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MICRO FINANCE TOWARDS GENDER EQUITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Development affects people differently in different parts of the world whether they are male or female. If women are given same access to resources and economic opportunities as men the resulting economic activity is not only good for families but makes significant contribution to community and country. Gender equity and women's empowerment are essential for inclusive growth and sustainable development and providing this leads to faster poverty reduction and accelerated progress towards attaining Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In developing countries, the growth of microfinance institutions (MFIs) which specifically target low income individuals are viewed as potentially useful for promotion of financial inclusion. With this background the paper aims at two objectives (i) how micro finance activities can lead to inclusive development & (ii) How this inclusive development can bring financial, social and economic empowerment as well as improve gender relation. The paper will be both descriptive and analytical. Both secondary and primary data are used to analyze the progress and impact of SHG's microfinance activities in the rural area. The first part of the paper provides a detailed discussion of SHGs microfinance activity in the national, state and district level followed by a case study in Dakshina Kannada district in the second part. The Findings of the study shows that SHGs through micro finance activities are changing the economic condition of women with indicators like income, saving expenditure and marketing activities showing the improvement. SHGs have created opportunities of promotion of income generation activities and enhanced empowerment of the poor. Because of SHGs large number of the women in rural areas, are not only achieving greater economic independence and security but also are gaining social benefits which lead to sustainable development.

KEYWORDS

Gender Equity, Sustainable development, SHGs, Women empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

ustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. All definitions of sustainable development require that we see the world as a system—a system that connects space; and a system that connects time. Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for inclusive and sustainable development. Gender equality needs to be pursued in its own right for a just and equal society, and for better development outcomes - inclusive growth, faster poverty reduction and accelerated progress towards Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) attainment. We recognize that without harnessing the talents, human capital and economic potential of women, India's goals of poverty reduction and sustainable development will not be met. India has made impressive strides over the last decade on narrowing gender gaps in education, health, employment and political participation. Today there are more girls in primary and secondary schools, more girls participating in tertiary education, fewer women dying in childbirth, more women in wage employment outside agriculture and more women in national parliaments and decision making bodies. But, the progress and achievements are not spread widely and evenly across the entire country.

Disparities remain in many areas. Many women are still denied access to basic services and essential assets such as land, and excluded from decision-making. Women still suffer from entrenched gender discrimination and exclusion that diminishes their life expectancy, education prospects, access to clean water, sanitation, and employment, and exposes them to gender-based violence. Empowering women economically and socially and giving them 'voice' is crucial for achieving goals of poverty reduction and inclusive development. "Equality for women is much more than only an ethical issue. A society that leaves girls and women out of the development process is one, that will never reach its full potential," – Rajat Nag, Managing Director General of ADB. Women's financial inclusion occurs when women have effective access to a range of financial products and services that cater to their multiple business and household needs and that are responsive to the socioeconomic and cultural factors that cause financial exclusion in women and men to have different characteristics. Financial inclusion, managed properly, can increase the empowerment of women in a number of ways. Firstly, having access to resources on their own account and to the tools that help them to earn a living can increase women's bargaining power within households and their influence over how money and other resources are used. Secondly, financial inclusion can help increase women's opportunities to earn an income or control assets outside the household. Thirdly, it can reduce women's vulnerability by, for example, allowing them to insure against risk or borrow to meet unexpected expenses, such as medical treatments. These are all key factors for economic empowerment and they can also help to empower women and micro finance is one such approach which leads to financial inclusive sustainable development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various studies have been conducted since many years highlighting role of SHGs on women empowerment. Several studies have been conducted by social scientist, financial institutions and agencies, which highlighted the positive trends and impact of SHGs on empowerment, credit accessibility and the social change. The researcher has tried to review the following:

