

MICROFINANCE: A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Women face discrimination in their family, social, economic and political life. An empirical study was conducted to measure the economic empowerment of women through microfinance. Economic empowerment was measured using criteria of income generation, mobilization of saving, change in expenditure pattern, participation in financial decision making, and access and control over the credit. The present study tried to link microfinance and economic empowerment. A total sample size of 180 respondents was drawn from Self Help Groups(SHG) and Sakhi MandalYojana Self Help Group from DRDA, Mehsana district of Gujarat. Sign Test was applied to analyze the changes before and after joining SHG.

Keywords: Economic Empowerment, Microfinance, *Mission Manglam*, Self Help Group.

INTRODUCTION

Women all over the world are facing so many obstacles in the society. Women's economic position is weak both within and outside the family. Women are treated more as liabilities rather than assets. Women face significant obstacles to equal participation in economic development initiatives. Economic empowerment is perhaps one of the most important parameter of the overall empowerment which includes social, self or psychological and political empowerment and also considered to be prerequisite for other remaining empowerments. The basic idea of economic empowerment of women is to provide them financial assistance and allow them to earn an independent income, contribute financially to their households and generate self-employment. It leads to increased self-respect, self-esteem, self-confidence.

Microfinance programme is led by SHGs which are small, economically homogenous group of the poor people coming together to save some money regularly, which are kept in a common fund to meet emergency needs of members and to loan to members as decided by the group. It has been recognized as an effective tool for capacity building of the

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marginalized section of rural society and as an alternative process to meet the urgent needs of the poor (Rao, 2003). It provides an appropriate platform for initiating and sustaining income generating activities. SHGs enhance the qualitative equality among women in social life, decision-makers and participant in the democratic, economic cultural spheres of life (McKiernan, 2002).

Microfinance programs for women have positive impact on economic growth by improving women income generating activities (Kasynathan, 2002). Most experts argue that investing in women's capabilities empowers them to make choices which are a valuable goal in itself but it also contributes to greater economic growth and development. Malhotra, Schuler & Boender (2002) in their comprehensive paper, '*Measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development*', identify the methodological approaches or indicators in measuring and analyzing the empowerment of women. These include, inter-alia, domestic decision-making, finance and resource allocation, social and domestic matters, child related issues, access to or control over resources, freedom of movement. Sharma P. (2007) surveyed 300 women clients of microloans in hill and terai of Nepal and in his study found that the credit program participation leads to women playing a greater role in household decision-making, having greater bargaining power compared with their husbands, more access to financial and economic resources, having greater social networks, and freedom of mobility. Anderson and Eswaran (2009) have demonstrated that the mere generation of income by women will not result in empowerment; the income also needs to remain in their control to yield higher bargaining power in the family setting power. Swain and Wallentin (2012) further advocate that the improved role of women as managerial decision-takers related to business planning, procurement of raw materials, as well as product pricing is crucial if they are to be empowered. To attain sustainable development outcomes, it really matters who decides the resource allocation (Kantor, 2005). Economic empowerment is embedded in women's role of independent decision-making in income-generating activities, as well as control over income from that activity. The study by Cristalbell (2009) assesses the role of microfinance in building up economic and democratic capacity of women and thereby enhancing their empowerment in India, with special reference to the state of Kerala. This is a study of a single microfinance organization, Samaththa Vanitha Swayam Sahaya Sangham. A sample was selected for an in-depth study of their activities and performance and from each of the selected SHGs, an adequate number of the women were selected. It evaluates the performance of the of SHG. It tries to identify the factors that contribute to their successful performance and sustainability. Sahoo (2013) analyzes the role and performance of SHGs in promoting women's empowerment in Cuttack District of Odisha.

The economic progress of India depends on the productivity of both male and female workforce. In India, in early period, women were limited within the four walls of their houses and were dominated by males. Gujarat Government announced '*Mission Mangalam*' programme. *Mission Manglam* developed new approach to integrate Self-Help Groups/ Sakhi Mandal. Under the scheme, a corporate value chain is created with objective of win-win scheme for all stakeholders like Banks, Industry Partners, Micro Finance Institutes and Skill Imparting Institutions, etc. It is workable innovative model which involves activities, trainings

and equipped with the most appropriate and effective strategy for poverty reduction in the post-liberalization era. It is a novel approach towards involving the corporate sector and the poor with an emphasis on skill development to transform the marginalized into successful entrepreneurs. Under the programme, the poor women are organized into Self Help Groups/ Sakhi Mandal. Other organizations link them with banks, build capacities in them and lead them towards sustainable livelihoods. Income-generating activities brings greater control over own lives and women's access to savings and credit gives them a greater economic role in decision-making through their decision about savings and credit. When women control decisions regarding credit and savings, they optimize their own and the household's welfare. Women's income in a family is very important in relation to their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It is being increasingly realized that women's income brings landmark change in the nutritional, economic and educational upliftment of the family.

