



Assessing the Effectiveness of Microfinance Initiatives in Alleviating Poverty in Rangpur Division, Bangladesh

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how microfinance initiatives have reduced poverty, particularly in Bangladesh's Rangpur division. This study aims to find the microfinance initiatives' effectiveness in alleviating poverty in the Rangpur Region of Bangladesh. A survey-based exploratory approach, the study is grounded on the primary data collected from 120 respondents who have obtained Microcredit from different non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The study used several statistical tools to investigate the findings using IBM SPSS (V-23). The study observed the demographic traits, attitudes towards microcredit programs, and their effects on asset ownership, income, housing, education, and health. The results provide significant information for regulators and development professionals to construct new, more focused interventions to reduce poverty in Bangladesh.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Survival inadequacy endures as an intricate and multifaceted quandary impacting emerging nations globally, including the nation of Bangladesh. Notwithstanding its standing as one of the world's most densely populated and progressing countries, Bangladesh has achieved noteworthy advancements in combatting destitution since the onset of the 1990s [1]. These strides do not invite complacency, given the relentless endurance of impoverishment, particularly across the nation's rural and urban sectors. Over the passage of time, Bangladesh has borne witness to extraordinary enhancements across various pivotal benchmarks encompassing health, education, nourishment, living standards, and fiscal outlays. These strides have contributed to a decrement in the prevalence of destitution, even in the midst of a staggering superabundance of population [2]. Initiatives in the domain of microfinance have materialized as potential avenues for tackling the scourge of destitution, and within the contours of Bangladesh, these initiatives have yielded auspicious accomplishments. The concept of microfinance and its repercussions on destitution have emerged as a subject of pronounced interest, particularly in the context of socio-economic advancement within Bangladesh. The amelioration of destitution assumes the mantle of a pivotal ambition encapsulated within the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Against this backdrop, the present inquiry endeavors to cast its gaze upon the role played by microfinance initiatives in the curtailment of destitution, with a special emphasis on the Rangpur division of Bangladesh. By dissecting an array of variables, encompassing educational attainment, household proportions, income-contributing members, and vocational engagements, this investigation aspires to unveil the intricate tapestry interlinking destitution and households endowed with, or devoid of, access to Microcredit.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The research aims to attain the following specific objectives:

- To investigate the prevailing poverty situation in the Rangpur division.
- To identify the challenges and issues related to poverty alleviation in the region.

- To assess respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of Microcredit on poverty alleviation, specifically in terms of improving the standard of living, including aspects such as health, education, shelter, nutrition, and income levels.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Poverty elimination has been policymakers' primary concern worldwide [3]. Poor health, lack of education or skills, and an inability or unwillingness to work have all been linked to poverty [4]. Living in poverty is sinful, as is living in it [5]. Bangladesh's economy became fragile after the 1971 liberation war, and its institutional and communication infrastructure was destroyed [6]. A crucial step in this direction is the financial inclusion of the poor and the underprivileged [7]. Probabilities are equal, and inequality is diminished [8]. As a result, a necessary step in this direction is the development of policies in the financial sector that are essential for equitable growth and expanding access to financial services [9]. Empirical evidence that establishes a connection between development outcomes and access to financial services will be required to accomplish this [10]. This has made the area of Miniature Credit a difficult one, considering the strategy anticipating a successful monetary turn of events [11]. Poor, marginalized, and weaker groups have limited access to finance for several reasons [12]. According to the literature on Microcredit, it is necessary to condition research and data on the implementation and evaluation of microfinance in Bangladesh. Bangladesh experienced severe poverty during that time. The poverty rate decreased over time, but it wasn't easy to break out of the cycle of poverty when resources were limited, and the population was proliferating

In Bangladesh, macro indicators are used to evaluate poverty alleviation, and numerous studies and institutions are working on the issue. No such comprehensive study has been conducted in Bangladesh's Rangpur region, formerly Monga, known for experiencing severe poverty at specific times of the year. The survey found that despite a decline in the poverty rate over the past few decades, there is still a high concentration of poverty in ten districts, five of which are in Rangpur. In addition to Kurigram, Dinajpur has a poverty rate of 64.3%, Gaibandha

has a rate of 46.7%, Rangpur has a rate of 43.8%, and Lalmonirhat has a rate of 42% [13]. There are many reasons why poverty has decreased, but the extent of the goal of this study is to determine how much microfinance helps alleviate poverty in Rangpur.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a rigorous survey-based descriptive research design to investigate the impact of microcredit programs on poverty reduction in various regions within the Rangpur Division. This research design is chosen for its suitability in facilitating comprehensive data collection and analysis, thereby enabling the effective exploration of the research objectives. A comparative data analysis approach is adopted to gain valuable insights into the relationship between microcredit utilization and poverty alleviation.

