

Periodic Research

Education and Socio-Economic Empowerment of Rural People: A Household Level Survey of Burdwan District in West Bengal



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Abstract

The present study was intended to examine the impact of education on socio-economic empowerment of rural people. The study covered seven hundred ten households in rural areas comprising different level of education and economic status (APL and BPL). The study was conducted with a view to show the role of education for achieving socio-economic empowerment through a system model. Multiple response analysis was also done to show the impact of education on different indicators of social and economic empowerment. The study revealed that education has a significant positive impact on the socio-economic empowerment of rural people.

Keywords: Education, Under Educated, Awareness, Socio-Economic Empowerment, Decision Making, Status of Women, Rural Development.

Introduction

Rural development is a matter of great concern to achieve sustainable development, but it cannot be realized without adequate community empowerment and participation. One key obstacle to community empowerment is the lack of education and literacy in rural communities. Public investment in rural education in developing countries has often been inadequate. In addition to increasing public spending on education and the participation of civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders, it is important to bridge the educational gaps in remote rural areas. Equally important is to address the various social and cultural constraints that inhibit the full participation of marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the development and implementation of rural development programmes (Gupta, 2003; Kavita, 2011).

The term empowerment is of recent origin. It is an ambiguous concept and is treated as the subject of much intellectual course and analysis. Women's empowerment refers to the ability to transform economic and social development when empowered to fully participate in the decisions that affect their lives through leadership training, coaching, counseling and the problem of enabling tools for women to lead their communities, regions and countries. UNO has propounded a conceptual framework which is considered as the useful starting point regarding empowerment. "Empowerment is defined as the processes by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices' (UNO, 2001). This means that empowerment is treated as a particular method of acquiring to make strategic life choices in a situation where this ability has earlier been denied (Nayar, 1993; Rao, 2001).

In broad sense, empowerment refers to the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (World Bank, 2012). The World Bank asserts that empowerment essentially addresses the plight of marginalized people who generally lack self-sufficiency and self confidence as a result of being denied opportunities and/or due to discrimination based on their disability, race, ethnicity, religion, age or gender; provides opportunities for marginalized people, either directly or through the assistance of non-marginalized others who share their own access to these opportunities; and thwarts attempts to deny those opportunities, and encourages and develops the skills for self sufficiency. Empowering implies the recognition that anyone can make the difference in his/her life and other people's lives. In many countries of the world, governments do

not/cannot allocate sufficient resources/capacities to efficiently support programmes aiming at poverty reduction. Earning income is the first step towards poverty eradication. Socio-economic empowerment is a key concern in this respect (Kavita, 2006; Eyben et al, 2008).

Social empowerment is understood as the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence and acting individually and collectively to change social relationships and the institutions and discourses that exclude poor people and keep them in poverty. On the other hand, economic empowerment is thought to allow poor people to think beyond immediate daily survival and to exercise greater control over both their resources and life choices. For example, it enables households to make their own decisions around making investments in health and education and taking risks in order to increase their income (ICPDPA, 1994; Eyben et al, 2008).

Education has an important role to empower people by giving them a good education that will prepare them to have a career and to hold a job that will make them more confident, give them the chance to learn from others, allow them to earn a good living to help their children to live a better life. So education as an empowering tool might help people to change the conditions of their lives by taking action while having knowledge and skills of a trade that will make them competitive in the particular productive field. An initiative on "Education for rural people" was launched during the World Summit on Sustainable Development with the objectives to increase access to basic education for rural people, to improve the quality of basic education in rural areas and to foster national capacity to plan and implement basic education in a way that addresses the learning needs of rural people (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011; Anonuevo, 1995; Olufunke, 2011, Paul et al, 2013).

Various studies are undertaken in India and abroad to assess the role of education in socio-economic empowerment of people, but most of the studies are not comprehensive one (Sudha, 2010; Ramchandran, 2009; Kavita, 2011; Nayar, 1993; Gupta, 2003). To our knowledge, the present study is the distinct one to fill in the gap of the earlier studies. Therefore, an attempt has been made to study the impact of education on empowerment on rural population by covering the broad spectrum in socio-economic concern in Burdwan district, West Bengal.

