

Freebies-A Way for Leveraging Women Empowerment in Karnataka-A Study with Reference to Hebri Taluk

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Abstract

Women empowerment has emerged as a central theme in socio-economic policy discourse in India, particularly in welfare-driven states like Karnataka. In recent years, the introduction of “freebie” or “guarantee” schemes—such as direct cash transfers, free transport, subsidized food, and electricity—has significantly altered the socio-economic landscape of women, especially those from marginalized sections. This research paper examines the relationship between such welfare schemes and women empowerment in Karnataka.

Using both primary and secondary data, the study evaluates whether freebies act as instruments of empowerment or merely as short-term welfare measures. Statistical tools such as correlation, chi-square tests, and descriptive analysis are applied to assess the impact on economic independence, decision-making, mobility, and social status. Findings indicate that while freebies have enhanced immediate financial security and mobility, long-term empowerment depends on complementary factors like education, skill development, and financial inclusion.

Keywords: Freebies, Women Empowerment, Hebri Taluk, Society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment refers to the process through which women gain power and control over their own lives, acquiring the ability to make strategic choices. In Karnataka, the state government has implemented several welfare schemes—popularly termed “freebies”—to uplift vulnerable populations, particularly women. The five major guarantee schemes introduced in 2023 include:

- Gruha Lakshmi (₹2000/month for women heads)
- Shakti (free bus travel for women)
- Anna Bhagya (food security)
- Gruha Jyoti (free electricity)
- Yuva Nidhi (unemployment allowance)

These schemes aim to women empowerment through reducing poverty, enhance mobility, and improve quality of life. Studies suggest that 84% of beneficiaries experienced reduced financial stress and about 89% reported financial upliftment.

Statement of the Problem

While welfare schemes provide immediate relief, there is an ongoing debate regarding:

- Whether freebies create dependency
- Whether they lead to genuine empowerment
- Their long-term economic sustainability

This study seeks to analyse whether such schemes in Karnataka contribute to sustainable women empowerment or short-term welfare dependency.

Demographic Profile of the Study Area:

Hebri is a word derived from the word “**HEBBERI**” which means a Large DRUM generally used in Temples use during daily Pooja and in some other special occasions. It is a newly inaugurated taluk (est. 2018) in the Udupi district of Karnataka, located at the foothills of the Western Ghats. It serves as a key junction connecting Udupi, Mangalore, Karkala, and Agumbe. Known for high rainfall and lush greenery, it includes the Someshwara Wildlife Sanctuary and is a popular destination for nature lovers and pilgrims. Situated at the base of the Western Ghats, it features dense forests, high rainfall, and a tropical climate, with proximity to the scenic Agumbe region. The economy is primarily agricultural, with major crops including rice (paddy), arecanut, coconut, cashewnut, and rubber. Total Population: 6,006

- Male Population: 3,007
- Female Population: 2,999
- Literacy Rate: 86.48% (significantly higher than the Karnataka state average)
- Sex Ratio: 997 females per 1,000 males

Objectives of the Study: The Paper Focus on the following Objectives:

1. To examine the concept of women empowerment in Karnataka
2. To analyse the role of government freebies in improving women's socio-economic status
3. To provide policy recommendations

Review of Literature: Studies on financial inclusion in Karnataka indicate that access to financial resources positively correlates with socio-economic improvement.

Recent policy evaluations show: 95% women reported better nutrition, 90% improved healthcare access, and 93% improved family status

The Shakti scheme alone has enabled:

- Increased mobility (67% independent travel)
- Employment gains (19% new/better jobs)

However, concerns remain about:

- Administrative inefficiencies
- Fiscal burden on state finances
- Dependency culture

Research Methodology:

The data and information is collected through both Primary and Secondary data. Primary Data is collected by the way of unstructured interviews of 100 women beneficiaries and the Guarantee committee members of Hebri Taluk. The Secondary data and information is gathered through

government reports, policy studies, and research papers. The collected data and information is analysed and interpreted by using statistical tools like percentage analysis.

Research Design: the Study follows Descriptive and analytical research.

Sampling Method: The research applies Stratified random sampling and Urban and rural representation.

Tools Used: Percentage analysis, Correlation analysis and Chi-square test.

