

Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP): A Programme for Economic Empowerment of women in India

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Abstract: *The goal of economic empowerment of women has there been in the planning agenda of Government of India since years. Although since early 80s different capacity building and income generation schemes have been implemented in India, most of them are of short duration. Support to Training and Employment Programme(STEP) is one such scheme that trains women and makes them eligible to be employed or for self-employment and is being continued for a long time. This paper aims at finding out if government has given enough importance to capacity building schemes like STEP amidst a plethora of women centric schemes addressing different issues. It has been found that government has been prioritising the motherhood schemes and in that process capacity building ones get neglected. This study has evaluated the impact of STEP on beneficiary women's economic empowerment. It has estimated impact of STEP on five outcomes, those are beneficiaries' economic empowerment indicators of access to income, access to decision making, access to bank account and on monthly income of beneficiaries and bank deposits of beneficiaries. Study has used the difference-in –difference method and has collected primary data from the villages of Golaghat and Kamrup (r) districts of Assam, a north-eastern state of India. Study has found significant impact of STEP on economic empowerment of women.*

Key Words: *Economic Empowerment of Women, Women Centric Schemes, Support to Training and Employment Programme, Impact Evaluation, Difference- in- Difference Method*

1. Introduction

If we see the Indian history of implementation of women capacity building schemes, a long list will be found, although most of them are short-lived. It is important to note that the effort of making women economically independent had started long ago in the early 80s. Schemes of Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Swawlamban were started long back in 1982-83. DWCRA aimed at improving the socio-economic status of the poor women in rural areas through group creation among them to organize a platform for income-generating activities on the self-sustaining basis. Swawlamban was introduced to train women in both traditional and non-traditional trades like computer programming, medical transcription, electronics, watch assembling, radio and television repairs, garment making, handloom weaving, secretarial practice, community health worker, embroidery etc. however, DWCRA merged into general employment generation scheme Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY) with IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme), TRYSEM (Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment) from April 1999. On the other hand, in 2006, Swawlamban, was transferred to the state authorities for the better implementation and monitoring of the scheme. But, the opposite happened and the scheme lost its pace. Swa-Shakti, which was introduced in 1988 aiming at skill-development of women, discontinued in 2005. In 1993, MSY was implemented to create the saving habit among women and then discontinued around 5 years of operation. In 1995, Indira Mahila Yojana was introduced where the scheme's objectives directly aimed at overall empowerment of women. It not only dealt in building economic strength through micro-level income-generating activities but also concentrated on awareness creation, disseminating information and knowledge to bring about attitudinal change. In 2001, Swayamsidha scheme took the place of IMY. Both IMY and Swayamsidha aimed at the establishment of Self Help Groups (SHGs). In 2008, Swayamsidha was discontinued. In India, only two capacity building schemes for women namely Support to Training and

Employment Programme for Women (STEP) and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) are being operational for a long time. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) was launched in 1986-87 and is being continued till now under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. STEP mobilizes women in small viable groups and provides training, facilitates credit and other inputs to make them capable of taking up income generation activities on their own or to get wage employment in some sectors. The scheme covers the sectors of agriculture, small animal husbandry, dairying and fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, khadi and village industries and sericulture, social forestry, wasteland development and some other locally appropriate sectors as recommended by the state governments. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) was introduced by Government of India in March 1993 as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Women & Child Development and is being continued in some states of India. It is a microcredit organization of the government to give micro-loans without collateral to poor women in the unorganized sector for setting up micro-enterprises, housing etc. "Empowerment refers broadly to the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life" (Narayan, 2002:14). Surrounding gender unequal institutional arrangements inflict powerlessness and voicelessness upon women. Empowerment denotes being in power from a state of powerlessness. Hence, it requires control over both resources and decisions by women. From the very beginning, the term 'women empowerment' has encompassed an economic dimension. However, the term 'economic empowerment' independently has come of late. In 2006, the World Bank was among the first to offer an explicit definition of the economic element of empowerment using the term 'economic empowerment' (Kabeer, 2012; Loveday, 2015). World Bank (2006) in its 'Gender equality as smart economics: A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan (2007-2010)' mentions 'economic empowerment' is about making markets work for women (at the policy level) and empowering women to compete in markets (at the agency level). "Economic empowerment of women comprises economic opportunities (e.g. expanding employment and entrepreneurship, promoting decent and productive work, improving access to finance); legal status and rights (e.g. improving women's property, inheritance and legal rights); and voice, inclusion and participation in decision-making (e.g. developing mechanisms to enhance women's involvement in decision-making bodies)" (UNDP, 2008: 9). If we consider women centric schemes as the means to women empowerment, those must provide women the scope to expand their capabilities in terms of choices and assets. In India, the issue of up gradation of women always gets its place in the planning agenda of Government be it the first five-year plan or the present NITI Aayog's annual plan. However, the perspective has been changed over time. The first to fifth five-year plans treated the development of women as a subject of 'welfare'. In 1953, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was established to take up welfare related activities for women. There occurred a shift in the approach from 'women welfare' to 'women development' during the Sixth Plan (1980-85) and Seventh Plan (1985-90) continued this developmental approach with the aim of raising the economic and social status of women. In 1985, the Department of Women and Child Development was set up as a branch of Ministry of Human Resource Development to give proper attention to the issues of women and children. However, with effect from 30th January, 2006, the Department was upgraded to a Ministry. Eighth Plan (1992-97) marked a shift in the approach again from 'development' to 'empowerment' of women and looked women as equal partners and participants in the development process. (GOI, Planning Commission, 2001). The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) made a major commitment to 'Empowering women as the Agents of Socio-Economic Change and Development' and Government declared the year 2001 as the Women's Empowerment Year. National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) was adopted in this plan. While, from Tenth Plan (2002-2007) onwards, different facets of women's empowerment i.e. social empowerment, economic empowerment, and political empowerment was aimed to treat separately to bring about empowerment of women in real sense. So, objective wise, Government always aims for women empowerment especially after eighth plan, but it would be interesting to analyse, to what extent, the women centric schemes have actually been designed to address

