



THE SIGNIFICANCE AND CHALLENGES OF FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FOR ILLITERATE WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Financial independence is a crucial aspect of empowerment for women, especially in the context of illiterate women who face unique challenges. This study aims to explore the significance and hurdles of financial independence for illiterate women. Financial independence not only improves the quality of life for women but also contributes to the socio-economic development of their communities. However, illiterate women often encounter barriers such as limited access to education, lack of awareness about financial resources, and societal norms that hinder their financial autonomy. This research will employ a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews with educated women, to gather insights on the perceived importance of financial independence and the obstacles faced by illiterate women. The findings will help in formulating strategies to enhance financial literacy and independence among this vulnerable group, ultimately promoting gender equality and economic growth.

KEYWORD: Financial independence, socio-economic, Quality of life, Gender equality.

INRODUCTION

Financial independence refers to the state of having sufficient personal wealth to live without needing to rely on others for income. It encompasses the ability to manage one's finances, make informed economic

decisions, and meet financial obligations independently. Key aspects of financial independence include self-sufficiency, economic stability, financial literacy, access to financial services and control over resources. Financial independence is a fundamental aspect of empowerment and self-sufficiency, particularly for illiterate women who face unique and multifaceted challenges. This study explores the significance of financial independence for illiterate women and identifies the barriers they encounter. Achieving financial independence is vital as it enables women to make informed decisions, improve their living standards, and contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities. However, illiterate women often face significant obstacles, including limited access to education, lack of financial literacy, restricted access to financial services, and socio-cultural constraints that impede their economic freedom.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anjali Devi (2016) observed that financial literacy is highly influenced by the residential location i.e., rural, urban and also employment in the Kamrup District of Assam. The study focused on the financial literacy of women as the women are most vulnerable group in the society. Economic empowerment of women is must for which financial literacy level of women need to be enhanced. As per the findings of the study financial literacy level of women is no doubt up to a satisfactory level but still it is not at equal level among the rural level lower than the urban women. Again, working women have more financial literacy level than non-working women. It shows that rural women are weaker than urban women with respect to financial literacy.

CA Anupama & Joshi. B. (2015) conducted a study on financial literacy of women and its effect on their investment choice decision. The objective is to evaluate the financial literacy of working and financially independent women and its impact on their investment decisions. The study is conducted on 85 educated working women in educational sector in Gautam Budh Nagarhas of Uttar Pradesh. Study concluded that Financial Knowledge leads to better life standards, independence in financial decision making and better empowerment and there is a drastic need for financial literacy programs to make women confident in making sound financial decisions.

Mathivathani and Velumani (2014) The study was conducted to know the level of financial literacy among women in rural areas of Tamilnadu. The study found that financial literacy of marginalized rural women is very low. Hence, the proper development of financial literacy would help the women for better financial decision making and proper utilization of financial services and products.

The study by OECD (2013) The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) clearly exhibit that on an average, looking across 121 countries representing a wide mix of developing and developed nations, women live five years longer than men. Hence, it is essential that women should develop an in-depth

understanding about the concept of financial planning and investment avenues to protect her from the financial challenges she may face in the future. It has been observed, in US and cross-national research in developed countries that older single women continue to be disproportionately poor as compared with older single men 70 and older married couples. Hence, lack of knowledge can be more costly for women because they tend to live longer (Wall Street Journal).

OBJECTIVES:

- ❖ To identify and analyze the barriers that illiterate women face in achieving financial independence, including limited access to education, financial resources, and societal norms.
- ❖ To understand the perceived challenges and potential solutions from the viewpoint of educated women who may have a broader awareness of financial issues and empowerment strategies.
- ❖ To assess the effectiveness of current financial literacy programs, microfinance initiatives, and support services aimed at empowering illiterate women.
- ❖ To identify gaps and areas for improvement in existing support systems that promotes financial independence for illiterate women.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The study will encompass various dimensions such as geographical coverage, target population, thematic focus, and methodological approach to explore the significance and challenges of financial independence for illiterate women. It aims to provide a comprehensive analysis and practical recommendations within these parameters. The primary focus will be on illiterate women facing barriers to financial independence due to their inability to read or write. Educated women will also be included to offer insights into the challenges faced by illiterate women and potential solutions. The study will evaluate the effectiveness of existing support systems, including financial literacy programs and microfinance initiatives. It will analyze trends and changes in the financial independence of illiterate women over a specific period, considering both short-term and long-term perspectives. The goal is to provide a thorough understanding of the significance and challenges of financial independence for illiterate women, leading to effective interventions and support mechanisms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The main data will be gathered using Google form, while the additional data will be obtained from a variety of journals, newspapers, articles, reports, and documentaries. The study will utilize a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to obtain thorough data. Surveys will be carried out with both illiterate and educated women to gather quantitative data on financial literacy, resource

