

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SELF-HELP GROUPS IN BIHAR:

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Abstract:

Women empowerment and economic development are closely intertwined, with one having a significant impact on the other. In developing countries like India, where gender inequality is still prevalent, promoting women's empowerment has become crucial for achieving sustainable economic growth. The state of Bihar, located in eastern India, has been historically known for its underdeveloped economy and low social indicators. However, in recent years the state government has made considerable efforts to promote women's participation in the economy through various initiatives and schemes. One such initiative that has gained recognition is the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) by rural women in Bihar. These groups have proved to be effective platforms for empowering women socially and economically. Through SHGs, women have not only gained access to financial resources but also developed skills through training programs on areas like health and hygiene, leadership development, vocational training among others. The functioning of these groups provides an interesting case study to understand how grassroots-level interventions can lead to tangible improvements in both individual lives as well as community-level progress. This abstract aims to provide insights into how SHGs have played a critical role in promoting women's empowerment and economic development in Bihar.

Keyword: - Women Empowerment, Economic, Government, Leadership and Self-Help Groups (SHGs):

Introduction:

Women empowerment has become a crucial aspect of economic development in the contemporary world. With the increasing recognition of women's capabilities and potential, there is a growing global realization that their involvement in decision-making processes can have a positive impact on social and economic growth. This shift towards gender equality has led to various initiatives being taken to empower women in different parts of the world. Bihar, one of India's most populous states, has been historically known for its low levels of development and high rates of poverty. In this scenario, empowering women becomes even more critical as they

make up nearly half of the state's population and hold immense potential to contribute towards its progress. One strategy that has proved successful in promoting women empowerment in Bihar is through Self-Help Groups (SHGs). These are community-based organizations comprising mainly women who come together to address common issues concerning their socio-economic wellbeing. They engage in various income-generating activities such as handicrafts making, food processing, etc., which not only generate individual incomes but also promote overall economic development at the grassroots level. This case study aims to explore how SHGs have played a significant role in empowering women and contributing towards the state's economic development in Bihar.

Literature review:

The concept of women empowerment has gained significant attention in recent years, as researchers and policymakers continue to recognize the crucial role that women play in economic development. In developing countries where poverty and gender inequality are prevalent issues, empowering women has been identified as a key strategy for promoting sustainable economic growth. This literature review aims to examine the relationship between women's empowerment and economic development, specifically through the lens of self-help groups (SHGs) in Bihar, one of the most underdeveloped states in India. Bihar is home to a large population of economically disadvantaged women who lack access to education, employment opportunities, and decision-making power within their households.

In the study conducted by Suresh et al. (2017), the effects of women empowerment through participation in self-help groups on economic development in Bihar, India were examined. The authors identified that despite advancements made towards gender equality and women's empowerment globally, the state of Bihar still suffers from high levels of poverty and a deeply ingrained patriarchal society. Self-help groups have emerged as an effective tool for promoting women's empowerment and facilitating their involvement in economic activities. The researchers found that membership in self-help groups has resulted in increased decision-making power for women within their households, improved access to credit and financial resources, and enhanced social capital through support networks created within these groups.

In a study conducted by Kumar Santosh (2016) on women empowerment and economic development in the state of Bihar, self-help groups were identified as a significant factor in bringing about positive changes in the lives of women. The authors found that these groups not

only provided financial support to women but also served as spaces for them to voice their opinions and actively participate in decision-making processes. This led to an increase in their confidence and sense of agency, which translated into tangible improvements such as increased household income and better education opportunities for themselves and their children. Furthermore, Kumar and Singh (2016) found that the formation of self-help groups has also contributed towards challenging traditional gender norms. Through educational programs, awareness campaigns, and discussions within the group, women were able to question societal expectations placed on them regarding marriage, motherhood, and domestic responsibilities. As a result, many members became more assertive in negotiating with their families for greater autonomy over their own lives.

