

RURAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP TOWARDS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SUSTENANCE IN RURAL INDIA – A STUDY IN BANGALORE & BELGAUM RURAL DISTRICTS

Ms. Sushama Bavle

Ph.D Research Scholar, Pacific University of Higher Education & Research University, Udaipur, Rajasthan & Assoc. Professor & HOD, Commerce, Maharani Lakshmi Ammanni College for Women, Bangalore.

Ms. Manjula Shekar

Asst. Professor, Commerce Department, Maharani Lakshmi Ammanni College for Women, Bangalore.

Abstract

In India, poverty has remained the biggest challenge in its developmental efforts to bring about a perceptible change in the quality of life of its teeming millions. India has been, and continues to be, a predominantly rural country. According to the 2011 census, 68.84% of India's population lives in villages. Besides, the incidence of poverty in India is much more severe in the villages than in the towns, the poverty ratio being 25.7% (2011 census).

Sustainable development of an economy can be ensured only through economic and social sustenance of its population. Rural women entrepreneurship is an effective means of poverty alleviation towards economic and social sustenance. This paper is based on two Minor Research Project : 1) Poverty Alleviation through Rural Women Entrepreneurship in Bangalore and Belgaum Rural District 2) Sustainable Development of Rural Women Entrepreneurs through Micro Finance – A Study in Bangalore Rural District.

The findings of the studies emphasize the importance of the contribution of rural women entrepreneurs to the family income in bringing about economic and social sustenance in the rural families. Microcredit and other services provided through various microfinance programmes and schemes has been instrumental in meeting the challenge of limited finance and in empowering the rural women entrepreneurs towards economic and social sustenance.

Key Words: Rural Women Entrepreneurship, Microcredit, Economic Sustenance, Social Sustenance.

1. Poverty

The Indian economy has been recognized as a fast developing economy with a relatively high rate of economic growth. Yet, in the midst of plenty there is poverty. There are a quite a few Indians appearing in the Forbes India list of rich in the world; even then the poverty ratio in India is relatively high. This paradoxical situation is because, in India, economic development is unbalanced with inequitable distribution of income and wealth. In 2012, according to the latest report by the Planning Commission of India (Tendulkar Committee), 21.9% of all people in India fall below the international poverty line of US\$ 1.25 per day. Over the last decade, poverty has witnessed a consistent decline with the levels dropping from 37.2% in 2004-05 to 29.8% in 2009-10. The number of poor is now estimated at 250 million, of which 200 million reside in rural India.

According to the release from the Planning Commission, 25.7% of people in rural areas were below the poverty line and 13.7% in urban areas. This is comparable with 33.8% and 20.9%, respectively, in 2009-10, and 42% and 25.5%, respectively, in 2004-05.

Table No.1: Percentage & Number of Poor Estimated by Tendulkar Method

Years	Poverty Ratio %			Number of Poor (Million)		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
1993-94	50.1	31.8	45.3	328.6	74.5	403.7
2004-05	41.8	25.7	37.2	326.3	80.8	407.1
2011-12	25.7	13.7	21.9	216.5	52.8	269.3

Average Annual Decline						
1993-94To2004-05	0.75	0.55	0.74			
2004-05To2011-12	2.32	1.69	2.18			

Source: Press Note on Poverty Estimates 2011-12 GOI, Planning Commission, July 2013

Rural population constitutes 68.84% (Census 2011) of the total population of the country and amongst the rural population, the rural female population constitutes 48.6% (Census 2011). Poverty alleviation in the rural population will enable economic sustenance in the rural areas thereby contributing to social sustenance too. Economic sustainability of the rural population will be ensured when the income of rural families is sufficient to meet all their expenses (food, clothing, housing, education, medical expenses and travel) and to save for emergencies/contingencies. Economic sustenance will ensure social sustainability of the rural population, i.e., social inclusion, empowerment, decision making ability, social recognition and self esteem.

