



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Empowerment and Entrepreneurship of Rural Women-Government Initiatives

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Abstract

Empowerment of women has emerged as an important issue in recent times. Women constitute around half of the total world population and also in India. Indian women well manage both burden of work and in household front and meeting deadlines. But the situation in the rural environment is completely different where the women are still dependent. Empowerment of rural women has emerged as an important issue in the present economic scenario. The economic empowerment of rural women is being regarded these days as a very popular sign of progress for a country. The Self Help Groups (SHGs) have paved the way for economic independence of rural women. The self help groups were formed to provide micro credit facilities to rural poor women to engage them in economic activities. Economic empowerment of rural women will lead to development of family, community, society, state and nation, and also it will increase the participation of women in gross root level politics. This article deals with empowerment of rural women through entrepreneurship and the initiatives taken by the Government. "Economic empowerment of women led to development of family and community".

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INTRODUCTION

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women."

The empowerment of rural women generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life and the economic wellbeing of women living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. According to the census more than 70% of the total population belongs to rural areas. Women constitute nearly 50 per cent of population, perform two-thirds of the work and produce 50 per cent of food commodities consumed by the country. They earn one third of remuneration and own 10 per cent of the property or wealth of the country. Women are regarded as the "better half" of the society and at par with the men. But unreality, our society is still male dominated and women are not treated as equal partners both inside and outside the four walls of the house. In fact they are treated as weak and dependent on men. As such Indian women enjoy an unfavourable status in society. Especially Rural Women in India constitute 77.00 per cent of the female population They share abundant responsibility and perform a wide spectrum of duties in running the family, maintaining the house hold activities like rearing, feeding, attending to farm labour, tending domestic animals and the like, even then they suffer from being both economically and socially invisible. The objective of this paper is to analyze the role of empowerment and entrepreneurship of women in rural India through Self Help Groups and the opportunities they have for their empowerment. It is giving lawful power or authority to act, If women were empowered they would be able to participate in the planning, execution and implementation of developmental schemes in rural development. Empowerment leads to development, which further leads to greater empowerment.

Rural women and Entrepreneurship

The emergence of rural women entrepreneurship and their contribution to the national economy is quite noticeable in India. The numbers of women entrepreneurs have grown over a period of time, especially in late 90's. Women entrepreneurs need to be lauded for their increased utilization of modern technology, increased investment, finding a niche in the global market, creating an extensive employment for others and setting the trend for other women entrepreneurs in the organized sector. While women entrepreneurs have demonstrated their potential, the fact remains that they are capable of contributing much more than what they already are. Therefore women's entrepreneurship needs to be studied for two main reasons. The first reason is that women's entrepreneurship has been recognised during the last decade as an important untapped source of economic growth. Women entrepreneurs create new jobs for themselves and others and also by being different. They also provide the society with different solutions to management, organisation and business problems as well as to the exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. The second reason is that the topic of women in entrepreneurship has been largely neglected both in society in general and in the social sciences. Not only women have lower participation rates in entrepreneurship than men but they also generally choose to start and manage firms in different industries than men tend to do. Hence it is evident that women are capable of handling any kind of activity and in any industry. Entrepreneurship development among rural women helps to enhance their personal capabilities and increase decision making status in the family and society as a whole. Entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of creating incremental wealth. But the wealth can be created if the individuals are capable of taking risks in terms of time, commitment and providing value to the customers. The provision of value to the customers mainly depends on securing and allocating necessary skills and resources. To empower the women to participate in various entrepreneurial activities first they need to be financially independent and would be able to manage people, financial resources. Securing of the necessary resources would be smooth for the poor if it is done with the help of micro finance which is effective and less costly if they are organized into SHGs.

Micro credit is promoting the small scale business enterprises and its major aim is to alleviate poverty by income generating activities among rural women. Therefore they could achieve self-sufficiency. Role of Self Help Group's is to improve the social and economic development of women and give the better status to women in households and communities at large. The micro entrepreneurship is strengthening the women and removing the gender inequalities. Self Help Group's micro credit mechanism makes the members to involve in other community development activities. Now-a-days economic development is such a strong factor that has changed the entire scenario of social and cultural environment within the country especially for the women. The rural women are engaged in small scale entrepreneurship programs with the help of Self Help Groups. Through that they will be economically empowered and attaining very good status in family and community.

