). But to understand *why* self-help groups were the focus of the programme, it is important to understand how narratives of rural development, poverty alleviation and empowerment of women have been intimately tied to the concept of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and microfinance.

### 2.1 The influence of microfinance

During the early 1990s, an interest in microfinance as a strategy that would address the economic development of those most marginalised in society and contribute to the fulfilment of the millennium development goals (Littlefield et al, 2003; Kabeer, 2005; Kumar, 2013) emerged. This interest was crystallised for the first time at the World Summit for Social Development at Copenhagen in 1995, and by the time the World Microcredit Summit was held in 1997, there were concrete measures countries decided to take to ensure that the poorest families could be empowered through microcredit (Rajeev, Balasubramanian and Veerashekharappa, 2016). Ten years later, in 2005, the United Nations declared the year of microcredit which helped propagate the idea of microfinance as a panacea for a number of development problems that poor countries were facing (Karnataka HDR, 2005; Naganagoud, 2011; Bhavya & Umesh, 2011; George & Kumar, 2014; Rajeev, Balasubramanian and Veerashekharappa, 2016; Koogi & Bagalkoti, 2016; Agnihotri & Malipatil, 2016).

The primary idea of microfinance as articulated through women's SHGs is to facilitate income-generation by allowing women from socially and economically disadvantaged communities to gain access to credit, savings and a means of earning a livelihood (Karnataka HDR, 2005; Bhavya & Umesh, 2011; Naganagoud, 2011; Chaithra, Handigol & Ramachandra, 2012; George & Kumar, 2014; Agnihotri & Malipatil, 2016; Koogi & Bagalkoti, 2016; Rajeev, Balasubramanian and Veerashekharappa, 2016; NABCONS Report, 2016; Kumar, 2016). Small groups of women come together to save a minimum amount per week and when the collective savings reach a threshold, they are able to take small loans and establish creditworthiness based on these savings (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). It is considered useful for many poor countries as it allows for flexibility and localisation of issues so that the specific needs of the group are catered to and groups are not bound by the structures of traditional banking systems (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). It allows women to create a common fund providing a flexible lending and savings systems that can be used for big or small loans (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012). Given that the group decides its own self-interest, the

lending rates tend to be affordable, cater to the needs of the group and has historically varied based on local contexts. The practice of coming together in groups every week also enables women to move outside the confines of their homes and create social relationships outside familial bonds (Chaithra, Handigol & Ramachandra, 2012; Poornima, 2013; George & Kumar, 2014; Rajeev, Balasubramanian and Veerashekharappa, 2016).

This movement away from the home and into groups also allows organisations (such as NGOs) and the government to work with the groups and cater to their needs directly. For example, SHGs are often used as a means to provide information about various financial resources and schemes, in addition to training, that enable women to be financially independent. NGOs have also been historically and centrally involved in ensuring that SHGs in the villages connect with community problems and enable them to be more active agents of social change (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).

When the SHGs mature, they transition to establish relationships with banks (Bhavya & Umesh, 2011). These are not always automatic in many cases (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012). On an average, SHGs have to save for a minimum of six months or more and their accounts have to be verified by the bank in order to be incorporated into formal banking systems. The rationale for establishing bank linkages is that they allow members and banks to minimise the risk of defaulting on loans (Bhavya & Umesh, 2011). Typically, even rural banks tend to be distant from the communities in which they function and women are often seen as surrogates for their family members, instead of being seen in their own individual right as citizens. Establishing a relationship in the form of an SHG also means a change in that women were able to deal with banking systems directly (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).

The SHG was a radical departure as it allowed a shift from the top-down 'welfare' approach which treated women as a disadvantaged group in need of handouts towards the recognition of women as participants in the local, state, national and global economies. Moreover, given the prevailing notion that an SHG will have a "common perception of need and an impulse towards collective action" (Bhavya & Umesh, 2011, p. 334), empowerment also emerged as a key outcome. Some of the ways in which participation in SHGs is related to empowerment outcomes are through increased mobility, exposure to more social milieux, increased awareness, changes in decision-making in the house, increase in access to social security schemes etc. (Sitaram, 2007). SHGs served as a platform to address the structural roots of gender bias, in addition to engaging women in economic and social mobility.

## **2.2 The origins of the *Stree Shakti* Programme**

The government of India (GoI) also realised the potential of the SHG model and decided to popularise it, especially given the lack of access to formal sources of credit among rural populations (Arunachalam & Kalpagam, 2006; Tankha, 2012). The GoI launched the *Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana* (SGSY) that allowed considerable scope to state governments to scale up NGO innovations in promoting SHGs and link them to banks under the SHG-bank linkage programme (SBLP). While SGSY partnered with a number of NGOs for promoting and nurturing SHGs, some

state governments, again mostly in South India, directly promoted SHGs through district development agencies (DRDAs). Some externally aided programmes (funded by IFAD, World Bank and Department of International Development {DFID}) implemented by state governments also gave impetus to the scaling up of the SHG model in states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka (Tankha, 2012).

In a parallel move, in 1996, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) also included financing of SHGs as a mainstream activity of banks under the priority sector lending programmes. From 2000 onwards, state governments in India started emerging as major self-help promoting institutions (SHPIs). They took a keen interest in facilitating SLBP for the poor to access loans to address their consumption and production needs. Gradually, this took the form of a target-oriented approach of promoting SHGs and pressurising the banking system to lend to SHGs. Since the promotion originated under the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) programme, in many states the Women and Child Development departments were at the forefront of SHG promotion. However, as the SGSY was being implemented through rural development departments, the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) gradually emerged as the major SHPIs (Tankha, 2012).

In the case of Karnataka, the government formulated and implemented various schemes for the furtherance of the social, economic and overall development of rural women. For example, the state government established the Karnataka State Women Development Corporation (KSWDC) but found that in order to create financial progress and independence for women, it was important to look beyond the provision of subsidies and loans and create awareness around rights and identity (Department of Women and Child Development {DWCD}, 2003). The objectives of microfinance in Karnataka for state and non-state actors have been to achieve the overall development of women, both financially and socially.

The origin of self-help groups in Karnataka is attributed to an NGO – the Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA) – engaged primarily in rural development projects (Fernandez, 2004; Karnataka HDR, 2005). MYRADA promoted several larger cooperative societies between 1984 and 1985 that allowed its members to extend loans to each other. These larger cooperatives, after a point in time, broke up into small groups, leading to a pre-formalised SHG (Karnataka HDR, 2005). At this time, they were informally termed as credit management groups and were working towards ways in which microcredit activities could lead to collective decision-making. These groups were, therefore, the precursors to the concept of SHGs in the state.

The first state venture in Karnataka with regards to microfinance through SHG groups was in 1991-1992 when the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) launched the SHG-SBLP (Karnataka HDR, 2005). After this linkage, the first loans to the SHGs were given in Kolar district of Karnataka by the Vysya Bank to Venkateshwara Mahila Sangha in 1991. NABARD upscaled the programme in the state by initiating a number of measures like training of the NGOs and bank staff, convening regular meetings of all intervening agencies, analysing reports and providing feedback for changes in operational systems to make them more user-friendly. It also

launched the first regional rural bank (RRB) - the Cauvery Grameen Bank of Mysore district - as an SHG-promoting institution in 1994-95 (ibid.)

Meanwhile, the government of India, in joint collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and World Bank, launched the *Swashakti* programme (Sitaram, 2007). The programme was managed by the Karnataka State Women's Development Corporation (KSWDC) which formed SHGs through NGOs in 7 districts of the state: Kolar, Tumkur, Chitradurga, Bellary, Koppal, Raichur and Gulbarga. About thirty-six NGOs were contacted to work in 979 projects villages and they formed about 2,100 SHGs with 38,508 members (Karnataka HDR, 2005, p.197).

The primary reason to creating a large-scale SHG programme was the documentation of widespread discrimination against women and girls, as reported by the Karnataka HDR in 1999. The report indicated the widespread stagnation of women's work participation in the poorer districts, the narrowing of their work and income prospects and opportunities, growing wage differentials between men and women, and rising regional inequality in the state (Karnataka HDR, 2005). In response, the strategy taken by the GoK included several measures, prominent among them was a strong emphasis on the SHG model, a clear and focused targeting of poor, Dalit, and tribal women, particular attention to the regional disparity in poverty levels in the state, especially in the districts of Hyderabad-Karnataka and Bombay-Karnataka, all of which was coupled with a strong emphasis on the idea of 'empowerment'. These measures were also supported by the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) drawn up by the GoI which first proposed a Women's Component Plan, under which both central and state governments were asked to ensure that 30% of the funds and benefits were earmarked for women-related sectors (Karnataka HDR, 2005, p.66).

The aim of the *Swashakti* programme was to provide support mechanisms for income-generating activities and harness women's participation in these groups to leverage their access to social programmes, so as to improve women's livelihoods and financial sustainability. The experiment was funded for five years and although the sustainability of these measures was questioned (Sitaram, 2007), a more robust system of reach and implementation was designed. The then-honourable Chief Minister of Karnataka, Sri S.M. Krishna, launched this new SHG-based women's empowerment project called the *Stree Shakti* (Women's Power) in 2000-2001, to strengthen women's access to financial resources.

**Table 1: A brief profile of women SHGs in Karnataka**

<b>Name of the Scheme</b>	<b>Promoting Institutions</b>	<b>Facilitators</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<i>Swashakti</i>	KSWDC with IFAD-World Bank	KSWDC in partnership with NGOs	Empowerment of women through training and self-development. No credit or subsidy components
<i>Stree Shakti</i>	DWCD, GoK	<i>Anganwadi</i> workers	Empowerment of women through savings, micro-credit and raising social awareness

Source: Karnataka HDR, 2005

The department started with the objective of forming one lakh *Stree Shakti* Groups (SSGs) and, at the latest count, they have about 1.5 lakh SSGs (DWCD, GoK, 2003 & 2016-17). The most recent evaluation of the programme indicates that the SSGs have, in fact, enabled the provision of financial services to the rural poor. It has also allowed women members to be more socially empowered and self-confident (NABCONS Report, 2016). Some SSG members have also been politically active and have been elected to local governing bodies. In some of the areas, block-level societies have been registered to form a kind of federation system. As of 2013, 175 block-level societies were registered and each given Rs. 30,000 to assist and strengthen the SHGs. Till 2013, about 370 lakhs of rupees were released to these societies.

## Chapter 3: Purpose and Methodology of the Study

The importance of the programme in changing in the lives of millions of women is acknowledged by various sources and there has been a large-scale effort to pool both human and material resources to empower women in rural areas. However, some evaluation reports as well as annual reports indicate that some aspects of the programme are not fully functional. For example, there appears to be a lack of training of the SSGs in critical aspects of marketing and there is an absence of infrastructure that could help in the marketing efforts (Belgaonkar, 2016). This has led to a downturn of some of the activities and functions of the SSGs. In Bijapur alone, functional SSGs have come down from 859 to 840 within a single year (Belgaonkar, 2016). It is important to understand the programme, the rationale and various processes that include the formation, functioning, and the sustainability of SSGs. Given it has been over 17 years since its inception, it will be useful to get a holistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, especially in relation to the economic empowerment of women. While the programme has played a significant role in transforming women's lives, it will also be useful to examine the programme through the various research studies and evaluations, especially with respect to its stated objectives.

Our primary research objectives for this study are:

1. documentation of SSP's approach, rationale and processes
2. documentation and analysis of research reports, annual reports, and evaluation reports focused on SSPs
3. documentation and analysis of the major recommendations provided to improve the functioning of the programme over the time period of the implementation
4. suggestions and steps forward for the SSP based on the comprehensive review

Given that the objectives of our study are primarily related to an in-depth documentation and analysis of existing literature, research and evaluation studies of SSP, we have primarily used **only desk-based research**, along with interviews with key individuals in the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), GoK.

