



DWCRA AND FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN ANDHRA PRADESH: OPPORTUNITIES, ISSUES, CHALLENGES

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An initiative called the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was introduced in India's rural areas during the 1980s. While the program wasn't as effective in other parts of the country, it achieved huge success in Andhra Pradesh. Recent times have seen a growing focus on women's empowerment, particularly in rural areas where challenges are often greater. Self-Help Movements (SHGs) offer a solution through small business programs that financially empower women. This economic empowerment has a ripple effect, leading to advancements in social and economic opportunities, property rights, political participation, and equality across various aspects of life. DWCRA programs recognize women as key to development and specifically target their economic empowerment. By encouraging women to save through SHGs, DWCRA has become a widespread movement in India, with millions of rural women participating. This paper explores the role DWCRA groups in empowering women in Andhra Pradesh, program's impact on rural women in Andhra Pradesh along with the role the government played in its success and how its impact is involved in rural development initiatives.

Introduction

The Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) program was introduced in the early 1980s as a sub-scheme of the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) in India. DWCRA aims to improve the socio-economic status of rural women by providing them with opportunities for self-employment and enhancing their access to resources and services. DWCRA was initiated to address the specific needs of women and children in rural areas, recognizing that traditional development programs often overlooked these groups. The program focused on forming self-help groups (SHGs) where women could pool resources, access credit, and undertake income-generating activities. It aimed to create a

supportive environment for rural women to gain financial independence and social empowerment. While DWCRA faced implementation challenges and varied success across different states in India, it achieved remarkable success in Andhra Pradesh. Factors contributing to its success in Andhra Pradesh include strong governmental support, effective local leadership, active participation of NGOs, and a favorable socio-cultural environment. The state's innovative approaches to SHG formation, credit linkage, and capacity-building initiatives helped DWCRA thrive and become a model for other regions.

Women empowerment is a multifaceted concept encompassing various dimensions, including economic, social, political, and psychological empowerment. It involves enhancing women's ability to make strategic life choices, control resources, and participate fully in societal activities. Financial empowerment focuses on increasing women's access to financial resources and economic opportunities like earning income, managing finances, and participating economically. Rural women in India face numerous challenges that hinder their empowerment. These challenges include limited access to education and healthcare, restricted mobility, lack of economic opportunities, and social norms that perpetuate gender inequality. Additionally, rural women often have limited access to financial services, property rights, and political participation. These challenges are compounded by poverty, illiteracy, and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas. Overcoming these barriers requires targeted interventions and programs like DWCRA that address the specific needs and constraints faced by rural women. By providing a comprehensive background on the DWCRA program and highlighting the importance of women's empowerment, this section sets the stage for an in-depth analysis of DWCRA's impact on women in Andhra Pradesh.

Literature Review

Several studies have explored the DWCRA program's impact, particularly in Andhra Pradesh, but there remain gaps in the literature. Numerous studies highlight DWCRA's success in enhancing women's economic status. Participation in DWCRA groups has been shown to increase women's income levels, savings, and access to credit. For instance, a study by Rao and Subramaniam (2003) found that women in DWCRA groups had higher income levels compared to non-participants. DWCRA has also been instrumental in improving women's social standing. Research by Reddy and Manak (2005) indicates that women involved in DWCRA experienced increased social mobility, better health awareness, and improved decision-making within households. The program has facilitated skill development among rural women. Studies, such as those by Narayanaswamy and Kamalamma (2008), report significant improvements in skills related to entrepreneurship, literacy, and vocational training.

Gaps in Existing Literature

There is limited research on the long-term sustainability of DWCRA's impact. Most studies focus on short to medium-term outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding the enduring effects of the program. While there is considerable literature on DWCRA's success in specific regions, comparative studies across different states or regions are sparse. This limits the understanding of contextual factors that may influence the program's effectiveness. Comprehensive assessments that integrate economic, social, and psychological

impacts are rare. Most studies tend to focus on one dimension, thereby providing an incomplete picture of DWCRA's overall impact.

Andhra Pradesh has been a pioneer in promoting SHGs, particularly through the DWCRA program. Studies, such as those by Rajasekhar (2004) and Sinha (2006), highlight the state's successful implementation of SHGs, resulting in significant economic and social gains for women. Comparative studies with other regions, like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, reveal varying levels of success in SHG implementation. For instance, Holvoet (2005) compares SHG models in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, noting that Kerala's SHGs have been more effective due to better institutional support and higher literacy rates among women. While significant progress has been made through the DWCRA program and SHGs in empowering women in Andhra Pradesh and other regions, there remain gaps in the literature, particularly regarding long-term sustainability and comprehensive impact assessment. Further research addressing these gaps would provide a more holistic understanding of the program's effectiveness and inform future policy initiatives.

