



PARTICIPATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN NGOs' ACTIVITIES IN MUZAFFARPUR DISTRICT OF BIHAR

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Abstract: *The present study explores the participation of rural women in the activities organized by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Muzaffarpur, Bihar. NGOs play a vital role in enhancing the livelihoods of rural women. The study was conducted in the year from 2022 to 2024 with a sample of 150 purposively selected rural women. This study adopted a descriptive approach, using structured close-ended questionnaires through quantitative analysis involving interviews and surveys to collect information. The study explored the participation of rural women in NGOs' activities in selected study area. This study found that rural women's participation in NGOs' activities was highest in medical camps and health screenings, with 38.66% engagement, indicating a strong preference for direct medical services. Financial literacy and entrepreneurship sessions attracted 36%, while 34.66% of women participated in handicrafts and artisanal work, making it the most popular livelihood activity. Awareness campaigns saw 33.33% involvement, and the same percentage of women benefited from scholarships and financial aid, emphasizing the role of economic assistance in supporting educational opportunities for rural women.*

Keywords: *Activities, NGOs, Participation, Vocational training.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

In rural areas, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in promoting development by addressing issues such as poverty, education, health, and empowerment. The participation of women in these organizations is especially crucial, as it directly influences their socio-economic status, decision-making power, and access to essential resources. In Muzaffarpur district of Bihar, where traditional gender roles and socio-economic limitations often constrain women's opportunities, NGOs provide a platform for rural women to engage in community-driven activities that enhance their livelihoods and well-being. The participation of rural women in NGOs' activities extends beyond mere participation, it encompasses skill development, leadership training, and increased awareness. Through these activities, women are empowered to challenge the structural barriers that have historically marginalized them. NGOs often utilize SHG-based activities as a primary mechanism for promoting rural women's participation in community development. A study by Verma and Sinha (2019) believed that SHGs serve as a foundation for empowering women in rural Bihar by involving them in structured financial and social support networks. These groups enhance self-reliance, leadership skills, and economic independence, fostering a supportive environment that encourages greater female participation in economic



activities. Kabeer (2005) conducted a study and believed that NGOs provide women with opportunities for skill development and self-employment, helping them gain economic independence and a stronger voice in household and community decision-making processes. Rural women's participation in NGO activities varies widely depending on factors such as education, social status, and local customs. By his studies Rao (2014) showed that NGOs can mobilize women by creating supportive networks and offering programs tailored to their needs, such as microcredit schemes, vocational training, and health initiatives. In Bihar, where poverty and low literacy rates prevail, NGOs have taken innovative approaches to engage women, including door-to-door outreach, community meetings, and group-based interventions like self-help groups (SHGs). Rao and Dev (2016), in a study "Empowering Women in Rural India through Self-Help Groups and NGO Initiatives" stated that these strategies have proven effective in increasing women's participation in development activities, especially in regions with deeply entrenched gender biases. As per the findings of study conducted by Hashemi et al., in 1996, participation in NGO activities has been linked to positive outcomes for rural women in terms of economic independence, increased self-esteem, and greater involvement in community affairs. Prasad in 2018 conducted a study and believed that in Bihar, where traditional gender roles often restrict women to domestic spaces, NGOs have helped women gain access to resources like microfinance and vocational training, enabling them to contribute economically to their households.

2. OBJECTIVE : To analyse the participation of rural women in NGOs' activities in selected study area.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present study was conducted in the Muzaffarpur district of Bihar during the year 2023-24. This study adopted a descriptive study approach, as it seeks to analyse the participation of rural women in NGOs' activities in selected study area. A quantitative method approach was followed to collect the data from the beneficiaries. Five Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working at selected district were selected randomly and from each Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), thirty rural women beneficiaries were randomly selected. Thus, a total of 150 rural women beneficiaries were selected for the study. A thorough list of activities was developed by discussing with the rural women and experts of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Activities were summarized under five categories i.e., formation and promotion of self-help groups, vocational training and skill development, livelihood activities, health and hygiene activities, and educational activities. A self-structured close ended questionnaires were administered to the beneficiaries to elicit information related to the objectives of the study. As for this study, primary data was collected from all the beneficiaries who were become the part of this study. The collected data underwent a systematic process, including coding, classification, analysis, and tabulation. To ensure accurate and meaningful interpretation of the results and to draw meaningful conclusions, statistical tools and techniques, such as frequency and percentage were utilized. The result thus obtained was then analysed and processed in the form of tables.

4. RESULT & FINDINGS

A comprehensive analysis of participation of rural women in NGOs' activities has been presented here.

