

Women Farmers Empowerment through Microfinance Services: The Case of East Shoa of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Poverty reduction is the most prevalent national issue that the government and people of Ethiopia are determined fighting against it. Many efforts have been made to reduce the level of poverty in the country. As part of this effort, microfinance was introduced with the objective of providing microfinance services to poor, specifically targeting women. This study was conducted with objectives of the study was to assess the empowerment women members in the study area and to identify factors affecting women empowerment through microfinance services. Primary and secondary data were collected from 160 women members and non members of microfinance users. The data were analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics, ordered logit econometric model and presentation of group discussion results and case stories. Empowerment index was prepared from important indicators to assess the empowerment status of the sampled respondents. Ordered logit model was also used to assess factors affecting women empowerment through microfinance in the study area. The five empowerment categories differed at less than one percent level in most of the hypothesized variables. The explanatory variables are marital status, level of formal education, extension participation, and years of experience in income generation, years of membership in MFI, contact with development agent, cumulative amount of loan, distance from district town, achievement motivation and level of aspiration. A total of twelve variables were fitted into the model. Out of them, seven variables are found to have influence on women empowerment. Accordingly, years of experience in income generation, years of membership in Micro finance institution and contact with development agent are found to have positive influence on women empowerment. On the other hand, age, marital status, distance from the nearest market and distance from the district town are found to have negative influence on women empowerment.

Keywords: Empowerment, Micro finance institution, poverty reduction, Women

Introduction

Microfinance services has been and increasingly become a popular intervention against poverty in developing countries, generally targeting poor women. It has been an effective vehicle for women's empowerment (Leach & Sitaram, 2002) The argument behind Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) targeting women is that, women are good credit risk, are less likely to misuse the loan, and are more likely to share the benefits with others in their household, especially their children (Garikipati, 2008; Swain & Wallentin, 2009). Furthermore, it is argued that women's increasing role in the household economy will lead to their empowerment (Hunt & Kasynathan, 2002). Empowerment of women is one of the most important issues in Ethiopia. It is viewed as a process in which women challenging the existing institutions to effectively improve their well being and of their children. Traditionally women have been marginalized and subjected under the control of men. About 70 percent of world's poor are women (Khan & Noreen, 2012) and about 50 percent of women in Ethiopia live in absolute poverty. They have no access to credit and other financial services. Due to their low education level, their knowledge and skills on how to manage their work is generally low. Furthermore, traditionally the position of women in Ethiopia has been low compared to men. Women were not expected to influence the decision making processes from domestic level to the national level. In the family level, attitudes which consider men as heads of households still exists, which limit women voices from influencing allocation of domestic resources. In additional women's legal and human rights are constrained by inadequate legal literacy among women. Strategies to address poverty and problems among women have been linked to women empowerment. Many poverty reduction programs specifically targeting women have a credit component, which has been extensively promoted as a way of alleviating poverty and empowering women (Wrigley Asante, 2011). This is due to the fact that access to the banks is still a major It is widely assumed that microfinance have a positive impact on women's livelihood in leading to higher income that help women to better perform their reproductive role as brokers of the health, nutritional, and educational status of other household members; increasing women's employment in micro enterprises and in improving the productivity of women's income generating activities; and enhancing their self confidence and selfesteem, and status within the family as independent producers and providers of valuable cash resources to the household economy (ILO, 1998). However, some studies have also detected negative impact on women's income and employment such as increased workloads and higher social pressure to ensure loan repayment Also many people believe that MFIs are extorting money from poor women through very high interest rates just like the money lenders, and also lead to many women running away from

their homes and villages after failure of repayment of loan installment avoiding their properties to be taken by MFIs. Therefore, this study investigate the relationship between women participation in microfinance services and how their empowered by using the combination of large quantitative and qualitative data from three selected regions of Ethiopia .

Objectives

- to assess the empowerment women members in the study area
- to identify factors affecting women empowerment through microfinance services

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Description of the Study Area

The study district Dugda district is located in East Showa Zone of Oromia Regional State Southern Ethiopia, 130 Km away from the capital Addis Ababa. The total area the district is about 923.68 km² with altitude of 1600-2020 masl. The main livelihoods of the population are Agriculture typically mixed crop and livestock production system. Teff, maize, wheat, haricot bean, barley, and sorghum are the main crops. Cattle, sheep, goats and poultry are the main farm animals. The average annual Temperature varies b/n of 25°C in different months. Rainfall ranges between 700-800 mm per year. The district has a total population of 164,393. About 84,584(51%) and 79,808 (49%) of the district’s population are males and females respectively.

Sampling Techniques

Stratified sampling procedure was employed to draw samples from the study area. The district Dugda has 36 villages to conduct the study; the 21 villages were purposively selected based on the availability of microfinance service. At second stage, four villages that are, two from far and two from near to the district’s capital, were purposively selected. The farthest village from the capital of the district is at a distance of 40km for Kelo Kabite and Menjikso Weji Village and the most nearest village is at 1 km for Oda Bokota village. Therefore, these villages were stratified in to far where the distance range is within 21-40 kms and near where the distance ranges from 1-20km. Among the villages of the two strata given above, far and near strata, four villages with maximum number of MFI women members were selected. Of the far stratum, *Argo Gedilala* village at distance of 35 from District capital with 80 women members and *B/G Sabole* at a distance of 22km from District capital with a total of 49 women members were selected purposively. Of the near stratum, *Mukiye Leman* village which is at distance of 14km having 74 women members and *Welda Mekdela* at a distance of 15km from District capital with 67 women members were again selected purposively. Using probability proportional sampling (PPS), the proposed 160 sample size from which the number of MFI members sample respondent is 80 were calculated to allocate among the four selected villages.

Table 1: Summary of MFI members and non members sample respondents calculated from PPS in the selected villages

Village Name	MFI members	MFI non members	Total
Mukiye Leman	22	22	44
Welda Mekdela	20	20	40
Argo Gedilala	24	24	48
B/ Guda Sabole	14	14	28
Total	80	80	160

Source: own survey

Data Types, Sources and Methods of Data Collection

Primary and secondary data were collected for the research. The primary data collected were both qualitative and quantitative. Focus group discussions were conducted both with purposively selected control and treatment groups. Key informant interviews were also used to triangulate findings and to find out additional information. Interview schedule was prepared and pretested. It was then pre-tested on ten purposively selected non-sample respondents and fine-tuned based on the pre-test feedback. The enumerators were, highly experienced women who are better educated, properly knowing the subject matter, speak the language of the area and know the culture of the people. However, they were properly trained by the researcher before commencing the survey on the research. The Case studies, key informant interviews and group discussions were facilitated by the researcher.

