

Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women Fisher Folk Through Microfinance: A Swot Analysis in Ramanathapuram District

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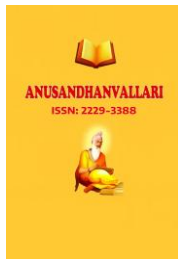
Abstract

Women fisher folk play a significant role in fisheries-related activities and contribute considerably to the socio-economic development of coastal households. In Ramanathapuram District, microfinance through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has become an important instrument for promoting economic independence and social empowerment among women fisher folk. The present study examines the socio-economic empowerment of women fisher folk through microfinance by applying SWOT analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with their participation in microfinance activities. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 160 women fisher folk using a structured interview schedule, while secondary data were obtained from books, journals, reports, and government publications. The study employed percentage analysis and SWOT analysis as the major analytical tools. The findings reveal that women fisher folk possess strengths such as achievement motivation, organisational capacity, entrepreneurial ability, and technical knowledge related to fisheries activities. Opportunities such as financial assistance, market expansion, skill development programmes, and self-employment initiatives contribute positively to their socio-economic empowerment. At the same time, weaknesses including low financial literacy, limited educational background, and dependence on traditional practices hinder their growth. Threats such as market fluctuations, inadequate infrastructure facilities, and environmental uncertainties also affect their livelihood security. The study concludes that microfinance has played a crucial role in improving the socio-economic conditions and empowerment of women fisher folk. However, effective institutional support, training programmes, and policy interventions are essential to ensure sustainable development and long-term economic stability among women fisher folk in the study area.

Keywords: Women Fisher Folk, Microfinance, Self-Help Groups, SWOT Analysis, Socio-Economic Empowerment.

Introduction

Women fisher folk play an important role in the fisheries sector by contributing to fish processing, marketing, drying, net making, and other allied activities. In coastal districts such as Ramanathapuram, women actively support the livelihood and economic stability of fishing households. Despite their contribution, many women continue to experience economic insecurity, lack of financial resources, low educational attainment, and limited access to institutional support. In recent years, microfinance through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has



emerged as an effective mechanism for improving the socio-economic conditions of rural and coastal women. Through SHGs, women are able to access credit facilities, savings opportunities, and income-generating activities that enhance their confidence and decision-making capacity. The participation of women fisher folk in microfinance activities has also encouraged self-employment, entrepreneurship, and financial independence. At the same time, several internal and external factors influence the success of these initiatives. In this context, SWOT analysis serves as an important analytical tool for identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with women fisher folk engaged in microfinance. Therefore, the present study attempts to examine the role of microfinance in empowering women fisher folk in Ramanathapuram district through a systematic SWOT analysis.

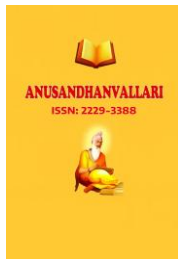
Review Of Literature

Naila Kabeer (2005) examined the relationship between microfinance and women empowerment in developing countries. The study found that access to financial services through Self-Help Groups improves women's economic participation and social status within the family and society. According to the author, women involved in microfinance activities gained greater confidence, mobility, and participation in household decision-making. The study also identified that regular savings and access to credit strengthened women's ability to manage family expenses and develop entrepreneurial activities. The author concluded that microfinance contributes significantly to social and economic empowerment when combined with institutional support and capacity-building programmes.

Rajendran and Raya (2011) studied the role of microfinance in empowering women through Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu. The study found that participation in SHGs improved women's income, savings habits, leadership qualities, and entrepreneurial abilities. The authors identified that microfinance activities created employment opportunities and enhanced economic independence among women members. The study also pointed out that training programmes and institutional support contributed to the success of SHGs. However, challenges such as inadequate marketing facilities and low educational levels continued to affect women's progress. The study concluded that microfinance has a positive influence on women empowerment and rural development.

Priya and Devi (2020) examined the role of Self-Help Groups in promoting women empowerment through microfinance activities in rural areas. The study found that SHGs enhanced women's financial literacy, savings behaviour, and self-confidence. Women members were able to participate actively in income-generating activities and improve their family living standards. The study also identified that group participation increased social awareness and leadership qualities among women. The authors concluded that microfinance through SHGs serves as an effective tool for reducing poverty and promoting socio-economic empowerment among rural women.