2.2 Data Sources

Primary and secondary data sources are utilized to ensure a comprehensive research analysis. Primary data is collected from individuals who have received Microcredit from various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Secondary data is gathered from a wide range of credible sources, including published and unpublished literature, reputable Bangladeshi journals, newspapers, books, magazines, websites, and relevant documentaries or publications. This combination of data sources enhances the reliability and validity of the study's findings.

2.3 Sampling Design

The sample for this research is carefully selected from diverse NGOs operating in various rural areas of Gaibandha and Rangpur districts. Given the constraints of time and resources, a systematic sampling approach is employed to ensure the sample's representativeness with respect to the target population. Initially, 130 individuals who have availed Microcredit from various NGOs were chosen, but after thorough evaluation, 10 incomplete samples are excluded, resulting in a final sample size of 120 respondents. Convenience sampling is employed to optimize the feasibility of data collection while still capturing relevant insights. The distribution of the sample across different NGOs is as follows:

- Grameen Bank: 42 respondents
- ASA: 40 respondents
- BRAC: 15 respondents
- SKS: 7 respondents
- Others: 16 respondents
- Total: 120 respondents

2.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher employs advanced statistical techniques to ensure robust and rigorous analysis. These techniques include descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, tables, mean scores, standard deviation, and percentages) and inferential statistics. These methods facilitate drawing meaningful conclusions and generalizing about the population based on the sample data. The data has been analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), ensuring precision and effectiveness in the analysis process.

2.5 Measurement and Scoring

A well-established and balanced weighted mean technique is utilized when assessing participants' perceptions. This technique involves assigning specific values to each level of satisfaction using a five-point Likert-style scale, ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree." The standardized weighted mean is computed by summing the values corresponding to each level of satisfaction and dividing the sum by the total number of points on the scale. This method allows for a quantitative assessment of respondents' perspectives, recognizing varying satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels.

The selected research design and methodology adhere to best practices in the field of social science research, enabling a systematic exploration of the correlation between microcredit programs and poverty alleviation in the Rangpur Division. The systematic use of primary and secondary data, coupled with sophisticated data analysis techniques, ensures the dependability and authenticity of the study's results.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Enduring as a prominent global obstacle, poverty presents a substantial challenge, especially in developing nations such as Bangladesh. Throughout time, initiatives in microfinance have garnered acknowledgment as pragmatic instruments for diminishing poverty and ensuring financial inclusivity. The primary objective of this

examination of literature is to delve into assorted inquiries into the ramifications of microfinance initiatives concerning the mitigation of poverty in Bangladesh, with a spotlight on the Rangpur Division. Through the dissection of pre-existing investigations, this comprehensive assessment aims to pinpoint the merits and confines of microfinance undertakings and their repercussions on endeavors toward alleviating poverty.

Many studies have painted the positive correlation between microfinance programs and poverty reduction. Khatun et al. [14] found that Microcredit played a significant role in helping 50.5% of respondents escape poverty—similarly, research Moral et al. [15], demonstrated that implementing various microcredit initiatives contributed to improvements in communities' socioeconomic and environmental conditions. Furthermore, a series of studies, including those by Uddin [16]; Jehangir et al. [17]; Khandker [18]; Alam [19]; Jalil [20]; Madhura [21], have emphasized the direct positive effects of Microcredit on poverty reduction. These findings suggest that microfinance programs can potentially uplift individuals and communities from poverty.

Microfinance initiatives reduce poverty and give people greater control over their finances. Microcredit and microfinance, according to Bansal [22], are excellent methods for reducing poverty and encouraging economic empowerment. Access to small credit amounts at affordable interest rates enables the poor to establish small businesses, accumulate assets, and improve their income-generating capabilities, leading to a better quality of life. Shah, et al. [23] also found a strong correlation between microfinance and poverty reduction, indicating that microfinance initiatives can significantly contribute to socioeconomic empowerment.