Objectives

1. To measure the socio-economic conditions of the rural people.
2. To find out the status of education of the rural people.
3. To study the level of socio-economic empowerment of the rural households in the concerned study area.
4. To identify the socio-economic indicators which are helpful for achieving socio-economic empowerment associated with education.

5. To estimate the association between education and socio-economic empowerment with respect to gender.
6. To find out the difference in attitude of the respondents belonging to different educational status about the promotion of socio-economic empowerment through education.
7. To find out the difference in attitude of the respondents belonging to different economic status about the promotion of socio-economic empowerment through education.

Hypotheses

H₁

There is a significant variation in the association between education and socio-economic empowerment of the rural households with respect to gender.

H₂

There is a significant variation in the attitude of the respondents belonging to different educational status about the promotion of socio-economic empowerment through education.

H₃

There is a significant variation in the attitude of the respondents belonging to different economic status about the promotion of socio-economic empowerment through education.

Methodology

This study was mainly empirical in nature.

Sample

The primary data was collected from 710 rural households of different subdivisions of Burdwan district in West Bengal.

Tools

A well structured questionnaire, developed by the investigator was used to assess the impact of education on socio - economic empowerment comprising of the following scales:

1. Socio - economic Status (SES) scale
2. Educational status Scale
3. Socio-Economic Empowerment scale

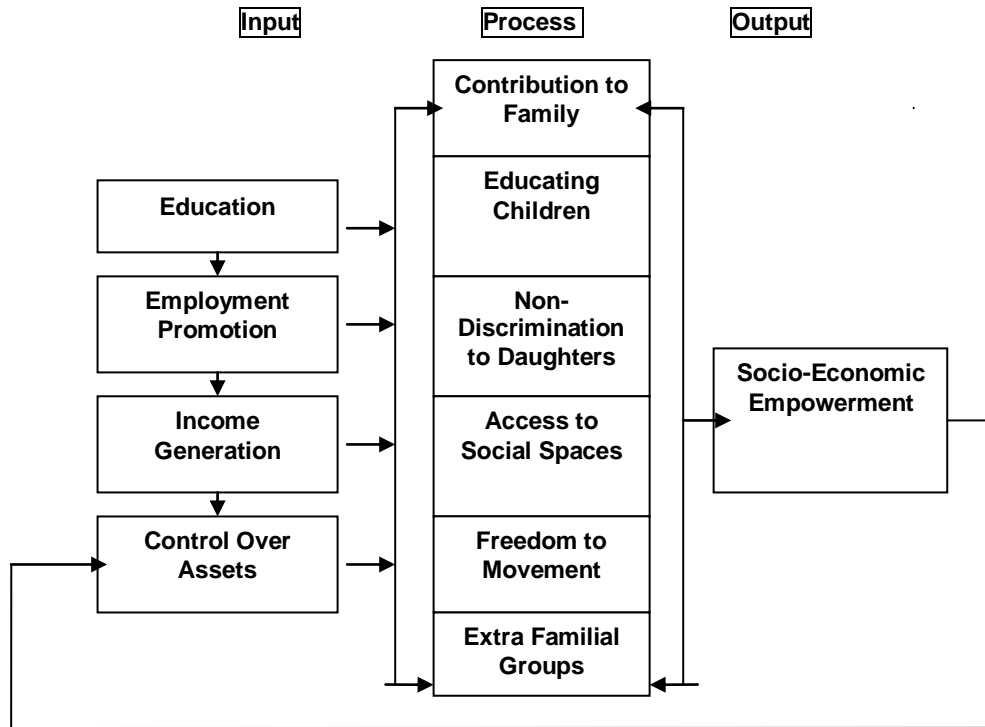
Statistical Approach

1. A system model was developed to show the inter-relationship between education and socio-economic empowerment (Fig.1)
2. Chi-square test was used to test the Hypothesis H₁ i.e. the gender discrepancy, if any, in the association between education and socio-economic empowerment.
3. Multiple response analysis was also made to compare the impact of education on socio-economic empowerment of the respondents belonging to five subdivisions of Burdwan district with respect to the corresponding indicators.
4. Student's t-test was used to test the Hypothesis H₂ and H₃ i.e. to find out the difference, if any, in the opinion of the respondents about the promotion of empowerment through education belonging to different educational and economic status respectively.