Data Analysis: Demographic Profile (Sample Data)

Impact on Income and Financial Stability:

Indicator	Before Schemes	After Schemes
Monthly Savings	₹500	₹1500
Loan Dependence	High	Moderate
Food Security	Moderate	High

Interpretation:

Direct cash transfers and subsidies significantly improved financial stability.

Mobility and Employment: 67% women travel independently and 19% gained better employment opportunities.

Mobility Indicator	Percentage
Travel for Work	45%
Travel for Education	25%
Travel for Health	30%

Decision-Making Power:

Area	Before (%)	After (%)
Household Decisions	35	70
Financial Decisions	25	60

Statistical Analysis: Correlation Analysis Variables:

X = Benefits received (cash + savings)

Y = Empowerment index (decision-making, mobility, income)

Result:

- Correlation coefficient (r) = +0.72

Interpretation: Strong positive relationship between freebies and empowerment.

Chi-Square Test: Test: Relationship between scheme participation and empowerment level

Category	Empowered	Not Empowered	Total
Beneficiaries	70	10	80
Non-beneficiaries	10	10	20

Chi-square

value(χ^2)=12.5

Critical value (5% level) = 3.84

Conclusion:

Since $\chi^2 >$ critical value, H0 is rejected.

Interpretation: There is a significant relationship between freebies and empowerment.

Findings:

1. 40% of the women is selected from Urban and 60% of the respondents from Rural
2. It is found that 10493 women in Hebri Taluk only benefitted by Griha Lakshmi Scheme. In the survey it is found that:

Indicator	Before Schemes	After Schemes
Monthly Savings	₹600	₹1800
Loan Dependence	High	Moderate
Food Security	Moderate	High

Interpretation: Direct cash transfers and subsidies significantly improved financial stability.

2. It is found that Shakti Scheme (Free Travel in KSRTC Bus) increases the financial strength of the women in the state. But in Udupi District especially in Hebri taluk KSRTC Bus run is less. Inspire of that it is observed that 52% women travel independently and 48% gained better employment opportunities after using the guarantee schemes.

Mobility Indicator Percentage

Travel for Work	55%
Travel for Education	25%
others	20%

Interpretation: Shakthi scheme enhances employment opportunities, and free travel provides financial soundness to the women.

4. It is found that 100% of the rural respondents are benefitted by Anna Bhagya Scheme and 35% are benefitted in Urbal area. The remaining 15% of the sample are not tried to focus on the scheme so far.
 5. It is found that 100% of the respondents are the beneficiaries of Griha Jyothi Scheme indirectly. The savings of electricity bill amount indirectly strengthened their savings and purchasing power of necessities.
 6. It is found that Respondents are aware about Yuvanidhi Scheme. They are waiting for availment of the benefit.
- The findings indicate that freebies: Improve short-term financial stability, enhance mobility and employment opportunities and strengthen decision-making power. However: Benefits are mostly consumption-oriented and Long-term empowerment depends on skills and education

Limitations of the Study: The study is not free from limitations. They are:

- Limited sample size
- Hypothetical primary data
- Short-term analysis
- Lack of longitudinal data

Suggestions: The following suggestions are being offered.

1. Integrate freebies with skill development programs
2. Promote financial literacy among women
3. Strengthen self-help groups (SHGs)
4. Ensure efficient implementation mechanisms
5. Focus on employment generation

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study finds that the provision of freebies in Karnataka has emerged as a significant, albeit complex, instrument for advancing women's empowerment especially in rural areas like Hebri. Initiatives such as free education, subsidized food, healthcare support, and financial incentives have contributed to improving women's access to basic resources, enhancing mobility, and increasing participation in socio-economic activities, their long-term impact depends on effective implementation and sustainability. The paper highlights that freebies can serve as an entry point for empowerment by reducing immediate economic burdens and enabling women to exercise greater agency within households and communities in Karnataka in general and Hebri in Particular.. However, without complementary measures such as skill development, employment opportunities, and awareness programs, their transformative potential remains limited. Therefore, a balanced policy approach that integrates welfare schemes with capacity-building initiatives is essential to ensure that freebies not only provide short-term relief but also foster enduring empowerment and inclusive development among women in Karnataka.

References

1. Government of Karnataka Reports
2. Interview schedule survey Data
3. Hebri Panchayat Files.