empowerment. This paper aims to evaluate the impact of the long lasting scheme of STEP on economic empowerment of women.

2. Objectives

- 1) To throw a light in to the fund extension for the implementation of STEP from the Central Government of India in comparison to other schemes.
- 2) To evaluate the impact of STEP on economic empowerment of women.

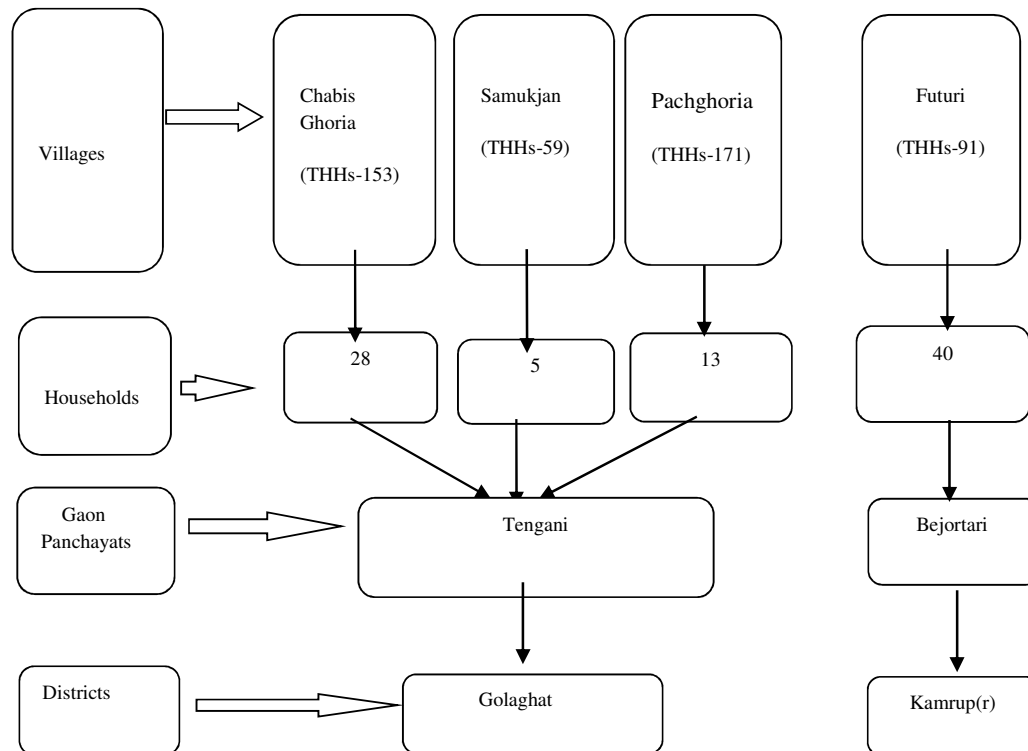
3. Methodology

In order to study the first objective of the paper, secondary data regarding fund extension over the years available at <http://indiastat.com> have been used and have been interpreted through percentage bar diagrams. In order to estimate the impact of STEP on economic empowerment of women, primary data have been collected from STEP implemented areas of Assam, a north-eastern state of India. The duration of survey was July 2015 to February 2016.

