

## **ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS THROUGH FINANCIAL INCLUSION: A STUDY ON THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF MARGINALISED WOMEN IN KANCHIPURAM DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the role of financial inclusion in enhancing the economic empowerment of marginalised women in Kanchipuram district, Tamil Nadu, within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Financial inclusion, defined as access to affordable and useful financial services, is widely recognized as a catalyst for women's empowerment (SDG 5: Gender Equality) and poverty alleviation (SDG 1: No Poverty). The research employs both exploratory and descriptive methods through a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis to provide a holistic understanding, thereby contributing to inclusive growth (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth).*

*The study is based on data collected from 200 marginalised women, both working and non-working, using convenience sampling. Primary data was gathered through structured questionnaires and analysed with statistical tools such as mean analysis, correlation, and regression. The study assessed four major dimensions of financial inclusion: Access to Financial Services, Usage of Financial Services, Financial Literacy, and Affordability and Cost of Services. These dimensions directly contribute to reducing economic disparities faced by marginalized groups (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities).*

*Findings reveal that the Usage of Financial Services scored highest, showing that marginalised women actively use savings accounts, credit, and government schemes. Correlation and regression analyses confirmed a significant positive relationship between financial inclusion and economic empowerment, with Access and Usage of Financial Services emerging as the most influential factors. The study offers academic and practical contributions, recommending strategies for policymakers, NGOs, and financial institutions to strengthen financial access, literacy, and affordability, aligning with SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals.*

**Key Words:** *Sustainable Development Goals, Financial Inclusion, Economic Empowerment, Marginalised Women, Access to Financial Services, Usage of Financial Services, Financial Literacy.*

### **Introduction**

Financial inclusion has become a critical driver for uplifting the economic conditions of underserved groups, and its importance is strongly reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By promoting access to banking and allied services, it directly supports SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) (Saha Sumanta Kumar & Qin Jie, 2023). Ensuring that individuals in rural and tribal regions can utilise essential financial facilities such as savings, credit, insurance, and digital payments strengthens their economic resilience and contributes to inclusive growth (CGAP, 2024). For marginalised women, however, participation in the financial system remains restricted due to geographic isolation, limited literacy, and entrenched social barriers (Vini Balot & Pragya Sharma, 2024). Overcoming these barriers not only advances financial security but also fosters empowerment, aligning with SDG 5 (Gender Equality), as it enables women to participate in income generation, manage resources, and secure their future (Kumar, 2020; Adera & Abdisa, 2023; CGAP, 2024).

In Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu, marginalised women continue to face challenges stemming from persistent poverty, lack of awareness, and minimal access to formal financial services (Adera & Abdisa, 2023). Understanding how inclusion in financial systems can shape their economic empowerment is essential for formulating targeted strategies and support mechanisms (World Bank Group, 2025). Strengthening access, usage, and financial literacy not only enhances independence and decision-making capacity but also contributes to wider economic development, which is central to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (Siddik, 2017). This study, therefore, positions financial inclusion as both a means of transforming the lives of marginalised women in Kanchipuram and as a pathway for advancing multiple SDGs, ensuring that empowerment at the local level resonates with global sustainable development priorities.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

Globally, nearly 1.4 billion people remain outside the reach of formal financial systems, lacking access to bank accounts, mobile money services, or other regulated financial institutions. Even among those with accounts, usage is often minimal due to inefficiencies and lack of convenience, leaving almost one-third of the adult population without effective financial services that could otherwise enhance their quality of life (CGAP, 2024). This challenge is directly linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which emphasise equitable access to resources for all.

In India, despite targeted initiatives by governments and financial institutions, many marginalised women continue to face barriers in accessing and utilising formal financial services (Vini Balot & Pragya Sharma, 2024). Within districts such as Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, these barriers are compounded by low levels of financial literacy, limited mobility, absence of proper identification documents, and socio-cultural restrictions. Such constraints undermine their ability to engage in economic activities, thereby weakening their financial independence and reducing their decision-making authority within households and communities (Chetiya Anuradha, 2024). Addressing these gaps is critical to advancing SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), as women's empowerment is central to sustainable and inclusive development.