We first scanned, collated, and documented all publicly available research and evaluation studies, scholarly articles, newspaper particles as well as books available on SSP. Based on our preliminary understanding of the programme, we prepared a list of interview questions for Ms. Sasikala Shetty, the then Director of the SSP. She was able to provide information with regard to some of the motivations, the current status, and the functioning of the programme. We were also introduced to Ms. Surekha Vijayprakash (then Deputy Director of the SSP and presently Project Director of SSP), who not only gave us an insider's perspective on the programme but was also able to share with us some of the data and information produced by the SSP. These include copies of *Antarala* (a yearly magazine celebrating the success of the programme, *Mukhyavahini* (monthly report on SSGs published by the DWCD, GoK), annual reports of the DWCD as well as a preliminary copy of the NABARD evaluation conducted in 2016. While other evaluation reports were not made available to us, such as the MYRADA report (2003) and the report by the Directorate of Economics and



Statistics (2002), we were able to get a fairly in-depth understanding of the processes and the status of the programme with the use of these documents.

In order to analyse the data available, we first identified and examined the common themes emergent in the literature that spans almost 17 years. We then analysed these recurrent themes against social constructs that underpinned each of these themes. For example, if we found savings and loans activities, or income-generating activities, or even political participation, we classified them into the different modalities of economic empowerment identified as central to the objectives of the scheme. Through this process, we analysed the existing data and research findings through the lens of the *purpose and rationale* of the programme. Through this exercise, we were also able to identify gaps in the literature in relation to the performance of the scheme. For example, we were unable to find many studies that examined the influence of SSGs on the economic mobility of the family or even the sustainability of any of the IGAs of the women in the SSGs.

The methodology that we followed has several limitations. Given that it is a meta-review of the evaluation literature of the SSP, it will be unable to answer the 'why' question of our findings. We can only postulate the potential reasons for the trends discernible. In addition, given that we were primarily engaged in desk-based research, our understanding of the programme is limited to the research that was done in the field and reported with the objectives of individual research studies. Different orientations of research were necessarily flattened for the purposes of this review. However, with all of these limitations, we consider this an important step in building the future functioning of the programme as it provides us the tools to examine the macro-trends of the programme. It gives us insight into the overall functioning of the programme, instead of examining a small section or a variant of the programme. By engaging with the material over a large span of time, we are able to analyse the issues, the problems, and results comprehensively. This way, we are better able to present a more holistic understanding of SSP and its evolution and also the directions it ought to take in the future.

## Chapter 4: Concept, processes and functioning of the SSP

The concept of 'empowerment' entered the lexicon of development discourse in the 1990s (Batiwala, 1994) and, currently, the term has been used to denote any venture related to gender, without really engaging with the core meaning of women's engagement with power within the family and in the community. If a programme is working towards women's empowerment, it needs to engage with changing existing power relationships with respect to gender and other forms of marginalisation. To evaluate or to understand a programme working towards women's economic empowerment, we have to understand the ways in which the programme has moved away from the 'welfare' approach and is actively engaging with social structures and institutions that enable women to challenge the current status quo of gender relations. It is important to examine the ways in which the concept of empowerment is articulated by the SSP, the methodologies and the processes that it uses to bring about the social change it envisages and the functions that state institutions play in supporting these processes.

### 4.1 The concept of SSP

The primary objective of the SSP is to "strengthen the process that promotes the economic development of women and create an environment for social change" (Purushothaman et.al, 2000, p. 12). As mentioned earlier, in order to do this, SHG was used as a model to build self-reliance of women and to provide them access to information regarding various schemes, so that they are become economically upwardly mobile. This is in keeping with the vision of the DWCD which is to ensure that women in Karnataka are socially, politically and economically empowered and that children are provided care and protection that would enable them to lead happy and healthy childhoods (DWCD Annual Report, 2016). Among the various concerns that the DWCD has articulated, especially with regard to women, is to provide for women's economic sustainability, to mainstream gender concerns in policies, provide for childcare, participate in justice delivery, and to prevent trafficking and violence against women. Given that one of the primary missions of the DWCD is to provide women with information about various programme and schemes and to build awareness about their constitutional rights, the SSP can be considered one of the vehicles of the social vision that guides the DWCD.

This vision of empowerment, as defined in particular through the SSP, is not concrete in any document. However, an idea of the vision and justification of the concept of empowerment can be found in the Handbook on the SSP published by DWCD in 2003 (DWCD, GoK, 2003). The document provides contexts of the various schemes and programmes for rural women in the state, which appears to be primarily aided through providing women financial support in the form of subsidy through different projects either directly or through banks. But in the evaluations done by the government, they realised that these schemes do not appear effective in enhancing the *confidence and capabilities* of these women. So, while many projects were being implemented for the financial progress and development of women, the government found that the social, economic and political development of women was not possible only through provisions of subsidies or loans. Instead, they felt that awareness has to be created among women regarding their own status, position, and

the rights to which they are entitled as equal citizens and their capacities built, with respect to social, economic and political resources.

In keeping with this latter idea of empowerment, the SSP in Karnataka was introduced. The following are the stated aims and objectives of the programme:

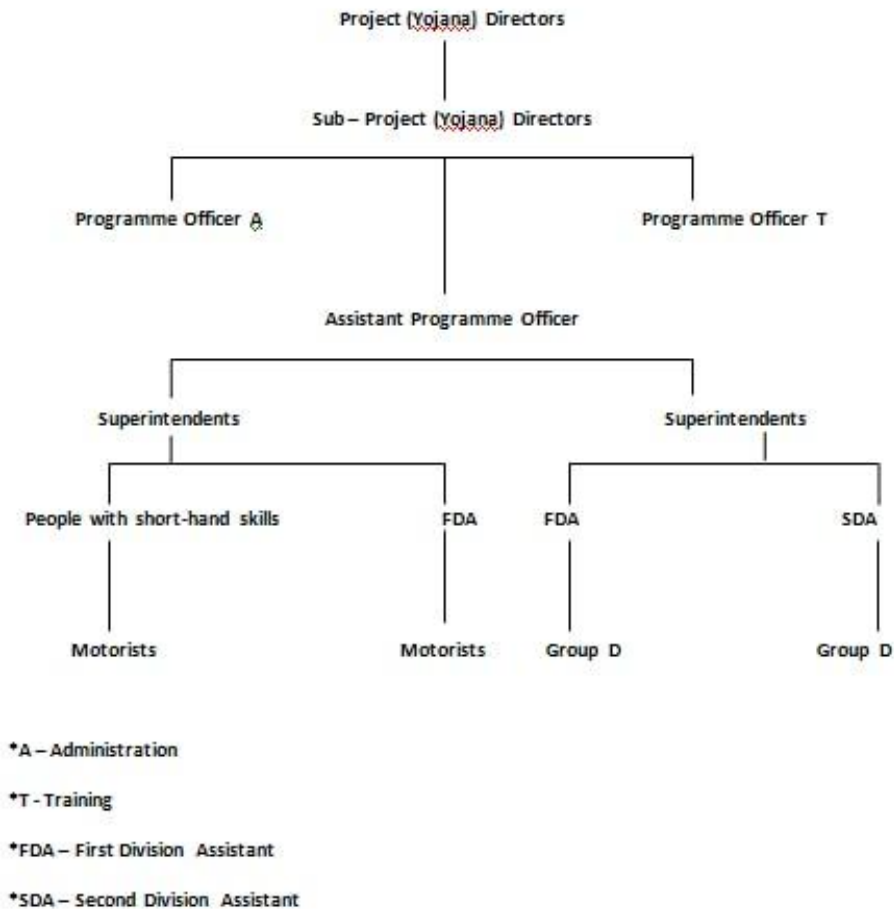
1. to strengthen and accelerate the process of economic development and create a conducive environment for social change for rural women in the state;
2. to form women's self-help groups based on thrift and credit principles which build self-reliance and in turn enable women to have greater access and control over resources;
3. to create self-confidence and increase income levels for rural women by involving them in income-generating activities thereby contributing to their financial stability as well as poverty alleviation and
4. to ensure rural women's access to credit financing by providing them opportunities to avail the benefits of other departmental schemes by converging the services of various departments and lending institutions to ensure women's access to credit financing.

The various components of empowerment, as defined by the SSP, were awareness and increases in self-confidence, financial, political and social capabilities and physical and social mobility. The SSP vision of empowerment, therefore, was to expand women's economic opportunities through the plugging of information gaps and to allow them to expand their current horizons, both social and economic, through diverse income-generating activities (Purushothaman et.al, 2000). It was posited that through these measures and by the enhanced access to credit institutions and credit products, financial stability would be enhanced for the poorest communities and would contribute to poverty alleviation at a general level and self-confidence and empowerment at the personal level.

## **4.2 The operational structure and process of SSP**

In order to understand how these objectives and components of empowerment have been articulated within the institutional structures and cultures of the government organisation, we will examine how the programme was operationalized within the government. The SSP is housed at the DWCD, GoK. As mentioned earlier, the mandate of the DWCD can be subdivided into the following heads: child development, women's development, social defence and other programmes. As one of the major projects of the DWCD, the programme follows a fairly well-organised chain of command, for the purposes of data collection, monitoring, and guidance. The organogram, as provided by the DWCD through our conversations, is as follows:

**Figure 1: Stree Shakti: Sanctioned Staff, Authorities, Details of Posts**



In terms of monitoring activities, there are committees at the state, district, and the taluk levels.

1. **State-level committee:** The Chief Minister of Karnataka is the Chairperson and the Minister for Women and Child Development is the Deputy Chairperson. The Chief Secretary and the heads of the departments concerned are members. The Secretary (Women and Child Development) is the Member Secretary of the Committee.
2. **District-level committee:** At the district level, the Deputy Commissioner of the district is the Chairperson and the district level officers of the departments concerned are members of the committee. The Deputy Director, Women and Child Development is the member secretary of the committee.
3. **Taluk-level committee:** At the taluk level, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the taluk panchayat is the Chairperson and the officers of the departments concerned at the taluk level are members of the Committee. The Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) is the member secretary to monitor the programme.

At the district and block levels, the structure of the programme is as follows:

**Figure 2: District and Block Level Functionaries associated with SSP**



The progress of the programme is typically reported on the basis of the Monthly Programme Implementation Calendar (MPIC) prepared by the Secretary to the Government (DWCD). The progress is also reviewed in monthly multi-level review (MMR) meetings as well as the quarterly Karnataka Development Programme (KDP) meetings (NABCONS Report, 2016).

In order to better understand the functionalities of these operational structures and the processes by which the programme is able to deliver on its mission, we will examine the primary process that underlies the methodology of the programme: the composition and the formation of the SSG.

#### **4.2.1 Group composition and formation process**

SSP groups are formed at the village level by *anganwadi* workers. They are usually clustered around groups of 15-20 women, preferably falling into the following categories:

1. women living below poverty line
2. women landless agricultural labourers
3. women from the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) communities and

#### 4. women from families with alcoholics, drug addicts or physically disabled persons

For the SSP to function, the *anganwadi* worker is central. Given she is the person who was given the responsibility to form and organise the groups for the first three years, in the initial years, the *anganwadi* worker was given training and a mandate to start at least three groups in her area. As the *anganwadi* worker was already working in the community with mothers and children, she was deemed to understand and navigate the dynamics of the village in order to create cohesive groups that might be sustainable. Within months of training, the *anganwadi* worker started creating and forming the SHGs. She was also responsible for holding regular meetings, taking down the minutes and proceedings of the meetings, facilitating bank linkages and doing the accounts. Over a period of time, she was also tasked with training the group to conduct all of these activities by themselves, so that they could function without her support. The *anganwadi* workers were given additional financial incentives to perform this role.

The transition of control of the activities of the SSG from the *anganwadi* worker to the SSG is supposed to be during the first six months. While the *anganwadi* worker in the village could continue to extend her cooperation and support to the SSGs, they were to manage their own activities at the end of six months. The idea was that within this time, the SSG would be given the tools and capabilities to organise and sustain themselves. If the groups were unable to manage themselves, they could appoint an outsider and provide remuneration to him/her out of the savings of the group. After six months, the groups also have to start initiating the process of providing small loans to group members from the savings that they have collected and to open a savings account in the name of the group in a bank.