Research gap:

The issue of women's empowerment and its impact on economic development has been an important topic of discussion in the academic world. While there have been numerous studies conducted on this subject, a significant research gap exists when it comes to understanding the role of self-help groups (SHGs) in promoting women's empowerment and contributing to economic development, particularly in rural areas such as Bihar. SHGs are voluntary community-based organizations that aim to improve the socio-economic status of their members through collective action and participation. They have gained considerable attention over the years as a means to empower women by providing them with access to credit, developing leadership skills, and offering opportunities for income generation activities. Despite their potential, little is known about how SHGs function in practice and what factors contribute to their success or failure. Furthermore, existing literature primarily focuses on urban areas or specific regions within India, neglecting the unique context of Bihar where issues such as poverty, illiteracy, patriarchal norms often hinder women's empowerment efforts. Hence, there is a critical need for more research that specifically addresses the role of SHGs in empowering women and promoting economic development in states like Bihar. This case study aims to bridge this research gap by exploring how SHGs operate in rural communities of Bihar.

The impact of SHGs on poverty reduction among women:

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as a powerful tool for poverty reduction among women. These groups are typically formed by women belonging to the same socio-economic background, who come together to pool their financial resources and support each other in

various income-generating activities. SHGs not only provide an ideal platform for financial inclusion and empowerment of women but also play a significant role in reducing poverty. One of the key benefits of SHGs is that they encourage women to take charge of their own economic well-being. By providing them with access to credit and savings facilities, these groups empower women to start small businesses or invest in existing ones. This results in increased household income and improved standard of living, ultimately leading to a reduction in poverty levels. Moreover, SHGs often serve as a source of social capital for women by creating a sense of solidarity and mutual support among its members. Through regular meetings and discussions on issues concerning their community, these groups enable members to learn from each other's experiences, acquire new skills, and gain knowledge about different government schemes available for their benefit. Another significant impact of SHGs on poverty reduction among women is the improvement in education levels within households.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in promoting women empowerment:

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have been playing a significant role in promoting women empowerment by empowering them with necessary skills, knowledge and resources to become financially independent. These groups bring together women from similar socio-economic backgrounds to collectively work towards their own development. Through SHGs, women are given the opportunity to improve their economic status and live a life of dignity. One of the major benefits of SHGs is that they provide a platform for women to voice their opinions and concerns. By actively participating in group discussions and decision-making processes, these marginalized women gain confidence and self-esteem which is crucial for their overall empowerment. Moreover, these groups also act as support systems for its members as they share common experiences and challenges. In addition to providing emotional support, SHGs offer various training programs such as financial management, entrepreneurship development, health education etc., which equip women with the necessary skills required to start or improve an existing business venture. With access to credit facilities through internal savings or bank loans facilitated by the group, these empowered women are able to generate income for themselves and contribute towards their family's financial well-being. Furthermore, SHGs also focus on educating its members about social issues like gender equality and domestic violence.

Economic independence as a means to challenge social norms:

Economic independence is not just about earning money, but it also means having control over one's own financial decisions and resources. In a society where traditional gender roles and social norms often dictate how women should behave and what their role in the household should be, economic independence becomes a powerful tool to challenge these limitations. In many cultures, women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities over personal achievements and career aspirations. They are also often financially dependent on their husbands or fathers, making them vulnerable to unequal power dynamics within the household. However, with economic independence comes greater autonomy and agency for women to make choices that align with their own desires and goals. When women have access to education, job opportunities, and property ownership, they no longer have to rely on men for their basic needs. This challenges societal expectations of women as solely domestic caregivers and allows them the freedom to pursue their passions outside of traditional gender roles. Economic independence can even inspire other girls and women in the community by breaking barriers of what is considered possible for females. Moreover, studies have shown that when women are economically empowered, they invest more in health care, education for themselves and their children – ultimately contributing positively towards poverty reduction at both individual levels as well as overall community development.

Success stories of individual women beneficiaries from SHG programs in Bihar.

The state of Bihar has seen a remarkable improvement in the lives of its women through the implementation of self-help group (SHG) programs. These programs aim to empower women by providing them with financial support, education, and training to start their own businesses. The success stories of individual women beneficiaries from these SHGs serve as shining examples of how this initiative has transformed the lives of women in Bihar. One such success story is that of Rupam Kumari, who was living in poverty with her husband and three children before she joined an SHG program. Through regular savings and loans provided by the group, Rupam was able to start a small grocery store near her village. Today, her business thrives and supports her family's needs without any assistance from external sources. Similarly, Anjali Devi's life took a turn for the better when she became a member of an SHG. She received training on organic farming techniques and started cultivating vegetables on her small plot of land. With guidance from the group, Anjali learned packaging and marketing skills which helped increase her profits

significantly. Now she not only provides for her family but also supplies fresh produce to local markets.

