



Livelihoods Generation through Corporate Social Responsibility: The Impact of CSR Initiatives on Socioeconomic Empowerment in Odisha

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajebe/2024/v24i111581>

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/126357>

Original Research Article

Received: 13/09/2024

Accepted: 15/11/2024

Published: 23/11/2024

ABSTRACT

Spearheading the cause of the communities is often eulogized as the overwhelming mandate of the corporate houses. There are a plethora of instances wherein companies of various sorts put serious effort on their social obligations and financially invest a lot in various developmental activities

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Cite as: Mahapatra, Manosmita, Soumyashree Dixit, and Srisikta Suvadarshini. 2024. "Livelihoods Generation through Corporate Social Responsibility: The Impact of CSR Initiatives on Socioeconomic Empowerment in Odisha". *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting* 24 (11):628-37. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajebe/2024/v24i111581>.

revolving around community development in one way or the other. This may include donations, volunteering activities, educational programs, livelihood ventures, healthcare initiatives, or infrastructure development in disadvantaged areas. The paper represents an attempt to highlight the role of CSR in community development through generation of livelihood programmes especially for the rural women. By following descriptive and exploratory research designs with a sample size of sixty women collected from five different SHGs chosen through simple random sampling along with the use of interview schedule as the tool, it analyzes the CSR contribution of the Dalmia Bharat Foundation (DBF) in promoting the livelihood concerns of women through a variety of initiatives including mushroom cultivation, tailoring, spice packaging, imparting business skills, access to finance and host of other initiatives.

Keywords: CSR; livelihood generation; women's empowerment; community development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The society requires every business to perform certain obligations because the existence of business organization cannot justify by the economy alone. Social, moral, ethical factors are also important for the success of a business. The inducement of socially responsible organization is to clout the process of developing and advocating socially responsible business practices which not only benefits the socially responsible organization and its employees but also benefits the greater community, the economy at large. The relationship between companies and civil society organizations has moved from paternalistic philanthropy to re-examination of the roles, rights and responsibilities of business in society. Corporate social responsibility, defined in terms of the responsiveness of business to stakeholders' legal, ethical, social and environmental expectations, is one outcome of these developments. The European Commission has defined corporate social responsibility as a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis.

There is a transformation of CSR from economic to social dimension. Economic CSR aims to ensure that businesses contribute positively to the overall economic well-being of the communities in which they operate. Moving from the economic dimension to the social dimension, CSR extends beyond financial considerations to encompass the social impact of a company's operations which signifies a broader understanding of the role of businesses in society. Hence, large corporations have started to intensify their CSR engagement under pressure of changing societal expectation (Jamali, 2008) where, CSR is defined as

integrating social concern in the business operation on a voluntary basis with stakeholders. Many companies under CSR engage in philanthropic initiatives and community development programs to support local people. This may include donations to charities, volunteering activities, educational programs, healthcare initiatives, or infrastructure development in disadvantaged areas. The Companies Bill, 2009 and its 2011 counterpart, represents the first major effort at comprehensively overhauling corporate law in India since 1956. The Companies Act 2013 has introduced several provisions which would change the way Indian corporate do business and one such provision is spending on corporate social responsibility activities such as eradicate hunger, poverty and malnutrition, promotion of preventive healthcare, education and gender equality, reducing social and economic inequalities, environmental sustainability etc.

Hence, the basic focus of the present study is tracing a link between business, society and social sustainability. It attempts to observe the role of CSR in community development through generation of livelihood which is the process of creating the capabilities, assets, and activities that people need to sustain their lives for the marginalized. Social sustainability which focuses on the well-being of people, communities, and workplaces is significant for the Companies which often tend to pursue a socio economic enhancement strategy through CSR to empower women in SHG formation. Woman's empowerment comprises woman's education and knowledge to enhance her understanding about her surroundings, her ability to control her life, freedom from domination by not depending on anyone else's income, her ability to participate in decision-making process, her capability to make independent decisions and finally her independence in terms of mobility

(Beauvoir,2011). The term "empowerment" may indicate a redistribution of power to the less powered group; therefore, it is relative and contextual. People's empowerment is studied keeping the temporal and spatial dimensions in mind and in relation to other people. Women's empowerment is the process by which women redefines gender roles in ways which extends their possibilities for the existence in societies (Mosadale, 2005).