Data Analysis

To achieve objective one, that is, “to assess the empowerment women members in the study area”, the data were analyzed with the help of empowerment index which was calculated from indicators of women empowerment through microfinance. To achieve the second objective, “to identify factors affecting women empowerment through microfinance services”, was analyzed by using ordered logit model.

Ordered logit

Sometimes response categories are ordered but do not form an interval scale. There is a clear ranking among the categories, but the difference among adjacent categories cannot be treated as the same. Responses like these with

ordered categories cannot be easily modeled with classical regression. Ordinal logit and probit models have been widely used for analyzing such data (Liao, 1994). Some polychotomous dependent variables are inherently ordered. Although the outcome is discrete, the multinomial logit or probit models would fail to account for the ordinal nature of the dependent variable (Greene, 2000). The ordered probit and logit models have come into fairly wide use as a frame-work for analyzing such responses (Zavoina and MacElvey, 1975). Hence, ordered logit model was used to assess factors affecting women empowerment having five distinct categories. That is, very low, low, medium, high and very high empowerment categories.

Model specification

Following Greene (2000) and Liao (1994) the functional form of ordered logit model is specified as follows:

$$y^* = \sum_{k=1}^k \beta_k \chi_k + \varepsilon. \quad (1)$$

y^* is unobserved and thus can be thought of as the underlying tendency of an observed phenomenon.

ε = we assume it follows a certain symmetric distribution with zero mean such as normal or logistic distribution.

What we do observe is

$$\begin{aligned} y &= 1 \text{ if } y^* \leq \mu_1 \\ y &= 2 \text{ if } \mu_1 < y^* \leq \mu_2 \\ y &= 3 \text{ if } \mu_2 < y^* \leq \mu_3 \\ y &= j \text{ if } \mu_{j-1} < y^* \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

Where y is observed in j number of ordered categories, μ are unknown threshold parameters separating the adjacent categories to be estimated with β s.

The general form for the probability that the observed y falls into category j and the μ s and the β s are to be estimated with an ordinal logit model is

$$\text{Prob}(y = j) = 1 - L\left(\mu_{j-1} - \sum_{k=1}^k \beta_k \chi_k\right) \quad (3)$$

Where $L(\cdot)$ represents cumulative logistic distribution

Marginal effects on the probabilities of each empowerment status will be calculated by

$$\frac{\partial \text{Prob}(Y = j)}{\partial X_k} = \left[f\left(\mu_{j-1} - \sum_{k=1}^k \beta_k \chi_k\right) - f\left(\mu_j - \sum_{k=1}^k \beta_k \chi_k\right) \right] \beta_k \quad (4)$$

Where $f(\cdot)$ represents the probability density function

To achieve objective three, that is, “to assess the savings and loan use patterns of Microfinance institutions communities’ women members in study area”, the data collected were analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics. That is, frequency, mean, standard deviation, percentages, tabulations, actual presentation of women’s cases and summarizing group discussion findings.

Definition of Variables and Working Hypothesis

The dependent variable: the dependent variable is empowerment. For the purpose of this study, the definition of women empowerment is operationalized as *the expansion of economic activities and assets of women to participate in, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives*. Consequently, the dependent variable empowerment is measured by empowerment index calculated from selected indicators of women empowerment through microfinance identified from review of literature. Moreover, the sampled respondents are classified into five empowerment categories as very low, low, medium, high and very high based on the scores of indexes. Therefore, this makes the dependent variable of an ordinal nature. The indicators with their operational definition are discussed as follows.

1. **Ownership of assets** refers to ownership of two categories of assets (cash asset and physical assets) registered in the name of the sampled women. The physical asset comprises nine basic assets selected for the purpose of this study. It was measured in terms of money considering the current value (in birr) of each item that a woman possesses .
2. **Participation in household decision-making** refers to the extent of sampled women’s ability to participate in formulating and executing decisions regarding domestic, financial, child-welfare, reproductive health and farming matters. Fifteen items were analyzed and a five-point scale was used to measure women’s participation in household decision making. That is, 0 for ‘no participation or husband only decides’, 1 for ‘low participation or husband mostly decides’, 2 for ‘equal participation’ and 3 for ‘high participation or the woman mostly decides’ and 4 for ‘full participation or the woman only decides’.
3. **Control over resources** refers to the sampled women’s power to use and/or get benefits from 12

selected important resources with the power to exclude others . It was computed using a five-point scale. That is, 0 for 'no control', 1 for 'little control/husband controls most', 2 for 'equal control', 3 for 'most control' and 4 for 'full control'.

4. **Bargaining power** refers to the sampled woman's ability to convince others (including her husband). It was computed using a four-point scale where values were assigned as 0 for 'no time', 2 for 'some times' 4 for 'most times' and 6 for 'always'. Then the total score obtained by the sampled respondent was divided by two when the woman is married. When the respondent was single, only her ability to convince others (i.e. excluding husband) is considered.
5. **Ownership of income generating activity** refers to ownership and control of on-farm and/or non-farm income generating activities and its benefit(s) by the sampled respondent. Hence, value 1 was given if the woman has her own income generating activity and 0 otherwise.
6. **Self-esteem** refers to the value the sampled respondent attaches to herself. It was measured using a list of 10 standard statements developed by (Rosenberg, 1965). Each statement has answer with five choices that take values ranging 1-5 and the total score for all statements ranges between 10 and 50. The total score was further divided into three categories as low (10-25), medium (26-38) and high (39-50) score ranges.
7. **Knowledge** refers to the sampled respondent women's knowledge of sanitation and nutrition activities that had been promoted in the sample villages . It was computed out of 10 with the help of sanitation and nutrition questions framed for the same purpose.
8. **Social participation** refers to the sampled women's participation in six selected local common activities (see appendix I, Q63). These common local common activities were identified in consultation with key informant interview. The score ranges between 0 and 18 which was further divided as low (0-6), medium (7-12) and high (13-18).
9. **Mobility** refers to frequency of the sampled women's movement to run income generating activities and/or to participate in six selected local common activities (see appendix I, Q63). Again these common local common activities were identified in consultation with key informant interview. The score ranges between 0 and 13 and was categorized as low (0-4), medium (5-9) and high (10-13).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Empowerment Status of the Sampled Respondents

