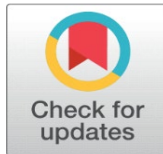


WOMEN SELF-HELP GROUPS AS VEHICLES OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A PATHWAY TO EMPOWERING MARGINALIZED WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The empowerment of marginalized women is increasingly recognized as a critical dimension of sustainable development, particularly in contexts where socio-economic and cultural barriers restrict their access to education, employment, credit, and decision-making. Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a viable strategy to address these challenges, with microfinance-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) proving especially effective. This study, examines the role of SHGs as grassroots vehicles of social entrepreneurship that combine financial inclusion with social change. Findings highlight that SHG-based microfinance fosters multidimensional empowerment—economic (income generation and financial independence), social (mobility, decision-making, and community participation), and psychological (self-confidence, autonomy, and agency). Evidence from initiatives such as Grameen Bank, SEWA, and Kudumbashree demonstrates how SHGs evolve into social enterprises that enhance household resilience, promote entrepreneurship, and strengthen community solidarity. However, persistent challenges such as patriarchal norms, financial illiteracy, institutional inadequacies, and mission drift limit their transformative potential. The study argues that empowerment through SHGs is not automatic but contingent upon enabling ecosystems, including gender-sensitive frameworks, capacity-building interventions, and supportive policy environments. It concludes that women-led SHGs, when integrated with education, digital literacy, health, and legal awareness, can move beyond financial tools to become engines of social transformation. Thus, SHGs provide a pathway to inclusive development by repositioning marginalized women as leaders and active agents of change

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Women Empowerment, Self Help Groups, Social Entrepreneur

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development increasingly emphasizes empowering marginalized women who are excluded due to gender, socio-economic, and cultural constraints. Despite various policy measures, millions of women in developing countries still face structural barriers that limit their access to education, employment, credit, and decision-making. Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a powerful tool to address these challenges by creating both economic value and social impact. Among

its approaches, microfinance stands out as one of the most successful, particularly when implemented through women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) act as grassroots engines of change, combining identity and collective strength with financial tools to promote entrepreneurship and resilience among women. Through microfinance, SHGs not only provide credit and savings but also encourage skill development, leadership, and social inclusion. This study focuses on microfinance as a model of social entrepreneurship that empowers marginalized women. It reviews existing literature, analyzes empowerment outcomes, and highlights challenges while suggesting ways to strengthen these initiatives.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: MICROFINANCE AS SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Microfinance provides small-scale financial services—such as loans, savings, and insurance—to low-income individuals often excluded from formal banking. More than just a financial tool, it embodies the essence of social entrepreneurship by promoting economic sustainability and driving social change [Yunus \(2007\)](#), [Ledgerwood \(2013\)](#). Unlike traditional business models, social entrepreneurship pursues dual goals: financial sustainability and social inclusion. In this context, microfinance becomes a key enabler for marginalized women, supporting microenterprise creation, strengthening household resilience, and fostering economic empowerment [Hulme and Moore \(2006\)](#), [Bateman \(2010\)](#).

As an empowerment tool, microfinance expands access to capital, enhances financial literacy, promotes entrepreneurship, and supports sustainable income generation. These outcomes help reduce poverty and foster self-reliance, allowing women to play a greater role in household and community decision-making [Kabeer \(2005\)](#), [Mayoux \(2001\)](#). However, while widely recognized as a pathway to empowerment, microfinance has faced critiques questioning its ability to bring deep, lasting change—particularly under loan repayment pressures or commercialization that overshadow empowerment goals. Despite these concerns, microfinance remains a powerful driver of inclusive development, provided it is adapted to local needs, supported by favourable socio-cultural and infrastructural conditions, and embedded in strong community institutions such as Self-Help Groups. In such contexts, it has the potential to move beyond financial support and foster lasting social transformation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As a qualitative research study, this work is grounded in a literature review and conceptual analysis. Its objective is to examine and synthesize the role of microfinance through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) as a model of social entrepreneurship in creating sustainable livelihoods and empowering marginalized women. The methodology follows a multi-stage approach, outlined below:

