

IMPACT OF NGO INITIATIVES ON EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN

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ABSTRACT--*India is an agrarian economy. Majority of Indians lives in the rural areas. A number of challenges in the area of health, education and employment are an obstacle to women development in rural areas. Numerous programmes have been initiated by Indian Government and for the development of women in rural areas. Apart from Government various non-governmental organizations, local self-governance institutions and Self-help groups bear a significant role in women empowerment in rural areas which is instrumental to their development. An empowered woman is key to the well being of their entire family as well to the entire community. The present study aims at analyzing the impact of NGO initiatives on empowerment of women. Primary data was collected from 310 women beneficiaries of NGOs working for the cause of rural women in and around Indore district of Madhya Pradesh in Central India with the help of a self designed questionnaire. The study identified a positive impact of NGO initiatives on the empowerment of rural women. Thus we can conclude that NGOs in India are effectively working towards upliftment of socio-economic status of the poor women in the rural areas thereby attaining the goal of rural management.*

Keywords-- *Agrarian, women development, well being, empowerment, positive impact, upliftment, rural management.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Women play an instrumental role not only in the society but in the whole world. It is a fact that in developed as well as most of the developing nations both men and women are equally contributing towards social, economic and development goals without any gender discrimination. However some of the countries are so much influenced by social and cultural bias that they are unable to give equally opportunities to the women in various fields. Therefore in the present scenario women empowerment is the important perspective. Women empowerment is a tool to strengthen the future of women in India and is a most important instrument for the socio-economic development of a nation. It can help to tackle the major challenge of bringing women into the main stream. Women can face any difficult situation if they are economically independent, self confident, self reliant and filled with positive self-esteem. It was at the international women conference at Naroibi in 1985 that the concept of women empowerment was introduced. The need for NGOs working towards the empowerment of women and development is vital in India as women are the key agents for bringing about environmental changes for sustainable rural development..

Rural areas refer to the remote and scarcely populated regions. These areas have a high proportion of resource base and mostly people depend on this resource base for earning their livelihood. Owing to their remoteness the communities in the rural areas are more culturally conservative, as they tend to adhere to their

traditional roles and views (Williams et al., 2018). Women in the rural areas suffer cultural and social discrimination due to several issues like negative attitude of majority of the families towards educating the girl child, insecurity towards a girl travelling alone from home to school, absence of separate toilets, responsibility of the elder girl to look after her younger siblings which are responsible for the high drop-out rate of girls from schools. The plight of the underprivileged women in the developing countries concerning economic, social, gender equity and access to fundamental rights have drawn attention from a global perspective in the past three decades. Though women in some parts of the globe have attained significant progress but still they continue to be undervalued and marginalized in the developing countries (Augusto and Zahidi, 2005).

NGOs play a vital role in managing the initiatives of empowerment of women of different strata of the society. The government of India has recognized the significant role of the NGOs in the Five year plans, owing to their credibility, commitment and professional approach to people's issues. Sustainability of NGOs is a major issue. However in the present era of globalization and liberalization wherein the forces of market play a key role, it has become imperative for the NGO sector to take a lead in enabling the women to face the challenges posed by the system. In the developing countries like India, women empowerment plays a major role in economic development. They undertake various initiatives in the area of education, reduction in the poverty levels and thereby contribute towards improvement in the economic growth of the beneficiaries (Bhoganadam,2014).

Women empowerment and economic development has close relationship. As it is rightly said inequality and disparity between men and women can be reduced to a great extent through development as well as empowerment of women may benefit development on the other hand. In present scenario, rural Indian women are playing major in building infrastructure of their village, other than empowering themselves. The Government of India has provided an opportunity to rural women to live with dignity and honor and equal footing with the rural man. Earlier, the contribution of the rural women was invisible to the people with patriarchal mindsets. These women are empowering themselves and making a contribution in building infrastructure in the villages.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The scope of development in India is very broad, as it is inclusive of not only the economic development but the growth on social perspective, better quality of life, development of women and children, overall empowerment, awareness and education of its citizens. This task is so complicated and humungous that the implementation of government plans will not suffice to fix the problem. A holistic vision and collaboration of efforts involving various agencies, departments, institutions and NGOs is required. The number of NGOs in India is considerably increasing owing to such a great need (Jadhav, 2015).

Capability enhancement of the community to deal with basic needs is the major objective of a development program (Vakil,1997). The emergence of NGOs in the developing countries is an outcome of the inability of the government to serve the interest of the poorest of the poor as well as to take a attentive note of the widening gaps between the upper sections and the lower strata of the society (Streeten,1997).