Puhazhendhi and Satyasai(2001) in their paper attempted to evaluate the performance of SHGs with references to social and economic empowerment. The finding of the study revealed that SHGs as institutional arrangement could positively contribute to the economic and social empowerment of rural women and the impact on the later was more pronounced than on the former. K.C. Sharma (2001) maintained that through SHGs women empowerment is taking place, their participation in the economic activities and decision making at the household and society level is increasing and making the process of rural development participatory, democratic, sustain and independent of subsidy, thus micro-finance through SHGs is contributing to the development of rural poor. K.P.Singh (2001) conducted a study in UP comparing the pre and post SHGs situations of women empowerment. He found that the average value of the assets increased by 46.0 per cent and the annual income per household by 20.0 per cent between pre and post SHGs periods. M.S. Kallur (2001) analyzed the impact of SHGs supported by NGOs namely MYRADA on women empowerment in Karnataka. It was found that loans were taken for productive purpose, interest charged were high to cover the expenditure of the group, the new rate was high compared to formal credit and income generation is small. Jothy K and Sunder J (2002) in their study of evaluation of the programme of Tamil Nadu, Mahalir Thittan found that SHGs women are currently involved in economic activities such as production and marketing of agarbhati, candle soap, ready made garment, pickles, coir mat, leather goods etc. A study conducted by NABARD (2002) in 11 states of India elucidated that there has been a positive result in enhancing the standard of living of SHGs members in case of assets holding, savings and borrowing capacity, income generation activity and income level. The housing condition of people is improved. Pattanaik (2003) in her study reveals that SHGs are continuously striving for a better future for tribal women as participants, decision-makers and beneficiaries in the domestic, economic, social and cultural spheres of life. But due to certain constraints like gender inequality, exploitation, women torture for which various Self Help Groups are not organised properly and effectively. Malhotra (2004) in her book has examined how women entrepreneurs affect the global economy, why women start business, how women's business associations promote entrepreneurs, and to what extent women contribute to international trade. It explores potential of micro-finance programmes for empowering and employing women and also discusses the opportunities and challenges of using micro-finance to tackle the feminization of poverty.

Narasaiah (2004) in her study mentioned that the change in women's contribution to society is one of the striking phenomena of the late twentieth century. According to him micro-credit plays an important role in empowering women. Giving women the opportunity to realize their potential in all spheres of society is increasingly important. Cheston & Kuhn (2004) in their study concluded that micro-finance programmes have been very successful in reaching women. This gives micro-finance institutions an extraordinary opportunity to act intentionally to empower poor women and to minimize the potentially negative impacts some women experiences.