Before the programme was rolled out, *anganwadi* workers, supervisors, and CDPOs were systematically trained in the activities that the SSGs were supposed to undertake<sup>1</sup>. In the initial three years, when *anganwadi* workers were support mechanism for the groups, supervisors in the block offices and the CDPOs in the district offices were empowered to guide *anganwadi* workers from time to time and supervise their work. As the groups started to become more capable and independent, the process was to establish independent relationships between the groups and the department, either directly or through block- or district-level societies (otherwise called federations). While this is the base process of the SSG, there are specific modes of functioning that the SSG is involved in that establish the groundwork for the economic empowerment of women.

### 4.3 Modes of functioning

#### 4.3.1 Activities of the SSG

One of the primary modes of functioning often investigated and evaluated is the frequency of weekly meetings. They are considered one of the main ways in which group cohesiveness and group identity is formed. While a wide variation of practices is found in the evaluation and research reports, the SSGs are supposed to meet once every week and save a minimum of Rs. 10 per week. While the meetings are primarily related to the collection of the savings and decision-making

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<sup>1</sup> Specific details regarding the training are included in Section 4.3.3

related to the loans and savings, some emphasis is given to social aspects of the programme. For example, at the beginning of every weekly meeting, the prayer is often followed by members stating the following resolutions:

- We will bring up our children in the family without gender discrimination.
- We will send daughters to school compulsorily and not make them drop out in the middle for any reason.
- We will arrange the marriage of our daughters only after they attain 18 years of age.
- We will plant two trees compulsorily in our house yards
- We will grow green vegetables in the backyard of our houses and use it for our families
- We will vaccinate our children at regular intervals and see that they are not malnourished and affected by any fatal disease.

As the meetings get more regularised and the savings reach a threshold, members start loan activities from the savings funds. In the beginning, the groups were also given a revolving fund<sup>2</sup> of Rs. 5000 to incentivise the undertaking of income-generating activities by the group or by individual members.

During this time, they also transition into creating bank linkages so that they can keep their savings in an account in the bank. After verifying their accounts, books, and records of weekly meetings, banks often are able to provide loans based on the savings deposited in the banks. These are often in the form of group loans and the SSG is responsible for the return of the loans (instead of individuals in the groups). Apart from engaging in loan activities, the SSGs are also actively encouraged to engage in various income-generating activities such as tailoring, weaving, *agarbatti*-making, *papad*-making etc<sup>3</sup>. While most of the SSGs are supposed to be engaged in IGAs, not all of them are. According to the reports provided by the DWCD, as of January 2017, out of a total of 1,50,000 SSGs, only 89,303 are engaged in IGAs. Incentives are given to districts to conduct *melas* and exhibitions, and as of 2016, Rs. 75,000 was released to each of the districts for this purpose (NABCONS Report, 2016).

Additionally, it appears that SSGs are also encouraged to engage with their communities either through cleanliness drives, anti-liquor drives etc. In some instances, as observed in the magazine *Antarala* published by the DWCD, some groups also participate in various cultural programmes (including dance-dramas and songs) to engage with social issues in their communities and in other public events. We also observed in the course of research done for another project in various districts of Karnataka, especially in Bagalkote, that SSGs were assisting *anganwadi* workers already overburdened with the implementation of many schemes, to help them to redistribute their load. The SSGs are also encouraged to form direct relationships and interfaces with government departments such as agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, health, industry, and rural development to access scheme information useful to the members of the SSGs.

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<sup>2</sup> A more detailed explanation is enclosed below.

<sup>3</sup> A detailed account of these activities can be found in the yearly publication released by the DWCD, GoK called *Antarala*.

### 4.3.2. Federations of the SSP

One of the main activities that evolved in the course of the programme was the institution of the district- and block-level federated structures. The objective of the federation is to be a “democratic body, formally registered to represent the *Stree Shakti* group members” (NABCONS Report, 2016, p. vii), and the primary role appears to link departmental activities and the groups. While a number of evaluation and research studies have paid attention to the functioning of the federations, we did not find any internal document that clearly articulated the roles and responsibilities of the federations<sup>4</sup>.

Our review of the literature indicates that the federations were conceptualised to serve many functions, some of which are:

- to create a meeting and discussion space for the SSGs at the taluk level
- to create a forum to discuss problems, concerns and issues that the SSGs are facing
- to create a platform for resolving problems or conflicts within or between SSGs
- to disseminate important information to the members and be resource centres for the SSGs
- to strengthen the existing SSGs by continually identifying training programmes
- to administer the institutional structure needed for the sustainability of the SSGs at the local levels
- to monitor the functioning of the SSGs and to create linkages between departments and individual SSGs

The objective of instituting the federation structure, therefore, appears to provide support for the SSGs at the block and the district levels, to create independence and self-sustainability. This is to ensure that when the government withdraws support (as it has done with the role reduction of the *anganwadis*, at least, officially), the federated structures would take over the management and functioning of the SSGs at the local levels. The federated structures, therefore, are supposed to support the DWCD in providing the SSGs assistance in several current activities such as monitoring the use of the revolving fund, organising exhibitions and *melas*, encouraging marketing activities, and construction of Stree Shakti Bhawans (SSBs) (NABCONS Report, 2016).

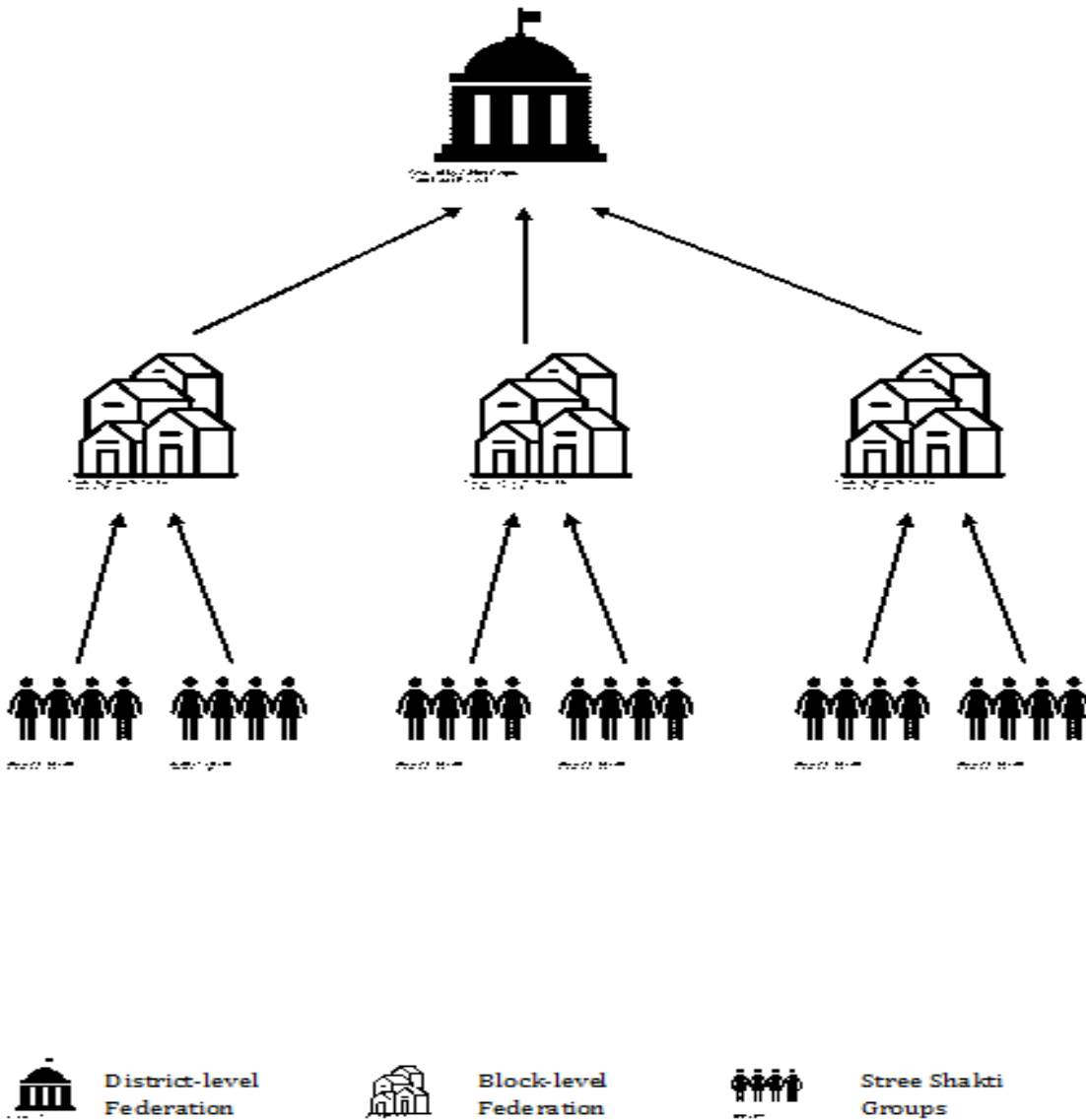
From our review of the available material, we find that there are primarily two kinds of federated structures in the SSP. One is the block-level federation and the other is the district-level federation. Block-level federations were formed in 2006 and the district-level formations have started very recently in 2016. By 2012, there were 175 block-level societies. The federations at the block level are informed by the federations at the cluster level, which are formed by representatives of 10-12 SSGs. As in a federated structure, representatives of 10-12 cluster-level groups form the block-level structures. Both block- and district-level federations are registered under the Karnataka Society Registration Act, 1960 (NABCONS Report, 2016).

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<sup>4</sup> Further analysis of this lack of articulation will be discussed later in the report.



**Figure 3: Federating process of Stree Shakti Groups**



The block-level federation is headed by the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) and Assistant CDPO (ACDPO), who also become part of the Executive Council (EC) along with 7 to 13 members of the federation. While there is no voting system at the moment, the government has been encouraging elections of the federated members of the EC. Currently, it is operating on a selection/voluntary basis. The federations are formed with a membership fee of Rs. 1000 for lifetime membership from participating SSGs, an annual membership of Rs. 250 and a monthly membership of Rs. 25. This is not uniform in every district. In some of the districts such as Bangalore (Rural) and Tumkur, for example, memberships are collected individually, in that individuals from the SSGs become members of the federations (NABCONS Report, 2016). The

officials appear to be themselves unclear on whether SSGs are seen as individual members or individual women within the SSGs are seen as members, as reported by several evaluation studies.

### 4.3.3. Training within SSP

The training within the SSP programme began at the conception stage. First, all the officer-level cadre were trained in the fundamentals of the SHG concept, its benefits, the procedures for starting an SHG, and the process of implementation. In early 2000, a two-day training was given to all programme officers, right from the director of the programme to the CDPOs. This cadre of individuals were then instructed to provide training to their junior programme officers, including supervisors and *anganwadi* workers. This second-level training was for more than two days and specific topic areas such as the proper manner to conduct the trainings, the potential topics of discussion, the mobilisation techniques to create groups and the procedural details regarding the running of the groups were explained to the junior programme officers.

Training within the SSGs is also an important component of the programme. The first round of training provided to SSG members by the DWCD is on the purpose and functionalities of creating SSGs. This is to provide an orientation to the programme. The second round concentrates on concepts of gender, communication skills, personality development, leadership qualities and maintenance of records. The third is on book keeping, credit management, and relevant social issues, and a fourth is on skill development and capacity-building (DWCD, GoK, 2003 and DWCD, GoK website) While the initial rounds of training are conducted in the villages, later rounds are done in training centres and marketing complexes instituted in Bangalore (urban), Belgaum, Mysore and Gulbarga (NABCONS Report, 2016). SSBs are also being constructed to ensure that along with marketing of SS products, training on various topics might be conducted in these bhawans.

### 4.3.4 Summary of the benefits and assistance provided by SSP

The following table provides brief summary of the various form of benefit and assistance provided under the SSP.