A. Sample Design

In the study, two implementing agencies of STEP in Assam namely Golaghat Nirman Mahila Gut of the Golaghat district and Man and Wild NGO of Futuri village of Kamrup(r) district have been selected purposively for collecting the data on the implementation of STEP. Golaghat Nirman Mahila Gut implemented a goatery project in the areas of Tengani Gaon Panchayat, Golaghat District in 2011-2012 for two years and the other Man and Wild NGO implemented a Handloom project in the village of Futuri in 2013-14, which was operational at the time of data collection. First, sample villages were selected purposively based on the implementation of STEP. Three villages of Golaghat district viz. Chabis Ghoria, Samukjan and Pachgharia were selected. Under the goatery project undertaken by Golaghat Nirman Mahila Gut under STEP, cash and training were provided to some women in those villages under Tengani Gaon Panchayat for purchasing goat and to start commercial goat farming. Similarly, Man and Wild organisation provided training to some women of Futuri village in Kamrup(r) under a handloom project and it channelized the marketing of the handloom products made by those beneficiary women. Therefore, the village of Futuri under Bejortari Gaon Panchayat of Rampur Block, Kamrup(r) district was selected for sample survey. Total 46 sample households from three villages of Golaghat and 40 sample households from Futuri village were selected purposively keeping in mind that the sample includes both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of STEP.

B. Sampling Design Flow Chart



C. Sample Respondents

All women of the age (18-65) are being considered as respondents in the study. This age range is selected on the basis of the two criteria:

(a) Voting right is given at 18 years of age, so any woman employed in that age is being assumed voluntarily employed in the study.

(b) 65 years is the maximum age for the working women in the organised sector of employment and hence able bodied women up to the age of 65 is being assumed to be capable of working in the study.

D. Method

The double difference or difference in difference method is being carried out in the present study to measure the impact of STEP on women's economic empowerment indicators (Women's Access to Income, Women's Access to Decision Making and Women's Access to Bank Account), Women's monthly income and Amount of deposits in bank account.

Difference in Difference is a popular approach among quasi experimental designs. Difference-in-differences (DID) also known as the 'double difference' method. It compares the changes in outcome over time between 'treatment group' (i.e. beneficiaries of the policy) and 'control group' (non-beneficiaries of the policy) to estimate impact of a policy change. DID gives a stronger impact estimate than the models estimating single difference, which only compare the difference in outcomes between treatment and control groups after the intervention. Application of DID method removes the difference in the outcome between treatment and control groups at the baseline (White and Sabarwal, 2014). DID estimation use four data points to evaluate the impact of a policy change or a treatment on the treated population. The structure of the experiment needs that the treatment group and

control group should have similar characteristics. The counterfactual (unobserved scenario) is that had the treated group not received treatment, its mean value would be in the same distance from the control group in the second period as in the base line.

E. Functional Form of Difference in Difference Model

The difference in difference (or "double difference") estimator is defined as the difference in average outcome in the treatment group before and after treatment minus the difference in average outcome in the control group before and after treatment: it is literally a "difference of differences" (Albouy, 2005).

The model is expressed as follows:

Double Difference (DD) =

$$E(Y^{T_1} - Y^{T_0} | T_1=1) - E(Y^{C_1} - Y^{C_0} | T_1=0) \text{ ----- (1)}$$

Where Y^{T_1} and Y^{C_1} indicate the outcomes for the treatment group and control group respectively at period $t=0,1$ where the time period $t=0$ refers the period before the implementation of the programme and $t=1$ refers the period after the implementation of the programme.

$T_1 = 1$ indicates the presence of the program at time $t = 1$ and $T_1 = 0$ indicates the absence of the program.

