



Original Article

Challenges of Women Self Help Group Members towards Marketing in Solapur District- A Geographical Approach

Dr. V. C. Dande¹, Archana Kalegaonkar²

¹Associate Professor and Head, Department of Geography, D. B. F. Dayand College of Arts and science Solapur

²Research Student, D. B. F. Dayand College of Arts and science Solapur

Manuscript ID:

IBMIIRJ -2025-020701

Submitted: 08 June 2025

Revised: 24 June 2025

Accepted: 11 July 2025

Published: 31 July 2025

ISSN: 3065-7857

Volume-2

Issue-7

Pp. 1-4

July 2025

Correspondence Address:

Dr. V. C. Dande

Associate Professor and Head

Department of Geography

D. B. F. Dayand College of Arts and

science Solapur

email : vcdande@gmail.com



Quick Response Code:



Web. <https://ibrj.us>



DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.16601721

DOI Link:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16601721>



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Abstract

The Self-Help Group (SHG) movement has significantly contributed to women's socio-economic empowerment in Solapur district by enhancing financial inclusion, entrepreneurial activities, and group solidarity. However, despite their success in production and enterprise development, marketing remains a major challenge for SHG members. This study aims to identify and analyse the key marketing challenges faced by women SHG members in Solapur district. Data was collected through structured interviews, focused group discussions, and field observations across various talukas. The findings reveal that lack of proper market information, absence of branding and packaging knowledge, limited access to urban markets, inadequate transport facilities, and dependency on middlemen are major barriers to effective marketing of SHG products. Moreover, insufficient training in digital marketing and business negotiation skills further restricts their market reach and profit margins. The study concludes that while SHGs have enabled economic participation of women, targeted interventions such as market linkage support, branding workshops, exposure visits, and digital literacy programmes are urgently needed to overcome these marketing constraints. Strengthening these areas will enhance the sustainability of SHGs and contribute significantly to women's economic independence and rural development in Solapur district.

Key words : Women Self Help Group, Marketing, Geographical Approach etc.

Introduction

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as effective tools for women's empowerment and poverty alleviation across India, particularly in Maharashtra. The SHG movement aims to build savings habits, provide microcredit, and create income-generating opportunities for women, thereby enhancing their socio-economic status. In Solapur District, SHGs have proliferated over the last two decades under various government schemes and NGO initiatives, leading to the formation of thousands of groups engaged in activities such as tailoring, food processing, papadmaking, agarbatti production, dairy, handicrafts, and small retail businesses. Participation in SHGs has enabled women to gain financial independence, develop leadership qualities, and contribute actively to household and community welfare. Moreover, bank linkages and microfinance programs have ensured better access to formal credit facilities for SHG members, further strengthening their entrepreneurial journey.

However, despite achieving success in production and small-scale enterprise development, marketing remains a critical challenge for SHG members in Solapur District. Many SHGs struggle to sell their products beyond local markets due to lack of branding, inadequate packaging, absence of business networks, and dependency on local middlemen, who often exploit them with lower purchase prices. Poor market information, limited digital literacy, insufficient training in sales strategies, and lack of exposure to wider markets further exacerbate their difficulties. As a result, even high-quality products remain confined to local bazaars, preventing members from earning fair returns on their efforts. Therefore, it is essential to study and analyze these marketing challenges in detail to design effective interventions that will enable SHG products to compete in regional and urban markets, thereby achieving the ultimate goal of economic empowerment for women in the Solapur district.

