The effect of microfinance on the empowerment of women and its societal consequences

A study of women self-help-group members in Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

Microfinance and micro-credit practices have become a popular means of local development. In India, their expansion has been largest in Andhra Pradesh. These practices target primarily women, who are encouraged to construct self-help-groups in order to have a social basis for raising collateral and for receiving financial services. Microfinance has been perceived by the public as inducing strong positive effects on women’s empowerment and as strengthening the democratic fibre.

From these standpoints, expansion and effects, it has been evaluated and analysed whether microfinance can empower women and if empowered women can make a difference in women’s and societal issues. Interviews were carried out in Andhra Pradesh with women active in self-help-groups, group members with political offices, whole self-help-groups, husbands of group members and microfinance consultants. The interviews were evaluated on the basis of theoretical notions of empowerment and wider impacts.

There are tendencies of self-help-groups being capable of empowering women, within the DWCRA-development model. Achievements such as geographical mobility and active decision making have been found. However there are also tendencies towards women’s disempowerment, in which women have become even more subjugated after receiving loans. From a societal point of view, the groups have in many ways improved the local communities that they are active in, but less so from formal political positions. The conclusion reached was that there is a connection between empowerment and the deepening of democracy, but this is not as linear, strong or automatic as proponents uniformly emphasize.

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(Keywords: Finance, history, micro-credit, empowerment, wider impacts, poverty, India)
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1. Introduction

In India, as in many other countries, there has been a shift from an economy where the government had an active and encompassing role, to an economy which is de-regulated and the government has instead the role of creating the means for economic growth. The real shift after the oil crises in 1973 and 1979 has been from a Keynesian macro economic approach to a Thatcherian micro economic approach\(^1\).

In the tradition of Keynesianism, Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister, had a high regard for the industrial developments of the Soviet Union and envisioned and initiated many large scale industries, including among others, chemicals, fertilizers, electrical equipment, machine tools, military equipment, railways, airlines and dams\(^2\). Due to several circumstances, one being an agricultural crisis in 1967-68, the United States gained influence in India’s economic policy. As a consequence of this influence Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came to initiate talks with president Ronald Reagan, which opened up for further US-friendly policies such as the dismantling of the five year plans, diminishing the government’s active role in the Indian economy and the reduction of trade barriers\(^3\).

With the withdrawal of the state as an active economic player, the power vacuum in the field of providing development has been filled with the agency of NGO’s, in particular the microfinance industry. Though there are critics of the micro finance poverty alleviating schemes, the business has spread in South and South East Asia, the Middle East, Africa and South America\(^4\). In the Indian context, the spread has been the fastest in Andhra Pradesh, where the mere increase of active borrowers was more than 1.5 million between the years 2004 and 2006. This was furthermore only the increase among the four biggest microfinance institutions, which indicates that the actual number might even be higher\(^5\). An overview of the 11 largest microfinance institutions shows that Andhra Pradesh has currently the largest spread of these institutions on the Indian subcontinent, if we compare the number of active borrowers with all the other states in India\(^6\).

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2 Ganguly, S. and Devotta, N., Understanding contemporary India. p. 127-129.
3 Ganguly, S. and Devotta, N., p. 76-77, 79.
5 “Microcredit in India: Microsharks – rapid expansion of Indian micro credit leads to a turf war with the government”, in The Economist, 19th of August 2006, p. 58-59.
The legitimacy of the microfinance businesses providing economic and social development builds on the notion that they are more transparent and effective than the state apparatus\(^7\). The Indian state bureaucracy has been accused of not being effective in delivering welfare schemes to the general public. It is perhaps in this context that the microfinance institutions are presented as being more effective in handling poverty. Bimal Jalan, a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, poses similar arguments regarding how the interface between politics, the economy and governance should organize society, arguing in favour for market solutions. According to Jalan the challenge for India becoming a “developed” nation lie in the reformation of the state apparatus. Field studies and observations which support his view have shown that leakages in government anti-poverty programmes are very high and that resources somehow find their way to the pockets of civil servants rather than to the actual intended.\(^8\) The notion of an ineffective bureaucracy has become broadly popular within the Indian intelligentsia. An example of this is the broad acknowledgment of the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990’s, officially as a logical consequence of the role played by the administration of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Her reign, by its alleged corruption and centralisation of power, severely damaged the bureaucratic legacy established by Nehru.\(^9\) It is not my intention to test how high the losses are and whether the microfinance institutions are more effective than the state apparatus, but it is this notion of how “development” should be brought about which has made the spread of microfinance possible. It has also most likely made microfinance hold sway over other forms of poverty alleviation.

The microfinance business targets women because they are seen as individuals who will have a greater impact on society and development. Secondary issues in the choice of women are that they are perceived by proponents of microfinance as being easier to deal with (more docile) and that they have higher repayment rates (to loans) than men do. The selection of women has also come about due to the issue of targeting the most destitute in developing countries, which mainly are women (due to their subordinate social role). This focus on strengthening the bargaining power of women, since a more active role in the economy would increase the bargaining power in the household as well at different levels of the community at large, has led to a discourse on the empowerment of women.\(^10\)

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\(^7\) Fernando, J. (1a), p. 30.
\(^10\) C.f. Brigg, M., “Disciplining the developmental subject: Neo-liberal power and the governance through micro credit”, p. 79-80.
2. Purpose

2.1 Research problem

When the micro finance institution Grameen Bank and its founder Muhammad Yunus were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006:”[…] for their efforts to create economic and social development from below[…]” which ultimately would enhance democracy and human rights\textsuperscript{11}, it sent a signal to the world that microfinance had an important role, perhaps the most important one, as an instrument in combating poverty. From the perspective of a (micro finance) business in expansion and with Grameen bank as an icon for success at large, it is interesting to analyze the assumption that micro finance really does create social and economic development from below and that the advancement and deepening of democracy follows as a consequence.

The objective of this study is to look into and evaluate whether women active in a micro finance program have become economically empowered through the support of the micro credit organizations and the women’s collateral groups. The study also involves analysing and discussing if there is a connection between economic empowerment and democracy. An underlying but none-the-less important focus of this field study has been assessing the wider impacts of micro-credit activities in Andhra Pradesh, in order to study the possible democratization process initiated by the self-help-group members. Wider impacts are structural changes that occur above the level of the individual and the household. Have the activities of single members and/or the whole self-help-group initiated processes in society which have had wider impacts on the economic and/or political areas? If empowerment would be followed by a democratization process it would likely commence from below, because the poverty alleviating credit schemes are targeting individuals and not structures. The democratisation would therefore constitute of more active individuals, who are taking important livelihood changing decisions. It is therefore interesting to investigate if actors, given the possibility of borrowing and gaining access to a network of social relationships, can advance in important decision-making processes and be spurred to take a more active part in the equalisation of political power.

The term “democracy” is conventionally accompanied by two definitions; one referring to the formal institutions of a democracy and the second being of a more qualitative nature, referred to in this study as the informal part of democracy. The formal definition captures the basic functions of a democracy such as universal suffrage, regular elections and basic civil rights, while

the informal is aimed more directly at political power and its equalisation.\textsuperscript{12} The characterization of the different definitional usages of democracy is important in order to analyse the relationship between economic empowerment and a possible democratisation process (see chapter on voting).

2.2 Research questions

In the quest for better ways of assessing the impacts on society Imram Matin and Sajjad Zohir have produced a study design to account for the economic and political aspects of changes.\textsuperscript{13} Their study design itself has qualities of functioning as a guide for the purpose of analysing a possible relationship between economic empowerment and the democratisation process. Using the study design, it was possible on an individual level to arrange questions relating to whether the women in the sample had made significant changes in their decision making. In practice it entails asking if the women in the micro credit schemes have become empowered, in the Kabeerian sense of using material, human and social resources, with the intentionality of changing their livelihoods.

Earlier research has denoted wider impacts as only aggregated facts from individuals and as purely non-economic variables. They have therefore missed the crucial point of assessing societal changes in relation to active individuals, since their scope has been the individuals themselves. The individual situation is important not as an aggregated fact, but from a more general relation to other individuals and bodies in a society.\textsuperscript{14} The study design has thus been preoccupied with attempting to look beyond the individual and the household and to assess the consequences of seeking deliberate societal change initiated by self-help-groups. This study’s definition of wider impacts has been interpreted from a statement of Zohir and Matin which described wider impacts as: “[…] repetitive feedbacks and conjunctures between individuals, households and markets”\textsuperscript{15}. The study guide also functions as a means of investigating the possibility of wider impacts.

The general research questions are: Have women organised in self-help-groups become empowered? Are there signs of self-help-groups making significant changes at the level of society? Can the activities of microfinance create development from below and advance the democratic fabric of society? Is the self-help-group a unit from which trust and cooperation emanates? Is there a relationship between empowerment and wider impacts?

\textsuperscript{13} Zohir, S. and Matin, I., “Wider impacts of microfinance institutions: issues and concepts”, p. 329. (see figure 1 in appendix)
\textsuperscript{14} Zohir, S. and Matin, I., p. 301ff.
2.3. The disposition and positioning of the thesis

I have given a brief introduction to the current development discourse relating to how micro finance is viewed, why it is interesting to study the empowerment of women and the possible societal effects of self-help-groups. In chapter three, I will explore how economic empowerment differs from economic development and investigate the depth of the analytical tools of empowerment; agency, resources and achievements, and wider impacts. In the end of chapter three, a generated conjecture will also be presented. In chapter four, the methodological concerns of selecting a qualitative approach, based on interviews and field work, will be discussed. In chapters five and six, the data from the interviews will be analysed and presented. In both these chapters, I will relate and discuss earlier research on microfinance and micro credit to the empirical findings. Last of all, in chapter seven, I will discuss and analyse the conclusions from my theoretical standpoint and also outline some ideas for further possible research.

In the modern discourse on microfinance and micro credit, two opposite intellectual stances on how to best address poverty reduction can be found. These stances could in short be characterised as follows: 1) The Sustainable Finance approach, which draws on the experience of the financial market in covering risks for lending. The proponents of this approach want to address a middle segment of the poor who can handle higher interest rates. 2) The Poverty Reduction approach has much in common with the intellectual standpoint of Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank in addressing poverty. This approach can be described as understanding the basis of poverty from the situation of the people in poverty themselves. It draws much of its intellectual capital from sociological and anthropological theories that poverty is not merely an absolute measure but also has relational and contextual underpinnings.16

The intellectual baggage of the thesis, its methodological and theoretical concerns, stem from the poverty reduction approach. This means that the understanding of poverty and the situation of women have been given primary attention. The choice of this approach is due to the belief that in order to address the situation of the poorest of the poor, a more contextual approach is required. However, I do not rule out that both stances can have fruitful exchanges on how to find effective ways of addressing poverty.

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3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Economic empowerment (micro) versus economic development (macro)

From a mainstream economic development point of view, the way to eliminate poverty and social inequalities is to focus on raising the gross national product and then everything else will follow. Gains in education, literacy, health conditions, agency, equality and the overthrowing of authoritarian regimes will come as “trickle down” effects from increasing domestic production (GNP) and income over time. Milton Friedman can be seen as a proponent for a market oriented solution to inequalities in which the economic arrangements are determinants to the dispersion and concentration of power: “I know no example of time and place of a society that has been marked by a large measure of political freedom, and that has not also used something comparable to a free market to organize the bulk of economic activity.”

How we distribute economic power thus seems to play a significant role in how power relations between individuals are formed, and choice and opportunity seem to be a part of it. It is here economic empowerment differs from economic development. Instead of putting the improvement in capabilities (Sen) or resources and agency (Kabeer) as secondary gains from a higher GNP, it is argued that the relationship is the reverse:

“And since enhanced capabilities in leading a life would tend, typically to expand a person’s ability to be more productive and earn a higher income, we would also expect a connection going from capability improvement to greater earning power and not only the other way around.”

Kabeer has developed her empowerment framework from the notion of what Amartya Sen called the enhancement of capabilities and functionalities, in order for people to live the life they want (resources and agency are what Sen would call capabilities). In the same terms, she argues that changes in access to the resources that individuals enjoy, such as income or welfare: “[…] but which leave intact the structures of inequality and discrimination may help to improve their economic welfare without necessarily empowering them”. In short the difference between economic empowerment and economic development is that in the former the struggle for equality and agency are followed by increasing of incomes, while in the latter equality and agency will be gained from the increase of incomes.

19 Sen, A., Development as Freedom., p. 90.
20 Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 27.
3.2 Empowerment and disempowerment

According to Naila Kabeer, empowerment should be seen as the possibility of making choices that previously were denied. Empowerment entails a process of change in which a necessary connotation is alternative choices. Having the power of making important choices is the same as having power in making alternative choices and vice versa (poverty has a negative effect on these alternatives). Not all choices, of course, are significant in terms of consequence for people’s lives… more strategic choices are for example choice of livelihood, where to live, whether to marry, who to marry, whether to have children, how many children to have, freedom of movement, choice of occupation or economic activity and participation in civil society.

In order to grasp the analytical depth of empowerment, empowerment must be understood in relation to disempowerment (being denied the ability of choice). This is important because someone who has been exercising a great deal of power during their lifetime has never been disempowered in the first place and can not therefore properly be considered empowered.

3.3 Structural disempowerment

Microfinance activities might have the effect of disempowering women, even though the official goal is of empowering them. Scholars, governments and international development agencies have embraced the notion of empowerment, which has set a discourse for poverty alleviation. In doing so, women in developing countries have been treated as having traits (altruism, thrift, risk-aversion, industriousness and civic responsibility) which have not yet been unleashed because they have not had access to credit.

Even if the overall intentions have been of improving the current situation for women, a focus on developing these presumed traits has given rise to the belief that solving gender equity issues will automatically solve other goals as well. The positive externalities might be good governance, environmental sustainability and achievement of economic efficiency to mention a few such outcomes. Since apparently “anything” at the level of discourse is considered to be legitimately solved by supplying policy implementations, that are based on these traits, the language of empowerment has been adopted into development projects as a mean of indirectly promoting the goals of governments and development agencies: “[…] who had little interest in empowering women beyond whether or not is capable of delivering the goods.”

Agencies whose purpose is not in practice to empower women but to supply some sort of minimal welfare may therefore not help the women the way, that they officially should, or the

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23 Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 50.
outcomes are not those expected and might therefore worsen the situation of these women. If programmes target women with no central element of empowering them, they might under circumstances in which patrimonial structures (female seclusion, boy preference etc) are socially very strong, instead disempower women. The social cost of deviating too much might cause a situation that women can not handle, such as greater conflict within the household and male violence?24

Creating an unbearable situation by defying male superiority might come with a too high a social cost, which can make it unlikely for women to use the loans for their own benefit only. Separating from an authoritative family might not be an option, especially since the economic liberalization reforms of the 1990s came with negative effects for poor and especially poor women25. Therefore, even with an increase in some kind of welfare, the strategy of complying with cultural and social values might be used by women. If the empowerment of women is not given first hand priority, the loans given out by the micro finance sector would not follow a control mechanism that is based on empowerment. Supplying credit could therefore become a tool for the possible disempowerment of women.

3.4 Empowerment as resources, agency and achievements

In assessing empowerment, according to Kabeer, we need to consider changes in three interrelated dimensions which comprise of choice: resources, agency and achievements. Empowerment according to her has to be understood from these three analytical stances. Resources should be interpreted as material (land, equipment, and working capital), human (knowledge, skills, creativity etc) and social (claims, obligations and expectations through relationships) variables. These resources are distributed through institutional constellations as family norms, patron-client relationships, public sector welfare etc. and it is therefore important to acknowledge the terms on which people gain access to resources when considering if empowerment is taking place.26

The self-help-groups offer credit to members which according to the definition of resources could be seen as either having access to material or to social resources. However, mere access does not tell us on what terms the resources are gained. A case in which a woman is applying for capital on the wishes of her husband and not from her own “free will” could not be seen as empowering, because empowerment entails a change in the conditions on which resources are

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obtained as much as an increase in access to resources. In this case the woman is possibly further constrained by not having the responsibility for the loan she officially has signed up for.

Agency means the ability for the individual to define goals and act upon them. Agency is not only about observable action it is also about meaning, motivation and purpose. Action is not merely interpreted as individual decision making, but has instead many strategies from which individuals act, such as bargaining, negotiation, deception, manipulation, subversion, resistance and protest. Agency can be performed both on the collective and the individual level.

In order to analyse the depth of this analytical tool, we have to define the different institutional constraints or abilities which surround the ability of making choices. There is a major difference between having “power to” define one’s own important goals and choices in life and having the “power over” others to limit their choices. The first statement, power to, has to do with the definition of empowerment as characterised above, because exercising choice from this standpoint is about the positive influence that someone can have over their own life, while not explicitly destroying this opportunity for others. Power over, on the other hand, is the moral fibre of disempowerment, because it ensures that others conform to the values of a powerful person or to a social norm which limits their ability to choose.

The third dimension, achievements, is the product of the two earlier dimensions in progress. Since the concern of this study is to evaluate the possibility of empowerment, it is interesting to highlight the inequalities in people’s capacity to make choices rather than differences in the choices they make. A lack of uniformity in the achievements made is not conclusive as an evidence of inequality, because people’s frame of reference for living a good life (to some extent choosing a livelihood) differs.

Using achievements as a measure of economic empowerment comes with the additional difficulties of interpreting to what extent the choices seem to contribute to the welfare of the whole family, or to what extent they are a display of female subordination. The relationship between power and choice is precarious, since choices which stem from an individual are under the heavy influence of a patrimonial culture, or are from the direct influence of a husband, but could be misinterpreted as being “made by her”.

Discriminatory behaviour by women themselves against other females in society is in this context also possible. Patrimonial societies in which women adhere to social norms and practices have dialectally led women to internalise a notion of lesser status, norms and practices such as son preference, discrimination of daughters in the allocation of food and basic healthcare. Lesser status may result in an oppressive exercise of authority by mothers-in-law over their daughters in.

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law, due to the logic of gender and age hierarchies. Thus the actions which stem from an individual, such as to be able to fund an enterprise from a self-help-group loan, might not in themselves be liberating depending on the circumstances in which the loan is taken. This is also an important consideration in determining whether there is a process of empowerment. The exercise of power does not lie explicitly with the resources but with the intentionality of a resource in use. To initiate change, individuals must according to this theory be given access to resources from which they can utilise bargaining power and other means in order to reach a certain goal. To evaluate if significant achievements have been made by women, the intentionality and contextuality of the actions taken have to be considered.29

3.5 From individual economic empowerment to wider impacts

The whole idea of micro finance is to induce changes and effects which stem from financial and social activities30. The evaluation of these activities, imposed by financial organisations which are interested in knowing whether their investments are being put to effective use, have been viewed from a perspective that poverty is more or less a lack of monetary means. Therefore these evaluations have looked into potential improvements of mere individual and economic variables.31

Concerns have therefore arisen that the focus on aggregates of individual factors might not show positive or negative outcomes, or the lack of these, on a macro level – the society. On the other hand the focus on, for instance, income and repayments as measurements of programme success is missing the broader point of changed social relations which surround financial relations (such as individual and the immediate family, relations to government institutions and so forth). The greater effects which directly or indirectly might stem from the fact that there are many active micro finance institutions in an area are therefore, in the current way of evaluating the effects in economic terms, lost. Looking for wider impacts according to Zohir’s and Matin’s theoretical framework is done to account for this loss.32

Evaluating wider impacts in relation to empowerment is also intrinsically important because it gives meaning to what it actually means of being empowered. I would argue that a high level of empowerment, making decisions which were previously denied, has a high level of correlation with wider impacts. If individuals are becoming more active in the local space this is likely followed by results which affect the whole society and not merely just active individuals and their

31 Economic variables such as income, repayments, expenditure, nutrition, housing conditions, assets, savings. Cf. Zohir, S. and Matin, I., p. 304.
immediate surrounding. However this is not to be interpreted that there is an automatic causal link between empowerment and wider impacts, because there could be institutional constraints which makes this link weaker such as norms, social behaviour, or the actual intensity of the “force” behind the process of being empowered.

