

# GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL INDIA: A MICRO STUDY

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the status of rural women empowerment in India. Women empowerment is prerequisite for the development of nation. The empowerment, equality and autonomy of women are globally recognized as key factors of all round development and growth of a society. The Five-Year plans in India are adopted as a model of development. 'Empowerment of Women' was the key theme of the Ninth Five Year Plan. Similarly, Tenth Five Year Plan also stressed on Economic Empowerment as one of the sector-specific 3-fold strategy for empowering women with the view of making all potential women economically independent and self-reliant.

Empowerment of women means the improvement in economic, social and political status of women in general and the traditionally underprivileged ones in backward and rural society. This study is based on primary data collected from a cluster of villages under Mahapura Gram Panchayat, Sanganer tehsil, Jaipur district. The study reveals that rural women fall under middle empowerment level and there is a lack of awareness of the government empowerment schemes. The study concludes by an observation that the status of rural women empowerment is not satisfactory. It leads to low level of awareness about government schemes and these women fail to avail the extended benefits from these schemes. So, it is imperative to address the endogenous factors in line with exogenous factors through government schemes to empower women. Women are empowered at different dimensions, in the present study we have different levels of empowerment of women but Empowerment is something an individual or a group of individuals evolves over time. The focus should be on removing various socio- cultural barriers and developing an endogenous development strategy. Few suggestions based on the study are: Skills Acquisition and Capacity-Building, Conducting Camps and workshops at regular intervals to demystify various myths, conducting Family development initiatives to change discriminatory traditional and cultural norms, collecting information about the complaints regarding the schemes to improve the quality of the services.

**Key words:** Women Empowerment, Government Schemes, Awareness, Endogenous Development

## Introduction

*"There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing."* – Swami Vivekanada

Women empowerment has become a raging issue globally including India over the last few decades. The empowerment, autonomy and equality of women are globally recognised as key factors of all round development and growth of a society. Although women constitute 50 per cent of the world's total population yet they're facing problems of gender inequality in almost every field all over the world.

Empowerment is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights.” Women empowerment refers to the eco-system, which makes them politically active, economically productive and independent, and enables them to take effective decisions about themselves.

According to United Nations Guidelines on Women's Empowerment, “Women Empowerment has five components: Women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally” (UN Secretariat).

The concept of women empowerment has two dimensions – Static and Dynamic Concept. According to static concept women is empowered when they have the capability to influence the decisions that have direct and indirect impact on their lives. “Women empowerment refers to the ability of women to transform economic and social development, when empowered, to fully participate in the decisions that affect their lives through leadership, training, coaching, consulting and the provision of enabling tools for women to lead within their communities, regions and countries” (Sida, 2006). According to Kabeer, “Women's empowerment is about the process by which those who have the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability.” This concept may propose that those women who lack an effective voice could be given one. Whereas, according to the dynamic concept, empowerment is a process of developing the capability of women to participate effectively in decision making in areas that directly or indirectly affect their lives. Thus, Empowerment is not only to create conditions to enhance their chances of becoming empowered, but also it is something that an individual person or a group of people acquires over time.

The difference between these two is significant as it leads to forming different empowerment strategies. The Static concept leads to adopt exogenous empowerment strategies whereas the Dynamic concept may adopt endogenous empowerment strategies. The exogenous empowerment strategies suggest a top down approach where disempowered individuals or groups can be empowered by external entities. Whereas, the endogenous strategies suggest a bottom up approach, which support the fundamental principle that external entities can only act as facilitators by creating enabling conditions so that disempowered groups can empower themselves.

### **Status of Women in India**

Current framework of international development recognizes women empowerment as an immense effective strategy for the versatile development of the society. Though India is rapidly developing economically and technologically but women, especially in the rural areas continue to be discriminated and their status in the society is still a source of concern. Across the nation, women constitute a disproportionate share of the chronically poor population. Though the constitution provides legal equality for men and women but social and economic equality is yet to achieve. This is the fact why rural women continue to be recipients of welfare services and remain a silent observer in decision-making process with poor access to education, health care and other basic facilities of life.