Through these Self Help Groups (SHGs) the women are now participating in all productive activities and they can earn as much as they need for meeting their monthly expenditure. Women, through SHG movement have asserted a dignified position in the family as well as in the society. Their decision making power has greatly improved not only in their family but also in the society. This paper attempts to understand the conceptual theoretical analysis of economic empowerment of women. The paper will deliberate over whether *Mission Manglam* has been successful in achieving the goal of economic empowerment of women.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is the evaluation and the descriptive survey method. The study is based on primary data as well as secondary data and information. The descriptive method is suitable because the research work involved data collection from rural community members of Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) with a view to determine whether or not microfinance contribute to poverty reduction by increasing their income and welfare. Primary data are those collected by the investigator for the first time. These are original in character. The primary data for this study was collected in the year 2014. The qualitative and quantitative information on SHG members and their households was obtained through interviews. Multistage random sampling has been used for the data collection. For this study, *Mission Mangalam* SHG has been selected. Three members from each SHG was selected and a total of 180 SHGs members were included for the study. For the data analysis, average and percentage analysis was carried out to draw meaningful interpretation of the results. Non-parametric "Sign Test" was used to find change in economic status of women before and after joining SHG. The data sources for secondary data has been Annual Reports of NABARD, *Gujarat Livelihood Promotion Company*, *District Rural Development Agency (DRDA)*, articles and research papers.

In the present study, women economic empowerment has been measured through five variable. The framework shows the linkages between microfinance and women economic empowerment. Income leads to mobilization of saving, change in expenditure pattern, participation in financial decision making and access and control over the resources.

Conceptual Framework of Microfinance and Economic Empowerment

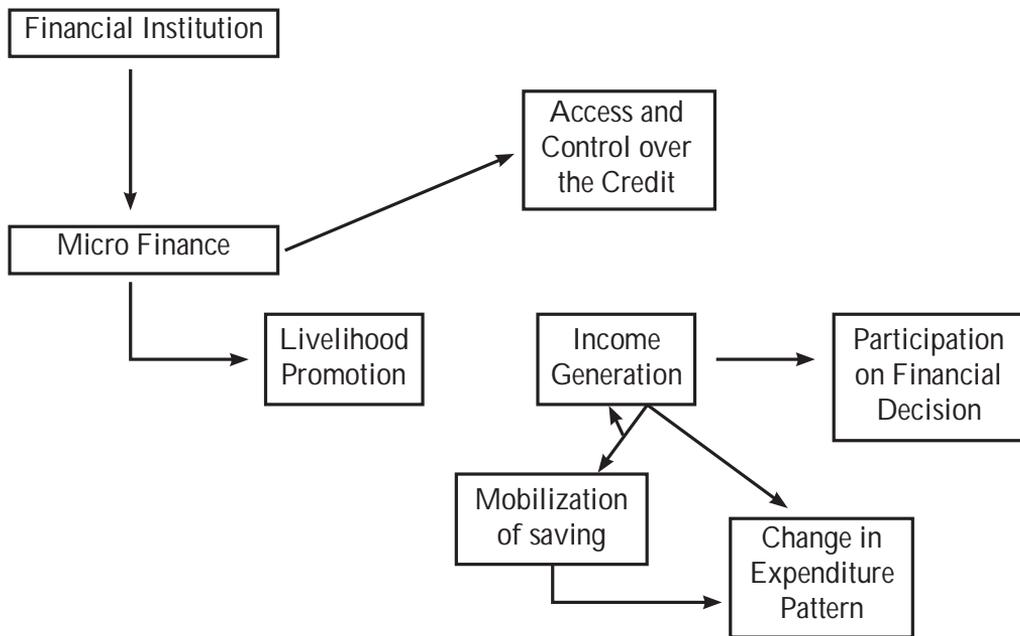


Figure 1

(Source: Self)

