

Original Article

Rural Women Empowerment Is the Key to India's Development

Dr. Arvind Kumar

Assistant Professor,

Faculty of Social Science, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya, Bihar

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Corresponding Author:  
Dr. Arvind Kumar

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**Abstract:**

Rural women empowerment is essential for India's overall development, as it drives both economic growth and social change. In rural areas, where agriculture and allied sectors dominate, women play a crucial role in sustaining livelihoods. Despite this, gender disparities persist, hindering progress.

Empowering these women can boost productivity, improve health, and foster education, leading to more sustainable communities.

This article highlights the need to integrate women empowerment in rural areas into rural development projects to create a more inclusive and prosperous India.

**Understanding the Importance of Empowering Rural Women:** Rural women empowerment is essential for achieving inclusive economic growth and sustainable development in India. Rural women play a significant role in agriculture, contributing to food security, poverty reduction, and community welfare.

Despite their critical involvement, rural women face challenges such as limited access to education, healthcare, and decision-making power. Empowering them enables improved productivity, fosters entrepreneurship, and drives social change.

Gender equality stimulates economic growth by enhancing productivity and increasing economic output. When women have equal opportunities in education, entrepreneurship, and employment, they contribute significantly to the labor force. This development leads to higher consumer spending, greater innovation, and a more diversified economy.

Women's involvement in various sectors, from business to agriculture, drives entrepreneurship and boosts overall production. As women access better education and resources, they contribute to more balanced and competitive workforces, which create sustainable economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve national prosperity.

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## **Introduction:**

### **The Role of Women in Rural Economies:**

Women in rural economies are involved in agriculture, from crop cultivation to animal husbandry, to provide essential food security. Despite their efforts, their contributions often go unnoticed due to a lack of land rights and financial independence. Women also drive local entrepreneurship, running businesses in textiles, handicrafts, and food production. They further improve healthcare by promoting maternal and child health. With access to education and resources, rural women can elevate their economic status.

## **Discussion:**

### **Current State of Rural Women Empowerment in India:**

Rural women's empowerment in India has seen a notable rise through targeted training programs and self-help group initiatives. Programs like RSETI and DDU-GKY continue to strengthen women empowerment in rural areas and economic participation.

- Heavy domestic workload limits time for income activities
- Social norms restrict career choices and mobility
- Lack of access to property affects credit eligibility
- Limited financial literacy and banking access
- Poor marketing networks reduce product visibility

### **Low education hinders business and tech exposure:**

- Scarce raw materials and high input costs hurt small enterprises
- Inadequate transport and infrastructure slow business growth
- Risk aversion and low self-confidence limit entrepreneurship
- Competition from organized sectors weakens small-scale women's businesses

## **Materials and Methods:**

### **Progress and Gaps in Government Policies:**

Government efforts in women's empowerment in rural areas have shown measurable gains, especially in skill training and entrepreneurship. Here's how:

- Schemes like RSETI and DDU-GKY have helped improve job placement rates and created a pipeline for rural economic inclusion. However, gaps remain in policy coherence.
- Many policies support gender equality but unintentionally hinder other sustainability goals.
- Environmental targets and governance reforms often clash with empowerment goals. This reveals the need for integrated planning that aligns rural women's empowerment with long-term development priorities.

## **The Benefits of Women's Empowerment in Rural Areas:**

Women's empowerment in rural areas boosts income, education, and social progress. In India, it improves access to opportunities, fosters independence, and reduces migration. Here are a few more benefits of women's empowerment in rural areas:

### **Economic Empowerment and Poverty Reduction:**

Rural women's empowerment serves as a powerful catalyst for economic transformation, helping families break persistent cycles of poverty through increased financial stability and opportunity. These economic benefits manifest in several important ways:

- Women-led microenterprises in sectors like dairy production, tailoring, and food processing generate consistent household income
- Access to credit and skills training enables women to scale their operations and create employment for others
- Programs like Rural Self-Employment Training Institutes (RSETI) provide hands-on skill development that leads to sustainable job settlement
- Empowered women demonstrate improved household savings behaviors and enhanced creditworthiness

## **Results:**

### **Improvements in Education, Health, and Child Welfare:**

Women's empowerment in rural areas creates cascading benefits for child welfare through improved educational outcomes and better health decisions at the household level. The impact of empowered women extends throughout family and community well-being:

- Literate mothers are more likely to ensure regular school attendance and complete immunization for their children
- Rural women's empowerment leads to earlier detection and treatment of childhood malnutrition and illness
- ASHA workers (Accredited Social Health Activists), often drawn from local empowered women, effectively educate families on hygiene practices and prenatal care
- Empowered mothers create a beneficial cycle by raising healthier, better-informed children who continue positive practices.
- Self-Help Groups (SHGs) promote awareness on critical issues like sanitation and nutrition, improving village-wide health standards.

### **Community Leadership and Decision-Making:**

Rural women's empowerment in India enables meaningful participation in governance structures like Panchayats (village councils) and cooperatives, bringing diverse perspectives to

community decision-making. This leadership dimension delivers tangible governance improvements:

- Elected women representatives effectively advocate for essential infrastructure like sanitation facilities, schools, and water access
- Programs such as Mahila Sabha train women to assess local needs accurately and monitor the implementation of development initiatives.
- Women’s leadership brings lived experience into governance, resulting in more practical and inclusive policy solutions.
- Empowered rural women help bridge the critical gap between high-level policy formulation and grassroots implementation needs.
- Women-led community initiatives often demonstrate higher participation rates and more equitable resource distribution.

