Women's Economic Empowerment through Strategic Welfare Initiatives in Goa

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Abstract

The empowerment of women is not only a social and moral imperative but also a critical factor in driving sustainable economic growth globally. When women have access to basic facilities such as health care, education and economic opportunities it enables them to actively participate in the society and the economy. This in turn improves productivity, fosters innovation and enhances the overall well-being of families and communities. Empowering women means addressing systemic barriers and ensuring equality in opportunities and resources. This could involve policies promoting equal pay, access to leadership roles and protection against discrimination. Additionally, it includes supporting women in traditionally male dominated sectors, providing child care and ensuring women have access to health care and legal rights. As such the Indian government along with the State governments has actively pursued women's empowerment, implementing diverse financial schemes and welfare programmes. This paper examines the role of the government welfare schemes in the economic empowerment of women. The study aims to evaluate the economic empowerment of women beneficiaries of select government welfare schemes and also to identify the challenges faced by them in availing the schemes. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of 300 women beneficiaries for the study. Statistical techniques SPSS and PLS-SEM using smart PLS were employed for the analysis of data. The study delves into the importance of welfare schemes towards the economic upliftment of women and also aims to offer valuable insights for the policymakers to effectively address the challenges associated with the implementation of schemes designed to economically uplift women.

Keywords: *Challenges, Economic Empowerment, Financial Schemes, Welfare Schemes, Women Beneficiaries*

Introduction

Empowering women is a vital issue that significantly contributes to the development of families and society as a whole. When women are empowered, they gain access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities, which not only enhances their personal well-being but also positively impacts their families. Educated and economically independent women can make informed decisions regarding their health, education and finances, leading to better outcomes for their children and communities at large (Sharma & Varma, 2008). Economic empowerment entails equal participation in market place, access to decent employment, control over productive resources and the ability to make economic decisions at all levels- from households to international forums. It involves women confidently expressing their voices, managing their time effectively and engaging meaningfully in economic decision making. Women's economic empowerment and reduction of gender gap are essential components of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2020).

Literature Review

There have been several empirical studies conducted on women empowerment- women economic empowerment and collective action (Sally, 2014), woman empowerment and household income (Natukunda et al., 2021), practices and challenges of economic empowerment of rural women (Bedru, 2011), factors affecting rural women economic empowerment (Kuma, B. & Godana, A. 2023), empowerment of women through self-help groups (Sail & Rajendra, 2013), women's right to and control over rural land (Hussein, 2014) and determinants of rural household saving participation (Melsew et al., 2022).

This study adds to the existing literature by identifying the factors affecting the economic empowerment of women. The composite indicators by Ucbasaran et al., 2009 and Kabeer, 1999 like control financial independence, control over resources, involvement in household decision making, investments were used to study economic empowerment through welfare schemes of the government.

Hypothesis Formulation:

Welfare Schemes-> Economic Empowerment of Women

The State Government of Goa has implemented several welfare schemes for the benefit of women. The schemes selected for the study were:

Griha Aadhar Scheme: The Griha Aadhar Scheme is a welfare initiative in Goa started on 1st September, 2016, aimed at providing monthly financial assistance to women, particularly homemakers, to ensure that they maintain a dignified standard of living. *Laadli Laxmi Scheme:* This scheme was launched on 6th July, 2012 to combat the issue of female foeticide and to support the parents of girls with regard to marriage expenses. *Dayanand*

Social Security Scheme: The scheme is a welfare initiative in Goa started on 1st January, 2002 aimed at providing financial assistance to vulnerable sections of society including senior citizens, single women and widow.

The welfare schemes help to uplift the economically backward women. Access to safe, simple financial resources is increasingly recognized as a prerequisite for achieving the goal of reducing income disparities and poverty. Such access allows individuals to integrate more fully into the economy, contribute actively to its growth and safeguard themselves against economic shocks (Serrao & Sequeira, 2012).

Economic Empowerment:

Economic empowerment of women is a transformative process that enables women to make and act on decisions, allowing them to achieve meaningful outcomes from economic activities and effectively utilize resources (Bill & Gates, 2009).

Hence, the hypothesis proposed is:

H$_1$: *Welfare Schemes have a significant impact on the economic empowerment of women beneficiaries.*

Measurement of Economic Empowerment of Women Beneficiaries:

Economic empowerment of the women beneficiaries is measured with the help of financial independence, family expenses and investments.

Economic Empowerment->Financial Independence (FD):

The concept of women's financial independence revolves around women having the autonomy to oversee their own financial resources and make decisions without depending on external support. Expanding access to finance to low-income individuals

can have a sizeable positive effect on economic activity (Bruhn & Love, 2014).

H₂: *Economic Empowerment has a significant impact on the financial independence of women beneficiaries.*

Economic Empowerment->Family Expenses (FE):

Family expenses for women encompass the costs incurred in managing daily life, pursuing education, sustaining a career, bearing one's own marriage expenses and supporting families. A greater access to financial resources contributes to improves economic outcomes for women (Adera & Abdisa, 2023).

