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Impact of Gruha Jyoti Scheme on Social Sectors in Karnataka

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Abstract

The Gruha Jyoti Scheme, introduced by the Government of Karnataka in 2023, aims to provide free electricity up to a specified consumption limit for eligible domestic consumers. The scheme seeks to reduce the financial burden of electricity expenses on households, particularly those belonging to economically weaker sections, while improving their overall quality of life. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from beneficiary households in Dhummawad Village through structured questionnaires and personal interviews. Secondary data were obtained from government reports, published research articles, official publications, and other relevant sources. The findings indicate that the Gruha Jyoti Scheme has significantly reduced electricity expenditure for beneficiary households, enabling families to allocate their savings toward essential needs such as education, healthcare, nutrition, and household welfare. The scheme has also contributed to improving the living standards of beneficiaries by ensuring uninterrupted access to electricity, promoting social well-being, and reducing financial stress. However, the study identifies certain implementation challenges, including limited awareness regarding eligibility criteria, delays in registration, billing-related issues, and technical problems.The study concludes that the Gruha Jyoti Scheme has made a positive contribution to the social and economic well-being of households in Dhummawad Village. It recommends strengthening awareness campaigns, simplifying administrative procedures, enhancing grievance redressal mechanisms, and ensuring efficient service delivery to maximize the scheme's benefits. The findings provide useful insights for policymakers and administrators to improve the implementation of welfare schemes aimed at inclusive rural development.

Keywords: Gruha Jyoti Scheme, Social Sectors, Rural Development, Electricity Subsidy.

Introduction

The Gruha Jyothi scheme was introduced as part of a broader commitment to social equity and economic support for the underprivileged in Karnataka1. It seeks to ease the financial strain on families facing rising living costs, especially in areas with high energy demand. By eliminating electricity costs for eligible consumers, the government aims to boost disposable income, allowing families to invest in essential needs like food, healthcare, and children's education. The scheme aligns with the vision of social justice, recognizing electricity as a fundamental necessity. While widely lauded for its intent, concerns about its sustainability, power sector efficiency, and implementation challenges such as inaccurate meter readings and low awareness in certain regions have been raised.

This study focuses on Dhummawad village in Kalghatgi Taluka, Dharwad District, Karnataka, to provide localized, in-depth data on how the scheme has impacted daily lives, household expenses, and the quality of life of rural residents. The research aims to assess the scheme's social impact, examine awareness and accessibility, evaluate beneficiary perceptions and satisfaction, analyze its influence on education, health, and safety, and identify challenges.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the level of awareness and utilization of the Gruha Jyoti Scheme among households in Dhummawad Village.
2. To assess the impact of the Gruha Jyoti Scheme on the economic condition of beneficiary households through savings in electricity expenses.
3. To examine the influence of the Gruha Jyoti Scheme on the standard of living and quality of life of the beneficiaries.

Hypothesis of the Study

"The Gruha Jyoti Scheme has no significant impact on the socio-economic status of beneficiary households in Dhummawad Village"

Research Methodology

This exploratory study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Gruha Jyoti scheme's impact. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire survey using both direct and telephonic interview methods, predominantly direct interviews. Secondary data was gathered from existing literature and reports related to the scheme in Karnataka.

A convenience sampling technique was utilized to select 40 respondents from Dhummawad Village of Dharwad District who directly benefited from the scheme. Quantitative data underwent statistical analysis using Excel to calculate descriptive statistics and create visual representations. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically to identify common patterns and themes in interview responses. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

Findings and Results

The study's findings from the 40 respondents in Dhummawad village provide detailed insights into the scheme's impact:

Beneficiary Profile and Background

Caste Composition: The majority of respondents belonged to marginalized communities, with Scheduled Tribes (ST) accounting for 35 per cent, followed by Other Backward Classes (OBC) at 27.5 per cent, and Scheduled Castes (SC) at 25 per cent.