3.6 Wider impacts and the methodology of Zohir and Matin

Zohir and Matin, who have spent a great deal of time in finding an appropriate methodology for evaluating wider impacts advocate that the simplest way of defining wider impacts is to define what they are not. According to them: “[…] wider impacts are those programme effects that do not operate primarily at the level of the individual member and her household.”

Zohir and Matin recognise that change can come about in four different spheres; economic, political, social and cultural. In short impacts on the economic domain embody changes in the engagement between households and various markets. Impacts that belong to the social sphere are changes in the social relations between individuals and between groups of individuals in a society. Impacts on the political domain are those that capture changes in the engagements between the households, civil society and the state and its agencies. Impacts belonging to the cultural sphere are changes in perceptions, values and norms pertaining to relations in all the other three spheres. This study is concerned with changes in the political sphere, as its purpose to investigate the effects of economic empowerment effects on the democratic institutions.

Wider political impacts might be the intentionally and unintentionally produced effects in the policies of a government or a local electorate body and in the relationship between individuals and groups of individuals. The changes can be brought about in the protection of civil rights, the emergence of local interest groups to influence local polities, policies and resource allocation at the local level and the emergence of common agenda (for action) which tie together different spatially and socially dispersed segments of society.

3.7 Complementary approach to wider impacts

Naila Kabeer has further developed the reasoning of Zohir and Matin. She argues that there are five different measures that can used when analysing the existence or non-existence of wider impacts: four of them are interesting for the purpose of this study. These four analytical tools are; impacts within the household, effects on non-members, participation in collective action and the absence of wider impacts.

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33 Zohir, S. and Matin, I., p. 5.
35 Zohir, S. and Matin, I., p. 11-12.
Wider impacts may occur within the domain of the household, but the preceding casual linkages stem from a negotiation between private and public behaviour in society. One such example is the reduction of men’s alcohol abuse and the reduction in the physical abuse of females within the network of a self-help-group community.

Positive effects for non-members could for instance stem from an improved economic situation in general, an indirect result of a generally stabilised economy caused by the activities of members and of micro finance institutions. The increased wealth of members could make their demand, for non-members products, more predictable. Participation in self-help-groups has shown to be a catalyst for collective action, due to the deepening of the social networks within the community. One study, for example, showed that members involved in a lending scheme group had, after some time, developed knowledge about legal and political matters.

Collective action as a result of strengthened solidarity and increased awareness has also taken form as demands for better local facilities, such as tube wells and roads. There is also evidence that women organised in the self-help groups have gathered in anti-liquor campaigns in order to reduce violence and improve the marital behaviour of husbands.

It is also possible that the micro finance organisations do not induce any change through their networks with women groups. In some cases, there has been an increase in entrepreneurial behaviour and self-esteem amongst members, but with no increase in decision making within the household or collective agency within the community. It has been suggested this could stem from micro finance institutions being very effective in supplying credit and ensuring that the repayments of the loans are made, but neglecting social mobilisation. Thus the demand for handling (financial) risks has the effect of making financial imperatives the strongest induced effect.

3.8 A hypothesis of the self-help-groups as the deepening of communal life

Despite the risk of structural disempowerment, as I have discussed, I will relate my own work to studies which see microfinance as a working alternative for poverty reduction. The theory of women’s empowerment implies that the organisation of women in self-help-groups, women who previously were confined to the four walls of their home, will have positive effects on their identities as well as positive outcomes for society. One way of being more active is through increased social networks in the role as an entrepreneur. The social network, created when the women meet up, has the potential to spread vital information to many families about disasters, market opportunities and political concerns. The fact that women have a chance to relate to other

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women in similar circumstances instead, of only to kin, has also to an extent a potential for changing norms and behaviours, especially for women who are subordinated to their husband and his kin. The self-help-group might take a role as a resource for individual women in gaining knowledge, income or a moral support to be used in situations in which it can act as a means for changing the marital relationship.

A hypothesis that may be analysed, due to the nature of the argument which implies that a linear, automatic and constructive response will follow the implementation of loans to self-help-groups, is whether self-help-groups will constitute a deepening of communal life. This may be expected since their activities are supposed to strengthen the entrepreneurial side of the individuals who are active in a loan taking scheme. The entrepreneurialism will possibly generate higher income for individuals, which will then be used to negotiate their social standing within the family and the community. A directed and motivated action has, in combination with group linked resources, the ability to change the status quo for women.

However, even if money does not just starts pouring in, the group itself might constitute the support from which changes occur. If trust and cooperation deepen the women might use it as a resource in case of emergency, instead of leaning towards their kin and family. In the end, the choices made have to signal a disruption with the patrimonial society the women are socialised-into. The choices should also mirror an intended action, done by the individual or collective of women in self-help-groups.

From a greater leeway through cooperation and negotiation, an interest in changing communal and even perhaps regional issues might flourish. If there is legitimacy for some women in the community to act a little differently from the accepted norm, there is also bargaining space for non-loan takers to negotiate differences in their lives. Thus, the loaning scheme might, from a distant causal point, spur the enhancement of a more equal and democratic society.

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4. Methodology

4.1 A problem of methodological concern - Three micro finance models or one?

The microfinance schemes in Andhra Pradesh can broadly be characterised as three different organisational models: the Financial Intermediary (or NGO) model, the Government (or DWCRA) model and the International (or SAPAP) model. The three models differ in the effects of their programmes because their structures differ, e.g. the poorer segments of society are targeted by DWCRA and SAPAP while any adult willing to take part in the NGO women’s group is welcome. Due to these differences, it is essential to analyse what Ankuram Sangamam Poram, the organisation which cooperated in providing interviews for this study, can be categorised as. In what respects does Ankuram share or lack qualities that relates to these three different organisational models and what are the consequences of this for the study?

Ankuram seems to have traits which correspond mostly with the DWCRA model. Firstly, Ankuram is federated under the Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies Act (MACS), of 1995, as with the DWCRA-model. Secondly, Ankuram has in contrast to the NGO-model, a targeted population, the lowest caste, the Dalits. The official goal of Ankuram is to overcome the social and economic inequality created by a caste structured society. Further, Ankuram also offers supplementary services for the members of the self-help-group, for the enhancement of their capabilities and livelihoods, as with both the DWCRA and the SAPAP models. Lastly, Ankuram has spread to 11 districts out of the 22 in Andhra Pradesh. Ankuram is thereby an organisation which is more encompassing than the SAPAP and the NGO-models and is more similar to the DWCRA-model, which has spread throughout the state.

It is suggested that the model Ankuram represents, DWCRA, is a mixture between the international and the financial intermediary models. DWCRA has a broader focus than the NGO-model, considering not only business prospects and it is less oriented towards socio-political empowerment, than the SAPAP model. Another basis for Ankuram being a mixture is due to the fact that the government model has the largest spread in Andhra Pradesh, and therefore being more common, constitutes more of a “middle ground” in supplementing and structuring the self-help-groups.

According to Galab and Rao there are similarities and differences between the impacts that models have in different areas. For the purpose of this study, the impacts which are related to

empowerment and wider impacts have been embraced and separated from the others. Empery has shown in all the models that the members were able to raise their incomes, to improve their access to health services and to better meet their basic needs in terms of water, gas connections and sanitation facilities. In all the models, the women could establish their access and control over their labour, access to resources, mobility and interaction, leadership positions and reproduction. In all three models, women have become more confident, assertive and independent. The models differ in areas in which the DWCRA and the SAPAP improved the skills of the self-help-group members or encouraged them to pick up new trades, while this was absent in the NGO-model. The outcomes relating to civil society are more pronounced in the SAPAP model than in the other two; as is the individual or collective interaction with government bodies in addressing livelihood concerns. SAPAP has developed a framework for enhancing capabilities relating to “political activism”.

Since all models share traits which could be seen as empowering, especially relating to the economic and cultural areas, it is likely that Ankuram’s micro credit programme will have similar effects. Perhaps the only regard in which Ankuram would not have strong programme effects could be in mobilizing women collectively in facing political issues, which the SAPAP model has done more effectively. It is therefore to be expected, in accordance with previous studies, that the interviews will convey a general improvement in women’s access to resources, in improvements in labour or trade and in the expression of leadership in economic and social terms, but that the improvements will not be as pronounced in, for example, voting behaviour and other political factors.

4.2 The issue of generality and theoretical sample

Qualitative studies, in comparison to quantitative studies, depend on theoretical evaluations rather than measuring and determining the commonality of particular sets of observations. This is due to the aspiration of getting behind the formal abstractions of Positivist science and closer to the individuals or the environment studied. For the qualitatively minded researcher, the ways of understanding contextuality are to relate to the world experienced by the people through place observations and interviews. These tools are the means of asking in depth questions. The answers are related to the theoretical statements under evaluation or construction.

Due to the nature of the inquiries, that is analysing the relationship between empowerment and wider impacts, a theoretical sample strategy was chosen. A theoretical sample is a non-statistical and process-like technique of assessing the data retrieved. An important part of this

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technique is to evaluate the retrieved data continuously against the theoretical framework, until there are no more new or relevant theory-dependent data retrieved. This means that the sample retrieved from a theoretical approach does contain a theoretical generality, but not a statistical generality.\footnote{C.f. Bryman, A., p. 271, 290-292.} The sample made is in comparison with quantitative studies small. None the less, the study has discovered important tendencies on a theoretical level.

Having been resolved for a theoretical sample, the retrieved conclusions could be categorised as showing tendencies with application for situations which people face within the DWCRA-model. It has been suggested that Ankuram shares most of the theoretical and anticipated effects with this particular development model.

\textbf{4.3 Sample and the number of interviews}

Before the project started, there was already an established contact with Ankuram Sangamam Poram (ASP). It was therefore of great help to ask them for assistance in finding subjects of inquiry. It also saved time and effort to be backed up by an organization with specific expertise in the area, in comparison with the situation of a person without the local knowledge and linkages. Experience from the field suggests that being indirectly represented by ASP opened doors which otherwise might have remained closed. Therefore, ASP functioned as a gatekeeper\footnote{C.f. Bryman, A., p. 283.} enabling and assisting me to interview women in their network.

The interviews were chosen according to my wish to talk to women who had been active recently in lending and saving and women who have recently held or are currently active in a political or civic organization. All the women in the interviews were also active members of a self-help-group. The selection of women seemed appropriate, because of the preoccupation of contemporary development discourse with women as a means for development. Three out of the eleven different districts where ASP is active were chosen for the purpose of retrieving a sample, with some spread in characteristics. The districts where the field study was carried out are Ranga Reddy, Visakhapatnam and Warangal\footnote{For a complete map see Appendix, “9.2 Map of the areas targeted by Ankuram Sangamam Poram”.}. Apart from the interviews which have been targeted to the participants of the micro lending schemes, interviews were also carried out with whole self-help-groups, with husbands to members and with advisors and microfinance experts. Interviews with men and women groups, were carried out for the purpose of contrasting the experiences of women and men in situations relating to the self-help-groups, employment and men’s and women’s issues. The interviews with the advisors were carried out in order to contrast my knowledge of microfinance with theirs and also to gain new perspectives.
Since an appropriate method was deep interviews and the areas investigated were of a qualitative nature, such as "perception of", people’s human and social skills, people’s choices regarding their understanding of the former, motivation of choice, the number of interviewees were significantly smaller than if the study rested on quantitative grounds. Conventionally with this kind of method, about 15 with give or take 10 interviews should be carried out, while keeping in mind the objective of finding out what is needed to answer the questions. The loan takers of a single group constitute around 10-12 people and the conventional measure of between 5 to 25 interviewees seemed fitting for the purpose of inquiry.

4.4 Interview methodology, the interpreter, transcription and fieldwork

In order to explore the livelihoods of Dalit women, active in self-help-groups, a qualitative interview was appropriate for the objective of the study. Interviews give the opportunity, according to Steinar Kvale: “[…] to investigate in detail the relationship of a specific behaviour to its context, to work out the logic of the relationship between the individual and the situation.”, which seems suitable considering the purpose of the study. Therefore a semi-structured and deep interview approach was chosen. A semi-structured interview method has the benefit for making scientifically comparable interviews, because the interview guide is constructed under thematic inquires. At the same time, a semi-structured interview method is flexible because themes, questions and follow up questions can be altered according to person and need. A qualitative and semi-structured interview is in comparison with a quantitative approach less encroaching and also has better scope in handling the thoughts, perceptions and life world of the interviewee. These methodological qualities are important because the objective is to meet women and persons who might have experienced great injustices and this method is therefore a tool for meeting people on their own terms.

A field officer employed at Ankuram, with language skills and experience of development issues and microfinance was chosen to be my interpreter, guide and companion during the field study. He helped out with the translation of the interview-schedule from English to Telegu, assisted with the negotiations with local federations (MACS) for appropriate interviews, and translated between English and Telegu during the interview itself. With the usage of an interpreter, the contextual meaning is to some extent lost in translation or remains to some extent between the interpreter and the interviewee. Therefore, the questions were formed and carried

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47 Kvale, S., *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, p. 103.
48 Kvale, S., p. 103.
out to concentrate on facts rather than purely subjective statements, in order to overcome this constraint\textsuperscript{51}.

The interview questions had to be adopted into the context in which they were to be used. Terminology based on economic and political theory was adopted into a language which was appropriate for women and men who have had little or no education. The adaptation and translation was carried out because the study had to mirror the world and livelihoods of the respondents and not the world of the interviewer. Having an interview schedule as a guide was also invaluable in minimizing eventual misunderstandings between the interviewer and me. It also facilitated as a resource for more precise follow up questions and for any confusion due to a moment of instant “senility”.

The interviews were both taken down in a note book and recorded, in order to capture the statements accurately. Both the written and recorded materials were used as the basis for the transcription of the interviews. The recordings were used where it seemed necessary, because the written material mirrored the source to a large extent correctly. The used method saved time and sustained factual consistency.

Retrieving the information has been achieved by qualitative methods and has made use of fieldwork and interviews as a scientific method of inquiry. The interviews were carried out during a ten week period in Andhra Pradesh. Fieldwork is a method more commonly used by anthropologists but it can be a fruitful approach for economic history research when dealing with people’s perception of their environment and their choices\textsuperscript{52}.

**4.5 The study guide and outlining the areas of interest**

For the purpose of capturing an economic empowerment process, studying the wider political impacts on society and finding a possible relationship between the two, an appropriate study guide was found in Zohir and Matin and it is represented by an image in the appendix. The areas of interest, in the economic and political spheres, which were selected in accordance with the purpose of this study were: changes in perceptions about the mobility of women, the mobility of female labour, increased female employment in non-traditional activities, exchange of market information and ideas through women, knowledge diffusion on basic civil rights and their protection, participation in voting, participation in the local government electorate and mobilization on local issues\textsuperscript{53}.

\textsuperscript{52} C.f. Johansson, K., *Plantation or own plot?: How plantation work and organic agriculture respond to the objectives of the farm household – a case study of small-scale farmers of Ecuador*, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{53} Zohir, S. and Matin, I., p. 329.
The interview questions were subsequently constructed under these themes. As comment on the selection of the areas of interest it may be noted that the changes in perceptions about the work and mobility of women was selected as an area because normative ideas concerning what economic occupation women and men should perform determine what occupations women and men actually do. Therefore changes in perceptions have a dialectic relationship with actual practice and therefore any changes in practice can also be found in changes in values.

Once the information had been retrieved and was in the process of being reformulated into data, it was found that some of the areas covered were not appropriate enough to be presented. Therefore; one of the categories was left out (knowledge diffusion on basic civil rights and their protection), another (mobility of female labour) was reformulated into “Women’s access to incomes and decision making over resources”, and another (Change in perceptions about women’s work and mobility) was changed into “The perceptions of Women’s and men’s work and mobility”.

4.6 Operationalisation of the questions

In order to make sense of the analytic framework developed for empowerment and wider impacts, it is necessary to pinpoint how it is possible to measure the analytical tools. By using for example the empowerment theory, a depth in formulating the questions was reached, because it was enabling to think in terms of why, how, when, etc., the actors have or have not acted and the reason(s) for this.

In order to operationalise the measurement of resource, it has been suggested to look for a person’s “access” to and “control” over it, in order to overcome the difficulties in accounting for how resources are related to agency. In earlier research, there has been a tendency to assume an automatic linkage between a resource at hand and women’s agency. In reality, cultural and social boundaries disqualify a free agency of the resource. The questions in the interview guide have been constructed in this manner in order to account for access and control. For example “Who decides how the resources should be used?”,”What do you do with the money you earn?”, “Has your involvement in the self-help-group had any influence on your work/or business and (if “yes”) in what way?”. During the interview there were a number of occasions which the information given could be retrieved, even while not following the interview guide. The spur-of-the-moment-questions are not accounted for.

The operationalisation has taken note from examples of how access and control have been recommended to be operationalised; access as: “[...] whether women had a say in household expenses, cash to spend on household expenses, freedom to purchase clothes, jewellery and gifts

54 Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 28f.
for their relatives[…],” while: “[…] control over resources is measured by asking who kept household earnings and who had a say in household expenditure.”

In rural India, there is a hierarchy of decision making responsibilities, which reserve certain key areas of decision making for men as household heads, while other areas are assigned to women as mothers, wives and daughters. Women are more likely to purchase or decide on food, household related consumption items and cover for children’s health. Men, on the other hand, have the responsibility of major household purchases, livestock transactions, decisions related to the children’s education and marriage.

In order to account for a more active role by women, the questions formulated and posed have been related to female actions in the areas of investments in production factors, children’s education, choice of occupation and voting behaviour. During the formulation of the questions and the evaluation of the answers, it has been noted of whether a decision was already confined to the woman’s sphere or not. A decision made, which has been previously denied, has probably a significant implication for the livelihood of women. The placement of decisions in a range from more to less important has been made to qualify the nature of the choice.

Women may in different degrees renegotiate power relationships by subtly defying male superiority, which is harder to account for. Consequently, formal decision making has been looked into. Agency has come to take the narrower term of decision-making agency, because it implies looking for change in specific decisions.

In order to account for achievements the study has been in search for outcomes which signal transformation on the behalf of the women’s livelihoods. It is harder to point at specific questions which account for the entire array of possible achievements even though achievements have had the same consideration in the formation of the questions as have agency and resource. Possible achievements are more easily accounted for in the context and evaluation of women’s empowerment. In this study, achievements are considered in such categories as market income, decision making over resources, exchange of market ideas through women, gains from S-H-G which might change the perceptions of women’s work and participation in the government electorate.