To determine the empowerment status of the sampled respondents, empowerment index was prepared using nine indicators of women empowerment through microfinance found from review of literature. The indicators are women's ownership of assets, women's ownership of own income generating activities, women's control over resources, women's participation in household decision-making, women's self-esteem, women's social or community participation, women's mobility, women's knowledge of project activities and women's bargaining power. For the sake of sound analysis and interpretation, the definition of each indicator is operational zed in the preceding section. The empowerment index prepared is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Empowerment indicators and their respective scores

SN	Indicator	Score	SN	Indicator	Score
1.	Ownership of personal asset		5.	Self-esteem	
1.1	Cash saving			▪ Low (0-14)	1
	▪ Nil	0		▪ Medium (15-27)	3
	▪ 1 - 200 birr	1		▪ High (28-40)	5
	▪ 201 - 400 birr	2	6.	Bargaining power	
	▪ 401 – 600 birr	3	6.1	Bargaining with husband	
	▪ 601 – 800 birr	4		▪ No time	0
	▪ 801 – 1000 birr	5		▪ Some times	2
	▪ 1001 – 1200 birr	6		▪ Most times	4
	▪ >1200 birr	7		▪ Always	6
1.2	Physical asset		6.2	Bargaining with others	
	▪ Nil	0		▪ No time	0
	▪ 1 – 500 birr	1		▪ Some times	2
	▪ 501 – 1000 birr	2		▪ Most times	4
	▪ 1001 – 1500 birr	3		▪ Always	6
	▪ 1501 – 2000 birr	4		Minimum	0
	▪ 2001 – 2500 birr	5		Maximum	6
	▪ 2501 – 3000 birr	6	7.	Participation in HH decision making	
	▪ 3001 – 3500 birr	7		▪ Husband only	0
	▪ 3501 – 4000 birr	8		▪ Husband mostly	1
	▪ 4001 – 4500 birr	9		▪ Equal participation	2
	▪ > 4500 birr	10		▪ Wife mostly	3
2.	Knowledge test			▪ Wife only	4
	▪ Minimum	0	8.	Ownership of own IGA	
	▪ Maximum	10		▪ No	0
3.	Mobility			▪ Yes	5
	▪ Low (0-4)	1	9.	Social participation	
	▪ Medium (5-9)	3		▪ Low (0-6)	1
	▪ High (10-13)	5		▪ Medium (7-12)	3
4.	Control over HH resource			▪ High (13-18)	5
	▪ Husband only	0		Empowerment Index	
	▪ Husband mostly	1		Minimum score	3
	▪ Equal control	2		Maximum score	61
	▪ Wife mostly	3			
	▪ Wife only	4			

For the purpose of comparative analysis the sample respondents are classified into five empowerment categories as very low, low, medium, high and very high based on their empowerment score. The score ranges between 3 and 61; while the actual range is between 6 and 52. The range is used to classify the sampled respondents into the aforementioned distinct categories thereby dividing it into five equal parts. That is, respondents with score ranges of 3-14, 15-25, 26-37, 38-48 and 49-61 are classified as very low, low, medium, high and very high empowerment categories respectively. The categories are tested for significance by one-way ANOVA and the result in Table 5 shows significant mean difference among the five categories at less than $p < 0.01$. Table (5) also shows that 46.3% of the sampled respondents fall under the very low and low empowerment categories. 49.4%, 4.4% and 0% of them fall under medium, high and very high categories respectively. Consequently, the result indicates that responsible organizations have to still strongly work to uplift the situation of women in the area.

Table 3: Distribution of sampled respondents into empowerment categories

Empowerment category	Empowerment		Empowerment Score Range	Mean	SD	F	P
	N	%					
Very low	2	1.3	3 – 14	14.50	.707		
Low	72	45	15 – 25	21.03	3.41		
Medium	79	49.4	26 – 37	31.81	3.17		
High	7	4.4	38 – 48	39.00	.82		
Very high	0	0	0	0	0		
Total	160	100	3 - 61	27.06	6.79	184.316***	.000

As already mentioned in the preceding sections, the samples were composed of both members and non-members of Microfinance institutions communities. Therefore, the mean difference between the Microfinance institutions members and non-members were also looked into in order to have better picture of the result. The result from chi-square test in Table 6 shows the existence of significant difference in the empowerment status of Microfinance institutions members and non-members at less than one percent level of probability.

The result in Table 4 also shows that the majority of the Microfinance institutions member sampled respondents, that is, 66 (82.5%) and 7 (8.75%) of them fall under the medium and high empowerment categories respectively. On the other hand, only 65 (81.25%) and 2 (2.25%) of the non member sampled respondents fall under the low and very low empowerment categories respectively where as 13(16.25) of the non member sample respondents fall under the medium empowerment category. However, neither the MFI ' member sampled respondents nor the non-member sampled respondents fall under the very high empowerment category. Consequently, the result indicates that Microfinance institutions member sampled women are moving towards a better empowerment status compared to the non member sampled women.

Table 4: Empowerment status of respondents by membership status (N=160)

Empowerment Categories	Members		Non-members		Chi-square	df	P-Value
	N	%	N	%			
Very low	0	0	2	2.5			
Low	7	8.75	65	81.25			
Medium	66	82.5	13	16.25			
High	7	8.75	0	0			
Very high	0	0	0	0			
Total	80	100	80	100	101.957***	4	0.000

Source: Own survey data

The Influence of Explanatory Variables on Women Empowerment

The second objective of this study was to assess determinants of women empowerment through Microfinance institutions communities' microfinance in the study area. In doing so, it is a usual phenomenon to conduct a bivariate analysis before running the model to see determinants of the dependent variable. Therefore, in this section, the result of the bivariate analysis of the hypothesized explanatory variables and the dependent variable is discussed.