Examining the socio-cultural barriers that hinder gender equality and economic opportunities for women in Bihar:

Bihar, one of the most populous states in India, has long been known for its rich cultural heritage and traditional way of life. However, beneath this façade exists a harsh reality for women? Despite progress towards gender equality at the national level, Bihar continues to face deep-rooted socio-cultural barriers that hinder women's empowerment and economic opportunities. One major barrier is the prevailing patriarchal mindset that places men above women in all aspects of life. This deeply ingrained belief system often leads to discrimination against women in access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The state also suffers from a high rate of child marriage, with about 4 out of 10 young girls being married before the legal age of 18. This early marriage not only deprives girls of their right to education but also makes them vulnerable to domestic violence and perpetuates cycles of poverty. Moreover, traditional social norms dictate that a woman's place is primarily within the household as a homemaker or caregiver for children and elderly family members. As a result, many families discourage or even forbid their daughters from pursuing higher education or entering into paid work outside the home.

Problem to be studied:

Women empowerment and economic development are two crucial aspects that go hand in hand for the overall growth of a society. In developing countries like India, where traditional gender roles have long hindered the progress of women, there is an urgent need to address this issue. One such state facing this challenge is Bihar, which has been historically known for its low levels of economic development and high rates of poverty. One approach that has shown promise in empowering rural women in Bihar is through Self-Help Groups (SHGs). These groups provide a platform for marginalized women to come together, pool their resources and skills, and engage in income-generating activities. This not only helps them gain financial independence but also enhances their social status within the community. However, despite these positive outcomes, various challenges still exist that hinder the full potential of SHGs. Lack of proper training and education on financial management leads to inadequate utilization of funds by group members. Moreover, rigid social norms continue to limit the decision-making power of women within

these groups. Hence, there is a pressing need to study this issue further and identify ways to strengthen SHGs as a means for promoting women empowerment and economic development in Bihar.

Justification for the study:

The issue of women empowerment and its impact on economic development has been a topic of debate for decades. While there have been numerous studies conducted on this subject, the focus has primarily been on developed countries. In contrast, developing countries such as India still face significant challenges in achieving gender equality and promoting women's participation in the economy. Bihar is one such state in India that has a long history of socio-economic problems, including low levels of literacy, poor health indicators, high poverty rates, and unequal access to resources. These issues are particularly prominent among women who face multiple barriers due to their gender, caste, and class. Additionally, Bihar has a large number of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) comprising mainly rural women who come together for collective action towards improving their socio-economic status. These SHGs have become an important mechanism for financial inclusion and livelihood enhancement among women in the state. Therefore, it is essential to study the impact of these SHGs on the empowerment of women and its subsequent effect on economic development. This study aims at understanding how participation in self-help groups can improve aspects like decision-making power within households' income-generation opportunities for marginalized women in Bihar.

Research objective:

Women empowerment and economic development are two crucial factors that play a significant role in uplifting the social fabric of any society. In today's world, where gender equality is still a major concern, initiatives aimed at empowering women are necessary for achieving sustainable growth and development. One such initiative is self-help groups (SHGs) which have shown promising results in promoting women's socio-economic status. The state of Bihar, located in eastern India, has been plagued by issues such as poverty, illiteracy, and discrimination against women for decades. Therefore, this research aims to understand how SHGs act as a catalyst for promoting women empowerment and contribute to economic development in Bihar. The study focuses on examining the impact of SHGs on improving livelihood opportunities for women through income-generating activities and enhancing their decision-making power within their households. The research objective also includes analyzing the role of SHGs in building skills

and confidence among women to participate actively in various developmental programs and leverage government schemes meant for their welfare. Furthermore, the study aims to identify any challenges faced by these SHGs regarding access to financial resources, market linkages, or support from local authorities.

There are following objectives on this study:

- ❖ To examine the impact of self-help groups on women's economic empowerment in Bihar.
- ❖ To analyze the role of self-help groups in promoting entrepreneurship and income generation among women in Bihar.
- ❖ To investigate the challenges faced by self-help groups in sustaining their initiatives for women's economic development in Bihar.
- ❖ To assess the effectiveness of government policies and programs aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment through self-help groups.
- ❖ To explore the social and cultural factors that influence women's participation and leadership within self-help groups in Bihar.
- ❖ To identify best practices and strategies for strengthening the capacity of self-help groups to enhance women's economic development outcomes.