Kumar and Rani (2022) studied the economic empowerment of women through microfinance programmes in fishing communities. The findings revealed that women engaged in SHGs experienced improvements in income, savings, and entrepreneurial skills. The study further noted that microfinance support encouraged women to participate in fisheries-related allied activities such as fish vending and processing. However, inadequate infrastructure and market instability were identified as major challenges. The authors concluded that institutional support and skill development programmes are necessary for ensuring sustainable empowerment among women fisher folk.



Objective Of The Study

- To analyse the socio-economic conditions of women fisher folk in the study area..
- To analyse the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of women fisher folk engaged in microfinance through Self-Help Groups in Ramanathapuram district.

Methodology

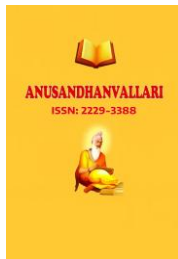
The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 160 women fisher folk engaged in microfinance activities through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Ramanathapuram District using a structured interview schedule. Secondary data were collected from books, journals, government reports, fisheries department publications, and earlier research studies related to microfinance and women empowerment. The study adopted a descriptive research design to analyse the socio-economic conditions and participation of women fisher folk in SHGs. SWOT analysis was employed as the major analytical tool to identify the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats associated with women fisher folk engaged in microfinance activities.

Result And Discussion

The socio-economic conditions of fisher folk play an important role in determining their standard of living, occupational stability, and access to financial opportunities. The present table analyses the socio-economic profile of 160 respondents in the study area based on variables such as age, educational qualification, marital status, occupation, and monthly income. These variables help to understand the demographic and economic background of the respondents and provide insights into their livelihood conditions and social status. The analysis of socio-economic characteristics is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of development programmes and microfinance activities among fisher folk households.

Table: Socio-Economic conditions of the fisher folk in the study area (N = 160)

S. No.	Variables	Categories/Indicators	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Age	Below 30 Years	32	20.0
		31 – 40 Years	48	30.0
		41 – 50 Years	52	32.5
		Above 50 Years	28	17.5
		Total	160	100.0
2	Educational Qualification	Illiterate	40	25.0
		Primary Level	46	28.8
		Secondary Level	50	31.2
		Higher Education	24	15.0
		Total	160	100.0



3	Marital Status	Married	118	73.8
		Unmarried	22	13.7
		Widow/Separated	20	12.5
		Total	160	100.0
4	Occupation	Fishing Related Activities	92	57.5
		Fish Processing	38	23.8
		Fish Marketing	30	18.7
		Total	160	100.0
5	Monthly Income	Below Rs.10,000	54	33.8
		Rs.10,001 – Rs.20,000	68	42.5
		Above Rs.20,000	38	23.7
		Total	160	100.0

Source: Primary Data.

The table shows that the majority of the respondents (32.5 per cent) belong to the age group of 41–50 years, followed by 30.0 per cent in the age group of 31–40 years, indicating that middle-aged women are more actively involved in fisheries-related activities and microfinance programmes. With regard to educational qualification, 31.2 per cent of the respondents have completed secondary-level education, while 25.0 per cent are illiterate, reflecting a moderate level of educational attainment among women fisher folk. The marital status analysis reveals that 73.8 per cent of the respondents are married, indicating greater family responsibilities and involvement in income-generating activities. Occupational analysis shows that 57.5 per cent of the respondents are engaged in fishing-related activities, whereas others are involved in fish processing and fish marketing activities. The income distribution indicates that 42.5 per cent of the respondents earn between Rs.10,001 and Rs.20,000 per month, suggesting a moderate level of monthly income among the women fisher folk in the study area.