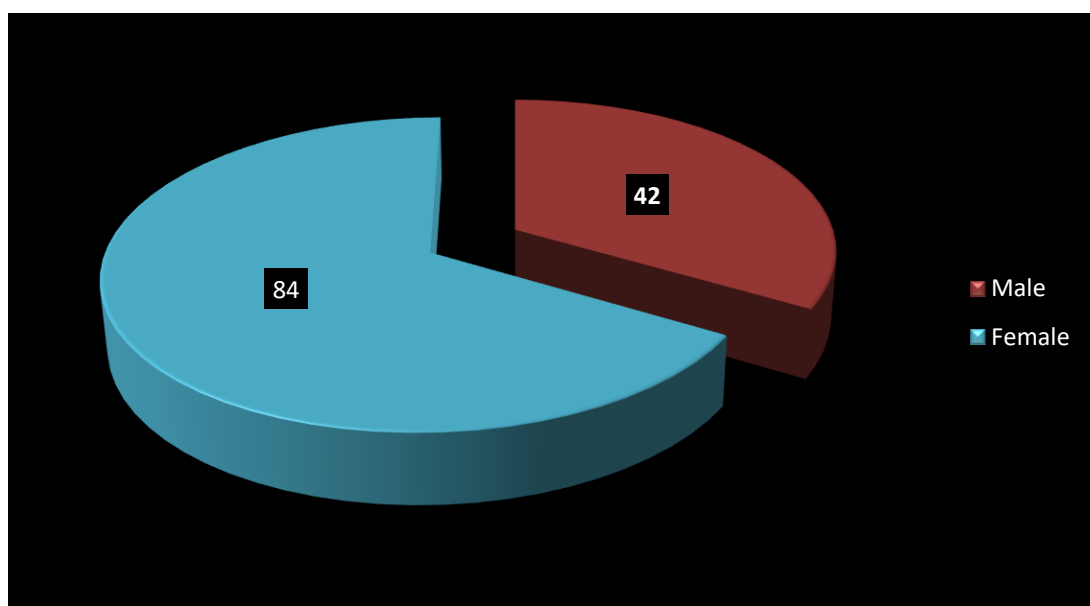
accessibility, and perceived obstacles. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted to gather qualitative perspectives on the individual experiences, obstacles, and success stories of illiterate women working towards financial autonomy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Table: 1 – GENDER AND AGE GROUP OF THE RESPONDENTS