- 1) Research Design:** This qualitative research study is based on literature review and conceptual analysis. Its main aim is to explore and synthesize the role of microfinance, especially through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), as a model of social entrepreneurship for building sustainable livelihoods and empowering marginalized women.
- 2) Data Sources:** This study used secondary data from journal articles, books, policy papers, and reports published by development organizations such as

the World Bank and UN Women. It also examined case studies of leading microfinance initiatives, including the Grameen Bank and SEWA. The reviewed literature consisted of peer-reviewed articles indexed in databases like JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

3) Inclusion Criteria: The reviewed literature met the following criteria:

Published between 1999 and 2024

Focused on microfinance, women's empowerment, SHGs, or social entrepreneurship

Included empirical or conceptual studies relevant to developing countries

Reported measurable or observable impacts on women's empowerment (economic, social, or psychological)

4) Data Collection and Analysis: The literature was systematically reviewed, analyzed through the following steps:

Identification of keywords: "microfinance," "women empowerment," "social entrepreneurship," "SHGs," and "marginalized women"

Screening and selection of studies based on abstracts and full-text relevance to the core issue

Synthes is organized around five key themes: empowerment outcomes, financial inclusion, gender barriers, institutional support, and sustainability of SHGs

Interpretive analysis to identify patterns, causal links, and contextual insights from the reviewed materials.

5) Scope and Limitations

The study is conceptual in nature and does not include primary fieldwork or quantitative data analysis.

It focuses only on women in developing country contexts; therefore, the findings may not apply globally.

It does not provide an in-depth analysis of any single SHG but instead highlights overall trends and implications

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

In many developing countries, women continue to face institutional exclusion from formal financial systems due to structural barriers such as lack of collateral, limited education, and inadequate institutional support. These challenges are compounded by cultural restrictions on women's mobility and participation in economic and entrepreneurial activities [Rhyne \(2001\)](#), [Aghion and Morduch \(2005\)](#). Together, these constraints reinforce a cycle of dependency and marginalization, preventing women from independently accessing resources for economic advancement.

Microfinance programs, particularly when implemented through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), have emerged as effective tools for overcoming these barriers. Through savings, credit, and enterprise development support, SHGs equip women with the means to engage in income-generating activities and build small businesses [Mayoux \(2001\)](#), [Rahman \(1999\)](#). These interventions go beyond financial assistance, creating opportunities to challenge traditional gender roles and enabling women to contribute to the economic well-being of their families and communities.

The literature confirms that microfinance fosters empowerment across multiple dimensions. Economically, women gain greater control over income,

manage household budgets, and experience a sense of freedom by reducing dependency on male breadwinners [Ledgerwood \(2013\)](#), [Helms \(2006\)](#). Socially, access to finance enhances women's status within the family and community, strengthening their ability to participate in group decisions and civic activities [Kabeer \(2005\)](#), [Mayoux \(2001\)](#). Psychologically, these experiences build self-esteem, autonomy, and agency, which together promote long-term empowerment [Thomas and Bhowmick \(2022\)](#).

However, the extent of empowerment varies across socio-cultural contexts and depends on the design and delivery of microfinance programs. Studies note that without adequate training, flexible repayment systems, and strong institutional support, the impact may remain superficial or even create additional stress. Thus, while microfinance—particularly through SHGs—can transform women from victims of exclusion into empowered individuals, its success also relies on complementary factors such as education, social support, and institutional frameworks beyond economics.

4.1. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SHG-BASED MICROFINANCE: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

Women in many developing countries have historically been excluded from the financial system due to structural barriers such as lack of collateral, limited education, and institutional bias. Deeply rooted cultural norms further restrict their participation in entrepreneurship, reinforcing dependence and socio-economic marginalization [Rhyne \(2001\)](#), [Aghion and Morduch \(2005\)](#). To address these barriers and promote gender equity, microfinance programs—especially when delivered through Self-Help Groups (SHGs)—have emerged as powerful instruments.

SHGs enable women to collectively access financial resources such as savings, credit, and training for microenterprise development [Mayoux \(2001\)](#), [Rahman \(1999\)](#). Their group-based approach reduces risks, builds trust, and facilitates entry into larger financial ecosystems. By doing so, SHGs position women not merely as borrowers but as active agents of change.

