

Women's Empowerment and Community Development in Rural Areas: A Focus on the DHEERA Foundation's Approach Through Its Tailoring Training Programme

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Introduction

The disparities between rural and urban areas in terms of health, education, and employment opportunities remain a significant challenge in many parts of the world. Rural areas often face systemic issues like limited access to quality healthcare, insufficient educational resources, and a lack of employment opportunities, which contribute to cycles of poverty and hinder social development. To address these challenges, the concept of "Development of Health Education and Employment in Rural Areas" (DHEERA) has emerged as a comprehensive approach aimed at transforming rural communities by focusing on key pillars of health, education, and employment. The DHEERA Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering positive social change in underserved communities through initiatives focused on education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability. The name "DHEERA," derived from Sanskrit, means "brave" or "courageous," reflecting the foundation's mission to empower individuals and communities to overcome adversity and create a better future.

The DHEERA initiative's approach to integrating health, education, and employment has a multifaceted impact on rural communities. By improving healthcare access, individuals are healthier, which leads to increased productivity and a higher quality of life. A healthier population also has greater potential to benefit from educational opportunities and contribute to the workforce.

Education, in turn, empowers individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to improve their personal livelihoods and contribute to community development. By equipping young people with both academic and vocational skills, DHEERA ensures that future generations are better prepared to face the challenges of the modern economy. Finally, by creating local employment opportunities and fostering sustainable economic growth, DHEERA reduces poverty, enhances social mobility, and creates a self-sustaining cycle of development. As employment increases, the economic well-being of families improves, leading to better health and educational outcomes.

DHEERA Foundation's Approach Through Its Tailoring Training Programme:

The empowerment of women and the development of rural communities are closely interconnected, with skill-based initiatives playing a crucial role in driving both. The DHEERA

Foundation, a non-profit organization committed to social transformation, has adopted a grassroots approach to uplift marginalized populations through targeted interventions in education, healthcare, and sustainability. One of its notable initiatives is the tailoring training programme, designed specifically to empower women in rural areas by equipping them with practical skills for economic independence. This programme not only enhances the financial capacity and confidence of women participants but also contributes to the overall well-being of their families and communities. By fostering self-reliance, promoting entrepreneurship, and challenging traditional gender roles, the tailoring training initiative serves as a model for sustainable community development. This paper explores the DHEERA Foundation's approach to women's empowerment through the tailoring programme, examining its impact on individual lives, household dynamics, and the broader socio-economic fabric of rural regions.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of the DHEERA Foundation's Tailoring Training Programme on women's empowerment and community development in rural areas. The research aimed to understand how the programme had contributed to improving the socio-economic status of women by enhancing their financial independence, self-confidence, and overall quality of life. By focusing on the tailoring training, the study explored how this skill development initiative had enabled women to create sustainable livelihoods, increase their income levels, and gain access to employment opportunities in rural communities where economic prospects were limited. Furthermore, the research examined how the programme had fostered personal growth among participants, enabling them to challenge traditional gender norms and take on more active roles within their households and communities.

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design. It described the processes involved in the tailoring training programme, analysed the outcomes on women's empowerment, and examined the broader social and economic impacts on rural communities. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to provide a holistic understanding of the programme's effectiveness.

Study Area

The research focused on rural communities where the DHEERA Foundation had implemented its tailoring training programme. These areas were selected based on their geographical location, the level of participation in the programme, and the availability of program beneficiaries for study. Specific villages and districts were identified through collaboration with the foundation's local coordinators.

Sample Size

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure that the sample represented different sub-groups of women in the community (e.g., age groups, education levels, and marital

status). Based on the number of women enrolled in the programme, a sample size of 100–150 women were targeted for participation in the study. This sample was proportionate to the number of women involved in the programme in each selected village.

As part of this study, a structured questionnaire was developed and administered to assess the impact of the DHEERA Foundation’s tailoring training programme on women’s empowerment and rural community development. The questionnaire served as a key tool for gathering quantitative data directly from women who participated in the programme across various rural areas. It was designed to capture measurable changes in participants’ socio-economic status, levels of self-confidence, decision-making ability, and engagement in income-generating activities. The analysis of questionnaire responses provided valuable insights into how the tailoring training influenced individual empowerment, household dynamics, and community participation. By using Likert scale items, multiple-choice questions, and demographic indicators, the data analysis aimed to reveal patterns and trends that reflect the effectiveness and reach of the programme. This section presents a detailed examination of the questionnaire findings, highlighting both the strengths and areas for improvement in the foundation’s approach to fostering sustainable empowerment and development.