Opportunities for Rural Entrepreneurs:

The various initiatives taken by the Government to train the rural women on various aspects of entrepreneurship by which the women can become financially independent and start their own enterprises.

I-Training Initiatives:

1. Small Industry Service Institutes (SISI's)
2. State Financial Corporation's (SFC's)
3. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA)
4. District Industrial Centres (DIC)
5. National Small Industries Corporations (NSIC's)
6. Support for Training and Employment For Women (STEP)

II. Mahila Vikas Nidhi: SIDBI has developed this fund for the entrepreneurial development of rural women.

III. Consortium of Women Entrepreneurs of India: Which is platform to assist women through different bodies like NGO's, Self Help Groups (SHG's) to help women entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial activities like decision making, financial planning etc.,

SHGs (Self Help Groups) are promoting micro enterprise through micro-credit intervention. Micro enterprise is an effective instrument of social and economic development. SHG mainly focuses on providing both Managerial and financial assistance to the women to make them resourceful, self-sufficient and ready to start their business.

Self-Help Group (SHG) SHGs are novel and innovative organizational setup in India for the women upliftment and welfare. All women in India are given chance to join any one of SHGs for training and development, so as to be prospective entrepreneur and skilled worker. The SHGs are promoted by the Government as if women in India may not be resourceful enough to be entrepreneurs. A self-help group (SHG) is a village-based financial intermediary committee usually composed of 10-20 local women or men. A mixed group is generally not preferred. Most self-help groups are located in India, though SHGs can be found in other countries, especially in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Members make small regular savings contributions over a few months until there is enough capital

in the group to begin lending. Funds may then be lent back to the members or to others in the village for any purpose. In India, many SHGs are 'linked' to banks for the delivery of micro credit. Self-help groups are started by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that generally have broad anti-poverty agendas. Self-help groups are seen as instruments for goals including empowering women, developing leadership abilities among poor people, increasing school enrolments, and improving nutrition and the use of birth control. Financial intermediation is generally seen more as an entry point to these other goals, rather than as a primary objective. This can hinder their development as sources of village capital, as well as their efforts to aggregate locally controlled pools of capital through federation, as was historically accomplished by credit unions. A self-help group may be registered or unregistered. It typically comprises a group of micro entrepreneurs having homogeneous social and economic backgrounds; all voluntarily coming together to save regular small sums of money, mutually agreeing to contribute to a common fund and to meet their emergency needs on the basis of mutual help. They pool their resources to become financially stable, taking loans from the money collected by that group and by making everybody in that group self-employed. The group members use collective wisdom and peer pressure to ensure proper end-use of credit and timely repayment. This system eliminates the need for collateral and is closely related to that of solidarity lending, widely used by micro finance institutions to make the bookkeeping simple interest, flat interest rates are used for most loan calculations. The distinguishing features of self help groups are given below.

- i) An SHG normally consists of not less than five persons (with a maximum of twenty) of similar economic outlook and social status.
- ii) It promotes objectives like economic improvement and raising resources for development and freedom from exploitation.
- iii) It has its own by-laws for the proper functioning of the group as well as for the observance of certain rules by the group members and regulations concerning membership.
- iv) The form of such a group could be mostly on an informal basis (unregistered).
- v) Periodical meetings of members are held for solving their problems (economic and social) and they collect fixed savings of the members.
- vi) The savings of members are kept with a bank in the name of group and authorized representative of the group operates the bank account. The deposit kept in the bank is used for giving loans to members for purposes including consumption at the rate of interest decided by the group (usually higher than what the banks charge).
- vii) Sources of funds are the contribution of members savings, entrance fee, interest from loans, proceeds of joint business operation and income from investment. Funds may be used for loans, social services and common investment.

Advantages of financing through SHGs

- An economically poor individual gains strength as part of a group.
- Besides, financing through SHGs reduces transaction costs for both lenders and borrowers.
- While lenders have to handle only a single SHG account instead of a large number of small-sized individual accounts, borrowers as part of an SHG cut down expenses on travel (to and from the branch and other places) for completing paper work and on the loss of workdays in canvassing for loans.

