

Social Empowerment of Women through Micro-enterprises: A Case Study of Parbat District of Nepal

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Abstract

An analysis of the impact of women-owned microenterprises on women's social empowerment in Parbat District is made in the current study, Social empowerment of women through micro-enterprises: a case study of Parbat District, Nepal. Women's social empowerment gives them the tools they need to be independent, self-sufficient and have a positive self-image to deal with challenging situations. Women should also be able to participate in development activities and the decision-making process. It is widely acknowledged that women's empowerment can be well paying strategy for overall economic and social development. This has profoundly impacted how women are assisted along a continuum from welfare to development. By assisting women in obtaining economic empowerment, micro enterprise backed by governmental or non-governmental programs contribute to the social empowerment of women. In this study, the freedom of movement and economic independence are used as criteria, while the social empowerment of women through microenterprise is used as a predictor variable. This purposive sampling-based quantitative research study involved 384 women micro entrepreneurs in the Parbat district. The statistical estimates and analysis are based on a data set of survey. The data set was statistically tested using standard SPSS software. Data analysis methods included descriptive and regression analysis. The findings showed that women who engaged in these endeavors experienced social empowerment. The study found that before and after participating in micro-enterprise, the overall average mean value of social empowerment was 1.61 and 2.68, respectively. Due to their involvement in microbusinesses, women's social empowerment increased. It reveals that the most significant change in social group involvement (2.82) was seen after participating in the micro-enterprise.

Keywords: *Micro Enterprises, Entrepreneurship, Social Empowerment, Women Empowerment, Freedom of Movement, Economic freedom, social uplift*

Introduction

The word Empowerment is a proactive, multifaceted process that should allow women to fully realize their identities and abilities in all facets of life. It would entail giving them more freedom from the restrictions imposed on them by tradition, belief, and practice, as well as greater access to information and resources, greater autonomy in decision-making, greater capacity to plan their lives, and greater control over the circumstances that have an impact on those lives. In general, empowerment refers to giving people the freedom to make their own decisions, think for themselves, and reach their full potential as contributing members of society. Women's empowerment is the process through which women have more control over the physical and intellectual resources that will help them become more independent and assert their rights as individuals, challenge the patriarchal worldview, and combat gender-based discrimination against women.

When a woman has the ability to engage in social and cultural activities, she is considered to be socially and culturally empowered. Social standing, mixing with others, access to numerous organizations, social involvement, participation in cultural activities/seminars/competitions, etc., are ways to achieve social/cultural empowerment. When a woman has the ability to strengthen and develop her own self-reliance, she is considered to be personally empowered. Economic independence, action freedom, capacity and participation in decision-making, self-esteem, gender equality, development in health and knowledge, etc., are all ways to achieve personal empowerment. When a woman has the ability to improve the welfare of her own family, this is referred to as familial empowerment. Improvements in family income, spouse support, family relationships, children's education, family members' access to health care, and improvements in basic conveniences and amenities are all ways to achieve familial empowerment.

Society is empowered when women are empowered. (2005) Ghulam. Women's economic and social empowerment is highly valued in prosperous and developed societies. Micro enterprise is one of the main endeavor that help achieve overall empowerment, claim Jan & Hayat (2009). Women who are economically empowered have more influence over a variety of income-generating activities that they own and manage, which results in a higher quality of life for them. They also stated that giving women skills and opportunities they need to be financially independent is necessary for their social and political empowerment.

According to Achala (2009), empowerment is the capacity to plan and manage one's own life. It is a procedure for improving human potential in order to increase options and chances so that each person can live a respectable and worthwhile life. According to Sherly and Lavanya (2012), empowerment gives women the ability to influence a variety of aspects of their lives. It comprises having both ideological and resource control, as well as increased self-assurance that makes it possible to solve any issues. Women's empowerment is essential for their individual well-being as well as the growth of their families and the community at large. Jaya and Binod (2013) define empowerment as the process of increasing awareness and capability, which results in increased involvement, increased decision-making authority, and more control over transformational action.