Table No. 1

Has the DHEERA Foundation tailoring programme helped women become more financially independent?

S. No.	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes, significantly	54	51.4
2	Yes, To Some extent	36	34.3
3	No, it has not helped	9	8.6
4	I do not know	6	5.7
Total		105	100.0

The majority of respondents, 51.4% (54 out of 105), feel that the program has significantly contributed to financial independence. This indicates that for over half of the participants, the tailoring program is an effective tool for empowerment, likely providing them with skills and opportunities to generate income and become more self-sufficient. Another 34.3% (36 respondents) think the program has helped "to some extent," which suggests that for a sizable portion of women, while the skills learned are useful, they may not be fully translating into significant financial independence. This could be due to a variety of factors, such as limited access to markets, competition, or other socio-economic barriers that hinder the ability to turn newfound skills into a sustainable livelihood.

Table No. 2
Has the programme improved your decision-making ability in your household or community?

S.No.	Perception	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes, significantly	65	61.9
2	Yes, To some extent	17	16.2
3	No, it has not improved	11	10.5
4	I do not know	12	11.4
Total		105	100.0

The data shows that 61.9% (65 out of 105) of respondents feel that the DHEERA tailoring training program has significantly improved their decision-making ability in their household or community. This suggests that the majority of participants believe the program has had a positive impact, likely by boosting their confidence, financial autonomy, or problem-solving skills, which could enable them to make more informed and effective decisions in both personal and community matters. Additionally, 16.2% (17 respondents) feel that the program has improved their decision-making ability to some extent. This indicates that while the program may not have had a transformative effect for all participants, it has still had a noticeable influence on a substantial portion of women, likely through the development of practical skills and increased self-reliance. Overall, 78.1% of respondents (61.9% + 16.2%) report that the program has had a positive impact on their decision-making abilities, either significantly or to some extent. This indicates that the program is largely perceived as beneficial in fostering greater confidence and decision-making skills.

Table No. 3
Do you believe that this programme has contributed to increasing your social status or respect within your community?

S.No.	Perceptions	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes, significantly	55	52.4
2	Yes, To some extent	34	32.4
3	No, it has not contributed	9	8.6
4	I do not know	7	6.7
Total		105	100.0

The data reveals that 52.4% (55 out of 105) of respondents feel that the DHEERA Foundation tailoring training program has significantly contributed to increasing their social status or respect within their community. This suggests that more than half of the participants perceive

the program as having a strong positive effect on their standing in the community, likely due to the skills learned, increased financial independence, and perhaps greater recognition for their abilities as they contribute economically or socially. A further 32.4% (34 respondents) believe that the program has contributed to their social status or respect to some extent. This shows that a substantial portion of women feel that the training has had a positive, though perhaps less pronounced, impact. They may have gained some recognition or respect due to their new skills, but the change in status might not be as significant or immediate for everyone. Overall, 84.8% of respondents (52.4% + 32.4%) feel that the program has positively impacted their social status or respect, either significantly or to some extent. This indicates that the DHEERA Foundation's tailoring program is widely perceived as beneficial in enhancing the social standing of women.

Table No. 4
Has the programme helped you establish or improve your own tailoring business or source of income?

S.No.	Perceptions	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes, I have started my own business	51	48.6
2	Yes, it has improved my income	36	34.3
3	No, I have not started any business	11	10.5
4	No, I am not earning more from tailoring	7	6.7
Total		105	100.0

The data indicates that 48.6% (51 out of 105) of respondents report that the program has helped them start their own tailoring business. This suggests that nearly half of the participants have been able to leverage the skills gained from the training to establish an independent source of income, marking a significant achievement in terms of entrepreneurship and financial autonomy. Additionally, 34.3% (36 respondents) feel that the program has improved their income, even if they haven't started their own business. This indicates that the program has contributed to enhancing the earning potential of a substantial portion of women, perhaps by enabling them to offer tailoring services, increase their productivity, or access better-paid work opportunities.