2. Self-Employment

According to the NSSO Census 2011-12, key indicators of employment and unemployment in India, of the total workforce, at the all-India level, the shares of self employed, regular wage/salaried employees and casual labour were 52 per cent, 18 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively. In the rural areas, the shares of self-employed, regular wage/salaried employees and casual labour were 56 per cent, 9 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively. In the urban areas, the shares of self-employed and regular wage/salaried employees were 42 per cent and 43 per cent, respectively and the remaining (15 per cent) were casual labours. The shares of self-employment in total workforce were 55 per cent for rural males, 59 per cent for rural females, 42 per cent for urban males, 43 per cent for urban females. The corresponding shares of casual labour were 36 per cent, 35 per cent, 15 per cent and 14 per cent for rural males, rural females, urban males and urban females, respectively.

Thus, share of self employed in total workforce is higher than that of employed and casual labour at the all-India level. In the rural areas the share of self employed is higher than in urban areas. Further, the share of self employed is higher for rural females as compared to rural males. Between rural females and urban females, the share of self employed is higher for rural females. The rate of self employment is higher in rural areas, and mainly amongst rural females primarily due to lack of employment opportunities. Micro businesses come into existence to meet the financial requirements of the family, i.e., for economic sustenance.

Though the rate of self employment is highest amongst the rural female population, these necessity entrepreneurs are unable to start businesses of a size which are financially viable and profitable. They are caught in the vicious cycle of small businesses due to small investments and low profits. Unless this vicious cycle is broken, economic and social sustainability in rural India will not be achieved. A remedy for small investments by rural women entrepreneurs is the provision of microcredit facility through microfinance programmes and schemes. The Government of India initiated the microfinance programme as a mechanism to deliver rural credit and services to the rural population encouraging them to undertake income generating activities.

3. Microfinance

According to CGAP, microfinance can be defined as the supply of loans, savings and other basic financial services to the poor. According to ACCION, microfinance is defined as "Banking and/or financial services targeted to low-and moderate-income businesses or households, including the provision of credit". Microcredit is a provision of loans to rural population to start a business. Microcredit is disbursed from the microfinance programmes like: Rashtriya Mahila Kosh [RMK], Swayamsidha Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana [SGSY], StreeShakti and Swashakti. Microfinance targets rural and urban households. Credit under microfinance follows thrift that is mobilising savings and lending the same. It involves a low transaction cost with short repayment period. The processing and delivery procedures are simple. Microfinance is channelised through Self Help Groups [SHGs], Non-Government Organisations [NGO] and Microfinance Institutions [MFIs]. Microfinance services involves two approaches

1. Financial intermediation: This approach comprises provision of financial products and services such as; savings, credit and payment system.
2. Social intermediation : This approach is a process of building the human and social capital for sustainable financial intermediation for the rural poor. It includes development services like; training, marketing, networking, capacity building and social services focusing on improvement in health, nutrition, literacy and education.

4. Rural Women Entrepreneurship

Rural India is characterized by high rate of illiteracy and low economic status of women. This underlines the need for increasing the earning power of women by providing them income generating assets. Provision of employment opportunities and income to rural women is one way to improve their nutrition, health, education and social status. In most of the developing countries greater emphasis is laid on the need for development of rural women and their active involvement in the main stream of development. In India, continuous efforts are being made by the Central and State Governments to improve the status of rural women through a number of schemes and programmes.

Ever since independence a number of innovative schemes have been launched for the upliftment of women in our country. There has been a perceptible shift from viewing women as critical agent for socio-economic development. Now the emphasis has shifted from development to empowerment of rural women towards economic self-reliance and social inclusion.