**Table 2: List of Assistance and Benefits to SSGs**

<b>Assistance and Benefits</b>	<b>Description</b>
Revolving Funds	<i>Rs. 5,000 is provided to each SSG as seed or capital money by the DWCD to take up income-generating activities. Recently, this amount has been increased to Rs. 25,000</i>
Kit Materials	<i>Each group is provided registers and a trunk worth Rs. 600 for the storage of these documents</i>
Training	<i>Training of the members of the group is considered an important component of the SSP. To cover topics such as gender issues, leadership qualities, book keeping, credit management, and skill development, coordination with various organisations such as MYRADA, NABARD, NIFT and the Animal Husbandry</i>

	<i>Department, GoK has been instituted</i>
Interest Subsidy on the Loans	<i>SSGs which have availed loans up to one lakh from the bank are provided with an interest subsidy of 6%</i>
Incentives for Excess Savings	<i>In the budget speech of 2003-2004, the Chief Minister of Karnataka had announced an incentive of Rs. 15,000 for groups which have saved between Rs. 75,000 to Rs. 1,00,000 and Rs. 20,000 for groups which have saved above Rs. 1,00,000</i>
Income-generating activities (IGAs)	<i>For taking up IGAs, each group is provided with Rs. 5,000. The different IGAs pursued by groups are dairying, production and sale of readymade garments, blanket marketing, marketing of seeds and manure, production and sale of papad, sambar powder, agarbatti etc., production and sale of composite manure, soap and detergent. The groups have also taken up various income-generating programmes available in other government departments like Animal Husbandry, Nirmithi Kendras etc.</i>
Construction of Marketing Complex	<i>In order to encourage SSGs to take up IGA and also to provide marketing facilities for the products prepared by them, 28 district level, 151 taluk level and 4 divisional level, marketing complex were constructed</i>
Strengthening of cluster/block/taluk-level federations	<i>To strengthen the functioning of SSGs and enable them to federate at the taluk level, federations have been formed in all taluks and registered under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, 1960. Each society has been provided with financial assistance of Rs. 30,000</i>
Exhibition-cum-Marketing Melas	<i>Each district gets Rs. 75,000 each year to organise exhibitions and marketing melas at the district and taluk levels to promote the marketing of the produce of the SSGs locally</i>
Awards for Best Group and Block Level Societies	<i>On the occasion of International Women's Day and as part of birth centenary celebrations of Smt. Yasodharamma Dasappa every year, <u>three cash awards and citations</u> are given at the state, district and taluk levels to the first, second and third best groups at each level</i>
New Swarnima programme	<i>SSGs which belong to backward classes are given financial assistance from the Backward Class and Minorities Development Corporation to take up income-generating services</i>
Credit linkages to the groups	<i>Under this, certain groups became eligible for credit linkages with banks and take up income-generating activities</i>
Mobile van	<i>The government has announced the provision of mobile van for the sale of products prepared by the SSGs as a pilot programme to be implemented in two districts of each division in the state in the budget speech of 2012-2013</i>

## Chapter 5: Review of the literature on SSP

As mentioned earlier, after we reviewed evaluation reports, research reports, and other publicly available studies on the SSP, we examined the common themes emergent in this literature. Most of the studies appeared to engage with similar frames of assessment:

- Credit- and savings-related: the savings, the loan, and the credit profile of the SSG.
- SSG structure-related: operational logistics of the SSG, including the regularity of meetings and the quantum of savings and credit disbursements.
- Functions: leadership and initiative taken by the SSG, consistency of operations and savings, involvement in marketing etc.
- Individual characteristics: Leadership shown by individual SSG members, decision-making by individual members within the household and their participation in the SSGs.
- Process- and performance-related: Rotation of leadership, personal involvement in the SHG, awareness of literacy and participation in community projects.

Given that these were the primary modes of assessment that we found, we paralleled our analysis along these same lines, in addition to examining the social constructs underlying these themes. We found the following to be the most pertinent in evaluating the programme.

### 5.1 Credit and savings profile

From the time that the scheme launched in 2000, the SSP has over 1.5 lakh self-help groups, as of 2016-17, with a membership of 22.13 lakh women. Among these, about 1.38 lakh groups have availed the group loan facilities. In the same year, 2,160 crores were accumulated by the groups, and they also borrowed 3,116 crores from banks. In terms of the revolving fund provided by the government, 71 crores were released to the SHG groups. In addition to the loans that they have taken from the banks, they also have utilised an internal loaning facility of almost 5687 crores (See Annexure 1).

Most groups reviewed in the literature showed very strong saving behaviour with members saving between Rs. 10 and Rs. 50 per week on an average (NABCONS Report, 2016). In the latest evaluation of the programme, 71% had given internal loans to members of their own SHGs, and 76.4% were charging between 19-25% p.a. on loans. The rest were charging between 7-12% on loans (NABCONS Report, 2016). In other reports, it is clear that repayment, loan provision and redistribution of savings as loans have been functioning very effectively (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). In a large-scale evaluation study, it was found that the repayment period for about 67% of the groups was fixed between 7-12 months, while 16% had fixed it at a period of six months. Longer periods were also fixed by 15% of the groups surveyed such as 19-24 months (NABCONS Report, 2016).

With respect to loaning behaviour, majority of the groups (86%) had availed a bank loan at least once. While one of the evaluation reports indicate that the majority of the groups able to avail bank

loans were often listed as IGAs (NABCONS Report, 2016), our interviews indicate that IGAs proposed at the time of the loan may not necessarily be carried out. Our conversations with local officials for another project indicate that given women realise that they are able to get loans for IGAs with minimal effort, they are likely to mark many of their personal or familial loans as IGAs.

In terms of loan recovery, it appears that in some districts like Davangere, internal recovery is more than the external recovery. According to our interview with the head of the programme, repayment has never been a problem and this appears to be largely true. For example, repayment appears to be hovering around 95% to 97%, although in a few lean years, it dips to 68% (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). While factors such as the leadership of the groups are often considered important for the rate of recovery for both internal and external loans (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013), it is likely that loan recovery is seriously monitored by the members of groups as it has a direct bearing on future access to financial resources. Additionally, the stigma is higher for members unable to repay loans, prompting higher rates of recovery. DWCD officials attested that because of the risks to the standing of the group credit, especially in relation to a bank loan, members of a group are also more likely to pitch in from their own resources to protect the credit history of the SSG in case of default.

Revolving funds as provided by the government have been utilised in several districts. In districts such as Haveri, over 95% of the groups have received the revolving fund and almost all of them have been able to open bank accounts with their history of savings (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012). Incentives of Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 20,000 were provided to groups that had saved more than Rs. 75,000 and Rs. 1 Lakh in Haveri (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012).

While most of the literature reviewed indicate that savings have gone up for a number of groups, there has been a downturn in the last few years (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). It was observed that a few SHGs had withdrawn substantial amounts of money from their savings for various reasons. Some of these are: fear of mismanagement or appropriation, apprehension related to default by a few members, lack of knowledge or awareness of next steps, lack of entrepreneurial skills or capacities among members, lack of direction and incentives from the DWCD and fear of losing the BPL status and associated benefits (NABCONS Report, 2016). The NABCONS report (2016) studied this problem extensively and argues that the primary reason appears to be a lack of monitoring and guiding help from the DWCD. In one of its recommendations, it states that some of these issues can be resolved if maturation and saturation of the SSGs are closely monitored so that transitions to the next steps can be taken more effectively.

## **5.2 Composition of the groups**

The mandate of the DWCD for the SSP was to cater to the most marginalised communities. From the earlier studies such as MYRADA in 2003, there were some indications to the government that the focus of the SSGs should be on the poorest of the poor and those who do not have any social or economic resources to begin with (NABCONS Report, 2016). In addition, married women were given priority because they were more likely to stay in the village (as most women move to their marital homes after marriage). In response to these suggestions, the DWCD defined the main target

groups to be women living below the BPL, women from SC, ST, and minority communities and women who were otherwise disadvantaged.

As of 2015-2016, among the 20 lakh women enrolled in 1.5 lakh groups, about 4 lakh women are from the SC community, 1.6 lakh from the ST community, and 14 lakh from the Other Backward Caste (OBC) communities. In the district of Haveri, for example, 11% of the groups can be classified as SC, 4% as ST, and 5% as members of the minority communities (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012). While this is laudable, it doesn't give any indication of the coverage in terms of the total size of these communities. For example, it is not clear what percentage of SC and ST communities have been covered by the SSP. This information is very important to understand the reach and coverage of the programme, especially if the aim is to target the most marginalised of groups.

In terms of enrolment related to the BPL status, it appears that most women enrolled in the programme do come from BPL families, although about one-tenth of the women are from non-BPL categories (9%, NABCONS Report, 2016). In terms of age composition, it appears that most of the women, especially in a sample drawn from Dharwad, are of an older age group (Kumar, 2016). In an older evaluation done by MYRADA in 2003 as well as studies done in Dharwad (Kumar, 2016), it was found that older members were not only more likely to join the group but also that they benefited more from the participation. NABCONS (2016) found that older members<sup>5</sup> were much more likely to influence their families on how to use their contribution to the family's earnings and had higher levels of comfort and confidence in their abilities to influence their family's decisions, as compared with newer members (NABCONS Report, 2016). Awareness levels of older members were also higher.

The composition of the groups over a period of time does not change very much, and if it does, the groups try to ensure that they retain the same number of individuals. One of the studies revealed that given that the maximum number of SSGs were limited to 15-20, it was only when the old members left, that new ones could join (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). This poses a problem for examining the growth of the SSGs. While statistics reveal that the number of SSGs have been increasing, it is unclear whether the same women are part of the growing number of SSGs (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013).

The activity levels of the SSGs appear to be mixed. Some studies (NABCONS, 2016) as well as the case studies featured in the *Antarala* magazines indicate very strong and active SSGs. For instance, even though it is not required or mandated by law to get audited, about more than one-third (37%) of the groups covered in a large-scale evaluation report had had their books audited to ensure good practices and financial responsibility (NABCONS Report, 2016).

Other studies have indicated that some areas have had trouble retaining members (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). Some of the reasons for the lack of retention, at least, in Davangere, appear to be: (1) the presence of other SHGs that provide more services, such as education loans or scholarships

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<sup>5</sup> Older groups, as defined by NABCONS (2016) are those groups that have been in existence for more than 3 years.

for children (2) poor management, lack of coordination, and cohesion among members and (3) uncooperative behaviour of banks, such as insistence on the requirement of collateral to open bank accounts (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). It also appears from our review of the literature that there are no mechanisms or systems set in place to identify the differing needs, interests or identities of the women in the groups. Therefore, a lot of the schemes associated with SSP are seen as not suitable to the needs of the group. Additionally, there appear to be no mechanisms to build the group into a cohesive and stable collective and the motivation of savings and loans were not sufficient to sustain the group for a long period of time. In fact, the study in Davangere reported that women in the SSGs had not benefited from joining the group (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013).

### 5.3 SSG Meetings

One of the most researched and documented aspects of the evaluation of the SSP is the frequency of the meetings of SSGs, as it is considered to be a proxy of the vibrancy and active nature of the SSG itself. We found that a lot of the SSGs covered are varied in their levels of activity, although most are fairly frequent (once a week). For example, in a major evaluation report in 2016, it was found that while the interval timings varied, the regularity was either weekly (52%), bi-weekly (10%) or monthly (38%) (NABCONS Report, 2016). Some SSGs were able to ensure weekly attendance by collecting penalties. As non-attendance is related to irregular payment of savings and irregular payment of loan installments, a small penalty was being charged to inculcate good saving behaviour by at least 75% of the evaluated SSGs (NABCONS Report, 2016).

Regular meetings also were reflected in the maintenance of books and regular book-keeping. As mentioned earlier, for the first six months, the books were initially written only with the help of the *anganwadi* workers. During the course of the formation and functioning of the SHG group, two to four members were either trained by the department (in special training programmes) or informally through the *anganwadi* worker in maintaining the books. It was observed that some book keepers did charge anywhere between Rs. 100 and Rs. 200 a month for the additional responsibility of book-keeping (NABCONS, 2016). Other studies as well as interviews with state officials indicate that in SSGs where these capacities are limited, *anganwadi* workers are still helping, even though the remuneration for these activities has long since stopped.

One of the observations made in some studies is that while the weekly meetings show a group dynamic that is more active and involved, without understanding the content and substance of these meetings it is not clear whether these meetings are able to facilitate social change within the communities in which these women are located. For example, if the meetings are only to collect money and lending and saving activities, without the push towards a collective identity and awareness of oppressive social structures, these groups cannot be leveraged to move towards greater freedoms for women or a more equitable society.

