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## Women Financial Self-sufficiency through Microfinance, Evidence from Northern Ghana

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### **Abstract:**

*This article argues that, though microfinance is endorsed as a financial tool to poverty alleviation in most developing countries including some parts of Ghana, the rural Northern Ghanaian woman who faces a patriarchy society is yet to benefit from microfinance. A snowballing sampling procedure was used to sample and investigate 247 microfinance clienteles' financial self-sufficiency challenges from the three Northern Regions of Ghana. SPSS statistical software was employed to analyze the primary data. The results confirmed that, households' sizes in rural Northern Ghana are very large, with an average of eleven members in a single household, majority of the people in the active working class are complete illiterates or had only basic formal education. Also, the area of the study is male dominance societies, which are the major hindrances that confront the positive impact of microfinance in improving the women financial position in the area. This study concludes that microfinance alone is not the solution to women's financial self-sufficiency in Northern Ghana, therefore, recommends that Ghana Government reinforces the free education system for persons living in the Northern Territory of Ghana.*

**Keywords:** *Self-sufficiency, Poverty Alleviation, Microfinance, Reinforce, Free Education*

### **1. Introduction**

Poverty is a major concern in many developing countries around the world. While many developing countries have reported significant growth rates during the past decades through microfinance, most Sub-Saharan African (SSA) rural areas are still lagging behind. SSA rural areas suffer greatly from poverty and income inequality. As reported by Solt (2009), the distribution of income by population quartile in SSA countries shows that the poorest 20% holds less than 10% of total income, while the richest 20% holds disproportionately more than 40% of total income. Again records have it that, the world's poor numbered 70%, and 65% are women from SSA (McFerson, 2010). Ghana has reported higher growth and stability rates than most SSA countries. However, it still faces serious poverty rate and income inequality, especially in the northern part of the country (Mayoux & Hartl, 2009). According to the Dessus, et al (2011), while Southern Ghana has reported a reduction of 2.5 million in the number of poor people, Northern Ghana has experienced a rise of 0.9 million poor people between 2005 and 2015. In addition, the Ghana Statistical Service 2010, population and housing census, reported that the poverty rates of the northern regions are two to three times higher than the national average, and that chronic food insecurity remains a critical challenge. As a result, many people in northern rural areas of Ghana live in abject poverty without sufficient food.

Several attempts have been put in place to alleviate this chronic poverty prevalence in the three regions of Northern Ghana to no avail. Past and present governments and their international development agencies around the world have instituted interventions such as microfinance and microfinance-related programmes. The popular assumptions by researchers such as, Kpefan, Taiwo, & Isibor (2016), Kusi, Opata, & Narh (2015), that microfinance would help the poor, in particular would empower poor active women to start their own businesses or expand existing ones, which would enable them to accumulate assets, and eventually facilitate their escape from poverty, seem not to be working in the three northern regions of Ghana. Addai (2017), hadj Miled & Rejeb (2015), Kumah & Boachie (2016), works on impact of microfinance services on women empowerment and poverty alleviation asserted that, though the poor of the poorest is not attractive to microfinance providers, due their riskiness, microfinance still impacts positively on the active poor. However, this paper argues that with the large sizes of households and the dominance of women by men in the Northern Rural set ups of Ghana, microfinance alone as a financial tool is fruitless. Nevertheless, the aim of this study is far from identifying all fundamental causes of large sizes of households and the domineering nature of men in rural Northern Ghana. An effort in that direction would imply developing the entire social investigation. Instead, the objective of this paper is to examine the relationship

between large size households impact on microfinance in mitigating women's financial self-sufficiency in rural areas of the three Northern Regions of Ghana.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Women Financial Self-Sufficiency through Microfinance

Dash, Prasad, & Koshy (2016), defines empowerment as the process of women taking control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices. Hence, Aggarwal, Goodell, & Selleck (2015), conducted a survey in Nepal to assess the empowerment effect of a microfinance programme, their results reveal that 68% of women experienced an increase in power in most areas of decision making that were culturally dominated by men. Similarly, Ashraf & Yin (2010), used randomised controlled trials to find out whether, the results are positive, as many studies have found that households tend to benefit from individual goal setting and savings if income accrues to women instead of men and the results were positive. Haile, Bock, & Folmer (2012), also confirmed that an increase in women's income benefits households to a greater extent than a commensurate increase in the income of men. For instance, (Nisbett, Davis, Yosef, & Akhtar, 2017), estimates that the contribution of microfinance to a household's consumption is higher for female borrowing compared to male borrowing. Women have been observed to spend more of their income on their families, not only their households; therefore, women are more likely than men to spend their profits on household and family needs.