Manimekalai (2004) in his article commented that to run the income generating activities successfully the SHGs must get the help of NGOs. The bank officials should counsel and guide the women in selecting and implementing profitable income generating activities. He remarked that the formation of SHGs have boosted the self-image and confidence of rural women. Dutta Neelakantan (2004) in their programmes, micro finance indeed any credit based activity faces certain unusual pre and post contractual problems such as adverse selection and moral hazards, which arise due to informational asymmetric and incompetence, as well as imperfect commitment on the part of contracting parties. Sahu and Tripathy (2005) in their edited book views that 70 per cent of world's poor are women. Access to poor to banking services is important not only for poverty alleviation but also for optimizing their contribution to the growth of regional as well as the national economy. Das Gupta (2005) in his article commented that a paradigm shift is required from "financial sector reform" to "micro-finance reform". While the priority sector needs to be made lean, mandatory micro credit must be monitored rigorously. Simultaneously space and scope have to be properly designed for providing competitive environment to micro-finance services. Extensive database needs to be created by the RBI for understanding micro-finance. Sinha (2005) in his study has observed that micro-finance is making a significant contribution to both the savings and borrowing of the poor in the country. According to him the main use of micro-credit is for direct investment. There is of course some fungibility, depending on household credit requirements at the time of loan disbursement. Naila Kabir 2005 in her study on Micro finance has assessed the impact of micro finance on women empowerment. Micro finance offers an important and effective means to achieve change in a number of different fronts, economic, social, and political. The success of micro finance organization is building up the organizational capacity of the poor women provides the basis for their social mobilization. Singh and Pandey (2007) in their study on empowerment of scheduled caste women have highlighted that impact of Micro finance on social, economic empowerment of scheduled caste women in UP and Uttaranchal. They are of the view that SHGs based on micro finance is an instrument for overall economic empowerment of rural poor women. Prem Chander and Vanguri (2007) highlighted the impact of micro finance programmes on women empowerment in India. They compare Swashakti, Swayamsidha, Swarn Jayanthi Grammen Rozgar Yojana and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, micro finance programmes for financing poor women in their access to micro credit. Prema Ramachandran (2008) in her study on unleashing the power of SHGs the study of world's largest micro finance programme has highlighted that the SHGs create significant social impact. It is a social mobilization process of poor for economic uplift and not merely a bank loan enabler. Renu Verma (2008) in his study on micro finance and empowerment of rural women highlighted that micro finance is expected to play a significant role in poverty alleviation and rural development, micro finance programmes have in the recent past become one of the move promising ways to use scarce development funds to achieve objective of poverty alleviation. Prof. Neha Patel (2009) highlighted in her study about the history of micro finance in India and role of micro finance in regarding power. Some studies reveal that micro-finance programmes have had positive as well as negative impacts on women. Some researchers have questioned how far micro-finance benefits women (Goetz and Sen. Gupta, 1996). Some argue that micro-finance programmes divert the attention of women from other more effective strategies for empowerment (Ebdon, 1995), and the attention and the resources of donors from alternative, and possibly more effective means of alleviating poverty (Rogaly, 1996).

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The review of literature pertaining on micro finance and women empowerment simply demonstrate that there has been significant contribution of SHGs based micro finance in the social change and empowerment of the poor. SHGs either non government or government have no doubt created opportunities of promotion of income generation activities and enhanced empowerment of the poor. However most of the studied focuses on specific issues and geographical regions. There is paucity of literature and empowerment data which provide basis of analysis of the impact micro finance activities on women empowerment. Thus present study attempted to assess the impact of SHGs based micro finance activities on rural and urban women in Dakshina Kannada District.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the paper are

1. How micro finance activities can lead to inclusive development &
2. How this inclusive development can bring financial, social and economic empowerment as well as improve gender relation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present paper is both descriptive and analytical. Both secondary and primary data are used to analyze the progress and impact of SHG's microfinance activities in the rural area. The first part of the paper provides a detailed discussion of SHGs microfinance activity in the national, state and district level followed by a case study in Dakshina Kannada district in the second part. The study undertaken in the Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka State in India for an in-depth analysis of issues related to women empowerment. A total of 300 members were selected representing equally rural and urban (rural 150 and urban 150).

Apart from primary data, the researcher gathered relevant data from various sources such books, journals, reports published by the government of India and Karnataka, financial institution, articles, dailies and internet publications. To capture the empowerment of women as an impact of microfinance activities through SHGs Likert five point range technique is used and later to determine the various components of empowerment and to compare the rural and urban cases index number is used. An index is devised to measure the level of empowerment scaled by target group. In the final ranking of each component that is instrumental in empowerment, was done with the help of an index on a five-point scale (A=80, B=60, C=40, D=20, E=>20). Response from the members of the SHG's was collected through interview, and participant observation method. Ranking was done on a five-point scale based on the response. Empowerment among women members of the SHGs were analyzed in three dimensions

- Personal empowerment,
- Social empowerment and
- Economic empowerment.

Appropriate parameters of these empowerments were identified and measured.