Participation of rural women in NGOs' activities under formation and promotion of self-help groups

The data in Table 1 offers a detailed look at rural women's participation in various activities organized by NGOs to establish and promote self-help groups (SHGs) in Muzaffarpur District, Bihar. Each activity serves a different purpose in empowering women by increasing their participation and skill-building through collective efforts. The highest participation was observed in awareness campaigns, with 33.33% of rural women actively involved. Capacity building and training followed at 26%, reflecting a strong engagement in skill enhancement initiatives. Group formation and registration activities accounted for 23.33% of the participation, showing moderate involvement in formalizing the SHGs. Group mobilization had the lowest participation rate at 17.33%, suggesting comparatively lesser focus on outreach and organizing efforts.



Table 1: Participation of rural women in NGOs’ activities under formation and promotion of self-help groups

Activities under formation and promotion of self-help groups (SHGs)	Frequency (%) n=150
Awareness campaign	50 (33.33)
Group mobilization	26 (17.33)
Group formation and registration	35 (23.33)
Capacity building and training	39 (26)

Participation of rural women in NGOs’ activities under vocational training and skill development

The results in Table 2 reveal varying levels of participation among rural women in NGO-led vocational training and ***Source: Field Survey** Among these, financial literacy and entrepreneurship sessions had the highest participation, engaging 36% of the rural women, followed by marketing and digital skills training at 28%. Technical skills training accounted for 22.66% of the participation, while basic skills training had the lowest engagement at 13.33%. These findings indicate that while there is interest across different skill areas, there is a notably higher inclination towards financial and entrepreneurial skills, reflecting the importance of economic independence and self-employment potential among rural women.

Table 2: Participation of rural women in NGOs’ activities under vocational training and skill development

Activities under vocational training and skill development	Frequency (%) n= 150
Basic skills training	20 (13.33)
Technical skills training	34 (22.66)
Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship	54 (36)
Marketing and Digital Skills	42 (28)

***Source: Field Survey**

Participation of rural women in livelihood activities of NGO

The field survey data (Table 3) highlights that a substantial portion of rural women, 34.66%, are engaged in handicrafts and artisanal work, making it the most popular livelihood activity among those offered by NGOs. Organic farming follows closely, with 32% of rural women participating in this sustainable practice. Livestock and poultry rearing is another significant activity, with 20% involvement, while handmade paper and eco-friendly product production has the least participation, attracting 13.33% of the rural women. These findings indicate a diverse engagement in NGO-supported livelihood activities, with a notable preference for handicrafts and organic farming among rural women.

Table 3: Participation of rural women in livelihood activities of NGO

Livelihood activities	Frequency (%) n= 150
Handicrafts and Artisanal Work	52 (34.66)
Organic farming	48 (32)
Livestock and Poultry Rearing	30 (20)
Handmade Paper and Eco-Friendly Products	20 (13.33)

***Source: Field Survey**



Participation of rural women in health and hygiene activities of NGO

The results from Table 4 indicate the participation levels of rural women in various health and hygiene activities conducted by NGOs. Health awareness programs engaged 30.66% of the women, reflecting moderate interest in educational sessions on health topics. A slightly lower participation rate (20%) was observed for sanitation and hygiene initiatives, showing some involvement in maintaining and promoting community cleanliness. Medical camps and health screenings were the most attended, with 38.66% participation, highlighting a higher preference for direct medical services. Lastly, only 10.66% of the rural women participated in health counselling and support services, suggesting limited engagement in personalized health guidance. Overall, the data reveal a tendency for higher participation in practical health services compared to educational or counselling activities.

Table 4: Participation of rural women in health and hygiene activities of NGO

Health and Hygiene Activities	Frequency (%) n= 150
Health awareness programs	46 (30.66)
Sanitation and Hygiene Initiatives	30 (20)
Medical Camps and Health Screenings	58 (38.66)
Health Counselling and Support Services	16 (10.66)

**Source: Field Survey*

Participation of rural women in educational activities of NGO

The data in Table 5 indicates that rural women participate in various educational activities organized by NGOs. Among these, scholarships and financial support for education have the highest participation rate at 33.33%, highlighting the importance of financial aid in supporting women's educational advancement. Educational camps and learning clubs attract 28% of rural, suggesting these programs are also popular for enhancing learning opportunities. Study tours and field trips, with a participation rate of 22%, show that experiential learning is a valuable component of NGO educational activities. Meanwhile, adult education and lifelong learning programs engage 16.66% of rural women, pointing to a moderate interest in continuing education. Overall, the data suggests a varied participation in educational programs, with financial assistance and structured learning experiences being key draws.