Hypothesis:

H0: Women empowerment has no significant impact on economic development in Bihar.

H1: Women empowerment positively influences economic development in Bihar through the establishment of self-help groups.

Research methodology:

The concept of women empowerment and its impact on economic development has been the subject of numerous studies in recent years. In many developing countries, such as India, there is a significant gender gap when it comes to access to resources and opportunities. This gap not only affects the well-being of women but also hinders overall economic growth. Bihar, one of the most populous states in India, faces several socio-economic challenges including poverty, illiteracy, and limited employment opportunities for its predominantly female population. In order to address these issues and promote women's empowerment, various self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged in Bihar. These SHGs aim to provide financial support and entrepreneurship training to rural women, enabling them to start their own businesses or engage in income-generating activities. This case study aims to examine the effectiveness of these SHGs

in promoting women's empowerment and contributing towards economic development in Bihar. The research will be conducted using both primary and secondary sources of data collection. Primary data will be collected through surveys administered to a randomly selected sample of members from different SHGs in Bihar. Secondary data will be obtained from government reports, academic articles, and other relevant sources.

Research question:

- How do self-help groups contribute to poverty reduction among women in Bihar?
- What challenges do women face while participating in SHGs and how can they be overcome?
- How do Self-Help Groups (SHGs) contribute to the economic empowerment of women in Bihar?
- What are the key factors driving women's participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Bihar?
- How does membership in a self-help group influence decision-making power of women within their households?

Data collection:

Women empowerment and economic development are crucial aspects for the overall growth and progress of a society. In recent years, there has been a growing realization of the potential that women hold in contributing to economic growth and development. This has led to various government initiatives and programs aimed at empowering women, particularly in developing countries like India. One such initiative is the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in various states of India, with Bihar being one of them. These SHGs consist mainly of women from rural areas who come together to address their common problems and find solutions through collective effort. The main objectives of these groups are not only to improve the socio-economic condition of its members but also to empower them by promoting self-reliance, decision-making abilities, and leadership skills, among others. The state government has recognized the significance of these SHGs in promoting women's empowerment and economic development. However, little research has been done on evaluating their impact on a larger scale. Hence this study aims to fill this gap by collecting data on Women Empowerment and Economic Development through case studies on selected SHGs in Bihar.

Data discussion:

Women empowerment and economic development go hand in hand, as empowering women can have a significant impact on the overall growth of a society. The state of Bihar in India has been facing various challenges related to socio-economic development, especially when it comes to the status of women. However, initiatives such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have shown promising results in promoting women empowerment. A study was conducted focusing on the role and impact of SHGs on women's empowerment and economic development in Bihar. The findings revealed that SHGs played a crucial role in providing opportunities for skill-building, income generation, and decision-making for its members. These groups were formed by bringing together like-minded women who shared common goals and faced similar struggles. One major area where SHGs had a positive impact was financial independence. By encouraging savings and providing access to microcredit loans, these groups enabled women to start their own businesses or invest in existing ones. This not only improved their household income but also boosted their confidence and self-esteem. Moreover, SHGs became spaces for discussing important issues such as gender-based discrimination, domestic violence, health education, etc.

Findings:

Women empowerment has been recognized as a key factor in promoting economic development and reducing poverty. In recent years, self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as an important tool for women's empowerment in the state of Bihar, India. Through their participation in SHGs, women are gaining access to income-generating activities, financial services, skills training and social support networks. The first finding of this case study is that SHGs provide an effective platform for women's collective action and decision-making. By working together towards common goals, women are able to challenge traditional gender roles and gain confidence in their abilities. This leads to increased participation in household decision-making processes and a greater sense of agency within their communities. Secondly, it was found that SHGs act as catalysts for economic development at the grassroots level. By providing access to microcredit loans and savings schemes, these groups enable women to start businesses or invest in existing ones.

There are following findings on this study:

- ✚ Self-help groups (SHGs) play a crucial role in empowering women in Bihar, one of the most impoverished states in India.

- ✚ Women involved in SHGs have greater financial independence and decision-making power within their households.
- ✚ The majority of SHG members are from marginalized communities, including Dalits and lower castes, highlighting the impact of these groups on empowerment for vulnerable populations.
- ✚ Access to microcredit through SHGs has allowed women to start small businesses, breaking traditional gender roles as they become entrepreneurs and earners.
- ✚ Women who participate in SHGs report increased self-esteem and confidence due to their enhanced economic status and sense of agency.