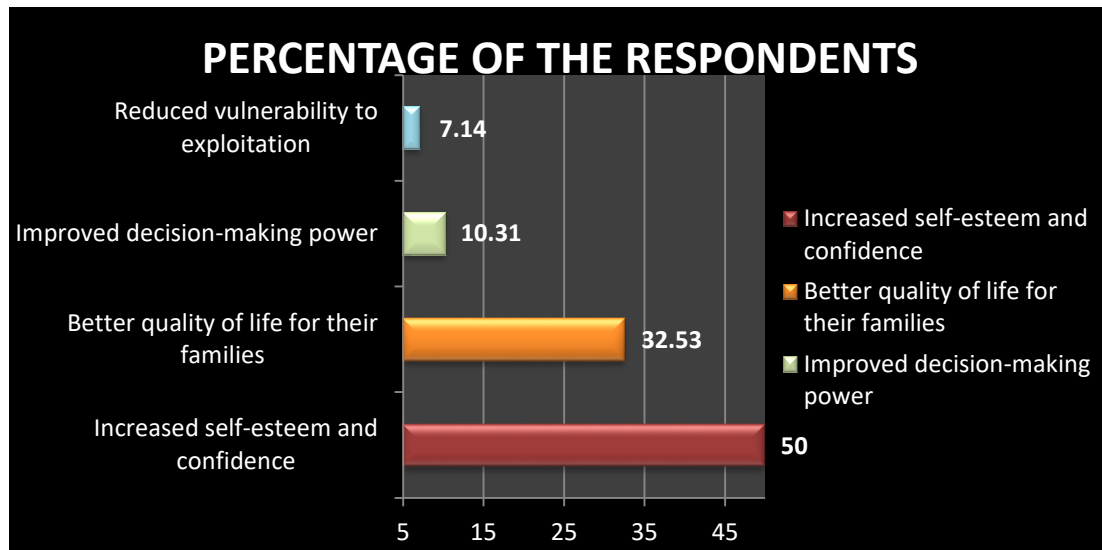
| BASICS | AGE | FREQUENCY | PER CENT |
|------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| Age groups | 18-24 | 70 | 55.55% |
| | 25-34 | 26 | 20.63% |
| | 35-44 | 20 | 15.87% |
| | 45-54 | 10 | 7.9% |
| | Total | 126 | 100 |
| Gender | Male | 42 | 33.33% |
| | Female | 84 | 66.66% |
| | Total | 126 | 100 |

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by gender and age group. Among the 126 individuals surveyed, 33.33% identified as male, totaling 42 respondents, while 66.66% identified as female, amounting to 84 respondents. In terms of age demographics, 55.55% of the participants fall within the 18-24 age range, representing 70 respondents. Additionally, 20.63% are in the 25-34 age group, corresponding to 26 respondents, 15.87% belong to the 35-44 age group with 20 respondents, and 7.9% are in the 45-54 age range, totaling 10 respondents.

CHART – 1 GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTSTable: 2 - KEY BENEFITS OF FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FOR ILLITERATE WOMEN

| BENEFITS OF FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE | PERCENTAGE OF THE RESPONDENTS |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Increased self-esteem and confidence | 50% (63) |
| Better quality of life for their families | 32.53% (41) |
| Improved decision-making power | 10.31% (13) |
| Reduced vulnerability to exploitation | 7.14% (9) |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Table 2 illustrates the significant advantages of financial autonomy for women with low literacy levels. Among the 126 participants surveyed, 50% advocate for enhanced self-esteem and confidence, totaling 63 respondents. Additionally, 32.53% endorse better quality of life for their families, with 41 respondents. Furthermore, 10.31% support the idea of increased decision-making power, which directly impacts their standard of living, represented by 13 respondents. Lastly, 7.14% back the notion of decreased vulnerability to exploitation, with 9 respondents in agreement.

CHART-2 KEY BENEFITS OF FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FOR ILLITERATE WOMEN.**TABLE: 3 - VARIOUS IMPACTFUL GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT ILLITERATE WOMEN**

| GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES | PERCENTAGE OF THE RESPONDENTS |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Vocational training programs | 17.46% (22) |
| Microfinance schemes | 37.30%(47) |
| Adult literacy programs | 23.01% (29) |
| Women's self-help groups | 15.07%(19) |
| Financial literacy workshops | 7.14%(9) |
| Total | 100% (126) |

Table 3 displays a range of significant government efforts to assist women who are illiterate. Among 126 respondents, the majority favors the microfinance scheme at 37.3%, adult literacy programs at 23.01%, vocational training programs at 17.46%, women self-help groups at 15.07%, and financial literacy workshops at 7.14%, with 47, 29, 22, 19, and 9 respondents respectively.