### 5.4 Income-generating activities

One of the main aims of the SSP is to ensure that women are able to diversify their skill sets and participate in livelihoods that improve their social and economic conditions. To this end, the

programme has directed its attention to families often dependent on agricultural labour or on their farms. In a study done in Dharwad, it was established that most women who had enrolled in the programme were daily wage labourers (43%) and about almost a third of them worked in agriculture (27%) (Bangari & Tamragundi, 2013). In the same study, the family income for most of the women was less than Rs. 15,000 a month (77%), while a quarter of their combined family income was more than Rs. 25,000 in a month (23%) (Bangari & Tamragundi, 2013).

The central motivation of focusing on IGAs is to ensure that the women are able to increase their personal and family incomes through the diversification of IGAs. For example, many women have reported taking loans to start new animal husbandry projects, inputs to agriculture and opening small local businesses (NABCONS, 2016). Animal husbandry, especially, is a very popular activity. Among small businesses, tailoring and flower-vending are prominent (Bhavya & Umesh, 2011). While some non-SSG groups also take part in these activities, it has been found that the “number of employment-generating activities taken up by SSG members was more compared to non-SSG members” (Bhavya & Umesh, 2011, p.343). But in another study, a closer examination of the actual usage of these loans indicates that most loans meant for IGAs were actually used for personal purposes (Kumar, 2016). Therefore, before arriving at a definite conclusion on the use of loans for IGAs, an in-depth analysis of the systematic and varied use of these loans has to be undertaken.

Given that IGAs are primarily to ensure an increase in economic mobility, some studies focused on the changes in annual family income and found that there were slight increases in family income after the SSGs (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012) in certain districts (NABCONS Report, 2016). In one of the studies that examined 100 members’ households, it was found that annual income and additional forms of employment were higher compared to non-SSG members (Bhavya & Umesh, 2011). Curiously, while IGAs are a crucial form of data collected by the DWCD, the corresponding impact on family income and the documentation of economic mobility or even the long-term sustainability of these IGAs are not recorded or reported by the DWCD. This is essential given that the economic mobility of the women and the family are crucial objectives of the programme.

## 5.5 Marketing complexes

One of the structural and institutional innovations in the programme has been the conceptualisation of the taluk marketing complexes that allow women to bring their produce to sell, creating a marketing channel for women’s produce, enabling them to get better prices. One of the studies reviewed the building of these complexes and reported that as of 2012, the DWCD has constructed many buildings in different districts for a cost of 2,650 lakhs, primarily to combat the various marketing problems that women face (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). Given that transportation and exploitation by intermediaries continue to pose problems for women, these marketing complexes hope to pave the way for more equitable and transparent marketing systems. However, while the state has released finances for 162 marketing complexes, no more than twenty have been currently built. The reason cited has been the “non-availability of suitable sites, and delay by construction agency” (DWCD Annual Report, 2016, p. 19). This is definitely a problem, given that one of the main infrastructural necessities to ensure that women’s entrepreneurial activities end in economic mobility is the building and proper functioning of these complexes.



In terms of entrepreneurial activities, it was reported that only a few SSGs were creating products on a collective basis (NABCONS Report, 2016). Most exhibitions organised by the DWCD in these marketing complexes or in any other venue featured goods that women had produced in their individual capacities or with their family members. Despite case studies featured in the *Antarala* magazines, by and large the idea of group-based entrepreneurial activity in the form of a cooperative was not evident in many of the reports we reviewed. Most products featured in these marketing complexes were related to food, tailoring, or handicrafts.

One of the main findings related to the marketing complexes as well as feedback from the women's focus groups suggest that training programmes have to be added to these ventures so that quality control, repeatability and packaging are given attention. This will allow for better remuneration for the products as well as the increased marketability (NABCONS, 2016).

## 5.6 Training

In almost all the research reports we reviewed, training appeared as a prominent subject of analysis. It was observed that training was essential to build the capacities of the group members, as well as group cohesiveness and solidarity. Either, due to the nature and short duration of the training, many could not pick up or retain the information provided.

Training is often given for the manufacturing of soaps and candles, preparation of familiar household condiments such as *papad*, *pickle*, *roti*, and *chaat* items. In addition, women are also given training to make useful household commodities such as wire bags, mosquito nets etc. For women who are farmers, improvements to agricultural cultivation and animal husbandry have also been provided (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). Other livelihood options such as beauty schools and tailoring have been part of the training courses.

The usual model of training has been documented in many studies. Typically, two members from a rural SHG are selected to go for a training session, usually conducted in a training facility located at the block or taluk level. It was presumed that those who receive training will, in turn, train the rest of the group. But whether or not this practice has been followed has not been monitored. Some studies have reported that in most of the SSGs they observed, this practice was not in place (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013).

Additionally, it appears that training was not uniform throughout the years (NABCONS Report, 2016). Older groups, for instance, reported getting basic training while the newer groups had not received any training (NABCONS Report, 2016). Even though the definition of 'basic training' has not been made clear in any of the reports or the documents provided by the DWCD, it appears to have been availed by almost all the members of the SSG in the initial years. But there has been a change in these practices as recently reported and trainings in bookkeeping and skill development have come down substantially.

## 5.7 Community activities and political participation

Diversifying women's participation in the workforce and providing them access to credit and savings is also considered to be useful for building their capacities, their self-confidence, and paving their way into participating more actively as citizens in their communities. In fact, one of the latest evaluation reports indicated that SSGs were able to influence an increase in savings within households, reduction of poverty (to above the poverty line) and an increase in person-days of work ratio within a given year, along with a reported increase in women's confidence and a reduction of reported family violence (NABCONS, 2016). Other studies have also indicated that as women have managed to create viable income-generating activities and diversified their participation within the village economy, they have also started taking up leadership positions in the village (Bhavya & Umesh, 2011).

Within households, some studies have found that women have increased freedom in spending money and been able to make small shifts in the food consumption patterns and asset accumulation (including the purchase of gold and immovable assets), which are deemed to be directly linked to access to credit systems (Chaithra, Handigol & Ramachandra, 2012). But a majority of the studies do not find any significant change in the level of political participation due to the presence of the SSP in the village (NABCONS Report, 2016). So, while some areas have reported at least 14% of the women participating in the SSP being elected into local governing bodies, there appear to be wide variations in geography with regards to political participation in the village.

## 5.8 Federations

Federations were conceptualised to be useful for the long-term sustainability of the SSGs as they are able to extend and support savings and loan facilities to their member institutions, provide administrative support such as auditing to SHGs at minimal cost, improve capacities in SHGs, organise trainings and resolving conflict among SHG members (NABCONS Report, 2016). Federations can also provide micro-insurance schemes and social support in the areas of education, health and livestock (NABCONS Report, 2016).

However, the evaluations on the role of the federations indicate that the rules and regulations governing the federations in SSP, right from the membership fees (individual or SSG, annual or life-time) to the financial autonomy of the federations, even the purpose of the federations, are not very clear (NABCONS Report, 2016). In fact, very basic questions such as whether the utilisation of the corpus of the federation can be used to lend or borrow, or undertake entrepreneurial business is not made clear. Even the purpose and manner of the spending of the maintenance expense of Rs. 30,000 given to the federation is not clear either to the CDPO or the federation members (NABCONS Report, 2016).

Even administratively, the federations do not seem to be working well. For example, the Executive Committee (EC) is supposed to be elected every year at the General Body Meeting (GBM). The system is that one member representing each cluster (which in turn represents ten to twelve SSGs) will be elected to the EC. The EC is supposed to have 11 members from the SSGs or the clusters and

one nominated member from the DWCD, who acts as the Secretary in the EC (as mentioned earlier in the report). As per a recent evaluation report, some of the federations had executive members, with only 16% of them having the ACDPO as Secretary (NABCONS Report, 2016). So, for some of the federations, there was a connection between the department and the federation and the exchange of pertinent information was possible. However, the functions, roles and responsibilities of this work have been unclear to the federations.

Federations have been able to collect a corpus that ranges from Rs. 1,12,000 to Rs. 39,03,700 (NABCONS Report, 2016). Currently, without any specific guidelines or instructions provided by the department, there appears to be no utilisation of these funds for any purpose (NABCONS Report, 2016). As per our discussion with officials from the SSP, there are no more SSGs being formed, even though there is a significant demand (Personal Interview, March, 2017). As a result, it appears that the membership fees of the federations have remained stagnant (NABCONS Report, 2016). It is also possible that without the incentive to create new members, the coverage of certain areas might have been compromised. Despite a high corpus, federations have so far not used any banks to borrow loans for their activities. However, they have lent money to their members using their own corpus (NABCONS Report, 2016). The federations report a recovery rate of about 90% for their distribution of loans to members. It is not clear, however, whether these loans were given to individual members or to the SSGs as a whole.

Given that the money allocated to the federation through the membership has not really been utilised in any form, reports indicate that there has been an increasing demand from federation members to withdraw their money and use it more productively. However, with no provision of retirement of membership, the corpus has been with the federation, accruing very minimal benefits for its members (NABCONS Report, 2016).

Attendance at federation meetings is fairly high with 13 out of the sample of 31 federations reporting more than 90% attendance and 12 reporting between 75 to 89% attendance (NABCONS Report, 2016). At the same time, the feedback suggests that federation meetings are not very regular because of the busy schedule of the CDPO, often the nominated secretary from the department. Some kind of training programmes have been conducted in almost all the federations, given Rs. 30,000 from the department. Federations also appear to be conducting awareness programmes and trainings in skill development (NABCONS Report, 2016). However, these have been reported to be neither 'helpful' nor 'effective' (p.62) because of the huge numbers of participants (and consequently insufficient attention given to members) and the limited time involved (NABCONS Report, 2016).

Only some federations have buildings, and this has been considered to be an important aspect of the SSP. As per the data provided by the DWCD, GoK, during 2016-17, the government has allocated 1.5 crores) for creating infrastructural facilities that enable the federations to work with the SSGs to train individual members, provide space for marketing, conduct health camps and meetings etc. Even from the evaluation, it appears that the functioning of these SSBs was not ideal (NABCONS Report, 2016). Site allocations for the building were inaccessible to many women and

were not located in the central spaces of marketing and other networking purposes (NABCONS Report, 2016). Federations also do not have access to computers and while some of them have created a unique email id, they do not have access to their own computers nor do they have access to or use any kind of database regarding their member base (NABCONS Report, 2016). Even the department officials appear to have indicated that “clusters are not effective and can be wound up” (NABCONS Report, 2016, p. 62).

When federation members were asked about their own requirements, they stated that they were not adequately compensated for their time and effort in organising and managing federation activities. They often lose a daily wage and incur travel expenses not always compensated for when they come for meetings. Members felt that if regular activities have to be conducted by the federation, financial arrangements have to be made in order to ensure that collectives are built (NABCONS Report, 2016). Additionally, they felt that the need of the hour is that the federation must be given autonomy to determine the needs of the SSGs and organise workshops, trainings and awareness programmes according to the information obtained from the ground, rather than directives by the department (NABCONS Report, 2016). A more equitable relationship between the federation and the state has to be built in order for them to work for the welfare of the SSGs.

## 5.9 Relationship with the state

Institutional studies, as reviewed by the NABCONS Report (2016), indicate that historically the groups formed by government bodies and agencies tend to be the weakest and relationships with banks can be improved in these spaces. One of the primary reasons cited for this is the lack of cooperation and coordination between various branches within the department or different departments. For example, information about subsidies are provided to the SSGs not only from the DWCD but also from the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (RDPR) departments, primarily through National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) funds. At the local level, it was observed that “there was no coordination between the GP/TP officials and the DWCD” (p.43), so as to understand, monitor, and coordinate the various schemes availed by the SSGs (NABCONS Report, 2016). Moreover, the supervision, monitoring, or handholding of the SSGs proves to be very difficult because local administrative units are already overburdened by multiple schemes, and given the withdrawal of the *anganwadi* workers in the overseeing of the SSGs, they have weakened considerably (NABCONS Report, 2016).