Marital Status

It is in marriage where men take the dominant positions to the detriment of women's lives (Lakwo, 2007). As a result, married women have less opportunity when compared with their unmarried, divorced and widowed counterparts. Hence, it was hypothesized that married women (coded as 1) are less empowered when compared with single women. Out of the total number of 160 sampled respondents, 135 (84.4%) are married and the rest 25(15.6%) are single in which unmarried, widowed and divorced comprise 13 (8.1%), 9 (5.6%) and 3 (1.9%) respectively. Of the single sampled respondents, 20 (51.3%) of them are members of Microfinance institutions and the rest 19 (48.7%) are non-members. The result from chi-square test in Table 7 shows significant difference among the five empowerment categories at less than one percent level of probability. Crammer's V symmetric measure of association also shows the existence of positive association between marital status and women empowerment supporting the hypothesis.

Table 5: The relationship between marital status and women empowerment (N = 160)

Empowerment Category	Marital status			
	Single		Married	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very low	1	2.6	30	18.6
Low	10	25.6	62	38.5
Medium	19	48.7	56	34.8
High	6	15.4	11	6.9
Very high	3	7.7	2	1.2
Total	39	100	161	100

$\chi^2 = 16.226$, $df = 4$, $p = .003$; Crammer's $V = 0.285$, $P = .003$; Source: Own survey data

Age of the Respondent

Age can generate or erode confidence. With age a person can become more or less risk averse to invest. Moreover, aged of a women may not have the energy to walk long distances (which is common in most rural Ethiopia) to run petty trading. Hence, age was hypothesized to have negative relationship with women empowerment. The mean age of Microfinance institutions members and non-members are 34.80 and 34.21

years respectively. The t-test result also shows no difference between Microfinance institutions member and non-member sampled respondents ($t = .388$).

The mean age of the total sampled respondents is 34.46 years with standard deviation of 10.64 years. The youngest and the oldest ages are 15 and 65. The result from one-way analysis of variance shows no significant mean difference in age among the five empowerment categories (Table 6). The mean age of the sampled respondents is below 35 years with significant difference between members and non-members. This is an indication that life expectancy in the area varies among members and non members. Hence, this could be the most probable reason for the presence of significant relationship between age and women empowerment.

Table 6: The relationship between age and women empowerment (N=160)

Age	Mean	SD	t- value	P value
Members	32.35	8.31		
Non-members	37.35	9.74		
Total	35.16	9.29	0.388 ^{NS}	0.698
Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	14.5	.71		
Low	21.03	3.41		
Medium	31.81	3.17		
High	34.52	.82		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	27.06	6.79	1.168 ^{NS}	.326

Source: Own survey data; NS= Not significant

Family Size

Family size in this study refers to the total number of family members in the household. The larger the family members, the more the labor force available. Hence, women can have time to run their own economic activity. Consequently, family size was hypothesized to have positive influence on women empowerment. The mean family size of members and non-members is 5.61 and 5.75 persons per household respectively with standard deviation of 2.35 and 2.26 respectively. The result shows difference in the mean family size between Microfinance institutions members and non-members. The result from t-test also shows difference in mean between the two groups at less than 10% level of probability.

The mean family size of the total sampled respondents is 5.68 persons per household, which is greater than the national average and therefore needs attention in terms of family planning interventions. The smallest family size is one and the largest is 11 persons per household. However, the one-way analysis of variance result in Table 7 shows no significant difference in mean family size among the five empowerment categories. The bivariate correlation analysis also shows no association between family size and women empowerment though the direction is similar with the hypothesis. The result shows no significant relationship because of the high level of dependency ratio among the sampled households (Table 7).

Table 7: The relationship between family size and women empowerment (N= 160)

Family Size	Mean	SD	t- value	P value
Members	5.61	2.35		
Non-members	5.75	2.26		
Total	5.68	2.30	1.926*	.056
Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	7.50	0.71		
Low	6.06	2.14		
Medium	5.33	2.27		
High	5.29	3.77		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	5.68	2.30	.895 ^{NS}	.468

Source: Own survey data; * = Significant at 10%, NS= Not significant; $r = .035$, $p = .621$

Dependency Ratio

The larger the dependency ratio, the larger is women's responsibility in the household. Hence, the lesser is the probability for women to go out of their house to engage in income generating activities and/or to participate in common local activities. As a result, dependency ratio was hypothesized to have negative influence on women empowerment. The mean dependency ratio of Microfinance institutions members and non-members is 3.79 and 3.23 respectively showing no significant difference. The t-test result also shows no difference between the means of the two groups. As indicated in the table below nearly 50.14% of the household members is dependents with standard deviation of 2.06 dependents per household. However, the result from one-way analysis of variance in

Table 8 shows no mean difference in dependency ratio among the five empowerment categories.

Table 8: The relationship between dependency ratio and women empowerment (N= 160)

Dependency Ratio	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Members	3.79	2.20		
Non-members	3.23	1.89		
Total	3.52	2.06	-.524 ^{NS}	.601
Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	5.50	0.71		
Low	3.75	2.18		
Medium	3.24	1.97		
High	3.43	1.72		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	3.51	2.06	.834 ^{NS}	.505

Source: Own survey data; NS= Not significant; $r = -.084$, $p = .239$

Level of Formal Education

The probability of taking productive loans increases as the person gets more formal education (Musebe *et al*, 1993; as cited in Samson, 2003). The more productive loans taken by women, the more is the probability to own personal assets and/or have better contribution for household expenditure. Therefore, formal education was hypothesized to have positive relationship with women empowerment. However, the vast majority, that is, 120 (75.1%) of the sampled respondents have no formal education and out of this figure only 6 (3.8%) of them read and write in their local language. The mean formal education achieved by members and non-members is 0.80 and 0.46 grades with standard deviation of 1.16 and 0.95 grades respectively. Result from t-test shows difference in mean formal education achieved between the two groups at less than 10% percent level probability (Table 9). The mean formal education achieved by the total sampled respondents is 0.63 grades; which is basically very far even from grade one showing the high level of women illiteracy in the study area. Though the mean formal education is too low, the result from one-way analysis of variance provides supportive evidence for the presence of hypothesized relationship between formal education and women empowerment. The result in Table 9 shows difference in mean formal education achieved by the five empowerment categories at less than one percent probability level. The bivariate correlation analysis also shows the existence of positive association between formal education achieved and women empowerment. The direction of relationship is also consistent with the hypothesis. Moreover, the result is consistent with the findings of (Trandley, 2005; Femida and Meenaz, 2004; Shahnaj and Leonhauser, 2004).

