

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP- 'AN EXPLORATION'

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ABSTRACT

The women empowerment is considered as a sine-quo-non for the all-inclusive development of the rural economies as a whole so the issue witnessed a principal significance in the eyes of social scientist, economic reformer, and the policy maker. The term empowerment has different meanings depending on the socio-economic, political and cultural context in which it is presented. Overall empowerment can be perceived as a process or as outcome/goal and can take place at different levels. Rural women entrepreneurship plays a catalytic role in activating the factors of production leading to an overall economic development in India, but it is still on the embryonic stage as this untapped source of the country has not been harnessed appropriately. The present paper intends to establish a correlation between women empowerment and rural entrepreneurship development. It further tries to recognize the various strategies, initiatives and institutive policies of the government and social reformer which would create a conducive ambience in fostering the culture of innovation and rural entrepreneurship development in the country for the economic empowerment of the women. Besides the above the paper also aims at deliberating some imperative aspects of women economic empowerment through SHG, and micro entrepreneurship development. The nature of study is basically exploratory and based on prevailing unpublished and published secondary sources. The study concludes with a diversified range of recommendations and feasible suggestions from the various corners which would encourage a more enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship in India.

Keywords : Women empowerment, SHG, Rural Entrepreneurship development, Government initiatives

INTRODUCTION

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

Jawaharlal Nehru

Theoretically speaking, the rural women are key agent for holistic development of the society. They are very essential element for sustainable development as they act as a catalyst in realizing the vision of economic reforms, environmental and social changes. But limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they face. These are further aggravated by the global food and

economic crises and climate change. Empowering them is essential, not only for the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also for overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural workforce. Dictionary meaning of the word empowerment means power given to someone to do something. The World Bank (2001) defines empowerment as the expansion of freedom of choice and actions and increasing one's authority and control over the resources and decisions that affects one's life. According to the International Encyclopedia (1999), it means having the

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capacity and the means to direct one's life towards desired social, political and economic goals or status. The United Nations Development program (1994)¹ reveals the definition as "empowerment is a process which enables individuals or groups to change balances of power in social, economic and political relations in society". Empowerment is a process of change by which individuals or groups gain power and ability to take control over their lives. It involves access to resources, resulting into increased participation in decision making and bargaining power and increased control over benefits, resources and own life². Therefore, women empowerment means giving the capacity and means to direct women's life towards desired goals. Empowerment is a process by which women gain greater control over resources (income, knowledge, information, technology, skill and training), challenge the ideology of patriarchy and participate in leadership, decision making process, enhance the self-image of women, to become active participants in the process of change and to develop the skills to assert themselves³. Entrepreneurship may be a force that assembles other resources to meet unmet market demand, the capability to create and build something from practically nothing, it is a process of creating value by pulling together a unique package of resources to exploit an opportunity⁴. According to Khanka (2000), a women entrepreneur is a confident, innovative and creative woman capable of achieving economic independence individually or in collaboration generates employment opportunities for others through initiating establishing and running an enterprise by keeping pace with her personal, family and social life⁵.

The Government of India has defined women entrepreneurs as an enterprise owned and controlled by women having a minimum financial interest of 51 per cent of the capital and giving at least 51 per cent of the employment generated in the enterprise to women⁶. In the modest term, women entrepreneurs are those women who has the quality and passion to lead and organize the business and offer employment

to others. Entrepreneurship development among rural women helps to enhance their personal capabilities and increase decision making status in the family and society.

NEED FOR RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

Progress of any society is directly proportional with the employment and revenue generating potential of its affiliates. The advancement in modernization processes such as industrialization; globalization; urbanization and migration have encouraged the need to earn a handsome income. Entrepreneurship at micro level is the only key to the problem of unemployment and crippled financial system, further it would lead to appropriate application of both human and non-human resources thereby, upgrading the standard of living of destitute. The industrial growth from the grassroot level is prerequisite for rural India due to following motives:

1. Rural industries enables large-scale employment opportunities as maximum of the rural industries are labour intensive.
2. Development of rural industries can check rural urban migration to a great extent as now people will not have to move to cities to earn livelihood.
3. Rural entrepreneurship would assist to improve the per capital income of rural people thereby reducing income disparities among rural and urban people.
4. Rural entrepreneurship curb the mushrooming growth of industries in cities and thereby encourages balanced regional development of the economy.
5. Rural entrepreneurship enables the social infrastructural facilities like roads, street lighting, drinking water etc. in the rural sector due to their accessibility to the main market.
6. Rural entrepreneurship creates a blooming avenue for rural educated youth to promote their career as a entrepreneur.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To find the interrelationship between women economic empowerment and

entrepreneurship development.