The study situates women in the focus from the point of view of marginalization. CSR initiatives of the company (Dalmia Bharat Foundation) undertaken in the study which includes activities on health, education, sports, environment, income generating works etc would reveal a transformation in the lives of the women in relation to the past. The present study attempts to focus only on income generation initiative as its CSR agenda. The women selected for the study, are beneficiaries of the concerned company form last few years and they all undertook the CSR based training such as skill enhancement and subsequently got placed either through placement assistance provided by the company or they have started with their own small-scale enterprise that is self-employment etc. In the process, their incomes, savings, investment, purchasing power, decision making power, marketability skills got enhanced. Women became independent and mobile; they now stand on their own. While pursuing research in the domains of industrial Sociology or Sociology of development, it is not uncommon to observe the dearth of research on CSR from business management perspective. CSR as a stake holding was introduced in 1960s and only in 1980s the stakeholder perspective became prominent within academic literature (Andriof et al, 2002). The research gap reveals the activities of CSR on women's empowerment are not intertwined with SHGs or small business scales and livelihood initiatives. CSR initiatives helps for women to get financial independence through the medium of self help group (Mahapatra, 2018). Through this study the researcher tends to analyze the role of corporate social responsibility in empowering women by implementing various livelihood generation activities via SHGs.

1.1 Aim of the Paper

Multinational Companies are often accused of taking advantage of weak laws, oppressive regimes and inadequate environmental regulation in developing countries where they

make things for their brand image (Waddock, 2004). But on the contrary, there are many conditions on the part of the government which trigger the emergence and presence of the Multinational companies in dedicated community development initiatives and in the process contributing to socioeconomic empowerment of rural women (Matten and Crane,2005). There is an increasing interest on CSR in recent years that has originated from the arrival of globalization and international trade. Accountability along with transparency of corporations to the goal of community development brings an enhanced trustworthy relationship between the corporate and the society as an important stakeholder. They create their own strategic management to uphold their endeavour in an efficient manner. Corporates have hitherto remained as business organizations for a long period; but are now expected to have a dominant role in social field, as they face an increasing pressure to play an active social role in addressing community issues and they engage in various mechanisms such as the capacity building programmes within communities which are increasingly becoming important (Lee, 2011). It is in this context; the present paper focuses on the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in empowering communities through a plethora of ventures such as livelihood generation enterprises for rural women and thereby bringing corresponding social empowerment and transformation in their lives. The objective of the present study is to examine the nature and extent of women's empowerment through CSR initiative of Dalmia Bharat Foundation (DBF) established in 2009 located in the township of Tangi, Cuttack. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the level of empowerment of women in terms of economic, social, and psycho-social participation through income generating activities under SHG programmes.
2. To comprehend the functioning and role of Dalmia Bharat Foundation in empowering women through different livelihood activities.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study is rooted in both on primary and secondary sources of data collection. The reported information of the company from the annual sustainability reports are taken as secondary sources of information. For the

primary data, the study is carried on in Tangi, Cuttack district of Odisha as its field research area which is the periphery of the location of the company and three Gram panchayats namely Safa, Amiyajhari, Bhagalpur are selected wherein the SHGs involved in different activities have been chosen randomly. With the use of descriptive and exploratory research designs, the study describes the socio-economic status of the respondents and the functions of DBF in livelihood initiatives under the SHG programmes. It also explores the empowerment level of women working under CSR-headed activities. With the pursuit of simple random sampling, the study encompasses sixty female respondents as its sample size from five SHGs (twelve members from each SHG).

It may be noted, these SHGs are engaged in a series of livelihood promotion activities such as paper plate making, pisciculture, mushroom cultivation, poultry and organic farming. Interview schedule is used to as the tool for the said research.