Overall, 82.9% of respondents (48.6% + 34.3%) report that the program has positively impacted their income—either by helping them start their own business or improve their earnings. However, 17.2% (10.5% who haven't started a business + 6.7% who haven't earned more) indicate that the program hasn't had a substantial financial impact for them, suggesting that there may be external factors preventing full realization of their potential. These individuals may benefit from additional support, such as mentorship, market access, or financial planning resources, to help turn their newly acquired skills into sustainable income.

Table No. 5
Has your participation in the tailoring programme helped create job opportunities for other women in your community?

S. No.	Perceptions	Frequency	Percent
	Yes, I have employed other women	42	40.0
	Yes, I have referred others for training or work	37	35.2
	No, I have not contributed to job creation	26	24.8
	Total	105	100.0

The data shows that 40% (42 out of 105) of respondents report that their participation in the DHEERA tailoring program has helped create job opportunities for other women in their community by directly employing them. This suggests that a significant number of women have not only gained skills but have also been able to pass on those benefits by providing employment to others, thereby contributing to the economic empowerment of additional women.

A further 35.2% (37 respondents) say that while they haven't directly employed others, they have referred women for training or work, thereby helping expand opportunities for others in their community. This indicates that a majority of participants (75.2% combined with the previous group) are actively involved in fostering job opportunities for other women, either directly through employment or by guiding them toward training or work opportunities.

Overall, 75.2% of respondents (40% who have employed others + 35.2% who have referred others) have played a role in creating or facilitating job opportunities for other women, which demonstrates the broader community impact of the DHEERA tailoring program. However, 24.8% who report no contribution to job creation suggests that there are still areas for improvement, particularly in enabling more participants to create sustainable employment or provide referrals. This could involve offering further support in scaling businesses, improving networking, or strengthening the reach of job creation efforts.

Table No. 6
In your opinion, how does empowering women through skills like tailoring contribute to community development

S. No.	Perceptions	Frequency	Percent
1	It promotes financial stability for families	48	45.7
2	It leads to healthier communities as women can better support their families	36	34.2
3	It fosters a sense of independence and dignity among women	12	11.4

4	It leads to increased community cohesion and collaboration	09	08.5
Total		105	100

The DHEERA Tailoring Training Programme plays a transformative role in empowering women and fostering community development through skill-building in tailoring. Based on the data, the most significant impact perceived by participants is the promotion of financial stability for families, accounting for 45.7% of responses. This suggests that the programme enables women to become economically active, contributing directly to household income and reducing financial dependency. When women earn, they often reinvest in their families—particularly in their children's education, nutrition, and healthcare—creating a ripple effect of stability and upward mobility.

The second most prominent perception, with 34.2%, indicates that the programme contributes to healthier communities. Financial empowerment allows women to better support their families, leading to improved living conditions, access to medical care, and general well-being. Moreover, empowerment through skills like tailoring enhances women's self-esteem and decision-making ability, which positively impacts their roles as caregivers and community members.

While less emphasized, 19.9% of responses (combining both entries for increased community cohesion and collaboration) highlight the social dimension of the programme. When women come together in a shared learning environment, they build networks of support, trust, and cooperation. These connections often extend beyond the training itself, forming the basis for community initiatives, small business collaborations, or cooperatives. This increased interaction strengthens the social fabric of the community and encourages collective problem-solving and resource-sharing.

Overall, the DHEERA Tailoring Training Programme does more than provide a vocational skill—it initiates a cycle of empowerment that touches economic, social, and health-related aspects of community life. It aligns with broader goals of inclusive development by offering women the tools to become self-reliant, respected contributors to their families and neighbourhoods. As women gain confidence and financial independence, their communities' benefit from increased resilience, improved well-being, and stronger social bonds.

Table No. 7
Would you recommend the tailoring training programme to other women in your community?

S. No.	Perceptions	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes, definitely	82	78.1
2	Yes, with some reservations	09	8.6
3	No	14	13.3
	Total	105	100

The data clearly indicates a strong positive perception of the DHEERA Tailoring Training Programme among participants, with 78.1% responding “Yes, definitely” when asked if they would recommend it to other women in their community. This overwhelming majority suggests that the programme is widely viewed as beneficial, effective, and empowering. Such a high level of endorsement reflects satisfaction with the training content, the practical skills gained, and the overall impact on participants’ lives, particularly in terms of financial independence and personal growth. Women who benefit from a programme are more likely to advocate for it, which in turn can help increase community engagement and participation, amplifying the programme’s overall impact.

