

ASSESSING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN A SOCIAL INTERVENTION PROJECT FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

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Empowerment is used to describe the process by which the powerless people become conscious of their own situation and organize collectively to obtain greater access to services or benefits of economic growth. Women in Internally Displaced Communities (IDP) are taken as vulnerable and marginalized who should be focused in empowerment in development interventions. The project 'A' was selected from an International Non-Government Organization (INGO), as a case to study the process, its effectiveness and the limitations of women's empowerment.

The general objective was to assess the women's empowerment due to a project that has attempted to assist IDPs. The specific objectives were to estimate the project's contribution to 8 dimensions of women's empowerment: Identity and self-image, space for women, mobilization and collective identity, social leadership, cultural change, economic security, women's personal autonomy and institutional support at the household level.

The study was carried out in Puttalam district in six Grama Niladhari divisions using pre-post evaluations of the same group. The sample size was 72, which was 2.5% of the total beneficiaries. Primary data were gathered by interviews and focused group discussions while the secondary data were collected using published and unpublished reports. T-test was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

In the sample 65%, 22% and 13% were Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese, respectively. Of them, 19% were single female-headed households. One to three families lived in the same dwelling. The average household size was 5 with a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 11 occupants. The overall degree of women's empowerment had increased during the project period. But, all the 8 dimensions had not significantly changed with the project. Identity and self-image, mobilization and collective identity, social leadership and institutional support had significantly increased during the period. Under the economic security, women's access and control over credit had significantly changed. Space for women, cultural change and women's personal autonomy had not been affected by the project. Even the salaried work condition, under the economic security dimension had not changed.

Based on the empirical and qualitative findings, to enhance women's empowerment, it was recommended to have different levels of activities for improving the involvement, awareness creation and counseling at the household level through the project field officers.

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