NGOs offer services related to promotion of literacy, medical and health care, availability of micro-finance, relief in emergency, awareness of human rights, agricultural extension (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). It is worth noting that there is a heavy concentration of women in the rural areas. The specific characteristics of rural

societies related to poverty, patriarchy, culture and ethnicity exert considerable influence upon the social relations in the rural areas (Little, 1987). The study reveals that Group corpus and Internal savings have a positive significant effect on the growth of income of the beneficiaries and alleviation of poverty. A study by (Tripathy and Jain, 2011) concludes that bank credit does not have a positive or significant impact on the income growth of beneficiaries while internal savings and group corpus have a significant and positive impact. Apart from this the economically and socially backward regions are more likely to gain from this programme.

Rural women are more impacted by time poverty as compared to men and urban women. They have to perform all the household chores including cooking, cleaning, child care, elder care, collecting wood and water for the family as well as disproportionate amount of community obligations. This limits their ability to engage in economic activity, attend trainings or travel distance for marketing or banking (Williams et al., 2018). Women's poor economic status can be directly attributed to the lack of economic opportunities and independence including credit facilities, isolation in land ownership and inheritance and non inclusion in decision making process. In the entire world only one-third of women can be said to be economically active (Mehra, 1997). Shambharkar, Jadhav and Mankar, (2012) in their study state that women empowerment is a key strategy to development process. Women are very important segment in development at local to global level. They are the best medium to touch the core of poverty. Thus, positive change in women is required for development. Alfirdaus (2019), in his study suggests that although gender issues are gaining some support, but still these issues are not given priority among the village development priorities. There is a lack of relevant empowerment programs that will have a significant impact on the improvement of gender equality.

A study by Nyataya (2018) in Rwanda district states that NGO's have played an important role in making women self dependent as they have started to move out of their homes and acquire jobs thereby earning regular incomes for themselves. Women have been able to achieve economic independence through the relentless efforts of the NGOs. Women are in a position to maintain a control over their finances. Gender equity, educational and vocational skill development, extension of legal and financial support to the vulnerable women in the district are some of the outcomes of women empowerment.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample of the study constituted of 310 women beneficiaries of NGOs working solely in the area of women development, however due to non compliance of the respondents only 264 complete questionnaires were used for analysis. The present study was undertaken in a series of steps. Firstly the NGOs working for the cause of women empowerment in the rural areas of Indore district of Central India were identified. The study was conducted in the rural sub districts of Indore, Depalpur and Sanwer on the NGOs working in the area of women development.

In the second step an interview series was conducted with the NGO women beneficiaries. The main purpose was to ascertain the extent of NGO governed activities in the rural areas, the nature of the activities undertaken, the perception of the beneficiaries towards NGO activities as well as to gain an insight into the economic situation of the participants. Primary data for the study was collected with the help of a self designed questionnaire consisting of three sections, Section A comprises of basic information about the respondents,

Section B comprises of 17 items based on five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree indicating factors contributing women empowerment and third section consist of four items based on five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree indicating change in attitude of women after joining NGO's . The variables for questionnaire were drawn from the previous works of Manimekalai and Rajeswari(2000), Ullah(2003), Rathirane and Semasinghe(2015), Vijayalakshmi(2016).

The analysis of collected data was done by Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 19.0), r and MS Excel 2007. To identify insignificant items which were not contributing towards women empowerment, item-total correlation was calculated. All the items shows correlation values greater than 0.196 (standard coefficient of correlation value) and were thus found significant and were considered for the analysis. Cronbach's Alpha was found to be 0.831 which assess the over-all reliability for the scale of the remaining 17 items. The result of KMO and Barlett's test is 0.748 which is supportive of factor analysis. Total four factors were extracted using factor analysis which explained for 66.26% of the total variance. The annexure 5 illustrates the factor loadings. The four factors extracted are discussed in detail below.

Factor 1: Control and decision-making is constituted of 7 items namely sufficient money to meet petty needs, use funds as per my wish, control over allocation of expenses, participate in decision making related to purchase or sale of asset, decision on the number of children, decision on children's education, decision on children's marriage. In these items "Have control to allocate the expenses" has the highest item load of 0.864 Eigen value and percentage of variance is 4.93 and 31.08.

Factor 2: Liberty is constituted of 5 items namely Go to relative or friend's place without taking permission from husband, not subjected to violence in case of any domestic issue, can go to festivals and fairs alone with my children, can go to the market alone to sell a commodity, sense of independence and confidence in me. Variable sense of independence and confidence has the highest factor load of 0.796. Eigen value and percentage of variance is 2.43 and 16.03.