A smaller portion, 8.6%, indicated they would recommend the programme but with some reservations. This suggests that while these participants recognize the value of the initiative, there may be areas for improvement—perhaps in terms of accessibility, duration, post-training support, or the availability of materials and equipment. Their responses point to the importance of ongoing evaluation and refinement of the programme to ensure it meets diverse needs and expectations.

Meanwhile, 13.3% of participants responded “No,” indicating that they would not recommend the programme. This minority view should not be overlooked, as it may reveal significant barriers or challenges experienced by certain individuals. These could include a lack of follow-up opportunities, limited market access after training, or personal circumstances that affected their ability to benefit fully from the programme. Understanding their concerns is crucial for identifying gaps and making the initiative more inclusive and effective.

Key Findings

Based on the analysis of the data collected from 105 participants in the DHEERA Foundation Tailoring Training Programme, several key findings emerge that reflect the programme’s significant impact on individual empowerment and broader community development:

- A majority of respondents (51.4%) stated that the programme significantly helped them become more financially independent, while an additional 34.3% said it helped to some extent.
- Nearly 83% of participants reported either starting their own business or improving their income as a result of the training. This highlights the programme's role in creating economic opportunities and promoting self-reliance among women.
- Above 62% of participants felt the programme had significantly improved their decision-making abilities within the household or community, with an additional 16.2% reporting moderate improvement.
- This suggests that the training not only provides vocational skills but also enhances confidence, autonomy, and leadership qualities, which are essential for meaningful empowerment.
- Over 85% of women reported a positive change in their social status or respect within the community due to their participation in the programme.
- This improvement can be attributed to increased economic contribution, visibility, and skills, indicating that the programme helps challenge traditional gender roles and promotes social recognition.
- Nearly 75% of respondents said they either employed other women or referred them for training/work, showcasing a ripple effect where beneficiaries of the programme become agents of change in their communities.
- This highlights the programme's potential to drive peer-to-peer empowerment and strengthen local economic ecosystems.
- Above 46 % of participants said the programme promotes financial stability for families, while 34 % noted it leads to healthier communities.
- Though fewer in number, 19.9% emphasized its role in fostering community cohesion, indicating that the programme facilitates not just economic benefits but also social integration and collaboration.
- A strong 78 % of respondents would definitely recommend the programme, indicating a high level of satisfaction and perceived value.
- While 9% would recommend it with some reservations and 13 % would not recommend it, these responses suggest that there are areas for improvement, especially in ensuring inclusivity, sustained support, and post-training opportunities.

Conclusion

The findings from the DHEERA Foundation Tailoring Training Programme highlight the multifaceted impact of skills-based empowerment initiatives for women. The programme has not only provided vocational training but has served as a powerful tool for transformational change in participants' lives and their communities.

A substantial majority of women have experienced increased financial independence, improved decision-making abilities, greater social respect, and enhanced capacity to generate income either through entrepreneurship or improved employability. Moreover, many participants have become catalysts for change, contributing to job creation by employing or referring other women, which reflects the programme's scalability and sustainability through community-driven support. Beyond individual empowerment, the programme has had a profound influence on community development. By equipping women with marketable skills, it has indirectly fostered family stability, better health outcomes, and stronger community ties. The training sessions likely served as informal spaces for social interaction, mutual support, and collaborative learning—elements that are critical in building resilient and cohesive communities.

The overwhelmingly positive response—reflected in the 78.1% who would "definitely" recommend the programme—underscores its credibility and effectiveness. However, the presence of reservations and dissent from a small portion of participants points to gaps in implementation, such as limited access to follow-up resources, uneven income opportunities, or socio-economic constraints that hinder some women from fully utilizing their new skills.

Recommendations:

To strengthen the program further, the DHEERA Foundation may consider providing additional support, such as business development training, access to markets, or financial planning resources, to help ensure that participants can fully benefit from the skills they acquire. More regular follow-ups, mentoring, and perhaps a clearer framework for measuring success could also help address the concerns of those who feel the program has not been helpful or are unsure of its impact.

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