2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study can be seen in the larger framework of the capability approach of Sen (1985). The approach is used in the context of human well-being and development. It emphasizes the importance of assessing people's capabilities and freedoms to lead the lives they value. The capability approach recognizes that gender inequality is not just about economic disparities but also about the denial of opportunities and freedoms to women. It emphasizes the need to address the multiple dimensions of gender inequality and enable women to exercise their capabilities fully. Sen also argues that women's empowerment should be achieved by focusing on expanding women's opportunities, choices and freedoms. This includes access to education, healthcare, employment, political participation etc. Studies (Watten & Crane 2005; Waddock 2004) reveal, the pursuit of incoming-generating activities through SHGs enables the rural women to attain certain degree of financial freedom and experience a continually expanding social circle. The role of the corporate world with its CSR drives including that of the NGOs in skilling rural women through SHGs has been notable. Every skill is an opportunity. By enhancing these opportunities, women can develop their capabilities and make choices that align with their own values and preferences.

Sen's capability approach emphasizes that women must have the ability to act and make decisions based on their own values. They should have the freedom to participate in decision-making processes at the family, community, and societal levels. Further, they need to raise their voice, express their needs, preferences, and concerns, and contribute to shaping policies and practices that affect their lives.

The capability theory also highlights the discrimination and unequal treatment faced by women, which restricts their capabilities. All efforts directed at women's empowerment should aim at promoting gender equity, challenging discriminatory norms and practices, and creating an inclusive society where women can exercise their capabilities without discrimination. Sen's capability approach advocates a multi-dimensional approach to measure women's empowerment. It goes beyond economic indicators and includes aspects such as education, health, political participation, personal security, and social relationships.

In summary, the capability approach provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and promoting women's empowerment and enabling them to take their own decisions. It emphasizes expanding opportunities, gender equity, social support, and multi-dimensional measurement to enable women to lead lives they value and exercise their capabilities to the fullest extent. The present study comes across an occasion to relate to and finds reason to make sense of CSR-induced women's development through the capability approach of Sen.

3. RESULTS

Dalmia Bharat Foundation has been working extensively for the social and community development under the CSR policy. Its sphere of CSR intervention includes education, health, livelihood, women's empowerment, organic cultivation, social infrastructure development, sustainable energy usage, sanitation and skill development at large. It has also been largely contributing to many other social issues for social welfare and betterment of the community. The company's CSR policy has been a determinant for the social harmony of the groups in the company peripheries. For empowering women with financial independence, the company utilizes self-help groups (SHGs) as an extremely important link in implementing development

programmes and income-generating schemes at the community level. It is understood, the Dalmia Bharat Foundation works with around 3400 women through 292 SHGS on a variety of initiatives including mushroom cultivation, tailoring, spice packaging, imparting business skills, access to finance and host of other initiatives in the periphery of the location of the company in 2022. These groups not only help women to become a part of income-generating projects but are an important support structure for the women and help in building community bonds. Dalmia Bharat Foundation also supports and sets up centres for training women in various skills to help make them financially independent. Many girls trained at these centres set up their own professional services and earn to support their families with the additional income. The company has spent an investment of Rs 328 Lakhs in 2022.

A total of 60 respondents (12 from each SHG) were chosen randomly as the sample size from all the beneficiary female population under the CSR of the company undertaken as primary study in Tangi, Cuttack district in Odisha. The socio-economic profile of respondents shows that the majority of the women belong to the age group of 40-50 years where as a very few respondents belong to the age group of 20-30 years. All of the respondents are Hindus where majority belong to OBC categories and a very few are from the categories of ST. Regarding educational attainment, most of the respondents are medium-qualified up to intermediate level and a very few among the respondents are illiterate. It is also observed; more married women participate in SHGs than the unmarried, widow and divorced women. Most of them are from joint families and are having maximum 2-3 children which motivates them to join SGHs and add the financial support to the family. With regard to average monthly income, the various income generating activities conducted through SHGs under the CSR policies of DBF contribute a sum of Rs 3000 per month and it stems from activities such as pisciculture, mushroom cultivation, paper plate making, organic farming, poultry and wadi project. Through these activities women are able to earn something on their own and succeed in contributing financially to their family income.