NOVELTY OF “MISSION MANGLAM”

The state of Gujarat has made a long journey since 1960. But the State is still lagging in rural development. Governmental and non-governmental organizations have introduced microfinance programs providing financial services to low-income households. In Gujarat, there are a host of agencies that promote SHGs under various type of programs and schemes. Rural Development Department itself promotes SHGs under Sakhi Mandal Yojana, SGSY, Watershed Program, Shram Yogi Yojana and several Special SGSY Projects implemented through NGOs. Women and Child Development Department has its own SHG schemes. Urban Development Department implements SJSRY in urban areas through SHGs. Tribal Welfare Department has some programs implemented through SHGs. NABARD and Banks create their own SHGs through NGOs. In addition NGOs themselves directly gain donor funds from international agencies and create and nurture their own SHGs. Thus, there are various types of livelihood programs implemented through a number of agencies. As a result, there is much duplication of efforts, and very often leading to one agency breaking existing SHGs to create new SHGs, identifying the same group of beneficiaries etc. This affects other agencies' works. A convergence platform was required to bring all SHGs formed by several agencies under single umbrella frame-work.

In *Mission Mangalam*, there is provision to centrally track all SHGs, create an online computerized database and real-time MIS, give each of them a unique ID code, help in linking with banks and eventually linking them to livelihood programs to ensure effective efforts to bring rural poor out of poverty. It could coordinate between all stakeholders, including different Departments of Government, Government Agencies, Bankers, MFIs, NGOs, Insurance Companies.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In India, the trickle down effects of macroeconomic policies have failed to resolve the problem of gender inequality. There are several reason for this. Among the poor, the poor women are most disadvantaged. They are characterized by lack of education and access of resources, both of which is required to help them work their way out of poverty and for upward economic status. In olden days, women were restricted to take part in any social activities and not given roles in decision making in her family. The situation was even more worsening in rural and remote areas. In Mehsana district, under the *Mission Mangalam* programme, microfinance programs offering financial services to low income households were introduced. This study is important because it will throw light on the reality of the problem.

SOCIO ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SHG MEMBERS

In Gujarat, total number of saving- linked SHGs was 2, 08,410 and credit- linked SHG was 72,671 in the year 2012-13. In the year 2014, total number of SHGs in Mehasana district was 9,491 and out of those 7,843 SHGs have received revolving fund and 4,611 have received bank loan.

From the primary survey data of Mehsana district, it has been found that women between the ages of 36-45 years are actively participating in SHG. Out of total, 40 percent women belong to this age group. In Mehsana district, 18.9 percent respondents were illiterate and 8.9 percent of the respondents could not put signature. Out of the total literate women, 27.2 percent women have received primary education, 30.6 percent women have received secondary education and 8.3 percent have received higher secondary education. Only 4.4 percent women are graduate and only one woman is post-graduate. 88.9 percent of beneficiaries are married, while unmarried women constitute 3.3 percent. Widow respondents in the SHGs stand at 7.8 percent in Mehsana district. 109 (60.6 %) respondents were from nuclear families and 71(29.1%) respondents had joint families. 52.8 percent respondents have their own land. 91.1 per cent respondents in Mehsana district live in their own houses and the remaining occupy rented houses. 53.3 percent respondents live in pucca house, 37.2 percent live in semi- pucca houses. 50 percent of the respondents received loan up to Rs.10001 -20000 and 25.6 percent of respondents received loan amount of Rs. 10001-to 20000. 51.7 percent SHG members were engaged in the agriculture and allied activities, 20 percent respondents were casual labor, 13.9 percent respondents were self- employed. They are doing motikam (handwork), making different types of product, stitch work, or run shop, beauty parlor, ice-cream parlor etc. Mere

7.8 percent respondents were employed in government sector and there too, they worked as Anganvadi sister, Asha worker or Teda Ghar worker . 12 member of SHG in the sample were unemployed.