Results and Discussion

Schematic Plan of System Model

Fig.-1 System Model Showing the Inter relationship between Education and Socio- Economic Empowerment



Feedback

System model provides the hypothesized benefit process of education, reflecting intermediate and ultimate impact goals to achieve socio-economic empowerment of the rural masses. The inputs of education through promotion of employment, income generation and control over assets have the potential to produce intermediate or first order effects that include contribution to family, educating children, non-discrimination to daughters in the family, access to

social spaces, freedom to movement and making of extra familial groups out of the own households especially of women members in the family. These first order effects provide the potential for the second order and ultimate effects on socio-economic empowerment which again helps to induce educational and economic status of the family. This process is self-perpetuating in nature.

Table – 1
Association between Education and Socio-Economic Empowerment with Respect to Gender

Respondents	Yes	Uncertain	No	Total	Value of χ^2	Level of Significance
Women	301	42	17	360	0.427	NS
Men	309	29	12	350		
Total	610	71	29	710		

Analysis of χ^2 has been made on the basis of opinions of gender variation with reference to Socio-Economic Empowerment (SEE). The value of Chi square is not significant at 0.05 level. Therefore, the variables SEE and gender variation are independent. The result leads to conclude that gender has no effect on the association between education and socio-economic empowerment. So, hypothesis H_1 was

rejected i.e. there is no variation in the association between education and socio-economic empowerment of the rural households with respect to gender.

During field survey, it was also revealed that both types of the members (i.e., male and female) are aware of education and its impact on socio-economic empowerment to improve their own status.

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Table -2
Impact of Education on Social Empowerment W.R.T. Corresponding Indicators

Indicators of Social Empowerment	Households surveyed in different Subdivisions under Burdwan district					Total
	Sadar (N&S)	Asansol (Rural Area)	Durgapur (Rural Area)	Katwa	Kalna	
Freedom of movement	99 (66)	119(85)	113(80.71)	99(70.71)	95(67.86)	525(73.94)
Non-discrimination against daughters	79 (52.66)	126(90)	119(85)	93(66.43)	91(65)	510(71.83)
Commitment to educate children	90 (60)	130(92.86)	123(87.86)	91(65)	78(55.71)	512(72.11)
Women's access to social spaces	72 (48)	113(80.71)	112(80)	105(75)	85(60.71)	487(68.59)
Participation in extra-familial social groups	67 (44.67)	116(82.86)	109(77.86)	84(60)	71(50.71)	447(62.96)
Total members	150	140	140	140	140	710

The analysis (vide table 2) shows that out of 710 households the highest number of households give positive response in favour of the indicator--freedom of movement (73.94 %) closely followed by commitment to educate children (72.11 %) and non-discrimination against daughters (71.83 %). Social empowerment of the household's members in terms of women's access to social spaces (i.e., 68.59 %) and participation in extra familial groups (i.e., 62.96 %) are also satisfactory. This means that households having education are more conscious about their

children especially to educate children and non-discrimination of daughters which is highly praiseworthy. Again, among the studied subdivisions in rural Burdwan district, rural area of Asansol and Durgapur occupy the predominant position in terms of achievement in social empowerment as per the selected indicators. The contribution of Burdwan South & North is significantly low in this respect. During field survey, it is noticed that industrialization has had a significant positive impact to accrue the full benefit of education through higher per capita income.