### **Barriers to Rural Women Empowerment in India:**

Rural women’s empowerment in India is held back by deep-rooted patriarchy, limited education, and poor institutional support. Traditional roles restrict women from formal employment and decision-making. Some other barriers include.

### **Social Norms and Gender Stereotypes:**

Traditional gender roles in rural India fundamentally constrain women’s agency and advancement by enforcing

restrictive norms that limit their activities and influence. The impact of these deeply embedded social expectations is far-reaching:

- Domestic responsibilities are consistently prioritized over women’s income-generating activities
- Prevailing stereotypes restrict women’s freedom, mobility, and participation in community affairs
- Women advocating for change face resistance from both men and older women who have internalized inequitable norms
- Social acceptance of women in leadership positions remains discouragingly low
- Economic empowerment often fails to translate into genuine authority in family or community matters
- Gender-based discrimination persists across generations despite broader societal changes

### **Limited Access to Education and Employment:**

(Niyati, S., & Vijayamba, R. (2021). Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on food security and indebtedness in rural India. Review of Agrarian Studies, 11(1), 107-123. )

Educational disparities severely limit rural women’s advancement opportunities, creating a cycle of disadvantages that perpetuates economic dependence. This education-employment gap creates numerous obstacles:

- Girls frequently abandon education prematurely due to poverty, early marriage practices, or safety concerns
- Female literacy rates lag behind male counterparts, narrowing future employment prospects
- Women who complete formal schooling still struggle with limited access to vocational training
- Persistent hiring biases restrict entry to formal sector employment
- Available jobs are predominantly informal, seasonal, and poorly compensated
- The disconnect between education and meaningful employment opportunities undermines economic self-sufficiency

Healthcare and Safety Issues. (Agrawal, N., Narayan, Samhitha., & Bhattacharya., Soham (2024): “New Working Poor: Features of Increased Female Workers in India”. Economic and Political Weekly (Forthcoming). Inadequate healthcare access and safety concerns create significant barriers to rural women’s well-being and productivity. These health and safety issues present daily challenges:

- Many villages lack female healthcare workers and essential maternal care facilities
- Coverage gaps persist despite improvements from Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs)
- Women’s specific health needs are frequently overlooked due to societal stigma and insufficient awareness

- Travel to healthcare facilities or workplaces often exposes women to harassment risks
- Inadequate sanitation infrastructure in rural schools discourages attendance among adolescent girls
- Health challenges directly impact women’s ability to participate in economic and community activities

### **How to Promote Women’s Empowerment in Rural Areas:**

(Women and Work in Rural India. Edited by V. K. Ramachandran, Madhura Swaminathan, and Shruti Nagbhusan. Tulika Books. 2020.)

Below are some ways to promote women’s empowerment in rural areas:

- Build schools for girls in rural belts and ensure regular attendance
- Provide digital literacy and access to online learning tools
- Offer skill-based training like tailoring, dairy, and food processing
- Encourage women’s participation in local panchayat elections
- Ensure healthcare camps, especially for maternal and reproductive needs
- Secure land rights for women through legal awareness drives
- Launch SHGs and cooperatives with micro-loan support

The Role of NGOs and Community Initiatives in Empowering Rural Women  
NGOs and community-led groups directly support rural women’s empowerment through on-ground programs. They offer skill training, legal aid, and health

awareness drives, and many provide access to microcredit.

These groups also form self-help collectives that promote saving habits and financial inclusion. NGOs bridge gaps where government programs don't reach. Their local presence helps challenge gender bias through community engagement.

### **How CRY America Supports Rural Women Empowerment in India?**

CRY America empowers rural women by strengthening their role in child development. It supports women-led community groups that monitor child health, education, and protection. These initiatives help mothers gain knowledge, confidence, and leadership.

CRY funds grassroots partners that train women in health awareness and livelihood skills. It enables them to challenge child marriage, improve school attendance, and demand better services. Through this support, CRY fosters long-term change by empowering women to lead community action and secure better futures for children.

### **What are the main challenges rural women face in India:**

Rural women face unequal pay, land ownership denial, poor healthcare, and limited education. Social norms restrict their mobility and participation in decision-making. Many lack access to formal credit and legal support.

### **How can education help empower women in rural areas:**

Education builds decision-making ability, awareness of rights, and employment skills. Literate women manage finances better, access healthcare, and invest in their children's schooling. Education also reduces early marriage and dependence.

### **What initiatives has CRY America taken to support rural women's empowerment:**

CRY America funds programs focused on girl child education, maternal health, and income training. It partners with grassroots groups to raise awareness about rights, nutrition, and gender equality. Moreover, its community-based approach creates safer, informed, and self-reliant spaces, directly empowering rural women in underdeveloped regions.

### **How can I contribute to empowering women in rural communities:**

You can donate to trusted NGOs, sponsor education, or support vocational training programs. Volunteering time or offering digital skills training also helps. Promoting local women-run businesses and advocating for fair policies can also be a great contribution.

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