Given these challenges, there is a pressing need to investigate whether and how financial inclusion can contribute to the economic empowerment of marginalised women in this context (Siddik, 2017). This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between financial inclusion and empowerment (Adera & Abdisa, 2023), aiming to generate insights that can guide policies and programs aligned with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) and tailored to the needs of marginalised women in Kanchipuram.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to assess how financial inclusion enhances the economic empowerment of marginalised women in Kanchipuram district, Tamil Nadu, with specific reference to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It examines women's access to financial services, usage patterns, and financial awareness, and evaluates how these factors shape their financial independence, income generation, and decision-making ability (Adera & Abdisa, 2023). The research further proposes measures to improve financial inclusion, thereby strengthening women's overall economic well-being. In doing so, it contributes to the advancement of SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), while also providing actionable insights for policymakers, financial institutions, and development organisations in line with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

## **Literature Reviews and Research Gap**

### **Literature Reviews**

Research conducted across various countries highlights the significant role of financial inclusion in advancing women's economic empowerment. Evidence from Ethiopia indicates a positive association between financial inclusion and women's progress in income and independence (Adera & Abdisa, 2023). In Bangladesh, women's participation in microcredit and financial programs has been shown to improve household income, enhance living standards, strengthen decision-making power, and reduce dependence on informal borrowing, while also supporting children's education (Pitt et al., 2006; Siddik, 2017).

In India, direct wage deposits into women's personal bank accounts encouraged greater workforce participation and gradually reshaped traditional gender perceptions (Field et al., 2021). Similarly, findings from South Africa suggest that access to financial services enables women to challenge household norms and play a more active role in family and work-related decisions (Van Biljon et al., 2018). Extending this perspective, research across Asia and Africa emphasizes the importance of tackling gender disparities, improving financial literacy, and ensuring equitable pay to strengthen women's empowerment (Cicchello et al., 2021).

Studies from the Middle East and North Africa further reveal that factors such as gender, education, age, and income strongly influence women's financial inclusion (Kazemikhasrigh et al., 2022). In addition, supportive policies and financial education are found to amplify the benefits of financial access, particularly for women in rural communities (Nguse et al., 2022; Christiaan & Wong, 2025).

### **Research Gap**

Although international evidence consistently highlights the positive impact of financial inclusion on women's economic empowerment, there remains limited research on marginalised women within the Indian context, particularly in Tamil Nadu. Existing studies seldom capture the local realities of how access, usage, and awareness of financial services shape the financial independence, income generation, and decision-making ability of marginalised groups. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining marginalised women in Kanchipuram district, with a focus on how financial inclusion can contribute to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Financial Inclusion**

Financial inclusion is broadly understood as the process of extending affordable and accessible financial services to all sections of society, particularly vulnerable and low-income groups (Government of India, RBI, 2008). It ensures that individuals, including those living in disadvantaged or remote areas, are able to access and effectively utilise essential financial facilities such as savings accounts, credit, insurance, and digital payment systems (World Bank Group, 2025; CGAP, 2024). By enabling such access, financial inclusion enhances financial security and promotes greater participation in economic activities.

In this study, financial inclusion is examined through specific sub-components such as Access to Financial Services (conveniently reach and utilise formal banking and financial facilities), Usage of Financial Services (how often and how well people actually use the financial services that are available to them), Financial Literacy (ability to understand basic financial concepts like saving, budgeting,

interest, loans, insurance, etc.) and Affordability and Cost of Services (how much it costs to use financial services and whether people can afford it) to marginalised women in the study area.

### Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment refers to enabling individuals, particularly women, to generate income, manage financial resources, and exercise decision-making power over their economic activities and future (UN Women, 2022). For marginalised women, this empowerment extends to controlling their earnings, engaging in sustainable livelihood opportunities, acquiring and owning assets, and actively contributing to financial decisions within their households and communities. Such empowerment strengthens their independence, enhances security, and supports long-term well-being (Mengstie, 2022).

### Methodology Employed

This study employs both exploratory and descriptive research designs, using a mixed-method approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative analyses. The research is centred on marginalised women in the Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu, with a sample of 200 respondents (working and non-working) selected through convenience sampling. Data is collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed with both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. By examining how financial inclusion influences economic empowerment, the study aligns with key Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), thereby contributing to global development priorities while addressing local challenges.

### Data Analysis and Discussion

#### Analysis of Role of Financial Inclusion in advancing SDG and Economic Empowerment of Marginalised women – Mean Analysis

To evaluate the role of financial inclusion in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with respect to marginalised women, a structured questionnaire was designed comprising 12 items grouped under four dimensions (shown in Table 1): Access to Financial Services, Usage of Financial Services, Financial Literacy, and Affordability and Cost of Services. Each dimension included three statements measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.”

The responses were subjected to mean analysis, and the results presented in Table 1 reveal that marginalised women in the study area experience a moderate level of financial inclusion. These findings highlight the need for targeted strategies to strengthen their financial participation, thereby contributing to SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

**Table 1: Financial Inclusion in advancing SDG – Mean Analysis**

<b>Financial Inclusion For SDG</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Sd</b>
Access to Financial Services	200	11.62	3.489
Usage of Financial Services	200	12.30	3.786
Financial Literacy	200	10.59	3.125
Affordability and Cost of Services	200	9.44	2.694
<b>Financial Inclusion In Advancing Sdg For Marginalised Women</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>43.95</b>	<b>5.364</b>

**Source: Primary Data**

The mean analysis of financial inclusion in advancing SDGs among marginalised women in Kanchipuram district reveals varying levels across the four dimensions (Table 1). Usage of Financial Services recorded the highest mean score (12.30), indicating that women are relatively active in using banking products, credit facilities, and government schemes. This is followed by Access to Financial

Services (11.62), showing that while services are available, gaps remain in ensuring wider reach. Financial Literacy (10.59) is moderate, suggesting that awareness and understanding of financial products still need to be strengthened. Affordability and Cost of Services scored the lowest mean (9.44), highlighting cost-related constraints as a major barrier to deeper financial inclusion. The overall mean score of 43.95 out of a maximum possible 60 translates to 73.25%, reflecting a moderate level of financial inclusion among the respondents.

These findings emphasise that while marginalised women are gradually engaging with formal financial systems, enhancing financial literacy and reducing cost-related barriers are critical for strengthening their empowerment in alignment with SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

### **Assessment of the Relationship between Financial Inclusion and Economic Empowerment of Marginalised Women in Advancing the SDGs – Correlation Analysis**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the Level of Financial Inclusion and Economic Empowerment of Marginalised women in Advancing the SDGs.

A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was employed to investigate the relationship between the level of financial inclusion and the economic empowerment of marginalised women in the context of advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Table 2: Relationship between Financial Inclusion and Economic Empowerment of Marginalised Women in Advancing the SDGs – Correlation Analysis**

Variable	N	'R' Value	P - Value	Relationship	Remarks	
					Significant	Result
Financial Inclusion and Economic Empowerment	200	0.736**	0.000	Positive	Significant	Rejected

(Source: Primary Data) \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As the p-value is below the 0.01 significance threshold for all examined relationships, the null hypothesis is rejected. The analysis demonstrates a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.736$ ) between the level of financial inclusion and the economic empowerment of marginalised women, highlighting its critical role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **7.3 Analysis of Impact of Financial Inclusion Aspects on Economic Empowerment of Marginalised women in Advancing the SDGs – Multiple Regression Analysis**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Financial Inclusion Aspects have no significant impact on Economic Empowerment of Marginalised women in Advancing the SDGs.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which various dimensions of financial inclusion (Independent Variable) predict the economic empowerment of marginalised women (Dependent Variable) in the context of advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