PART I - DISCUSSION

In recent times, microfinance intervention have been increasingly seen all over the world as an effective mechanism for poverty alleviation and improving socio-economic status of rural poor. In India too, Micro finance claimed to be headway in its effort of reducing poverty and empowering rural women. Micro finance institutions in India can be broadly classified in to two categories namely, formal institutions and informal organizations - Commercial banks, Regional Rural banks, Cooperative Bank that provides micro finance services in addition to their general banking activities and are referred to as micro credit service providers. On the other hand, informal organizations include NGOs that under take microfinance services as their as main and also as their allied activities. It should be noted that SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association), a cooperative of women of petty trade groups, established in 1974 in Gujarat was the pioneer informal organization providing microfinance services. The leadership of Ms Ella Bhatt for providing banking services to the poor women employed in the unorganized sector of that region. First official interest in India took shape during 1986-87 on the initiative of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). NABARD sponsored an action research project in 1987 through an NGO called MYRADA (Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency) in Karnataka. Encouraged by the success of MYRADA, NABARD launched a pilot project in 1991-92 in the partnership with NGOs for promoting and grooming self help groups (SHGs) and making saving from existing banks and within the legal framework. Steady progress of the pilot project led to the main streaming of the

SHGs –bank Linkage programme in 1996 as a normal banking activity of the banks with widespread acceptance. In India formal financial institutions have not been able to reach the poor household and women in particular, in the unorganized sector. Structural rigidities and overheads leads to high cost of making small loans. This gave rise to the concept of micro credit for the poorest segment with a new set of credit delivery techniques. With the support from NGOs an informal sector comprising small self help groups started mobilizing savings of their members and lending resources among the members on micro scale. The potential of SHGs to develop as local financial intermediaries to reach poor has gained recognition due to their community based participatory approach and sustainability, recovery rates have been much higher than those achieved by commercial banks in spite of loans going to poor, unorganized individual without collateral security. Success stories in the neighboring countries, like Grameen banks in Bangladesh, Bank Rakyat in Indonesia, commercial and Industrial Bank in Philippines etc Gave further boost to the concept in India.

SHGs IN KARNATAKA

The history of SHGs promotion in Karnataka started with NGOs taking the lead in the mid-1980s and the lead passing on to the NABARD by the late 1980s. After the SHG-Bank linkage programme was launched in 1991-92, the very first loans to SHGs in the country were given in Kolar district of Karnataka. by the Vysya Bank Bangarpet branch to Venkateshwara mahila sangha of Muduguli on December 9 1991 and by Corporation Bank to Saraswathi Mahila Sangha on January 30 1992. NABARD up scaled the programme in Karnataka by initiating a series of measures that included training of NGOs and bank staff, convening regular meetings of all intervening agencies, analyzing report and providing feed back for changes in operational systems to make them more user friendly and launching the first RRB(regional rural bank) the Caverry Grameen bank of Mysore Districts an SHG promoting institution(1994-95). In the 1990 IFAD with World Bank collaboration, and in partnership with the government of India and six state governments including Karnataka, launched a similar programme titled Swashakti. This experience encouraged Karnataka to launch a state wide programme called Stree Shakti(women power)based on the SHGs strategy. Together the initiatives of various stakeholders, (the government, NGOs Bank) increased SHGs coverage in Karnataka significantly. At recent estimates 40295anganwadi workers (of Department of Women and Child Development) 561 NGOs 8 regional rural banks 20district central cooperative bank and 2 commercial banks are engaged in SHGs promotion. Together they are estimated to have facilitated the creation of close to 1, 95,000 SHGs in Karnataka.

OUT REACH

Today there is scarcely a village in Karnataka where an SHG has not been facilitated. The state government is the single largest SHG promoting institution. Broadly; there are three categories of institutions promoting: SHGs the Government, financial institutions and NGOs. The promoting institution plays a significant role in the way an SHG develops and functions. The Stree shakti programme anchored by the department of Women and Child Development, attempt to focus the attention of the members on curbing domestic violence against women, promoting girl child education, preventing child marriage etc. SHGs promoted by financial institutions have focused on credit provision, and investment in the institutional capacity building of SHGs. SHGs promoted by NGOs tend to promote the priorities and agenda of the NGO concerned and to reflect the organizational and financial strengths as well as weaknesses of the NGOs. However though there may be one institution taking the lead in SHG promotion in a given context, yet in most cases other institutions are brought in as the programme progresses. For example, both the government and the financial institutions tend to involve NGOs in the training of SHGs. NGOs and government encourage their groups to link with financial institutions, and NGOs learn both from the government and from the financial institutions the formal system of reporting and financial management.