Methodology

The research on the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) program and its impact on women's empowerment in Andhra Pradesh will employ secondary data sources. The Secondary data related to present study was mainly collected through various periodicals, magazines and websites etc. Government publications, such as reports from the Ministry of Rural Development, National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), Reports by Andhra Pradesh State Government and data from Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty(SERP) will be analyzed to gather data on DWCRA's implementation, reach, and outcomes. Reports and publications from NGOs working in rural development and women's empowerment, such as SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) and CARE India, will be reviewed to understand the on-ground impact and challenges of DWCRA. A thorough review of existing academic literature, including journal articles, dissertations, and conference papers, will be conducted to collate findings from previous studies and identify gaps in the current understanding of DWCRA's impact.

DWCRA Program Implementation in Andhra Pradesh

The Government of India is fostering the growth of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to achieve socio-economic development. A key aspect of DWCRA's approach is the establishment of women's SHGs. These groups, typically comprising 10-20 women from similar socio-economic backgrounds, pool their resources to create a common fund for income-generating activities. SHGs, generally made up of individuals within a community, are formed for social and economic purposes, with the primary aim of enhancing financial security for their members. These groups can be established with or without government registration.

In Andhra Pradesh SHGs are organized in three tier structures. SHGs, Village Organizations (VOs), Mandal Samakhyas (MSs). Above this Zilla Samakhya at district level works closely with MSs and Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty(SERP) at State level and with government organization, District Rural Development Authority (DRDA). At state level, Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) is an

autonomous body operating under the Ministry of Rural Development. SERP makes all plans and initiates new programs and provides support for implementation at gross-root level.

Table-1

Self Help Groups Member Count Report : Andhra Pradesh - District Wise as on 26/06/2024							
S No	District Name	Total SHGs	No. of Members in SHGs				
			0	1-5	6-9	10-20	21 & Above
1	ANAKAPALLI	4329	0	113	74	4142	0
2	ANANTAPUR	11848	0	242	405	11201	0
3	ANNAMAYYA	4399	0	78	153	4166	2
4	BAPATLA	5270	2	194	218	4854	2
5	CHITTOOR	7779	0	159	445	7175	0
6	DR. BR AMBEDKAR KONASEEMA	3664	0	71	45	3548	0
7	EAST GODAVARI	11107	0	77	298	10732	0
8	ELURU	7601	0	111	278	7212	0
9	GUNTUR	21223	20	243	960	20000	0
10	KAKINADA	12904	0	188	377	12339	0
11	KRISHNA	9861	1	283	442	9134	1
12	KURNOOL	16039	0	432	1468	14119	20
13	NANDYAL	9594	0	158	599	8837	0
14	NTR	20921	0	285	925	19696	15
15	PALNADU	10179	0	174	262	9743	0
16	PARVATHIPURAM MANYAM	3231	0	113	58	3060	0
17	PRAKASAM	9424	0	608	220	8596	0
18	SPSR NELLORE	14808	14	403	1416	12963	12
19	SRI SATYA SAI	8528	0	168	355	8004	1
20	SRIKAKULAM	5619	0	62	73	5484	0
21	TIRUPATI	12788	2	357	713	11714	2
22	VISAKHAPATNAM	34765	0	335	679	33742	9
23	VIZIANAGARAM	8244	0	131	163	7947	3
24	WEST GODAVARI	9357	0	110	407	8840	0
25	YSR	14634	0	336	556	13741	1
Total		278116	39	5431	11589	260989	68

Source: Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty, Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh

DWCRA program in Andhra Pradesh emphasizes skill development through training in various trades and vocations. This includes entrepreneurship training, financial literacy, and vocational skills tailored to local needs, such as agriculture, handicrafts, and small-scale industries. DWCRA facilitates access to microcredit and financial services. Through partnerships with banks and financial institutions, SHG members

can obtain loans at low interest rates to start or expand their businesses. The program provides marketing support to help women sell their products. This includes setting up fairs and exhibitions, creating linkages with larger markets, and providing branding and packaging assistance. Social mobilization efforts focus on raising awareness about women's rights, health, education, and legal issues. Campaigns are conducted to educate women and the broader community about gender equality and the benefits of women's empowerment.