Kabeer has suggested that evidence of women’s agency leading to a reduction in prevailing gender inequalities can be taken as evidence of women’s empowerment. It has been deemed reasonable to assume that the improvements in the wellbeing of women are likely to be followed

57 C.f. Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 34.
by improvements in the wellbeing of other family members. For example, child mortality has proven to be lower in households where women were not residing with their in-laws and in households with small differences in the age and education levels of husband and wife.\textsuperscript{60}

According to Kabeer, achievements may also be seen in the actual gained influence in decision making over such resources as the purchase of household items, decisions to work outside the households and in the number of children to have. Since boy preference is a strong issue in India, any sign of spending equal amounts towards children’s education would be a sign of empowerment.\textsuperscript{61}

The study has made use of an evaluation of the empery with all three sides of the theory, in order to have an appreciation of empowerment. The triad is a means to avoid conclusions which are not sufficiently based on empirical findings. In the absence of supportive evidence, there is danger of lost meaning in the indicators portrayed.\textsuperscript{62} Findings which show that women have access to resources are evidence for the potential rather than the actual choice, because the characteristic of a resource does not have an immediate relationship to the agency of a person. The contextuality of agency is equally important. Without the proper information about what was purchased or invested in and the intentionality behind the action, it is very hard to describe major decisions which can bring about a significant change of lifestyle. On the same basis, it is hard to measure an achievement, without the proper evidence of knowing who was engaged in the decision making.\textsuperscript{63}

An underlying methodological concern which has shaped the formation of the questions and the sorting out of irrelevant ones has been to consider the wider side effects of the activities of the microfinance institution on the community at large. The microfinance organisations are widely spread India and especially in Andhra Pradesh. Their presence and activities have impacts on the local societies which legitimise a search for wider impacts. The intended effects, side effects and unexpected effects have been assessed in asking self-help-group members whether their affiliation in a group has had positive or negative consequences for the community at large. It has also been considered whether the self-help-group itself can function as a promoter of gainful impacts on society.

4.7 Comments on studying changes in women’s agency

In order to account for changes in structures which may enable or disable human action, the point of departure is ordinarily a characterisation of current or prior periods. These periods can

\textsuperscript{60} Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 36.
\textsuperscript{61} Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 39.
\textsuperscript{62} C.f. Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 44.
thereafter be used as a guidance to contrast the empirical material.\textsuperscript{64} The demarcation has in this study been the constraints women face today, due to the course of history. These constraints are, as Kabeer and others have shown, ordinary restrictions for destitute women in India, where male agency in important matters is more common\textsuperscript{65}. The interviews were constructed to account for changes in the behaviour of women, relating to resources, agency and achievements. To account for changes in the lives of individual women, the questions which were produced and posed were constructed along the lines of grasping a possible change taking place from the point of membership until the interview. The answers were thereafter evaluated on the basis of constraints for female agency.

Is it possible to address changes in an individual’s (life) condition as an outcome of self-help-group activity? In some cases there were no doubts that self-help-groups had influenced or supported an action, because no other conclusions could be drawn from the statements of a respondent. If a case did not have the same clarity, questions to rule out the condition were posed, such as: “Has your involvement in the self-help-group had any influence on your work. Agricultural work and/or business?” and “In what way, and for what reasons, do you believe the self-help-group has had an influence on your work and/or business?”\textsuperscript{66}.

4.8 Source critique and methodological concerns

The approach suggested for this study has tried to come to terms with making an assessment according to the specific situation of the investigated population. Therefore, the tendency to project my own reality in forms of theory onto the individuals studied has hopefully been minimised. There is otherwise a risk of representing the investigated women as subjugated entities bound by tradition and poverty and thus making universal statements about individuals who themselves would not view themselves in that fashion\textsuperscript{67}.

Even if one thoroughly prepares for the field work, interviewing is to some extent a subjective activity since it is dependent on my selection of questions, theories and empirical work. The subjectivity might therefore, even with the best efforts, lead to the manufacturing of stereotypic images of the situation of women. There is an entire post-structural theory on how people in general, in contact with another culture, tends to make it exotic and separated from oneself and one’s own culture\textsuperscript{68}. I believe that I faced situations in which the colonial history of India interfered with the responses given. A public consciousness concerning matters that were in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{64}] Dahlgren, S. and Florén, A., \textit{Fråga det förflutna – En introduktion till modern historieforskning}, p. 122f.
\item[\textsuperscript{65}] Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 19.
\item[\textsuperscript{66}] See Interview questions in Appendix.
\item[\textsuperscript{68}] C.f. Värlander., J., p.11.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
reality insignificant, for example as my complexion being white and perceived of as being wealthy, might have had an influence on the responses\(^{69}\).

If the women interviewed were not comfortable with being interviewed and with being under pressure to open up to other men than their husbands, this might also have affected the answers given. It was attempted to minimize this risk by creating a trustworthy relationship to the interviewee by giving information about the purpose of the study, information about me, the length of the interview, etc, without exceeding the limits of professionalism\(^{70}\).

There are also concerns about the results of the interviews, since it is a handicraft which comes with practice; the answers are dependent on how I conduct the interview. Are the answers given to me fairly correct or did the interviewed part try to portray themselves in a different light?

When dealing with the life worlds of people, a note of caution should be mentioned, because their memories of an event might be slightly incorrect. An event which is deemed important could have occurred a year or more before the interview situation. The memories of that event can have changed slightly, due to new introspective insights of the individual. Some answers relating to questions which referred to a comparatively long time span and were of a more subjective nature, might have suffered from a higher degree of this discrepancy. Interview questions which handled a specific event of agency, e.g. the purchase of agricultural components, had often a much more adjacent time interval with the interview and would therefore be more accurate. A majority of the questions posed were made up of questions which were more concentrated on facts.

Since I did not know the local language of Telugu and the women in the villages did not have sufficient English skills, the services of an interpreter were needed. Using an interpreter may have the advantage of making the analysis of what is said more valuable, since he is familiar with the local culture and therefore can perhaps perceive more of what is being said in the underlying context. However the interpreter is also subject to his own prejudices, which might influence the processed answers. Even if it was convenient to let the micro bank arrange an interpreter, the relationship between his dual functions is biased, since this person already has an economic interest invested in his relationship to the micro bank. There is a risk that he would, therefore, make sure that something that might be viewed negatively will be given in a more microfinance-friendly form. However, if this interpreter already knows the women in the peer group, it could on the other hand be a resource, since it could ease the tension that some questions during the interview could create. He knows how to formulate the questions to the women in a proper manner.

\(^{69}\) C.f. Johansson, K., p. 18-19.  
It was presented above that even though women might increasingly defy male superiority on informal grounds, the study would only account for formal decision making. There is however a problem with this kind of measurement, because there is a discrepancy between what is evaluated and the actual process. On the other hand, accounting for any kind of defiance might not lead to the best understanding either. How subtle can, for example, a comment be in order to be accounted for as lifestyle changing?
5. Economic sphere

5.1 Economic contextualisation

In order to understand the constraints on female actions, it is important to look into the local context regarding their position in society.

5.1.1 Economy, work and employment

Agriculture accounts for a huge part of the Indian economy and about 65 percent of the total population is directly involved in agriculture as cultivators or as agricultural labourers. The domination of agriculture on the Indian subcontinent is also visible in the exports of products, such as cotton textiles, jute carpet backing, fruits, vegetables and leather goods. Considering the food deficiency and hunger which is widespread amongst the lower strata, India is oddly enough a net exporter of foodstuffs. If we look at the rate of employment in different sectors, in states comparable by size with Andhra Pradesh, it is also evident that agriculture is a common basis of employment.

Diagram 5.1.1: Share of males and females in different sectors of the Indian economy by state

Source: Census India 2001, Registrar General & Census Commissioner India. http://www.censusindia.net. Notes: IN = India, AP = Andhra Pradesh, KE = Kerala and BI = Bihar. “Other workers” comprise of people engaged with: livestock, fisheries and forestry, mining and quarrying, industry, construction, trade and commerce, transportation and communications and other services. See Appendix 9.3 for the basic statistics of this diagram.

72 Ganguly, S. and Devotta, N., p. 113.
The states of India presented in the Diagram 5.1.1 are all, except Kerala, of equal size and thus interesting for comparison. Kerala is however a good tool for contrasting the trends in the other states, since it shares many social and cultural similarities with “developed” nations with regards to female literacy, female education, and access to basic healthcare and infant mortality rates\(^{73}\).

In all states, it is more common for women than men to be salaried as agricultural labourers than to be engaged in agriculture as cultivators. The women are thus to a higher degree than men left out of the ownership of land. Andhra Pradesh is the state with the most uneven balance of female and male agricultural labourers, with 55.8 percent of the women and only 29.8 percent of the men are registered as labourers. This is the second highest share of women as labourers and the highest difference between men and women in this particular sector. In Kerala, the difference between male and female employment as agricultural labourers is the lowest. Kerala has in comparison with other Indian states, a smaller share of people active in this kind of work.

The share of cultivators in the Indian economy ranges from 15 percent to 30 percent and together with the agricultural labourers they constitute up to 80 percent of a regional economy. There is no dominance by either males or females as cultivators, even though men are to a larger extent cultivators than women.

A lower percentage of females as cultivators is probably evidence that land ownership in general is being determined by caste and gender. Indian women are more secluded to their homesteads than Indian men in their economic activities\(^{74}\). Professor Manjit Singh at Panjab University argues that land and indebtedness are major problems in rural areas, because the Dalits, the casteless, form nearly 33 percent of the rural population, but own only about 2 percent of the land\(^{75}\). Thus the rural economy is encompassed by an unequal measure of ownership of the land, the basis for agricultural production.

Household industry workers, people engaged in some form of craftsmanship or smaller industry located in the facilities of the household, comprise in total only about 4 to 10 percent of the total economy in the investigated states. Women in Andhra Pradesh and in the other states are more confined than men are to this kind of practice. In Andhra Pradesh, 7.0 percent of the women are engaged in this activity compared with 3.3 percent of the men.

Other workers, is a broad category and a mismatch of different income levels. It comprises of people engaged in: livestock, fisheries and forestry, mining and quarrying, industry, construction, trade and commerce, transportation and communications and other services\(^{76}\). “Other workers” is, despite its crudeness, an indicative measurement of the development of a higher order of

services or production of goods. In contrast, a high share of agriculture is indicative of a low
development of services or production of goods. This assumption is valid if the agricultural
sector is based on single farmers, with no or low ownership of land and with a low employment
of technology, as is the case of much of the agriculture in India and in Andhra Pradesh. Even if
the discourse of the linear development policies has received much criticism\(^77\), there is some truth
to the view that developing nations are to a larger extent than developed nations dependent upon
agriculture as a source of income. While not suggesting that there ever is a typical developing
country, it is still the case that in many low income countries the agricultural sector accounted for
between 30 and 60 percent of GDP in the 1990s. The average for middle-income countries was
17 percent. In high-income countries, agriculture accounted for less than 5 percent of GDP.\(^78\)

Thus, a comparison of the extent of dependence on agriculture with dependence on other
sectors does give a crude measurement of the level of development. A high dependency on
agriculture is associated with a low dependency on other workers and thus to some extent on
their high order good and services. The degree of economic development is crucial for
determining the range of occupational choices and the possibilities of employment outside
agriculture. As Dalits have been barred from holding land and have been compelled to work as
landless labourers, they are to a higher extent subjected to exploitation in an agrarian economy\(^79\).
Anand Chakravati describes the limited opportunities for low castes to find an occupation
outside agriculture as follows: “[...] the oppressive scenario is compounded for the landless
because the character of the economy does not offer much scope for employment outside
agriculture – be it industry or the service sector.”\(^80\)

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<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Other workers</th>
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<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP</td>
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<td>BI</td>
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<td>18.8%</td>
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<td>KE</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
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Source: Census India 2001, Registrar General & Census Commissioner India. [http://www.censusindia.net](http://www.censusindia.net). Notes:

IN = India, AP = Andhra Pradesh, KE = Kerala and BI = Bihar. “Agriculture” is equal to cultivators and
agricultural labourers. “Other workers” comprises of people engaged in: livestock, fisheries and forestry, mining and
quarrying, industry, construction, trade and commerce, transportation and communications and other services.

\(^77\) C.f. Hagberg, S., Poverty in Burkina Faso – Representations and realities. Chpt. Economic, social and political
contextualisation. and Barnes, T. J., Logics of dislocation: models, metaphors, and meanings of economic space. Introduction.
\(^79\) Chakravarti, A., ”Caste and Agrarian Class: A View from Bihar”, p. 50ff
\(^80\) Chakravarti, A., p 54.
Andhra Pradesh is the state that is the second most dependent on agriculture in this comparison and it also has the second lowest dependency on other workers, which indicate that the production opportunities for the low caste women are to be found in the agrarian sector. For India as a whole, the dependency on agriculture is lower than in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, and the dependency on other trades is higher. Thus, Andhra Pradesh can be considered as a state with a high dependency on agriculture. Production relations in the Indian agriculture are affected by class and gender, but foremost by caste relations, and this system determines access to cultivable lands. In general the higher castes own the majority of the land followed by the middle castes, while the lower castes, which are constituted by the scheduled castes and tribes, are mostly exploited as labourers.

Receiving a wage or income from the market or not doing so is a crude measure with which to determine what males and females are more likely to do in the economy. Not having the opportunity to receive a wage and be a part of the formal economy is in table 5.1.3 categorised as being a non-worker. The Registrar General & Census Commissioner defines a non-worker as someone with the following occupations and activities: student, household duties, dependant, pensioner, beggar, vagrant and others. The definition of a “worker” is therefore a person who earns a wage from the formal economy, or who earns money from running a business.

Females are in general more restricted than men from taking part in the formal economy and are therefore not as likely to receive a wage. Thus making women more likely and also more

Table 5.1.3: Share of Workers and Non-workers in Indian states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% Worker</th>
<th>% Non-worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>51,7%</td>
<td>25,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>56,2%</td>
<td>35,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI</td>
<td>47,4%</td>
<td>18,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KE</td>
<td>50,2%</td>
<td>15,4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census India 2001, Registrar General & Census Commissioner India. http://www.censusindia.net. Notes: IN = India, AP = Andhra Pradesh, KE = Kerala and BI = Bihar. “Non workers” are defined by their main activity of employment, such as: student, household duties, dependant, pensioner, beggar, vagrant and others. “Workers” are those earning a wage from the formal economy or earning money from running a business.

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81 Chakravarti, A., p. 64-66.
inclined to earn a wage, by the means of micro credit, is a way to overcome this gender gap concerning their exclusion from the market. Interestingly, the women in Andhra Pradesh have the highest rate of female workers whereas the more “socially equitable” Kerala has the highest number of female non-workers. Women from Andhra Pradesh are in this regard better off than women from the other states with a comparable size. The emergence of women, who have not earlier been entitled their own market income, as wage earners, has important consequences for their position in society, because it equalises the economic situation, which earlier had been mostly favourable for men.

Regarding the importance of employment; Martha Nussbaum emphasizes that employment outside the home and receiving an independent income as a means for women to improve their self-respect and the perceived societal value of women. Nussbaum continues: “[…] it represents a means of escape from male control over female labour. It represents a means of economic independence. […] It serves to increase women’s bargaining power and autonomy within the household and within society more broadly”. She concludes that employment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for women’s position and influence in society. This is true because women might, for example, gain access to both employment and an independent wage, but if the working conditions are poor the actual situation for women has not qualitative improved.

5.1.2 Work and employment as determined by caste and gender values

What particular labour operations women and men are engaged in are determined by various components, such as class, ethnicity, age, level of education, and family situation as well as ideas about and how people perceive gender relationships within the confines of work. Even though the Indian constitution guarantees equal employment opportunities, the reality is far from this generous de jure stance. There is a de facto sexual division of labour and women are more secluded to their homes than men are. Certain spheres of economic activity are designated as male or female. The homestead is interpreted by society in being largely a female sphere, while places in the public sphere, such as markets and towns, are primarily male. This shared patriarchal system is interwoven with a hierarchical social structure, which by ranking work appropriate to the status of each caste further determines the patterns of female work.

In India, caste is also a determinant of the work activity females are engaged in. However this system does not operate on exactly the same terms for different religions, castes and communities

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83 Nussbaum, M. and Glover, J., p. 54
84 Gender is referring to the social sex men and women are socialised into and from which their actions are made legitimate. (Hedenborg, S. och Wikander, U., Makt och försörjning, p. 69)
in India. The social restrictions on women’s lifestyles tend to become more rigid as one moves up in the caste hierarchy. Generally, there is more seclusion of females in North India than in the South and among upper castes and classes than among lower castes and classes. In the highest castes, or surplus farm households, the women are to the utmost confined to the household and secluded within the four walls of their home. Below this group is the main local peasant caste or middle farmer group. Their women are occupied mainly with domestic duties, but also work in their own fields. In the third group of middle castes or small farm households, women work mainly in their own fields but might work for a small wage in the busy season. The fourth and lowest social group is composed of women belonging to the lowest castes or poorest households who regularly seek paid work in order to support their families.

5.1.3 Analysis and summary of the economic contextualisation

The state of Andhra Pradesh is one of the most dependent on agriculture for its size. Its women are more often agricultural labourers than cultivators in comparison with its men and the men are more likely to own land. Andhra Pradesh has a low proportion of advanced services, and compared with the men, its women are more often confined to carrying out small-scale production within the walls of the household, and are much more likely to be excluded from the formal market economy and thus less inclined to earn a wage or an income. Lastly, Andhra Pradesh has the highest number of women within the formal economy, even if the numbers of female participants are low. The labour markets for women and men are determined by caste and gender. Higher caste women are more constrained to the household than lower caste women. There is also a divide between male and female spheres, in which women are seen as more suitable for household chores. Men, on the other hand, are able to enjoy a greater outreach and mobility in society and between tasks.

5.2 The perceptions of women’s and men’s work and mobility

In the section on economic contextualisation, the concept was presented that values about what activities are “proper” for men and women are determinants of the activities actually performed by men and women. There is therefore a need to look into the values concerning what constitutes proper work for women, because these values are limiting the empowerment of women. A change of values should therefore be associated with increased female agency. An

86 In the whole of India ploughing is almost exclusively a male task whereas drying and storing grain are typically female tasks.
understanding of the social environment in which decisions are made is therefore important in understanding the basis of change.

Has the microfinance industry and the increased participation of women in self-help-groups influenced how they perceive themselves and how their husband’s perceive what is appropriate work for them? How women and men are perceived to be are important determinants in how they are by society approved for doing activities which are regarded as being within natural “male” or “female” boundaries of action. Värlander acknowledges that the strategies used by microfinance organisations to legitimize and implement their actions are contributing to the manifestation of stereotyped representations on how men and women typically are. The general picture held by the microfinance industry is that women are more docile and immobile and they are also more responsible when it comes to caring about the welfare of children and the family. Men, on the other hand, epitomize the opposite of these descriptions and are perceived as not to be trusted. Are these stereotypes held by the men and women about whom this gendered discourse is constructed?