SHGs MOVEMENT IN DAKSHINA KANNADA DISTRICT

Dakshina Kannada district assumes an important place in the history of micro finance SHGs of Karnataka. Ever since the SHGs bank linkage programme of NABARD launched in Karnataka state in 1992, the movement started to spread soon across the district (Jayasheela et al 2006). The response in the district for SHG movement has been quite rapid due to the presence of good physical infrastructure and literacy rate and wide spread banking network in the district. Besides, there are plenty of NGOs in the district who took boldly the steps to promote and nurture SHGs. The role of state government too cannot be ignored. As a result today Dakshina Kannada district has more than 65000 SHGs in the state. About 70.0 per cent are exclusively women SHGs and remaining are men and mixed SHGs. Promoting agencies of SHGs in the district may be classified in to four categories. (1) NGOs (2) Bank (3) Co operative (4) Government. NGOs promote 50.0 per cent of the SHGs, followed by Cooperative and Bank (RRBs) 35.0 per cent and government 15.0 per cent. Government SHGs are under SGYSY of the central government and Stree Shakti, programme of the state government SGYSY groups are limited in number and are linked with leading NGOs, in the district.

CONDITION OF WOMEN IN KARNATAKA

The condition of women in terms of income, inheritance rights and social status continued to be the matter of concern in all regions of the state. The Karnataka Government brought out Human Development Reports in the year 1999 and 2005 with an exclusive topic on women. These reports too computed Human development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) for all districts of Karnataka's close readings of these indices enable us to understand as to how women continued to be at disadvantages. The report observed the presence of wide disparities in GDI and HDI among the districts of Karnataka. Table-1 shows the HDI and GDI for the districts in the state.

TABLE-1: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (HDI) AND GENDER DEVELOPMENT INDEX (GDI) IN KARNATAKA

Sl. No.	Districts	2001 (HDI)		2001(GDI)	
		Value	Rank	Value	Rank
1	Bagalkot	0.591	22	0.571	23
2	Bangalore Rural	0.653	6	0.640	6
3	Bangalore	0.753	1	0.731	1
4	Belgaum	0.648	8	0.635	9
5	Bellary	0.617	18	0.606	17
6	Bidar	0.599	21	0.572	22
7	Bijapur	0.589	23	0.573	21
8	Chamarajnagar	0.576	25	0.557	25
9	Chicmaglore	0.647	9	0.636	8
10	Chitradurga	0.627	16	0.618	14
11	Dakshin Kannada	0.722	2	0.714	2
12	Davengere	0.635	12	0.621	13
13	Dharwad	0.642	10	0.626	11
14	Gadag	0.634	13	0.625	12
15	Gulbarga	0.564	26	0.543	26
16	Hassan	0.639	11	0.630	10
17	Haveri	0.603	20	0.596	19
18	Kadagu	0.697	4	0.690	4
19	Kollar	0.625	17	0.613	16
20	Koppal	0.582	24	0.561	24
21	Mandya	0.609	19	0.593	20
22	Mysore	0.631	14	0.605	18
23	Raichur	0.547	27	0.530	27
24	Shimoga	0.673	5	0.661	5
25	Tumkur	0.630	15	0.681	15
26	Udupi	0.714	3	0.704	3
27	UttarKannada	0.653	7	0.639	7
	Karnataka	0.650		0.637	