The first term of the equation (5.10) represents the average difference between before and after for the treatment group and it can be shown by

$$E(Y^{T_1} - Y^{T_0} | T_1=1) = \frac{1}{N_T} \sum_{i \in T} (Y_{i1} - Y_{i0}) = \overline{y_{T1}} - \overline{y_{T0}} \text{ (2)}$$

Similarly, for control group it can be shown by-

$$E(Y^{C_1} - Y^{C_0} | T_1=0) = \frac{1}{N_C} \sum_{j \in C} (Y_{j1} - Y_{j0}) = \overline{y_{C1}} - \overline{y_{C0}} \text{ (3)}$$

Substituting the values of (2) and (3) in equation (1), the impact of the programme can be represented as

$$\text{Impact} = (\overline{y_{T1}} - \overline{y_{T0}}) - (\overline{y_{C1}} - \overline{y_{C0}}) \text{ (4)}$$

The same results can be obtained by following regression framework also. The regression is given by

$$y_i = a + b\delta_i + cT_i + d\delta_i T_i + \varepsilon \text{ (5)}$$

Where, a = constant term;

δ = The object under treatment (to measure the average differences between treatment group and control group in base line) $\delta_i=0$ if the observation is from the control group (i.e. not receiving treatment) and $\delta_i=1$ if it is from the treatment group (i.e. receiving treatment).

T = Time; $T_i=0$ if the observation belongs to time $t=0$, that is before the implementation of the program and $T_i=1$ if the observation belongs to time $t=1$, that is, after the implementation of the program.

δT =The Double Difference or Impact of the Programme (i.e. mean difference between two time periods for treatment group – mean difference between two time periods for control group)

The interpretation of regression equation in terms of impact of the programme can be checked by following ways:

Observation belongs to	δ	T	y_i
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Control group before the programme	0	0	$\overline{y_{C0}} = a$
Control group after the programme	0	1	$\overline{y_{C1}} = a + c$
Treatment group before the programme	1	0	$\overline{y_{T0}} = a + b$
Treatment group after the programme	1	1	$\overline{y_{T1}} = a + b + c + d$

Now, using equation (4),

$$\text{Impact of the program} = [(a + b + c + d) - (a + b)] - [(a + c) - a] = d$$

In the present study, the data is being collected for two points of time from the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of STEP. One point of time is the present data collecting time and the other is five years before point of time. The present time period refers to after the implementation of STEP, where the five years before time period refers to the implementation of STEP.

The null hypothesis under the test is that there is no impact of STEP on the economic empowerment Indicators. The economic empowerment indicators or the outcome variables (WAI, WADM and WABA) in the study are binary variables, the model (5) is a linear probability model in the study. The rationale behind the use of linear probability model instead of nonlinear models is that DID coefficient will not be readily interpretable for interaction terms in nonlinear models (Ai and Norton, 2013).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Central Government's Fund extension to STEP: Is it enough?

The fund extensions for the implementation of STEP along with six other schemes over five years' period (2010-15) have been shown in figure 1. There other six schemes are Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls - SABLA, Mahila Samakhya Scheme (MSS) and SWADHAR. ICDS, JSY and PMMVY have addressed women as mothers. The scheme of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was launched on 2nd October 1975 in India and is being continued till now under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Although, this scheme primarily aims at strengthening health and education of children below 6 years, it also stresses on the health of pregnant women and lactating mothers providing nutritious food, education, free health check-ups and health education to mothers. Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) was introduced in April 2005 and is still operational. It offers cash assistance, free delivery except in complicated cases and provides pre and post-delivery care to the beneficiaries. It aims at reducing maternal and neonatal mortality with the provision of institutional delivery among poor pregnant women. Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) was introduced in 2010 under the Ministry of Women and Child Development and now this scheme is known as Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY). Under PMMVY, conditional cash transfer is made to pregnant and lactating mothers in order to improve their health and nutritional status. This scheme indirectly provides relief to women in case of their compulsion to work right up to the last stage of pregnancy and resumption of work soon after childbirth facilitating compensation of wage loss as maternity benefit. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls - SABLA

is introduced by Ministry of Women and Child Development on 1st April 2012 to address the issues of adolescent girls. SABLA aims at improvement of the nutritional and health status, up gradation of home skills, life skills, and vocational skills of adolescent girls of 11 to 18 years. Mahila Samakhya Scheme (MSS) was introduced in 1988 by Ministry of Human Resource Development to pursue the objectives of the National Policy on Education, 1986. It aims at educating women and organizing them in Sanghas. MS aims at capacity building among women through awareness generation by disseminating information regarding their rights and development-related entitlements. Swadhar is a scheme aimed for rescue and rehabilitation of women. Ministry of Women and Child Development introduced Swadhar in 2001-2002. This scheme offers basic needs of shelter, food, clothing and care to marginalized women and girls living in difficult circumstances without any social and economic support. It facilitates their rehabilitation through education, awareness, skill up gradation, personality development training etc.