Another issue was related to the disbursement of funds. It was suggested in evaluation reports that the delivery of incentives has to be streamlined and that amount could be credited directly to the beneficiary’s account at the state level, instead of travelling from the district and then to the CDPO. Moreover, many reports indicated that the amount disbursed was not in keeping with actual requirements and an accurate assessment of the needs of the SSGs should be taken in order to adjust the incentives.

Two problems emblematic of the relationship between the government and the SSGs are: assessing the needs and requirements of the SSGs and, two, conducting the background work required to address identified needs and requirements. Two areas in which this is clear is the provision of the

mobile vans and the constructions of the SSBs. With respect to the mobile vans, the government had identified eight districts in which to deploy the mobile marketing van to ease the problems of accessing different markets and to ensure that there is timely delivery of produce to the markets (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013), but this service was soon closed. Part of the reason appears to be that the product packaging sold through the mobile vans was not of good quality and there was no standardisation of products provided in these vans (DWCD Annual Report, 2015-2016). Essentially, there was no guidance provided to the SSGs regarding the quality and quantity of the products to be sold through the mobile vans, resulting in huge problems with the supply chain of materials and products (NABCONS Report, 2016; Belgaonkar, 2016). Given that a base assessment of the market ecosystem was necessary (yet absent) before launching the mobile van, the programme was deemed a failure and shut down.

In a similar vein, the SSBs were sanctioned either to be used as shops for selling federation or SSG products or to be given to another department. SSBs were also to be used for conducting federation meetings, seminars, and training programmes (NABCONS Report, 2016). But multiple reports indicate that site selection was a problem right from the beginning. While the idea of creating SSBs was to foster a sense of community among the SSGs as well as build marketing networks, the reality was that the SSBs were often constructed in areas with not much footfall and not likely to attract new customers (NABCONS Report, 2016). Moreover, it proved to be too far for federation and SSG members to travel to (as it was away from bus routes etc), and this discouraged attendance at meetings (Belgaonkar, 2016).

However, the department has tried to foster and encourage better-performing SSGs as a way of creating role models. This is done primarily through cash awards. Cash awards are given to SHGs with outstanding performance, mostly on International Women's Day (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). The prizes are usually Rs. 50,000, Rs. 30,000 and Rs. 20,000 for the first, second and third positions respectively. Along with these state-level awards, local awards of Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 2,000 are also given at the taluk level. In addition to this, revenue generation is also rewarded by cash rewards of Rs. 80,000, Rs. 70,000 and Rs. 60,000 for the best three SHGs. Similarly, the taluk also provides Rs. 10,000 for the SHG with the most revenue generation (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013).

In general, it appears from our brief analysis that while there are some areas in which SSP is doing very well, there are others in which significant changes are required. In order to examine these areas of improvement, we briefly review the recommendations provided by most of the research studies and evaluation reports.

## Chapter 6: Summary of Recommendations

In addition to the findings in each of the reports, we also reviewed each of the recommendations found in research studies, newspaper articles, and evaluations reports. We found that while some studies had specific recommendations for the programme (depending on their specific area of study); there were also a few suggestions common to most of the studies. In order to build a more complete evaluation of the programme, we have collated and summarised the key recommendations, as described below.

### *Training*

- Gender sensitisation of all personnel involved is currently lacking and gender training is a key element in creating empowerment outcomes (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).
- Training in trade and marketing is essential as critical information regarding the mechanics of market needs, demand and supply is not available currently (Purushothaman et.al, 2000; Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012).
- E-book keeping can be introduced to the SSGs so that auditing and recording keeping can be done in a more transparent way (NABCONS Report, 2016).
- Training schedules have to be more regularised and more intensive training has to be planned to build skill levels among members (NABCONS Report, 2016).
- Training programmes for Panchayat members who can help support SSGs have to be included (Karnataka HDR, 2005).
- Critical reflection trainings have to be a vital part of the SSGs (Purushothaman et.al, 2000). It is important that learning of the new information is done in an interactive and reflective manner.
- Training in terms of livelihoods are still in the realm of traditional gender norms and have not ventured into more higher-paying, non-traditional skill building (NABCONS Report, 2016). This can be improved upon.
- It is important to take into consideration the present skill sets of women and accordingly plan income-generating activities around the existing skill base, instead of imposing a skill-based scheme in all areas (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).

### *Relationship with markets and banks*

- Markets are critical for the survival of many of women's professions and large-scale activities have to be undertaken to ensure there are vibrant local markets for women's produce and goods (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).
- Banks have to improve access and control over financial resources and create gender-sensitive criteria for bank loans and financial schemes (Purushothaman et.al, 2000)
- Elimination of target approach and investment in financial literacy programmes will help in creating more economically empowered women (Purushothaman et.al, 2000)
- Instead of concessional credit, banks must devise products more catered to the community around them, so that they can be availed when the need is the highest (Purushothaman et.al, 2000; Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012).

- To address the problem of accessibility, banking correspondents should be used extensively to extend bank linkages to poorly-serviced areas (NABCONS Report, 2016).
- Interest rates for loans in some places have been very high, some at the rate of 16% to 36%, which is not feasible in the long term. Some guidelines have to be set to stabilise or limit interest rates (Naganagoud, 2011).

### *Role of SSGs*

- SHGs cannot be used as an entry point into the village or the nodal point for distribution of schemes. Instead, the priorities of the SHG must be seen as the starting point for any intervention or scheme (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).
- SHGs should have a culture of building awareness with respect to the culture of violence, the ability and willingness to carry out a self-assessment, and build a culture of learning (Karnataka HDR, 2005).
- The stated objectives of SHGs have to be made explicit to the group members. Too many objectives can be harmful. If the primary objective is empowerment, this have to be clearly defined and supported by adequate interventions (Karnataka HDR, 2005).
- Autonomy in decision-making is essential in creating and sustaining the SHGs (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).
- Governments must think of the SSG as equal participants rather than beneficiaries, and channels of communication must be transparent to facilitate better functioning of the SSGs (Purushothaman et.al, 2000; Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012).
- Building a sense of the collective and ensuring that the group is functional as a social unit must be encouraged, as groups require more than savings and loan information to be fully functional (Purushothaman et.al, 2000; NABCONS Report, 2016).

### *Federations*

- The federation is currently functional only on paper and there has been no definition or clarity about its roles and responsibilities. Federations must be provided training as well as clarity in managerial operations, leadership development, fund management etc, so that they are able to understand and organise the federation accordingly (NABCONS Report, 2016).
- The role of the federations, especially of the officials associated with the federations, and the nature of the relationship between the *sangha* and the federation, as well as the autonomy of the organisations (with respect to the departmental objectives) have to be clearly articulated (Sitaram, 2007; NABCONS Report, 2016).
- There is no uniformity in the functioning of the federations, rules of membership, or the ways in which contributions are collected. These have to be made clear based on the current policies of the DWCD (NABCONS Report, 2016).
- Term of election in federations can be extended from one to three years so that members have a time-period to learn, understand and implement their plans (NABCONS Report, 2016).
- Volunteers working in the federation have to be provided some form of remuneration for services rendered to the federation (NABCONS Report, 2016).
- It is potentially possible to use the federation as a nodal point of agency to route subsidies and incentives for all government departments (NABCONS Report, 2016).

### *Governance and accountability*

- The *gram sabha* (GS) can be made into the centre of activities that can determine priority areas, allocation and distribution of funds and SSGs can be more involved in terms of regular attendance and participating in the functioning of the GS (Purushothaman et.al, 2000)
- Government approaches have to modify themselves to focus more on looking at community needs, moving away from the ‘welfarist perspective’ to a ‘building self-reliance’ one, and working primarily on a ‘quality’ rather than ‘target’ approach (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).
- A “comprehensive compendium of instructions” might be useful for the people working in the field (NABCONS Report, 2016, p. viii).
- Given that *anganwadis* continue to be the main link and are integral to the process of sustaining the SSGs, it is important to pay them for their work or, at least, revisit the issue of compensating them for their labour and time (NABCONS Report, 2016).
- Given that *anganwadi* workers are already overburdened, along the lines of Kudumbashree (Kerala) and Velugu (Andhra Pradesh), a dedicated person or persons should be used to organise, supervise, and collectivise the SSGs (Puroshothaman et. al, 2000; NABCONS Report, 2016). These then can be monitored by a supervisor who is part of the federation at the taluk level.
- Government officials must ‘honour’ their responsibilities and commitments, so as to build trust and legitimacy within communities (Purushothaman et.al, 2000, p. 6).
- The members from the SC, ST, and OBC communities have to be further encouraged to participate in SSGs (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012).

### *Convergence*

- In order to create infrastructure for marketing as well as other functions of the SSGs, joint committees of SHGs, NGOs, banks, NABARD and government bodies must collectively examine structural problems and possible solutions (Purushothaman et.al, 2000; Bhavya & Umesh, 2011; Kumar 2016).
- Integration of services is absolutely necessary so that women are able to understand the diverse range of options and schemes available to them and are not hard pressed to go to separate departments for inter-related needs (Purushothaman et.al, 2000)
- Given that there are other programmes such as NRLM that appear to have similar objectives, it’ll be useful to understand commonality of objectives through conversations about convergence (NABCONS Report, 2016).

### *Policy*

- The programme has to ensure that there is a ‘dialogue, reflection and analysis on what has worked and what has not worked’ (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).
- Questions related to the time required for economic empowerment, the quantum of beneficiaries, and deeper questions related to participation of SSGs and federations in the communities have to be measured as well (Naganagoud, 2011).



- Gender budgeting has to be incorporated on a larger scale (Purushothaman et.al, 2000), and the interconnectedness of the various gender-related schemes and funding related to the various schemes must be matched to local activities and requirements (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).
- Digitisation of memberships through Aadhar Card will eliminate multiple memberships (NABCONS Report, 2016)
- It is important that statistics are collected regarding the sales of products, the margins of profits, and the cost-benefit of exhibitions for participants (NABCONS Report, 2016).
- While best practices must be documented, they must also be analysed to figure out techniques and strategies that have worked in order replicate them in other contexts (Purushothaman et.al, 2000).

### *Empowerment*

- Empowerment cannot have a single economic focus, and must expand to include non-economic areas and contexts (Purushothaman et.al, 2000)
- Political participation and participatory processes have to be incorporated more centrally into the process (Karnataka HDR, 2005).

## Chapter 7: Analysis of the Evaluation and Recommendations

In the light of both the review of the literature, there are some key concepts that have emerged that require further analysis. As mentioned earlier, one of the limitations of working only with secondary data that is publicly available is that our analysis is based on what has already been discussed and evaluated. However, we find that even with this small window into the functioning of the programme, there are five specific areas that bear further scrutiny.

### 7.1 Functioning of the SSGs

The fundamental building block of the SSP is the SSG – a group composed of 15 to 20 women, formed by an *anganwadi* worker working within a specific geographical area. One of the main issues tackled by the evaluation and research reports appears to be the composition of the group. The group composition is typically homogenous, even without a targeted approach to group formation. For example, given that the group formation is typically left to the discretion of the *anganwadi* worker and she is working in predominantly SC areas, she would form SC groups, and so also for other minority groups. Given it was area-dependent, it was very likely that the composition of the groups would be homogenous. But what is not clear in the review is if there are any guiding principles followed by the *anganwadi* worker in forming these groups and what the motivations are of the women joining them.

More importantly, there is no information on who is *not* included in these groups. The reason for this concern is that, initially, the *anganwadi* worker was instructed to form three to five groups and no more. After a period of time, this group formation was closed, so that no more groups can be formed in that area. So, if one is unable to join in the first iteration of the group, one is likely to be left out of the programme entirely. This appears to be contradictory to the stated objectives of the programme, as it is supposed to benefit all women in the village. So, the selection criteria as well as the subsequent closure to new membership or new groups influences the fundamental demographics of who is being serviced in the village by the SSP and who is not. For example, while statistics regarding the percentage of SC/ST memberships exist in the village, it is not clear what percentage of the population in SC/ST communities are represented in the SSGs. Given that the SSP is especially directed towards the most marginalised women in the village, it is very pertinent to find out whether these groups are being catered to by the SSGs.