- The empowerment outcomes of SHG-based microfinance are multidimensional: **Economic empowerment** is reflected in greater control over income, improved household financial management, and reduced dependence on male providers [Ledgerwood \(2013\)](#), [Hulme and Moore \(2006\)](#).
- **Social empowerment** comes through increased mobility, enhanced decision-making power, and stronger recognition within families and communities [Kabeer \(2005\)](#), [Mayoux \(2001\)](#).
- **Psychological empowerment** develops as women gain self-confidence, autonomy, and agency [Swain and Wallentin \(2009\)](#).

Additional evidence strengthens these findings. [Banerjee et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Pitt et al. \(2006\)](#) demonstrate improvements in healthcare access, children's education, and household asset accumulation. D'Espallier, [Gertler et al. \(2011\)](#) emphasize the emotional support and resilience fostered by group solidarity. [Nanda \(2014\)](#) highlights increased bargaining power for women in patriarchal households, while [Parvin et al. \(2012\)](#) note greater awareness of health and legal rights through SHG participation. [Gaiha and Nandhi \(2007\)](#) observe that even seasonal entrepreneurs benefit from cyclical capital flows enabled by SHGs. At the same time, [Karlan and Zinman \(2011\)](#) suggest that programs are more effective when paired with skills

training and mentorship, whereas [Morduch \(1999\)](#), [Hermes and Lensink \(2011\)](#) warn that credit without adequate support services can lead to debt stress.

This study puts forward the assertion that microfinance-supported SHGs are doorways to multidimensional empowerment. However, empowerment through SHGs is not guaranteed; it relies on factors such as financial literacy, institutional support, and community willingness to accept change. To truly understand their local impact, SHGs must be viewed not only as financial mechanisms but also as grassroots social enterprises capable of fostering long-term transformation.

4.2. MICROFINANCE-SUPPORTED SELF-HELP GROUPS AS PATHWAYS TO MULTIDIMENSIONAL EMPOWERMENT

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become a major force for social entrepreneurship in developing countries, particularly in South Asia. Formed mostly by women from disadvantaged backgrounds, these groups enable members to save money, learn new skills, and support one another. While initially designed to help women access the formal economy, SHGs have expanded their scope to include pooling resources, starting small businesses, and creating sustainable livelihoods. By offering both financial support and social empowerment, SHGs play a vital role in promoting inclusive development.

Typically, an SHG consists of 10 to 20 women who contribute small savings to a common fund. This fund is then used to provide interest-bearing loans to members. SHGs operate on core principles such as regular meetings, collective decision-making, and shared responsibility, which ensure accountability and repayment. Many SHGs later link with banks and financial institutions through programs like India's SHG-Bank Linkage Program, where social bonds and peer accountability help secure access to larger credit facilities [Mayoux \(2001\)](#), [Rahman \(1999\)](#).

Beyond their financial benefits, SHGs foster women's social and political empowerment. Participation builds leadership skills, accountability, solidarity, and confidence. By engaging in decision-making, leadership roles, and skill-building activities, women experience what is often termed "empowerment from below," gaining not only financial independence but also autonomy and a stronger voice in households and communities [Kabeer \(2005\)](#), [Thomas and Bhowmick \(2022\)](#). SHGs also act as platforms for peer learning, spreading awareness on health, education, legal rights, and sustainable practices.

Across South Asia, several case studies highlight SHGs evolving into social enterprises:

- In Bangladesh, the Grameen Bank pioneered collateral-free loans to women, boosting family incomes and enhancing women's control over household decisions [Yunus \(2007\)](#).
- In India, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) integrates financial services with labor rights and welfare support, enabling women to thrive as independent entrepreneurs [Chen et al. \(2007\)](#).
- In Sri Lanka, the Association for Social Advancement (ASA) strengthens SHGs through digital literacy training and business mentorship, increasing women's resilience [Fernando \(2006\)](#).

Research shows SHGs deliver diverse benefits:

Economic empowerment through better income control, asset accumulation, and protection from financial shocks [Ledgerwood \(2013\)](#), [Helms \(2006\)](#).

- **Social empowerment** by enhancing mobility, decision-making power, and recognition in families and communities [Mayoux \(2001\)](#), [Kabeer \(2005\)](#).
- **Psychological empowerment** through higher self-confidence, emotional resilience, and autonomy [Thomas and Bhowmick \(2022\)](#).
- **Entrepreneurial capacity**, transforming women from dependents into active entrepreneurs and contributors to local economies [Banerjee et al. \(2015\)](#).