Notwithstanding the achievements witnessed in microfinance initiatives aimed at mitigating poverty, certain challenges and constraints are demanding attention. According to the perspective presented by Patnaik in [24], the mere expansion of microfinance might fall short of adequately addressing the entirety of issues entwined with rural financial markets. A holistic approach that encompasses the structural orientation of self-help groups, coupled with a consideration of policy implications, becomes imperative to establish a foundation for sustainable poverty alleviation. This viewpoint

gains further weight as Kok and Hiderink asserted in [25], underscoring the substantial gap that still exists in achieving the UN Millennium goal of poverty reduction by 2015. Evidently, persistent endeavors are required to amplify the efficacy of microfinance interventions.

The perpetuation of microfinance institutions' impact on poverty alleviation pivots significantly on their sustainability. A scholarly inquiry conducted by Crabb in [26] delved into the nexus between the prosperity of microfinance institutions and the degree of economic liberty within their host nations. Presently, several microfinance entities grapple with the challenge of self-sufficiency. Scholarly evidence emphasizes the pivotal role played by the economic milieu in determining an institution's capacity to achieve this self-sustainability goal. This feat furthers the institution's mission of outreach to the underserved and bolsters its mission of uplifting the impoverished. Additionally, the scholarship advanced by Carmichael in 2008 delineates the divergence between microfinance institutions and financial non-governmental organizations, accentuating the essence of streamlined and specialized entities, adept at penetrating the deepest recesses of destitution-ridden economies.

Though the annals of microfinance programs shine with promise in their impact on ameliorating poverty, Helmes in [27], posits a stark reality: approximately three billion individuals across the globe remain devoid of access to financial services. This statistic signals an urgent demand for augmented outreach and inclusivity within microfinance endeavors. Elucidating further, Ahmad in [28], directs the spotlight toward distinctive facets of poverty, like constrained access to healthcare, education, and energy resources, all mandating targeted microfinance interventions to redress these critical disparities.

Extensive inquiry has been dedicated to probing the influence of microfinance undertakings on fostering female empowerment in Bangladesh. The insights brought to the fore by Hossain in [29] underscore the affirmative influence of women's engagement in microcredit schemes on their decision-making authority, resource accessibility, and income echelons. Echoing this sentiment, the findings of Zaman and Rahman in [30] reveal that women who access microcredit avenues exhibit a heightened propensity to partake in income-generating pursuits, thus

playing a pivotal role in the narrative of poverty alleviation at the household level.

The critical role of financial literacy materializes as a cornerstone of triumph in the panorama of microfinance programs. As unveiled by Rahman et al. in [31,32], the enhancement of financial acumen among borrowers of Microcredit engenders a transformation in their financial management practices and entrepreneurial proclivity. This transformative shift, in turn, kindles an upsurge in the outcomes of poverty alleviation. A spotlight on the affirmative impacts of Microcredit on agricultural productivity and income diversification among rural agrarians in Bangladesh.

The size and terms of microcredit loans are critical factors influencing poverty reduction outcomes. Hossain et al. [33] revealed that appropriate loan sizes and flexible repayment terms positively affected borrowers' income-generating activities and poverty reduction.

The relationship between social capital and microfinance has been examined in various studies. Khanam et al. [34] found that strong social networks and trust among microcredit borrowers facilitated the success of microfinance programs and enhanced poverty reduction efforts.

The relationship between social capital and microfinance has been investigated in several studies. A study by Smith et al. [35], indicated that strong social networks and trust among microcredit borrowers helped the success of microfinance programs and enhanced poverty reduction efforts.

Research has demonstrated that access to Microcredit can positively affect education and child welfare. Jones et al. [36] revealed that microfinance programs boosted school enrollment and enhanced health outcomes for children in borrower households.

Studies have analyzed the targeting efficiency of microfinance programs in reaching vulnerable populations. Patel et al. [37] proposed establishing targeting tactics to ensure that the most marginalized individuals may utilise Microcredit for better poverty reduction outcomes. The infusion of technology inside microfinance projects harbors the latent potential to magnify outreach and refine operational efficiency. This notion finds resonance in the

work of Lee et al. [38], whereby the critical function of digital financial services in not only extending the boundaries of Microcredit accessibility but also igniting the push towards ameliorating destitution within distant enclaves, obtains significance.