Table 9: The relationship between formal education and women empowerment (N= 160)

Formal Education	Mean	SD	t- value	P value
Members	0.80	1.16		
Non-members	0.46	0.95		
Total	0.63	1.07	1.923*	.057
Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	1.00	1.41		
Low	0.40	.89		
Medium	0.81	1.18		
High	0.86	1.22		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	0.63	1.07	3.581***	.008

$r = 0.201$, $p = 0.004$; *, ***= Significant at 10% & 1% level respectively

Source: Own survey data

Distance from the Nearest Market

Distance from the nearest market is measured in kilometers. The closer the women is to the nearest market, the more likely the women will receive valuable information (Abadi, 1999; as cited in Ebrahim, 2006). Microfinance institutions members get income generating activities selection, planning and management training from the responsible organization. This training helps them to better process and use the information they get as a result of their nearness to the market. Moreover, those better access to marketed them to engage in different income generating activities. As a result, women who are close to market have better possibility to be relatively better empowered than those who are far from market. Hence, distance from the nearest market was hypothesized to negatively affect women empowerment. Results from the analysis show that the mean distance from the nearest market is 5.58 kms with standard deviation of 3.76 kms. The nearest and farthest distances from market are one and 12 kms respectively. However, the one-way analysis of variance result in Table 10 shows no mean

difference among the five categories. This could be because most of the sampled respondents are living relatively near to market places as a result of the large number of small markets in the district.

Table 10: The relationship between distance from the nearest market and women empowerment (N=160)

Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	12.00	0.00		
Low	6.11	4.23		
Medium	5.00	3.17		
High	4.86	3.39		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	5.58	3.76	.559 ^{NS}	.693

Source: Own survey data; NS = Not Significant

Distance from District Town

Distance from district town is a proxy measure of remoteness of the area. Distance from the district town has implication on access to different services. Among others, frequent contact with extension workers is dependent on accessibility of the area. Areas relatively near to the district town have better contact with extension workers. Moreover, in most rural districts in Ethiopia, the quantity and quality of social services like transportations and communication facilities diminish going away from the district town. Hence, distance from district town was hypothesized to have negative influence on women empowerment. The mean distance from the district town is 21.25 km with standard deviation of 9.28 kms. The findings are consistent with the hypothesis showing significant difference in mean at less than one percent probability among the five empowerment categories. The result from bivariate correlation analysis also shows negative association between distance from district town and women empowerment substantiating the hypothesis. Moreover, Table 11 shows that the sampled respondents that fall in the very low empowerment category are very far from the district town compared to those sampled respondents that fall in the rest empowerment categories.

Table 11: The relationship between distance from district town and women empowerment (N= 160)

Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	15.00	0.00		
Low	19.86	9.14		
Medium	22.57	9.40		
High	22.43	9.25		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	21.25	9.28	4.646 ^{***}	.001

$r = -.193$, $p = 0.006$; *** = Significant at 1%

Years of Experience in Income Generation

Women's ownership of income generating activities is considered as the foundation for their empowerment (Mayoux, 2000; Birgit, 2001). Hence, the better women's experience in income generation, the better is the possibility for their ownership of assets and/or contribution for household expenditure. Moreover, the better is their access to more information. Therefore, years of experience in income generation was hypothesized to positively influence women empowerment. Among the 120 sampled respondents who respond to this specific question, 109 (68.1%) of the respondents have experience in income generation. Table 14 illustrates that, out of this figure, 64 (57.71%) are Microfinance institutions members and the rest 45 (41.28%) are non-members. The other 11(9.17%) respondents responded that they do not have income generation. Of the 160 total sample respondents, 40 (25%) of them didn't say anything to the question and taken as missing values. The result from Chi-square test in Table 12 shows significant difference between Microfinance institutions members and non-members at less than one percent level of probability.

Table 1: Distribution of sampled respondents in experience in income generation

Membership status	Experience in income generation			
	Yes		No	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Members	64	58.71	7	63.64
Non-members	45	41.28	4	36.36
Total	109	100	11	100

$X^2 = 98.13$, $df = 15$, $p = .000$; Source: Own survey data

The mean years of experience for members and non-members are 6.54 and 1.98 years with standard deviation of 5.31 and 3.17 years respectively showing significant difference between the two groups. Result from t-test (Table 13) also shows significant difference between the two groups at $P < 0.001$. The mean years of

experience for total sampled respondents is 4.68 years with standard deviation of 5.10 years. The one-way analysis of variance result in Table 13 shows significant mean difference at less than one percent level of probability among the five empowerment categories. A bivariate correlation analysis also shows positive association between years of experience in income generation and women empowerment. Hence, results from both the one-way analysis of variance and the bivariate correlation analysis are consistent with the hypothesis.

Table 2: The relationship between years of experience in income generation (IG) and women empowerment (N=160)

Years of Experience in IG	Mean	SD	t- value	P value
Members	6.54	5.31		
Non-members	1.98	3.17		
Total	4.68	5.10	9.2***	.000

Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	.00	.00		
Low	6.42	5.97		
Medium	7.41	6.86		
High	4.57	3.31		
Very high	.00	.00		
Total	6.94	6.44	7.36***	.001

$r = 0.382, p = 0.000$; ‘***’ = Significant at 1%

Source: Own survey data

Out of the total of 64 Microfinance institutions members who had experience in income generation by the time of interview, 52 (81.25%) of them had no experience in income generation before joining Microfinance institutions. But after joining MFI, 49 (76.56%) of them showed improvement in their income generating capacity at different levels. That is, 3 (6.12%) of them showed slight improvement, 9 (16.24%) of them showed fair improvement, 29 (59.18%) of them showed good improvement and the rest 8 (16.33%) of them showed significant improvement (Table 14). During group discussion, women who had experience in IGA before joining Microfinance institutions were asked regarding the reasons for the improvement. The improvement is the cumulative effect of their exposure to income generating activities selection, planning and management training, the experience they share each other in their Microfinance institutions and their access to loan service. Above all, they mentioned their sustainable access to loan service to contribute a lot for their improvement in income generation capacity.

