

Socio- economic issues in empowerment of hilly women through information, education and communication (IEC) interventions: A review of past studies

DIMPLE BAGAULI^{1*}, CHHAVI ARYA², MAITREYI THAPLIYAL³ AND LEENA RAWAT⁴

Assistant Professor^{1&2} and ^{3&4}Research Scholar

¹Department of Home Science, Govt. Degree College, Raipur
Dehradun (Uttarakhand) India

²Department of Home Science, D.S.B. Campus, Kumaun University, Nainital
(Uttarakhand) India

³Department of Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh (U.T.) India

⁴Department of Commerce, H.N.B. Garhwal University, Srinagar, (Uttarakhand) India

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on how empowerment can lead to an improvement in the health and overall well-being status of an individual, group, or a community of womenfolk. There is a broad body of literature on empowerment, and this review has been designed to identify material, particularly case studies, that can be included within the following 'empowerment domains': Participation, Community-based organizations, Local leadership, Resource mobilization, Assessment of problems, Links with other people and organizations, Role of outside agents, and Programme management. The paper discusses the results of the literature review and provides examples, from both developed and developing countries, of how each of the 'empowerment domains' has led to an improvement in health and economic outcomes. The results of the review should be of interest to the planners and practitioners of health, population and nutrition programmes that have a particular focus on empowerment.

Key Words : Women, Empowerment, Health, Social well-being outcomes, Review literature

INTRODUCTION

Women's status in society :

Women form about half of the population of the country, but their situation has been grim. For centuries, they have been deliberately denied opportunities of growth in the name

How to cite this Article: Bagauli, Dimple, Arya, Chhavi, Thapliyal, Maitreyi and Rawa, Leena (2017). Socio- economic issues in empowerment of hilly women through information, education and communication (Iec) interventions: A review of past studies. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, **4** (1-4) : 25-32.

of religion and socio-cultural practices. Before independence, women were prey to many abhorrent customs, traditional rigidities and vices due to which their status in the society touched its nadir and their situation was all round bleak. Women in rural areas indulge in unpaid work throughout the day in strenuous conditions, which takes a toll on their health. Women are considered inferior to their male counterparts and have unequal access to society's resources. Despite innumerable Government schemes targeting the health and socio-economic profile of women there has been no drastic change in their condition so far. The empowerment of women through information, education and communication interventions can bring about a positive change in their condition.

Women empowerment as a tool of upliftment :

Empowerment is a process that involves continual shifts in power relations between different groups, individuals and social groups in society. The essence of empowerment is that it cannot be bestowed by others but must be gained by those who seek it. But it is most consistently viewed as a process in which individuals, groups, and communities progress towards organized and broadly-based forms of social action. Women empowerment can be used as a tool to bring about a substantial positive change in women's socio-economic condition.

Role of IEC :

Developments in information, education and communication technologies (IECs) during the last quarter of the 20th century heralded an information age in which economic and social activity has been widened, deepened and transformed. The more optimistic projections suggest that a informative world would not only ensure a more widespread and rapid growth of employment, productivity and output, but would also improve access to facilities that enhance the quality of life. In this paper, we consider some of the interventions and changes which could affect socio-economic conditions of women in developing countries. We focus on some experiences of using IECs in the health sector in India which indicate how the potential of IECs can be exploited in developing countries. We also consider the constraints on the realization of such potential.

The link between empowerment and outcomes :

In the literature, empowerment is seen to enhance individual competence and self-esteem. This paper discusses an extensive review of literature to identify material, including case studies that show the link between each domain and specific outcomes. A range of measures of outcomes on women's condition were used in the review, including mortality, quality of life, perceptions of pain, the to function day to day and so on. In the literature on community psychology, empowerment is seen to enhance individual competence and self-esteem which, in turn, increase perceptions of control which has a direct effect on improving socio-economic outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

There is more evidence to show the pathways through which the link between

empowerment and positive outcomes occurs and, within a programming context, the pathways have been identified as the domains of empowerment of the community that allow participation in groups and communities of interest.

The study identified nine empowerment domains : Participation; Community-based organizations; Local leadership; Resource mobilization; Assessment of problems; Links with other people and organizations; Role of outside agents; and Programme management. The domains cited are robust and provide a useful concept of empowerment of community through women.

Review of literature :

Indian studies :

Malhotra *et al.* (2002) analysed the frequently used “Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). It is a composite measure of gender inequality in three key areas: Political participation and decision-making, economic participation and decision-making and power over economic resources (HDR, 2003). It is an aggregate index for a population and does not measure empowerment on an individual basis. It is made up of two dimensions: economic participation and decision-making. For our purposes, GEM is limited and does not capture the multidimensional view of women’s empowerment. It cannot be assumed that if a development intervention promotes women’s empowerment along a particular dimension that in empowerment in other areas will necessarily follow.”