In 2010, the Population and Housing Census of Ghana reported that of the 28 million people living in the country, 51% are women. Furthermore, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are largely owned by women and contribute greatly to the informal sector. Nevertheless, women face difficulties in accessing credit compared to their male counterparts in the urban and rural set-ups. This lack of access to credit for women from rural communities is one of the economic impediments to the country's development. Many women are disadvantaged in financing their business growth and face a number of cultural barriers, such as the traditional land tenure system, the inheritance system, ignorance of business laws and ethnics, lack of formal education, large number of dependents in each household, lack of knowledge of financial transactions and their riskiness (Ghana Statistical Survey 1999). According to Iakovleva, Solesvik, & Trifilova, (2013), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), reports that approximately 58% of women who own MSMEs have no access to credit, and this is considered the most severe barrier to growth. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that Ghana is ranked as 101<sup>st</sup> among 142 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2014 report (World Economic Forum 2015) with an index score of 0.66. The index measures gender inequality among various countries, with the highest possible score being 1 (equality) and the lowest possible score 0 (inequality).

### 2.2. The Rural Women Access to Credit

Professor Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel laureate in economics, is credited for inventing microfinance in the 1970s, however, the first credit union in the whole of Africa was established by the Canadian Catholic Mission in the 1950s in the Northern Territory of Ghana (Brafula-Insaidoo, 2011; Kwarteng & Hannah (2011)), with the sole aim of providing financial services to alleviate poverty and empower, especially, women.

The lack of access to productive capital is often viewed as a major constraint for economic development and poverty reduction in developing countries (Owusu & Odhiambo, 2014). Microfinance is basically designed to lend money in a cost-effective way to poor households, with the long-term objectives of eliminating poverty and building institutional capacity (Quaye & Hartarska, 2016; Lopatta, Tchikov, Jaeschke, & Lodhia, 2017). Microfinance generally includes savings and credit, but can also include other financial services such as insurance and payment services (Otero, 1999; Banerjee, Duflo, Glennerster, & Kinnan, 2015; Raihan, Osmani, & Khalily, 2017). According to Mia (2017), women are more reliable than men in repaying loans. A review of World Bank projects by Roodman & Morduch (2014), confirms this finding. These authors point out that loan repayment rates in projects that have concentrated on women were higher than in mixed-gender projects. It is suggested by many research findings that there is an explicit correlation between gender-related development issues and a country's total development indicators (Gupta, et al., 2013). However, Stewart, Dickson, Majoro, Dickson, & Majoro (2010), points out that in many developing countries, there are cultural barriers that often restrict women's participation in the financial sector. Evidence from poverty reduction projects confirm that for the success of government interventions to eliminate poverty such barriers must be obliterated (Permanyer, 2010). According to Van Rooyen, Stewart, & De Wet (2012), one of the reasons for targeting women through microfinance is that women represent the majority of the world's poorest persons, and are often not given the same opportunities as those offered to men.

### 2.3. Large Households and Gender-Specific Constraints

Microfinance is widely accepted as a sustainable method of empowering women and alleviating their poverty, particularly in poor societies where women lack access to traditional financial services. However, the role of microfinance in such societies is usually hampered by a number of factors, including socio-cultural norms and gender-based constraints. Using his term "structures of constraint," Ayferam (2015), explains the cultural norms that identify the relationships between different groups in a society, mainly between the genders. He demonstrates that this structure entails some holding dominating positions over others in addition to an identification of the choices available for each group, including their access and control over resources. Zhao & Tyler (2013), examined the culture, economics, cross-national and social outreach of microfinance organizations and found that the patriarchal logic of a structure and its patterns of gender inequality constitute a major challenge for microfinance institutions (MFIs) and hinder their roles in facilitating women's participation in the economy. Social barriers to female entrepreneurs' access to microfinance can also be explained by the notion of "headship of a household" and by the way this is defined based on gender relationships. This concept

identifies, mostly based on gender, one family member as the head of the household. In an investigation of this notion in South African households by Rogan (2016), reports that most respondents use gender when referring to the characteristics of the head. It is believed that in societies where the level of and the notion of headship is a norm, major and highly valued roles such as the primary wage-earning responsibilities are assigned to males, while female roles are limited to domestic duties such as cooking and childrearing. In that sense, a lower value is given to the aptitudes and activities associated with women. In such societies, men are the heads of their households, while women are expected to be dependent on their husbands, and this dominance is usually accepted as a kind of submission or respect (Zhao & Wry, 2011). In relation to microfinance, wives in such patriarchal societies may be coerced into relinquishing loans to their husbands, or even forced to give up the returns of their ventures into the control of men (Karim, 2011), these practices undoubtedly divert microfinance credit away from its intended goal and hinder its role in empowering women, specially the Northern Ghana rural woman (Karim, 2011). Moreover, men in patriarchal societies may force their wives to stay away completely from microfinance in order to avoid subsequent conflict with their empowered wives. In a study conducted to investigate women's empowerment and gender relations in the Dangme West district of Ghana, Wrigley-Asante (2012), found that despite the success of credit programmes in reducing some women's vulnerability to poverty and improving their socio-economic status, other women are still constrained by the legacy of headship, and their decisions are dominated by men. Wrigley-Asante asserted that, empowering women and improving their economic status leads at times to power conflicts or confrontations between spouses. Based on the preceding literature, women financial self-sufficiency through microfinance in the Northern Territory of Ghana is expected to be influenced by the large households' sizes and patriarchal logic patterns of gender inequality constitute major challenges for microfinance activities in the area, which is the gap this study intends to fill. In other to achieve the objective of this paper the following research question are posed.

