Abstract

Empowerment of the poor women needs a multi-dimensional approach to assimilate them into the unique social, political, and economic environment of the rural society of Bangladesh. While the microfinance interventions have set solid footprints by providing the economic gains that are well-recognized, this study was conducted to explore how much these have impacted on empowering the poor women of Bangladesh. It has been conducted by identifying the contributions and outreach of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Microfinance Institutions (MFI) in this regard. Non-participant observation, data and findings of previously conducted researches and case studies were carefully examined to draw inferences during the study. Women empowerment has diverse factors that need to be understood and carefully considered, in terms of social, cultural, economic and sometimes political imperatives. Conducting a focused field study was not possible, so the researcher thoroughly utilized the relevant secondary data which remains a constraint of the study. Nevertheless, the findings of the study help to infer that microfinance is to be pursued with long-term goals to effectively bring visible social mobility and self-esteem of the poor women of Bangladesh. It however, did not reveal significant evidence that these interventions had pronounced impact to eradicate the existing social/cultural disparities like, gender discrimination, participative decision-making, and feebleness of the women in the wake of a male-dominant rural society. Therefore, the relationship between the effects of microfinance and women empowerment is less contributory than what is generally perceived. The study recommends that a holistic microfinance intervention instead of a minimalist engagement with extensive exercise of educational and skill-training opportunities is warranted to bring more productive results from these noble initiatives. It would necessitate policy modifications to consider the poor women are not necessarily entrepreneurs, but active participants.