CHART -3 VARIOUS IMPACTFUL GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT ILLITERATE WOMEN

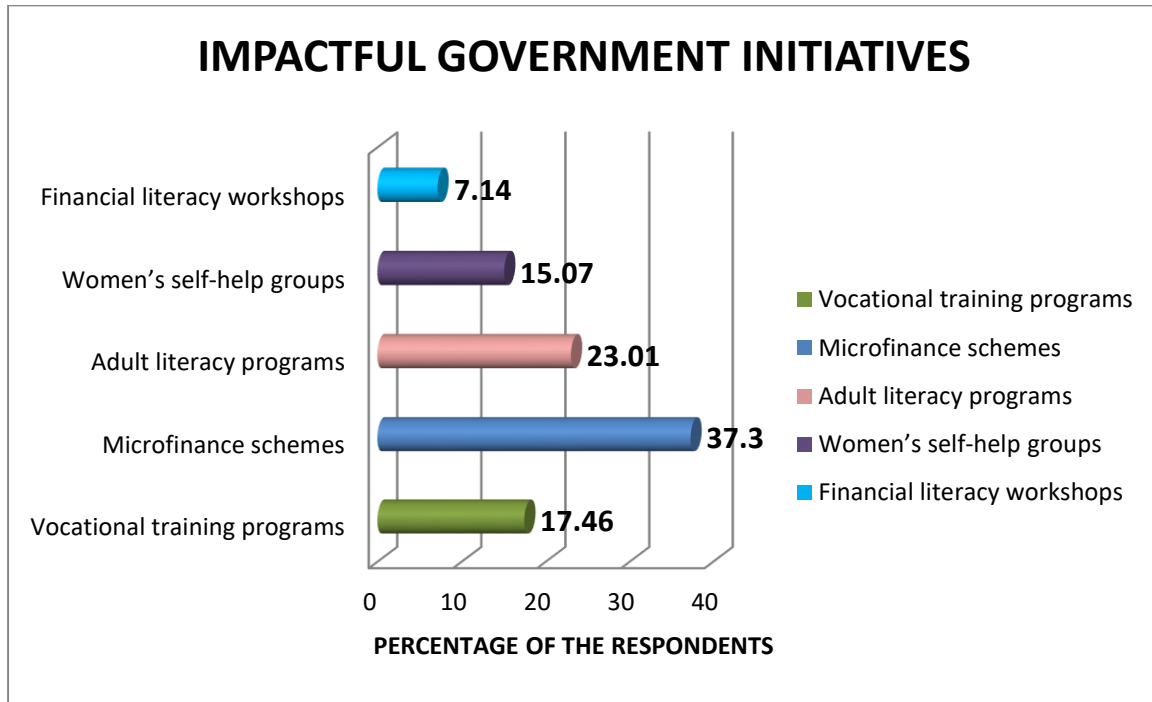


TABLE-4 CURRENT GOVERNMENT AND NGO PROGRAMS ARE IN PROMOTING FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE AMONG ILLITERATE WOMEN.

| RESPONSIVENESS | PER CENT |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Very Effective | 57% (72) |
| Effective | 19.04% (24) |
| Moderately Effective | 9.5% (12) |
| Slightly Effective | 14.2% (18) |
| Not Effective | 0 |

Table 4 illustrates the level of support provided by the current government and NGO initiatives in empowering illiterate women financially. Among the 126 respondents, 57% found the programs to be very effective, 19.04% considered them effective, 9.5% viewed them as moderately effective, and 14.2% perceived them as slightly effective, with corresponding numbers of 72, 24, 12, and 18, respectively.

CHART-4 CURRENT GOVERNMENT AND NGO PROGRAMS ARE IN PROMOTING FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE AMONG ILLITERATE WOMEN.