The Government, realizing the need to raise the contribution made by rural women for the development of the country, included Rural Women Development Programmes in its Five Year Plans. Various programmes/schemes which were launched and implemented – SGSY [Swarnajayanthi Gram Swarojgar Yojana], DWCRA [Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas], Swa Shakti, etc. are playing a significant role in making rural women self-reliant and independent. Various institutions set up by the Government too have been giving priority to development of rural women. Government initiated microfinance programme for disbursement of microcredit to the micro and needy entrepreneurs. Microfinance is disbursed by NABARD from the SGSY scheme through linkage with Self-Help Groups to meet the credit needs of rural women entrepreneurs. Women's cell under the Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGE&T) coordinates with the states for the vocational training of women. Rashtriya Mahila Khosh, a national credit fund extends credit facilities to poor and needy women. Many of these programmes have been implemented with the support of NGOs. Some of the NGOs assisting rural women entrepreneurs are AWAKE, WASME, RUDSETI and SEWA.

5. Sustainable Development

Brundtland Commission's Report "Our Common Future" (1987), which discloses the idea of sustainable development, postulates that sustainable development is the kind of development, which satisfies the current needs without endangering the future generations to satisfy their own. The essence of Brundtland's statement is fair distribution of natural resources both among different generations and among the present generation of people from the first, the second, and the third world, and finding a positive consensus between the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of environment. Thus, sustainable development is not about a choice between environmental protection and social progress, but rather more about striving for economic and social development that would be compatible with environmental protection.

The three main elements of sustainable development as depicted in the triangle [figure 1] are:

- Economic sustainability: This covers economic growth, economic efficiency and economic stability. Economic growth of a nation is reflected in its GDP, per capita income and the economic growth rate. Economic efficiency is reflected in its industrial productivity, human resource productivity, savings/investment ratios, export-import ratios, etc. Economic stability is indicated by the inflation rates, employment rates, poverty ratios etc. Economic sustenance is the core requirement of sustainable development of an economy which is indicated in these three parameters.

- **Social sustainability:** This comprises social empowerment, social inclusion/consultation and social institutions/governance. Social empowerment is the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence. It focuses on acting individually and collectively to change social relationships, institutions and discourses for the exclude poor people . It implies equal opportunities for all sections of society; mutual respect and dignity for all irrespective of gender, caste, profession and economic status. Social inclusion implies the provision of certain rights such as employment, adequate housing, health care, education, training etc. to all individuals and groups in society . Social governance is an important aspect of governance for sustainability whereby each and every member of the society is responsible, accountable and participates in decision making.
- **Environmental sustainability:** This encompasses environmental resilience/biodiversity, rational use of natural resources and concern for environmental pollution. Environmental sustainability is about making responsible decisions that will reduce business negative impact on the environment. It is concerned with rational use of natural resources so as to ensure its availability for future generations.