H₃: *Economic Empowerment has a significant impact on the family expenses of women beneficiaries.*

Economic Empowerment->Investments (INV):

The access to individual private savings accounts empowers women to make financial decisions, purchase durable goods and also strengthen their bargaining power within their household (Dupas & Robinson, 2013).

H₄: *Economic Empowerment has a significant impact on the investments of women beneficiaries.*

Research Methodology:

The study employed a quantitative research design and used a structured questionnaire which consisted of four constructs with 17 items, as shown in Table 1. The measurement scales for these constructs were adapted from previously validated scales and tailored for this study. A 5-point Likert scale was used to analyse the respondents' perceptions regarding each factor, with 1 indicating *'strongly disagree'* and 5 indicating *'strongly agree'*. The study deals with measuring economic empowerment (dependent construct) through the independent

constructs; financial independence, family expenses and investments. Data was collected from a sample of 300 women beneficiaries of the select schemes across Goa. The data is analysed using SPSS 26.0 and PLS-SEM using smart PLS.4 to assess the relationship between these factors and economic empowerment of women.

Table 1: Measurement Items

Constructs	Code	Items	Source
Financial Independence	FD 1	I have access to bank	Abrar-Ul-Haq, M. (2016), Aduda, J., & Kalunda, E. (2012)., Bruhn, M. & Love, I. (2014).
	FD 2	Participation in household financial decisions	
	FD 3	Economic independence	
	FD 4	Receive timely medical aid	
	FD 5	Start my own entrepreneurial venture	
	FD 6	I can lend money to the needy	
	FD 7	My family has been able to come out of poverty line	
Family Expenses	FE 1	Can arrange funds for my marriage	Brune, L. (2015), Bruhn, M. & Love, I. (2014).
	FE 2	Monetary support to my family	
	FE 3	Healthy food is provided to my family	
	FE 4	My family's purchasing power has increased	
	FE 5	I can spend on tuition fees of my children	
Investments	INV 1	Household durables and other assets can be acquired	Calvet, L., Campbell, J., & Sodini, P. (2007). Gaisina, S., & Kaidarova, L. (2017).
	INV 2	Savings have increased	
	INV 3	Increase in Investments	
	INV 4	Greater access to government schemes and loans	
	INV 5	Improvement in my standard of living	

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables	Classification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Age	Less than 25 years	83	27.70
	26-45 years	127	42.30
	45 years and above	90	30.00
Educational Background	Illiterate	30	10.00
	Primary	114	38.00
	Secondary	81	27.00
	Higher Secondary	60	20.00
	Others	15	5.00
Monthly Income	Less than Rs. 25,000	119	39.70
	25,000-50,000	98	32.70
	50,000 and more	83	27.70
Marital Status	Married	215	71.70
	Unmarried	85	28.30
Place of Residence	Rural	198	66.00
	Urban	102	34.00

Source: Primary Data

The above table 1 shows the demographic details of women respondents. It is seen from the table that majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of less than 26-45 years (42.30 percent). 30 percent of them were 45 years and above and 27.70 percent of the respondents were less than 25 years. Majority of women 38 percent completed their primary education; 27 percent of the respondents completed their secondary

education and 20 percent completed their higher secondary. 66 percent of the respondents lived in the rural areas and 34 percent of them in urban areas. With respect to the marital status, 71.7 percent were found to be married while 28.3 percent were unmarried. In case of monthly income 39.7 percent of the respondents had a monthly income less than ₹ 25,000. 32.7 percent of them had a monthly income between ₹25,000 to ₹50,000.

Data Analysis and Results:

The data analysis was performed using SPSS 26.0 and the normality test values of skewness and kurtosis were found to be within limits and hence the dataset was established to be normally distributed. Furthermore, the dataset was imported in SEM smart PLS.4 for validation of multicollinearity. The variance inflation factor (VIF) of the constructs was between 1 and 3 indicating that the data lacks multicollinearity (Hair et. al., 2019).

Internal Consistency Reliability

The internal consistency reliability of the factors included in the measurement scale was examined with the help of Cronbach's Alpha. The recommended value of Cronbach's Alpha for all the selected factors in the scale should be greater than 0.70 (Hair et. al. 2019).

Table 3: Internal Consistency Reliability

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha
Economic Empowerment	0.940
Family Expenses	0.905
Financial Independence	0.922
Investment	0.876

The above table shows the internal consistency reliability through the Cronbach's Alpha of the factors in the scale indicating the correlation among the items measuring the factors. It can be concluded that the responses obtained for the factors measuring economic empowerment of women beneficiaries meet the criteria for internal consistency reliability.