Regarding the functioning of SHG, majority of the respondents have viewed that DBF arranges meetings among them for the group discussion and training on a regular basis. It helps them to

work under the direct supervision of livelihood professionals. While two-third of the SHG workers opine that company helps in the sale of their products, the rest of the respondents have denied about the company's assistance in market linkage. They view that their products get sold in the local market itself due to less production especially in terms of organic farming, poultry and mushroom cultivation. With regard to betterment in standard of living, most of the respondents opine that they experience an increase in their standard of living and they attribute this positive change to the CSR policies of DBF.

Respondents have shown a positive approach towards Dalmia Bharat Foundation and majority of them appreciate the welfare measures the company has undertaken for their development. Most of them have viewed that under the CSR policies of DBF, the company organize training programmes for various livelihood initiatives. This includes training and capacity building for paper plate making, mushroom cultivation, pisciculture, organic farming and poultry. The programmes also include kitchen garden etc.

The study delineates the opinion of the respondents regarding their socio-economic position. It is observed, majority of women were not economically self-sufficient before joining SHG because they lacked opportunities for income generation. They were totally dependent on the male members of their family for their basic requirements/ amenities. In terms of fulfillment of needs, most of them are deprived of the same and their views were not given importance. More than half of the respondents didn't have bank accounts of their own before joining the SHG as they didn't have any income opportunities and any idea concerning administrative formalities. With regard to the source of motivation in joining SHG, more than half of the respondents opine that they have joined SHGs after being motivated by the local Anganwadi workers while less than one-fifth among them have joined SHGs after getting references from their fellow women. However, with regard to the reasons of joining SHG, a little less than half of the respondents joined SHGs to attain economic assistance. One-third among them have opined that they joined SHGs for saving purpose while a very few among them have viewed the cause as recognition from the society and for self development. It can be said that rural women prefer economic upliftment over self-development.

It is observed from the study that all the SHGs have bank linkages and all of them perform bank transactions on a regular basis. In terms of getting financial assistance, majority of the respondents have given positive responses. It is concluded, that activities and transactions of all the SHGs studied are institutionalized through the CSR office of the company under study. Respondents from different SHGs perform various income generating activities which includes making paper plate, organic farming, mushroom cultivation, poultry, pisciculture, kitchen garden etc. However, some of the respondents witness certain rate of dropouts in their respective SHGs due to reasons like marriage of the member, death of the member and migration of the family members. Majority of the respondents opined that sanitary conditions of the work place are upto expectations because the workplaces are generally adjacent to their homes. A few of them have denied and suggested for better sanitary condition.

3.1 Economic, Social and Socio-Psychological Empowerment

Women's empowerment is not one-dimensional. Real empowerment comes when there is a merger of the enhanced economic position of the women along with the corresponding social empowerment and personality development. Studies conducted in Odisha scenario on CSR also highlights that there is inadequate focus on the agenda of corporate social responsibility as has been found by the CSR approach of NALCO (Pradhan and Tripathy, 2013). The corporate houses can provide the push for the progress of women by improving employment opportunities and creating their participation in economic and social activities (Abraham, 2013). SHGs are found with a purpose of promoting women's economic and social development. SHGs provide skills for entrepreneurship where loans from the Government, introduction of entrepreneurial development programme for women, educational facilities and schemes are the ways towards holistic development of women. However, the successful implementation of policies for the women's empowerment depends upon the various steps like educating them, upgrading their social status, awareness about family planning, farming, environmental growth, health awareness and sanitation (Swarnlatha and Anuradha 2017). Thus, CSR intervention broadly helps in social transformation and in increasing the status of rural women. The concept of explicit CSR where the communities are taken as

stakeholders influences the social structure through the CSR programs. Multinationals tend to undertake various issues for community development including health, education and sustainable livelihood as a whole (Mahapatra, 2019). CSR in public sector companies in Odisha plays a vital role in resolving social issues and extending them better quality of life along with digital literacy to women and girl child (Subbarao, 2020). A comprehensive observation of the field reveals that there has been a holistic empowerment of the community in general and women in particular covering the three dimensions of empowerment: economic, social and socio-psychological empowerment.