Women Empowerment is affected by many different variables in India, such as geographical location, level of exposure, level of education, gender, social status, age, etc. Government of India has passed and amended several women specific legislations and implemented a gamut of

programs and schemes aimed at empowering women and ensuring their well-being and economic independence. Women empowerment policies and schemes exist at the national, state and local levels. These policies and schemes focus on several important sectors such as health, equal economic opportunities, education, hygiene, contribution in decision making process, political participation, etc. The scope of such schemes has been extended to gender equality, eventually, lead to both social and economic empowerment of women in the society.

Some major government initiatives are:

- Ministry of Women & Child developed was formed in 1985
- National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001)
- Empowerment of women was an important approach adopted in the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) for development of women.
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- Women's Reservation Bill was passed on 9th March 2010
- SABLA
- Support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP)
- Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)
- Kishori Shakti Yojna
- Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao
- Ajeeveka

Despite the effective implementation of the above schemes and programmes, there are substantial gaps between achievements of the policy on paper and actual scenario. India ranks 130 among the 155 nations on Gender Inequality Index. Regardless of repeated claims of progress by the Government, according to the Global Gender Gap Index India is simply not doing enough for the women. In India, women account for 48 per cent of the total population of 1.3 billion, the sex ratio is 944 females per 1000 males, the literacy rate of women is 65.5 per cent whereas that of male is 82 per cent (even below to world' average 79.7%), Work Participation rate is 28.8 per cent females in comparison to 83 per cent males, 14 per cent of entrepreneurs in India are women entrepreneurs, 10% participation in parliament and etc.

### **Status of Women in Rajasthan**

The condition of women in Rajasthan, in comparison to the other states is deplorable. Rajasthan is disreputable for child marriages and is among one of the states having worst sex ratios in the country- 928 females per 1000 males and the sex ratio of children (0-6 years) is 883 which is way below than the country average of 914 due to reasons of infanticide, high infant mortality rate and child mortality rate. There is no such programme implemented till date which can change and challenge these deep rooted social dogmas.

The age of marriage is lower than the prescribed legal age, 49 per cent in age group 15-19 are already married, including 11 per cent who are married but the gauna has not been performed. In the same age group the rural- urban break up shows that 57 per cent rural girls are already married compared to 27 per cent in urban areas. The female literacy rate is a shocking 52 per cent. About 60

per cent women depend on their husbands or families for any medical assistance and basic needs. Women in the rural areas are also not financially stable as there is a lack of employment opportunities. To tackle such social issues and to empower women in the state the State Government is running various schemes and programs with focus on the rural areas but the results are far from being satisfactory.

### **Literature Review**

A. Sundaram (2011) in his study tried to highlight the current status of women in Mizoram and the factors which act as obstacle in acquiring equal status with men. He concluded that effective implementation and utilization of women empowerment programme will safeguard the interests of women.

Study by Anupam Hazra (2011) reiterates that the role of women and participation in the society must be given high priority because women have a fundamental right to enjoy equality in all aspects of life as well as their capacity in playing a crucial role in the sustainable development process.

Duflo E. (2011) in her study contends that the correlation of development and empowerment are perhaps too feeble to be self-sustaining. This paper states that continuous policy commitment may be needed in order to bring about equality between men and women.

Hashemi, Schuler, Riley (1996) in the paper titled "Rural credit programs and Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh" states findings from two programs providing credit to women in rural area, it was found that the programs have significant effects on 8 dimensions of women empowerment. A combination of information collected via case study and sample survey are used by the authors to reason that the success of Grameen Bank in empowering women is due to its central focus on credit, and its skilful use of rules to ensure smooth functioning of the loan program.

Kunja Kusum Kakati (1990) in her paper studies the socio-economic status of educated working women of Kamrup district and it states that even with of legal and constitutional provisions, women remain economically dependent, educationally backward and socially discriminated. Her study reveals wide gaps between the rights and privileges that a woman is given in theory by the constitution as a worker and rights she has in reality. It is found that in matters of decision making power working women were significant than the nonworking women.

