

Female self-help groups as an alternative public service delivery mechanism in rural India

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Self-help Groups (SHGs) are an approach to community-based participatory development that has been increasingly adopted within international development practice as a platform for broader community engagement. These voluntary, membership based organizations of 10 to 20 women have been mobilized in developing regions such as India to promote government programs and local development initiatives for their perceived ability to empower participants in ways externally implemented programs cannot. This research explores the role of SHGs as an alternative public service delivery mechanism and looks at the benefits and challenges surrounding this approach. To address this, a qualitative analysis was conducted with 172 SHG members, policy makers, and key informants through focus group and individual interviews in two high-density districts in the Indian state of Kerala. The findings support the role of SHGs as an effective delivery mechanism for public services in rural communities while addressing the potential for exploitation.

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