Entrepreneurship Development of Rural Women through Self Help Groups (SHGs)

Women comprise half of human resources they have been identified as key agent of sustainable development. The contribution of women and their role in the family as well as in the economic development and social transformation are essential. Women constitute 90% of total marginal workers of the country. Rural women who are engaged in agriculture form 78% of all women in regular work. Men and the project administrators are low that determine extent to which empowerment may or may not take place. Micro credit is promoting the small scale business enterprises and its major aim is to alleviate poverty by income generating activities among rural women. Therefore they could achieve self-sufficiency. Role of Self Help Group's is to improve the social and economic development of women and give the better status to women in households and communities at large. The micro entrepreneurship is strengthening the women and removing the gender inequalities. Self Help Group's micro credit mechanism makes the members to involve in other community development activities. Now-a-days economic development is such a strong factor that has changed the entire scenario of social and cultural environment within the country especially for the women. The rural women are engaged in small scale entrepreneurship programs with the help of Self Help Groups. Through that they were economically empowered and attaining very good status in family and community. Because development of society is directly related with the income generation capacity of its members with

agriculture, as the key income generation activity the entrepreneurship on farm and home can directly affect the income of a major mass of Indian population. Entrepreneurship on small scale is the only solution to the problems of unemployment. The delivery of micro finance to the poor is smooth, effective and less expensive if they are organized into Self Help Groups. All Self Help Groups are promoting micro enterprise through micro-credit intervention.

Areas of Micro-Enterprise Development

Scope of micro-enterprise depends on number of factors from landholdings, subsidiary occupations, agro climatic conditions, political and socio-personal characteristics and family member of the rural women. It also differs from place to place. Generally, micro-enterprise development is classified into three major heads like,

1. Agriculture and allied agriculture activities, like cultivating to organic vegetables, food grains, seasonal fruits, flowers, oil seeds and seed production besides mushroom growing and bee-keeping. Some more areas can be like dehydration of fruits and vegetables, bottling or canning of pickles, chutneys, jams, squashes, dairy and other products that are ready or semi ready to eat.
2. Livestock management activities, like dairy farming, poultry farm, domestic animals feed production and production of dung cake using by animal waste can be an important area in which women can utilize both of their technical skills and raw materials from the farm and livestock to earn substantial income and small scale agro-processing units.
3. Household based operations, like knitting, stitching, weaving, embroidery, bakery flour milling, petty shops, food preparation and preservation etc.

“Micro finance cannot provide a definite answer to the challenges of poverty alleviation, but it can lead to financial inclusion by providing credit to the customer as per his/her own needs.”

-Shri Jairam Ramesh (Former Rural Development Minister)

Advantages of Entrepreneurship among Rural Women

Empowering women particularly rural women is a challenge. Micro enterprises in rural area can help to meet these challenges. Micro – enterprises not only enhance national productivity, generate employment but also help to develop economic independence, personal and social capabilities among rural women. Following are some of the personal and social capabilities, which were developed as result of taking up enterprise among rural women.

- Economic empowerment
- Improved standard of living
- Self confidence
- Enhance awareness
- Sense of achievement
- Increased social interaction
- Engaged in political activities
- Increased participation level in gram sabha meeting
- Improvement in leadership qualities
- Involvement in solving problems related to women and community
- Decision making capacity in family and community

Increased participation of women in the labour force is a prerequisite for improving the position of women in society and self-employed women. Particularly the entry of rural women in micro enterprises will be encouraged and aggravated. Rural women can do wonders by their effectual and competent involvement in entrepreneurial activities. The rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resources to establish and manage enterprise. But the necessary awareness has to be created among the rural women about the initiatives taken by the government for empowering them. Most women in rural areas lack in the basic requirements like education, encouragement and they are not involved in decision making. But their participation in the self help groups had bought a lot of change in their views. They are able to empower themselves as well as capable of managing and encouraging co women to participate actively in various activities which led to their development. Through self help groups they have learnt many skills like team work, managing the team, managing financial resources, decision making, participation in various activities and public addressing. This improvement has bought a lot of changes in the mindset of the rural people which has created a way for women empowerment and entrepreneurship.

Finally we can say that economic empowerment of women by micro entrepreneurship through self help groups led to the empowerment of women in many things such as socio-economic opportunity, property rights, political

representation, social equality, personal right, family development, market development, community development and at last the nation development.

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