Ankuram targets primarily Dalits and to some extent Sudras, who consist of the lowest castes and of groups outside the caste system. Therefore, the situation of high caste women has not been considered. However, it should be expected that the women interviewed are accustomed to taking paid labour, since lower caste women to a greater extent than higher caste women do generally take paid work.

The interviews have been constructed to investigate the roles of men and women. The interviews with men have been contrasted with the interviews with women. There are statements made by men and women, about men and women in the interviews. There are therefore possible male and female roles to consider. For this section, interviews with groups of women, individual women and individual men have been carried out.

5.2.1 How work is perceived and what women and men will do

Organising women around economic concerns has not changed the way that households are organised regarding productive relationships. Women are still doing most, if not all, the domestic household work, while some men might fetch water. Husbands can attend to their own or the family’s business more than their wives can, the wives being more confined to the chores within the four walls of the home. All the women claim that they have the main responsibility for carrying out the domestic chores, such as taking care of the children, cleaning, cooking and

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89 Värlander, J., p. 44-45.
90 Värlander, J., p. 42-43.
overall maintenance.\textsuperscript{91} It is also common for women in the villages to be preparing the meals before the rest of the family has woken up, to tide up after the meals before attending to their work and/or business and to be home before everyone else to prepare the evening meals.\textsuperscript{92}

When men are ill they also enjoy the privilege of having their chores taken care of. Women will not only attend their husbands businesses when he is ill, but also do stone cutting or the digging of canals, which in other cases is seen as being too heavy for women to carry out. Even though women perform these heavy tasks, they are perceived of not being made of the right stuff to carry them out. There are references to men being needed for putting up the vessel when sugar-cane is processed and being more suited for carrying big axes than women.\textsuperscript{93}

Electrical work is considered to be dangerous and only suitable for a man to perform. Work associated with electricity is therefore, according to these views, not suitable for women. Women are not allowed to go out in the dark in order to turn off the generator, which supplies the village with electricity. This limits the mobility of women. Interestingly, this view is held by the women themselves.\textsuperscript{94} Thus, women’s mobility in their work situation, is limited because they are not able to perform or move in the spheres which are considered dangerous, and something considered dangerous is perceived to be a man’s job. They are also perceived as being more apt at taking care of the “soft issues”. How then are women ever going to do other jobs if they are excessively associated with the homestead?

Agricultural work which is mechanised is also something which men are more likely to perform, while women will do operations which are manual. If there is a machine in use, such as a tractor for handling cropping, the men will use it. In contrast, the women will remove cotton and waste grass by hand.\textsuperscript{95}

Women are also less likely then men to be managing a business and the business operations the women are perform, are somewhat connected to their households. This is perhaps not all to surprising, since their current comparative advantage lies in the daily chores that they are performing. Men also do business more often because women usually have problems with a lack of money for investments\textsuperscript{96}. Women’s work is also valued less: they receive lower wages than men, even though they are employed at the same place of work and perform the same or similar duties. One group of women stated that if women get Rs 50 for labour work, men will receive Rs

\textsuperscript{91} Interview no. 17-28.
\textsuperscript{92} Interviews no. 19 (S-H-G) and 25.
\textsuperscript{93} Interviews no. 20 (S-H-G), 22 (S-H-G) 24 and 26.
\textsuperscript{94} Interviews no. 22 (S-H-G) and 24.
\textsuperscript{95} Interviews no. 27 and 28.
\textsuperscript{96} Interviews no. 17 (S-H-G) and 18 (S-H-G).
Another group believes that women are doing more than men, they work more hours per day, but earn less income.

Actually, the work performed in the household is perceived by men and women themselves as perhaps not qualify as work, because women have to manage gaining an income while they also attend to their household chores, children and their husband’s business. One can wonder if this heavier work load can be empowering women? A constrained situation in which loans have to be repaid and the time found with which to pursue a business, is in conflict with the roles that women have as wives and mothers. The strained situation in the household is something which also concerns Dr. K. Lalita, who observes that providing services for rural women is one way of making empowerment and self help come true. In comparison with women in the cities, women in rural areas do not have access to the supply of services which could supplement the household and ease the domestic burden. Therefore she believes that, if: “[…] women could come about and collectively organise the supply of services such as fetching water, firewood, cooking, nursing for small women and child care […]” it would be of benefit for rural women. In her opinion these issues have been neglected by non-governmental- and microfinance organisations. Some other studies have similarly highlighted the increase of work burdens, overwork, fatigue and even malnutrition of women which have started businesses due to newly gained access to credit.

5.2.2 Gains from mobilizing women in self-help-groups

Even if the overall picture is that the current situation for women has not changed, or perhaps has even become more constrained, there are some traits which show that change is nevertheless underway. Women reportedly are talking to men differently, perhaps in a more peremptory tone, and are more willingly taking decisions. Even though the nature of decisions was not mentioned in the interviews, the men maintain that their women seem more active in this regard. This development, in conjuncture with women feeling more confident in approaching bank and government officials with their needs, must have an effect on the overall negotiating ability for women. The situation shows that women are more willing than before to change their current livelihoods, which surely must also have effects on how and with what they are working.

Before women joined the self-help-groups, men did not tell women about how much money they earned. They would instead hide away money for their personal gain. This has now changed, because women have gained a sense of what one earns, a sense of the value of money and an

97 Interview no. 22. (S-H-G)
98 Interview no. 20. (S-H-G)
99 Interview no. 29 with Dr. K. Lalita, consultant of Think Soft and Ankuram Sangamam Poram.
100 Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 41.
101 Interviews no. 25 and 27.
understanding of the importance of money. Gaining a sense of what money is worth is apparently helping women not to be tricked by their husbands, who earlier could keep the money for themselves. Now the women have knowledge of how much money the whole household is bringing in, and consequently they have the possibility of demanding that a certain amount be put on a particular activity, whether it is hospital care, schooling for children or something else. This development is an improvement of the situation for women.

Allegedly, the women are spending more money on individual consumption, such as bangles, health care and ornaments, as well as sending their children and daughters to private education. This has an equalising effect, since some of the poorer households now have, for example, access to English based education and greater opportunities for getting a job in the future. A measure of consumption, such as being responsible for sending the children to school, might have a spill over effect on the status of their work, since women now have the ability to provide these highly desired social and economic inputs and costs.

Women in the groups are gradually taking more decisions about the purchase of livestock, in order to increase the resources of their family; the cattle they purchase are registered in their names. Some women are also increasingly purchasing bits and pieces of land. Having livestock registered in your name is most likely having positive status effects on the work the women perform, since income partly generated by the livestock is also associated with the person who is responsible for owning the livestock. The effect is more status to women, which might work in favour of the work situation of women in general.

5.2.3 Analysis and summary of perceptions

The agency of women is curtailed because they are seen as naturally confined to the domestic sphere, in roles such as in taking care of the household chores. Even though they have ability in receiving a loan and engaging in economic matters, women have an increasing work burden. If the situation becomes unattainable, there is a risk that women will fall back into the role as “only being capable of performing household duties”. Reasons for this possible outcome are the lesser status of female work generally, and more specifically the reluctance of their male counterparts to share the work load. That female work is considered to be of lower value has the consequence of being translated into receiving lower wages than men, even if they perform similar kinds of work. The current situation is that women are considered to be more apt at caring for the children and the household, which is a constraint for them as individuals, because it stereotypes the role of

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102 Interviews no. 20 (S-H-G), 21 (S-H-G), 22 (S-H-G), 24, and 25.
103 Interviews no. 20 (S-H-G), 21 (S-H-G), 22 (S-H-G), 24, and 25.
104 Interviews no. 21 (S-H-G) and 24.
105 C.f. Ilaiah, K., Buffalo Nationalism – A critique of Spiritual Fascism, chpt. 9 On Education.
106 Interview no. 22 (S-H-G)
women and forces them to be in charge of these chores. Thus, it must be acknowledged that the stereotypes of men and women found in this study match the stereotypes produced by society and the microfinance agents.

The self-help-groups have, on the other hand, increased female mobility and to some extent changed how women view themselves. These changes have a potential to alter the current work situation and the livelihoods of women in general. A basic understanding of how interest rates, borrowing and savings function have made women more aware of what money is worth. It has made it difficult for their husbands to hide money away from the rest of the family, which benefits women because it is a tool for negotiation. The entitlement to material resources in their names have made women more confident in general, because they are now more mobile and confident in addressing officials. It is hard to account for the long term effects of these achievements, because the stereotypes with which women and men are perceived still seems to still dominate what women and men are doing. However, the achievements would probably not have been possible without the organisation of women into self-help-groups.

5.3 Women’s access to incomes and decision making over resources

Have women’s memberships in self-help-groups enabled them to earn an independent income? Receiving a wage or income from the market would signal a change in the prestige of women’s work, because women in India are more likely to be excluded from the market economy. Thus receiving a wage is a start for women to be accorded the same socio-economic status that the men have enjoyed. Supplementing or gaining your own income can be seen as synonymous with finding an employment outside the home, because it entails an economic relationship with a third party. If there is something which can represent a change in the livelihoods of women, it is a break with the tendency to institutional seclusion, such as that of not earning an income from the market.

Earning an independent income or making contributions to the family’s welfare, have a signal effect showing increasing decision making over important issues within the household. Having access to an independent income is an important base of negotiation and for building of self-esteem. On the other hand, income itself does not tell us as much about actual agency. Therefore it has to be considered how resources were put to use and by whom. Decision making, which entails a clear change of female behaviour, is considered to be an achievement. As Kabeer shows, changes in decision making over important economic matters could be found, in India, over the purchase of major household goods, purchase of food, purchase of small items of jewellery,
course of action if a child falls ill and decisions about the education of children and the type of school\textsuperscript{107}. Thus, the issue of contextuality is important in order to account for empowerment.

From the analysis of the interviews, four analytical categories have been established; 1) the husbands have the main income outside of agriculture while the women have no income 2) the husbands and wives share businesses and incomes outside agriculture 3) the husbands and wives share the incomes from agriculture 4) Women with other marital and economic situations. Basic information about the individual female members is found in the appendix\textsuperscript{108}.

5.3.1 Women without their own incomes

The women in this group have been curtailed from actively engaging in relationships which could enhance their social and economic standing, because they are not entitled for carrying out income generating activities by their spouses. Even though the women have joined a self-help-group in order to obtain loans and engage in economic activities, their husbands make these decisions and stand for the main income for these families. Since the women in this group do not use the loans for their own purposes, their link to resources are severely limited, which restrict their ability for decision making. If the women have a subordinated role in the household and their kin pushes them to take credit for their own purposes, it is likely that women are not able to free themselves with credit. On the contrary, they are stuck with the official repayment burden. At the same time, they have no means of repaying the loan since they are not making their own income. The livelihood of the postmaster’s wife is very representative for this group and looking at her story gives a colourful but also insightful look into the way in which she is denied her own income. Four out of 16 interviewees can be said to belong to this particular category.

“Sonia”\textsuperscript{109} has no own source of income because she only attends housework, while the husband is the sole breadwinner as a village branch postmaster. She is clearly dominated by her husband and mother-in-law, and she executes their demands and decisions. Six years ago she and her mother-in-law lost the petty commodity-shop that they had managed, because the mother-in-law’s husband passed away. As a woman, she was expected to and had the responsibility of taking care of the mother-in-law (read: family) at a time of crisis. Later on, she joined a self-help-group in the village because her mother wanted money for to start a petty shop, similar to the one which was lost. On the behalf of her husband she has also borrowed money to purchase and repair an old jeep. She had either no influence over how major investments were made. The husband decided that a large portion of the family’s income, apart from the jeep, would be spent

\begin{footnotesize}
  \item Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 33.
  \item See Appendix 9.4.1.
  \item By ethical reasons the identities of the respondents are presented anonymously. “Sonia” is a pseudonym for her real name.
\end{footnotesize}
on their son’s engineering degree. In this family, he has also the responsibility of saving, withdrawing money, and making repayments of loans.\footnote{Interview no. 8.}

In another illustrative case, the bank account is the husband’s and the husband decides on what the savings and loans are to be used for; consumption, fertilizer and pesticide.\footnote{Interview no. 13.} The only person in the first group who claimed that both the husband and wife agreed on purchasing an auto-rickshaw had a small, but irregular, income from paddy cropping. This shows that having your own income contributes to increased decision making. Even in this case, the husband is in charge of savings and repayments.\footnote{Interview no. 16.}

In cases like Sonia’s, in which the family and the immediate kin have a strong influence over the decisions which women take, the loans from the self-help-group work in a counterproductive way, since they further reinforce, the subjugation of women. Instead of being empowered the women who are oppressed are facing a process of disempowerment; in which they are under increased control, as their incapability of repaying a loan means that they have to rely on others to do this. A situation in which women take on the risks and burdens of debt without having control over this money seems to be widespread: a study of three major micro credit institutions in Bangladesh found that 63 percent of the loans borrowed were controlled by their husbands\footnote{Rahman, A., p. 33.}.

Women in patrimonial societies might discriminate against each other because they have internalised their lesser status as human beings, which the presented case of Sonia is likely to be representative for.

As an explanation for situations like Sonia’s, it is enlightening to consider the following factors. A general tendency for these women is that their role within the family is perceived as weak. In one case, the immediate kin (a mother-in-law and a husband) are forcing their will onto the woman. In another case, the woman is very young (18 years old) in comparison with her husband (28 years old)\footnote{Interviews no. 8 and 15.}. A study by S. Kishor found similarities of impaired ability of agency among women who were less educated than their husbands, much younger, or who lived with the in-laws and “[…] were subordinate the authority of a senior female.”\footnote{Kabeer, N. (1a), p. 37.} Another similarity between these particular cases is that the husband or the mother-in-law have motivated or pushed the women, into being a member. It is also representative that the husbands and/or the mother-in-
laws have formulated and initiated business ideas, instead of the women who signed up for a loan. In comparison with the men, they do not receive a stable income on their own. Two husbands have government jobs, a local post branch manager for India Post and a bus driver for the Andhra Pradesh State Road Corporation. Their similarities are that they both have received large loans from MACS and the self-help-groups, and invested in expensive vehicles for transport purposes. The large loans indicate that these families have such stable incomes that they are trusted in managing the repayments. Is it possible that the husbands’ stable incomes give less incentive for the women to engage in economic activities, or are the incomes tools for the husbands to control their spouses?

Almost all the women had been active in the self-help-group for a considerable amount of time. The amount of time ranged from four years up to ten years by three of the four members, which indicates that the group has not had a major influence over their personal economic situation. There is also no apparent connection between the length of the memberships and to what extent the persons have a say in major purchases, savings or investments.

5.3.2 Women and men with a shared business and income outside of agriculture

In this group, the females have more access to resources than in the group in which women lacked income. This enables more potential for decision making, because group members are thinking in terms of initiating businesses and gaining incomes. This behaviour signals differences in achievements, because there are examples of higher mobility in this group. In Indian society, women do not regularly travel independently and the husbands need to come along to meetings if they are held in a neighbouring village. Even though there is more leeway for female action, the husbands, in all cases but one, control the income. The husbands have the only bank accounts, are in charge of savings and investments and are the ones who initiated the businesses.

An example of female agency is found in the case of “Pusupa”. She asserts that she is on an equal footing with her husband in deciding on how the income should be invested. There is also a greater mobility in this group than in the first group; Pusupa can travel along with her self-help-

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116 These women are occupied as; housewife, student or seasonally labour in agriculture. The husbands have incomes from outside the agriculture; post branch manager, painter, bus driver or manual labourer (Interview no. 8, 13, 15 and 16).

117 Interviews no. 8 and 16.

118 Interviews no. 8, 13, and 16.

119 Four cases were found in this group, in which the couples and families are involved in running a fair price shop which supplies wheat, kerosene oil and meat under government subsidised prices, travelling vendors for beauty products and sandals, service for marriage and other festive occasions and saree-weavers.


121 Interviews no. 3,4,10 and 12.
group friends. Likewise in “Sharda’s” case, her stitching and marriage business seems to involve moving between customers. Therefore, sharing income and having a partial say over it increases the likelihood of agency.\textsuperscript{122}

Pusupa has some leeway in mobility and in income; when she is away she receives money herself for the products she sells. The husband works on his own in nearby towns by selling sandals. She and the other four women from the self-help-group travel to towns outside their district\textsuperscript{123} and sell female beauty products. They go back and forth in one day. Pusupa claims that she takes the decision to invest in her own business (the income), but that they both have to agree when they will invest and who to prioritize. The latest investment was in items (make up) which the wife is selling, a purchase with a total value of Rs 50,000\textsuperscript{124}. This investment shows that she has influence on what they will invest in.\textsuperscript{125} In Pusupa’s case and for her fellow travellers, there is a possibility of talking about having an opportunity of geographical mobility, enabled by their business and self-help-group interest. She is having access to a social network, based on their daily trips, which have the potential to function as a resource for decision making in other situations. It is likely that her geographical mobility has contributed to her having more influence over the family’s resources.

In this group, the women in general are more involved in forming businesses. Sharda had after joining the self-help-group the means (with loans from self-help-group and MACS) with which to invest in a tent business. She had from her contacts made through her stitching service come up with the idea of providing the tent service, since she already was providing the clothes for festivities. The income from letting out tents is the main income for the family with the marriage service, but “Sharda’s” stitching contributes nearly as much as their main income.\textsuperscript{126} This entrepreneurialism testifies of a clear sign of empowerment, because she is taking decisions over how loans should be spent and this in an innovative way. She also shares a greater mobility with Pusupa.