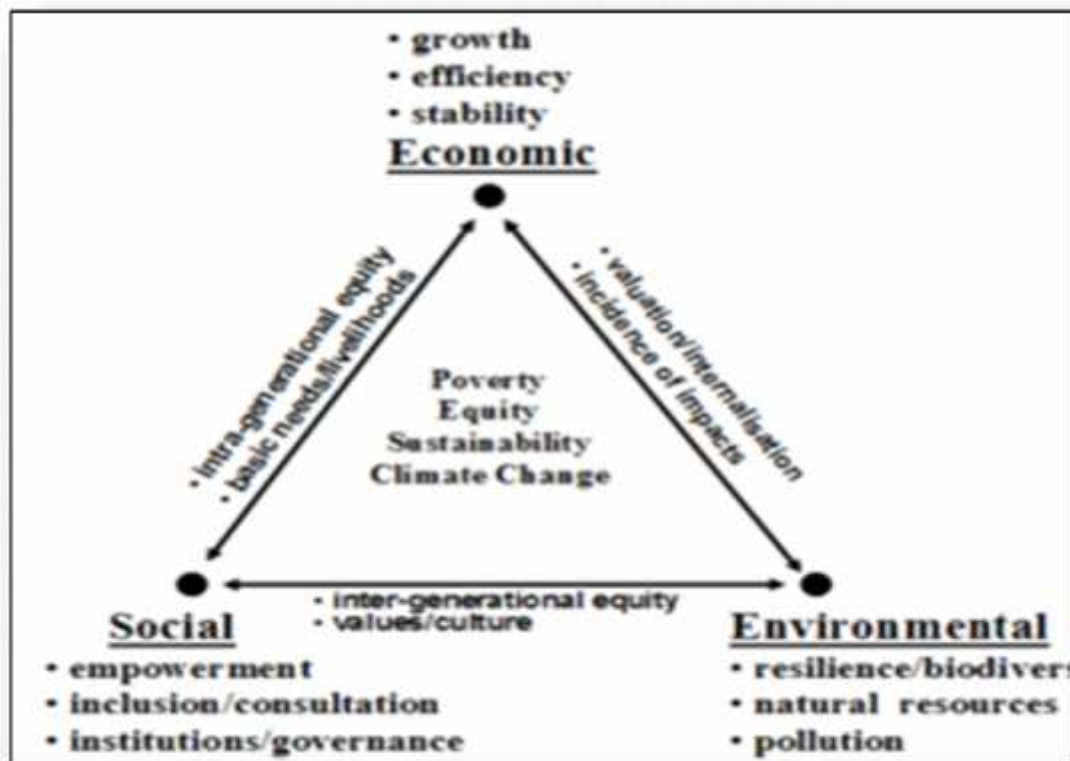


FIGURE 1: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
(Source: adapted from Munasinghe 1992a, 1994a)

This article focuses on two elements of sustainable development: economic sustainability and social sustainability. Economic and social sustainability is the major goal of development. Microcredit to the excluded communities is observed as a central pivot in the development with the focus on rural women. The emphasis on promoting economic and social sustenance of rural women is reflected in the development programmes of the

country. Rural women entrepreneurship is a well recognized and an effective tool for economic and social sustenance.

6. Review of Literature

Various studies have been undertaken articulating the significance of economic and social sustenance of rural women entrepreneurship. The review comprises the following:

- Mohan Munasinghe (2007) *Basic Concepts and Principles of Sustainomics*, *The Encyclopedia of Earth*: In this article the author states that world decision makers are facing traditional development issues (such as economic stagnation, persistent poverty, hunger and illness), as well as new challenges (like environmental damage and globalization). One key approach that has emerged is the concept of sustainable development or 'development which lasts'. Munasinghe proposed the term "Sustainomics" to describe "a transdisciplinary, integrative, comprehensive, balanced, heuristic and practical framework for making development more sustainable". Sustainomics broadly describes sustainable development as "a process for improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual human beings and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time, while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems". The author also has proposed the sustainable development triangle with the key elements of sustainable development represented in the three vertices – economic, social and environmental elements.

- Remigijus Ciegis, Jolita Ramanauskiene, Bronislovas Martinkus (2009) "The Concept of Sustainable Development and its Use for Sustainability Scenarios". According to the authors, the most appropriate definition that best expresses the idea of sustainable development is provided in the report of the Brundtland commission, stating that sustainable development is the development that satisfies the needs of the current time period without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs. Difficulties related to sustainability definition depicts that sustainable development is a complex and multi-domain issue, which has to combine efficiency, equity, and intergenerational equity on economic, social, and environmental ground. The article is based on the assumption that sustainable development is based not on economic, social, ecological, or institutional dimensions, but rather on their system seen as an integrated system.

- Jeremy K. Hatll, Greg Daneke, Michael Lenox, (2010) "Sustainable Development and Entrepreneurship: Past Contributions and Future Directions": This article discusses the emerging research concerned with sustainable development and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship has been recognized as a major conduit for sustainable products and processes, and new ventures are being held up as a panacea for many social and environmental concerns. It provides an overview of sustainable development, role of entrepreneurship and outlines recent contributions exploring this role.

- Zoltain J. Acs & Laszlo Szerb (2010) "The Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index (GEDI)". The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of economic development by constructing a Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index (GEDI) that captures the essence of the contextual features of entrepreneurship and fills a gap in the measure of development. The authors have developed a Global Entrepreneurship Index that offers a measure of the quality and quantity of the business formation process in 71 of the most important countries in the world. The GEDI captures the contextual feature of entrepreneurship by focusing on entrepreneurial attitudes, entrepreneurial activity and entrepreneurial aspirations. These data and their contribution to the business formation process are supported by three decades of research into entrepreneurship across a host of countries.