Table 3: Distribution of MFI member sampled respondents in their level of improvement in income generation capacity

	Level of improvement in income generation capacity					Total
	No	Slight	Fair	Good	Significant	
Frequency	0	3	9	29	8	49
Percent	0	6.12	12.24	59.18	16.33	100

Source: Own survey data

Access to microfinance services is believed to contribute for women empowerment provided that women have control over their loans (Barbara and Mona, 2001; Birgit, 2001; Lakwo, 2007). However, their involvement in income generating activities, which are believed to be the foundation for their economic empowerment in particular and the overall empowerment in general may have some negative consequences that lead to their disempowerment. That is, women may suffer from additional workload and/or their husbands may reduce or totally cut the budget for household expenditure (Mayoux, 2000). Hence, it was tried to look into these issues in order to have complete picture of their progress towards empowerment. Table 17 shows that out of the total of 64 MFI members who have got their own income generation activities, 28 (43.75%) of them didn't encounter work load. Nevertheless, 36(56.25%) of them encountered increase in their daily or weekly workload at different level. That is, 7 (15.22%) of them encountered slight increase, 32 (69.57) of them encountered moderate increase and the rest 7 (15.22%) of them encountered significant increase in their daily or weekly work load.

Table 4: Distribution of MFI members sampled respondents in level of increase in work load

	Level of increase in work load					Total
	No	Slight	Moderate	Significant	Highly Significant	
Frequency	0	7	32	7	-	46
Percent	0	15.22	69.57	15.22	-	100

Source: Own survey data

The women who encountered increase in work load because of their IGA were also asked if they had ways of alleviating their work load. 32 (100%) of them had ways of alleviating their work load which is to mean none of them had no way of alleviating their work load. As to the ways of alleviating their work load, Table

16 shows that 6 (16.75%) of them received help from their sons, 14(43.75%) of them received help from their daughters, another 6 (26.1%) of them received help from another family member and for the rest 8 (25%), their husbands hired them labor.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents in ways of alleviating work load

Ways of Alleviating Work Load	Frequency	Percent
No way to alleviate	0	0
Her son(s) helped her	6	18.75
Her daughter(s) helped her	14	43.75
Another family member helped her	8	25
Her spouse/she hired labor for her	4	12.5
Total	32	100

Source: Own survey data

MFI member sampled respondents were also asked whether their husbands reduced or stopped their contribution for household expenditure as a result of the women's involvement in income generation activities. Table 19 shows that all of them observed reduction in their husbands' contribution for household expenditure. As to the level of decrease, 4 (6.25%) of them encountered slight decrease, 46 (71.88%) of them encountered moderate decrease, 13 (20.31%) of them encountered significant decrease and 1(1.56%) of them encountered highly significant decrease. It was necessary to conduct group discussion with MFI member sampled respondents regarding the issue since significant number of them responded to face reduction in household expenditure by their husbands. On the group discussion participant women confirmed the existence of the problem; however, they also revealed that reduction of husbands' contribution for household expenditure in not totally negative. It is because of shift of budget allocation in the household. Women's involvement in income generating activities increased their contribution for household expenditure (Table 17). In the area most husbands contribute for household expenditure by selling their agricultural produce which has got direct implication on family nutrition and asset accumulation. Nevertheless, this time household expenditure is being covered by income from women income generating activities thereby saving their agricultural produce and/or income from cash crops.

Table 6: Distribution of respondents by their husbands' level of decrease in household expenditure

	Level of husbands' decrease for household expenditure					Total
	No	Slight	Moderate	Significant	Highly Significant	
Frequency	0	4	46	13	1	64
Percent	0	6.25	71.88	20.31	1.56	100

Source: Own survey data

One of the possible ways that women's involvement in income generating activities contributes for their empowerment is by improving their contribution for household expenditure; which in turn improves their participation in household decision making (Birgit, 2001). Hence, it was necessary to look into this issue. As a result, sampled MFI members who had their own income generating activities were asked with regard to change in their contribution for household expenditure. Table 18 shows that among the 80 Microfinance institutions communities savings member sampled respondents, 63(78.75%) of them have improvement in their contribution for household expenditure. As to the level of improvement, 1 (1.6%) of them have slight improvement, 20 (31.75%) of them have fair improvement, the other 39 (61.9%) of them have good improvement and where as 3 (4.76%) of them have significant improvement in their contribution for household expenditure. However, the remaining 13 (16.25%) of them didn't respond to this specific question during data collection.

Table 7: Level of improvement in women's contribution for household expenditure

	Level of improvement					Total
	No	Slight	Fair	Good	Significant	
Frequency	0	1	20	39	3	63
Percent	0	1.6	31.75	61.9	4.76	100

Source: Own survey data

Years of Membership in Microfinance institutions

Years of membership in Microfinance institutions has direct relationship with asset accumulation in terms of financial, physical, human and social assets. Because of this fact, years of membership was hypothesized to have positive relationship with women empowerment. As already mentioned in the previous section, 80 (50%) of the respondents are members of Microfinance institutions. The minimum and maximum years of membership by the sampled member respondents are 1 and 4 years respectively. The mean year of membership for total sampled respondents is 1.93 year with standard deviation of 1.12 year. One-way analysis of variance test was conducted to see the existence of mean difference among the five empowerment categories. The result in Table 21 shows significant mean difference at less than one percent level of probability. The mean also shows consistent increase

going through very low to very high empowerment categories. At the same time, the bivariate correlation analysis supports the hypothesis showing positive and strong association ($r = .272$, $p = .000$) between years of membership and women empowerment. Thus, the result strongly supports the hypothesis.

Table 8: Relationship between years of membership in Microfinance institutions and women empowerment (N=160)

Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	0.00	0.00		
Low	1.00	0.00		
Medium	1.97	1.15		
High	2.43	0.98		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	1.93	1.12	46.632***	.036

$r = 0.272$, $p = 0.000$; '***' = Significant at 1%

Source: Own survey data

Extension Participation

Frequency of participation in these trainings and events was used to measure extension participation. The more frequently a woman participates in extension trainings and events, the better is the probability for her level of empowerment because of her better access to information which is one of the basic elements of empowerment (World Bank, 2002). Therefore, extension participation was hypothesized to have positive influence on women empowerment. The mean number of extension participation by MFI members and non-members is 0.39 and 0.49 times respectively revealing significant difference between the two groups. T-test result in Table 22 also shows significant difference in mean between associations' members and non-members at less than 1% probability. The difference in mean extension participation among the five empowerment categories was tested by one-way analysis of variance. The result is in line with the hypothesis showing significant difference at less than 1% probability. The mean also consistently increases going through very low to very high category. The bivariate correlation analysis further confirms the existence of positive association ($r = .358$) between extension participation and women empowerment. The direction of relationship is also consistent with the hypothesis.