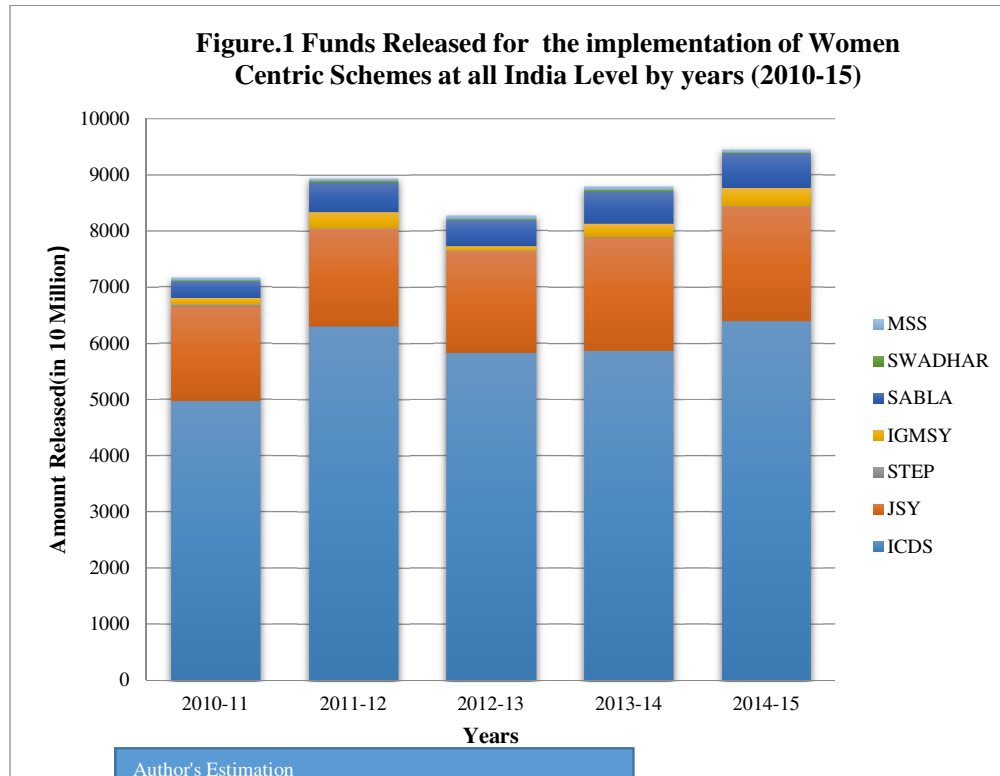
Table 1. Amount of funds released for the implementation of women-centric schemes in all India during (2010-15)

Name of the Schemes	YEARS(Amount in billions)				
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
ICDS	49.6871	63.02508	58.21766	58.66686	63.9078
JSY	16.8248	17.41	18.0967	20.1897	20.3981
STEP	0.24317	0.083314	0.08833	0.070185	0.040022
IGMSY (PMMVY)	1.17959	2.93839	0.825783	2.320584	3.303171
SABLA	2.96734	5.17813	4.56599	5.753644	6.102136
SWADHAR	0.228403	0.333	0.286005	0.298731	0.156334
MSS	0.4573	0.4973	0.5973	0.5973	0.5975

Source: Collected from <http://indiastat.com>

It is evident from table 1, where the fund extension for the implementation of ICDS scheme ranges from 49 billion to 63 billion during each of the five years during 2010-2015, the same for JSY ranges from 16 to 20 billion. On the other hand, the fund extensions for the implementation of STEP and MSS have not touched the amount of 1 billion in any of the years. In case of STEP, the amount of fund release in all India is below 100 million in the four years from 2011-2015.

It is evident from Fig.1 that ICDS is the scheme against which the largest amount of funds has flowed from the Government of India over the five years (2010-15) followed by JSY. Both the schemes are directed towards the health of mothers. After ICDS and JSY, SABLA gets the third place in terms of fund extension. The fund release for IGMSY (PMMVY) is also visible for all the years although the amount is less in comparison to the schemes of ICDS, JSY and SABLA. On the other hand, the funds release for the schemes of STEP, MSS and SWADHAR are negligible in comparison to the motherhood schemes.



This scenario implies that Government of India has been prioritizing reproductive health of women, while the schemes addressing income generation and education have been functioning with limited funds.

B. Impact of STEP on Economic Empowerment of Women:

The study has estimated the impact of STEP on five dependent variables. Three are binary variables with yes/no options i.e. women's access to income, women's access to decision making regarding household purchases and women's access to bank account. These three have been taken as economic empowerment indicators in the study. The other two dependent variables are monthly income and amount of bank deposit.