1. Is there any correlation between microfinance performance and large size households?
2. Can microfinance improve the financial position of the rural northern woman in a high patriarchy society?

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Research Design and Population*

The area of this is the three Northern Regions of Ghana- Upper West, upper East and Northern Region. A non-probability (snowball) sampling procedure was used to collect primary data from 260 microfinance clients in the three regions, of which 247 were valid. According to García-Pérez, Yanes-Estévez, & Oreja-Rodríguez, 2014; Hing & Nisbet, 2010, a non-probability sampling procedure is required when data features are irregular.

This research questionnaire contains twomajor parts: multiple choice questions and the Likert scale items. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to collect information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as gender, occupation, education, marriage and family size. The second part, respondents were asked a number of Likert scale items to find out whether microfinance made a difference in their lives financially or socially. In these Likert scale stuffs, respondents were asked to give their opinions on a number of statements indicating the impact of microfinance on their households, socially and educationally. The respondents' opinions ranked as highly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and highly agree (5).

#### *3.2. Sample Procedure*

This study design adapted a descriptive and causative investigation established on the clarification by Hair, Celsi, Ortinau, & Bush (2008), Kojok, Dani, Mokahal, & Bakri (2012), that descriptive research strategy is suitable when the study aims include the drive of the amount to which the selected variables are linked and how a variable source controls the observations of other variables. Also a quantitative method was used owing to its neutrality; it also enables data to be transformed into distinct units that can be compared with others by the use of statistical investigation which is a vital measure of numerical study. SPSS statistically software is used to analyze the data.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	57	23.1	23.1
Female	190	76.9	100.0
Total	247	100.0	
<b>Age</b>			
18-25	80	32.4	32.4
26-35	70	28.3	60.7
36-45	69	27.9	88.7
46-62	28	11.3	100.0
Total	247	100.0	
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single	28	11.3	11.3
Married	156	63.2	74.5
widow/widower	55	22.3	96.8
Divorce	3	1.2	98.0
Separate	5	2.0	100.0
Total	247	100.0	
<b>Education Level</b>			
Illiterate	72	29.1	29.1
Primary School	106	42.9	72.1
Junior High School	39	15.8	87.9
Senior High School	12	4.9	92.7
Tertiary	18	7.3	100.0
Total	247	100.0	
<b>Number of Dependents</b>			
No, or one Dependent	10	4.0	4.0
Two or Three or Four Dependents	9	3.6	7.7
Five or six or Seven Dependents	62	25.1	32.8
Eight or Ten Dependents	80	32.4	65.2
Eleven and Above Dependents	86	34.8	100.0
Total	247	100.0	

Table 1

Source: Field work, 2016

From the table majority of the respondents 76.9%, are females with only 23.1% males, this was intentional as the aim of this study is to find out the financial position of rural women in Northern Ghana. The age distribution reveals that most of the respondents 88.7% fall in the active working class, between 18-45 years old, and the rest 11.3% are in the 46-62 age group. The marital status shows that, 63.2% are married, 22.3% are widows or widowers, while 11.3% are single, only 3.2% are either divorce or separated. 29.1% of the respondents are complete illiterates, 42.9% had primary education, 15.8% completed junior high school, and 4.9% and 7.3% had senior and tertiary education respectively. Therefore majority of the respondents had primary and junior schools education. The results on households size show that 34.8% of the respondents had eleven (11) or more dependents, 32.4% had eight (8) or ten (10) dependents, 25.1% had five (5), six (6) or seven (7) dependents, and 4.0% had no or one (1) dependent, while only 3.6% had two (2) or three (3) dependents. This confirms the large size households in the area of this study.

