

A Study on the Financial Inclusion of the Minority Women in Rural Bengal through Self-Help Groups

Abstract

Since ages women have been facing inequality in every aspect of their life. Backward communities were completely neglected especially the female gender of the society and were underestimated in comparison to their men-counterparts. Unless social justice and gender equality are ensured, development alone cannot bring peace and prosperity in a country. Women who constitute about half of the population of the country have been bypassed by various development programme. All these invite gender inequality and human civilization seems to be jeopardised in its sustainable development as women are considered as the builders of socio-economic development of any society. In reality minority women have been found to suffer insecurity more than any other sections of the society. They have lowest literacy rate and lowest work participation rate. In India, there has been diminishing growth of minorities in comparison to other sections of the society not only in rural areas but also in urban areas. At present the government is working on this burning issue to help them come out of this crisis by financially including them so as to have an access to formal financial services at an affordable cost. Microfinance is a poverty alleviation tool which is widely accepted and also ensure socio-economic empowerment of its women beneficiaries. Involvement of women would ensure effective utilization of funds and hence improved quality of their life. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) can be considered as an empowerment tool for women as it provides easy access to credit. SHGs is a necessary platform to overcome poverty and exploitation and create confidence among rural poor, particularly among women who are mostly invisible in the society. This thesis attempts to study the role of financial inclusion in providing a social platform to minority women and their empowerment through Self-Help Groups in the selected districts of West Bengal. The thesis depicts a whole picture of the workings of minority SHGs in West Bengal. The sample Districts taken are Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling Districts from the northern part, Malda and Murshidabad Districts from the central part and North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas from the southern part of West Bengal. The study is descriptive in nature and is based on purposive sampling method. For the purpose of the study, data analysis was conducted based on Multinomial Logistic Regression method based upon the nominal data fetched through personal visit and interviews. From the interpretations of the data collected it was observed that minority SHGs are doing quite well in most of the sample regions and the members are empowered to some extent. Yet there is an urge to aware and encourage more number of minority women to participate in SHGs.

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