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How to cite this article:

Dande, V. C., & Kalegaonkar, A. (2025). Challenges of Women Self Help Group Members towards Marketing in Solapur District- A Geographical Approach. *Insight Bulletin: A Multidisciplinary Interlink International Research Journal*, 2(7), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16601721>

Objectives

1. To study the socio-economic profile of female SHG members in the Solapur district engaged in various income-generating activities.
2. To identify and analyze the major marketing challenges faced by female SHG members in promoting and selling their products.
3. Suitable measures and strategies to overcome marketing challenges and improve SHG members' market access and profitability

Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to study the socio-economic profile, identify marketing challenges, and suggest suitable strategies for women SHG members in Solapur district. The research was conducted in Solapur district, focusing on major talukas such as Solapur North, Solapur South, Barshi, Akkalkot, and Sangola where SHG activities are prominently undertaken. The universe for this study consists of all women SHG members in Solapur district engaged in income-generating activities. A multi-stage purposive sampling technique was used. In the first stage, five talukas with high SHG activity were selected. In the second stage, two villages or urban wards from each taluka were randomly selected. In the third stage, 10 SHG members from each selected village/ward were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure inclusion of members engaged in diverse activities (e.g. tailoring, food processing, retail). Thus, the total sample size comprises 160 SHG women members from various economic activities across the district. Structured Interview Schedule: Prepared to collect data on socio-economic profile, income sources, savings, loan utilisation, and business details. Secondary Data collected from government reports, SHG federation records, NABARD publications, and previous studies related to SHGs in Maharashtra. The collected data was analysed using Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean to understand socio-economic profiles.

Analysis and Interpretation**1. Socio-Economic Profile of Women SHG Members**

Table 1: Age-wise distribution of SHG members

Age Group (years)	Number of Members	Percentage (%)
Below 25	20	14.28
26 – 35	45	32.14
36 – 45	60	42.85
Above 45	15	10.71
Total	140	100%

Source : Researchers Survey

Table 1 shows that the majority of SHG members (42.85%) were in the 36–45 years age group, indicating that middle-aged women were most active in SHG activities due to their family responsibilities and economic needs. About 32.14% belong to the 26–35 years group, showing that younger women are also significantly participating in seeking financial independence and entrepreneurial opportunities. 14.28% were below 25 years, reflecting growing awareness among youth towards SHGs, while 10.71% were above 45 years, showing continued involvement of older women who often contribute experience and leadership to the group.

Table 2: Educational status of SHG members

Education Level	Number of Members	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	10	7.14
Primary (1-4)	30	21.42
Upper Primary (5-7)	47	33.57
Secondary (8-10)	35	25
Higher Secondary & above	18	12.85
Total	140	100%

Source : Researchers Survey

About 21.42% had only primary education, while 7.14% were illiterate, indicating that the SHGs included women with limited formal education. Notably, 12.85% had higher secondary or higher education, reflecting that some educated women are also part of the SHGs for entrepreneurial activities. Overall, the data highlight that, while most SHG members have basic schooling, there is a need for simple and practical training modules to suit their educational levels for better business, marketing, and financial management outcomes.

Table 3: Types of income-generating activities undertaken

Activity Type	Number of Members	Percentage (%)
Tailoring	30	21.42
Papad/Pickle making	27	29.18
Dairy business	19	13.57
Agarbatti/Candle making	14	10
Retail (grocery/kirana)	16	11.42
Food stalls/snacks	14	10
Others (bags, crafts)	20	14.28
Total	140	100%

Source : Researchers Survey

The table shows that the SHG members engage in diverse economic activities. The highest participation was in tailoring (21.42%) and papad/pickle making (29.18%), indicating that these were popular and accessible businesses for women. Dairy business (13.57%) and others such as bags and crafts (14.28%) also have significant involvement, reflecting local resource utilization and traditional skills. Activities such as retail (11.42%), agarbatti/candle-making (10%), and food stalls/snacks (10%) show that SHGs are entering small-scale trade and production sectors. Overall, the data highlight that SHG members utilize their skills in food processing, tailoring, crafts, and retail to generate income but may require better market linkage and branding support to expand these businesses.