- Brijesh Patel & Kirit Chavda (2013), *Rural Entrepreneurship in India: Challenge and Problems*, : In this research paper, the authors highlight the effect of globalisation on rural entrepreneurship as productivity and efficiency effect, economic growth effect, technological effect, distributional effect, transformational effect, insecurity effect and policy. The challenges faced by rural entrepreneurship in India are listed as: family challenges, social challenges, technological challenges, financial challenges and policy. The problems of rural entrepreneurship include financial problem, marketing challenge, management issues and human resource problems.

The review of studies reveals that, there has been noteworthy contribution of microcredit and rural women entrepreneurship towards economic and social sustenance rural areas.

7. Need for the Study

Research studies have revealed that though a large number of programmes in the area of self-employment and empowerment of women have been designed and implemented in the country, they have not brought about radical changes in the conditions of rural women entrepreneurship. The problem of achieving economic and social sustainability in rural areas can be addressed with effectiveness through focused approach towards the development of rural women entrepreneurship. Microfinance is an intervention focusing on accelerating the growth in a two pronged manner: economic sustenance and social sustenance of rural women entrepreneurs. Rural women entrepreneurship can certainly transform rural and urban areas into engines of economic growth facilitating economic and social sustenance.

Hence the article focuses on Rural Women Entrepreneurship towards Economic and Social Sustenance in Rural India: A Study in Bangalore and Belgaum Rural Districts..

8. Objectives

- 1.To assess the relationship between rural women entrepreneurship and economic sustenance of rural families.
- 2.To study the role of micro finance in sustainable development of rural women entrepreneurs.
- 3.To analyse the role of rural women entrepreneurship in building social sustenance amongst rural women.
- 4.To ascertain the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in sustained growth of their business.
- 5.To suggest measures towards economic and social sustenance of rural women entrepreneurship.

9. Research Methodology

This paper is based on two Minor Research Projects:

- Poverty Alleviation through Rural Women Entrepreneurship in Bangalore and Belgaum Rural Districts : Ref: MRP(H)-227/2005(X Plan)KABA029/UGC-SWRO
- Sustainable Development of Rural Women Entrepreneurs through Micro Finance – A Study in Bangalore Rural District: Ref: MRP(H)-203/08-09/KABA029/UGC-SWRO.

The studies adopted were analytical study of exploratory nature involving rigid survey. Data was collectethrough questionnaires and personal interview schedule. Random sampling method was used in identifying the respondents.

9.1. Sampling Plan

- The sampling plan of Minor Research Project titled “Poverty Alleviation through Rural Women Entrepreneurship in Bangalore and Belgaum Rural District” covered two rural districts of Bangalore and Belgaum. The area was divided into villages and 5 villages from each district were selected at random. From each of these villages 5 women were selected at random to form a sample of 250 rural women (existing and potential entrepreneurs).
- The sampling plan of Minor Research Project titled “Sustainable Development of Rural Women Entrepreneurs through Micro Finance”-A Study in Bangalore Rural District covered four taluks of Bangalore Rural District. The taluks were: Anekal, Devanahalli, Dodaballapur and Hoskote. A sample size of fifty rural women entrepreneurs from each taluk was considered and a total of 200 rural women entrepreneurs were covered for the study.

9.2. Sources of data ; Primary data for the surveys was collected through administering questionnaires to the respondents (rural women and rural women entrepreneurs). A structured interview schedule was designed to collect information from Self Help Groups.

9.3. Methods of Analysis: The tools used for analyzing data collected included percentages, measures of central tendency/averages, correlation and probable error.

10. Findings and Discussion

10.1. Rural Women Entrepreneurship and Economic Sustenance

The three pillars of sustainable development of an economy are economic sustenance, social sustenance and environmental sustenance. In fact, to ensure that the fruits of development are equitably enjoyed by the present and future generations it is necessary that economic and social development occurs without endangering the environment.