Pradhan (2003) in the study entitled “Measuring Empowerment: A Methodological Approach, Society for International Development”, argue that “ quantitative socio-economic measures of empowerment are useful indicators as a first approximation; they are not sensitive enough to capture the nuances of gender power relations. This is because quantitative methods alone are unable to capture the interactive processes. Therefore in order to understand the socio-cultural context within which women’s behaviour in social interaction and gender relationships takes place, an in-depth anthropological method is essential.”

Purushothaman (2003) in her study entitled “The empowerment of women in India: grass roots women’s network and the state”, based on a case study of an informal network of nongovernmental organizations and group of women of the swayam shikshan prayog. She analysed “the functions of organization for changing power relation and for fostering women’s autonomy and other social groups. She also demonstrates a decentralized, loosely structured network of organization can actually increase the visibility and participation of poor women, enable them to bargain for resources, and change their policy, while simultaneously protecting the autonomy of organization involved”.

Handy and Kassam (2004) have conducted a research entitled “Women’s Empowerment in Rural India”. Researchers state that “ CRTC is a rural NGO set in the foothills of the Himalayas is a successful NGO with a goal of empowering the poor rural women. CRTC does not have access to trained employees from cities and had to find local women to nurture empower and train to be responsible and effective employees. This potential disadvantage turned out to be an advantage. By employing women who come from similar backgrounds as their clientele, CRTC was able to have a staff that was able to not only ‘walk the talk’ but also serve as credible models of the changes that were possible. The high scores in overall

empowerment of the ‘Supervisors’ and ‘Field workers’ as compared with the potential ‘Recipients’ confirm this. The experiences of CRTC suggest that such employees can be found among the clientele and nurtured and trained to take on positions of responsibility.”

Mohammad and Shahid (2004) the study entitled “Rethinking women’s participation, empowerment and gender equality: a micro analysis”. This study analysed “the outdoor participation potential of women; the process of women’s empowerment; and the interrelationships of women participation, empowerment, gender equality and their functional dependency on age, education, income and caste. Due to outdoor participation respondents developed self-confidence and self-respect. At home also, they participated effectively in decision making regarding income expenditure, children’s education, family planning, etc. It was revealed that women in the 25-45 age groups were more participative, vocal and active than women below 25 years and above 45 years of age. All the sampled WPs were illiterate, and low caste WPs who had limited income, wanted to overcome their illiteracy, by undergoing training and actively participating in outdoor political and economic activities. It was suggested that there is a need to provide empowerment training to all voluntary workers and local leaders. A strategy should be formed so that more and more women can be involved in outdoor activities, particularly those women who want to work, are educated and belong to low income, and low caste category.”

Basu and Basu (2004) in the study entitled “Income Generation Program and Empowerment of Women – A case study in India”, study attempts to assess the roles of the public sector and voluntary organisations in the process of conducting economic development programs for women in India. “This socioeconomic case study based on the interview of some 70 women beneficiaries of economic development program from a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and a governmental organisation (GO) in the districts of South 24 Parganas in West Bengal, India. The case study finds that income generation activity of the NGO increases economic empowerment and overall empowerment of women more than government organisation. Research found that the NGOs’ development programs have contributed more than the GOs’ programs to improve the economic and social status of women beneficiaries. The NGOs have certain positive qualities that make them more successful in reaching the poorer sections of society. The major positive point lies in the NGO development strategy or approach. This approach includes participation, partnership and member accountability.”

Das (2006), the study entitled “A study on the role of vocational and skill development for women empowerment in rural areas: an impact study with special reference to poverty and gender in Khurda district The study “identified and analysed the factors responsible for the overlapping of gender and poverty in villages. It also examined the strengths and weaknesses of the vocational and skill development programmes undertaken by various agencies (Government and Non-Government) in different fields of women empowerment. The social factors preventing the access of women to these skill development programmes were also identified. Training was given for tailoring, stitching, making wall hangings (chandua), soft toys, embroidery, candles, agarbatti (incense sticks), phenyl, papad, spices, cane, bamboo and jute work, and agriculture and allied activities like fishery, goatery, dairy, plantation, mushroom cultivation, bee keeping, etc. 88.59% respondents found the training to be

satisfactory in all aspects. 77.17% women started their own work after training, and 62.38% thought of expanding their business. The agencies that imparted vocational training were Nehru Yuva Kendra, NABARD, Mother Teresa Seva Pratisthan, Sarvodaya Vikas Samiti, Udyog Bikash, CENDERET and District Welfare Organisation. in Orissa”.