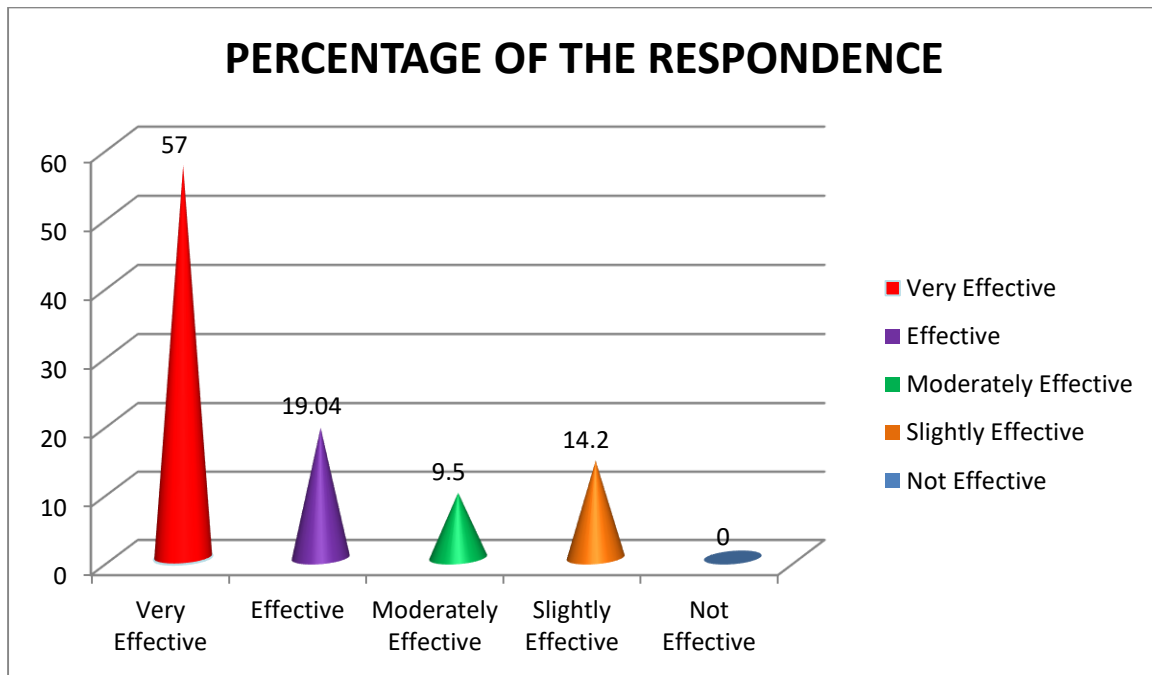
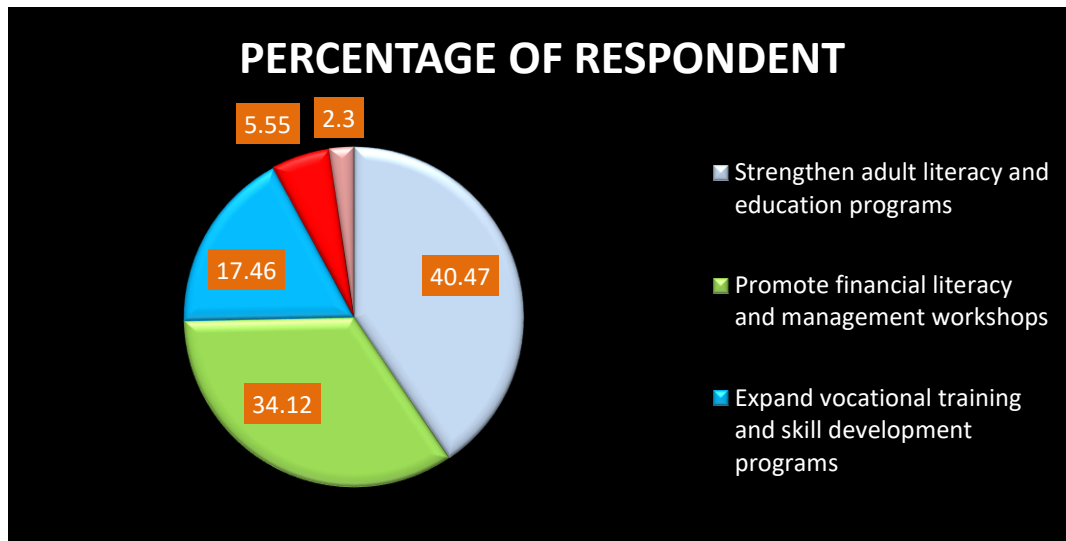


TABLE -5 EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FOR ILLITERATE WOMEN

| INITIATIVES | PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS |
|--|-------------------------|
| Strengthen adult literacy and education programs | 40.47% (51) |
| Promote financial literacy and management workshops | 34.12% (43) |
| Expand vocational training and skill development programs | 17.46%(22) |
| Encourage partnerships with private sector and NGOs | 5.55%(7) |
| Increase funding for microfinance and small business loans | 2.3%(3) |

Table 5 illustrates the various government initiatives aimed at promoting financial independence for illiterate women. Among the 126 respondents, 40.47% advocate for the enhancement of adult literacy and education programs, 34.12% endorse the promotion of financial literacy and management workshops, 17.46% support the expansion of vocational training and skill development programs, 5.55% favor partnerships with the private sector and NGOs, and 2.3% back the increase in funding for microfinance and small business loans.