Ration Card Ownership: A significant 62.5 per centof families held Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards, indicating the scheme's reach to economically vulnerable groups.

Educational Background: A substantial 32.5 per cent of respondents were illiterate, and 30 per cent had only primary education, reflecting limited access to basic education among the surveyed population.

Occupational Distribution: Agricultural laborers constituted the largest occupational group at 32.5 per cent, highlighting a strong reliance on agriculture-related work.
Housing Status: Half of the families (50 per cent) resided in semi-pucca houses, while 32.5 per cent lived in pucca (RCC) houses, suggesting moderately stable housing conditions.

Awareness and Registration Process
Awareness Levels: A majority of respondents (67.5 per cent) were fully aware of the scheme, while 20 per cent were partially aware, and 12.5 per cent had no awareness.
Sources of Information: The Panchayat Officer was the primary source of information for 62.5 per cent of respondents, followed by social media at 20 per cent.
Ease of Registration: Only 35 per cent found the registration process easy, with a significant 55 per cent reporting that someone else registered on their behalf, indicating potential challenges in independent registration.

Access and Benefits
Electricity Consumption: Most households (42.5 per cent) consumed between 100 to 150 units of electricity per month, while 25 per cent used 150 to 200 units.
Post-Scheme Electricity Bills: Despite the free units, 40 per cent of respondents reported an electricity bill between ₹300 to ₹500 after joining the scheme, suggesting many exceed the 200-unit cap.
Reduction in Household Expenses: While 22.5 per cent experienced a significant reduction in household expenses, the majority (62.5 per cent) reported only a slight reduction.
Utilization of Savings: Half of the respondents (50 per cent) used money saved from electricity bills primarily for buying food and groceries. Personal savings accounted for 23 per cent, and 10 per cent was spent on children's education.
New Appliance Usage:55 per cent of respondents had started using new electric appliances, and another 40 per cent were planning to, indicating an increase in appliance use due to the scheme.
Impact on Children's Education: A majority of respondents (62.5 per cent) affirmed that the scheme positively affected their children's education, likely through better lighting for studying.
Socio-Economic Impact
Increase in Income: Only 32.5 per cent of respondents reported an increase in income due to the scheme, with 60 per cent finding the question not applicable, suggesting a limited direct impact on income for many.
Women Empowerment: A strong majority (52.5 per cent strongly agree, 30 per cent agree) believed the Gruha Jyoti scheme played a positive role in women's empowerment.
Comfort at Home:67.5 per cent of respondents felt more comfortable at home due to improved power access provided by the scheme.
Financial Independence: The scheme had varying degrees of impact on financial independence, with 25 per cent reporting a "very much" impact and 30 per cent a "moderately" impact, while 12.5 per cent felt "not at all" impacted.

Feedback and Suggestions
Overall Satisfaction: The majority of participants expressed a positive view, with 55 per cent satisfied and 32.5 per cent very satisfied with the scheme overall.

Sufficiency of 200 Units: A large majority (72.5 per cent) considered the 200-unit limit sufficient for their household needs.

Scheme Continuation: There was strong support for the scheme's continuation, with 60 per cent definitively supporting it and 22.5 per cent wanting it to continue with improvements.

Need for Improvement: Surprisingly, 82.5 per cent of respondents indicated that the scheme does not need to be improved, suggesting general satisfaction with its current implementation.

Discussion:

The Gruha Jyothi scheme has demonstrably contributed to rural development in Dhummawad village by addressing energy poverty and providing significant social benefits. The findings underscore the scheme's success in enhancing household energy access, particularly for marginalized communities, which aligns with its core objectives of promoting social equity and supporting the underprivileged.