Table 9: Relationship between extension participation and women empowerment (N=160)

Membership status	Mean	SD	t- value	P value
Members	0.44	0.49		
Non-members	0.34	0.48		
Total	0.39	0.49	4.303***	.000

Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	0.00	0.00		
Low	0.29	0.46		
Medium	0.44	0.50		
High	0.86	0.38		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	0.39	0.49	4.058***	.000

$r = 0.252$, $p = 0.000$; '***' = Significant at 1%

Table 10: Relationship between contact with development agent and women empowerment (N= 160)

Empowerment Category	Contact with Development Agent		Total
	No	Yes	
Very low	0	14.50	15.5
Low	20.25	21.18	36
Medium	31.47	31.89	37.5
High	38.00	39.17	8.5
Very high	0	0	2.5
Total	100 (28)	100 (132)	100 (160)

() = N; $X^2=67.600$ $df = 1$, $p = .000$; Crammer's $V = .641$, $p = .000$

Source: Own survey data

Cumulative Amount of Loan

Large cumulative amount of loan received by the person shows the persons self-confidence and ability to take risk. As a result, cumulative amount of loan was hypothesized to have positive influence on women

empowerment. The mean cumulative amount of loan received by MFI members and non-members is 328.63 and 92.50 birr with standard deviation of 147.99 and 10.61 birr respectively. T-test was conducted to see mean difference between Microfinance institutions members and non-members. The result in Table 27 shows difference in mean between the two groups at less than one percent probability level. The mean cumulative amount of loan received by the total sampled respondents is 321.58 birr with standard deviation of 151.26 birr. The maximum cumulative amount of loan is 800 birr where as the minimum cumulative amount of loan is 85 birr. The result from one-way analysis of variance shows significant mean difference among the five categories at $p < .001$. The bivariate correlation analysis result is also consistent with the hypothesis showing positive association ($r = 0.376$, $p = .000$) between cumulative amount of loan and women empowerment (Table 22).

Table 11: Relationship between cumulative amount of loan and women empowerment (N= 160)

Cumulative Amount of Loan	Mean	SD	t- value	P value
Members	328.63	147.99		
Non-members	92.50	10.61		
Total	321.58	151.26	24.54***	.000
Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	0.00	0.00		
Low	240.71	101.34		
Medium	333.54	148.69		
High	308.33	210.75		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	321.58	151.26	1.199***	.000

$r = 0.376$, $p = 0.000$; ‘***’ = Significant at 1%; Source: Own survey data

Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation is an individual’s desire and striving to accomplish any task with some degree of excellence. An individual with higher achievement motivation has strong hope of success than failure (McClelland, 1978). Therefore, achievement motivation was hypothesized to have positive relationship with women empowerment. The mean achievement motivation score of sampled MFI members is 13.74 and that of non-members is 12.81 with standard deviation of 1.59 and 1.14 respectively, showing significant difference. The result from t-test in Table 28 also shows significant mean difference between sampled association members and non-members at ($p < 0.001$). High achievement motivation registered among members of Microfinance institutions could be the effect of the project. The findings from the one-way analysis of variance support the hypothesis showing significant mean difference in achievement motivation among the five empowerment categories at less than one percent probability level. The mean also shows consistent rise from very low to high empowerment categories though it has little deviation at the very high category. The bivariate correlation analysis also shows positive association between achievement motivation and women empowerment (Table 23).

Table 12: Relationship between achievement motivation and women empowerment (N= 160)

Achievement Motivation	Mean	SD	t- value	P value
Members	13.74	1.59		
Non-members	12.81	1.14		
Total	13.27	1.45	106.67***	.000
Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	10.50	3.54		
Low	12.82	1.40		
Medium	13.54	1.58		
High	14.00	1.00		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	13.20	1.57	5.76***	.000

$r = 0.293$, $p = 0.000$; ‘***’ = Significant at 1%; Source: Own survey data

Level of Aspiration

Level of aspiration is a strong desire or ambition to achieve something. It was therefore, hypothesized to have positive association with women empowerment. The mean score of level of aspiration for MFI members and non-members is 9.05 and 7.78 with standard deviation of 3.31 and 2.77 respectively. Table 29 shows that the difference between the two means is significant at $p < 0.001$. The high level of aspiration registered among MFI members might result from the benefits they boosted because of their membership in Microfinance institutions communities. The one-way analysis of variance result shows significant difference among the five empowerment categories at $P < .001$. The mean value of each category in Table 29 also shows an increase from very low to high empowerment category. A bi-variate correlation analysis test was conducted to see the

existence of association between level of aspiration and women empowerment. The result shows positive association ($r = .151$) between level of aspiration and women empowerment (Table 24).

Table 13: Relationship between level of aspiration and women empowerment (N= 160)

Level of Aspiration	Mean	SD	t- value	P value
Members	9.05	3.31		
Non-members	7.78	2.77		
Total	8.41	3.12	33.35***	.000
Empowerment Category	Mean	SD	F value	P value
Very low	7.00	7.07		
Low	7.83	2.92		
Medium	8.71	3.27		
High	9.14	3.02		
Very high	0.00	0.00		
Total	8.31	3.15	1.25***	.000

$r = 0.151$, $p = 0.000$; ‘***’= Significant at 1%; Source: Own survey data

Factors affecting Women Empowerment

After conducting the multicollinearity test, the data were entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program for parametric estimates of Ordinal Logit Regression model. Model fitting and goodness-of-fit statistics ($\chi^2 = 172.120$, $df = 12$, $p = 0.000$ and $\chi^2 = 511.751$, $p = 0.996$) show that the likelihood ratio for all explanatory variables are different from zero and the model fits the data very well. The parallel lines test (LL $\chi^2 = 38.901$, $df = 34$, $p = 0.228$) also tells us that there is no violation of the basic assumption for ordinal logit regression that the location parameters (slope coefficients) are the same across response categories. As to the power of the model, it explained 68.1 percent of the variation in the dependent variable that is due to explanatory variables included in the model. A total of 12 variables which were believed to have influence on women empowerment were entered into the model. The result presented in Table 34 shows that seven variables are found to have significant influence on women empowerment at different probability level. That is, age (AGE), marital status (MARSTAT), years of membership in Microfinance institutions communities (YRMEMBER) and distance from district town (DISTOWN) are significant at less than one percent probability level. Experience in income generation (EXPIGA) and contact with development agent (DACONTACT) are significant at less than five percent probability level; whereas distance from the nearest market (DISMARKET) is significant at 10% probability level. As to the direction of influence, all the variables have the expected direction of influence. On the other hand, family size (FAMSIZE), dependency ratio (DEPRATIO), level of formal education achieved by the respondent (FOREduc), extension participation (EXTPART) and cumulative amount of loan received (CAMLOAN) are insignificant.