With regard to economic empowerment, the study reveals that the monthly income of all the respondents has increased up to a considerable extent amounting to a positive change in their overall economic position. Majority of the respondents have given positive response in terms of increase in saving while a few fail to save. By adopting income generating activities, women from the rural belt have been successful in getting regular monthly income. In addition, majority of the respondents have learnt new skills and become economically self-sufficient. Further, most of them use the loan amount for production purposes which includes paper plate, organic farming, small business while a very few use the amount for their house hold requirements. The causes for utilizing the amount for domestic requirements include expenditures on higher education of the children, house building, health care etc. The respondents chosen for the present study opine that their (SHG) products hold good demands in markets as like the other ready-made products and they get praiseworthy remarks and more orders from the markets. Some showed their inability to fulfill the market demands due to lack of transportation and time constraints as shown in Table 1.

With regard to social empowerment, it is found that after joining SHGs women are more confident to move alone to various institutions for work. Majority of them are able to go to market and panchayat without male escort. Most of them have become capable of Bank transaction and documentation. Half of them are able to go and attend their work in government offices. More than half of the respondents are going to hospitals alone for accessing health care facilities for them, their children and their family members. Those who are unable to go to hospitals and government offices, it is because of lack of education and inner confidence. Frequent

bank transaction under SHG programme has made most of the women familiar with the bank practices. With regard to the social empowerment, majority of the respondents gain better social status than before. They are assigned importance from the family and community including having a say in the

decision-making process. More than half of them are aware of their rights and privileges in the society and a few of them are not informed about their rights because of illiteracy and lack of education. Almost half of the respondents are in a position to take decisions in the family and community level.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents' opinion on economic empowerment

Economic Indicator	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Rise in income		
Yes	60	100.0
No	00	00
Rise in saving		
Yes	43	71.66
No	17	28.33
Learnt New skills		
Yes	54	90.00
No	06	10.00
Self Sufficiency		
Yes	52	86.00
No	08	14.00
Utilization of loan amount		
Production purpose	51	85
Household purpose	09	15
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey

Table 2. Distribution of respondents' opinion on social empowerment

Social Indicators	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increase in social status		
Yes	57	95.0
No	03	5.0
Awareness of rights and privileges		
Yes	47	78.33
No	13	21.66
Decision at community level		
Yes	32	53.33
No	28	46.66
Rising voice regarding social issues		
Yes	38	63.33
No	22	36.6
Discussion over issues in village		
Yes	19	31.66
No	41	68.33
Helping fellow women and resolving group conflict		
Yes	35	58.33
No	25	41.66
Voice over women subjugation and eradication		
Yes	14	23.33
No	46	76.66
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field Survey

Table 3. Distribution of respondents' opinion on social-Psychological empowerment

Psycho-Social Indicators	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increase in self confidence		
Yes	54	90.0
No	06	10.0
Increase in working interest		
Yes	51	85.0
No	09	15.0
Enhancement of working spirit in group		
Yes	43	71.66
No	17	28.33
Respect and support in family		
Yes	48	80.0
No	12	20.0
Support from husband		
Yes	52	86.66
No	08	13.33
Control over income and family assets		
Yes	33	55.0
No	27	45.0
Decision over family issues		
Yes	39	65.0
No	21	35.0
Decision over child education		
Yes	43	71.66
No	17	28.33
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field survey

More than half of the respondents raise their voice over various social issues and happenings. Approximately one-third of the total respondents gather to discuss the ongoing issues in village and community level. The issues include eradication of liquor practices by the youth and male members of their family. More than half among them have opined that they lead their fellow women in the course of crisis and also try to resolve ongoing group clash and conflict. Little more than one-fifth of the respondents are vocal about the women's subjugation and injustice towards them in the community.

Regarding the empowerment of the respondents on political aspect, it is observed that after joining SHGs women feel they are politically more active. Majority of them have developed a positive outlook towards political participation. What has come out in a more evident form is that the members of certain SHGs now stand as candidates in the local elections and even some of them hold political positions. Majority have denied about the influence over the choice of voting. They experience almost zero influence in their voting behavior from their family front. That

is, they enjoy absolute freedom in casting their votes. During collective occasions, most of the respondents share ideas, issues, and solutions including recreations. It indirectly tends to enhance the existing cohesion and group solidarity.

