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Empowering Rural Women: Micro-enterprise through Achievement Motivation

Kiron Wadhera and George Koreth

Published by Sage, London, UK, 2012. 224 pages. Paperback: ISBN 9781780641607, Price £14.99¹. Ebook: ISBN 9788132109426; £37.50.

'*Empowering Rural Women*' is a pioneering piece of research written by Kiron Wadhera and George Koreth. Kiron Wadhera is currently a consultant to the government of Dehli, India in developing citizens partnerships with the government on a city wide basis. George Koreth is currently advising the government of Dehli on building and sustaining a citizen's partnership in good governance. The authors embarked on this line of research in the hope of influencing policy makers, educationists and national social policy that aim at improving the standard of living amongst the rural poor. A major hope for this research is that new policy directions would help these disenfranchised groups to help themselves in a sustainable way.

The book came about because of a lack of significant study undertaken on women entrepreneurs and their challenges and successes (in comparison to research carried out on urban, successful male entrepreneurs). In identifying this research gap, the authors set out to provide original research on poor rural women micro entrepreneurs, at the same time measuring their achievements and motivations. The research establishes a clear relationship between presence/absence of achievement motivation and the success/failure of these women in sustaining their enterprises.

Wadhera's doctoral study reviewed the research conducted by the NGO; Asian Centre for Organisational Research and Development (ACORD). Initiated in 1994, ACORD has undertaken various projects in the area of social development, health, agriculture and communication and awareness building. Having reviewed ACORD project findings, Wadhera's research was driven by the question 'Did those successful women micro entrepreneurs who emerged from ACORD's rural programmes have an 'inner drive' - the 'achievement motivation' described and measured in the case of urban men by McClelland et al in 1953. McClelland refers to an entrepreneur as an individual with a strong need for achievement. The need for achievement was identified as a major factor in poverty alleviation through micro enterprise among rural women. Perception of opportunity as others may not see, and response to a perceived opportunity, have also been found to be important for a person with entrepreneurial inclination in order to start an enterprise. The authors identify a cashless material lone model with they believe is replicable and scalable for rural women micro entrepreneurs which can be used effectively to solve some of the problems that are related to rural backwardness as cash will not then be used for

consumption or mis-appropriated by males in the family. This model was successfully trialled and developed by ACORD.

The authors worked with poor rural illiterate and semi-literate women in the 27 villages of the Bharatpur district, Rajasthan, India. They acknowledged those women who overcame several social and structural barriers to step out of their homes and set up and run their micro-enterprises. Women from 18 of these villages participated in the research either through answering questionnaires and/or tests and allowing survey teams to do observational studies of their houses and household possessions. The work is based on information gathered from 183 women who attempted an enterprise and from an equal number of male members and their families. Of these women 45 were analysed to identify the presence or absence of their needs for achievements.

From a Western perspective, rural India is still quite conservative and lags behind in development indicators relative to urban areas. Women in rural India are all the more challenged as they face discrimination on multiple levels (patriarchy, gender, education and economic etc). The book states that Women's work roles have been secondary to executing the maternal, emotional and social life of the family, and women therefore direct their lives around the needs of the family, whereas men organise their lives around the demands of their work.

As a relatively privileged Westerner, the lack of access to education and the dependency on male/community approval and support struck me as considerable obstacles that I thankfully don't need to consider when running my own business. In essence, the main premise of the book is that success is dependent on an inner drive for achievement, and that the development of that drive is based on extrinsic and intrinsic influences. This resonates beyond the profile of the study group and encompassing all nationalities, regardless of gender or social status. As a facilitator of community programmes, it also interesting to note that in the villages where women entrepreneurs had developed successfully, others followed and the wider family and community began to thrive.

Empowering Rural Women captures how some women, despite being illiterate and poor, show the presence of an inner need for achievement, which had a clear relationship with the women's efforts in sustaining their micro-enterprise. The women who displayed the need for achievement in their profiles did not give up when faced with failure. Two out of three started a different venture and succeeded. The remaining third actively searched for other opportunities to earn and found employment that enabled her to earn more income. In contrast those who did not display a need to achieve in their profile did not succeed because they lacked self-motivation, and in all of these cases, they began the program on insistence from their husbands, the ACORD staff or relatives.

¹ In mid-January 2015, £1 was approximately equivalent to \$US 1.51 and €1.28 (www.xe.com)

The successful women entrepreneurs often got support/encouragement from their husbands and families to initiate the enterprise, provided the husbands were included in the early discussion processes. Very often the successful business became a family business. In several cases where the women were managing tea shops and provision stores, the spouse's sons and other members of the family added new lines of micro enterprise such as vegetables and selling or helped to extend the enterprise. Women with a need for achievement in their profile by and large chose those activities for their micro enterprise which involved selling, trading, and farm related sales rather than only production or skilled development. Those that did not succeed chose the production model and thus avoided the risk and uncertainty of trying to sell, and they did not try again when the first venture failed.

As they worked on their micro enterprise, even the illiterate developed basic skills like simple calculation, bargaining, selling as well as self-confidence and increased social status with their family as well as increasing their standard of living. Many reported an improvement in the food, clothing and education of children. They got better levels of respect and acceptance

within the family and the society in which they lived. Involvement in micro-enterprise also has the added value of increasing self confidence amongst these women, and this sense of empowerment resulted in some women having more of a say in the decision making within the household and in the family's finances.

In an environment where there is a greater media spotlight on the effectiveness of spending on aid programs, this research is commendable in how it has rigorously measured the critical factors of success for women entrepreneurs in socially disadvantaged societies. Wadhera engaged in worthwhile research, not only on women in rural disadvantaged societies, but also on what drives and prevents women in succeeding in entrepreneurship.

The conclusions of the study deserve to be taken seriously by policy makers and educationalists. In respect of health, nutrition, sanitation and gender, the findings offer an evidence-based methodology to policy makers in ensuring that India increases its social indicators and meets its Millennium Development Goals.

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