According to Aparajita (2006), strengthening women's status in the sociopolitical power structure of society may be construed as empowerment of women. Without bolstering women's status in the current economic system, which entails giving them more social possibilities and capacities so they may contribute significantly and effectively to the economy of the society, empowerment in this sense cannot be achieved. Entrepreneurship, which is regarded as a crucial component of both economic and social development, produces microenterprises (Makombe, 2006).

In Nepal, more than 80% of people—50% of which women—live in rural areas. Widespread poverty and the migration of productive labor outside are both directly related to the inadequate income-generating options in these regions. The Government of Nepal (GoN) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) began conducting the Micro Enterprise Development Program (MEDEP) in 1998 with the intention of meeting the needs of socially excluded people living below poverty line by encouraging off-farm employment. It has developed over the past 20 years into one of the most effective programs for reducing poverty because it works with the poor directly and produces unmatched outcomes on the ground. Since then, it has developed into a prototype for business growth with the potential to help thousands of individuals escape poverty. Targeting women, disadvantaged groups, and rural poor people in order to give them economic empowerment. As of the fiscal year 2009/2010, GoN has incorporated the program as Micro Enterprise Development for Poverty Alleviation (MEDPA). Both programs are being carried out simultaneously as a result of the Government of Nepal's ratification of the MEDPA Five-Year Strategic Plan in July 2013. Hundreds of thousands of women impacted economically and significant difference in women's socio-cultural and political empowerment found after involvement in Micro enterprise. Similarly, in the area of Ilam, a survey was done among the women who received benefits from the small farmers cooperative limited (SFCL). After engaging in the SFCL program, the study found a substantial difference in the socio-cultural and political empowerment of women. This study found that women's access to financial resources had an impact on their standing in the family and community. The study found that in order to empower those who are socially disadvantaged, the SFCL program needs to be expanded into difficult-to-reach areas (Poudel & Pokharel, 2017).

To sum it, empowerment is the process of giving people control over their own lives in all areas that are crucial to their survival and the advancement of humanity as a whole. Empowering women entails giving them the equipment they need to be independent financially, self-sufficient, and confident enough to deal with any challenging circumstances. Women should also be able to participate in development initiatives and the decision-making process.

"Empowering women is a requirement for developing a healthy nation; when women are empowered, society would be stable," said former President A P J Abdul Kalam. Women's empowerment is crucial because it fosters the growth of a good family, a good society, and eventually a good nation through the influence of their ideas and value systems. Women's empowerment, according to Ramani and Nandita (2005), refers to their ability to engage as equal partners in a society's political, social, cultural, and economic systems.

Research on women-run microenterprises, their contributions to women's social lives, and their effects on society are still lacking. Because there aren't many articles published in Nepal, a study was conducted to look into how micro businesses contribute to society.

Materials & Methods

The study adopted a quantitative design because it had used the standardized survey questionnaire to collect the data. This descriptive study examined the social empowerment of women who work in microenterprises. Based on a random sampling procedure, 384 women-owned micro-enterprise from the Prabat district were chosen as a sample. The sample size is established by accounting for the 95% level of confidence, the 5% margin of error, and the 50% prevalence. The respondents were selected by using a simple random sampling procedure. With the use of timetables, the focus group approach and individual interviews were employed to collect the necessary data. Statistical analysis was done to show the data. The degree of women's empowerment both before and after the launch of microenterprise was evaluated.

Result & Discussion

Descriptive statistics of social empowerment of women

In terms of having access to land, finance, and decent jobs, women are still very backward, according to the United Nations (United Nations Human Rights, 2015). Women's social empowerment is essential for societal progress. Rural and distant areas of Nepalese society provide considerable challenges for women. A comprehensive program, like micro-enterprise, that primarily benefits women is needed to address these problems. It makes it possible for people to elevate both their social and living circumstances. Social empowerment in rural areas should start the process of removing societal barriers of all kinds. Living independently, having unfettered mobility, and having a high social status are all examples of social empowerment. It empowers people to lead-free and self-sufficient lives in society.