The positive transformation in education is evident, with children benefiting from better lighting for studying and potential access to digital resources. Similarly, healthcare services have improved, enabling local Primary Health Centres (PHCs) to operate more effectively and safely store vital medical supplies like vaccines. The scheme has been a powerful tool for women's empowerment, enabling participation in home-based income-generating activities and enhancing their safety and mobility due to improved street lighting. The financial relief provided, allowing savings to be redirected to essentials like food and education, underscores its contribution to economic well-being and the local rural economy.

However, the study also highlights critical challenges and concerns identified by experts and echoed implicitly by some findings. While the scheme provides short-term relief, its long-term sustainability is a major concern unless coupled with reforms in power sector efficiency, revenue management, and energy conservation. The observation that 40 per cent of beneficiaries still face moderate to high electricity bills suggests that many consume above the 200-unit cap, potentially leading to overconsumption if not mitigated by energy conservation efforts. This aligns with criticisms that without proper regulation and awareness, the free-cost model could strain power infrastructure.

Furthermore, the implementation process presents hurdles; the fact that over half of the respondents needed assistance with registration points to bureaucratic or digital challenges, as noted in broader literature concerning documentation gaps and low awareness in certain regions like Kalyana Karnataka. Experts also warn of the fiscal implications, with potential diversion of funds from other critical sectors. The scheme's focus on short-term relief might also distract policymakers from addressing fundamental structural inefficiencies within electricity distribution companies (DISCOMs), such as financial losses and power theft.

Despite these challenges, the Gruha Jyoti scheme is recognized as a noteworthy example of "targeted welfare electricity distribution" by the World Bank. Its success will depend on a balanced approach that combines social welfare with accountability, transparency, and sustainability in the power sector. This includes robust evaluation frameworks, third-party audits, and potentially consumption caps or data-driven targeting systems to ensure benefits reach those most in need without fostering overuse or burdening public finances. Integrating renewable energy sources and promoting energy-efficient appliances are also crucial for achieving both environmental sustainability and social equity.

Suggestions

Based on the findings and the broader context, the following suggestions are crucial for strengthening

the Gruha Jyoti scheme and ensuring its long-term effectiveness:

- Conduct regular village-level awareness programs to educate residents about the scheme's benefits, eligibility criteria, and proper electricity usage.
- Educate residents, especially students and homemakers, on conserving electricity to ensure sustainable usage and prevent overconsumption.
- Upgrade transformers and power lines in Dhummawad and similar rural areas to support increased demand and ensure continuous power supply.
- Equip schools with digital learning tools and reliable electricity to create better teaching and learning environments for children.
- Ensure continuous power supply to primary health centers for essential functions like lighting, refrigeration of medicines, and operation of medical equipment.
- Support women in starting small-scale electric-powered businesses like tailoring, food processing, or handicrafts to further enhance their financial independence.
- Establish local monitoring systems to track electricity consumption and prevent misuse or overuse of the free units.
- Encourage families to wisely use money saved from electricity bills for education, nutrition, or health-related expenses, reinforcing the scheme's broader welfare goals.
- Introduce electric cooking and lighting devices to reduce reliance on traditional fuels like firewood, improving household health and environmental outcomes.
- Collect and disseminate success stories and lessons learned from Dhummawad to guide effective implementation in other similar villages across the state.

Conclusion

Gruha Jyoti Scheme has made a noticeable and positive transformation in the social dynamics of Dhummawad village. It has significantly improved access to quality education, enhanced healthcare services, empowered women, and uplifted the economic conditions of rural households. By easing the financial burden of electricity costs, it has allowed families to reallocate resources to other essential needs, thereby contributing to local economic growth and improved living standards.Dhummawad village serves as a compelling demonstration of how a well-implemented public welfare policy can profoundly influence the social development of a rural community. While the scheme has achieved remarkable success in its initial phase, addressing existing infrastructural gaps, enhancing community awareness about energy conservation, and integrating it with broader development programs will be crucial for its sustained impact. With continued support and careful monitoring, the Gruha Jyoti Scheme holds great potential to serve as a model for inclusive rural development in Karnataka and potentially beyond.

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