The SWOT analysis of women fisher folk engaged in microfinance through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Ramanathapuram district provides a comprehensive understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the empowerment process. The major strengths include strong group cohesion, family support, access to microfinance, and improved savings and credit practices, which significantly contribute to economic empowerment. Motivational factors such as achievement orientation, entrepreneurial interest, and the desire for social recognition further strengthen their participation in SHGs. However, certain weaknesses continue to persist, including limited financial literacy, inadequate technical skills, dependence on intermediaries, and vulnerability to seasonal income fluctuations. At the same time, several opportunities exist in the expansion of fisheries-related allied activities such as fish processing, seaweed cultivation, and value addition, supported by government initiatives and institutional mechanisms. On the other hand, threats such as market instability, price fluctuations, climate-related risks, and socio-cultural barriers restrict mobility and decision-making capacity. Thus, while microfinance has played a significant role in enhancing the socio-economic empowerment of women fisher folk, addressing these structural and institutional challenges is essential for achieving sustainable development.

TABLE 1

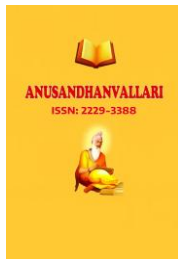
SWOT ANALYSIS OF WOMEN FISHER FOLK ENGAGED IN MICROFINANCE THROUGH SELF-HELP GROUPS (SHGS) IN RAMANATHAPURAM DISTRICT

Category	Description and Relevance to Microfinance/SHGs	Corresponding Variables
S: Strengths (Internal, Helpful)	Internal advantages that women bring to the enterprise and SHG process. These intrinsic motivational factors enhance the likelihood of success.	Urge to Achieve (10), Organisational Skills (21), Technical Knowledge (22), Entrepreneurial Experience (23), Self-interest (7)
W: Weaknesses (Internal, Harmful)	Internal limitations that constrain their potential and indicate areas where support is required. These reflect the constraints that microfinance seeks to address.	More Dependents (3), Use of Idle Funds (6), Traditional/Hereditary (24, where skills are outdated), Dissatisfaction with Existing Job (20)
O: Opportunities (External, Helpful)	Favorable external conditions created by SHGs and the local economy. These represent enabling factors that support growth and empowerment.	Financial Assistance (17), Market Potential (18), Economic Independence (13), Social Status (14), Self-employment (9)
T: Threats (External, Harmful)	External challenges that may hinder the success of microfinance initiatives and empowerment outcomes.	Unemployment (19), Infrastructural Facilities (16, if inadequate), Employment Opportunities (15, if seasonal or unstable)

The SWOT analysis presented in Table 1 provides a systematic understanding of the internal and external factors influencing women fisher folk engaged in microfinance through Self-Help Groups in Ramanathapuram district. The strengths reveal the inherent capabilities of women, including achievement motivation, organisational ability, technical knowledge, and entrepreneurial experience, which positively support their participation in SHGs and related economic activities. At the same time, certain weaknesses such as a higher dependency burden, ineffective utilisation of funds, and continued reliance on traditional practices indicate areas requiring improvement and institutional intervention. The opportunities identified include access to financial assistance, market potential, economic independence, and enhanced social status, all of which contribute to the socio-economic development of women fisher folk. Nevertheless, threats such as unemployment, inadequate infrastructural facilities, and unstable employment opportunities continue to create barriers to sustainable growth and empowerment. Overall, the analysis indicates that women fisher folk possess considerable internal potential, but effective policy support and institutional assistance are necessary to overcome external challenges and ensure long-term development.

Conclusion

The study concludes that microfinance through Self-Help Groups has played a significant role in improving the socio-economic conditions of women fisher folk in Ramanathapuram district. The SWOT analysis reveals that women possess several strengths such as achievement motivation, organisational ability,



entrepreneurial skills, and active participation in income-generating activities. These strengths have helped them improve their savings habits, access credit facilities, and achieve greater economic independence. The study also identifies various opportunities including financial assistance, market expansion, self-employment, and social recognition, which contribute positively to their empowerment process. However, certain weaknesses such as limited financial literacy, dependence on traditional practices, and inadequate technical knowledge continue to restrict their overall development. In addition, external threats such as market instability, unemployment, climate-related risks, and insufficient infrastructural facilities create barriers to sustainable progress. Therefore, the study emphasises the need for effective government support, training programmes, institutional assistance, and market linkages to strengthen the participation of women fisher folk in microfinance activities. Overall, microfinance has emerged as an important instrument for enhancing the economic and social empowerment of women fisher folk and promoting sustainable rural development.

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