With regard to socio-psychological empowerment it is observed that after being associated with SHG programme and income generating activities under CSR enterprise, there has been an enhancement in the self-confidence of majority of the respondents and there has been a huge growth in their working interests in terms of income, mobility and self-growth. More than half of the respondents have viewed that there is an increase in working spirit in group while some have opined that there exists some number of differences in interest and clashes of opinion among the group members. Most of the women get respect and support for the activities they perform under SHGs and CSR programmes. Their opinions are being taken into consideration and they decide over various family issues. Most of them have opined that they get maximum support from their husbands. Women in general

feel that they are getting more importance and priority after being self-employed and after becoming capable of earning on a regular basis.

It is interesting to note that more than half of the respondents have control over their income and family assets while in case of the rest, the husbands dominate the same. Most of the respondents in the present study exercise some degree of freedom to decide over various issues affecting their family. Majority of them are now in a position to decide about the pattern, place and course of education of their children. In terms of education of their children, there has been a positive change. Women are now able to send their children to private coaching centers and to afford extra care for their educational enhancement. But in terms school there is no major noticeable change. Regarding the ability and tendency to access medical facilities, after getting income women have started paying for quality health checkup and medicines.

In terms of decision taken on daily basis, it is noticed that women tend to exhibit some degree of assertiveness. Everyday consumption, education of children, are solely decided by the women while in cases of deciding the number of children to give birth, house building, property acquisition, use of contraceptive and abortion, the decisions are jointly taken; the say of women is not at all ignored. Family members especially other female members of family take care of the health of majority of the respondents. They too help in the domestic work just to create a healthy environment for the respondents to work and earn through livelihood initiatives by CSR intervention of Dalmia Bharat Foundation.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Dalmia Bharat Foundation provides integrated development to the people for their growth as it impinges on all spheres of life including education, availability of health services, job opportunities under CSR performance. This foundation focuses on health, hygiene, mobile health unit, water, sanitation etc. in communities involving a complex combination of issues that include technical and human development components. It is in this backdrop, the study examines the role of CSR of the company under study for livelihood generation and empowerment of rural women. The Dalmia Bharat Foundation works with around 3400 women through 292 SHGS on a variety of initiatives including mushroom cultivation, tailoring, spice packaging,

imparting business skills, access to finance and host of other initiatives. It also supports and sets-up Centre's for training women in various skills to help make them financially independent.

With regard to the challenges, insights reveal that the respondents face a series of challenges including external attack for the crops and fishes, issues regarding transportation, irregular electric supply, irregular availability of seeds, huge situational loss for mushroom and organic farming, and inadequate assistance for poultry. As a remedial measure to come to terms with the challenges, the respondents realize that they require extensive training, regular provision of seeds, provision of protective net for the crops and pisciculture, installation of more paper plate makers, DC stabilizer, vehicle for transportation and most importantly simplification of market orders and facilitation of product sale. These may lead to more income and greater capacity building of women to be active contributors to their development in particular and that of the community in general.

It can be concluded that after joining SHGs, respondents know about the importance of economic activities for women's wellbeing. Their role in the family has also assumed greater importance. They have become socially and politically mature after associating with SHGs. The SHGs under the CSR policy of DBF help the rural women to acquire power for their self-supportive life. The SHG programs under the CSR policy play a central role in empowering women not just for meeting their economic needs but in contributing to their holistic social development. There is also evidence of rise in the income level and improvement in the standard of living of rural women. They have gained more self-confidence in line with their social, economic and personal improvement.

There is a need to provide more market linkage for the greater promotion of livelihood initiatives under CSR policy. There is a need for adequate trainings and skill-enhancing training programmes by the CSR of the company for rural women through SHGs. The government needs to extend seeds and protective nets for their crops. CSR policies should take initiatives to give minimum education to the deprived ones to uplift their status. Further, empowerment also lies in providing more financial assistance to the rural women by generating more livelihood programmes. That's apart, it's equally imperative to carry awareness raising campaigns with a

view to extend wider and enriched exposure to women.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

We hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:

The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
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