The findings of the study highlight the economic and social sustenance in the rural districts of Bangalore and Belgaum. The research study brought to the fore the poor economic conditions of rural families in the two districts. Entrepreneurship was necessity based to meet the financial needs of the family. Rural women entrepreneurs were mainly engaged in petty businesses like: tailoring, fruit & vegetable stall, petty grocery shop, incense stick making, saree business, embroidery etc. These businesses were started with very small investments [mainly from borrowings] and the earnings were used mainly towards household expenses and repaying debts. A few rural women entrepreneurs developed a habit of saving a small proportion of their earnings in banks/post office to purchase assets. Thus, rural women entrepreneurship enabled a few rural women to achieve economic sustenance of their families.

Table Number 2: Levels of Poverty and Economic Sustenance in Rural Families

Items of expenditure and savings	Non-Entrepreneurial Rural Women (%)	Rural Women Entrepreneurs (%)	Level of poverty
All expenses + Savings (Economic Sustenance)	2	10	0 No poverty
All expenses(no savings) (Ability to attain economic sustenance)	7	25	1 Very Low poverty
Food, clothing, housing, education & Medical expense (no Travel and misc. exp.) (No economic sustenance)	60	50	2 Moderate poverty
Food, clothing and housing expense only (No economic sustenance)	28	15	3 High poverty
Food expense only (No economic sustenance)	3	0	4 Very High poverty

Source: Primary data

It is observed there is economic sustenance in rural families when the earnings of the family are sufficient to enable savings and investment after all expenses related to food, clothing, housing, education, health and travel are met. The findings of the study revealed that 10% of rural families where the women were entrepreneurs had achieved economic sustenance, whereas only 2% of rural families where the women were not entrepreneurs had reached economic sustenance. Poverty alleviation i.e., earnings sufficient enough to meet all expenses, but not sufficient to save and invest; is the initial step to economic sustenance. This has been attained by 25% of rural families where the women are earning from business and only 7% of rural families where women are not entrepreneurs. Absolute poverty where the families earn enough to meet only food expenses and are unable to meet the other expenses is not seen in the families where the women are entrepreneurs, whereas 3% of rural families where, women are not entrepreneurs experience this level of abject Poverty.

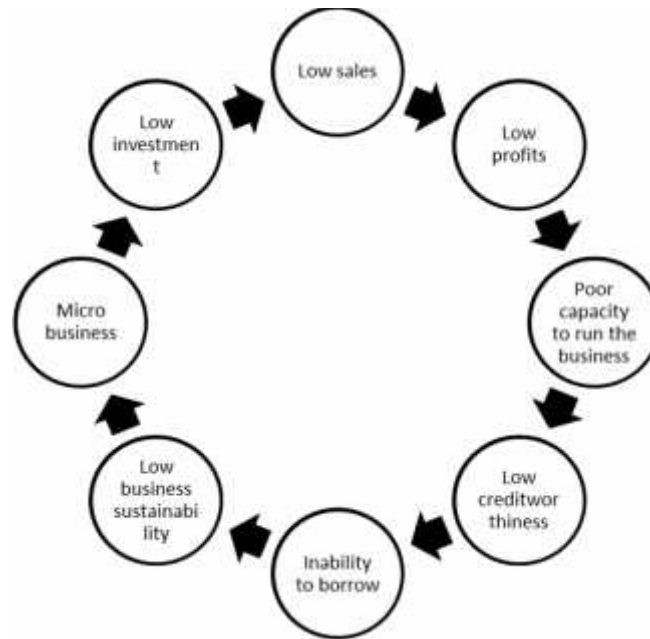


Figure 2: Vicious Circle of Micro Business

Thus, it is observed that contribution of rural women entrepreneurs to family income has been instrumental in poverty alleviation and economic sustainability of families in the rural districts of Bangalore and Belgaum.