Table 1: Growth of SHG in Mehsana District

Taluka	As on 31st March 2013		As on 31st March 2014		% Growth	As on 31st March 2014	
	No. of	No. of	No. of	No. of		% Share in	% Share in
	SHGs	Members	SHGs	Members		SHGs	Members
Becharaji	649	7472	697	8108	7.40%	7.34%	6.68%
Kadi	1096	15685	1176	16449	7.30%	12.39%	13.55%
Kheralu	1126	11871	1313	13768	16.61%	13.83%	11.34%
Mehsana	689	10993	749	11715	8.71%	7.89%	9.65%
Vadnagar	600	7874	662	8638	10.33%	6.98%	7.11%
Vijapur	1880	24409	1931	25014	2.71%	20.35%	20.60%
Visnagar	699	8979	859	10646	22.89%	9.05%	8.77%
Satlasana	723	9216	783	9736	8.30%	8.25%	8.02%
Unjha	1186	15871	1321	17350	11.38%	13.92%	14.29%
Total	8648	112370	9491	121424	9.75%	100.00%	100.00%

(Source: District Rural Development Agency)

Table 1 shows that the Visnagar Taluka has the highest growth i.e 22.89 percent in proliferation of SHGs in the year 2014 compared to the year 2013 followed by Kheralu and Unjha block with figure of 16.61 percent and 11.38 percent, respectively. Vijapur Taluka is in top position in market share at 20.35 percent in number of SHGs followed by Unjha and Kheralu with 13.92 percent and 13.83 percent, respectively.

ECONOMIC STATUS

Microfinance through SHGs has linked rural poor women with formal credit delivery system, provided micro-loans and has encouraged them to livelihood promotion activity. This programme has helped in increasing income, saving expenditure, and participation in financial decision making, increased access and control over the credit.

Table 2 : Changes in Monthly Income of SHG Members Before and After Joining SHG

Individual Income (Monthly)	Before joining SHG		After joining SHG	
	No. of Person	%	No. of Person	%
Nil	15	8.3	12	6.7
Upto Rs.1,000	76	42.2	16	8.9
Rs.1,001-2,000	68	37.8	81	45
Rs.2,001-3,000	12	6.7	48	26.7
More than Rs.3,000	9	5	23	12.8
Total	180	100	180	100

(Source: Primary Survey)

Table 2 shows the monthly income of SHG's women. Before joining the SHG, 8.3 percent women were unemployed whereas after joining the SHG their number has gone down to 6.7 percent. Those who earned up to Rs.1,000 per month before joining SHG increased their income significantly after joining the SHG. After joining the SHGs their percentage has gone down from 42.2 percent to 8.9 percent. In the income group of Rs. 1,001-2,000 where earlier there were 37.8 percent respondents, post-SHG, the number has gone up to 45 percent. In the income group of Rs. 2,001-3,000, the growth has been phenomenal from 6.7 percent to 26.7 percent. Before joining the SHG, mere 5 percent women were earning more than Rs. 3,000 whereas after joining the SHG their number has gone up to 23 percent. This clearly indicate that after getting a loan, members utilized the amount for productive activities such as purchase of stitching machines, raw material for the handicraft, buying seeds and equipment for increased agricultural production and cattle. Thus, we can conclude that there has been progressive economic empowerment through microfinance in Mehsana district.

Table 3: Changes in Monthly Family Income of SHG Members Before and After Joining SHG in Mehsana

Monthly Family Income	Before joining SHG		After joining SHG	
	No of Person	%	No of Person	%
Upto Rs.2,000	27	15	4	2.2
Rs.2,001-4,000	95	52.8	45	25.0
Rs.4,001-6,000	27	15	69	38.3
Rs.6,001-8,000	15	8.3	30	16.7
Rs.8,001-10,000	7	3.9	17	9.4
More than Rs.10,000	9	5	15	8.3
Total	180	100	180	100

(Source: Primary Survey)

Table 3 shows the monthly family income of SHG members before and after joining SHG. The number of the families which earned up to Rs. 2,000 per month has decreased from 15 percent to 2.2 percent. Out of the total number of families, 46.1 percent families earned between Rs. 2,001 to 4,000 before joining the SHG. But after joining the SHG, this number has decreased to 25 percent. In the monthly income group of Rs. 4,001 to 6,000, the respective figure has increased from 15 percent to 38.3 percent families. In the monthly Income group of Rs. 6,001 to 8,000 and Rs. 8,000 to 10,000, we can see number of families have increased from 8.3 percent to 16.7 percent and 3.9 percent to 9.4 percent, respectively. The numbers of the families who earn more than Rs. 10,000 have increased from 5 percent to 8.3 percent. This clearly indicates that before joining SHG the income of the respondent was low because they did not have sufficient amount, no proper guidance, or no training for skill development for livelihood promotion. After joining SHG, the income of the families of women has gone up.