“Marja”, the woman engaged in saree-weaving, does not have as accentuated role as Sharda, because she does not have a unique knowledge in the family’s production. Marja’s husband does the same kind of work as her in the production. Hence her knowledge is replaceable. In the saree-weaving family, the husband decides on what the income will be spent on, such as on treads and chemical substances. The husband, she says, is also very ingenious in coming up with business ideas which he takes up with her. Sharda obtained an income by supplying services

\textsuperscript{122} C.f. Interviews no. 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15 and 16.
\textsuperscript{123} District – administrative unit also called Mandal in A.P. (Sinha, F. et al., Chpt. Glossary.)
\textsuperscript{124} About 3000 SEK.
\textsuperscript{125} Interview no. 3
\textsuperscript{126} Interview no. 10.
which were in line with the family business, but which were also based on independent knowledge. In comparison, Marja lacked an independent knowledge of the production process, which explains the lack of own income for her.\textsuperscript{127}  

If one considers the amount of time that the women have been active in the self-help-group with the influence that they have over resources, one can see that the woman with the longest membership also had the most influence. However, those who had least say over the resources had also been members of the self-help-group for 10 and 7 years (see table 9.4.1 in Appendix). This shows another case in which the period of membership does not necessarily influence women’s decision-making.\textsuperscript{128}  

\textbf{5.3.3 Women and men with a shared business and income from agriculture} 

In this group, there are more signs of female agency in comparison with the women without their own incomes, and the women are as free as or perhaps even freer than the women with a shared business and income outside of agriculture. The women have responded that they have jointly made important decisions on their own investments. Only one woman answered that economic decisions are up to her husband.\textsuperscript{129} Two of the women also said that they had taken decisions over investments with their husbands; in one case on a tractor with a market value of Rs 100,000 and in another case two buffaloes.\textsuperscript{130}  

The resources this group have access to, apart from the loans and support by the groups, are knowledge, experience and networking from being engaged in the federated structure of the microfinance organisation. Gains which signal changes in the situation of the women (achievements) are a better ability to contribute to important economic decisions, such as deciding over investments in child education and the purchase of land. However, none of the women are contributing with the main income for their families. Supplementing the main income by their own means is more widespread among the women engaged in agriculture than for the women with a share of a business and an income outside of agriculture.\textsuperscript{131}  

Women in South Asia are more likely to take the minor economic decisions within the family, while the men decide on major investments, such as the education of the children.\textsuperscript{132} “Saisvawami” has with her income from selling buffalo milk been active in decisions over a major

\textsuperscript{127} Interviews no. 12 and 10. 
\textsuperscript{128} Interviews no. 3, 4, 10 and 12. 
\textsuperscript{129} Interviews no. 2, 5, 6, 7 and 11. 
\textsuperscript{130} Interview no. 6. About 17 000 SEK. 
\textsuperscript{131} Amongst the families where the husband and the wife share’s the income from agriculture all women, but one, have their own income from selling buffalo milk, paddy-crops or agricultural labour. (Interviews no. 2, 5, 6, 7 and 11), and Paddy - *noun (pl. paddies) 1 a field where rice is grown. 2 rice still in the husk. Paddy”, Ask Oxford. http://www.askoxford.com. 2007-05-06.) 
\textsuperscript{132} See Theoretical framework (‘agency’).
investment, which is usually confined to men. She supported her son’s engineering degree, which should be seen as empowering and as something which indeed is status enhancing for women\textsuperscript{133}. Another such example of gaining an income which is traditionally confined to the male sphere is “Sirivinella”, whose income come from selling a paddy crop. The paddy-crop comes from a piece of land (2.8 acres) which she cultivates. She has purchased the land with the help of a loan from the self-help-group.\textsuperscript{134}

Two of the group members have high posts within Ankuram Sangamam Poram’s federated structure. “Prasana” is the elected vice-president of the board of directors. The board of Directors is the highest decision-making body of Ankuram, which comprises of elected self-help-group leaders from all the engaged districts in the state of Andhra Pradesh.\textsuperscript{135} “Gangabhavari” is currently representing her local Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies (MACS)\textsuperscript{136} in the General Body of Ankuram\textsuperscript{137}. These high posts do not offer compensation in terms of income, but the wives gain knowledge in how to negotiate and handle different circumstances with conflicts of interest, which could be used as a resource in other situations. The offices which involve many face-to-face situations also most likely function as a base for networking.

Prasana has, unlike Gangabhavari, no income of her own. Prasana’s husband makes the economic decisions, such as on all purchases of agricultural inputs, savings, repayments etcetera. Gangabhavari obtains her income from the vending of vegetables and, temporarily, income from the selling of labour power for the construction of buildings. The family’s main income comes from the sale of milk from two buffaloes, which they both decided on investing in with a loan (Rs 6,000) from the local self-help-group.\textsuperscript{138} To some extent these results seems to be a contradiction, because a person with the highest mandates is not in control over the important investments of her family. The difference could be because Prasana’s office requires more engagement than Gangabhavari, which signal that in order to be successful at either political or economic activities, a specialisation is needed.

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\textsuperscript{133} Interview no. 2.
\textsuperscript{134} Interview no. 7.
\textsuperscript{136} The MACS is a legal entity on the Mandal level. The MACS function as the principal intermediary to negotiate for credit, livelihood and managerial skills and services for their members. It provides members with linkages with government agencies and development programmes. Two leaders from each self-help-group come together to form the General Body whose most important function is to elect the highest decision making body as the Board of Directors, from the members represented in the General body. The local MACS and self-help-group leaders have the responsibility of outlining their annual growth path and activities and to seek support among the General Body for these activities in order to receive financial support for their members. ("About us, Our Roots, Our Work, Out Reach and Documents", Ankuram Sangamam Poram. \url{http://www.ankuram.com}, 2007-05-24.)
\textsuperscript{137} Interview no. 11.
\textsuperscript{138} Prasana has no income of her own and her husband has decided on buying two buffaloes from the sale of milk. She has the responsibility of rearing the buffalo. (Interviews no. 5 and 11.)
In this group there is a clearer link between the number of years of membership and the extent of decision making. All the women who show signs of agency have been in the group from 4 to 11 years. One woman with modest signs of agency has only been active for 1.5 years. However one of the women had modest signs of decision making but 7 years of membership.\footnote{Interviews no. 2, 5, 6, 7 and 11.}

5.3.4 Women with other marital and economic situations

This group differs from the others because these women all have different marital and economic circumstances from which they can act. In two cases out of three the husbands are not present, and in one case the son has taken the husband’s place as a breadwinner. This group has the clearest sign of empowerment because the women use their resources in order to improve their own situation. The women earn independent incomes and in two out of three cases the women are in charge of the main income for the family. “Pragat” was initially forced to act on as a consequence of her husband passing away, which has enabled her to become an elected politician and to start an insurance bureau. “Sri Devi” has changed occupations and become an elected ward member. “Vennela”, on the other hand owns a large amount of land, which might indicate that she belongs to a higher socio-economic stratum within the Dalit community. She has initiated several businesses.\footnote{Interviews no. 1, 9 and 14.}

Pragat is, since January 2006, elected to the post of President Chairman of an Andhra Pradesh Mandal\footnote{Mandal - an administrative unit.} and this political post takes up most of her time. A supplementary income comes from an insurance company, which she has set up, for impoverished women. She spends about three hours a week on this business, which she intends to expand after her political career. Her political mandate is for five years. One crucial event which changed the course of her life was the unfortunate death of her husband seven years ago. At this point, she was already involved in the self-help-group, but following this event she started thinking about the conditions of women and their rights and entitlements. Previously, the husband had been present and she had to do other work, predominantly household work.\footnote{Interview no. 9.}

The husband of Sri Devi has departed. Her son contributes the main income to the family as a contract electrician. She used to do agricultural labour and masonry work before joining the self-help-group. Now she is engaged in three different projects; breeding goats, building up a petty commodity shop, and she has also been elected a ward member. Sri Devi earns an income by selling of milk on the market. The breeding of goats was her daughters’ idea; they are planning to procreate and breed lambs in order to sell them on the market. MACS office has lent her Rs

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Interview no. 2, 5, 6, 7 and 11.
  \item Interviews no. 1, 9 and 14.
  \item Mandal - an administrative unit.
  \item Interview no. 9.
\end{enumerate}
10,000 and she needs to raise another Rs 10,000 herself to get the petty business started. During the interview, the son repeatedly took over his mother’s role as a respondent and he tried to answer instead of her, or to fill in what he felt she had left out. He appeared to be very dominant and this is most apparent when we were discussing the mother’s and the family’s incomes. This could be a result of him having an influence in the family since he is the main bread earner. His mother seems to be very industrious and also successful using the possibilities of micro-credit. Therefore, his behaviour reveals a perceived threat to his self image as the bread winner.  

Vennela owns 10 acres of land. This is a distinctly different characteristic from the other women, because almost none of the others own a considerable amount of land. In her case, this could perhaps be a resource in negotiations over family decisions. The main income for the family comes from the cotton production which she initiated. On top of that, she and one daughter are engaged in the production of greeting-cards (with Vedic themes), which generates from Rs 3,000 to 4,000 in a month. This has become one of the most important incomes for the family. Her husband initiated an investment in a tractor and she initiated an investment in a bore well. In her case, she has the upper hand in terms of owning a bank account and being in charge of savings.  

In this group two out of three women had been in the self-help-group for nine respectively ten years. The third woman has been a member for three years. Thus, there is some connection between the length of the membership and decision making.  

5.3.5 A possible relationship between length of membership and decision making  
Since it has been suggested that there is no straightforward or conclusive relationship between the possibility for a woman to exert her demands on what resources a family invests in and the length of time of involvement in a self-help-group, there was a need to outline this statement. A possible relationship between decision making over resources and the length of membership has been put forward in this section. It has been acknowledged that there exist three different relationships in relation to time, in which: 1) The husband is making the important decisions, 2) Both husband and wife make important decisions and 3) The wife is making the important decisions. These relationships were captured in the following table:  

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143 Interview no. 1.  
144 Interview no. 14  
145 Interviews no. 1, 9 and 14.
Table 5.3.5: Is there a relationship between the number of years in the self-help-group and decision making over important resources?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in SHG</th>
<th>&quot;1&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;2&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;3&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview no. 1 – 16. Note: 1 = The husband is making the important decisions, 2 = Both husband and wife make important decisions and 3 = The wife is making the important decisions. The results are presented as number of respondents in each column. See table 9.5.1 in Appendix for further details.

If there is a strong relationship between the duration of membership and the degree of decision-making, and thus if the membership in the self-help-group does influence the decision making of its members, there would be the following tendencies. Under section “1”, where the husband is making the important decisions, there should be a high number of women in the category for 0 to 3 years and vice versa for the higher categories. In sections “2” and “3”, where women either shares the important decisions with men or make them on their own, the tendency should be that the lesser time they have participated, the smaller number of women, and that a longer time in a self-help-group, (categories 4 to 7 years and 8 to 11 years) should correspond to a larger the number of women.

Among the population it is evident that there is not a direct relationship between women having a say in, or being in charge of, household decisions and the length of the membership in the self-help-group. However, where both women and men had a say in household resources and where the women made the important decisions, there is a relationship between decision-making and the time that they have been a member of a self-help-group. On the other hand, there is for a large group of women (in group “1”) no such trend: they have been a member for a long time but cannot decide themselves how, where and when resources should be used. Thus the conclusion must be that the liberating effect of the self-help-groups on decision making over resources is possible for some women but not for other. Therefore, the work of microfinance has some liberating effect, but is not all encompassing for all the active women.

5.3.6 Analysis and summary of the four groups

In summary we have seen that even though women have been members of the self-help-group for several years, this does not necessarily mean that they are able to make influential decisions
regarding the family’s economic matters. In some cases it has been evident that the possibility of getting a loan has not changed the bargaining power of the woman. On the contrary it is a worsening situation that some women are experiencing; they are the ones who have put their signatures on the financial bill, but they are not in charge of the income generating activities by which the loans can be repaid. In cases in which the woman is subjugated to demands and decisions the in-laws, the microfinance industry cannot empower the livelihoods of women. The loans funded by microcredit organisations work counterproductively and will therefore disempower women. This is perhaps the result of structural disempowerment and of not making empowerment a top priority in policy implementation. If the woman who is applying for the loan is not in some sense there because of her own free will, and she is applying for a loan on the behalf of someone else, how will she then gain from the experience of starting a business?

Explanations of the weak condition of the women in the first group were, among others that the women were in general in a lower position due to age differences and the heavy influence of the in-laws. It was also argued that the stable government employment some husbands had acquired (hence: stable incomes) gave less incentive for women to engage themselves in economic activities. A complementary explanation could be that sole bread winner status gives the husband control over the decision making of his spouse.

Women are freer to engage in decision making in situations in which they have gained access to income. In these cases, women are allegedly making choices on important matters together with their husbands. The membership in a self-help-group has also enabled women to become elected for posts of responsibility within the federated structure. These opportunities have increased their knowledge of how to organise in a democratic manner. The access to income, the support of the self-help-group and the possibility of drawing experience from work within the federated structure, have all initiated a series of positive effects for the women. The achievements signal a difference in the behaviour of the women; an increased social and geographical mobility and increased decision making in areas which traditionally have been confined to men (such as the acquisition of land and investment in the education of the children). Something which in these groups signalled a constraint in female action was a situation in which the woman had skills in the production process that were less than or about equal to those of her husband, in this case the production of sarees. A tendency was found in which women focused on their semi-political offices rather than their economic livelihoods.

In addition to the income, the special livelihoods of some women made them in more or complete control of the key areas of their lives. A higher socio-economic status and genuine ingenuity gave Vennela a complete control of important livelihood choices. Pragat was actually
forced into this position when her husband past away. Previously she mostly did housework, but after this event she has been elected to one of the highest political mandates on the village level and she has also started an insurance bureau for destitute women. Since the empowerment of women is equalising the social relationships, it also stirs up conflicts and destructive feelings from the kin and from society, as in the case of Sri Devi.

Finally, it was presented that there existed no general direct relationship between the length of being active in a self-help-group and the possibility for women to exercise decision making over resources. However, such a relationship did exist for some of the investigated women there existed such a relationship and to some extent it is possible to say that self-help-groups can have a liberating effect.

5.4 Exchange of market information and ideas through women

In order to capture women’s agency in this case as economic and/or business entrepreneurs within the local economy, it would be of interest to get an appreciation whether the microfinance institutions, through the self-help-groups, influence this behaviour. This section therefore looks at the possible entrepreneurial development among the members; have the women become encouraged into thinking in terms of using market information (i.e. prices) for the benefit of their work or business? This section also looks into and evaluates ideas, working conditions, capital, collective activity and knowledge transformation.

Market information and ideas are means of changing and improving economic behaviour. In, for instance, agriculture the flow of new information could lead to the employment of new technologies, which would lead to an improvement of production. Ideas about how to fulfil service demands, such as food-consumption (e.g. tea-stalls) and transportation (e.g. Auto-rickshaws), could fall under this parameter. From where do the women or their families as economic agents get their ideas for shaping a business?

If women increasingly are becoming empowered, this would likely be followed by an increasing economic agency. A capacity to understand economic relationships (understanding basic lending and saving procedures) and the possible engagement between actors within the group, can lead to a greater willingness to earn money.

5.4.1 The women, business ideas and the transfer of knowledge

Most of the respondents answer that the self-help-groups have not influenced their work situation or/and their business. They also claim that it is their spouse or themselves who have come up with the ideas of how they will run or eventually improve their work or business. If the self-help-groups have in some way had influence, it is through the financial means that they offer;
by helping out with loans or getting information, reaching the importance of savings, deposits and attendance in the meetings. The majority of cases seem to convey that there is no deepening of trust and cooperation in the groups and discussions do not go deeper than sharing the availability of capital. There are indirect measures of how groups give support and that is through providing information about loans and savings. The individual formation of business ideas might show that there is, in some cases, an increasing willingness and ability of women to formulate and implement their ideas. The single woman with an increased willingness to generate ideas should be seen as empowered.

The help offered at the meetings perhaps does not from this perspective run deeper than the mere financial help, since the actors seems to be independent in implementing and enacting ideas. In some cases in which the husband stands for the creativity as with the family who produced sarees the man claims that he gains his inspiration from current trends in society rather than from the meetings with other weavers. His wife’s self-help-group comprise of a community of weavers, but even though they all share the same interest they have not discussed work conditions or business ideas. When they create new collections of sarees with new patterns, they do not gain this inspiration from their colleagues but from current trends in society or the media. Another illustrative case is that of Sharda, who has initiated the business and linked together market opportunities. A woman from her stitching service contacts came up with the idea of providing a complete marriage service.

Even though the general picture is that there is no collective improvement and influence on each other’s ideas, there are examples of where trust and cooperation are deepening. It was more common for women in groups three and four to account for the influence of the group on their work. The self-help-group has made it possible for Pusupa to spend a whole day on the road in other districts. Having the opportunity to be away with her female self-help-group-friends is an escape where they can share experiences, grievances and gossips, and this is in itself a window of opportunity for empowering themselves. Regarding the influence of the self-help-group on her business, she claims that all the ideas are hers but that the self-help-group has helped out with loans for different investments. However, the four other members who share the same kind of trade surely should have some influence on her choices in conducting her business. Even if she says that there is no direct influence from the sharing of business knowledge, it is almost impossible for people to work this close side by side and not to affect each other, in an unconscious manner. On the other hand, she claims that they are all doing their individual

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146 Interviews no. 1-16.
147 Interview no. 12.
148 Interview no. 10.
149 Interviews no. 1, 3, 5, 7 and 14.
business while they are visiting the villages, and so the influence from the self-help-group is perhaps subtle.\textsuperscript{150}

One woman, Prasana, relates that before they created a self-help-group in her village, she mostly did housework, but now she has become engaged in the collective activity of cultivation, in which the women in the group help each other, by first helping one and then moving on to another member’s fields. The same self-help-group has taken the initiative in investing time and energy in making agricultural work for the whole village more effective. They are about to purchase a generator which could supply electricity during power cuts, which would make their work less vulnerable and more stable. They are also about to construct an iron gate in order to control the water flow, for a more effective irrigation system, when producing rice. The level of water will affect the production of crops. The former gate was made of a cheap wood material and therefore washed away at times.\textsuperscript{151}

Sririvinella and Sri Devi believe that the self-help-groups have supported their income generating activities by the sharing of specific information. The groups have supplied information concerning applications for getting rid of insects, which have attacked Sririvinella’s crops. Sri Devi believes the group has enlightened her business mind through discussing the importance of deposits and savings, attendance in meetings, loans and repayments. Experienced members have also motivated members to save in order to, in the future, invest in agricultural inputs.\textsuperscript{152}

Vennela, who was engaged in Vedic-leaf-paintings, has trained the other self-help-group members and some of their daughters in how to make the traditional handicraft, in order for them to have an alternative source of income; she has done this training for no business cost. The group also goes out in the field to help each other out with agricultural work during harvesting times, because the loans from self-help-group have released some of the economic pressure and it is therefore possible to help others with their work, which is a benefit for the whole group.\textsuperscript{153}

5.4.2 Analysis and summary of the exchange of market information and ideas
In summary, we can conclude that the activities of a microfinance institution can deliver an economic base of lending and saving and some opportunities for cooperation. Whether the group formation does enable an enhanced opportunity for the flow of market information and implemented solutions to economic problems has been shown to be possible in some cases, but perhaps it is not happening for the average member.

\textsuperscript{150} Interview no. 3.
\textsuperscript{151} Interview no. 5.
\textsuperscript{152} Interviews no. 1 and 7.
\textsuperscript{153} Interview no. 14.
There are signs of increased information about loans, savings, and the implementation of techniques, in this case pesticides, the control of water flow, the use of a power generator and advice on investments, which have been generated by the self-help-groups. However the information generated and spread is not affecting all members and members everywhere, because in the majority of the business situations presented the information is created within the boundaries of the family. In the groups in which the women had the most decision making, this process was more common and it is not surprising that agency creates more engaged members.

From what has been accounted for in the interviews, microfinance does not seem to offer any miracle solution to economic problems, because there is no general process initiated in which trust and cooperation start to trickle out from it and in which every member becomes an economic man of creativity. It seems that if there are creative and active individuals the process will follow and not vice versa.
6. Political Sphere

6.1 Political contextualisation

6.1.1 Participation in the local government electorate

Historically, women have in general been excluded from politics in India, because the country has patriarchal structures which have excluded, discouraged and stopped most, attempts by women to politically mobilize themselves\textsuperscript{154}. One third of the government seats were reserved for women at all levels by the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment, through the Panchayati Raj Act of 1992. These reserved places have not led to an active involvement in the political process by the elected women. Legal fiat and a patriarchal society have made sure that the male relatives could continue to manage the Panchayat’s affairs\textsuperscript{155}. Inspired by NGOs there are currently an increasing number of cases of women who have started to contest in the elections, although their numbers are still small. Once they have become elected, some women have developed into leaders on the local political scene\textsuperscript{156}.