The correlation coefficient 'r', between contribution of rural women entrepreneurs to family income and levels of poverty is -0.787 indicating a high degree of negative correlation. The Probable Error (0.0296) indicates the significance of the correlation coefficient. This indicates the importance of the role of rural women entrepreneurs in poverty alleviation and economic sustainability of families in rural areas.

The finding that 65% of rural families where, women are entrepreneurs are unable to meet certain expenses [15% high level of poverty and 50% moderate level of poverty] and have not achieved economic sustenance reveals that their earnings are very minimal and there is need to ensure growth in their earnings. This can be enabled only by providing sufficient financial assistance, marketing assistance and training to the rural women entrepreneurs to break the vicious circle of poverty and increasing the size of the business.

10.2. Role of Microcredit towards Sustainable Development of Rural Women Entrepreneurs

The biggest challenge faced by rural women entrepreneurs is that of limited capital and financial assistance. Microfinance organizations through providing micro credit facility to rural women have resolved the problem and motivated rural women to venture into entrepreneurship.

The data collected and analysed shows that microcredit is disbursed from the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana scheme by NABARD through microfinance schemes towards sustained growth of rural women entrepreneurship in the Bangalore Rural District. The role of microcredit towards sustainable development can be enumerated as follows:

- Providing sustainable access of rural finance to the rural women.
- Encouraging rural women's participation in entrepreneurial activities.
- Creating a desire and determination among rural women to improve upon their present and future life.
- Recognizing local resources, human as well as material in rural areas through SHGs.
- Generating self-reliance among rural women through rural women entrepreneurship.
- Creating awareness of the rural women's credit needs to achieve sustainable development of rural women entrepreneurship.
- Mobilizing available rural women power and resources and guiding them to productive and prolific community organization.

- Explaining the communities about the new technology, by arranging functional literacy programmes, social education, etc..
- Providing an open forum to the members of SHGs to discuss their problems and find solutions to their problems.
- Providing maximum priority to training, marketing, networking and capacity building programmes encouraging and developing rural women entrepreneurship.
- Improving the socio-economic status of rural women entrepreneurs.
- Building women empowerment through microcredit programmes and schemes.
- Empowering the rural women entrepreneurs through ensuring better human development.
- Serving as a mechanism for inclusive growth by providing livelihood security and enterprise growth.

Thus it was observed that microfinance schemes, through providing microcredit and other allied services, are playing a significant role in ensuring economic sustenance of rural women entrepreneurs. They are also contributing to social sustenance of rural women entrepreneurs through activities/programmes aimed at organizing marketing, ED training programs and women empowerment.

10.3. Rural Women Entrepreneurship towards Building Social Sustenance amongst Rural Women

Social sustainability includes empowerment of individuals, social inclusion and decision making. Rural women entrepreneurship by enabling rural women to become financial independent and self-reliant has empowered them in making decisions for the family. It has created opportunity for the younger members of their families to get educated instead of engaging in activities towards contributing to the family income.

The analysis of data it was observed that the number of family members who contribute to family income was greater (4 or more than 4) in families of non-entrepreneurial women than in families of rural women entrepreneurs (not exceeding 3). This shows that the contribution of rural women entrepreneurs is significant enough to ensure meeting family expenses without contribution from more number of family members.

Microfinance programmes which provide microcredit and allied services (guidance, motivation, training etc.) have guaranteed the inclusion of the rural women into the gamut of formal banking system in Bangalore Rural District. The study has demonstrated that majority of the rural households prior to assistance from microfinance programmes were inaccessible to both: financial and non-financial services. In the post-microfinance intervention, a large proportion of the rural households are able to access the microfinance and allied services. This has improved the income, employment, assets, household expenditure, housing condition, immunization, health services, education and empowerment of the rural women. Policy recommendation includes delivery of microfinance-plus services, reaching out to the marginalized and vulnerable rural women at a minimum cost, thereby focusing on a wider impact on the economic and social sustenance of rural women.