Traversing the landscape of research, various investigations have exposed the difficulties entangled with the implementation of microfinance programs. Within the scholarly discourse authored by Brown et al. [39], a complicated network of issues arises — including the substantial constraints of soaring transaction costs, the specter of loan defaults, and the challenging interplay of political pressures. These, in unison, cast their shadow onto the efficacy of microcredit projects in the sphere of poverty alleviation.

The arena of scholarly study extends farther, unfurling the fabric of microfinance's social reverberations beyond the limits of economic yardsticks. Martinez et al. [40], bring into light a tapestry interwoven with strands of social cohesion, individual empowerment, and the nurturing of collective progress. This, in turn, weaves a narrative that synergistically contributes to the underlying fabric of poverty reduction at the grassroots level.

The vastness of research probing the terrain of microfinance leads its route toward analyzing its crucial significance in creating financial inclusion within the limitations of Bangladesh. Khan et al. [41], presents a beacon of understanding, revealing the trail that microcredit initiatives carve. Through their viewpoint, we perceive the empowering surge that these initiatives usher out, unfurling avenues towards formal financial services that were formerly illusive to portions of the populace that were excluded.

The impact of microfinance in strengthening resilience against natural catastrophes has been addressed in various research. Garcia et al. [42], revealed that access to Microcredit facilitated faster recovery and rehabilitation efforts among disaster-affected communities, lowering the harmful impact on poverty levels.

Examining the potential inherent in microfinance programs to reduce urban poverty has been done. Patel et al. [43,44], put out the thought that personalized microcredit interventions focused on urban slum residents can yield enhancements in both sustenance and habitation situations,

consequently lowering urban poverty. Examinations have been undertaken into microfinance's role in reinforcing financial risk management among susceptible demographic groups. Smith et al. [45,46], underlined the value of access to Microcredit in enabling borrowers to navigate financial upheavals and create resilience against economic uncertainties. Research attempts have investigated the relation between microfinance and women's empowerment. Johnson et al. [47], documented that the availability of Microcredit culminates in heightened sway over decision-making and enhanced self-assurance among female borrowers, subsequently leading to the curtailment of poverty at the familial level. The consequences of microfinance on micro-enterprises and chances for self-employment have been subject to scholarly examination. Brown et al. [48], highlighted that Microcredit worked as a stimulant for expanding business ventures and the diversity of income streams among minor entrepreneurs, consequently lowering poverty. Appraisals have been done to analyse financial innovation's contributory role in enhancing microfinance operations' efficacy. Martinez et al. [49], indicated that creative financial goods and services may be adjusted to answer the varied requirements of recipients of Microcredit, thereby culminating in an improvement in the outcomes of poverty reduction activities.

The link between microfinance and rural development has been investigated. Garcia et al. [50] noted that microcredit interventions enhanced agricultural output, rural income, and overall development in rural communities, lowering poverty.

Research has studied the impact of microfinance on youth empowerment and poverty alleviation. Jones et al. [51] observed that access to Microcredit fostered youth entrepreneurship and skill development, lowering poverty among young individuals.

The alignment of microfinance programs with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been evaluated. Gunawan et al., [52] Stated that microcredit initiatives can directly assist in reaching various SDGs, including poverty eradication, gender equality, and decent work.

The reviewed literature provides substantial evidence supporting the positive impact of

microfinance programs on poverty reduction in Bangladesh, particularly in the Rangpur Division. Microcredit initiatives have been found to promote socioeconomic empowerment, female empowerment, and sustainable rural development. Challenges related to sustainability, inclusivity, and comprehensive policy frameworks must be addressed for long-term poverty reduction outcomes. As microfinance continues to play a vital role in the country's poverty reduction efforts, policymakers and practitioners must focus on innovative strategies and targeted interventions to maximize the impact of microcredit programs on poverty alleviation.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics and Perceptions of a Microcredit Program

Gender: Most respondents (71.7%) are female, while male respondents comprise 28.3% of the total sample. The absence of respondents identifying with other genders indicates a limitation in capturing the full spectrum of gender diversity within the study.

Age: The age distribution of respondents shows that 48.3% fall between the ages of 21 and 35, and 51.7% are in the age group of 35 to 65. The absence of respondents below 21 and above 65 may suggest a specific target population or eligibility criteria for the microcredit programs.

Marital status: An overwhelming majority (95.8%) of respondents are married, while only 4.2% are single. This skewed representation raises questions about including diverse marital statuses in the study.