- To study the role of Self Help Group(SHG) in rural entrepreneurship development.
- To review the role of Government in fostering the culture of entrepreneurship development.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The research would assist the implementing agencies to redesign their policies and working framework in alignment with suggestion of this paper for attaining the ultimate mission of women's economic empowerment through rural entrepreneurship development. Further the study would highlight the efforts of government in fostering the culture of entrepreneurship from the grassroot level for women's empowerment.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research design

The study is of exploratory in nature as it intends to recognize the various strategies, initiatives and institutive policies of the government and social reformer which would create a conducive ambience in fostering the culture of innovation and rural entrepreneurship development in the country for the economic empowerment of the women.

Sources of data

The study is based on secondary data both from published and unpublished sources which is collected from various books, online available studies and journals.

WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT- AN INTEGRATION

Theoretically speaking Economic empowerment is the capacity of **women** and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth⁷. In context of women it is defined by oxfam Women's

economic empowerment refers to the ability for women to enjoy their right to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and wellbeing⁸. Women's economic empowerment is a sine-qua-non-for sustainable development and pro-poor growth i.e the national policies specially aligned with the focus on the growth of poor people. Vis-à-vis it is about the rights and equitable justice for the women as it offers a firm foundation of women empowerment. There are numerous factors that have witnessed a constraining position in the way of women being active and equitable contributors to India's economy—gender discrimination at workplaces, lack of suitable opportunities, domestic responsibilities, orthodox family values and safety concerns are some of the major hindrances women face⁹. The only steady way through which women can come out of this cobwebs is their self-financial dependency and Entrepreneurship and self-employment is only precondition and correct remedy Entrepreneurship unlocks manifold corridors of opportunities for women to enter the active workforce, sometimes even without having to run out of their homes and cities. It is considered as an imperative factor that encourages financial empowerment and fosters the economies for inclusive development of the nation.

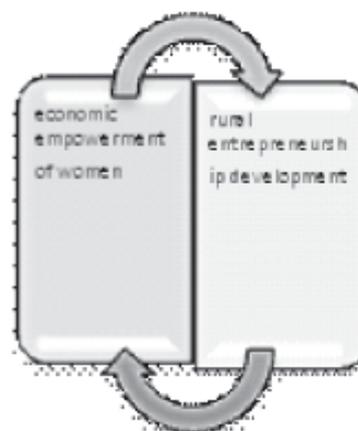


Figure : Interrelationship between economic empowerment and entrepreneurship development.

ROLE OF SELF HELP GROUP (SHG) IN RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The definition of SHG as approved by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development [NABARD] the apex banking body in India, is “An SHG is a small, economically homogeneous and affinity group of rural poor voluntarily formed to save and mutually agree to contribute common fund to be lent to its members as per group decision for their socio-economic development¹⁰”. A self-help is a small, economically homogeneous and attractive group of 10-20 rural poor people which comes together to save small amounts regularly¹¹. It usually accomplishes several types of economic activities through their meagre amount of savings. Women Self-help groups are purposely formed informal association of 10-20 women who work together for some monetary benefit out of mutual help, unity and social responsibility. Mostly, the monetary benefit embraces mobilization of savings and credit services from group based economic activities performed by the members. SHG approach is the group based approach, which helps the poor women members of each SHG to accumulate capital by way of small saving and helping them to get credit facilities from their funds¹². Right now, the poor women of the rural society are financially crippled to start any economic venture for their livelihood and to become financially independent, for them SHG has become a boom. From dairy at grassroot-level to mechanized farming using modern technologies, weaving, knitting, poultry, food processing units etc, SHG plays a very pivotal role in the self-employment by raising the level of income and standard of living rural women. The development of SHGs is a smart investment in human capital through training and capacity building measures which is ought to develop the entrepreneurial culture among the rural women in order to be economically empowered and lead the life of self-reliance.

OBJECTIVE OF SHG FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION



WORKING MECHANISM OF SHG:

Ten to twenty women are selected, one each from a rural family to form a group which is expected to implement following code of conduct like Assigning name to the SHG, Regular meetings in a Democratic way, Open exchange of thoughts in these meetings, Participation in the Decision-Making process, Bank Account in the name of the SHG and Selecting a President and Secretary from the SHG¹³. The total accumulated fund by the group members is deposited in the bank account created for the purpose. Those SHGs which has shown better goodwill in terms of financial records over the last six months can avail a ‘Revolving Fund’ from DRDA and Bank as a cash-credit facility. The amount so received can be utilized by the members for internal lending at a very nominal amount of interest. As per scheme of NABARD Loans given to members of a group shall be repaid by them in 50 equal instalments, along with interest as under¹⁴.