Role of government and local authorities is worth noting here. The state and central governments provide policy support and funding for DWCRA. The Ministry of Rural Development allocates budgetary resources, while the state government tailors the program to local needs. The program is implemented through a network of government agencies, including District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs), which coordinate activities at the district level. Local authorities ensure that the program reaches the intended beneficiaries and address any implementation challenges. Government agencies conduct regular monitoring and evaluation to assess the program's progress and impact. This includes collecting data on key performance indicators, conducting field visits, and engaging with beneficiaries for feedback. The government collaborates with NGOs and community-based organizations to leverage their expertise and grassroots reach. These partnerships help in mobilizing communities, providing training, and ensuring that the program is effectively implemented.

Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to DWCRA's Success in Andhra Pradesh

The diverse economic activities promoted by DWCRA, such as agriculture, animal husbandry, handicrafts, and small-scale industries, have provided multiple avenues for income generation. This diversification reduces economic vulnerability and enhances household resilience. Andhra Pradesh has relatively high literacy rates compared to other states, which has facilitated better comprehension and uptake of DWCRA initiatives among women. Literacy enables women to better manage their businesses and engage with formal financial systems. Improved rural infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and communication networks, has supported the growth of DWCRA initiatives. Access to infrastructure enables better connectivity to markets and resources. The cultural emphasis on community and collective action in many rural areas of Andhra Pradesh aligns well with the principles of SHGs and DWCRA, fostering a supportive environment for women's groups.

The success of DWCRA is heavily reliant on active community participation. Community meetings, participatory planning, and decision-making processes ensure that the program addresses local needs and priorities. Strong local leadership within SHGs and community organizations has been crucial. Women leaders who emerge from these groups play a pivotal role in motivating others, managing group activities, and liaising with authorities. The social networks formed through SHGs provide emotional and practical support to women. These networks help in sharing knowledge, pooling resources, and collectively addressing challenges. Community-based monitoring mechanisms, such as peer reviews and participatory audits, ensure transparency and accountability in the use of resources and implementation of activities. The

DWCRA program in Andhra Pradesh has been successful due to strategic implementation, robust support from government and local authorities, favorable socio-economic factors, and strong community involvement. These elements collectively contribute to the empowerment of rural women and the overall success of the program.

DWCRA and Financial Empowerment of Women in Andhra Pradesh

The Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) program has significantly impacted the financial empowerment of women in Andhra Pradesh. By focusing on economic and social empowerment, DWCRA has transformed the lives of many rural women, enhancing their financial independence, social status, and overall well-being. DWCRA has enabled women to engage in various income-generating activities, such as small-scale farming, handicrafts, and other micro-enterprises. Participation in these activities has led to a substantial increase in household income, providing women with greater financial security and independence. The program provides training and support for women to start and manage their businesses. This has fostered an entrepreneurial spirit among rural women. Success stories of women entrepreneurs have inspired others in the community, creating a ripple effect of economic empowerment.

Through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), women have gained access to microcredit facilities. These loans are used to start or expand businesses, purchase assets, and improve agricultural practices. The availability of credit at low interest rates has reduced dependence on informal moneylenders, who often charge exorbitant interest rates. SHGs encourage regular savings among members, promoting financial discipline and planning. Collective savings provide a safety net for members during emergencies, reducing financial vulnerability. This financial empowerment could possibly lead to the empowerment of women in socio, cultural and political realms.

DWCRA has improved the social status of women by involving them in economic activities and decision-making processes. Women who contribute to their household income gain respect and recognition within their families and communities. Participation in SHGs and DWCRA activities has boosted women's self-confidence and self-esteem. Training programs in leadership, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship have equipped women with the skills and confidence to take on new challenges. The increased income from DWCRA activities has enabled families to invest in the education of their children, particularly girls. Education initiatives under DWCRA also focus on adult literacy, improving women's ability to manage their finances and businesses effectively. Enhanced financial stability has improved access to healthcare for women and their families. DWCRA's awareness programs on health, nutrition, and sanitation have led to better health outcomes and reduced infant and maternal mortality rates.

DWCRA has encouraged women to participate in local governance and community decision-making processes. Women in SHGs are often involved in village committees and other local bodies, influencing decisions that affect their communities. The program has helped develop leadership skills among women,

enabling them to take on leadership roles within their SHGs and communities. Women leaders from SHGs act as role models, inspiring other women to participate in governance and public life.

The DWCRA program has had a profound impact on the financial empowerment of women in Andhra Pradesh. By increasing income, providing access to credit and savings, enhancing social status, improving education and health outcomes, and promoting participation in local governance, DWCRA has played a pivotal role in transforming the socio-economic landscape for rural women. This comprehensive approach to empowerment not only benefits individual women but also contributes to the overall development of their communities.