Source: Government of Karnataka H.D & G.D Report 2005

Table-2 indicates that the HDI for the state has increased from 0.541 in 1990 to 0.650 in 2001, showing a 20.0 per cent improvement. There are wide disparities in the level of development among the districts. The district HDI in 2001 has been found to range from 0.753 in Bangalore urban district to 0.547 in Raichur district. Both HDI (2) and GDI(2) are higher in Dakshina Kannada district compared to the state average. It is widely understood that mere provision of state sponsor facilities to enhance women condition is not sufficient because these facilities are mediated through a complex socio-economic structure which to great extent women exclusive. Micro finance activities have been growing in Karnataka over the years. Various self help groups are playing a key role in promoting micro finance activities.

MICRO FINANCE IN DAKSHINA KANNADA DISTRICT

Dakshina Kannada district is an important coastal district known for commerce, banking, education and rich cultural heritage. As we know from Human development Report of 1991 and 2005 that Dakshina Kannada district is better in terms of economic, human and gender development indicators compared to other districts of the state. In fact this may be only district where we find women heading family tradition are prevailing. The district has made spectacle improvement in all the sectors of social and economic life with rapid modernization. The movement of self help groups and the programmes of micro finance for women empowerment were enthusiastically welcomed in the region hence; the region offers an interesting site for exploring how micro finance schemes through self help groups affects women empowerment. Dakshina Kannada district is divided into five taluks. There are more 80000 Self help groups sponsored by government and non government agencies working in the district.

Empowerment through micro-credit is one of the components in the development Programmes in Dakshina Kannada of Karnataka. In the district, Non-government Organizations, Voluntary sector, Co-operative sector and the Civil Society Organizations are actively involved in the task of women empowerment through Micro-credit. These organizations have been justifying their presence in the economic development of the region on the basis of their achievements in empowerment of women. For example Sri Kshethra Dharmasthala Rural development Programme (SKDRDP), Shankaranarayana Milk producers Cooperative society, Sthri Shakthi, Netravathi Grameen bank, Nagrika Seva trust, Maitri Trust, Canara Organization of Development and Peace etc. The several studies conducted by research scholars found strong evidences that micro finance institutions contributed to women's empowerment in the district. One consistent finding was increased self confidence, increased self esteem and women's increased participation in economic and political decision making. Various studies have also shown ample evidence of efficient sustainable micro finance institutions whose programmes are intentionally empowering.

Women experienced an increase in their decision making role in the areas of family planning, children's marriage, buying and selling property, and sending their children to school. It is also found that the combination of education and credit put women in stronger position to ensure more equal access for female children to food, schooling and medical care. Other studies also showed increased ability to make purchasing choice, manage household funds, and manage enterprise funds for example SKDRDP has promoted economic empowerment among the poor landless families by introducing various income generating activities both in production and service sectors. Like this many government and non government agencies in the district are successful in bringing desired grass root changes in rural economy and have created awareness so much that almost in all villages in the district women have joined in large number such agencies. But there are studies whose findings show that there is no substantial manifestation of improvement of material conditions in terms of assets, resource allocation, capacity building and income generating activities. As it is claimed that micro finance activities through self help groups have increasingly freed women from the clutches of rural money lenders, although it looks true but such a freedom has not lead to liberation from debt burden of women what has happened is a shift in the source of debt with, of course lesser interest rates. Apart from this, due to multiplicity of membership of poor women in different SHGs promoted by different facilitators in the same village, the women are falling in to a kind of 'proto debt trap'. Therefore the improved condition that micro finance promises is a borrowed and an illusory better world. The largely unaffected material condition of poor and disadvantaged women be corroborated by the evidences from the studies conducted relating to the assets, level of education, occupation, income and autonomy where it matters to the beneficiaries. But it is also a fact that there is also a sizable section of women that is left out of the whole enterprise of micro finance and SHGs movement because thrift is the passport to the entry in the SHG, this group does not possess that, studies also found many defect in management and organizational set of SHGs.