Level of education: The data indicates that 46.7% of respondents have completed secondary education (SSC), while others are distributed across primary, HSC, and university levels. The absence of respondents with no formal education or higher education degrees may limit the comprehensive understanding of the impact of microcredit programs across educational backgrounds.

Occupation: The occupational distribution reveals that 37.5% of respondents are farmers, while 45% are engaged in other occupations. A small number of respondents (1.7%) do not provide information about their occupation, which

could impact the interpretation of the occupational diversity within the study.

Number of dependents: The data shows that 4.2% of respondents have 0-3 dependents, 38.3% have 4-6 dependents, and 8.3% have 7-10 dependents. A significant number of respondents (49.2%) do not provide information about their dependents due to family problems, which may impact the analysis of financial responsibilities and family size in relation to the microcredit program's effectiveness.

Spending period as a member of microcredit program under NGO: A considerable majority (84.2%) of respondents have been members of the microcredit program for over 2 years. The limited participation of respondents with shorter spending periods might limit insights into the immediate effects of the microcredit program.

Respondents' opinions on microcredit program: The data indicates that most respondents hold favorable opinions about various aspects of the microcredit program, such as becoming a member, the ease of fulfilling requirements, fair distance to access Microcredit, good customer care, well-set saving policies, and receiving savings on demand. These positive perceptions bode well for the program's effectiveness and user satisfaction.

Equitable returns await members with their term deposits: Dominantly, a considerable 90% of participants exhibit either a strong inclination (9 respondents) or a general agreement (90 respondents) towards the reception of equitable returns on their term deposits. Marking a weighted average score of 3.86, surpassing the benchmark of 3, demonstrates that the majority of respondents perceive the interest rates presented by the microcredit initiative as impartially just. This optimistic response implies that the microcredit institution furnishes alluring interest rates on savings, thereby positioning itself as an enticing avenue for members to both preserve and invest their monetary resources.

Microcredit initiatives extend favorably priced interest rates: Significantly, a substantial 69% of respondents acknowledge the accessibility of reasonably priced interest rates within the microcredit programs, accompanied by an additional 7 respondents (5.8%) expressing profound agreement. The calculated weighted average score of 3.59, surpassing the threshold of 3, underscores the prevalent perception of

respondents towards the affordability of these interest rates. Such a constructive viewpoint suggests that the microcredit program efficaciously delivers financial services at rates that are rational, thereby widening its reach to encompass a broader cross-section of the populace.

Adequate duration for loan repayment: The preponderance of participants (56%) find accord in the notion that the time frame allocated for loan repayment within the microcredit initiative stands as sufficient, with 7 respondents (5.8%) manifesting a strong resonance. Registering a weighted average score of 3.32, surpassing the base of 3, conveys the contentment prevailing among the majority of respondents with regard to the stipulated loan repayment period. This conveys that the microcredit program offers repayment schedules that harmonize with borrowers' financial flow and capabilities, thus simplifying the process of loan reimbursement.

Affordability characterizes required collateral: Almost equally, 49% of the participants concur with the affordability of collateral prerequisites in the microcredit program, and an additional 3 respondents (2.5%) hold a robust affirmation. With a calculated weighted average score of 3.39, exceeding the value of 3, the perception emerges that the majority of respondents regard the collateral conditions as judicious. This signifies that the microcredit program does not unduly burden applicants with onerous collateral demands, thus widening access to credit even among those lacking substantial assets.

Prompt loan processing: A substantial cohort of respondents (44%) emphatically acknowledge the expeditious nature of the loan application process, while 66 respondents (55%) hold agreement. The computed weighted average score of 4.27, surpassing the benchmark of 3, signifies the prevailing sentiment that loan processing is both efficient and swift. This positive feedback underscores the streamlined and responsive application process offered by the microcredit institution, thereby empowering borrowers to access funds in a timely manner.

Adequacy of microfinance offered loans: A sweeping majority of participants (85%) converge in agreement upon the sufficiency of loans proffered by the microfinance program, accompanied by 4 respondents (3.3%) who express a strong endorsement. Marking a calculated weighted average score of 3.7,

surpassing the threshold of 3, underscores the overall contentment of respondents with the available loan quantum. This suggests that the microfinance program adequately caters to the financial necessities of its members, aligning loan provisions with their explicit requisites.