Another point of concern is a focused but blinding view of the savings. While information on savings is collected exhaustively, no metric is set up to systematically understand what these savings are used for. While many documents, including the *Antarala*, list case after case claiming that savings have been used to increase income, there has been no systemic or systematic measurement of how this income generation has helped other social outcomes such as the increase in family income, the educational prospects of children, or even the building of infrastructure. While cases exist to illustrate this transition, the sustainability, or the long-term view, of these savings and the influence on the next generation have not been fully documented.

Instead, the prominent view of savings still appears to be, from the lens of the banking system, a measure of credit-worthiness, and from the lens of the state, a means to bolster the income-generation for the women. These are very rarely connected to the more structured, sustainable political and social autonomy of women in marginalised contexts. For example, the literature contains many examples where money borrowed by women was used in the interest and at the behest of men in the family who do not always honour repayment agreements, so that women are forced to repay loans that they themselves have not used or benefited from (Sitaram, 2007). It has also been observed that women's increase in income can also lead to the withdrawal of male responsibility towards the family, sometimes impoverishing the family or jeopardising the financial health of the family (Sitaram, 2007). Thus, easy access to credit and savings have to be more closely examined in the context of unfair gender burdening of debt on women.

One of the prominent problems documented in the evaluations is the federation and the relationship it has with the SSGs (Sitaram, 2007). It appears from the review of reports that it takes about three to five years of constant activity for SSGs to stabilise and function as institutions (Karnataka HDR, 2005). Without continuous training and support, these time periods can be prolonged. Without the maturity of the SHG, it becomes dependent on the federation for its survival (in the absence of the *anganwadi* worker) before it has gained any identity of its own or its independence. This is especially problematic because instead of articulating its own agenda, it becomes dependent on things being provided or 'thrust' upon them. In fact, there is no indication in any document that we have reviewed whether there were any markers or guidelines that could define or indicate which SSGs were mature and which were not.

Moreover, the federation itself is a new concept, its roles and responsibilities ill-defined, and the resources required to strengthen it have not been fully utilised. Given these circumstances, the stability of SSGs that are new or are not mature is in question. One of the prominent suggestions to combat this problem is to engage with the federation as a bonafide institution, with "well-defined organisational structure and clarity and specifications of functions" (Sitaram, 2007, p. 21). According to the suggestions provided by some of the literature, federations should have the following characteristics: federation staff should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, staff should be chosen from the SSGs instead of other programmes, training and capacity-building for the staff for their new roles must be regular, support from the local communities, especially with respect to member SSGs, has to be actively fostered, and there should be a presence of an optimal number of already well-functioning and mature SSGs, who can be models for the other SSGs (Sitaram, 2007). Additionally, if arrangements are made so that the employees of the federated structure are paid and are devoted to the tasks provided to them, it is possible to create stable, sustainable institutions that engage with both the government and the SSGs.

One of the ways to improve the organisational structure and communication systems between the SSG, the federation and the department is by creating a transparent communication or monitoring system that would allow information flows in both directions. A simple example of the under-utilisation of communication mechanisms that could help in information flows is that while computers, printers, and email accounts are allocated to the district and block offices to ensure

information is stored and computerised, (Purushothaman et.al, 2000), the use of the computer is not extended to the SSGs or even the federation, This is a serious flaw, considering the ways in which information can be used to empower women at local levels.

Moreover, a more in-depth understanding of the local contexts that the women have to deal with has to be factored into the functional administration of the programme. For example, as mentioned earlier, it appears that the prayers in each of the SSGs include promises of ensuring that children will be raised without gender discrimination, that they would be sent to school without discrimination, that trees would be planted in backyards, and vegetable gardens will be grown (Agnihotri & Malipatil, 2016). While these are excellent resolutions, it is not clear if the women themselves understand and endorse these value systems, whether there is any training prior which establishes these principles on why women \*should\* follow these resolutions, or even whether they actually have followed these principles.

What is clear from the review of literature is that SSGs do not exist in a social vacuum. They interact with other structural constraints as well as opportunities (such as the presence of other SHG groups). Instead of dividing this social space artificially, it is more important to start converging the interests of the groups of women, in a move towards solidarity and collectivism, so that the problems that these women are dealing with, which are structural in nature, can be more adequately addressed.

## 7.2 Governance of the SSGs

One of the most prominent success stories featured in *Antarala* was the launch of a sanitary napkin production centre that was to be run by the SSGs and the federations. While training was conducted, the venture was soon “abolished” (DWCD Annual Report, 2015-2016). The reason for the failure, very thinly described in the report, appears to have been related to the lack of raw materials and marketing problems. This example is emblematic of some of the activities conceptualised within the SSP. One of the prominent problems appears to be a combination of very little background research into the realities on the ground, a lack of preparation for a new enterprise, and little or no marketing training provided to women who are planning to undertake new ventures.

Another new programme that was also discontinued because of the lack of basic research on the ground was the introduction of the ‘mobile marketing van’ that would have allowed the products produced by SSGs to travel to the villages (potentially resolving the problem of access to the markets), sanctioned in 30 districts (DWCD Annual Report, 2015- 2016). However, the 82.82 lakhs that was released was not disbursed in 19 districts, because it was considered to be an “unsuccess” (DWCD Annual Report, 2015-2016).

Some of these problems of engaging in enterprises that have since been discontinued can be attributed to the lack of understanding of the social contexts within which the programme has been implemented. Part of the problem rests with the kind of documentation that has been done within

the department. While it is clear that there have been tremendous success stories, as documented by the case studies, no move has been made to understand why these were successes, while others have failed. In fact, there appears to be minimal investigation on why programmes failed in some areas of the state. Even in reports that are often uncritical of the programme, the financial management of the programme has been pointed out as a major flaw (Agnihotri & Malipatil, 2016). Evidence suggests that average loans that have been given out were “grossly inadequate” (p.82) in fulfilling any of the needs that the women actually have (Poornima, 2013). However, there doesn't appear to be any reflection of these problems in the documentation provided by the department or in our individual conversations. So, more investment into the self-assessment of the systematic problems that affect the programme is required and action has to be taken.

One of the primary problems identified in almost every report (and yet no action taken) is with regard the role of the *anganwadi* worker. Most of the reports that we reviewed indicated that local officials as well as the *anganwadi* workers were often stressed with handling multiple programmes at once, and this often creates a bottleneck with respect to the proper administration of the schemes and services. Given that bulk of the work, despite the ‘official withdrawal’, hinges on the *anganwadi* workers, “already overburdened with work and poorly remunerated” (Purushothaman et.al, 2000, p. 14), some of these well-intentioned programmes do not function as planned.

In order to engage with this problem, there are two potential interventions. Given the strong link between knowledgeable *anganwadi* workers and the performance of the SSGs (NABCONS Report, 2016), it is possible to officially recognise that *anganwadi* workers continue to play an important role, and ensure that their presence is officially recorded and financially rewarded. The other option is to ensure that other trained individuals responsible for building the SSGs and providing support to the SSGs are incorporated into the administration of the SSGs. These individuals can then handhold the SSGs and the federations into creating more self-sustaining and independent models of functioning, as per the social context in which they are functional.

The other key elements that appear to be missing are effective linkages to services and infrastructure and the training components that specifically examine gender sensitisation of the SSGs, federations, and the local officials, as well as training on building group dynamics and cohesion. While the review of the literature suggests that training modules appear to have been geared towards building courage and confidence among women (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013), and along with accounts and health, gender sensitisation has also been taught, the problem of gender inequality is structural and not only a function of lack of information. While women might *know* that they have to work towards gender equality in their families and in their communities, solidarity-building and collectivisation are crucial to really engage with the ways in which inequality pervades the household, the community, and themselves, as well. Without this in-depth and critical engagement with the core concepts of gender inequality, training on gender sensitization is unlikely to translate into the anticipated social empowerment or emancipation.

While one of the characteristics of the SSGs are that they ought to collectively make decisions (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013), these decisions do not always evolve naturally. A process-based

training that can help women to engage with difference and conflict-resolution is necessary. Although considered one of the biggest assets of a SHG, “crisis management without harming anybody’s interest” (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013, p. 37), this capacity cannot be built without a notion of collective identity and a culture of openness and trust that requires the cultivation of open communication and conflict resolution.

Beyond the changing of training modules, a shift in governmental attitudes about the ‘utility’ of these programmes is needed. For example, often women are blamed for ‘lack of management skills’ without understanding the structural problems of unfamiliarity and systemic casteism and sexism that can lead to the failure of projects (Purushothaman et.al, 2000). Therefore, it is important that the reasons for failures are moved from blaming the lack of interest expressed by the women to understanding the structural problems facing women. For example, a simple shift would be in addressing the shame or stigma attached to the borrowing of loans for non-productive purposes. Given life-events and emergencies are often the reasons for life-long debt for families, it is important to separate distress debts from loans taken for income-generating activities (Karnataka HDR, 2005) and to really engage with the articulated needs and wants of the women such as the need for loans that are specifically to repay family or lifelong debt, or family weddings, instead of focusing on pre-determined activities and schemes that are deemed ‘good’ for women.

Reports have indicated that the department itself is unclear on the future course of the scheme and the final goals of the programme (Purushothaman et.al, 2000). Therefore, as early as 2000, it was predicted that the “delivery of the schemes [could become] ritualistic” (Purushothaman et.al, 2000, p. 14). Thus, it is important to examine the programme in the context of its stated objective of enabling women’s economic empowerment.

### **7.3 Defining economic empowerment**

Some of the major indicators of progress made in the SSP are related to the increase in savings and loans utilised by the women to create IGAs, increased linkages to banking systems, the various incentives provided by the government to reward SSGs, as well as cash prizes to best performing SSGs and individuals (Shidagnal, 2011). The credit-worthiness of groups has also benefited individual relationships with the banks, so that individual access to the banks has been made possible through SSGs (George & Kumar, 2014). In villages where there is a functional banking system in place and a concentrated development of local markets, microfinance can provide a sustainable model for development (Rajeev, Balasubramanian and Veerashekharappa, 2016).

However, access to credit cannot be considered as the panacea for gender inequality as it does not easily and automatically translate into concepts of empowerment such as autonomy, independence, and mobility. While livelihoods and skill development build on women’s capacities and capabilities, they are by no means the only, or even sufficient, ways to ensure economic empowerment of women. This has been pointed out at the beginning of the programme in one of the early evaluations of the programme which emphasized that a target-based approach should not be adopted as it tends to “obscure real progress towards quality and a real improvement of women’s

livelihoods” (Purushothaman et.al, 2000, p. 27). In fact, a growing body of evidence suggests that microfinance groups do not benefit the most marginalised and do not influence women’s empowerment (Banerjee et al, 2009).

In our analysis, we have found many studies assume a direct link between the savings and loan behaviour to decision-making power in the household, without any analysis as to the process of change. For example, one of the studies argues that “women are able to earn higher income which leads to taking up decisions within the family and for their businesses” (George & Kumar, 2014, p. 272). But as we know, the link between loans or savings and higher incomes (in the absence of knowledge regarding the use of these loans and saving), and the link between higher income to greater decision-making powers is not only complex, but also highly influenced by social institutions such as the role of women in the family, participation of women in the agrarian economy, and the power differentials within a given household located within a very closed community. In fact, studies (eg. Rahman, 1999) have suggested that participation in microfinance has led to particular instances of violence against women in other contexts.

Therefore, the central questions for any future assessment or evaluation must address the links between savings/loans and income generation and between income generation and implications for economic empowerment. For example, the implications of income generation on health, education, and socio-economic status of the family have not been recorded or collected in any of the studies that we reviewed. Even the sustainability of the IGAs have not been documented or indicated in the annual reports. *Antarala* is able to capture some of these stories through pictures but the long-term prospects of these ventures and the impact of these income-generating activities on the empowerment prospects of the women or even their children are not always recorded.

