

*“I learned to talk”: The role of income-generation projects in village women’s empowerment in India*

*Iris Lin*

*Catherine Kwantes*

*Deanne den Hartog*

Researchers have long commented on the role that economic independence has in developing personal empowerment. However, does empowerment come about solely because of one’s ability to earn an income or are there specific additional factors that differentiate between empowering jobs and those that act as merely another source of livelihood? The aim of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the influence that income-generation projects had in developing rural village women’s empowerment. Focus group sessions were conducted with the women who worked in three different income-generation projects in villages located in Kanakapura taluk of Bangalore Rural district, Karnataka, India. Additionally, interviews were also conducted with field coordinators and senior executives of the organization in charge of overseeing the income-generation projects, so that a variety of perspectives could be incorporated into this case study analysis. Village women’s empowerment was studied from a variety of angles including the women’s internal feelings of empowerment, their outward behavioural expressions of empowerment, and the role that external sociocultural factors had in encouraging or hindering women’s empowerment. The findings of this case study suggest these income-generation projects indeed affect empowerment both through and beyond providing an income. Further, these findings may assist empowerment initiatives in these contexts by identifying job factors or characteristics that encourage development of women’s empowerment.