Table 4: Changes in Monthly Saving of SHG Women before and after Joining SHG in Mehsana

Saving of SHG women (per month)	Before joining SHG		After joining SHG	
	No. of Person	%	No. of Person	%
Nil Saving	121	67.2	0	0
Up to Rs.100	29	16.1	115	63.9
Between Rs.101-200	12	6.7	31	17.2
Between Rs.201-500	10	5.6	14	7.8
More than Rs.500	8	4.4	20	11.1
Total	180	100	180	100

(Source: Primary Survey)

Table 4 clearly shows that 67.2 percent respondents did not have any savings before joining the SHG. It means all women in the SHG started saving only after joining the SHG. Before joining SHG, 16.1 percent respondents used to save money in the bank or post office but now 63.9 percent respondents are saving due to the mandatory first principle of the SHG that members have to save continuously for six month. After saving, the SHG can help in getting loans or financial assistance from any financial institution. The interest accrued on savings is also a source of income for some women. The women who saved Rs.101-200 and Rs. 201-500 have increased from 6.7 percent to 17.2 percent and 5.6 percent to 7.8 percent, respectively. 4.4 percent respondents have saved more than Rs. 500 per month before joining the SHG. But after joining the SHG, 20 percent respondents have savings. One can infer that the after joining SHG, economic empowerment of women has positively changed.

Table 5: Changes in Monthly Family saving of SHG Members Before and After Joining SHG in Mehsana

Saving Family	Before joining SHG		After joining SHG	
	No of Person	%	No of Person	%
Nil Saving	77	42.8	0	0
Up to Rs.200	44	24.4	74	41.1
Between Rs.201-500	29	16.1	37	20.6
Between Rs.501-1000	17	9.4	36	20
More than Rs.1000	13	7.2	33	18.3
Total	180	100	180	100

(Source: Primary Survey)

Table 5 shows the saving pattern of the family changes considerably in Mehsana district. 42.8 percent respondents of the family did not have savings before joining the SHG. After joining SHG all are saving their money. 24.4 percent of respondent's family were saving up to Rs. 200 per month before joining the SHG which has increased to 41.1 percent after joining the SHG. In saving level of Rs. 201-500 and Rs. 501-1000, one can discern number of families increased from 16.1 percent to 20.6 percent and 9.4 percent to 20 percent, respectively. The members of the families who saved more than Rs. 10,000 have also increased from 7.2 percent to 18.3 percent.

Table 6: Changes in Monthly Family Expenditure of SHG Members Before and After Joining SHG in Mehsana

Expenditure	Before joining SHG		After joining SHG	
	No of Person	%	No of Person	%
Up to Rs.2,000	37	20.6	9	5.0
Rs.2,001-4,000	90	50	82	45.6
Rs.4,001-6,000	22	12.2	64	35.5
More than Rs.6,000	14	7.8	25	13.9
Total	180	100	180	100

(Source: Primary Survey)

Table 6 describes the level of expenditure of the SHG's family. Out of total, 20.6 percent of respondents families had monthly expenditure upto Rs. 2,000 before joining the SHG. The figure has dwindled to mere 5% now. We notice that 50 percent of the families had expenditure between Rs. 2,001-4,000 before joining SHG. The percentage of families in this group has

come down to 45.6 percent. The SHG members of the families whose monthly expenditure was in the level of Rs.4,001-6,000 have increased from 12.2 percent to 35.5 percent. Number of families incurring more than Rs.6,000 monthly family expenditure has grown from 7.8 percent to 13.9 percent after joining the SHG. One can infer that when income increases expenditure also increases concurrently .

Table 7: Changes in Monthly Family Food Expenditure of SHG Members Before and After Joining SHG in Mehsana

Food expenditure	Before joining SHG		After joining SHG	
	No of Person	%	No of Person	%
Up to 2,000	141	78.3	97	53.9
2,001-4,000	30	16.7	67	37.2
More than 4,000	9	5	16	8.9
Total	180	100	180	100

(Source: Primary Survey)

Table 7 displays the monthly expenditure of families on food before and after joining the SHG in Mehsana district. Out of the total number of families, 78.3 percent families used to spend upto Rs. 2,000 monthly before joining the SHG but after joining SHG, the number has decreased to 53.9 percent. Number of families which incurred monthly expenditure on food between Rs.2,000-4,000 has increased from 16.7 percent to 37.2 percent. Before joining SHG, only 5% families were spending more than Rs.4,000 per month on food. After joining SHGs, the figure is 8.9 percent. One can infer that food expenditure have increased after joining SHG due to positive change in income of the family, high level of food inflation etc.