Factor 3: Family Support is constituted of 4 items i.e. I have family support, family members trust my decisions, family appreciates me, have access to social protection schemes. Variable Family members trust my decision has the highest factor load of 0.791. Eigen value and percentage of variance is 1.78 and 11.87.

Factor 4: Personal Development is constituted of 2 items namely enhancement of communication skills and improvement in lifestyle. Eigen value and percentage of variance is 1.27 and 7.28.

The factor scores extracted with the help of principal component method of factor analysis has been further subjected to Multiple Regression Analysis using R. The regression analysis has been used to find out the impact of factors explored on women empowerment through NGO initiatives.

IV. DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

A number of programs have been initiated in the areas of health, education and employment for the women development. Some other schemes with distinct emphasis on health, nutrition and family welfare programs have also been implemented (Yasaswini; Tharaka and Bhagavanulu, 2017). In their study on empowerment of women living in rural areas through Self Help Groups (Sharada; Shivmurthy and Suresha, 2000) conclude that training, education, managerial and technical skills can be developed in women. The sustainability and success of the Self

Help Groups can effectively contribute for promotion of agencies like Non Governmental Organizations. NGOs play a major role in upliftment of the deprived sections of the society. In the past few years there has been a significant increase in their physical as well as financial activities as well as their presence has also increased from national to international level. According to Haque (2004) the main focus of NGOs is on capacity building and improving the environment in which women work. Self Help Groups encourage Women to participate in planning and implementation of their own developmental programmes and they become the part of rural development.

On the basis of the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Control and Decision making has significant positive impact on women empowerment in Indore district.

H2: Liberty has significant positive impact on women empowerment in Indore district.

H3: Family Support has significant positive impact on women empowerment in Indore district

H4: Personal development has significant positive impact on women empowerment in Indore district

V. MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

In the present study four factors extracted from factor analysis namely Control and decision-making, Liberty, Family Support and Personal Development were taken as independent variables and the dependent variable was taken as women empowerment comprises of four items indicating change in attitude of women after joining NGO's. These items were 'I feel confident now', 'I have achieved better living standard', 'I have attained financial security', My social Status have increased'. The underlying assumptions of regression are discussed below;

Residuals vs Fitted plot (figure1) shows no fitted pattern. The presence of a pattern indicates a problem with some aspect of the linear model. The horizontal red line at zero confirms the linearity relation between the predictors and the outcome variables. Homoscedasticity assumption is checked by examining the scale-location plot (figure2). A horizontal line with residuals spreads equally along the ranges of predictors is considered to be good for analysis. Thus the homogeneity of variance is met. Normality is examined by QQ plot of residuals (figure 3). The residuals plot should approximately follow a straight line. In the study, maximum points fall along the reference line in the Q-Q plot, thus normality assumption is met. Outliers are identified by visualizing the Residuals vs Leverage plot (figure.4). The plot in the study highlights the three most extreme points (#26, #172 and #180). A dashed line in the plot represents Cook's distance. When cases are outside of the Cook's distance (a red dashed line in figure.4), the cases are influential to the regression results. It can be seen that no case is outside the cook's distance. Thus we conclude that there is no influential value/ outlier which can affect the results. The Durbin-Watson in this study is found to be 2.0351 which is under acceptable range 0-4. The statistic value confirms that the assumption of independence of errors is tenable. The necessary assumptions of multiple regression analysis are met thus the model proposed in the study is acceptable and has potential to be used for future predictions.

Table 1: Revised Model

Coefficients

| | Estimate | Std. Error | t value | Pr(> t) |
|-----------------------------|----------|------------|---------|--------------|
| (Intercept) | 8.81818 | 0.63066 | 13.982 | < 2e-16 *** |
| Control and Decision Making | 0.98138 | 0.09551 | 10.275 | < 2e-16 *** |
| Liberty | 1.21757 | 0.11428 | 10.654 | < 2e-16 *** |
| Family Support | 0.66001 | 0.13137 | 5.024 | 1.01e-06 *** |

Significance codes: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05

Residual standard error: 1.949 on 232 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.6024, Adjusted R-squared: 0.5973

F-statistic: 117.2 on 3 and 232 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