PART II CASE STUDY

Review of the literature on women empowerment indicates that women contribution to the economy is invisible; their work is not accounted however, significantly for the economic development. Ignorance of their contribution is more in rural areas. Efforts were made to empower women through various

planned programmes. In the recent years, SHGs movement through micro finance activities mobilized backward women to come forward. This study makes an attempt to study the role played by SHGs in empowering women both in rural and urban areas in Dakshina-Kannada district and its impact on inclusive growth. The present study has considered certain measurable indicators of women empowerment which are consolidated again as Personal empowerment, social empowerment and economic empowerment. These empowerment indicators are analyzed further, scores of these empowerment indicators are compared across rural and urban cases.

PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

In the framework of empowerment, psychological empowerment of women by feeling better about themselves, gaining self confidence, believing in their potential is important. It is this, psychological feeling coupled with increased level of awareness that will give them the power to assert themselves or express their needs. Again these parameters of personal empowerment of women is analyzed through the scores given by the sample members of SHGs, Further indicators such as Self confidence, Self image, Leadership quality, Self awareness, Skill development, Problem solving capacity, Positive attitude Communication skill, Negotiating power, Risk taken.

TABLE-1: EMPOWERMENT LEVELS AS PER THE EMPOWERMENT INDEX

SL.No	VARIABLES	Rural	Urban
1	Self confidence,	B	A
2	Self image	B	C
3	Leadership quality	A	A
4	Self awareness	B	A
5	Skill development	D	B
6	Problem solving capacity	D	B
7	Positive attitude	B	C
8	Communication skill	C	B
9	Negotiation power	D	D
10	Risk taking capacity		
	Total self empowerment scores	480	640

As far as the personal empowerment of women members in SHGs concerned, urban case shows a slight better compared to rural case. However in case of self confidence rural women scores remarkable higher than the urban sample members. However, in case of rural women risk taking, problem solving capacity, communication skill, and Skill development are scored significantly low. In case of urban women problem solving capacity, risk taking, are scored low. And all other variables are comparatively better scored.

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Social empowerment of women enables them to participate in the decision making, enhancing status of women in the family and community. Women respondents have also experienced improved status and gender relations in the household. Women's financial contribution helped them earn greater respect from their husband and to avoid family quarrels over money. Indicators used to know social empowerment at community level are respect in family, recognition in the society, ability to run the family, participation in public programmes, social awareness, social mobility, decision making, social respect, risk taking ability and entrepreneurial ability.

TABLE-2: SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT LEVELS AS PER THE EMPOWERMENT INDEX

Sl.No	variables	Urban	Rural
1	respect in family	B	A
2	Recognition in the society	B	A
3	Ability to run the family	B	A
4	Participation in public programmes	B	A
5	Social awareness	B	A
6	Social mobility	B	A
7	Decision making	D	C
8	Social respect	D	D
9	Risk taking ability	D	C
10	Entrepreneurial	D	C
	Total social empowerment scores	620	440

When social empowerments scored are compared across rural and urban cases, unlike in personal empowerment, rural case shows better scores than urban case. It is to be noticed that social mobility, scores significantly higher in case of rural women. Further, there are few variables under social empowerment scored significantly low both in rural and urban area.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Economic empowerment refers to access to financial resources, decrease of vulnerability of women during crises situations, eliminating the dependency on money lenders, increase in the income of women and the freedom to use that income, financial self reliance and ownership of income generation assets. Women access to saving and credit gives them a greater economic role in decision making through their decision about saving and credit. When women control decision regarding credit and saving, they will optimize their own and the household's welfare. The investment in women economic activities will improve employment opportunity for women and then have a trickle down and out effect. To find out extent economic empowerment has taken place indicators like Income improvement, consumption, saving, economic decision making investment, managing economic activity, employment assets position and standard of living etc are considered Economic empowerment

