

PERCEPTION OF OFFICIALS ABOUT SELF HELP GROUPS INVOLVED IN VEGETABLE CULTIVATION

The State of Kerala, blessed with fertile land and tropical climate produces only 6 lakh tonnes of vegetables whereas the requirement is 17 lakh tonnes (Muthukulam, 1998). In order to solve this paradox of insufficient production, two programmes, the Kerala Horticulture Development Programme (KHDP), which is a Quasi-governmental organization, and Intensive Vegetable Development Programme (IVDP), which is a governmental programme, were started in Kerala. The core units of both the programmes are self help groups (SHGs). *The success of any development programme mainly depends upon the perception of its cli-*

entele groups and the officials involved in the functioning of the programme. The present investigation was done with the objective of studying the perception of officials about self help groups involved in vegetable cultivation.

The study was conducted in Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala using an ex-post facto research design. Twenty-five extension personnel who were actively associated with vegetable production were selected as the respondents of the study. Rao and Narayana (1984) defined perception as a process by which people organize, interpret, experience,

Table 1. Perception of officials about SHGs

Sl. No.	Statements	Category	Frequency	%
1	Self help groups boost the self confidence of rural farmers	Low	12	46
		High	13	54
2	Self help groups develop interdependence and mutual trust among its members	Low	10	41
		High	15	59
3	Self help groups create a 'We' feeling among its farmers	Low	03	13
		High	22	87
4	The principal mechanism in a self help group is its voluntary association unlike in bureaucratic organization	Low	06	22
		High	19	78
5	The political interference is the major problem faced by most of the self help groups	Low	10	41
		High	15	59
6	Self help groups help in the technology transfer and thereby increase the production potential	Low	07	26
		High	18	74
7	In self help groups the group members are not involved in decision making	Low	03	14
		High	22	86
8	The self help groups do not provide a means of livelihood for its members	Low	09	36
		High	16	64
9	Self help group is a set of persons with common interest and some interpersonal relationship	Low	14	56
		High	11	44
10	In most cases self help groups disintegrate due to the lack of fund	Low	10	39
		High	15	61
11	Self help groups formed by NGOs function in a better way than by others	Low	10	39
		High	15	61
12	Self help groups play an important role in providing training for scientific cultivation	Low	06	22
		High	19	78
13	Self help groups shift the attitude of farmers from what is possible to produce to producing what is marketable	Low	10	38
		High	15	62
14	The SHGs introduced credit system for the poor farmers who formerly have no access to credit	Low	07	26
		High	18	74
15	Self help groups enhance the income of people on a sustainable and profitable basis by starting income generating activities	Low	02	09
		High	23	91

process and use stimulated materials in the environment so that they satisfy their needs. Perception was measured by applying the schedule developed for the purpose. The schedule consisted of 15 statements comprising of 12 positive and three negative statements reflecting the respondents' perception about SHGs. The respondents were asked to give their responses in a five-point continuum as 'strongly-agree' to 'strongly disagree' and scoring pattern was five to one for positive statements and was reversed in the case of negative statements. Total score of all the 15 statements was the respondent's score on the perception about SHGs. The mean score for each of the perception statement was calculated. The score above the mean score was categorised as high and score below the mean score was categorised as low.

College of Agriculture
Thiruvananthapuram 695 522, India

It can be inferred from Table 1 that most of the officials were high perceivers for the statement "Self help groups enhances the income of people on a sustainable and profitable basis by starting income generating activities" (91%) followed by "Self help groups create a 'We' feeling among its members" (87%). The least perceived statement was "In the self help groups, the group members are not involved in decision making" (86%).

It can be inferred from the study that majority of the officials had a strong positive feeling towards the concept of SHGs. Only a very few of them have negative perception towards the statements "In self help groups members are not involved in decision making" and "The self help groups do not provide a means of livelihood for its members".

G. S. Sreedaya
N.P.Kumari Sushama, S.Mothilal Nehru

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