In the village context, the women who are competing for political power are trying to be elected to the local Panchayat – the council at the village level (or a cluster of 3-5 villages) which is a focus for village decision-making, the allocation of funds and implementation of government programmes. The Panchayat consists of around 12 members who are elected to represent different geographical wards. The head of the Panchayat is the Sarpanch, who is supported by a deputy. The elections take place every five years. One third of the seats are reserved by rotation for women, including the position of Sarpanch. Seats are also reserved for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe candidates\textsuperscript{157}. The Panchayat has the responsibility of ensuring that funds allocated for specific programmes are spent on those programmes (such as infrastructure – road building and repair, the laying of water pipes, school construction, and ensuring that appointments are made in vacant positions in schools and health centres), or deciding who accesses social security programmes (the issue of ration cards, pensions, pensions for widows), or programmes targeting the poor (for example for housing and electricity)\textsuperscript{158}.

\textsuperscript{154} C.f. Gauguly S. and Devota, N., p. 137-139.
\textsuperscript{155} These males are often referred to as “Sarpach pati”, from Sarpach the head of the village council (Panchayat).
\textsuperscript{156} Gauguly S. and Devota, N., p. 143.
\textsuperscript{157} Sinha, F. et al., p. 58.
\textsuperscript{158} Sinha, F. et al., p. 61.
6.1.2 Key features of the self-help-group members who contested in an election

A study has been conducted to map out the impacts and workings of self-help-groups in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa and Rajasthan. Among the areas studied was the representation of self-help-group members in local politics. In total 61 women, who were self-help-group members ran for office in the Panchayat in four states. Out of the total number of women contesting, 44 of them were elected. Of the total number of the women in these groups, the women who contested represent 2.5% and the women who became elected represent 1.8%. Of the elected women, only nine became Sarpanch, head of the local council, which represents 0.04% of the total members.

Among the group members elected to the Panchayat about 48 percent had been self-help-group leaders, while 62 percent were ordinary group members. About 16% of the elected, comprising mostly of leaders, had been community workers such as village field workers and teachers in government programmes, to mention a few of the offices held. It was found that the women with both leadership and development experiences already had a considerable degree of mobility within and outside the villages.

In order to be successful in an election, funding is required. Food and drinks should be provided to voters, leaflets have to be printed and there is a need to keep track of the competition, which in many elections is composed of the village elite. Selection of a candidate for the Panchayat is therefore a question of money, contacts and political networks outside of the self-help-group. In the southern states (Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka), almost all self-help-group members who stood for election came from families that are active in local mainstream politics.

The level of engagement varied, as well as the results that the elected women achieved. It was concluded that about 43% had a “low engagement”, such as their presence being mostly ignored by men and other castes. Women therefore did not have the opportunity to influence the decisions on funds. About 27% had a “moderate engagement”, which implies attending meetings regularly and having some influence over the development activities in the village. Women who have had low and moderate engagements reported that they need their husbands to accompany them to meetings, because they are not allowed to travel out of town. Others reported that their illiteracy requires them to have the support of a husband in order to handle

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160 Sinha, F. et al., p. 58.
161 Sinha, F. et al., p. 58-59.
162 Sinha, F. et al., p. 59.
163 Sinha, F. et al., p. 61.
political documents. Crucial differences between the few successful candidates and the rest, the not so successful candidates, is an advantage in various factors such as wealth rank, the confidence and experience that come with being a community worker (mobility, experience of travelling and interacting) or having previous family involvement with the Panchayat with a father, husband or brother being a former Panchayat member.

If women are elected as proxy candidates, where they either are supplemented by their husbands (a “Sarpanch Pati”) or have low engagement and influence on the decisions taken in the electorate, there is a risk of the disempowerment of women. Officially, they will be elected as women, under the quotas, representing the issues of women but in reality they are either not listened to or co-opted.

6.1.3 Do the self-help-groups influence the candidates?
In the few cases women in which do participate in the elections (as seen above about 2.5 % of the total members), there are examples where the self-help-groups have supported a member’s nomination, campaigning actively on their behalf and lending out funds for campaigns. However it was also found, for becoming a candidate, the support of a self-help-group was less important than whether the woman or her family already had established contacts with political parties from which she could draw support. Few of the microfinance institutions supported political activities by giving guidance, especially in Andhra Pradesh. A representative case, which shows the importance of family ties, is that of Uma Sethi in Orissa, who is one of the few women to have reached far in her engagement in the Panchayat and in politics. She has been active in getting approval for a pond development, roads and supply side support, such as grants for rickshaws and pump sets. She had been elected as a representative for the local council before there were self-help-groups in the village, because her family had political connections that she could use.

Based on the empirical findings of this study, it was discussed in an earlier chapter whether engagement in self-help-groups has negative impacts on activities outside the income related activities promoted by the self-help-groups. It was found that, once they received loans, one group had stopped talking about women’s issues and started discussing financial issues. Thus, engaging in one activity reduces the time that is spent on other issues. Uma Sethi, in Orissa, had invested heavily in her political career, but as a consequence she had accumulated outstanding debts to the local self-help-group. This could in time disturb the loan cycle which could disqualify that self-help-group from further loans.

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164 Sinha, F. et al., p. 62.
165 Sinha, F. et al., p. 64.
166 Sinha, F. et al., p. 64.
167 Sinha, F. et al., p. 67.
6.1.4 Participation in voting

According to Freedom House, an agency which observes and analyses the international development of democratic institutions, India has since independence held “reasonably” free elections. A large number of regional and national parties participate in every election, and sitting governments are thrown out of office with regularity.\(^{168}\) About 600 million citizens are eligible voters and out of them roughly 63 percent (12\(^{th}\) general election in 1998) participate in the elections for parliamentary seats, in the lower house of Lok Shaba\(^{169}\).

Definitions of democracy – formal and informal – were presented for the purpose of dealing with two aspects of the understanding of democracy. The formal denomination refers to suffrage, regular elections and basic civil rights. The informal denomination refers to the equalisation of power.\(^{170}\) Having the right to vote would, according to these definitions, be associated with an institutional definition and is thus an important and basic condition of a parliamentary democracy. However, the institutional approach does not disclose how the voting is exercised, i.e. who is taking the decisions about the vote. Therefore, looking at decision making captures the power structure which underlies such decisions.

6.1.5 Mobilization on local issues

The study of F. Sinha looked into whether the self-help-groups address social justice issues, many of which are related to the effects of the gender inequality in many families and a patriarchal society which reproduces these inequalities, and what the potential impacts of addressing these issues might be.

In the sample of 214 groups from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, and Rajasthan, about 12\(^{\circ}\)\% of the groups had addressed issues such as drunken violence, bigamy, dowry deaths, assisting in the marriage of an orphan girl, remarriage of a separated woman, prevention of child marriage and dealing with sexual harassment, to mention a few examples. It was also found that it was more common for groups with members of a relatively high socio-economic status (economic wealth and caste) than for the very poor, scheduled castes and tribes, to be active in addressing social justice issues.\(^{171}\) In general, the conduct in addressing these issues involved a participation by the entire self-help-group, who deal with the issues publicly. These public actions were most common in areas where there had been support from NGOs and government programmes.


\(^{169}\) Ganugly S. and Devota N., p. 70.


\(^{171}\) Sinha, F. et al., p. 76.
which promote ideas of how to face issues with a third party, and in villages with a large number of established self-help-groups. The protests involved at least three or more groups.  

Issues within the household are traditionally viewed as a private affair, and since the custom requires them to live with their in-laws, individual women do not have much of a chance by themselves of dealing with discriminatory behaviour. Turning “family matters” into issues which can be dealt with in public, by involving the self-help-groups, has the potential to alter how families and society react to, for example, domestic violence. Thus, the active demonstration of self-help-groups has a potential for initiating wider impacts. Not all the actions taken by the self-help-groups have given a fair and just result and there are cases in which courses of action have been counterproductive. In a case where a woman was raped, the implemented solution was for the victim to marry the perpetrator, because in accordance with Hindu tradition the reputation of the woman would otherwise be at stake. Therefore, not all the activities carried out by the women’s groups will benefit the situation of women at large and can have negative effects.

There are records of women in self-help-groups coming together and taking action on issues which concern entire villages and communities in attempts to improve the local services and community infrastructure, in the planning and management of resources and in managing group enterprises and contracts. Most actions were initiated by a member or a group of members and were mainly one-off matters involving a campaign, a petition, and a contribution. These actions were carried through by more than one self-help-group in the villages and also by non-members. In half the cases, out of 108 reported, the outcome could be considered a success. About 36 percent of the cases had only partial success and the rest failed. Many of the anti drinking campaigns had only a partial success, because when self-help-groups managed to close down a local distributor of alcohol, the supply and demand shifted to the nearest village instead.

In most of the cases, a petition, a rally or a demonstration came about from issues raised at the larger institutional network meetings, which gather self-help-groups. These issues were then carried out by at least 3 to 4 self-help-groups, or more, in the villages. Many of the ideas came from officers employed by the larger institutional framework, which is built around the self-help-groups. Within self-help-groups organised under the legal MACS entity, this would constitute the

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172 Going together to a man’s house, going to the police station, initiating a legal case or bringing disputing parties together for resolving the dispute. (Sinha, F. et al., p. 77.)
173 Sinha, F. et al., p. 78.
174 C.f. Sinha, F. et al., p. 80.
175 Examples on these issues are: instalment of water lines, deposits for a new school, improving the health service, village road instalment, housing issues, pension schemes, construction of a community hall and a school building. Sinha, F. et al., p. 86.
176 Sinha, F. et al., 87.
framework (MACS). Subsequently, support from the village leaders was sought out in order to legitimize the actions.\footnote{C.f. Sinha, F. et al., p. 88.}

### 6.1.6 Analysis and summary of political contextualisation

The contextualisation shows that not many self-help-groups come together to address issues of social injustice. However, once the issues have been initiated, they have a potential for changing the way in which local norms force women to certain behaviour. An example of such change can be seen in domestic violence, because when the issues are brought out in the open the perpetrators cannot get away with claiming that it is a “private” matter. As with the initiation of issues with wider impacts, issues of social inequality are more likely to be raised if someone from the larger institutional network has taken a leading role in guiding the self-help-groups in the matter. Being able to raise such issues also required not only support from three or more self-help-groups, but also the consent of the village group leaders. Some of the social justice issues raised have shown to have counter-productive impacts.

### 6.2 Participation in the local government electorate

This section is used to highlight whether economic empowerment and the self-help-groups act as a catalytic factor in the deepening of communal life. If there is a connection, the women who are members of a credit scheme should as a result of this affiliation be striving to enhance the political, economic and social situation of women. This chapter explores the possibility of self-help-groups to influence and enhance the engagement of women in local politics. It has been suggested that the regular meetings of the self-help-groups have given the village women not only more visibility, but also experience of democratic processes that can prepare them for public actions\footnote{C.f. Sinha, F. et al., p. 57.}. \footnote{Interviews no. 2, 3, 4, 10, and 12}

From the interviews, it has been possible to distinguish two groups of women; 1) Women who did not contest in the elections. 2) Women who have been elected members of the Panchayat Raj, together with members who have participated in the elections but have not been elected. In both groups, there were women active in political parties.

#### 6.2.1 The women who did not contest in the elections

The women who had not contested in the election for the local government council gave some enlightening reasons for why they did not want to take part; lack of money and time being the most common answers\footnote{Interviews no. 2, 3, 4, 10, and 12}. In this group, it was also common to support a husband, a male
cousin, a male caste member or a male friend in the elections\textsuperscript{180}. If the results are compared with the analytical groups presented in the economic section, the women who did not contest are most strongly represented in groups with little or no decision making. In contrast, the women who did stand up in the election are in the majority over those who did not, in groups with more pronounced decision-making and achievements.\textsuperscript{181}

Almost unanimously, the women who did not contest in the elections claimed that they did not discuss whom to support in a village council election during meetings of the self-help-groups. They believed that it is not worth sacrificing time discussing anything else than economic problems, which they felt have a higher priority.\textsuperscript{182} It has been suggested in the political contextualisation, as with the case of Uma Sethi, and in the economic chapters, that engaging successfully in either business or in politics requires a specialisation on one trade. For the self-help-groups, this specialisation has the consequence of women’s issues losing their attention. The focus on becoming entrepreneurs seems to have a negative effect on engagement in the election. The empirical findings do not completely match the hypothesis that the self-help-group deepens the cooperative spirit of the women’s group members and their engagement in social and community issues.

A handful of interviewees were afraid of contesting, because they were concerned that they would come into conflict with the caste elders, that women in the self-help-group would turn against them, that other parties would create “problems” or that other people would think badly of them\textsuperscript{183}. This is perhaps an example of structural disempowerment, because the efforts to enhance the individual and family income have not had effects on the ability of women to openly face social inequalities. A colourful example of the reluctance of these members to compete would be the case of “Vennela”, who was an entrepreneur within cotton and Vedic-leaf-cards production:

“Vennela had been active on the local scene dealing with marital issues and also demanding old age pensions for the elderly. She has therefore built a reputation for herself in the community which she lives in. Because of her eagerness to develop the general economic position of the scheduled castes (the Dalits) she has also made a lot of enemies among the village landlords and the village elders, who see the economic uprising of the scheduled castes as a threat to their high position within the rural economy. Therefore, she is not comfortable in competing because she expects social repercussions if she does.”\textsuperscript{184}

\textsuperscript{180} Interviews no. 8, 12, 13 and 15.
\textsuperscript{181} Interviews no. 1-16. (See Appendix, table 9.6.1)
\textsuperscript{182} Interviews no. 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, and 13
\textsuperscript{183} Interviews no. 3, 5, 8 and 14.
\textsuperscript{184} Interview no. 14.
It is easier to understand Vennela’s choice of not engaging in politics if we consider how caste relations between the Dalits and the upper castes have been acted out in the past. Any action which signals change in the village status quo concerning economic, political or social issues, might jeopardize the hold of the upper castes on the lower castes and may result in severe repercussions. There are cases in which a Dalit spokesperson has demanded land, increased wages or political rights, and as a result of this action, a whole community has been socially punished by the upper castes. The punishments have included not allowing the Dalits to enter their lands, to get wood, to buy goods from the upper caste’s stores or to fetch water from wells adjacent to upper caste’s land. In the worst case scenario, women might be physically violated and raped by upper caste men.185

There was also a woman who had a profound interest in political matters, but who did not want to contest, because she thought that she already had platforms from which she could support the development of the community and the situation of women within the community. This example shows that there were also women with an interest in politics who found other ways of expressing their will to change their society:

“Gangabhavari” is a self-help-group leader and also a representative in MACS, where she is involved in negotiating for credit, managerial skills and services for their members. She is also engaged in developing the infrastructure of MACS in order to make it more effective, which will in the end lead to more loans for their members. She has been involved in establishing a pensions program and basic computer training for members. Apart from this involvement in MACS, she is an active member of the local CPM-party and the MW-foundation. In the CPM, she has been involved in a campaign for increasing the level of wages for her community. For the MW-foundation, she has sold seeds, grains and chilli-powder in order to raise money for securing rights of children and women. On the behalf of MW-foundation, she has also been active in programs of giving nurses’ training, planting trees and training people in the methods of campaigning. She did not want to contest in the elections because she already had a number of commissions of trust and projects to support.186

The case of Gangabhavari shows that women who have higher positions in the federated infrastructure can be strengthened in taking an active part in local politics. However, her contribution to changing livelihoods lies foremost within the federated structure of the self-help-group members.

185 Narula, S., Broken people - Caste violence against India’s untouchables, p. 29f.
186 Interview no. 11.
6.2.2 The women who contested in the Panchayat elections

All the self-help-group members who contested in the election for the Panchayat, regardless of whether they were elected or not, had prior to competing to become a ward member been active in community issues, a political party, or a community affiliation and/or had held a commission of trust\textsuperscript{187}. The members who contested and became elected were all represented in the group in which the women had the most influence over their economic assets and had different marital situations\textsuperscript{188}. The members who contested in the Panchayat elections, but did not get elected, received support from in the form of votes in the election, though this was the only support which was offered for the Panchayat elections\textsuperscript{189}. Instead of self-help-groups pushing their members forward, it is more the case that the members themselves are interested in community issues and politics, which will be illustrated by the following statements:

“Lakshmi” and her husband are members of the Congress party and also well known community profiles, because her husband initiated and organised a rally for constructing a road for their community, in which her self-help-group and about 10 to 15 households took part. She wanted to become a ward member in order to secure more investments for her community, which could bring more jobs to them. The-self-help-group had voted for her because she had a good reputation, but despite this support she did not get elected.\textsuperscript{190}

“Regorty” holds a commission of trust as Mandal secretary in the Telugu Desam Party. As a secretary, she keeps records of attendance and records of the issues that have been brought up and discussed during a meeting. Her neighbours of the same caste, who are also active in the TDP, inspired her to contest because they thought she had the right leadership qualifications for becoming a ward member. She had at the time acquired skills during 10 years of membership in the TDP (8 years in the S-H-G). Her self-help-group supported her in the election, but she did not get elected.\textsuperscript{191}

Both Lakshmi and Regorty, had connections outside the self-help-group from which they drew their support. They had also gained experience from their political memberships, which had strengthened their resolve to contest. Thus, the self-help-group had not supported their political activities prior to the elections, but it did support its members in the elections. This indicates that the groups have the potential to function as vote banks.

\textsuperscript{187} Interviews no. 1, 6, 9 and 16.
\textsuperscript{188} Interviews no. 1 and 9.
\textsuperscript{189} Interviews no. 6 and 16.
\textsuperscript{190} Interview no. 6.
\textsuperscript{191} Interview no. 16.
“Sri Devi” was elected a ward member in 2006 and had in similarity with Lakshmi and Regorty before contesting and before becoming a member of the self-help-group, engagements in the civil society. Sri Devi had previously, with some other self-help-group members, helped a youth club with community protests and rallies. She also received the same kind of support from the self-help-group in the election, since all the members voted for her. It is therefore not conclusive which factors made her more interesting for the voters than Lakshmi and Regorty.

The difference between the interviewed Sarpanch, “Pragat”, and the other women who contested, is that her situation changed when her husband passed away and that she received a lot of support from the self-help-group, which can help to explain her political success:

“When ‘Pragat’s’ husband passed away she started thinking about women’s rights because she was now on her own and had to face issues that her husband used to take care of. During this period, she also started talking to families with marital problems and solving these. She started this engagement because she had experienced that women are usually more negatively affected when families run into problems this being a consequence of their lesser social status. When she later joined the self-help-group, she felt it had given a positive change in her and the other members’ confidence, in discussing women’s issues. She also believes that they, through the self-help group, have gained an opportunity to solve problems on their own, instead of going to a husband or a mother-in-law. The self-help-group has influenced and inspired her to become the Sarpanch because they discussed issues concerning women and elections in the group. They helped out with the campaign and the other women ultimately supported her campaign. Before and during the election she received a great deal of criticism and harassment from men who did not want her to participate. She was treated badly even though she already had earned a name for herself within the Telugu Desam Party, by supporting development issues and by helping couples with marital problems. Since she had support from the self-help group, she largely ignored their comments. As a Sarpanch, she is engaged in targeting empowerment issues with female students in 7th to 10th class and also in working with an education about women’s empowerment for school headmasters.”