Vijayalakshmi (2009) study entitled “L3 Women: A Technology Enhanced Life Long Learning Strategy for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women”. She revealed that “Inclusive growth then compasses the gender equality and empowerment of women and rural poor to bring them into the mainstream of development. Technology enhanced L3 is an essential approach for achieving Gender Equality and empowerment of women, the fourth goal of UN MDGs. As envisaged by UN Millennium Developmental Goals (MDG) Project, women are the vital human resources to be empowered to contribute for development. Exclusive women Life Long Learning resource centers are essential to provide access to women from rural and urban areas for opportunities for updating the knowledge/skills and learning for livelihoods and the most important is developing the zeal towards education and inculcating the habit of participating in the process of development through capacity building among women as managers as well as beneficiaries in lifelong learning projects”.

Beena and Jothi (2012), has conducted study on “ Education- A tool of Women Empowerment: Historical Study based on Kerala Society”, researcher concludes that “education played an important role for women empowerment. The activities of the missionary societies in the field of women’s education have brought about tremendous changes in the society of Kerala and to change the attitude of the people towards girl’s education. As a result of the activities of the missionaries there was rapid spread of education among the people of Kerala especially among women. In 1947, the percentage of literacy of males and female was 58.1 and 36.0. Certain social evils such as sati, devadasi system, etc. disappeared from the society. These facilities tremendously enhanced the educational and social status of women in the society of Kerala in the first half of the 20th century”.

Foreign studies :

Christine (2005), has conducted a study on “Social Learning for Women’s Empowerment in Rural Tanzania”. The “research design included facilitating and observing women who engaged in a three-fold cyclical process involving collective learning through researching and analyzing information about their land tenure problem, collective action taking, and collective reflection that returned the women to further researching and analyzing more information. This study uncovered women’s unacknowledged potential in terms of intellectual and social-political abilities to deal with a problem that affected their lives. It revealed the women’s capacity to empower themselves through their analytical skills, critical questioning, creative imagination, agency, solidarity and social networking”.

Acharya *et al.* (2007) have conducted study on “Empowering rural women through a community development approach in Nepal”. This study explores a “community development strategy to empower rural women through educational and small-scale household economic activities. Qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were used to assess the impact of a community development project launched in a remote hill district of Nepal.”

Beatrice (2011) has conducted study on “Women’s Literacy as a Tool of Empowerment-

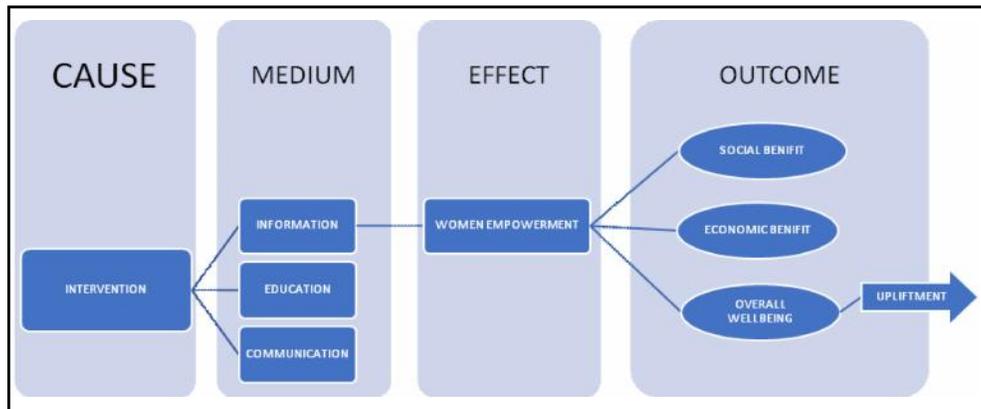
A Closer look at the Women of Senegal”, this study suggests that “non-formal education (NFE) programs have done more for Senegalese women than just teach them basic literacy and numeracy skills. These programs have assisted in the improvement of women’s lives within their communities through the transmission, creation and development of knowledge and skills.”

Constraints in empowerment :

The basic difficulties encountered in using IECs to bring about improvement in the socio-economic conditions of women are: an inadequate physical infrastructure; insufficient access by the majority of the women to information; and a lack of the requisite skills for implementing them. Substantial problems faced in successful intervention are providing a wider access, and the problem of resource allocation in poor countries like India where basic infrastructure for health and education is still lacking. Educating health professionals in the possible uses of IECs, and providing them with access and “connectivity”, would in turn spread the benefits to a much wider set of final beneficiaries and might help reduce the inequality divide.

Conceptual framework :

The conceptual framework of this paper is based on the notion that IECs can affect



socio-economic conditions in poor countries both directly and indirectly. It can work directly by improving health care provision and disease prevention. It also works indirectly on the socio-economic status of the population through its effects on the broader determinants of socio-economic, such as growth, the economic position of households, and the social infrastructure. The effect of IECs on health differs from its impact on other sectors in crucial ways. Achieving some of the benefits of IECs requires that health workers are reached and not necessarily the final beneficiaries, thus, the cost of a given quantum of effect is reduced. In that respect, it does indeed hold out a great deal of promise. However, such promise is limited by a number of features which are common to most poor developing countries. These include large gaps in basic infrastructure availability, and the ability and

willingness of health workers and others to make use of the opportunities that are being offered. The empowerment leads to overall well-being and upliftment of the womenfolk in society.