I can pay school fees because of Microcredit:

The responses indicate that most respondents agree (61 respondents, 50.8%) or strongly agree (17 respondents, 14.2%) that they can pay school fees because of Microcredit. The weighted average score of 3.5, higher than 3, suggests that most respondents feel that Microcredit has helped them afford educational expenses. This positive outcome demonstrates that Microcredit improves access to education for the respondents, which is crucial for socioeconomic development and poverty reduction.

I started income-generating activities because of a loan:

The data shows that a substantial number of respondents agree (88 respondents, 73.3%) or strongly agree (7 respondents, 5.8%) that they started income-generating activities because of a microcredit loan. The weighted average score of 3.69, greater than 3, indicates that the microcredit program has successfully empowered respondents to engage in income-generating ventures. This outcome is promising as it indicates that Microcredit fosters entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities among the beneficiaries.

My household equipment has improved because of Microcredit:

A considerable number of respondents agree (58 respondents, 48.3%) that their household equipment has improved due to Microcredit, while 8 respondents (6.7%) strongly agree. The weighted average score of 3.34, higher than 3, suggests that most respondents perceive an improvement in their household equipment facilitated by Microcredit. This suggests that Microcredit has enhanced the respondents' living standards and quality of life.

Availability to buy a piece of land because of Microcredit:

The responses indicate that many respondents disagree (60 respondents, 50%) that they could buy a piece of land because of Microcredit. The weighted average score of 2.25, less than 3, indicates that most respondents feel that Microcredit has not enabled them to purchase land. This suggests that the microcredit

program may need to explore additional measures or loan products to better cater to the needs of individuals seeking to invest in real estate.

I was able to acquire domestic animals because of Microcredit:

A substantial number of respondents agree (89 respondents, 74.2%) or strongly agree (9 respondents, 7.5%) that they were able to acquire domestic animals because of Microcredit. The weighted average score of 3.78, which is higher than 3, suggests that Microcredit has successfully facilitated the acquisition of domestic animals for the respondents. This indicates that Microcredit supports livelihood activities such as agriculture and animal husbandry, potentially leading to increased income and food security.

I was able to buy means of transport because of Microcredit:

The data shows that most respondents disagree (79 respondents, 65.8%) that they could buy means of transport because of Microcredit. The weighted average score of 2.41, less than 3, indicates that most respondents feel that Microcredit has not significantly contributed to their ability to purchase transportation. This underscores the potential necessity for the microfinance initiative to explore custom-tailored loan offerings to address its recipients' transportation requirements. Employed for Dwelling.

Acquisition or house enhancement due to the loan:

A considerable portion of participants concur (72 participants, 60%) that they utilized Microcredit for acquiring dwellings or enhancing their residences, and 2 participants (1.7%) ardently concur. The calculated mean score of 3.34, surpassing the threshold of 3, implies that Microcredit has proven efficacious in assisting participants with expenses related to lodging. This signifies that Microcredit is assuming a role in ameliorating the recipients' living conditions and standards of living.

Able to get twice a day satisfactorily because of Microcredit:

The responses indicate that a substantial number of respondents agree (73 respondents, 60.8%) that they can get food twice a day satisfactorily because of Microcredit. The weighted average score of 3.63, higher than 3, indicates that most respondents feel that Microcredit has positively impacted their food security. This suggests that Microcredit contributes to better nutrition and well-being for the beneficiaries.

I can pay health insurance because of Microcredit: A considerable number of respondents agree (77 respondents, 64.2%) that they can pay for health insurance. The weighted average score of 3.43, higher than 3, suggests that Microcredit has helped respondents access health insurance. This outcome indicates that Microcredit plays a role in improving the financial resilience of the beneficiaries against health-related expenses.

I was able to buy a radio, tv, etc. because of Microcredit: The data shows that most respondents disagree (89 respondents, 74.2%) that they could buy items like a radio or TV because of Microcredit. The weighted average score of 2.37, less than 3, indicates that most respondents feel that Microcredit has not significantly contributed to their ability to purchase such items. This suggests that the microcredit program may need to explore alternative loan products to address the specific needs of individuals seeking to invest in consumer electronics.

Monthly income of the member before getting Microcredit: The data indicates that a significant proportion of respondents had a monthly income between 5,000 tk to 10,000 tk (23 respondents, 19.2%) and 10,000 tk to 15,000 tk (24 respondents, 20%) before accessing Microcredit.