Loan Amount (in Rs)	Weekly Repayment (in Rs)	Weekly Interest (in Rs)	Total Sum to Pay (in Rs)
500	10	1	11
1000	20	2	22

source: www.nabard.org

In special cases, the group may decide to change the repayment schedule.

The maximum amount for the first loan will be Rs.10000/.Representatives of the Voluntary

Agency and/or the bank will train the borrowers and will see to it that the loans taken are utilized for the purpose for which they are taken, and that all transactions are done openly in the

meetings in the presence of all members. If group is found to be regular in its internal lending and successfully utilizes this revolving fund; proposal for bank loan may be forwarded for sanctioning¹⁵.

Outcome of SHG



The self-employment has been acknowledged as an indispensable tool for socio-economic development in rural India. This approach is basically intended to catapult the socio-economic standard of living especially of poor women who are mostly unseen in the social structure. In India SHGs bridge the gap of inequality by intermixing the destitute section with the rest of the rural community by enabling them timely availability of finance to start the new venture, providing better job avenues and enlightening the quality of life of rural women towards becoming economically empowered plus accomplishing the life of esteem, dignity and self-reliance.

Role of Government in fostering the culture of entrepreneurship Development

The Government of India has started several initiatives and instituted policy measures to foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country. Job creation is a foremost challenge facing India. With a significant and unique demographic advantage, India, however, has immense potential to innovate, raise entrepreneurs and create jobs for the benefit of

the nation and the world. In the recent years, a wide gamut of new programmes and avenues to foster innovation have been initiated by the Government of India across several sectors. From engaging with academia, industry, investors, small and big entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations to the most underserved sections of society.

Spotting the significance of women entrepreneurship and economic participation in aiding the country's progress and prosperity, Government of India has ensured that all policy initiatives are geared towards enabling equal opportunity for women. The government seeks to bring women to the forefront of India's entrepreneurial ecosystem by providing access to loans, networks, markets and trainings.

A few of India's efforts at promoting entrepreneurship and innovation are :

1. **Startup India** : With the Startup India initiative, Government of India promotes entrepreneurship by mentoring, nurturing and facilitating startups throughout their life cycle. Since its launch in January 2016, the initiative has effectively given a sprouting opportunity to several ambitious entrepreneurs to make their dream of own

enterprise successful. With a 360 degree approach to empower startups, the initiative delivers a all-inclusive four-week free online learning program, has set up research parks, incubators and startup centers across the country by creating a strong network of academia and industry bodies¹⁶. More prominently, a 'Fund of Funds' policies has been created to help startups to gain access to funding. The core of the initiative is to develop an ecosystem in which startups can innovate and excel without any barriers with the access of mechanisms like online recognition of startups, Startup India Learning Programme, Facilitated Patent filing, Easy Compliance Norms, Relaxed Procurement Norms, incubator support, innovation focused programmes for students, funding support, tax benefits and addressing of regulatory issues.

2. **Make in India** : The Make in India initiative was launched by Prime Minister in September 2014 as part of a wider set of nation-building initiatives.¹⁷ It is intended to metamorphose the country into a global design and manufacturing hub as it propagates the message of the Government's mindset – a shift from issuing authority to business partner. The strategy behind Make in India was to map India as a high capable pulp for investment among global market platforms, disseminate vast amount of techno-info in 25 industry sectors¹⁸ and penetrate from national to local audience via social media and keep them updated about forthcoming opportunities and reforms. Thus, the initiative has ensured the replacement of outmoded and obstreperous frameworks with transparent and user-friendly systems which would eventually lead to procure investments, foster innovation, develop skills, protect intellectual property and build best-in-class manufacturing infrastructure.
3. **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)** : AIM including self-employment and talent Utilization is one of the pioneer schemes of Government to stimulate a culture of

innovation and entrepreneurship, and serves as a platform for promotion of world-class Innovation Hubs, Grand Challenges, start-up businesses and other self-employment activities, particularly in technology driven areas¹⁹. To foster curiosity, creativity and imagination right at the school level, AIM recently floated Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL) across India where students can work with tools and equipment to gain hands-on training in the concepts of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). Atal Incubation Centres (AICs) is another scheme beneath the shade of AIM to build innovative start-up businesses as scalable and sustainable enterprises by facilitating world class incubation services with suitable physical infrastructure in terms of capital equipment and operating facilities²⁰. The presence of these centres across the country would help in easy access to sectoral experts, business planning support, seed capital, industry partners and trainings to encourage innovative start-ups.