Table 14: Parameter Estimates of Ordinal Logit Regression model

Variables	Estimate	Wald	Sig.	Exp (β)
Cut-point [y = 1]	-4.877	22.916	.000	
Cut-point [y = 2]	-1.975	4.224	.040	
Cut-point [y = 3]	2.151	4.556	.033	
Cut-point [y = 4]	4.241	15.343	.000	
Independent Variables				
AGE	-.053***	9.279	.002	.948
MARSTAT	-2.002***	18.050	.000	.135
FOREduc	.090	.629	.428	1.09
FAMSIZE	.056	.493	.483	1.06
DEPRATIO	-.662	.843	.358	.515
EXPIGA	.095**	5.702	.017	1.10
YRMEMBER	1.181***	16.901	.000	3.26
CAMLOAN	.001	2.375	.123	1.00
DISMARKET	-.093*	3.363	.067	.911
DISTOWN	-.062***	12.329	.000	.939
DACONTACT	1.356**	7.603	.006	3.81
EXTPART	.053	.769	.381	1.05

Model-2Loglikelihood = 528.336, Chi-square = 172.120, $df = 12$, $p = 0.000$

Goodness-of-fit $X^2 = 511.751$, $p = 0.996$

Nagelkerke Pseudo $R^2 = 0.681$

Restricted LL $\chi^2 = 38.901$, $df = 34$, $p = 0.228$)

Age: It's possible to find that Literatures show age of a woman has relationship with women

empowerment. The econometric model output also confirmed that age has negative influence on women empowerment at less than one percent probability level. The result is consistent with the findings by (Trandley, 2005; Femida and Meenaz, 2004). The possible explanation could be as women get aged, their access to information decreases because of decrease in their mobility especially to run income generating activities. Asset accumulation also diminishes as the woman's productivity decreases. Moreover, their achievement motivation and level of aspiration diminishes with age.

Marital status: It was hypothesized that marital status influences women empowerment negatively towards married women. The result was also consistent with the hypothesis showing negative influence of marital status on women empowerment at less than one percent probability level towards married women. The possible reason is that married women have less control over household resources and decisions compared to single ones. Moreover, they have less freedom of mobility and hence, have less access to information.

Years of experience in income generation: It was found to positively influence women empowerment at less than 5% as it was hypothesized. The probable explanation on the one hand, is that, women having many years of experience develop self-confidence and self-esteem because of their exposure outside their home. Moreover, they will have better knowledge as a result of their repeated exposure to the outside environment. On the other hand, as the number of years in income generation increases, women can have better accumulation of wealth.

Years of membership in Microfinance institutions: Literatures indicate the existence of relationship between number of years getting services of microfinance institutions and microfinance impact. The result is in line with the hypothesis showing positive and significant influence of membership in saving and internal lending communities on women empowerment at less than 1% probability level. The result is also consistent with the finding of (Femida and Meenaz, 2004). The possible reason is that as years of membership in saving and internal lending communities, so do women's asset accumulation in the form of financial, human, physical and social assets.

Distance from the nearest market: It was hypothesized that distance from the nearest market has negative influence on women empowerment. The result is consistent with the hypothesis showing that distance from the nearest market has negative and significant influence on women empowerment at less than 10% probability level. The most possible explanation is that women living far from market places have less access to valuable information which could have helped them to make advantage of opportunities.

Distance from district town: The result is consistent with the hypothesis showing negative and significant influence of distance from district town on women empowerment at less than one percent probability level. The probable reason is that social services diminish going away from district town especially in the context of remote rural areas. Hence, as women's residence becomes far from district town, their access to social services diminishes. This in turn decreases their access to information which is further reflected on their level of empowerment.

Contact with development agent: It was hypothesized that contact with development agent and women empowerment have positive relationship. The result is also in line with the hypothesis showing the existence of positive and significant relationship at less than 5% probability level between contact with development agent and women empowerment. The possible explanation is that development agents are the major sources of information for women or otherwise living in remote rural districts. Hence, women who have better contact with development agents can better access information that they use for production or investment.

Conclusion

Microfinance model is a vital intervention to uplift the level of empowerment among women farmers. The result from both descriptive statistics and econometric model revealed that single women are more empowered than their married counterparts at less than 1% probability level. Promotion of labor saving technologies, family planning and gender education along with savings and internal lending communities' microfinance intervention can better help to improve the level of empowerment among married women. Emphasizing on income generation options that can be run around the homestead is also another option to improve the condition of married women who have labor shortage for household duties. Empowerment is a psychological phenomenon that has strong attachment with behavioral change. Hence, to uplift the level of empowerment of rural women through microfinance calls for the provision of quality extension services by responsible organizations. The findings of this study also revealed the same. Women with relatively better level of empowerment had better extension participation and better contact with development agents. Moreover, savings and internal lending communities' members have got better achievement motivation and level of aspiration compared to non-members. This is partly because of their better access to extension services. Therefore, savings and internal lending communities' microfinance interventions meant for women empowerment among others, shall provide due attention to the quality of their extension services in terms of content and delivery mechanisms.

Women's general education and literacy are important if they are to reach their full potential and become empowered. This is because illiteracy creates a situation of dependency on others that can limit the

individuals' prospects for empowerment. The illiteracy rate of the sampled women is very high. 75.1% of the total sampled respondents have no formal education and again out of this figure, only 3.8% of them can read and write in any language. Hence, linking savings and internal lending communities' members (especially young women having the interest) with adult literacy programs can help enhance their level of empowerment. However, it should be handled cautiously and in a more creative way to avoid overburdening women. Women living far from the district town are found less empowered compared to those living near to the district town. Hence, special attention shall be given for them in terms of provision of extension services and introduction of appropriate income generation options.

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