At the same time, challenges remain. Some SHGs face dominance by elite members, unequal participation, and repayment pressures when leadership is weak. As commercial microfinance institutions expand their involvement, there are concerns about profit motives overshadowing empowerment goals [Morduch \(1999\)](#) [Hermes and Lensink \(2011\)](#). Without training, institutional support, and inclusive participation, SHGs risk becoming less effective in the long term [Karlan and Zinman \(2011\)](#).

Therefore, SHGs require more than access to credit. Their success depends on inclusive governance, continuous capacity-building, and support systems that prioritize empowerment over financial performance. Long-term sustainability will also depend on integrating digital literacy, health, and legal awareness into SHG programs. More research is needed to understand their adaptability in urban contexts and their potential to scale through technology. Such insights will be essential for policymakers, development practitioners, and financial institutions seeking to promote inclusive growth through women-led social enterprises.

4.3. CHALLENGES FACED BY MARGINALIZED WOMEN IN MICROFINANCE AND SHGS

Microfinance and SHGs have contributed significantly to empowering marginalized women, yet persistent challenges limit their full transformative potential. These barriers are deeply rooted in socio-cultural, economic, and institutional structures that restrict women's access to resources, decision-making authority, and long-term entrepreneurial growth. Understanding these obstacles is essential for designing financial models that are more inclusive and resilient.

A major challenge lies in cultural and structural barriers. Patriarchal norms in rural and traditional communities enforce strict gender roles that limit women's mobility, economic independence, and access to institutions. Women are often expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over economic participation, which hinders their involvement in SHG meetings or training [Nanda \(2014\)](#). Even when loans are accessed, men in the household may control their use, undermining women's empowerment [Bateman \(2010\)](#). These constraints entrench dependency and perpetuate women's invisibility within financial systems.

Another obstacle is the lack of financial literacy and education among participants. Limited formal education weakens women's ability to understand interest rates, repayment terms, business planning, or bookkeeping, often resulting in loan misuse or debt cycles [Morduch \(1999\)](#). Rigid repayment schedules, which overlook irregular and seasonal incomes common in agriculture and informal sectors, create further stress, leading to dropouts from microfinance programs [Dichter \(2007\)](#).

Institutional gaps and mission drift in the microfinance sector also pose serious risks. As commercialization increases, many MFIs prioritize financial performance

over social impact, leading to higher interest rates, stricter repayment conditions, and reduced investment in capacity-building [Hermes and Lensink \(2011\)](#), [Mersland and Strøm \(2010\)](#). Weak SHG monitoring, poor grievance redressal, and inadequate legal protection further undermine long-term viability.

Research supports these concerns. [Goetz and Gupta \(1996\)](#) observed that women often lack control over loans, while [Guérin et al. \(2015\)](#) reported rising household conflict and stress linked to debt. [Baland et al. \(2011\)](#) noted that elite dominance can marginalize weaker SHG members. [Roy \(2017\)](#) highlighted that digital illiteracy and limited access to mobile banking deepen gender gaps in financial inclusion. [Sanyal \(2009\)](#) argued that without social capital development, microfinance fails to achieve sustainable empowerment.

These findings indicate that microfinance and SHGs, though valuable, cannot achieve transformative change unless embedded in supportive ecosystems. Programs must therefore incorporate financial literacy, flexible repayment options, gender-sensitization processes, and safeguards against elite capture. Empowerment should not be seen as a one-time outcome of credit but as a continuous process requiring sustained institutional and social investment.

Future research should explore how microfinance can better serve poor urban women, tribal groups, and women with disabilities—segments often excluded from SHG networks. More studies are also needed on the mental well-being of women borrowers in high-debt regions. Finally, the integration of digital tools and fintech into SHGs must focus not only on efficiency but also on genuinely empowering women to participate in the digital economy.

4.4. IMPACT OF MICROFINANCE AND SHGS: POVERTY REDUCTION, ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Mainstream theorizing on microfinance and empowerment often presents it as a strong empirical model promoting economic development, entrepreneurship, and community building. While theoretical discussions explain these processes, impact evaluations demonstrate the tangible social and economic outcomes when marginalized women gain access to financial resources, training, and support systems. This section highlights three key areas where microfinance and SHG initiatives have shown measurable success: poverty reduction, enterprise development, and the building of social capital.