Table - 3
Impact of Education on Economic Empowerment W.R.T. Corresponding Indicators

Indicators of Economic Empowerment	Households Surveyed in Different Subdivisions Under Burdwan District					Total
	Sadar (N&S)	Asansol (Rural Area)	Durgapur (Rural Area)	Katwa	Kalna	
Women's control over income	75(50)	116(82.86)	109(77.85)	88(62.86)	91(65)	479(67.46)
Women's access to employment	79(52.67)	123(87.86)	119(85)	81(57.86)	85(60.71)	487(68.59)
Women's control over assets	82(54.66)	127(90.71)	113(88.71)	88(62.86)	95(67.86)	505(71.12)
Economic contribution to family	73(48.66)	113(80.71)	99(70.71)	64(45.71)	70(50)	419(59.01)
Access to credit and markets	61(40.66)	109(77.86)	98(70)	57(40.71)	63(45)	388(54.65)
Total members	150	140	140	140	140	710

Table 3 provides an explanation of achievement of economic empowerment of the surveyed households in different subdivisions of Burdwan district in terms of selected indicators. As the economic empowerment is concerned, 'women's control over assets' occupies the highest position (i.e., 71.12 %) closely followed by women's access to employment (68.59%), women's control over income (67.46 %). As the results among the inter subdivisions are concerned, economic empowerment of the two rural area of industrialized subdivisions - Asansol and Durgapur are noticeable in all respects. This indicates that the households of the industrial belts enjoy better economic status than the households of the agricultural belts. The performance of Burdwan Sadar is significantly low in this respect. Therefore, it is documented that education has a strong positive impact on economic empowerment especially among women of the studied households.

Table - 4
Attitude about Impact of Education on Socio-Economic Empowerment among Households Comprising of Different Economic Status (APL & BPL)

Type of Households	N	Mean	S.D.	t value	Level of Significance
APL	380	28.39	5.58	2.72	0.01
BPL	330	21.61	3.64		

The value of 't' is significant at 0.01 level, indicating thereby, two groups differ significantly in their attitude about impact of education on socio-economic empowerment and favours APL category. So H₃ is retained i.e. there is a significant variation in the opinion of the respondents belonging to different economic status about the promotion of empowerment through education. This means that households belonging to higher economic status (i.e.,

above Poverty Line) have more consciousness about socio-economic empowerment than that of households belonging to lower economic status. During field survey, it has been found that households of higher economic status have more solvencies to spend more money for education for their children rather than the BPL (Below Poverty Line) households taken under consideration.

Table – 5
Attitude about Impact of Education on Socio-Economic Empowerment among Households Comprising in Different Educational Status (Educated & Uneducated/Under Educated)

Types of Households	N	Mean	S.D.	t value	Level of Significance
Educated	450	27.47	4.92	2.63	0.01
Uneducated/under educated	260	21.10	3.15		

The value of 't' is significant at 0.01 level. This means that awareness of rural people regarding socio-economic empowerment significantly differs as per educational status and favours the educated. So H₂ is retained i.e. there is a significant variation in the opinion of the respondents belonging to different educational status about the promotion of empowerment through education.

During investigation, it was also observed that educated persons are much conscious compared to uneducated or under educated ones due to better knowledge and understanding about empowerment.

Conclusion

The present paper based on the research study highlights the role of education in promoting socio-economic empowerment among the rural households. The result revealed a positive association between education and achievement of socio-economic empowerment and there is no gender variation exists about this. The results further indicated that there has been significant positive influence on promoting socio-economic empowerment in case of educated people rather than uneducated ones. However, there exists some variation regarding the degree of socio-economic empowerment through education among the members of households belonging to different levels of education and economic status (APL and BPL).

Suggestions

The researcher concludes the following:

1. Spread of education to promote socio-economic empowerment among the rural people.
2. Active participation of masses in socio-economic activities.

3. Literacy driven programs should be undertaken to make aware about empowerment.
4. Voluntary organizations (i.e., N.G.Os) and SHGs (Self-help Groups) can take part an important role to promote empowerment of the rural common masses.

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