No	Effect of Household size on Microfinance	1	2	3	4	5	%	Mean
1	The large number of dependents in a household is the cause of women poverty.	8.5	4.5	10.1	25.9	51.0	76.9	4.0648
2	The low level of education is the cause of poverty	39.3	9.3	4.5	10.9	36.0	46.0	2.9514
3	My family feeds on one meal often	1.6	12.1	13.8	30.0	42.5	72.5	3.9960
4	My family feeds on three or two square meals often	6.5	28.7	23.1	19.0	22.7	41.7	3.2267
5	My husband direct on how my loan and other incomes should be used	10.3	9.3	4.5	29.9	45.0	74.9	4.3036
6	If a woman becomes financially self-sufficient, her husband will divorce her	39.3	9.3	4.5	10.9	36.0	46.9	2.9514
7	Microfinance helped me start my business	6.5	28.7	23.1	19.0	22.7	41.7	3.2267
8	Microfinance will be helpful if the women make decisions concerning their lives	1.2	2.0	14.6	52.2	30.0	82.2	4.0769
9	My income level has increased through microfinance	39.3	9.3	4.5	10.9	36.0	46.9	2.9433
10	Women financial problem can only be solved through formal education	1.6	12.1	13.8	30.0	42.5	72.5	3.9960

Table 2: Degree of Responses of Household Size and Microfinance

Source: Field work, 2016

From table 2 above, challenges confronting women's financial self-sufficiency through microfinance vary from the size of the household to women financial problem. Indicating that, 76.9% of respondents confirm that the large sizes of the households are the causes of women poverty in Northern Ghana, 74.9% of respondents started businesses through microfinance and 46.9% income increased through microfinance. Yet majority of them, 72.5% often have a meal once a day and only 41.7% have two or three meals a day. This implied that though many started their businesses and income increased, consumption did not increase. From the results it shows that 41.7% of the respondent's loans are managed by men, however majority as many as 82.2% of the respondents believed their financial problem could be better if women take decisions by themselves. The statement low level of education is the cause of poverty recorded 46.0%, while statement-Women financial problem can only be solve through formal education documented a higher percentage of 72.5%.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1	Large number of children	1									
2	Large number of dependents	.038	1								
3	Feeds on three or two meals	-.068	.043	1							
4	Feeds on one meal often	-.035	.048	.462**	1						
5	Helped me start my business.	.528**	.073	-.155*	-.081	1					
6	Self-sufficient, her husband divorce her	.038	1.000**	.043	.048	.073	1				
7	Husband takes decisions on use of loan	-.035	.048	.462**	1.000**	-.081	.048	1			
8	Helpful if the women make decisions	.274**	.159*	.028	.027	.399**	.159*	.027	1		
9	Income level has increased	.046	.991**	.052	.047	.070	.991**	.047	.156	1	
10	Women problem can solve through education	-.068	.043	1.000**	.462**	.155*	.043	.462**	.028	.052	1

Table 3: Correlation Analyses of microfinance impact, large households and other activities.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The correlation result shows nine highly significances positive and three perfectly positive correlation between microfinance impact of women's financial self-sufficiency, household sizes, low level of education, feeding once a day, women's freedom to making decision, increase in women's income and their formal education at 1% and at 5% alpha levels respectively. However, there is a negative correlation between women's new businesses and the quality of their diet.

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

The findings reveal that most of the active poor in Northern rural Ghana are illiterates, with large household sizes, who live on a single meal a day and battling with challenges in their patriarchal societies. These findings are in line with the primary poverty theory by Nussbaum (2001) -the poor lacks the basic need such as food - confirmed by the Ghana Statistical Service 2010 population and housing census report, that the poverty rates of the Northern Regions of Ghana are two to three times higher than Ghana's national average. Hence, microfinance alone is not a capable financial tool in promoting women's financial self-sufficiency in the rural areas in Northern Ghana. In contrasts to this article, are studies by Addai (2017), Kumah & Boachie, (2016), Teye, Coleman, & Okyere(2016), on women empowerment through microfinance in the Southern Regions of Ghana, they concluded that an increase in financial accessibility with other microfinance activities correctly put in place, women empowerment and poverty will be alleviated in the regions of their studies. Lastly, this article establishes two major long-run feasible means that can improve women financial self-sufficiency and alleviate poverty in the three Northern Regions of Ghana; the women must be free to decide and choose activities that affect them without the intrusion of the male counterparts, and the reinforcement of the girl child formal education must be the primary objective in the three northern regions.

## 6. Recommendations

This article recommends that the traditional system of external family system in Ghana, especially, in the three Northern Regions of Ghana must be abolished through awareness creation to pave a way for the nuclear family system, to enable the women carry out their households' responsibilities effectively. The Government of Ghana must revisit the free education system and make it effective through the districts assemblies throughout the whole country. Reconsidering the female child education as the primary development objective in the area will be the starting point of women's poverty and financial empowerment of women in Ghana. The patriarchal system in Rural Northern Ghana must be abolished to pave a way for females to decide in matters that concern their well-welfare. Finally, the Ghanaian Northern women should be viewed as having equal rights and responsibility as her male counterpart.

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