Poverty reduction and income gains are among the most frequently reported outcomes of microfinance interventions. Through microcredit, women are able to engage in productive economic activities, thereby increasing household income, ensuring food security, improving housing, and affording healthcare and education. [Pitt et al. \(2006\)](#) showed that long-term engagement with microfinance institutions in Bangladesh led to significant improvements in consumption, asset ownership, and children's school attendance. Similarly, [Imai et al. \(2012\)](#), in a cross-country study, found that microfinance participation positively contributed to household poverty alleviation in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Microfinance also acts as a buffer against economic shocks, enabling income diversification and encouraging investments in productive activities rather than subsistence wages [Osmani \(2007\)](#).

Enterprise development is another important contribution. Microfinance supports female entrepreneurship, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions, by providing startup capital and financial independence. Women establish or expand enterprises such as tailoring, food stalls, dairy farming, and home-based work. [Robb](#)

(2010) argues that microfinance fosters entrepreneurial skills by lowering barriers to market entry traditionally dominated by men. Banerjee et al. (2015), in a randomized control trial in Hyderabad, found that women who accessed microfinance were more likely to own businesses and engage in economic activities, though income effects varied. Field et al. (2013) observed that flexible loan structures significantly improved business success among first-time women entrepreneurs. Beyond individual gains, effective microfinance schemes also promote broader economic development through job creation and market linkages Armendáriz and Morduch (2010), Chliova et al. (2015).

Building social capital is an equally vital, though sometimes overlooked, dimension of empowerment. SHGs nurture trust, accountability, and a collective identity among women through regular meetings, shared experiences, and problem-solving. This creates solidarity and emotional support within groups. Kabeer (2005) and Hulme and Moore (2006) suggest that SHGs enhance women's visibility in public life and community decision-making. Networking through SHGs also improves access to healthcare, education, and legal awareness. Brody et al. (2017) reported that SHG members in India developed stronger community ties, greater civic engagement, and confidence in interacting with authorities. Similarly, Datta (2015) found that bonding within SHGs reduced intra-household conflict and improved family relations.

The combined effects of poverty alleviation, enterprise development, and strengthened social networks suggest that microfinance and SHGs contribute to holistic and sustainable empowerment. However, the scale and consistency of these impacts depend on program design, length of participation, training, and socio-cultural context. While women may start enterprises, long-term success often requires additional inputs such as market access, financial literacy, and institutional support.

At the same time, caution is warranted. Recent literature warns that without safeguards, microfinance can result in over-indebtedness, repayment stress, social pressure, or unequal opportunities within groups. Hence, impact evaluations should not rely only on financial outcomes but also assess qualitative changes in well-being, agency, and resilience.

Future research must explore how technology integration—such as mobile banking and digital wallets—can enhance the inclusivity and efficiency of SHGs. Longitudinal studies are also needed to capture intergenerational effects of microfinance on education, health, and mobility. Importantly, impact assessment data must be disaggregated by caste, location, age, and marital status to reflect how empowerment varies across subgroups of marginalized women. Such nuanced insights would inform policy frameworks that are comprehensive yet adaptable to local realities.

4.5. POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPERATIVES FOR STRENGTHENING MICROFINANCE AND SHGS

Microfinance and SHGs have shown great potential in empowering women, but their long-term success depends on an enabling policy environment and effective implementation practices. Empowerment is not an automatic result of credit disbursal; it requires an ecosystem that responds to the multidimensional realities of women's lives. Integrated policy interventions must link financial access with sustainable empowerment by building gender-responsive capacities supported through institutional coordination.

For microfinance to serve as an effective development tool, it must be integrated with capacity-building interventions. Financial services alone cannot empower women if they lack the knowledge, skills, or confidence to make economic decisions. Training programs in financial literacy, business management, digital tools, and vocational skills should accompany credit models to ensure funds are used productively. Additionally, integrating microfinance with health awareness, legal literacy, and leadership training can further enhance women's autonomy and resilience [Parvin et al. \(2012\)](#), [Khalid and Yasin \(2021\)](#). The Kudumbashree program in Kerala, India, demonstrates this integrated approach, combining credit with education, sanitation, and entrepreneurship training to promote holistic empowerment [Devika and Thampi \(2007\)](#).