Swati Mutalik (1991) attempts to explore the nature of influence of formal education on social awareness. Her study finds that education has significant correlation with the acquisition of social awareness. Highly educated women belonging to high economic status had higher level of social awareness but readiness for action was absent in them. Therefore, it is necessary to motivate these women for action.

### **Rationale of the Study**

The constitution of India states equal rights for both men and women and makes equal provision to improve the status of women in the society, yet majority of them are still unable to enjoy and access the rights and utilise the opportunities guaranteed to them. The government has come up with a plethora of schemes and allocated specific funds for empowering women with emphasis on the rural areas the results are not satisfactory. Despite running various schemes, the benefits are not derived by the women as there is a lack of awareness, and even if they are aware about certain schemes they

do not know the procedure to derive the benefit or even if they are registered for a scheme they do not receive any assistance.

Hence even though there are various schemes, these schemes are not properly Communicated, they are not Converged, thus not resulting in Capacity Building. (i.e. Empowerment). This study tries to review the reasons behind this gap so the effectiveness of the schemes can be enhanced.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The core objectives of the study are as follows:

- To know the status of women in Rajasthan.
- To explore the level of women empowerment in the rural areas of Jaipur.
- To explore the level of awareness of government schemes among the women of rural areas of Jaipur.
- To examine the impact of women empowerment on the awareness level.

### **Research Methodology**

The research design is exploratory in nature based on survey conducted to find the level of Empowerment and Awareness of women in the rural areas in Jaipur district. Primary data has been collected. Judgement sampling method has been used to select a sample of 50 women of the rural area, those who are registered with the Anganwadi and frequently visit the Anganwadi, these women belong to cluster of villages under the Mahapura Grampanchayat, Sanganer tehsil in Jaipur district. Other information has been collected from the Anganwadi workers and the Sarpanch of the village.

Tool of data collection used is a questionnaire divided in two parts-

Part A is based on women empowerment scale (Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley, 1996) and responses have been collected on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree) to check the Empowerment level on 3 dimensions taken from the Women Empowerment scale, these are:

- Women's mobility,
- Freedom from Family Domination,
- Economic Security and Contribution.

It consists of 18 questions in total, broken down into 8 questions for Women's mobility subscale, 4 questions for Freedom from Family Domination subscale and 6 questions for Economic Security and Contribution subscale.

Part B of the questionnaire is used for the awareness level of 9 running Rajasthan government scheme has been collected on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = Not at all aware - 5 = Extremely Aware). The 9 schemes are considered as follows:

- Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao
- Bhamasha Yojna
- Mukhyamantri Balika Sambal Yojna
- Janani Suraksha Yojna
- Mukhyamantri Shubhlakshmi Yojna

- Kaleva Yojna
  - Kishori Shakti Yojna
  - Sabla Yojna
  - Mukhyamantri Humari Betiyan Yojna

The Women Empowerment Level and the Awareness Level was divided into 3 categories and the ranges were determined based on Mean (+/-) 1 S.D, and the categories were:

- Low Empowerment/Awareness Level
- Medium Empowerment/Awareness Level
- High Empowerment/Awareness Level.

Simple linear regression has been used to examine the impact of the empowerment level on awareness level. The data was calculated using IBM SPSS version 21 and MS excel 2016.

### Analysis

The present study focuses on finding the level of socio-economic Women Empowerment and Awareness Level of government schemes in the rural areas of Jaipur and to examine the impact of Women Empowerment on the Awareness Level. The data collected on the Women Empowerment Scale has been analysed in two parts:

- a) Women Empowerment level
- b) Awareness level.

And an attempt has been made to find out the impact of Empowerment level on the Awareness level. The lower limits and the upper limits for both empowerment and awareness level are being calculated with the formula = mean (+/-) 1 S.D., It is assumed that the data is normally distributed and thus the range has been divided into three levels i.e., Below average, Average and Above average.

#### PartA: Women Empowerment Level

**Table 1: Empowerment Level**

Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Low Empowerment Level (<35)	7	14%
Medium Empowerment Level (35-50)	34	68%
High Empowerment Level (>50)	9	18%
Total	50	100%

\*\*Mean = 42.68000, SD = 7.34969

(Refer Table 1) Empowerment level depicts that 68 percent of the sample falls under Medium empowerment level followed by 18 percent under High empowerment level which is comparatively higher than 14 percent falling under Low empowerment level.