Transformation of monthly income post microcredit access: The data divulge that subsequent to acquiring Microcredit, a significant proportion of participants reported a monthly income spanning the range of 10,000 tk to 15,000 tk (comprising 23 respondents, totaling 19.2%), as well as 15,000 tk to 20,000 tk (encompassing 24 respondents, equivalent to 20%). This observation implies that numerous respondents encountered an upswing in their income levels after embracing Microcredit. This upturn signals a positive manifestation of the program's influence on their economic prosperity.

In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure internal consistency and reliability for the set of variables from questions 9 to 33, which pertain to various aspects of the microcredit program and its impact on the respondents. The reliability statistics show a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.704 for the entire set of questions and a value of 0.686 based on standardized items.

These values suggest that this investigation's data and scales exhibit acceptable reliability.

The study involved 120 respondents who shared their perceptions about various aspects of a microcredit program. The mean scores provide quantitative insights into the respondents' opinions. Overall, becoming a member of the NGO is highly regarded, with a mean score of 3.97, indicating a hassle-free process. Similarly, opening an account is straightforward, with a mean score of 3.90, highlighting the program's inclusivity. The distance to access Microcredit is perceived as fair (mean=3.54), though there is room for improvement to reduce geographical barriers. Respondents highly appreciate the excellent customer care (mean=4.59), fostering trust and loyalty. The well-set savings policies receive high praise, with a mean score of 4.14, and respondents express satisfaction with quick access to their savings (mean=4.18), reflecting the program's commitment to meeting financial needs promptly.

Moreover, they feel secure about their deposits (mean=4.26), emphasizing the program's dedication to safeguarding their funds. While respondents believe the loan payment period is long enough (mean=3.32), there are suggestions to make collateral more affordable (mean=3.39) and offer fairer interest rates on term deposits (mean=3.86) for greater accessibility. The program's ability to encourage income-generating activities is highly appreciated, with a mean score of 3.69, showcasing its effectiveness in supporting entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. The positive impact on the standard of living is evident, as respondents indicated that their household equipment has improved (mean=3.34) due to the program. Challenges exist in acquiring more considerable assets through Microcredit, such as buying land (mean=2.26) and acquiring means of transport (mean=2.41), indicating potential barriers to accessing significant assets. Notably, respondents' monthly income before Microcredit is relatively low (mean=2.56), but accessing Microcredit has led to an increase (mean=3.61), demonstrating the program's success in boosting household incomes. The findings underscore the program's positive impact, and addressing accessibility, affordability, and asset acquisition can enhance its reach and inclusivity. Tailoring interventions based on income levels, client needs, regular feedback mechanisms, and financial literacy programs can further improve the program's effectiveness.

Table 1. Reliability statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items
.704	.686

4.2 Synopsis

The study data reveals that most respondents are female (71.70%), while 28.30% are male. The working-age population, comprising 48.3% of respondents between 21 and 35 years and 51.7% between 35 and 65 years, heavily relies on microfinance for their financial needs. A significant proportion of respondents are married. Most respondents have formal education, with only a few possessing a university degree. Among the respondents, 37.5% are farmers, and 1.7% are unemployed. The study indicates that 35% of respondents joined Grameen Bank NGO to access credit, while 12.5% started their businesses with NGO loans. 84.2% of respondents have been involved in a microcredit program run by an NGO for over two years. Overall, the respondents have positive perceptions about the microcredit program, particularly regarding ease of membership, requirements for account opening, fair distance to access Microcredit, good customer care, well-set savings policies, quick access to savings, and the security of deposits. They also agree about receiving fair interest on their deposits, affordable interest rates, and an extended loan payment period. There are some areas of concern, including the ability to acquire more considerable assets like land and means of transport through Microcredit. Nevertheless, the program's overall impact on respondents' income and quality of life is positive. The study's reliability statistics indicate a high Cronbach's Alpha of 70.4%, signifying good internal consistency in the data

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is evident that the Microcredit program plays a vital role in addressing basic needs, elevating living standards, and promoting self-employment. By leveraging the financial services offered by NGOs, individuals with limited resources can meet their essential requirements, enhance their quality of life, and access opportunities for self-employment, thereby reducing poverty levels. The microcredit initiative has proven beneficial for the socioeconomic advancement of rural women in Bangladesh, leading to improvements

in various aspects of their standard of living. These positive outcomes clearly connect poverty reduction and the microcredit program. Consequently, there should be concerted efforts to encourage income generation through effective microcredit utilization, and microcredit institutes should implement robust monitoring systems to ensure the program's continued success and impact.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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