The women who contested in the Panchayat all had political, civil society and caste connections outside the self-help-group which were crucial for their participation in the elections. The memberships in, for example, political parties also gave experiences and qualities to the women which were needed in order to compete. These findings of political connections and

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192 In October 2003, two sons of upper caste politicians destroyed the village Ambedkar statue, which mobilised the local scheduled castes. (Interview no. 1). B. R. Ambedkar is a symbol for the Dalit struggle against the atrocities of the upper castes. He was himself a Dalit who endured hardships during his lifetime. Even though he had been in precarious situations, he became one of the highest educated men in Indian history and his experiences enabled him to be the chairman of the constitution drafting committee. Thus, he had an ultimate say in the construction of the Indian constitution. (Omvedt, Gail, *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*)

193 Interview no. 9.
process experience are in line with what was found in a previous study and which was outlined in the political context. Contrary to what was found in the other study, that political and family connections are more important for the success in an election than the support of the self-help-group, the case of Pragat showed the support of the self-help-group to be at least as important in explaining her success. Without the self-help-group, she would not have had a forum for developing the women’s issues that she was interested in and she would possibly not either have received the support to persevere throughout the competitive election.

6.2.3 Analysis and summary of participation in the local government electorate

A majority of the interviewed women are not willing to take part in the local elections for reasons such as: they are afraid of becoming outcasts, they are afraid of becoming physically assaulted, lack of money or lack of time. If one considers the case of Vennela it is possible to argue that, the activities with the self-help-group have not helped a politically interested person to be able to participate (providing support, knowledge, etc) in the formal political forum. However, if one also has the case of Gangabhavari in mind, and compares it with Vennela, it is possible to see that perhaps self-help-groups can open up a “non-political” arena (as with the representation in MACS), which with the expansion of microfinance can still will have some political relevance in the long run.

As for the contesting members, the connections outside of the self-help-group seem to have provided them with the qualities needed to take part in an election, or at best be elected to hold an office. In most of these cases, the self-help-group facilitated in the role as a vote bank, but did not necessarily have anything to do with promoting their “own” member to the Panchayat.

The case of Pragat shows that the self-help-group can, however, provide their members with (moral-, knowledge-) support with which to compete for the Panhayat. Her precarious situation after her husband’s death perhaps forced her to deal with women’s issues, which should be seen as a step towards empowerment. Even if she is a strong individual who had started to tackle women’s issues, it is most likely that the support from the group facilitated this by acting as a resource for withstanding the verbal attacks of those who disapproved of her running for office.

Unsupported, lower caste women are not able to compete on the same terms as men in elections. This is disempowering because individuals who would like to see their interests be represented cannot without representation influence decisions of consequences for themselves or for their group. When groups do offer support, there are signs of empowering achievements.
6.3 Participation in voting

If empowerment is occurring, in accordance with the definition of Kabeer, and if this empowerment is followed by a deepened democratization process with more engaged and active self-help-group members, as the Nobel Prize proclaimed, this active engagement should spill over to the entire democratic structure, including voting behaviour. It is interesting from this point of view to see whether the active voting behaviour of one or more individuals has made the self-help-groups more inclined to take an interest in voting and in politics, and in doing so increased their awareness of the decision making that takes place over their votes. In order to “measure” the empowerment process, the difference between voting independently and votes affected by a husband has been used to indicate whether a decision on whom to vote, has been reached on individual terms or not.

It was also investigated whether there were any similarities between the different analytical groups (income and decision making) and the voting behaviour, such a match could indicate a relationship between economic empowerment and the deepening of democracy. If a woman experiences a positive relationship between getting a loan, decision making and voting independently, it could be argued that this is indicative of an empowerment and a wider impact process.

6.3.1 The voting behaviour of self-help-group members

The interviewed self-help-group members were asked about their voting behaviour in the last elections for the national parliament, and at the state, district and local levels; did they vote, on what did they vote, and who and what decided on what they voted, to mention a few questions. The voting behaviour is summarised in table 9.7.1 in the appendix.

Eight of the sixteen interviewed women stated that their votes were based either on the influence of the husband or on the decision of their husband. Six of the members voted independently, because they either liked the values of the party and/or because they wanted a local branch of a national party to develop the local community. Two of the respondents’ voting behaviour was not available because they chose not to contribute to this particular part of the interview.194

Some of the women hold commissions of trust, such as the Mandal President chairman, ASP board of directors, self-help-group leader (MACS), ward member, Telegu Decsam Party (TDP) Mandal secretary and TDP education committee chairmanship. It was more common for these women to vote independently than for women who did not hold such an office.195

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194 Interviews no. 1-16.
195 Interviews no. 1, 5, 9, 11, 12 and 16.
knowledge about how a democratic process functions probably gives more incentive for thinking in terms of voting and being represented by the elections.

In the economic section, the self-help-group members were divided into four analytical categories, in which the women’s relationship to income was the basis for this division. When the voting behaviour was arranged according to these categories, the pattern showed a clear relationship between having an income and making important decisions about voting independently. All the women in the group with other marital and economic situations had voted independently, and in the groups in which women shared the businesses and both contributed to important decisions two women said that they had voted independently. Among the women who did not have any incomes, there was one woman who had voted independently. Interestingly, she was also the only woman who had temporarily small incomes from labour work. The results indicate that active decision making in other matters has the possibility to spill over to voting. It seems that the income gained from the activities enabled by the self-help-group had influenced this behaviour. It is therefore possible to conclude that “resources” gained in the self-help-groups had some influence in political achievements.

6.3.2 Influence from a third party

In a study of self-help-groups in India, it was found that these groups are emerging as a factor in local politics by acting as potential vote banks. This development was most accentuated in Andhra Pradesh, due to the large number of self-help-groups in every village. This substantial spread of the microfinance network gives the political parties a “natural” rallying point to start their elections from. During elections, local supporters of the political parties interact closely with self-help-group members and leaders, and self-help-group members are brought in large numbers to political meetings organised by the government. The motivation and pressure political parties put on self-help-groups is the distribution of money in exchange for their support in the elections. The groups have understood the political game and in turn demand funds and benefits. Hopefully, the effect of these attempts of active voting recruitment by the political parties will be that local women use the self-help-groups as a voice, which now has a greater likelihood of being heard at a higher level. A stronger voice can be helpful in seeking support in issues that benefit women.

The women in this study have also had visits from contesting candidates and from the Panchayati Raj during elections. These candidates have given promises to construct or establish roads, temples, old-age-pensions and drinking water, and in some cases offered money for their

196 See chpt. 5.3, p. 35.
197 Interviews no. 1-16.
198 Sinha, F. et al., p. 67.
votes. Unanimously, the interviews reveal that the promised implementations have been forgotten as soon as the elections were over and the parties had received the votes.\textsuperscript{199} Most self-help-groups had not discussed on whom to vote, nor to raise an issue with these candidates to any greater extent, even if they had visits from political candidates.\textsuperscript{200} In the few cases where self-help-groups have discussed voting, they were either visited by politicians or had a member who had voted independently.\textsuperscript{201} Therefore, the deepening of communal life is not a trait of the analysed cases.

6.3.3 Analysis and summary of participation in voting

It has been shown that there is a link between exercising decision-making over resources and making an independent vote, and therefore it could be said that the activities of self-help-groups and microfinance have the ability to empower the women and to deepen the level of democracy. However, since this link was strongest among the members with a special marital and economic situation, microfinance perhaps only has partially affects whether women vote independently. Something that supports this argument is that the members who voted independently also had commissions of trust and links to political parties.

The self-help-groups do to some extent work as vote banks for political parties, because they parties visit the groups during elections in order to attract potential voters. On the other hand, the members do not encourage each other to discuss issues related to voting and the importance of voting independently, and thus the effects on individual voting behaviour are most likely small. Due to the inaction of not taking an interest in voting, there is a lack of achievements in some groups. If self-help-groups do not all show an increasing ability and willingness to discuss political matters, is there really a strong connection between economic empowerment and the role for these groups as the cement binding together communal impacts? The democratic effects of the self-help-groups are most likely small, even if there are some effects, as has been discussed.

6.4 Mobilization on local issues

In this section, the purpose is to discuss whether the activities of self-help-groups have produced wider impacts on the society, and if this can be seen as a result of more engaged and active self-help-group members. Wider impacts denote changes which affect a larger section of a community, and not impacts at the level of the household. The definition of what wider impacts are and are not has guided the formation of the examples in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{199} Interviews no. 6, 9, 13, 14 and 15.
\textsuperscript{200} Interviews no. 1-16.
\textsuperscript{201} Interviews no. 12 and 14.
The individual interviews (no. 1-16) and the interviews made with the self-help-groups (no 17-22) constitute the basis of this segment. In four interviews, this particular area was not covered and should be considered as excluded.\textsuperscript{202}

6.4.1 Self-help-groups which had not raised social justice or community issues

In five cases, it was reported that the self-help-groups had not brought up any social justice or community issues and the reasons for this varied.\textsuperscript{203} In four of the cases, it was claimed that the self-help-groups had not discussed anything else than how to obtain loans and they attend exclusively to their own businesses and do not discuss community or women’s issues.\textsuperscript{204} In three cases, the interviewees assumed that the reason for them not bringing up these issues was that they had no interest in them or that they had thought about them, even though these are issues worth addressing.\textsuperscript{205} In the interview with “Saisvawami”, it was discovered that some of the self-help-group members had participated at a Mandal meeting promoted by the government, where several villages discussed investing in centralised storage facilities, bore wells and other issues. However, the members did not initiate a rally or petition as a result of this experience.\textsuperscript{206} In the fifth case, there was already a strong community body established for handling issues at this level, which was probably the reason for the self-help-group being inactive:

“\textit{Pusupa}, and her fellow group members only resolve issues within their own caste, which holds frequent meetings in the village. These meetings are held quarterly and if caste members do not attend these meetings they are be penalised and have to pay fines (Rs 500 to 1000) to the organisers, the village elders. In the worst case scenario they could be excluded from the caste. In these meetings, they handle issues of caste interest, for example, marriage dowries, the permission to marry a member of the community and very rarely, possible inter-caste marriages."\textsuperscript{207}

The cases in which the members are not willing to be engaged in community or social justice issues, but are more interested in focusing on their individual businesses, could be viewed as what Kabeer denotes as \textit{absence of wider impacts}.\textsuperscript{208} She found that a microfinance institution had managed in supplying credit and ensuring that the repayments of the loans were made, but that it had not focused on social mobilisation, which had the effect that financial imperatives had the

\textsuperscript{202} Interviews no. 1, 5, 7 and 8.
\textsuperscript{203} Interviews no. 2, 3, 4, 12 and 13.
\textsuperscript{204} Interviews no. 2, 4, 12 and 13
\textsuperscript{205} Interviews no. 4, 12 and 13.
\textsuperscript{206} Interview no. 2.
\textsuperscript{207} The dowry system is forbidden according to Indian law. The caste meetings should be seen as a continued injustice towards women. They have to bear the social repercussions and their families the economic repercussions if the dowry does not satisfy the husband and his family (C.f. Interview no. 3).
\textsuperscript{208} C.f. Chpt. "Complementary approach to wider impacts".
strongest induced effect. This has probably happened in these self-help-groups. Another possible explanation for the absence of wider impacts was the existence of other local formations which had the exclusive mandate to determine the local issues that could be brought up. If we consider the perceptions of the proper female and male spheres, women are more confined to the household than men, and this is likely to affect the level of participation in community action.

6.4.2 Self-help-groups which had raised social justice and community issues

Issues which have been addressed, by 11 self-help-groups, were of the following kinds: Social justice issues - preventing physical assaults on women, demanding better working conditions for agricultural labourers, educating students and headmasters in women’s issues, informing women about marriage, dowry and status issues, resolving family and marital issues, cooking and providing food for starving children, teaching illiterates how to sign their names and helping protesters out of prison. Community issues - protesting against the government’s support of commercial farmers, covering the medical expenses of non-members through loans, preventing husbands from drinking, fighting for a centralised supply of water, constructing an irrigation system, producing petitions for the instalment of streetlights and for the centralised supply of gas, dispersing information about and preventing the spread of Dengue fever to spread and fighting for the construction of roads.

The self-help-groups engaged in various methods in order to achieve their goals: writing petitions, rallies, protests, gathering a whole community around an issue, approaching the Panchayati Raj, approaching family-members and organising other self-help-groups and youths groups around an issue. Some of the groups were more active in raising issues and the characteristic feature of these groups was that they had active members who themselves brought up issues, either from their political base or from their interest in the issues. Vennela, a woman from the income group with the most decision making, is an example of this. She has single-handedly taught the scheduled caste in her village how to write their names and started new groups in other villages. She and her self-help-group confronted the Panchayat to put a ban on alcohol, but there was no success.

The activities of self-help-groups can have significant impacts on the way that their community functions and on the way people address certain issues. In one case, the self-help-group, women’s groups and youth groups have come together to construct an irrigation system in order to be able to cultivate the land and manage the water in the rainy season. From this, a whole community

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209 Interviews no. 6, 9-11, 14-16, 18 (S-H-G) and 20 (S-H-G).
210 Interviews no. 6, 9-11, 14-16, 18 (S-H-G) and 20 (S-H-G).
211 Interviews no. 9, 11, 14 and 20.
212 Interview no. 14.
situated in a valley has benefited with an expansion of agriculture and a growing number of trees.\textsuperscript{213} Another example of these major impacts can also be shown by the role the self-help-groups can play in a crisis. When Dengue-fever spread in their village, the Sarpanch organised the women’s self-help-groups in order to supply information and to carry out disease-prevention’s work, in order to tackle the spread of the disease\textsuperscript{214}. Thus, the group has facilitated the spread of information between grassroots and the polity-legal institutions. The flow of information has increased in the society. Studies have shown that domestic violence and alcohol abuse by husbands have decreased due to the activities of self-help-groups in villages, because they have changed the boundaries of what can be considered private matters and what is under the scrutiny of the public\textsuperscript{215}. An example of the reduction of domestic violence was found in this study:

"The group has given attention to cases in which a wife has been beaten by the husband and the in-laws. They then go there and offer advice to the woman and the other involved parties. They believe that forming the self-help-group has given them the courage to face these difficult issues. Before the group was formed, the physically violated wife would go to her mother or mother-in-law and cry out, but nothing more happened; now the person behind the beatings has to face public humiliation. Physical assaults on women have diminished in the village.\textsuperscript{216}

In this section Kabeer’s analytical tools for wider impacts have been used\textsuperscript{217}. The participation in collective action has been due to the interest of some members in approaching political issues and in being the inspiration for the activities. Some groups are more active than others because of the activities provided by a handful of members, who with the knowledge and motivation to address issues are the driving forces behind these activities. A major positive effect that the establishment of self-help-groups has brought is the role that they can play in a crisis situation. One effect is to provide information to society in order to raise preventive measures, such as for stopping the spread of Dengue fever. At other times, self-help-groups who organise around structural issues, as with the watershed, can have important economic impacts for the greater society. The decreases in marital beatings in this study and in other studies also support the view that self-help-groups have had wider impacts within the household, because they change or have the potential to change how the public view private matters. When husbands or in-laws get are disgraced in public by self-help-groups for using physical violence against women, they will receive unwanted attention, which has changed their behaviour. There were also effects on non-members, because a

\textsuperscript{213} Interview no. 15.
\textsuperscript{214} Interview no. 20 (S-H-G).
\textsuperscript{215} Kabeer, N. (1b), p. 110 and Sinha, F. et al., p. 78.
\textsuperscript{216} Interview no. 20 (S-H-G).
\textsuperscript{217} Chpt."Complementary approach to wider impacts".
women’s group offered loans for non-members in order for them to cover for hospital or medical expenses. No indication was found of the wider institutional network supporting and mobilising such issues in these villages.

6.4.3 Analysis and summary of mobilization on local issues

The activities of self-help-groups have had significant impacts for the greater society in which they are active. Thus there are many cases in which wider impacts have taken place. If the results in this chapter are compared with the results of the previous chapters in the political sphere, there is a connection between increased income and agency, more motivated self-help-group members, and actions taken by the group for the benefit of the whole community.

In cases in which issues were raised, groups came together, which is a sign of deepened trust and cooperation, as it was stated in the hypothesis. It has been suggested that this gathering around local issues is due to key members who have the ability and knowledge to do so. For these individuals, self-help-groups are forums for empowerment because they are gaining experience and assertiveness in addressing issues. Communities which reap the benefit of active groups can gain positive wider impacts. Fellow members and non-members have, in the long run, the possibility of empowering themselves due to these activities.

The dual roles of being a profitable economic actor and being a political animal are to some extent conflicting. Not all actors have an interest in taking a stand for better political, social and economic opportunities for the whole community and are better at focusing on their own role. On the other hand, there are cases where strong individuals with the support of the self-help-group manage to become successful on both turfs. There might also be institutional constraints which hinder the development of women’s groups as active players on the local arena, such as caste formations and norms about the domesticity of women.
7. Conclusions

The results from the empirical study have shown that some women can be empowered by organising in self-help-groups with the possibilities of managing loans and savings. The signs of empowerment are increased mobility, decision making, gained knowledge of economic and social situations (having the courage to face officials), voting independently and contesting in elections. Only some women enjoy these newly gained freedoms because the results are only partially dependent upon the self-help-group. Other factors which have influenced the results are socio-economic status, the independent of individuals and family affiliations and connections. Due to this partial influence on women’s lives, the activities of self-help-groups and the federated support structure are also having the potential to disempower women. Women who already have a weak position have been shown to be in a worse situation when they have the pressure from their families to bring in loans in their names. Women might also endure harder pressure from working more to maintain their families, at the same time as running a business and making repayments. Even if some women have started to perceive themselves differently, society still views women in a traditional manner as associated with the domestic room, which clearly is a constraint to empowerment.

If the group were to be acting as the point from which cooperation, trust and coordinated actions to improve women’s lives is emanating, an immense flow of information would be expected. A flow of market information and ideas was found in some cases, but this was far from being all encompassing. The women or their families focused on their own businesses, rather than sharing and passing on information on how to improve other businesses within the self-help-group. The groups had neither started engaging in politics (they had not promoted their own candidate) nor discussed among themselves which parties or persons to vote for in order to promote women’s issues. If one of the members did run in an election or was harassed, the groups did however support this person by giving moral or voting support. Thus, it seems that the group does not in every instance function as a concerted tool for the deepening of democratic and social institutions, because the effects of agency and resources are not as strong as expected. There is however a link between empowerment and the duration of membership, even if it is not an all encompassing one. If this link is contrasted with the findings, the achievements are perhaps more subtle and less intense than expected.

There are many examples of how self-help-groups have supported the development of women’s issues, the economy and the flow of information in the village. These activities cannot
have taken place if there were no effects flowing from the self-help-groups as a means for the deepening of community life. Thus, there is a connection between economic empowerment and wider impacts, although this relationship is not as strong, automatic or linear as proclaimed by proponents for microfinance as a working alternative. The hypothesis is therefore not entirely falsified.