Thus rural women entrepreneurship has succeeded in bringing the rural women into the mainstream (social inclusion), enabling them to make decisions including financial decisions for the family (empowerment) and has ensured social sustainability.

10.4. Challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs

Though rural women entrepreneurship has growth potential, it has a few challenges in operation and outreach. The challenges can be classified as:

Challenges in the initial stages of business

- Lack of awareness of financial schemes and cumbersome bank procedures have been constraints in the development of rural women entrepreneurship.
- Inadequate activity oriented training programmes have been a hindrance for rural women in converting their interest/skills into a source of income through entrepreneurship.
- Rural women entrepreneurs are confined to rural markets. The rural population has a low purchasing power, limiting the profit making ability of rural business.

- Credit sales and difficulty in collection of debts are two major factors restricting rural women from taking up entrepreneurial activity.
- The products of rural women entrepreneurs are not standardized for the urban market, thereby restricting their sales and profit margins.

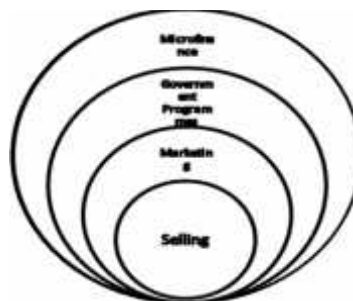
Challenges of microcredit schemes/programmes:

- Inadequate targeting of the programmes and lack of safeguards against entry of SHGs in these programmes leads to lack of awareness and appropriate information on microcredit schemes.
- Lack of uniformity in savings resulted in disparity amongst the SHG members leading to conflict and dropout.
- Irregularity was observed in remittance of savings and repayment of loans causing interruption in recycling of funds for SHGs.
- Capacity building programmes initiated for the benefit of members of SHGs failed to reach them in adequate measures, resulting in underutilization of these programmes. Absence of follow up of microfinance programmes lead to ineffectiveness in the delivery of microcredit and allied services.

10.5. Measures for economic and social sustenance of rural women entrepreneurship

The measures facilitating and providing impetus to the growth of rural women entrepreneurs towards economic and social sustenance is summarized as follows:

- The education levels of the rural women should be improved. Counseling centers should be set up to counsel the rural families on the benefits of education of the girl child because women can go a long way in ensuring the well-being of the rural families.
- The students of business schools can take the initiative in providing guidance to the rural women entrepreneurs in enhancing their marketing skills and in making their products marketable in urban areas.
- The banks can simplify the procedures of advancing loans, and lower the rates of interest for rural women entrepreneurs.
- The government should introduce need specific microfinance programmes to promote rural women entrepreneurship. This will circumvent the problem of small investment in business carried on by rural women.
- Government can encourage different institutions (Commercial banks, Regional Rural Banks, Co-operative banks and NGOs) to serve as self-promoting institutions to provide credit facilities to rural women entrepreneurs.
- The Ministry and the Department of Rural Development can take the initiative and introduce various financial schemes and training programs placing a proposal to the Government of India for promotion of rural women entrepreneurship to alleviate poverty and enhance the scope for sustained growth of their business.
- A systems approach to promote rural women entrepreneurship can be adopted by the Government by initiating microfinance programmes (SHGs, NGOs and MFIs) involved in this field. Training programs, financing schemes, EDP, marketing, counseling etc. can be integrated to encourage rural women entrepreneurship, especially by developing traditional





11. Conclusion

The Indian economy, especially the rural population is characterized by low levels of education, training, employment and income. The standard of living and quality of life in rural areas is not comparable with the urban areas. The poverty ratio is higher in rural areas and unemployment rates are also high. It is in this context that findings and recommendations of this research study gain relevance. The sustainable development of a country requires economic and social sustenance of its entire population. Rural women entrepreneurship through assistance on saving from banks, microfinance programmes, (microcredit), training, marketing support, education on saving and thrift etc. can enable the sustainable development of rural women entrepreneurship. This in turn will enable economic and social sustenance of rural families and rural India.

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