Currently, the evaluation categories in most of the studies examine indicators like group size, type of members, number of meetings, attendance of members, active participation of members, fixity of the amount to be paid, interest on loans, a complete utilisation of savings, percentage of recovery from loans, the proper maintenance of books, education levels of the members, and knowledge of government programmes as ways of evaluating SSGs (Kavitha & Laxmana, 2013). While these are useful for the initial progress and the spread of the programme, they are not as useful to ensure an understanding of the long term sustainability of the project. For example, while active participation is a useful measurement, it is not clear how ‘active’ is measured, and what it would mean to be active. Is a woman’s presence at a meeting considered to be active or does she have to raise questions, voice concern and initiate action in order for her to be active? Another example is the regularity of meetings. As mentioned above, while the regularity of meetings is a good indicator for understanding the vibrancy of an SSG, a more potent measurement would be to ask about the topics that were discussed at the meeting and investigate the kind of concerns being raised at the meetings.

The programme must invest in evaluation and assessment indicators more pertinent to its stated objective of economic empowerment instead of engaging primarily with savings and loan behaviour. For instance, some of the indicators can cover: the purpose and use of the loans in the

financial health of the family or the individual, the sustainability of the new enterprises being invested in, and the translation of the higher incomes into social mobility (within the family and the village). While no one disputes that there has been a significant change in the lives of many women as witnessed and recorded by *Antarala* over the years, it is also important for the programme to expand its current notion of assessment to a more qualitative understanding and evaluation of economic empowerment of the women.

This is especially useful because economic empowerment has to deal with the structural inequalities in the system. So, while poverty is related to the lack of savings and access to credit, the more important aspects of economic inequality are tied to the unequal wage structure, unfair burden of care work that restricts working hours, family duties, responsibilities, and constructed social roles that restrict women's participation in the workforce, and the work environment (socially and physically) that can be detrimental to women's well-being. These are structural problems that cannot be tackled through access to credit, and can only be tackled by policy that builds women's collective identity and willingness to change the basic structural nature of inequality. So, it is important for the SSP to ensure that women's own knowledge, experience, and needs are taken into consideration so as to embrace a more holistic notion of empowerment.

#### 7.4 Dimensions of Empowerment

In our review of independent studies, we found that apart from persistent barriers of education and literacy, women also reported that they needed self-confidence to deal with the world outside (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012). In Haveri, for example, women reported that their "inferiority complex" came in the way of their work (p. 302), in addition to the caste politics that plague the villages (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012). As mentioned in the earlier sections, even studies that have reported positive findings for savings and loan behaviour have been very clear in elucidating that enabling basic tenets of gender equality have to be brought into the programme in a more central, focused manner. This is because if SSGs are seen as only proxies of development, or as an end in and of itself, then it has the "potential to be disempowering, [especially] if their structure is inappropriate and imposed from outside and their internal processes are hierarchical or elitist; in such cases, they reflect and reinforce the existing class/caste/gender relations" (Karnataka HDR, 2005, p. 294).

Studies that have examined the objectives of the programme have advised the department to look at women's overall empowerment more broadly, instead of examining a singular economic focus (Purushothaman et.al, 2000; Karnataka HDR, 2005). In addition, an integrated approach to SSGs must be undertaken so that they are not merely seen as entry or end points, but as long-term focal points for women's empowerment. For example, women themselves have identified enhancement of family and social status, women's education, capacity to take own decision with respect to self, awareness of the world and the functioning of the government as critical to improving their current situation (Yatnalli, Banakar & Huggi, 2012). While access to banks and physical mobility of women is extremely important, empowerment requires a greater representation of their issues and those of their communities in the larger political sphere (Sitaram, 2007). Currently, information is



restricted to the kind of schemes and/or awareness about health, sanitation, environment, increase in self-confidence and improved financial status. These must be seen as the ground upon which empowerment processes must be built, instead of viewing them as the end result of empowerment.

Another reason to engage with larger issues of inequity and power, instead of focusing solely on particular indicators of economic empowerment alone, is because of the power dynamics that are evident even in the functioning of the SSGs or the federation. For example, a recent evaluation study indicated that members who are elected to be President or Secretary – very likely the more vocal and visible members of the community – tend to take “the loans themselves without giving chance to other members, although their needs were more urgent and genuine” (NABCONS Report, 2016, p.33). These kinds of conflicts can be resolved only when power as a central force in the community is addressed more directly and engagement with power as a system is addressed more widely. In order to do this, the government has to consider moving from engaging with empowerment as a stable state towards engaging with it as a process. It might have to shift the creation of targets from the end-state to assessing targets that are process-based.

Therefore, the state needs to move from engaging with the SSGs as a space where women are ‘provided’ training to one where participatory and democratic practices are cultivated and the structures of inequality that women often deal with are actively engaged with. As one of the reports indicated: “It is not enough to teach people to fish, if they cannot reach the river” (Karnataka HDR, 2005, p. 294). Thus, to fulfil the mandate of the SSP, they have to recreate the SSGs and the federations from institutions of micro-credit to institutions of empowering social change.

## 7.5 Concepts of collectivisation

Women often face multiple but common issues of marginalisation, especially related to illiteracy, caste, poverty, landlessness, and dealing with family issues of alcoholism, dowry, violence, and disability. One of the rationales for creating a microfinance group of women was to ensure that the collective identity of the group of women would enable them to forge alliances across differences and focus on the commonalities of oppressive structures that plague them in a given social context. Therefore, to create any form of empowerment outcomes, it is important that group dynamics are at the forefront of any organisational effort and to create positive role models of self-reliance and independence, women have to be provided the space to do so.

While reviewing the literature, we find that while there is a clear conceptual framework as regards the specific movement of creating SHGs to livelihoods, the processes by which the group would enable empowerment (in whatever way it was defined) was not delineated clearly in any document. Given group dynamics, cohesiveness and a sense of a common identity are often processes that the group evolves from the inside out, a top-down, target-oriented approach does not always work. This, however, does not mean that the idea of collectivisation is always organic. In fact, without training, direction, due process and collective action, it is difficult to move a group from an individual identity to a collective identity. So, while the space for an SSG can be “an essential vehicle for social, political and psychological empowerment”, (p. 334), it cannot be

assumed that providing access to information to the group implies the automatic transition into knowledge, action, awareness, and participation. Instead, a vigorous self-reflective training programme, as well as a process-based group formation system requires to be put in place to move the women into a more influential collective space.

Another issue is the manner in which the women are “seen” by the state. In one of the criticisms published in the newspapers, it stated that the schemes have not been community-friendly so that “all women from marginalised communities can access it with dignity” (Express News Service, 2016). A crucial aspect of the problem that has not been covered in many of the articles is around this phrase: dignity of service. One of the central themes of the review and an underlying construct of many of the articles was the nature of the relationship between the government mechanisms and the groups themselves. When schemes, proposals, and projects are implemented without taking into consideration the needs, requirements, or even the social contexts, women become recipients of governmental ‘benevolence’ instead of active participants in the governing process. While many research studies have stated that women ‘have undergone a silent revolution’ (NABCONS Report, p.54), we contend that this “silence” is precisely the problem that undercuts the intent of the programme. If we are truly to work toward the empowerment of women through the SSP, we then have to inculcate a politics and culture that engages with the ‘voices’ of women, so that SSGs become the true vehicle for women’s empowerment in every sense of that word.

## Chapter 8: The way forward

From our review of the literature on SSGs, it is clear that there is a positive impact of SSGs on women's lives. Some of these groups, especially those that have been built over a long period of time, have been working hard to create social change in their lives as well as in their communities. It is also clear from our review that the existing structures, including the federated structure, have a lot of potential that has yet to be tapped. Given the long history of the programme as well as the structural support that it is able to provide, it can easily be an enabling force to create spaces in villages where women can be collectivised to initiate conversations and actions of equality. In order to do this, SSGs, federations, and the department have to start engaging in the process of creating new indicators of measurement so as to understand the current status, future prospects, as well as a roadmap for currently functioning SSGs. In order to aid in the process, an in-depth understanding of the current functions, needs, requirements, strengths, and structural constraints has to be mapped out. In essence, it is imperative that a holistic, integrated, long-term approach to the future of the SSGs and the federations is concretely worked out in order to ensure its sustainability.

To aid this process, it is important that future evaluations examine the nature of social and institutional barriers that women in SSGs and federations experience. The primary objectives of future evaluations should cover the following aspects:

1. building an understanding of the rapidly changing factors that impact the lives of working women in rural contexts, including the role of family, care work and identity politics.
2. understanding the network of relationships between the state and SSGs/federations that can aid and/or undermine the process of empowerment for women.
3. proposing a new set of indicators, developed between administrators and women, which could provide a more accurate assessment of the programme, especially to accomplish its stated goal of women's empowerment.

Given there has already been an extensive understanding of the literature in the area, it is important to incorporate more ethnographic field methods to engage with women in SSGs and federations to identify problem areas, re-articulation of concerns in the context of the programmatic focus, mapping of the networks between the state and the SSG/federation, and to provide women space to engage with deciding the future direction of the programme. A traditional set of tools such as participation-observation, focused group interviews, in-depth interviews can be used to elicit the proposed information. Given the social realities of multiple SHG groups working in the field as well as the newly proposed collaboration with the *Mahila Samakhya* Programme (MSP) with SSP, the landscape of relationships currently functional in the village context should be fully explored, so as to provide guidelines for the collaboration.

We hope that the information elicited will be useful in creating a more robust policy that can provide direction and support to existing SSGs and federations, in addition to creating a deeper and richer understanding of the process of empowerment of women in rural Karnataka.

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## Annexure 1: Stree Shakti Progress Report January 2017

<b>Women and child development department</b>			
<b>Stree Shakthi Progress Report January-2017</b>			
		<b>Total</b>	
1	No. of SHGs formed	150000	groups
2	Total members	2213673	members
3	No. of SC members	449791	members
4	No. of ST members	173899	members
5	No. of Minorities members	179280	members
6	No. of other members	1410703	members
7	Total savings	2160.20	crs
8	No. of groups which opened bank account	140000	groups
9	No. of groups taking loans from banks	138567	groups
10	Loan amount taken from banks	3116.47	crs
11	Repayment of bank loan	2842.42	crs
12	Loan amount disbursed by SHG (Internal Leading)	5687.28	crs
13	Repayment of the internal loan	4310.85	crs
14	No. of groups taken Revolving Fund money	150000	groups
15	Total amount released for Revolving Fund (Rs. 5000 for each group)	70.00	crs
16	Release of additional Revolving fund	133452 125.17	groups lakhs
17	Total no. of clusters	11632	
18	Total No. of the taluk federations formed and registered	175	each block
19	Total Amount released for empowerment of taluk	416.10	lakhs
20	Total No. of groups involved in IGA	89303	groups
21	Agriculture-based activities	37208	groups
22	Other economic activities	52095	groups
23	Groups are mainly involved in sheep-rearing, chicken-rearing, readymade garments, making of papad, pottery, condiments, garlands prepared with cloth and sandal, agarbatti, bamboo products, ayurvedic medicine oils, paper bags, metal idols, jute products, woollen products etc.,		
	<b>Details regarding Incentives given to SSGs</b>		
24	No. of groups taken money for IGAs	37364	groups
25	The total amount of incentives released for groups involved in IGAs	1868.20	lakhs
26	No. of groups which have saved Rs. 75000 to Rs. 1 lakh and have received Rs. 15,000 as incentive.	8493 1273.95	groups lakhs
27	No. of groups which have saved Rs. 1 lakh and above have received Rs. 20,000 as incentive.	4706 941.20	groups lakhs
28	No. of groups with 6% subsidy obtained and amount released	8027 664.48	groups lakhs
	<b>Marketing Complex</b>		
29	Taluk SSBs		
30	No. of buildings sanctioned	165	taluks
31	No. of completed buildings	106	taluks
32	The amount released for the construction of the taluk SSBs for 159	3738.14	lakhs
	<b>District-level Marketing Complex</b>		
33	No. of buildings	28	SSBs
34	No. of completed buildings	21	SSBs
35	The amount released for the construction of the district-level marketing complex	207.94	lakhs
36	Divisional-level SSBs		
37	No. of buildings in each division: Bangalore, Gulbarga, Gadag, Mysore (1 each)	4	SSBs
38	The amount released for the construction of the division-level SSBs	876.42	lakhs

Source: DWCD, GoK, 2017