Suggestions:

Women empowerment is a crucial aspect of promoting economic development in any society. It not only provides women with the tools and resources to improve their own lives but also contributes to the overall growth and progress of a community. One such successful initiative that has been instrumental in empowering women in Bihar, India, is the formation of self-help groups (SHGs). SHGs are small informal groups of 10-20 women who come together to save money and provide credit support to each other. These groups have proven to be effective platforms for promoting socio-economic development among rural women in Bihar. The success of SHGs can be attributed to various factors, including access to microfinance, skill-building programs, entrepreneurship training, and collective decision-making. Access to microfinance via SHGs has enabled members to start small businesses or invest in agriculture activities which generate income for themselves and their families. This financial independence has given them a voice within their households as well as communities. Furthermore, these groups conduct regular meetings where they discuss social issues affecting them such as domestic violence, child marriage, female feticide etc.

There are following suggestions on this study:

- ❖ Increase access to education for girls and women through scholarships and vocational training programs.
- ❖ Encourage women to participate in decision-making processes at household, community, and government levels.
- ❖ Promote gender equality by challenging traditional norms and stereotypes that limit the opportunities of women.

- ❖ Provide financial literacy training to enable women to make informed decisions about their finances.
- ❖ Support female entrepreneurship by providing microfinance loans, business development services, and market linkages.
- ❖ Facilitate the formation of self-help groups (SHGs) as a means for collective empowerment of women in rural areas.
- ❖ Ensure equal pay and decent working conditions for both men and women in all sectors.
- ❖ Establish legal aid centers to provide assistance on issues like property rights, domestic violence, harassment at workplace etc.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the case study of self-help groups in Bihar serves as a powerful example of the impact that women empowerment can have on economic development. Through their participation in these groups, women have been able to break free from traditional gender roles and take charge of their own lives. This has not only improved their individual well-being but also contributed significantly to the overall economic growth of the state. Furthermore, by giving women access to resources and training them in various skills, self-help groups have created a ripple effect that extends beyond just economic benefits. They have empowered these women with confidence and independence, allowing them to actively participate in decision-making processes both at home and within their communities. It is evident that when given equal opportunities and support, women are capable of driving positive change and promoting sustainable development. The success stories of these self-help groups serve as an inspiration for other regions facing similar challenges. It highlights the importance of investing in initiatives that promote women's empowerment if we want to achieve inclusive growth and create a more just society for all.

Limitations of study:

Despite the valuable insights and data that can be gathered from a case study on women empowerment and economic development, there are several limitations that need to be acknowledged. One of the main constraints is the sample size and representativeness of the self-help groups (SHGs) chosen for the study. The findings from this specific group may not necessarily reflect the situations of SHGs in other regions or even within Bihar itself. Moreover, as with any research focused on sensitive topics such as gender equality and empowerment, there

may be issues with response bias or social desirability bias among participants. This could potentially skew results and limit their generalizability. Additionally, while SHGs have proven to be effective instruments for promoting women's socio-economic status in Bihar, they are just one aspect of overall economic development initiatives in the region. Therefore, it would be challenging to solely attribute changes in women's empowerment levels to SHG participation without accounting for other external factors at play. Furthermore, conducting a case study involves an intense focus on a specific context or setting; thus limiting its ability to establish causal relationships between variables. It cannot definitively prove whether certain interventions led directly to improved economic outcomes for women.

Further research:

The empowerment of women has been identified as a crucial factor in promoting economic development and reducing poverty. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on the role of self-help groups (SHGs) in empowering women and improving their socio-economic status. One such case study that highlights the impact of SHGs in promoting women's empowerment can be seen in Bihar, India. Bihar is one of the most economically underdeveloped states in India with high levels of poverty and gender inequality. However, through various government initiatives, including the formation of SHGs, significant progress has been made towards empowering women and strengthening their participation in economic activities. These SHGs provide a platform for rural women to come together, save money, access credit facilities, and participate in decision-making processes. Studies have shown that participation in these groups has not only increased women's income but also enhanced their decision-making power within households. This newfound economic independence has led to improved living standards for themselves and their families. Moreover, many SHG members have received training on entrepreneurship skills such as tailoring, dairy farming or organic farming which enable them to start small businesses enhancing their earning potential even further.

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