Policy conclusions :

This analysis of the constraints on realizing the potential of IECs for improving socio-economic conditions suggests there is a need for a careful and nuanced approach to the implementation of IECs in poor countries. On the one hand, it is true that IECs offer developing countries an opportunity to introduce many improvements in health service delivery, as well as overall developmental goals which have an impact on socio-economic condition of women. On the other hand, however, despite its rapid growth, the focus on information dissemination in most developing countries is small and the effect of its growth on the rest of the economy is limited. In addition, there is the prospect of a sharply widening inequality divide even within developing economies.

All this makes it difficult for the governments of developing countries to determine their investment priorities. Providing access to new information for the overwhelming majority of the womenfolk who cannot access them for awareness reasons would impose a large financial burden. However, an even more difficult task is that of helping those without any skills or “connectivity” to develop the competence needed to participate, however marginally, in the emerging economy. With indefensibly low levels of literacy and schooling in most developing countries, many people would argue that the first task of governments should be to increase the availability of school education to the whole population of women-folk.

It is plausible to propose that as a priority this should be placed above the target of providing a minimum degree of access to IECs to those without either economic skills or “connectivity”. However, the nature of the challenge of overcoming backwardness is such that a degree of syncopation is inevitable, necessitating large resources. However, the special nature of the interaction between IECs and the health and other socio economic outcomes shows that it has yielded more than proportionate benefits. Based on the examples from India, it is possible to suggest that use of IECs in enhancing delivery and providing better information to rural women-folk is both viable and important as a means of improving their conditions in many situations. In this context, it may be more important to focus on educating womenfolk with the use of IECs, and providing them with access and “connectivity”, which would in turn spread the benefits to a much wider set of final beneficiaries.

REFERENCES

- Acharya, Sanjay *et al.* (2007). “Empowering rural women through a community development approach in Nepal”, *Community Development J.*, **42**(1): 34–46. Downloaded from (2013-07-26) <http://cdj.oxfordjournals.org>.81.
- Basu, Saswati and Basu, Parikshit (2004). *Income Generation Program and Empowerment of Women – A case study in India*, Charles Sturt University Bathurst, Australia. <https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/.../BasuandBasu.pdf>.
- Beatrice, Willie Baskervill (2011). “Women’s Literacy as a Tool of Empowerment A Closer look at the

- Women of Senegal”, Master thesis, Department of African Studies, Indiana University.
- Beena, Dominic and Amrita Jothi C. (2012). “Education- A tool of Women Empowerment: Historical Study based on Kerala Society”, International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Volume 2, Issue 4, April 2012 , downloaded on (July 26, 2013) from www.ijsrp.org.
- Christine, Hellen Mhina (2005). “Social Learning for Women’s Empowerment in Rural Tanzania” Ph.D. thesis, Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta.
- Das, Hara Prasanna (2006). A study on the role of vocational and skill development for women empowerment in rural areas : an impact study with special reference to poverty and gender in Khurda district in Orissa : final report. New Delhi : Indian Council of Social Sciences Research. 101 p.
- Handy, Femida and Kassam, Meenaz (2004). Women’s empowerment in rural India. Paper presented at the ISTR conference, Toronto Canada.
- Malhotra, Anju, et al. (2002). Measuring Women’s Empowerment as a Variable International Development, World Bank, Gender and Development Group, Washington DC http://www.icrw.org/docs/MeasuringEmpowerment_workingpaper_802.doc.
- Mohammad, Noor and Shahid, Mohammad (2004). Rethinking women's participation, empowerment and gender equality : a micro analysis. *Women's Link*, **10**(3) : 7-14.
- Pandit, Vijayalakshmi (2009). L3 women: A technology enhanced lifelong learning strategy for gender equality and empowerment of women, *University News*, **49**(43) : 10-14.
- Pradhan, B. (2003). Measuring Empowerment: A Methodical Approach”, *Society for International Development*, **46** (2) : 51-57
- Prasad, Hemalatha (1995). Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas: Successful Case Studies. *J. Rural Development*, **14**(1): 85-87.
- Purushothamanan, Sangeeta (1998). “The Empowerment of women in India-Grassroots Women’s Network and the stage”. New Delhi: Sage Publication.
- Saradha, O. (2001). Empowerment of Rural Women through Self-Help Groups in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh – An Analysis. M. Sc. (Agri.) Thesis, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore.