Opportunities

The Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) program has extended its influence beyond individual empowerment, by creating opportunities which significantly contribute to broader rural development in Andhra Pradesh. By fostering economic, social, and sustainable development, DWCRA has created a holistic impact on rural communities. DWCRA's focus on income-generating activities has led to the establishment of numerous small-scale enterprises in rural areas. These enterprises include agriculture, animal husbandry, handicrafts, and other micro-industries. By promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment through DWCRA will create job opportunities not only for SHG members but also for other community members. The multiplier effect of successful businesses often leads to the creation of additional jobs, as these enterprises grow and require more labor, contributing to reduced rural unemployment rates. DWCRA has challenged traditional gender roles by empowering women economically and socially. These breakthroughs contributed to household income gaining more influence and decision-making power within their families. As women take on leadership roles within SHGs and their communities, they become role models, demonstrating that women can be effective leaders and entrepreneurs. The visibility of successful women entrepreneurs and leaders helps shift societal attitudes towards gender equality. Communities begin to recognize the value of women's contributions beyond domestic roles. Awareness campaigns and educational initiatives under DWCRA also promote gender equality and women's rights, leading to a gradual change in societal norms. The training and capacity-building components of DWCRA ensure that women acquire skills that sustain their businesses long-term. The establishment of SHGs creates a supportive network that ensures collective resilience and sustainability. These groups can withstand economic shocks better than individual enterprises. Through DWCRA initiatives, we can promote environmentally sustainable practices as well. For example, agricultural training often includes organic farming techniques, which are both cost-effective and environmentally friendly. Sustainable use of local resources is encouraged, ensuring that development does not come at the cost of environmental degradation. By fostering community cohesion and collective action, DWCRA ensures that social development is sustainable. SHGs provide a platform for continuous social engagement and mutual support. The focus on health, education, and gender equality creates a foundation for sustained social progress, as educated and healthy communities are better equipped to maintain development gains.

Issues and Challenges

Despite the significant achievements of the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) program in Andhra Pradesh, it faces several challenges and limitations that affect its implementation and impact. For political benefits DWCRA has been integrated under the roof of various schemes with Velugu, 'Indira Kranthi Pathakam'(IKP). Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty(SERP) is implementing IKP now. These challenges include operational and logistical issues, cultural and societal barriers, and limitations related to research methodology. Identifying these challenges is crucial for improving the program and guiding future research efforts.

Inconsistent and insufficient funding is a major challenge for DWCRA. Delays in fund disbursement can disrupt activities, creating uncertainty and demotivation among SHG members. Limited financial resources can restrict the quality and scope of training programs, as well as support services provided to SHGs. There are often disparities in resource distribution, with some regions receiving more attention and support than others. This can lead to uneven development and dissatisfaction among SHGs in underfunded areas. Access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and financial services is often limited in rural areas. This affects the overall well-being and productivity of SHG members. Deeply ingrained gender norms and stereotypes can limit women's participation in SHGs and economic activities. Women may face resistance from family members or community leaders who believe in traditional roles for women. Patriarchal attitudes within communities can undermine the authority and effectiveness of women in leadership positions within SHGs. Male dominance in decision-making processes can limit women's autonomy and influence. Lack of community support and buy-in can hinder the success of DWCRA initiatives. Without the backing of the broader community, SHGs may face challenges in mobilizing resources and sustaining their activities.

Scaling up successful initiatives across different regions and contexts can be challenging. Programs that work well in one area may not be as effective in another due to varying socio-economic conditions and cultural contexts. Inconsistent and unreliable data collection and reporting practices can hinder the effective monitoring and evaluation of DWCRA's impact. Accurate data is essential for assessing progress and identifying areas for improvement. Lack of a robust monitoring framework can lead to inefficiencies and gaps in program implementation. While DWCRA has made significant strides in empowering women and promoting rural development in Andhra Pradesh, addressing its challenges is essential for further progress. Operational challenges such as inconsistent funding, poor infrastructure, and limited access to services need to be tackled to enhance the program's reach and effectiveness. Cultural and societal barriers must be addressed through awareness campaigns and community engagement to promote gender equality and social inclusion. Improving the quality of training, ensuring consistent monitoring and evaluation, and focusing on long-term impact assessments are crucial for the sustained success of DWCRA. By addressing these issues, DWCRA can continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of rural women and their communities. It can be concluded that DWCRA has become a powerful tool in bringing women together in the rural areas

and thus helped to emancipate them to march forward towards collective community progress on a sustainable basis.

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