Measurement Model

Two forms of construct validation namely convergent validity and discriminant validity are examined by the measurement model. The convergent validity is tested using the three criteria namely construct loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) estimates. The construct loadings and the composite reliability should be greater than 0.70 and AVE should be 0.50 (Hair et al. 2019) in order to satisfy the convergent validity. The results depicted in table 4 show that the factor loadings and the composite reliability values are more than 0.70 and the AVE values are within the threshold limit of 0.50.

Table 4: Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Financial Independence (FD)	FD 1	0.828	0.922	0.682
	FD 2	0.801		
	FD 3	0.819		
	FD 4	0.84		
	FD 5	0.822		
	FD 6	0.835		
	FD 7	0.834		
Family Expenses (FE)	FE 1	0.782	0.906	0.726
	FE 2	0.885		
	FE 3	0.875		
	FE 4	0.876		
	FE 5	0.839		
Investments (INV)	INV 1	0.746	0.882	0.670
	INV 2	0.843		
	INV 3	0.851		
	INV 4	0.826		
	INV 5	0.712		

The discriminant validity is examined with the help of two different criteria, namely Fornell Larcker Criteria and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity: Fornell Larcker Criterion

	Economic Empowerment	Family Expenses	Financial Independence	Investment
Economic Empowerment	0.714			
Family Expenses	0.702	0.711		
Financial Independence	0.683	0.697	0.689	
Investment	0.666	0.583	0.647	0.680

The Fornell Larcker Criteria is shown in the above Table 5. It evaluates the convergent validity of the measurement model by

analysing the AVE and Composite Reliability (CR). The square root of the AVE for each latent variable must exceed the correlation values between the latent variable and the other latent variables in the measurement model. It indicates that the AVE Square root values are more significant when read diagonally than the correlation of the constructs. Consequently, the requirement of the measurement model has been satisfied (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 6: Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

	Economic Empowerment	Financial Independence	Family Expenses
Financial Independence	0.785		
Family Expenses	0.685	0.582	
Investment	0.589	0.486	0.401

The HTMT ratio which is estimated for each of the pairs of factors indicates the ratio of corelation between the items of different constructs to the correlation between the items of the same constructs. The HTMT ratio of each pair of constructs is likely to be less than 0.85 (Kline, 2011) or it can vary upto 0.90 (Gold et. al., 2001). As seen in Table 6 of discriminant validity the recorded values lie within the threshold limit of 0.85.

Structural Model:

The structural model focusses on evaluating the significance and relevance of path coefficients.
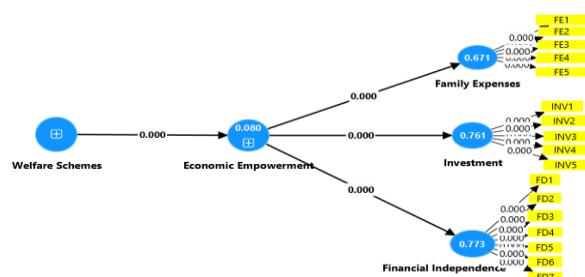
Table 7: Testing of Hypothesis

	Path Coefficient	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P values	Result
Welfare Schemes -> Economic Empowerment	0.579	0.094	6.163	0.001	Supported
Economic Empowerment -> Financial Independence	0.479	0.014	2.615	0.004	Supported
Economic Empowerment -> Family Expenses	0.247	0.026	4.132	0.012	Supported
Economic Empowerment -> Investment	0.087	0.02	0.569	0.315	Not Supported

Results and Discussion:

The findings of the SEM analysis supported the hypothesis that H_1: *Welfare Schemes have a significant impact on the economic empowerment of women beneficiaries* (p-value 0.001), H_2: *Economic Empowerment has a significant impact on the financial independence of women beneficiaries* (p-value 0.004), H_3: *Economic Empowerment has a significant impact on the family expenses of women beneficiaries* (p-value 0.012). However, the SEM analysis did not support the hypothesis H_4: *Economic Empowerment has a significant impact on the investments of women beneficiaries* (p-value 0.315). It was found that the investments made by women beneficiaries had not increased after availing the schemes. The results however, reported that the women beneficiaries highly agreed that they became economically independent after availing the schemes.

Conclusion

The Welfare schemes of the Government are aimed at providing financial respite to the women in order to promote women empowerment and to work towards their upliftment. The welfare schemes have emerged as catalyst for the economic empowerment of women especially the marginalised by providing them with financial support. Through these schemes the government has been able to promote gender equality and women empowerment. These schemes have helped to increase the financial independence of women thereby increasing their confidence in nurturing their families and themselves. In conclusion, the welfare schemes represent a significant step towards achieving sustainable development objectives in Goa. In order to maximize the impact of these schemes, the policymakers must ensure effective implementation, monitoring and also evaluation of such

programmes while addressing the challenges or shortcomings. Through continued efforts and strategic interventions, the welfare schemes initiated by the Government of Goa have the potential to serve as a key driver of women empowerment and sustainable development of all segments of the society.

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