Studies have been carried out all year to find out more about the social empowerment of women through microenterprises. According to Addai (2017), micro-enterprise was essential for socially empowering women. Additionally, among other things, it is said to support business owners in gaining self-assurance, problem-solving abilities, decision-making, public involvement, and financial management (Addai, 2017). Women are also involved in decision-making, public engagement, control over the use of money, and other activities in Nepal's rural and remote areas. A crucial measure of a nation's development is the social empowerment of women.

This study looked into the social empowerment of women through micro-enterprise using a number of different questions. The total average mean before and after participation in micro-enterprise was, according to Table 1, 1.61 and 2.68, respectively. Due to their involvement in microbusinesses, women's social empowerment increased. It reveals that the biggest change in social group involvement (2.82) was seen after taking part in micro-enterprise.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of social empowerment of women

Descriptive Statistics (Mean)	Before	After
How do you involve in any social groups (Micro Entrepreneurs Group, Cooperative, mothers' group, users' groups)?	1.5885	2.8203
Are you a leader of any social group?	1.4818	2.6328
How do you involve in the household level decision?	1.7292	2.8594
How do you participate in any community level meeting and discussion?	1.6198	2.7240
Do your community people listen your advice?	1.6250	2.6380
Are you aware about the current program, policy and Planning Process of local government?	1.5339	2.5885
Are you invited in any program (meeting, seminar, orientation, training, planning) of local government in last 6 months?	1.5573	2.6484
Are you invited in any program (meeting, seminar, orientation, training, planning) of non-governmental organization in last 6 months?	1.6068	2.6328
Did you take any responsibility in solving the intellectual and social problems of your communities?	1.5651	2.6146
Do you visit health post/hospital for your health treatment alone?	1.7760	2.7682
Do you visit school or college of your children to know their progress?	1.7344	2.7370
Do you speak against the domestic violence?	1.5469	2.6172
Do you speak against the harmful culture of society like caste based or gender-based discrimination, restriction in menstrual time, etc.?	1.6042	2.6198
Total Mean	20.9689	34.901
Total Average Mean	1.6129	2.6846

Table 1 above demonstrates that participation in social groups like cooperatives and groups for micro entrepreneurs has undergone the largest transformation. The mean value was 1.59 previously, but after participating in a micro-enterprise, it increased to 2.82. For a leader in any social group, the mean value was 1.48 (before) and 2.63 (post-intervention).

Furthermore, after learning about current local government programs, regulations, and planning processes, the mean value—which was 1.53 before micro-enterprise participation—rose to 2.58. There was a change in the invitation to any local government program over the past six months before (1.56) and after (2.65) participation in micro-enterprise. The mean value for invitations to any non-governmental organization's program climbed from 1.61 to 2.63 over the previous six months.

The mean value for responsibility in addressing intellectual and social difficulties in their communities grew from 1.57 to 2.61 after involvement in micro-enterprise. The smallest change in mean value was for visiting a health post or hospital alone for medical attention; it went from having a mean value of 1.78 prior to becoming active in micro-enterprise to 2.77 after. Additionally, after taking part in micro-enterprise, the mean was raised by at least 1 for speaking out against domestic abuse, visiting their children's schools or colleges to learn about their development, and speaking out against negative cultural norms such as caste- or gender-based discrimination.

During the field visit, Mrs. Tara Chochalin, 40, stated that she now speaks up against numerous infractions that happen all around her. Her micro-enterprise had given her more self-confidence, and she now spoke out against any discrimination in her society. She continued by expressing her reluctance to alert others to any form of violence. But as her confidence grew, she spoke more freely. She took part in numerous initiatives supported by non-governmental organizations.

Social empowerment of women through micro-enterprise

One of the biggest problems in rural areas is unemployment. There, laborers make up the majority of the workforce. As a result, one of the difficult aspects is establishing jobs in rural areas. In Nepal's rural and remote locations, small companies and microenterprises can assist create jobs. Rural microbusinesses support the growth of the economy and society. As a result, more women are given more power in their culture. It helps society's gender gap go smaller.