4. **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)**: STEP was launched by the Government of India's Ministry of Women and Child Development since 1986-87 as a 'Central Sector Scheme' to train women with no access to formal skill training facilities, especially in rural India²¹. The Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and NITI Aayog recently redrafted the Guidelines of the 30-year-old initiative in accordance with the present-day need. The canopy of initiative rollout to all Indian women above 16 years of age. The programme imparts skill in numerous segments such as agriculture, horticulture, food processing, handlooms, traditional crafts like embroidery, travel and tourism, hospitality, computer and IT services.
5. **Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM)** : JAM, for the first time, is a technological intervention that empowers direct transfer of subsidies to intended beneficiaries and, therefore, removes all intermediaries and

outflows in the system, which has a latent impact on the lives of millions of Indian citizens²². Besides serving as a vivacious check on corruption, JAM make available all accounts to all underserved sections, to avail the banking services accessible to the bottom of pyramid.

6. **Digital India:** The Digital India campaign was launched to modernize the Indian economy to makes all government services available electronically. The initiative intends to renovate India into a digitally-empowered society and knowledge economy with worldwide access to goods and services²³. This initiative aims to penetrate high-speed internet facilities down to the grassroots. The program further proposes to improve citizen participation in the digital and financial space by enabling India's cyberspace more safe and secure. Digital India campaign vision to transform the entire ecosystem of public service using information technology enormous multiplicity by enabling digital resources and services available in all Indian languages.
7. **Stand-Up India :** The scheme was Launched in 2015, to leverage institutional credit for the benefit of disadvantaged section of the society. It focus on dual aspect one to enable economic participation of, and other to share the benefits of India's growth, among women entrepreneurs, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Through this scheme at least one women and one individual from the SC or ST communities can avail loans between Rs.10 lakh to Rs.1 crore to set up greenfield enterprises in manufacturing, services or the trading sector²⁴. The Stand-Up India portal also serve as a digital platform for small entrepreneurs in disseminating information on financing and credit guarantee.
8. **Trade related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD) :** To buckle down the critical complications in accessing credit by disadvantaged women, the TREAD programme envisaged that credit, counselling and training opportunities to kick-start proposed enterprises can be accessed by the interested women through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who would be capable of handling funds in an appropriate manner so that now they can take up non-farm activities with equal vigor and zeal²⁵.
9. **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):** A flagship initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), this is a Skill Certification initiative that aims to train youth in industry-relevant skills to enhance opportunities for livelihood creation and employability²⁶. Individuals with prior learning experience or skills are also assessed and certified as a Recognition of Prior Learning. Training and Assessment fees are entirely borne by the Government under this program.
10. **National Skill Development Mission :** Launched in July 2015, the mission envisaged to build synergies across sectors and States in skilled industries and initiatives²⁷. With an idea to shape a 'Skilled India' it is stratified to accelerate decision-making across diverse sectors to provide skills at scale, without compromising on quality or speed. The seven sub-missions proposed in the initial phase to guide the mission's skilling efforts across India are: (i) Institutional Training (ii) Infrastructure (iii) Convergence (iv) Trainers (v) Overseas Employment (vi) Sustainable Livelihoods (vii) Leveraging Public Infrastructure²⁸.
11. **Science for Equity Empowerment and Development (SEED):** SEED seeks to provide openings to motivated scientists and field level workers to undertake action-oriented, location specific projects for socio-economic gain, particularly in rural areas²⁹. Efforts have been made to associate national labs and other specialist S&T institutions with innovations from the grassroots level which would allow access to inputs from experts,

quality infrastructure. SEED accentuates equity in development, so that the benefits of technological advancement can reach to a vast section of the population, particularly the underprivileged member of the society.

CONCLUSION

The paper can be concluded with a view that Women's entrepreneurship is having a dyadic aspect, firstly about women's position in society and secondly about the capacity of entrepreneurship in the same society. Women entrepreneurs confronted with many impediments which have to be vanquished in order to provide them with equal access to the same opportunities as men so that they both can come on same level playing field.

Increased involvement of women in the labour force is a prerequisite for enlightening the position of women in society, particularly the entry of rural women at micro enterprises will be reinvigorated and stimulated. In a highly populated country like India where the rate of unemployment is somewhat considerably high, it has turned out to be essential for the government to initiate measures to foster innovation and establishing businesses leading to increase in the employment and reducing the poverty. Rural women can do wonders by their efficient and accomplished engagement in entrepreneurial activities. The rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resources to establish and manage enterprise. Now, what is the need is knowledge regarding accessibility to loans, various funding agencies procedure regarding certification, awareness on government welfare programmes, motivation, technical skill and support from family, government and other organization. For this government is toiling hard to penetrate to the bottom of pyramid with their initiative policies and institutive framework.

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