Table 8: Changes in Monthly Education Expenditure of SHG Members before and After Joining SHG in Mehsana

Education Expenditure	Before joining SHG		After joining SHG	
	No of Person	%	No of Person	%
No expense	58	32.2	28	15.6
Up to 200	79	43.9	66	36.7
200-500	26	14.4	47	26.1
More than 500	17	9.4	39	21.7
Total	180	100	180	100.0

(Source: Primary Survey)

Table 8 displays the families' monthly expenditure on education before and after joining the SHG in Mehsana district. An increase in the expenditure on education has been noticed. In Mehsana district, there are number of good education institutions. From the Table 8, it is evident that after joining SHG, the level of education expenditure has changed. Percentage of families incurring monthly education expenditure between Rs. 201-500 and more than Rs. 500, has increased from 14.4 percent to 26.1 percent and 9.4 percent to 21.7 percent, respectively.

Table 9 : Change in Participation in Financial Decision

Participation of Financial Decision	Before joining SHG		After joining SHG	
	No. of Person	%	No. of Person	%
Not At All	17	9.4	11	6.1
Some Extent	97	53.9	54	30
Large Extent	66	36.7	115	63.9
Total	180	100	180	100

(Source: Primary Survey)

Table 9 shows the participation of women in the household financial decision before and after joining SHG in Mehsana. The participation in making financial decisions like, expenditure, budget allocation, saving, buying and selling of household durables etc has increased. One can discern from data that 53.9 percent of the women in the sample have participated in financial decision-making to some extent, the percentage of participation of the financial decision at some extent has come down to 30 percent, while the figure for participation to large extent has hiked from 36.7 % before joining SHG to 63.9% after joining SHG. The level of financial participation has seen positive change before and after joining SHG. It amply illustrates that microfinance programme helps the economic status of women and they feel more empowered within their family.

Sign Test

H0: *There is no significant difference in the economic status of respondents before and after joining the SHG in Mehsana District "*

H1: *There is significant difference in the economic status of respondents before and after joining the SHG in Mehsana District "*

Table 10: "Sign Test"

Variable	Calculated value	Level of Significant	Tabulate value
Individual income of the SHG member	10.68	.000	1.96
Family income of the SHG member	11.27	.000	1.96
Individual saving of the SHG member	12.61	.000	1.96
Family saving of the SHG member	12.25	.000	1.96
Expenditure of the SHG member's family	9.17	.000	1.96
Food expenditure of the SHG member's family	6.44	.000	1.96
education expenditure of the SHG member's family	8.71	.000	1.96
Participation on Financial Decision Making	7.28	.000	1.96

(Source: Primary Survey)

From Table 10, it is evident that the calculated values of 'Sign test' for all the variables are found to be more than the Table value. Therefore, Null Hypothesis (Ho) is rejected. It means alternative hypothesis is accepted. There is significant difference in the economic status of respondents before and after joining the SHG in Mehsana District. The value itself shows that there is a drastic change in saving (individual women and their family) of the SHG members. Education expenditure also changes significantly.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that several government and non-government organization in Gujarat has played their part in development movement of SHGs and generation of financial resources through livelihood development by linking the SHG to schemes and project which make these SHGs more sustainable. Primary work also reveals that microfinance has a positive impact on poverty alleviation. Empowerment of woman is a million dollar question but still there is a silver lining in the dark cloud, because of intervention through microfinance programme. Women through this SHG movement have asserted a dignified position in the family. The study concludes by delienating the positive impact of Self Help Groups on income generation, mobilization of savings, changes in the expenditure (food expenditure, education expenditure), positive change in participation in financial decision-making and access and control over the credit. Microfinance is slowly but surely changing the economic status of women. It has inculcated banking and saving habit among them. This economic independence has also enabled them to improve their overall capacity building. There is a need for a state level as well as a national level organisation to coordinate the routing of financial resources towards the SHGs and capacity building of the promoting organisations. Microfinance through SHGs is a useful tool for creating livelihood opportunities. It leads to poverty reduction and empowerment of women.

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