Table. 2 Impact of STEP on WAI, MINC (Monthly Income), WADM, WABA, BD (Bank Deposit) (Difference in Difference Model Results)

y_i	a	b	c	d	Adjusted R-Square
WAI	.2461538***	.1824176 **	.1477855*	.305996 **	0.1754
MINC	261.2308*	427.341	442.1783**	2442.78 ***	0.4461
WADM	.2923077***	-0.0066	0.11678	.3916201***	0.1196
WABA	.2461538***	-0.0747	.5114219 ***	.2289142 **	0.3519
BD	635.385	-303.96	1099.464**	-369.1	0.0131

Source: Author's Estimation from Field Survey Data

Note: *, ** and * denotes significant levels at 1%, 5% and 10% respectively**

C. Impact of STEP on WAI

The result of WAI estimates that Adjusted R^2 is 0.1754 indicating that 17.5% of the variations are explained by the explanatory variables. The intercept term indicates the probability of having access to income for the women from the control group. b shows that there has significant difference of 18.24% between the probabilities of having access to income between the women from target group and control group in the base period at 5% level of significance. c shows that there occurs a significant increase of 14.7% in the probability of having access to income is realised over the time period among the control group women at 10% level of significance. The impact of STEP on the probability of having access to income is found as significant at 5% level of significance. d shows that STEP alone has increased the probability of having access to income by 30.59% in the treatment group.

D. Impact of STEP on Monthly Income

The result shows the adjusted R^2 is 0.4461 indicating that 44.6% of the variations are explained by the explanatory variables. The intercept term indicates the mean monthly income of the women from the control group. It is evident that there is no significant difference between the monthly incomes of the women from the treatment group and control group in the period before the programme implementation as b is insignificant. It is found that c is significant at 5% level of significance. It means that a significant increase of monthly income of Rs. 442.18 is being realised over time among the control group women. The impact of STEP (d) on monthly income is significantly positive at 1% level of significance. It has been observed that STEP alone has increased the monthly income of treatment group women by Rs. 2442.78.

E. Impact of STEP on WADM

The result of WADM estimates that adjusted R^2 is 0.1196 indicating that 11.96% of the variations are explained by the explanatory variables. It is observed that there is no significant difference between the probabilities of having access to decision making in the base period as b is insignificant. Similarly, there has not occurred any significant increase in the probability of having access to decision making over time among the control group women. The impact of STEP on the probability of having access to decision making is found significantly positive at 1% level of significance. d shows that STEP alone has increased the probability of having access to decision making by 39.16% in the treatment group.

F. Impact of STEP on WABA

The estimation of WABA shows that adjusted R^2 is 0.3519 indicating that 35.19% of the variations are explained by the explanatory variables. It is observed that there is no significant difference between the probabilities of having access to bank account in the base period of treatment group and control group as b is insignificant. c shows that a significant increase of 51.14% in the probability of having access to bank account is being realised over time among the control group women at 1% level of significance. d shows that STEP alone has increased the probability of having access to bank account by 22.89% in the treatment group at the 5% level of significance.

G. Impact of STEP on Amount of Bank Deposit

The result of BD shows that adjusted R^2 is 0.0131, which indicates very weak fit. The intercept term indicates the average amount of bank deposits of the women from the control group. It is evident that there has no significant difference between the amount of bank deposits of the women from the control group and treatment group in the period before the programme implementation as b is insignificant. It is observed that c is significant at 5% level of significance. It means that a significant increase in the average of bank deposits by Rs. 1099.46 is realised over time among the control group women. The impact of STEP (d) on bank deposit amount is insignificant.

Thus, it has been revealed that except the amount of bank deposits in case of all other variables i.e. access to income, monthly income, access to decision making and access to bank account, STEP has shown positive impacts.

5. Conclusion

This paper reaches at two conclusions; first, STEP has been proved effective one to bring about economic empowerment of women, secondly, Government of India spends a meagre amount for such capacity building schemes of STEP, MSS. The need is to give importance to the capacity building schemes by government apart from motherhood schemes. We cannot expect to attain women empowerment only addressing reproductive health of a section of women, neglecting the needs of the rest. It is the negligence on the part of authority that can be blamed for the frequent discontinuities of capacity building and income generation schemes. Therefore, government should devote a bigger amount for the implementation of STEP and other such capacity building schemes.

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