## Part B: Awareness Level

**Table 2: Awareness Level**

Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Low Awareness Level (<12)	11	22%
Medium Awareness Level (12-19)	32	64%
High Awareness Level (>19)	5	10%
Total	50	100%

(Refer Table 2) Awareness level depicts that 64 percent of the sample comes under Medium awareness level followed by 22 percent having Low awareness level which is much greater than 10 per cent of the sample in High awareness level.

### Impact of Women Empowerment on Awareness Level

**Table 3: Impact of women Empowerment Level on Awareness Level**

R	R Square	F	Constant	Coefficient
.443	.196	11.699	.801 (0.007)	.402 (0.001)

(Refer Table 3) depicts the impact of empowerment on Awareness Level. 44 percent variation in awareness level is due to women empowerment level, it is a good fit model.

The impact is significant because at 95 per cent confidence level, the value is less than .05.

## Findings and Discussion

### Findings

The major findings of the study are:

- Out of the sample of 50 women, it is found that majority of them 68 percent fall under medium level of empowerment
- Similarly, 64 percent of the sample have medium awareness level of the various schemes run by the government.
- There exists a significant impact of Women Empowerment on the Awareness Level.

### Discussion

The findings of the study reflect that there is a significant impact of Women empowerment on Awareness Level and in both the cases, majority of the sample comes under the middle level.

Women are empowered at different levels at different dimensions; in the present study also we have different levels of women empowerment, following the endogenous strategy of empowerment we establish that empowerment cannot be given to an individual or a group, it is something that evolves over time. The concept of empowerment has two dimensions – Static supports the view that women empowerment can be developed by following an exogenous strategy whereas Dynamic supports the view that empowerment can be enhanced by following an endogenous strategy. Thus, empowerment cannot be given to people, but encouraging conditions can be generated for increasing chances of becoming empowered on their own. Thus the focus should be on removing

certain socio-cultural barriers such as antagonism of men, domestic and family restrictions, dearth of access to information, cultural barriers, lack of education and vocational skills, traditional stereotypes, and low self-confidence Garba (1997). These will help in developing an ecosystem that positively impact empowerment and increase the efficiency and reach of the schemes.

A study by Garba (1999) supports the same theory and states that in terms of effectiveness, endogenous strategies of empowerment are likely to be more effective as compared to exogenous strategies of empowerment as it focuses on fulfilling the real needs and in terms of appropriateness, a dynamic concept of empowerment is more appropriate than a static concept as it forms a basis to endogenous empowerment strategies.

The challenge and task are to develop the capacity of women so that they can perform their role properly to make a difference. Extended policy interventions with effective implementation; awareness building at family, institution and community levels; better follow-up and intensified efforts for integrating gender dimensions in policy-formulation are required for getting the better outcomes and to encourage the participation of women in the mainstream of each socio and economic affairs.

### **Suggestions**

The findings of the study suggest:

- Women education has to be made compulsory. Educated woman is prerequisite condition for women empowerment and enhance the effectiveness of the various schemes.
- A proper assessment of the skills and capacities, actually possessed by women, are identified for effective capacity building and skill development. Proper need assessment can help in finding out the actual gaps. So by imparting relevant training can ensure the identified gaps are filled.
- Camps and workshops can be conducted at regular intervals to demystify various myths.
- Family development initiatives can be conducted to change discriminatory traditional and cultural norms.
- Additional efforts from the government as well as NGOs are suggested to target women in the rural areas and increase their awareness about the various schemes so that they can derive the benefits.
- Proper evaluation of existing schemes at each level of the government is required. It must be ensured that the benefits should reach to right parson.
- It is also necessary to gather data regarding the complaints related to various schemes as it'll improve the quality of such schemes and policies and help solve problems.
- Proper laws should be formulated and implemented for women empowerment. Women should be made aware and informed about these laws.
- Several NGO's E.g.: CARE India, AZAD foundation aims at developing the status of rural women to enhance their dignity and decision making.

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