Results from the political sphere shows that women’s groups are more involved in solving community issues than in taking part in the formal elections for the Panchayat. This is perhaps because women’s groups are better at addressing informal issues. Traditionally, women have been excluded from parliamentary seats and if they did enter they were treated as proxy candidates with limited influence. It is therefore likely that it is harder to take a stand in the formal democratic institutions, since they are governed by men. Women’s groups are therefore more effective in addressing practical matters, with impacts for the greater good of all members of a community. If they can draw the support of leaders in the Panchayat, they have an easier way of directly addressing issues than electing candidates, which may not have the same direct impacts.

The anticipated effects of the DWCRA-model are similar to the effects found in this study. The economic achievements are more pronounced than the political achievements. This might be because the terms for competing in the two spheres are different. To fulfil a market demand with group loans and possible help from MACS-officers is perhaps easier than being successful in an election. Women who already had some political connections did have a higher degree of participation in elections and voting. Tending to a family business might be in the short term more of an immediate need, in many cases. Another reason for finding economic empowerment effects more pronounced than political empowerment could be that the microfinance industry perceives women as sharing the same needs. Microfinance is becoming more diversified; offering education, insurance and other services to their members, but the clients are still treated as having foremost the needs of becoming economic entrepreneurs. A consequence is therefore that women with other needs and desires may feel that they are being offered a limited number of choices, with which to fulfil their personal goals.

There are empirical findings which point at tendencies for women to turn away from dealing with women’s issues, and towards dealing primarily with their businesses. This has the effect of women becoming apolitical, which makes them less able to influence decisions which have impacts on them as individuals or as a group. Solely economic compensation is of small comfort if one does not have a forum to address issues which can have economic, social and political consequences. If the federated structure (MACS), on the other hand, took an active interest in
offering, for example, legal support and encouraged women to organise around social and political issues, there would perhaps be more signs of the achievements of women.

Does the presence of the microfinance actors’, as an expansive development sector in Andhra Pradesh, crowd out other means of development? If so, does this mean that they have to take greater responsibilities in areas which have not yet been perceived as belonging to the core of microfinance?
8. References

Literature


“Microcredit in India: Microsharks – rapid expansion of Indian micro credit leads to a turf war with the government”, in *The Economist*, 19th of August 2006.


Internet sources


Interviews

Interviews no. 1 to 16: Deep interviews (about 3-4 hrs per interview) with women self-help-group members in the Ranga Reddy, Visakapathnam and Warangal districts in Andhra Pradesh, India.

Interviews no. 17 to 24: Deep interviews (about 1,5-2 hrs per interview) with women self-help-groups (2 or more) in the Ranga Reddy, Visakapathnam and Warangal districts in Andhra Pradesh, India.

Interviews no. 25 to 28: Deep interviews (about 1,5 hrs per interview) with the husbands of self-help-group women in the Ranga Reddy, Visakapathnam and Warangal districts in Andhra Pradesh, India.

Interview no. 29: Deep interview (about 2 hrs) with Dr. K. Lalita consultant in women’s issues and microfinance for Ankuram Sangamam Poram and Think Soft.
9. Appendix

9.1 The study guide of Zohir and Matin

9.1.1 Figure 1 – Wider impacts of Group Formation on Women’s Space.

9.2 Map of the areas targeted by Ankuram Sangamam Poram

Note: Map of Andhra Pradesh, India.
Source: Ankuram Sangamam Poram Ltd 2006.

9.3. Basic statistics for the economic contextualisation

9.3.1 Basic statistics for Diagram 5.1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cultivators</th>
<th>Agricultural labourers</th>
<th>Household industry workers</th>
<th>Other workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>31.1%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (IN)</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (AP)</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (AP)</td>
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<td>55.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (BI)</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (BI)</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (KE)</td>
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<td>13.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (KE)</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census India 2001, Registrar General & Census Commissioner India, [http://www.censusindia.net](http://www.censusindia.net)
9.4 Basic information about the women self-help-group members

9.4.1 Table 9.4.1 – Information about the respondents of the individual interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Int. No.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years in school</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Land</th>
<th>Years in SHG</th>
<th>Loans</th>
<th>Repaid</th>
<th>Latest loan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>i **</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rs 5,000</td>
<td>Rs 3,000</td>
<td>dec-05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>dec-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rs 10,000</td>
<td>Rs 5,000</td>
<td>jul-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>jun-06</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>okt-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0,025</td>
<td>1,5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>dec-06</td>
</tr>
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<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>m</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Rs 30,000</td>
<td>Rs 20,000</td>
<td>dec-06</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Rs 30,000</td>
<td>sep-05</td>
</tr>
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<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>All loans</td>
<td>apr-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rs 15,000</td>
<td>Rs 8,000</td>
<td>dec-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4800***</td>
<td>dec-05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10****</td>
<td>Rs 15,000</td>
<td>Rs 11,000</td>
<td>mar-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rs 300***</td>
<td>apr-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rs 70,000</td>
<td>Rs 55,000</td>
<td>nov-05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All the interviews are with females. i = illiterate, s = single, m = married and w = widow. * = Not available, ** = Husband has departed, *** = Remaining balance and **** = She has been able to participate before the age of 18 since her mother, a group leader, has been the guardian for her. Source: Interviews no. 1 to 16.

9.5 Outlining a possible relationship between duration of membership and agency

9.5.1 Table 9.5.1. Duration of membership and agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Int. No.</th>
<th>Years in SHG</th>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0to3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4to7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4to7</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>8to11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source: Interviews 1-16. : 1 = The husband is making the important decisions, 2 = Both husband and wife make important decision and 3 = The wife is making the important decisions. The results are presented as the number of respondents in each column.

9.6 The participation by self-help-group members in the Panchayat

9.6.1. Table 9.6.1 Members who did not contest, who contested and who were elected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group/Interview no.</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Length in SHG</th>
<th>Contested</th>
<th>Elected</th>
<th>Not contested</th>
<th>Commision of trust</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>G1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes TDP Mandal secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>i</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes Education committe charimanship</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>G3</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes ASP Board of directors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes S-H-G leader (MACS)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes Ward member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes Mandal president chairman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interviews no. 1-16. Notes: G1 = the husbands have the main income outside of agriculture while the women have no income, G2= the husbands and wives share businesses and incomes outside agriculture, G3 = the husbands and wives share the incomes from agriculture, G4 = women with other marital and economic situations.
9.7 Voting behaviour

9.7.1 Table 9.7.1. The women’s voting behaviour as dependent on the husband or as independent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group/Interview no.</th>
<th>Based on the husband’s decision</th>
<th>Independently</th>
<th>Commision of trust</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>TDP Mandal secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>TDPeduction comitte chairmanship</td>
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<td>G3</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>ASP Board of directors</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>S-H-G leader (MACS)</td>
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<td>G4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ward member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mandal president chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>TDP Party member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interviews no. 1-16.

Notes: * = Not available. The subject of interview no. 9 is a widow. For interview no. 1; the husband has departed but the son is now the main earner and in this case the questions were based on the relationship between the mother and the son. G1 = the husbands have the main income outside of agriculture while the women have no income, G2= the husbands and wives share businesses and incomes outside agriculture, G3 = the husbands and wives share the incomes from agriculture, G4 = women with other marital and economic situations.

9.8 Questions to the loan-taking women

Introduction

Hello, my name is Knut-Erland Berglund and I come from Uppsala University in Sweden, in northern Europe. I am here because I am very interested in micro credit and women’s issues. As members of Ankuram, I think that it would be interesting to listen to what you have to say about your livelihoods. I am doing a study with my university, Uppsala University, and Ankuram. I think that women’s issues and micro-credit are interesting areas, which I hope to work with in the future.
For these reasons, I hope you will have some time to answer my questions. Lastly, I would like to say that I am not a part of Ankuram, and that whatever you answer will not in any way effect your participation in the program. Your names and identities will be kept completely secret.

1. Personal questions and alternative variables

1.1. What is your name?
1.2. How old are you?
1.3. Are you literate? (if “yes”) How many years of education have you had?
1.4. What is your marital status (single-married/divorced/widow)?
1.5. How many children do you have?
1.6. Do you own land? Does your husband own land? (if “yes”) Size?
1.7. How long have you been in the self-help-group?
1.8. How many loans have you taken with the self-help-group?
1.9. How many loans have you been able to repay?
1.10. When did you take your latest loan?
1.11. How large was your latest loan?
1.12. From which different sources have you received credit?
1.13. Do you receive or have you received any other help from some other organization or other source than the self-help-group?
1.15. What are you planning to do with your savings?
1.16. Who is responsible for the repayments? What do you feel about that?
1.17. Where in the village do you live? Could you show me where you live?
1.18. From where do you get your water? How far do you have to go to get water?
1.19. What temple do you go to?
1.20. Have you experienced some forms of untouchability? (If “yes” please explain)

2. Mobility of female labor and increased female employment in non-traditional activities

2.1. What kind of work do you perform?
2.2. Could you please describe this work and/or business for me?
2.3. What types of income generating activities are crucial for your work, agricultural activities and/or business?
2.4. Who decides how the income generating activities (resources) should be used?
2.5. Do you receive a wage and/or do you sell produce?
2.6. How much money do you earn per day?
2.7. What do you do with the money you earn?
2.8. What kind of meaning do you receive from being active in this kind of work?
2.9. Has your involvement in the self-help-group had any influence on your work. Agricultural work and/or business?
(If “yes” on question 2.9.)
2.10. In what way, and for what reasons, do you believe the self-help-group has had an influence on your work and/or business?
(If “no” on question 2.9.)
2.11. Why do you think, and for what reasons, the self-help-group has not had an influence on your work and business?
2.12. What are your goals for the future for your work, agricultural activities and/or business?
2.13. How do you think you will achieve these goals?
2.14. Could you sometime (today, tomorrow or the next day) show me your work, agricultural work and/or business?

3. Changes in perceptions about women’s work

3.1. What kind of work would you say is typical under normal circumstances for women in your village, inside as well as outside the household?
3.2. Why do you believe that these work situations, as you previously described them, are typical for women?
3.3. What kind of work do you believe that women should and could perform?
3.4. Why do you believe that this line of work is something that women should and could perform?
3.5. What kind of work would you say is typical for men?
3.6. Why do you believe that these work situations, as you previously described them, are typical for men?
3.7. What kind of work do you believe that men should and could perform?
3.8. Why do you believe that this line of work is something that men should and could perform?
3.9. Do you think women in this village, today, have the opportunity to do men’s work if they want to?
3.10. Do you think women and men are different in running a business?
3.11. Has the self-help-group encouraged you and/or strengthened you to do work outside the household?
3.12. Has the self-help-group encouraged you and/or strengthened you to do men’s work?
3.13. Has your lifestyle changed after joining the self-help-group?

4. **Exchange of market information and ideas through women**

4.1. Do you see how you could change your current work, agricultural activities or business in any way to the better?
4.2. What do you need to make your work, agricultural activities or business better?
4.3. Have you implemented some of your ideas for making your work, agricultural activities or business better, into real actions? What did you do and how did you do it?
4.4. Have you previously had ideas of how to make things better, and what did you do with these ideas? (if not) Why have you not previously had ideas of how to make things better?
4.5. Have other people presented to you their ideas of how to make work, agricultural activities or business better, and in that case what did you do with these ideas?
4.6. Do you know somebody in the self-help-group who has implemented their ideas for making work, agricultural activities or business better? What did they do and how did they do it?
4.7. Has the self-help-group helped you to think of ways to improve your work, agricultural activities or business? Please tell me about it.
4.8. Why have you formed this self-help-group?
4.9. Is the self-help-group the solution to the problems you have or might have?

5. **Political sphere**

5.1. Do you know what civil rights you are entitled to and could you please describe some of these rights to me?
5.2. Do you think that the government protects the most important rights of the scheduled castes (the Dalits) in India?
5.3. Have you discussed certain civil rights in the self-help-group?
5.4. Do you think there are certain areas where you lack rights?
5.5. Can you think of situations where you think that you should have rights?
5.6. Have you talked to other people about enforcing the lack of rights and if so, how would you go about enforcing these?
5.7. When did you first learn about civil rights?
6. Participation in voting

6.1. Do you vote for the Lok Shaba? (MP) (if not) Why not?
6.2. For which party/person did you vote (MP)?
6.3. Do you vote for the Andhra Pradesh state assembly (MLA)? (if not) Why not?
6.4. For which party/person did you vote (MLA)?
6.5. Do you vote for the village council (Panchati Raj)? (if not) Why not?
6.6. For which party/person did you vote (Panchati Raj)?
6.7. Do you vote for MPTC and ZPTC? (if not) Why not?
6.8. For which party/person did you vote (MPTC and ZPTC)?
6.9. Who and what decides for which party/person you will vote?
6.10. Have you received some gifts or promises from the political parties in order to vote?
6.11. Have you discussed voting or/and politics in the self-help-group?

7. Participation in local government electorate (village council)

7.1. Are you a board member of the village council?
(if “yes” on question 7.1.)
7.2. Why have you contested to be a board member of the village council?
7.3. What inspired you to participate in the village council?
7.4. What do you hope to achieve by participating in the village council?
7.5. When did you first think about becoming active in the village council?
(if “no” on question 7.1.)
7.6. Have you ever contested to become a board member of the village council?
7.7. Have you supported someone you know to become a board member of the village council?
7.8. Has the self-help-group in any way inspired you to become a member of the village council?
7.9. Are you a member of a political party for local issues? (if “yes”) Please tell me about it.

8. Mobilization on local issues

8.1. Are you active in mobilizing local issues, for instance demonstrations, meetings and rallies or other forms of activities? (if “yes”) Please tell me about it.
(if “yes” on question 8.1.)
8.2. What was the purpose of forming the community interest group?
8.3. What issues have you raised in your community interest group?
8.4. What do you think this formation means for you vis-à-vis the village community?
8.5. How did you make this political formation happen?
8.6. When did you first think about becoming active with local issues?
8.7. Has the self-help-group in any way inspired or encouraged you to start a local interest group?
(if “no” on question 8.1.)
8.8. Have you thought about and discussed with others about forming a community interest group?
8.9. Why (for what reasons) have you not formed a community interest group?
8.10. Has the self-help-group discussed forming an interest group for local issues?

9.9 Questions to microfinance experts

1. Does microfinance have the ability to empower women? (If “Yes”) In what way are women empowered? (If “No”) Why are the women not empowered?
2. Are there any personal gains for the women who are participating in a Self-Help-Group? (Economic, social, political, cultural, caste and/or civil rights).
3. Are there any gains for the family, in which a woman is engaged in a Self-Help-Group? (Economic, social, political, cultural, caste and/or civil rights).
4. Are there any gains for the local societies in which S-H-Gs and microfinance organisations are active? (Economic, social, political, caste, cultural and/or civil rights).
5. Are there any gains for a greater region or a country if there are active S-H-Gs and microfinance organisations? (Economic, social, political, caste, cultural and or civil rights).
6. Is there a positive relationship between economic empowerment and the progress of democratisation in India?
7. Does the microfinance development model inflict any problems on the individual, family, local society or the country? (Economic, social, political and/or cultural).

Statements to comment on
(From the preliminary results)

1. Many women, who are involved in S-H-Gs, report that they have to work longer and harder than the men do, because they still have the sole responsibility of taking care of the household work, while they are at the same time running a small business or doing labour work. The men on the other hand can tend to their own work. How is this heavier work load helping/empowering the women?
2. It seems that not many women have gained the courage or the support to contest in local elections for becoming a ward member, a member of the Panchati Raj or for taking an
action and/or a leading role in a political party. Many women give as an explanation that they will not contest because they are afraid of getting into conflict with other women or men if they would enter into an open contest for a party. Only one woman has made a political career and this was initiated after her husband’s unfortunate death, because she then felt free to do so. Furthermore the majority of the women vote the same as their husbands’ votes. Considering this, does microfinance really contribute to the stabilization and democratization of society?

3. The men that I have interviewed believe that women are better and more efficient at household work, that women work harder, and that women have to walk longer to do their daily chores, but that men do more work in less time and that men earn more money than women do. Considering this, does microfinance have the ability of changing perceptions of gender and equalising the relationship between a man and woman?

9.10 Glossary

Caste: An endogamous status group usually associated with an occupational category occupying a specific position in a social hierarchy.

Dalits: A self-proclaimed term which means “suppressed” or “exploited people”. Other synonyms which are used in different contexts are untouchables, scheduled castes, lower castes or harijans.

Gross domestic product: (GDP) The total dollar value of all goods and services produced in a country.

Lok Shaba: (“The House of people”) The elected lower house of the Indian Parliament.

Mandal/District: An administrative unit.

Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies: (MACS) The self-help-groups legal form at the district level. These have administrative staff and representatives from the groups. The MACS function as the principal intermediary in negotiating for credit, livelihood and managerial skills and services for their members. They provide members with links with government agencies and development programmes.

Panchayati Raj: Decentralised system of government with elected representatives at the level of the village (or village cluster), blocks and district. Established through legislation in each state.
Paddy: A field where rice is grown or rice still in the husk.
Rupees: (Rs) Indian currency.
Saree: Traditional female garment.
Sarpanch: Head of the village Panchayati.
Sarpanch pati: (Derogatory) A situation in which the male relatives of an elected female Panchayat are implicitly taking the political decisions.
Self-help-group: (S-H-G) A group formed by women, who have come together in order to gain access to the services of a microfinance organisation.
Minor Field Studies-reports

SIDA:s (Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency) program, Minor Field Studies, is designed to give Swedish university students the opportunity to increase their knowledge about countries in the Third World with whom Sweden conducts development cooperation. The program is part of the internationalisation of Swedish Universities. By undertaking minor field studies, Swedish students have the chance to gain first-hand knowledge in developing countries. It is hoped that the MFS-reports will lead students to a continuing engagement and contribution to an increased understanding of aid issues in general. For further details: http://www.sida.se, http://www.programkontoret.se or http://www.mfs.nu.

The effect of microfinance on the empowerment of women and its societal consequences
– A study of women self-help-groups in Andhra Pradesh

Microfinance and micro-credit practices have become a popular means of local development. In India, their expansion has been largest in Andhra Pradesh. These practices target primarily women, who are encouraged to construct self-help-groups in order to have a social basis for raising collateral and for receiving financial services. Microfinance has been perceived by the public as inducing strong positive effects on women’s empowerment and as strengthening the democratic fibre.

From these standpoints, expansion and effects, it has been evaluated and analysed whether microfinance can empower women and if empowered women can make a difference in women’s and societal issues. Interviews were carried out in Andhra Pradesh with women active in self-help-groups, group members with political offices, whole self-help-groups, husbands of group members and microfinance consultants. The interviews were evaluated on the basis of theoretical notions of empowerment and wider impacts.

There are tendencies of self-help-groups being capable of empowering women, within the DWCRA-development model. Achievements such as geographical mobility and active decision making have been found. However there are also tendencies towards women’s disempowerment, in which women have become even more subjugated after receiving loans. From a societal point of view, the groups have in many ways improved the local communities that they are active in, but less so from formal political positions. The conclusion reached was that there is a connection between empowerment and the deepening of democracy, but this is not as linear, strong or automatic as proponents uniformly emphasize.

The study has been carried out within the framework of a master’s thesis (magisteruppsats) at the Department of Economic History, Uppsala University.