Globally, it is believed that women's empowerment is feasible when there is equality, no domestic violence, and an equal pay system. The empowerment of women has improved in developing nations like Nepal as a result of the growth of microbusiness and education.

The calculated findings were computed using the paired samples test. Table 2 displays the paired samples test. It shows how the mean, standard deviation, and standard error are coupled to differ. It reveals that social group involvement had the biggest mean change between before and after micro-enterprise participation (-1.23). Participation in microbusiness contributed to the social empowerment of women.

Table 2: Social empowerment of women through micro-enterprise

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
How do you involve in any social groups (Micro Entrepreneurs Group, Cooperative, mothers' group, users' groups)?	Before - After	-1.23177	.69382	.03541	-1.30139	-1.16216	-34.789	383	.000
Are you a leader of any social group?	Before - After	-1.15104	.72846	.03717	-1.22413	-1.07795	-30.964	383	.000
How do you involve in the household level decision?	Before - After	-1.13021	.79733	.04069	-1.21021	-1.05021	-27.777	383	.000
How do you participate in any community level meeting and discussion?	Before - After	-1.10417	.85782	.04378	-1.19024	-1.01810	-25.223	383	.000
Do your community people listen your advice?	Before - After	-1.01302	.82540	.04212	-1.09584	-.93020	-24.050	383	.000

Are you aware about the current program, policy and Planning Process of local government?	Before – After	- 1.05469	.81091	.04138	-1.13605	-.97332	- 25.487	383	.000
Are you invited in any program (meeting, seminar, orientation, training, planning) of local government in last 6 months?	Before – After	- 1.09115	.81084	.04138	-1.17250	-1.00979	- 26.370	383	.000
Are you invited in any program (meeting, seminar, orientation, training, planning) of non-governmental organization in last 6 months?	Before – After	- 1.02604	.88465	.04514	-1.11480	-.93728	- 22.728	383	.000
Did you take any responsibility in solving the intellectual and social problems of your communities?	Before – After	- 1.04948	.81446	.04156	-1.13120	-.96776	- 25.251	383	.000
Do you visit health post/hospital for your health treatment alone?	Before – After	- .99219	.79977	.04081	-1.07243	-.91194	- 24.311	383	.000
Do you visit school or college of your children to know their progress?	Before – After	- 1.00260	.78663	.04014	-1.08153	-.92368	- 24.976	383	.000
Do you speak against the domestic violence?	Before – After	- 1.07031	.70266	.03586	-1.14082	-.99981	- 29.849	383	.000
Do you speak against the harmful culture of society like caste based or gender-based discrimination, restriction in menstrual time, etc.?	Before – After	- 1.01562	.78482	.04005	-1.09437	-.93688	- 25.359	383	.000

Participation in any social group was reported to have had the largest change in mean value (-1.23), whereas going to a health facility/hospital by yourself for medical care was reported to have experienced the smallest change (-0.99). Similar to this, there was a -1.15 difference in the mean value for becoming a leader in a social group before and after micro-enterprise involvement, with a 0.73 standard deviation. Making household decisions also had a mean difference of -1.13 and a standard deviation of roughly 0.80. A factor of 1 had also been applied to other indices. Speaking out against domestic violence, criticizing destructive societal norms, visiting their kids' schools or colleges, taking charge of resolving intellectual and social issues in their communities, and inviting in any government and non-government programs have all changed over the past six months.

Additionally, it was seen that there were substantial differences in the mean since the p-value for each indication was 0.000, which is significantly less than 0.05.

Women's social empowerment through micro-business has changed significantly in the areas assessed. As a result of societal advancement and women's empowerment through micro-enterprises, they started to speak out against domestic violence. It has also contributed to the economic emancipation of women. Some of the women had advanced to become autonomous social leaders. Women had started assimilating into a society's socioeconomic class and had inspired others. They were also conscious of their obligations and rights. They started working outside of the home. In domestic decisions, women had a voice. Similar to this, there was a decline in gender-based discrimination in society as a result of micro-enterprises support.