TABLE-3: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT LEVELS AS PER THE EMPOWERMENT INDEX

Sl.no	Variables	Rural	Urban
1	Income improvement	D	E
2	Consumption	C	C
3	Saving	C	C
4	Economic decision making	D	D
5	investment	B	C
6	Managing economic activity	C	D
7	Employment	A	B
8	Asset position	D	D
9	Standard of living	C	D
10	Sense of economic activity	C	D
Total	Economic empowerment scores	420	310

With regard to economic empowerment also rural case scores better than urban case. Here it is interesting to notice that in managing economic activity, improvement in asset position are scored by rural sample women remarkably higher than urban counter parts. This indicates SHGs movements have better impact in rural area in terms of improved capacity of managing economic activity, employment generally and improvement in assets positions. It is also noticed that SHGs movement has helped to improve income level of rural women. However, scores on saving improvement, investment change, economic decision making are significantly low.

TABLE-4: EMPOWERMENT LEVELS AS PER THE EMPOWERMENT INDEX

Empowerment components	Rural	Urban
Economic empowerment	420	310
Personal empowerment	480	640
Social empowerment	620	440
Total	1520	1390

Comparison among the rural and urban cases indicates that SHGs movement empowered rural women more than urban women members. Among the rural women economic empowerment is followed by personal and social empowerment. With regard to economic empowerment SHGs movement through there micro finance activists in rural area is better than urban areas.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The present study found that micro finance activities with Self Help Group movement have experienced women empowerment both in rural and urban areas.

- Compared to urban areas SHGs and their impact on women are found very effective in rural areas, all the indicators used to measure economic empowerment, shows this point oblivious.
- In rural areas awareness about various SHGs is more and in fact every women is a member of one or the other SHG, Whereas in urban areas majority of women living below the poverty line do not know the existence of such agencies, either because of their ignorance or lack of motivation by the staff of SHGs.
- Economic condition of women in rural areas is found to be better than their counterparts in urban areas, because in rural areas poor women are working at a time in multiple jobs in addition to the beedi rolling and agriculture but in urban areas majority of poor women are engaged only in beedi rolling while very few are engaged in other activities because of that they earn less income.
- The study reveals that the respondents had experienced great relief from the burden of debt from money lenders but not completely liberated from debt as they continued to borrow money from different SHGs at the same time.
- In the absences of income generating activities among majority of the respondents, the standard of living continued to be low.
- Very few respondents have taken loan for productive purpose, so it is necessary to sensitize the members about the productive use of loan so that economic empowerment can be achieved.
- There is a sizable section of the women that is left out of the whole SHG movement precisely because thrift is the passport to the entry in to SHGs and they do not posses.
- SHGs run by the NGOs are performing better than SHGs run by the Government.
- The researcher found that women in rural areas are more active and involved in the SHG movement, compared to urban women who shown very limited interest in such movement.
- SHGs have developed awareness among women and are successful in developing their communication skill, leadership quality and also general knowledge. They have created a lot of self confidence among poor women and led to their personality development.
- A very interesting finding of the present study is that women both in rural and urban areas are getting good support from their families' particular from the male members.

SUGGESTION/CONCLUSION

It is proved that Self-help Group is a good strategy associated with micro-finance to empower rural women. It has made rural women to involve in various investment activities and hence, inculcated confidence of engaging economic activities. But Viability of micro finance needs to be understood from a dimension that is far broader- in looking at its long-term aspects too. Very little attention has been given to empowerment questions or ways in which both empowerment and sustainability aims may be accommodated.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is clear that gender strategies in micro finance need to look beyond just increasing women's access to savings and credit and organizing self help groups to look strategically at how programmes can actively promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Moreover, the focus should be on developing a diversified micro finance sector where different type of organizations, NGO, MFIs and formal sector banks all should have gender policies adapted to the needs of their particular target groups and work together to make a significant contribution to gender equality towards sustainable development.

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