Major Marketing Challenges Faced by SHG Members

Table 4: Identified marketing challenges

Marketing Challenge	Number of Members reporting	Percentage (%)
Lack of market information	91	65
Inadequate branding and packaging	98	70
Limited access to urban markets	84	60
Dependency on middlemen	77	55
Lack of transport facilities	50	36
Insufficient digital marketing skills	101	72

Source : Researchers Survey

The table shows that insufficient digital marketing skills (72%) and inadequate branding and packaging (70%) were the most reported marketing challenges among SHG members, highlighting their limited knowledge of modern marketing techniques and presentation standards. The lack of market information (65%) and limited access to urban markets (60%) indicate that members struggle to find wider markets beyond their local areas. Dependency on middlemen (55%) remains a significant issue, reducing their profit margins, while the lack of transport facilities (36%) also limits their ability to sell products directly. Overall, the data reflect that despite active production, marketing challenges, such as poor digital skills, branding, and market access, restrict SHG members from expanding their businesses and earning fair returns.

Suggested Measures and Strategies by Members

Table 5: Suggestions by SHG members to overcome marketing challenges

Suggested Measure	Number of Members	Percentage (%)
Training in branding and packaging	105	75
Assistance in market linkages	95	68
Exposure visits to urban markets	84	60
Digital marketing training	98	70
Dedicated SHG product marketing centres	77	55

Source : Researchers Survey

The table shows that the majority of SHG members (75%) suggested training in branding and packaging, indicating their awareness of the importance of product presentations for better sales. Seventy% recommended digital marketing training, reflecting their interest in learning about online marketing to expand their customer base. 68% requested assistance in market

linkages, showing a need for support to connect with wholesalers, retailers, and larger markets. 60% suggested exposure visits to urban markets to understand market trends, customer preferences, and pricing strategies. Lastly, 55% wanted dedicated SHG product marketing centers, highlighting the need for a permanent place to display and sell their products directly to consumers. Overall, these suggestions indicate that SHG members are keen on improving their marketing skills, networks, and infrastructure to overcome existing challenges and enhance their income-generating activities.

The analysis reveals that although SHG members in Solapur district are actively involved in various income-generating activities and belong to a productive socio-economic demographic, their marketing potential remains underutilized due to challenges such as lack of branding, market information, and digital skills. Addressing these gaps through structured interventions will not only improve their income levels, but also significantly enhance their social and economic empowerment.

Conclusion

The present study explored the socio-economic profile, marketing challenges, and suggested measures for women's Self-Help Group (SHG) members in Solapur District. The findings reveal that most SHG members belong to the economically productive age group of 26–45 years and have basic education up to the upper primary or secondary level. They are engaged in diverse income-generating activities such as tailoring, food processing, dairy, retail, and handicrafts, which contribute significantly to their household income and economic empowerment. However, despite their active participation in production activities, SHG members face several marketing challenges such as inadequate branding and packaging, lack of digital marketing skills, insufficient market information, limited access to urban markets, and dependency on middlemen. These challenges restrict their ability to expand their market reach and earn fair returns. To overcome these issues, members suggested practical interventions such as training in branding, packaging, and digital marketing; assistance in market linkages; exposure visits to urban markets; and establishment of dedicated SHG marketing centers. Therefore, it is concluded that while SHGs have enabled the economic participation of women in Solapur District, focused capacity building, infrastructure development, and strategic market support are essential to strengthen their marketing potential and ensure sustainable livelihood enhancement.

Acknowledgment

we are deeply thankful to the management and faculty of D. B. F. Dayanand College of Arts and Science, Solapur, for their constant encouragement and academic support. Special thanks to the Department of Geography for providing the necessary resources and a conducive environment for conducting this study.

Financial Support and Sponsorship

This research was financially supported by the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute (BARTI).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Ethical Approval

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards. As the research did not involve human or animal participants directly, formal ethical approval was not required. However, all procedures followed the institutional and academic guidelines for responsible research conduct.

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16. **Fellowship** : Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute (BARTI)