Social changes in before and after

Society changes as a result of people's changing behavior. Both the individuals and the nation profit from positive societal progress. Over time, education has been crucial in shaping and transforming society. Despite Nepal's late adoption of education, it has contributed to the country's social development. To aid in educating the public, the government has made public awareness campaigns available through the radio, television, and other social initiatives. Violence, prejudice, and gender inequality nevertheless still exist in our culture. In rural and isolated Nepal, women are often treated differently than men. Women are consequently denied access to equality, sanitation, health care, and education. To empower women in those places is, therefore, one of the most challenging tasks for the government and other groups. In some locations, various organizations have helped to advance women's economic, social, emotional, psychological, and political empowerment. Micro-enterprises and tiny firms have been created in order to achieve equity in all facets of society.

This section looked at social developments both before and after microbusiness participation. Table 3 below demonstrates that after participating in a micro-enterprise, the mean value in social change increased from 20.97 with a standard deviation of 6.93 to 34.90 with a standard deviation of 4.99.

Table 3: Social changes in before and after

Paired Samples Statistics									
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean				
Pair 1	Before	20.9688	384	6.92851	.35357				
	After	34.9010	384	4.98935	.25461				
Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Before- After	-13.93229	8.54236	.43593	-14.78940	-13.07518	-31.960	383	.000

Additionally, it was found that the standard deviation was 8.54 and that the mean difference between before and after micro-enterprise involvement was, on average, -13.93. Their participation in micro-enterprise led to a large social revolution in society.

It highlights how women's involvement in micro-businesses led to social empowerment for them. Furthermore, the null hypothesis no. 2 (There is no significant change in social empowerment of women after involving in microenterprise.) of this study was rejected because there were significant differences in mean value and the p-value was 0.000, which is less than 0.05.

Conclusion

The study focused on the social empowerment of women through microbusinesses. Rural women who were below the poverty line had their entrepreneurial talent and potential developed and used through microbusinesses. The continued existence and expansion of these businesses guarantee higher living standards for women, resulting in happier and more tranquil personal, familial, and social empowerment.

The study examined the following social aspects: i) increased leadership in social groups, ii) increased participation in current local government programs, policies, and planning processes, iii) increased invitation to participate in local government programs, and non-governmental organization programs, v) increased responsibility in addressing intellectual and social challenges in their communities, and vii) increased visits to historical sites. The empowerment of women through participation in social organizations obtained the highest mean value (2.83) when these six qualities were evaluated, whereas the empowerment of women through independent visits to a health facility or hospital for medical care had the lowest mean value (2.77).

Similar to this, women entrepreneurs now have control over family matters thanks to their participation in micro-enterprises. The women entrepreneurs' self-confidence has been fostered through the microbusinesses, demonstrating their social empowerment.

Thus, it is determined that women have achieved social empowerment as a result of launching their microbusinesses, which is a true representation of their attaining economic empowerment through microbusiness.

Only the social empowerment of women through microenterprise was examined in the study. In order for future scholars to investigate the social empowerment of women through microenterprise, the other part of women's empowerment has not been explored.

Recommendation

The current study demonstrates that women's empowerment in social spheres has occurred as a result of launching micro-businesses. Hence, the following recommendations are made for promoting women-owned micro businesses.

1. The government should develop awareness campaigns targeted solely at women, and they should work to inform less educated women about the opportunities for entrepreneurship development.
2. Rural women should be given access to low-cost finance options and information about various sorts of microenterprises that are appropriate for the locale in order to encourage them to start their own businesses.
3. In order to give women, the chance to create microbusinesses in their individual communities without disrupting their family lives, proper training for managing the firms, keeping accounting, and developing marketing strategies must be provided.
4. Support systems should reform and realign their policies and programs in a way that encourages women entrepreneurs to be more engaged at work, achieve more success, for involvement and participating environment for the women in local planning process and have fewer role conflicts. Active policy intervention for better market facilities, enough financing, and better infrastructure is required to make it practicable.
5. The government should take the initiative to set up special training and orientation programs for the officers and workers who are tasked with supporting women business owners.

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Conflicts of interest: None

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