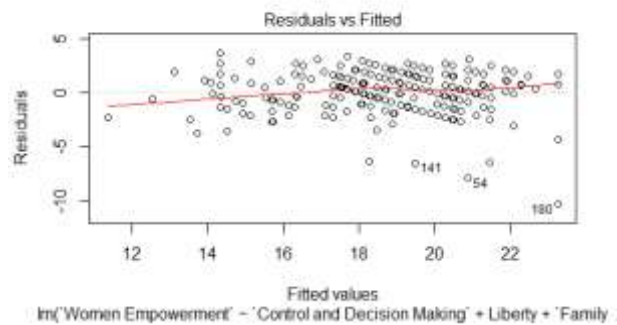


Figure 1: Residual Vs Fitted Plot for linearity

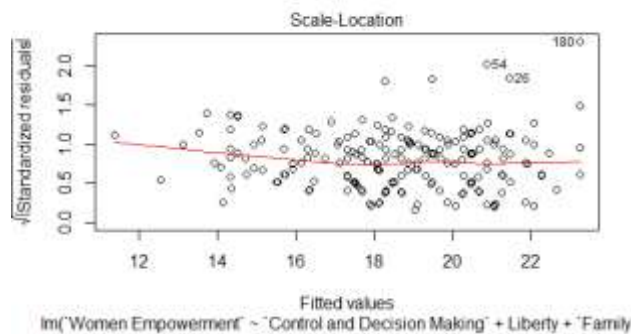


Figure 2: Scale-location plot: Homogeneity of variance

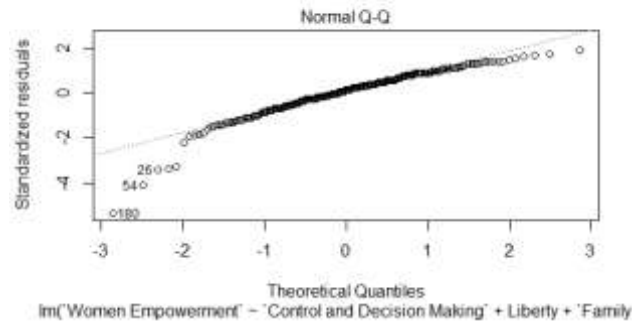


Figure 3: Normality –Q-Q plot

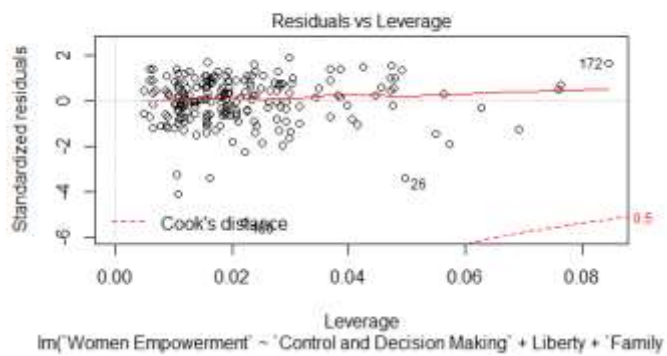


Figure 4: Residuals vs Leverage: Outlier detection

The results of multiple regression reveal that F-value is 89.04 and p-value is less than 0.05. Thus we conclude that significant influence of independent variables occurs over the dependent variables in the model proposed. The calculated t values for Control and Decision making is 10.356, 10.544 for Liberty, 4.411 for family support, and 1.56 for personal development. The p-value of first three variables are less than 0.05 where as the p-value of the variable ‘Personal development’ is found to be 0.119 which is greater than 0.05. The result indicates that ‘Personal development’ is not significant predictor for the dependent variable ‘Women Empowerment’ and thus removed from regression model. After removing the insignificant predictor, the new regression model is generated. The results of final model are given in annexure 3. The F-value was found to be 117.2 with df (3,232) and p-value is less than 0.05. Thus the hypothesis H3: There is a significant impact of NGO activities on women empowerment is accepted. All the remaining predictors are found to be significant. The coefficient of determination R^2 is 0.6024.

On the basis of nonstandard coefficients, the final regression equation (Annexure 4)

$$Y = 8.818 + 0.981 X_1 + 1.217 X_2 + 0.66 X_3$$

Where Y = Women Empowerment, X_1 = Control and Decision making X_2 = Liberty X_3 = Family Support and X_4 = Personal Development

VI. CONCLUSION

The result of the study indicates that the majority of rural women who constituted as respondents for the present study, being member of NGOs have benefitted considerably in terms of women empowerment. Women participation in NGO have obviously created remarkable impact on the life style of women and empowered them at various levels not only as individual also as member of family, member of community and society as whole. After joining NGOs these women have gained self confidence and have started earning money, raise in the income level has made them independent and self motivated. They can take their own decisions in some matters and give their suggestions in family concerns. But even after a lot of effort of NGOs in the area of women empowerment, still the situation need to be improved at the paramount level. Effective schemes for women empowerment should be implemented. More important is to make the women aware of the schemes that are prevalent and also the new schemes that have been formulated. Attractive awareness programs should be organized so that more and more women can be involved.

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