**Table3: Impact of Financial Inclusion on Economic Empowerment in Advancing the SDGs - Multiple Regression Analysis**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.609	.785		1.547	.535
	Access to Financial Services	.306	.135	.265	5.112	.000**
	Usage of Financial Services	.658	.124	.327	6.887	.000**
	Financial Literacy	.210	.142	.203	4.025	.000**
	Affordability and Cost of Services	.129	.156	.112	2.236	.026*

**Dependent Variable: Economic Empowerment of Marginalised women**  
(\*\*1% and \*5% Level of Significance)

The regression results indicate that the overall model is statistically significant, with  $F(4, 195) = 356.128$  and p-values below both 0.01 and 0.05, demonstrating that the model provides a strong fit for the data. The Adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.724 shows that approximately 72.4% of the variance in the economic empowerment of marginalised women is explained by the four independent variables: Access to Financial Services, Usage of Financial Services, Financial Literacy, and Affordability and Cost of Services, representing a large effect size according to Cohen's criteria.

Among the predictors, Usage of Financial Services had the most substantial impact ( $\beta = 0.327$ ), followed by Access to Financial Services ( $\beta = 0.265$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Financial Literacy ( $\beta = 0.203$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), highlighting that greater engagement with financial services significantly enhances women's economic empowerment. In contrast, Affordability and Cost of Services exhibited the least influence, with a standardized beta of 0.112 and a p-value of 0.026, though it remained statistically significant at the 5% level.

These findings indicate that while cost and affordability are important, their effect is comparatively lower than other dimensions of financial inclusion. Overall, the analysis confirms that the aspects of financial inclusion collectively have a significant and positive impact on the economic empowerment of marginalised women, thereby contributing to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### Suggestions and Recommendations

The findings underscore that financial inclusion is a key driver of economic empowerment for marginalised women in Kanchipuram. Given that the usage of financial services has the strongest impact, targeted awareness programs should encourage women to actively engage with banking and digital financial tools. Simultaneously, access can be improved by establishing additional rural bank branches, deploying mobile banking units, and simplifying documentation procedures. Strengthening financial literacy through regular training and workshops in local languages, covering topics such as savings, credit, budgeting, and financial planning, is also essential.

To address affordability concerns, banks and service providers should offer low-cost or no-cost financial products and reduce transaction fees tailored to the needs of marginalised women. Implementing these measures holistically can create a more inclusive financial ecosystem, empowering women to make informed economic decisions and advance their well-being, thereby contributing directly to SDG 1 (No

Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that financial inclusion plays a crucial role in enhancing the economic empowerment of marginalised women in Kanchipuram district, Tamil Nadu. The findings reveal that women are increasingly engaging with financial services such as savings accounts, credit facilities, and government benefit schemes, which positively influence their financial independence, income generation, and decision-making capacity. Despite these gains, challenges remain in terms of access, financial literacy, and affordability. The study also identified a strong positive relationship between financial inclusion and economic empowerment, indicating that inclusion in the formal financial system encourages greater economic participation and self-reliance among marginalised women.

While the research provides important insights, it is limited to a specific region and sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the results to other areas or populations. Future studies could expand to different districts in Tamil Nadu or India and examine additional variables such as digital inclusion or cultural factors. Academically, the study contributes to the literature on women's economic empowerment through financial inclusion. Practically, it offers guidance to policymakers, banks, and NGOs for designing targeted financial literacy programs, improving service accessibility, and reducing cost-related barriers. These measures can advance SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), ensuring that financial inclusion has a meaningful and lasting impact on the lives of marginalised women in rural India.

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