Table 5: Participation of rural women in educational activities of NGO

**Source: Field Survey*

Educational Activities	Frequency (%) n= 150
Educational Camps and Learning Clubs	42 (28)
Adult Education and Lifelong Learning	25 (16.66)
Scholarships and Financial Assistance for Education	50 (33.33)
Study Tours and Educational Field Trips	33 (22)

5. DISCUSSION:

The present study highlights the participation of rural women in NGOs' activities in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar. The findings reveal how NGOs in Muzaffarpur District, are leveraging SHG-focused activities to promote rural women's empowerment through structured involvement. Studies reveal that awareness campaigns are essential in mobilizing rural women, by educating them about the economic and social benefits of SHG membership. A study by Sharma and Rani (2021), campaigns are essential in informing women of the economic and social advantages of joining SHGs, thereby increasing their interest and confidence in participating. These campaigns address misconceptions around SHGs and introduce women to the collective benefits they can gain, such as improved income, access to financial resources, and community support. Capacity building and training are also recognized as essential components in enhancing the effectiveness of SHGs. A study by Sharma and Singh (2019) stated that capacity-building activities equip women with



skills related to finance, management, and entrepreneurship, fostering a sense of self-reliance. They argue that training strengthens the operational sustainability of SHGs, making them more resilient to economic challenges. Research consistently indicates that programs focusing on financial literacy and entrepreneurship are highly impactful, as they directly address women's economic empowerment. For instance, Singh and Gupta (2019) performed a study and found that women who acquire financial and entrepreneurial skills are better positioned to achieve self-sufficiency and contribute to household income, underscoring the appeal of these skills for rural women seeking economic independence. The growing involvement of rural women in handicrafts and artisanal activities reflects an increasing alignment of livelihood initiatives with traditional skills and locally accessible resources. Mukherjee and Singhal in 2020 underscores that the promotion of handicrafts among rural women offers a dual advantage: it utilizes pre-existing skills and requires minimal capital, making it an accessible option for economically disadvantaged groups. Their study observed that artisanal work fosters an inclusive economy by reducing barriers to entry for women who may lack formal education or substantial financial resources. This resonates with the field survey data, which indicates handicrafts as a preferred activity for 34.66% of women, highlighting its accessibility and low start-up costs. In a broader context, according to the study conducted by Rani and Sharma in 2018, handicrafts provide a vital income source for rural women by leveraging traditional skills, reducing the barriers often associated with formal employment. The study notes that this sector aligns well with local resources, making it accessible for women in economically constrained households. Handicrafts become a medium through which women can contribute economically while enhancing their social capital, which is especially important in rural settings where community networks are integral. The survey data's indication of high participation in handicrafts therefore not only highlights a popular income source but also points to a broader cultural and social impact facilitated by these NGO-led initiatives. The findings reveal that rural women's engagement in health and hygiene activities led by NGOs often hinges on the accessibility and direct benefits of these programs. Numerous studies have shown that medical camps and health screenings are among the most popular services because they directly address urgent healthcare needs and provide on-the-spot treatment options (Smith, 2019; Patel & Kaur, 2021). A study by Sharma et al., (2018), participation in such initiatives is frequently higher because they offer immediate, tangible benefits like consultations, screenings, and sometimes medication, which are otherwise hard to access due to logistical and financial constraints. The participation of rural women in educational activities organized by NGOs highlights the vital role of financial support, such as scholarships, in enhancing access to education. Several studies underscore that financial aid can significantly improve educational attainment among marginalized communities, particularly women in rural areas. Financial constraints are among the most substantial barriers to education, especially in underprivileged settings (Kabeer, 2005; Banerjee & Duflo, 2011). By providing scholarships, NGOs alleviate economic pressures, allowing more women to pursue educational opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible.

These findings highlighted the participation of rural women in NGOs' led activities, emphasizing the pivotal role that NGOs play in encouraging their active participation in development activities, particularly through gender-sensitive initiatives that foster women's empowerment.

6. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant role of NGOs in empowering rural women in Muzaffarpur District, Bihar, by facilitating active participation in activities. NGOs' initiatives, such as self-help groups (SHGs), capacity building, and vocational training, have been essential in fostering financial independence, skill development, and social empowerment. Awareness campaigns emerge as foundational in mobilizing women, breaking down misconceptions, and building confidence for community engagement. Capacity-building programs enhance women's economic self-reliance through skills in finance and entrepreneurship. Additionally, the promotion of traditional handicrafts offers a practical and accessible livelihood option that connects rural women to their cultural heritage. Health and education initiatives, including medical camps and financial aid for schooling, directly address critical needs, improving both health outcomes and educational opportunities for rural women. Overall, NGOs' gender-sensitive approaches effectively foster social, economic, and cultural empowerment, reinforcing the role of rural women as key contributors to community development.

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