Equally important is the adoption of gender-sensitive frameworks in microfinance design and delivery. Women's financial needs often differ due to caregiving responsibilities, time poverty, and informal work patterns. Policies should incorporate flexible repayment schedules, family-inclusive savings, group insurance schemes, and maternity-linked financial products to better align with these realities [Thomas and Bhowmick \(2022\)](#). Programs must also recognize the unique contexts of tribal women, widows, women with disabilities, and young entrepreneurs [Harper \(2002\)](#). Institutionalizing gender audits and impact assessments can ensure continuous refinement and inclusivity in program design.

Strong government and institutional support is another critical pillar. Strategic collaboration between governments, NGOs, private financial institutions, and civil society organizations is essential for expanding outreach, ensuring accountability, and reducing bureaucratic barriers. Government-backed policies can provide legal protection, interest subsidies, and simplified documentation to encourage participation among the poorest and most vulnerable groups. Digitization—through mobile banking, biometric identification, and e-governance platforms—further enhances accessibility and transparency [Roy and Goswami \(2020\)](#). The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana in India is a successful example, showing that digitally supported financial inclusion can be accelerated when anchored in institutional partnerships and political will [World Bank \(2017\)](#).

Policy and practice frameworks must also reflect lessons from past shortcomings. Programs designed without inter-sectoral coordination risk redundancy and inefficiency, while the lack of disaggregated data on gender, region, and income constrains evidence-based policymaking. [Goetz and Jenkins \(2018\)](#) argue that empowerment must not be treated as an incidental outcome but as an explicit and measurable policy goal, supported by gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring.

Looking ahead, a multi-stakeholder approach that incorporates local knowledge and recognizes women as co-creators of development should be prioritized. Future policy research must explore linking SHGs with national employment schemes, green financing, and climate resilience programs. Digital tools for real-time impact tracking could improve adaptive program management and faster responses to emerging challenges. Finally, policy frameworks should not only facilitate women's inclusion in financial systems but also promote their leadership within them—transforming women from beneficiaries into decision-makers who shape their own economic futures.

5. DISCUSSION

The impact of SHG-based microfinance is best understood through its dual role in promoting economic inclusion and driving social change, viewed through the lens of social entrepreneurship. SHGs help emancipate women from traditional roles, enabling them to take greater control of their lives and contribute meaningfully to their families and communities.

Empowerment through microfinance is not automatic. It depends on contextual factors such as cultural norms, institutional support, and the design of microfinance programs. A well-functioning SHG must go beyond simply disbursing loans; it should also provide mentoring, advocacy, and a sense of collective identity. These non-financial benefits are essential for sustaining empowerment in the long run.

The potential of SHG-based microfinance extends beyond financial empowerment to broader development goals, including education, health, and environmental sustainability. By integrating microfinance with multi-sectoral support systems, its impact can be significantly strengthened, particularly in rural and tribal regions where women face the deepest marginalization.

6. CONCLUSION

Microfinance, as a form of social entrepreneurship, carries extraordinary transformative potential in empowering marginalized women. Through SHGs, women gain not only financial independence but also social dignity, leadership skills, and opportunities to participate in civic life. Yet, structural barriers, limited literacy, and commercial pressures continue to restrict its full impact. A holistic and integrated approach—linking financial services with empowerment frameworks—offers the way forward to ensure sustainability and inclusiveness in women's empowerment.

Women-led SHGs represent a strong model of social entrepreneurship. They provide access to finance, nurture leadership qualities, and strengthen community ties. While the economic benefits are significant, the greatest impact lies in social and psychological empowerment, enabling women to redefine their identities and claim greater agency.

To realize the full potential of this model, supportive policies are essential. These must address structural inequalities and ensure microfinance remains mission-driven. Future interventions should combine financial services with education, digital literacy, legal awareness, and health programs to create a comprehensive ecosystem of empowerment.

In this way, SHGs can serve not only as instruments of economic inclusion but also as engines of social transformation—propelling marginalized women into leadership roles and fostering inclusive development for all.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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