CHART -5 EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FOR ILLITERATE WOMEN.



FINDINGS:

- ❖ Among the 126 respondents surveyed, 33.33% are male and 66.66% are female, totaling 42 and 82 respondents respectively.
- ❖ A majority of the 126 respondents, accounting for 55.55%, fall within the age group of 18-24, comprising 70 individuals.
- ❖ In the survey of 126 respondents, 50% advocate for increased self-esteem and confidence (63 respondents), 32.53% support better quality for their families (41 respondents), 10.31% endorse improved decision-making power related to standard of living (13 respondents), and 7.14% back reduced vulnerability to exploitation (9 respondents).
- ❖ Out of the 126 respondents, the majority favor the microfinance scheme (37.3%), followed by adult literacy programs (23.01%), vocational training programs (17.46%), women self-help groups (15.07%), and financial literacy workshops (7.14%), with 47, 29, 22, 19, and 9 respondents respectively.
- ❖ Among the 126 respondents, 57% find the survey very effective, 19.04% consider it effective, 9.5% rate it moderately effective, and 14.2% perceive it as slightly effective, with 72, 24, 12, and 18 respondents respectively.
- ❖ Out of the 126 respondents, 40.47% advocate for strengthening adult literacy and education programs, 34.12% support promoting financial literacy and management workshops, 17.46% are in favor of expanding vocational training and skill development programs, 5.55% endorse encouraging partnerships with the private sector and NGOs, and 2.3% back increasing funding for microfinance and small business loans, with respective respondents.

SUGGESTION:

Enhancing financial independence for illiterate women necessitates a comprehensive strategy that tackles the fundamental obstacles they encounter. It is essential to customize educational programs to meet their specific requirements, offering fundamental literacy and job-related skills that are directly relevant to local economic prospects. The establishment of mobile and community-based learning centers can enhance the accessibility of education.

Financial inclusion is another key aspect; banks and financial institutions should develop easy-to-use, uncomplicated financial products and services that cater to illiterate women. The utilization of mobile banking and community-based financial advisors can help bridge the divide between these women and formal financial systems. Moreover, it is crucial to address societal and cultural barriers. Community awareness campaigns that challenge traditional gender roles and highlight the significance of women's economic contributions can cultivate a more supportive atmosphere.

Involving local leaders and influencers in these campaigns can amplify their impact. Economic policies should also be formulated to generate stable and inclusive employment opportunities for women. This may involve providing incentives for businesses that hire women and extending support to women-owned enterprises through grants and low-interest loans. By implementing these targeted interventions, we can establish a more conducive environment that empowers illiterate women to attain financial independence, thereby enhancing their quality of life and social standing.

CONCLUSION:

It is crucial to empower illiterate women by helping them achieve financial independence. Our research demonstrates the numerous positive outcomes of financial autonomy, such as increased self-esteem, better quality of life, and higher social standing. Nevertheless, illiterate women encounter significant obstacles, including lack of education, limited access to financial services, societal norms, and economic instability.

To overcome these challenges, a holistic approach is required. Tailored educational programs can equip illiterate women with essential literacy and job skills. Financial institutions need to offer accessible products and services, utilizing mobile technology and community-based assistance to reach this demographic. Campaigns promoting societal change are essential in challenging traditional gender roles and recognizing women's economic contributions. Furthermore, economic policies should create stable job opportunities and support businesses owned by women.

By addressing these areas, we can establish a supportive environment that empowers illiterate women to attain financial independence. This not only enhances their personal lives but also contributes to the overall socio-economic progress of their communities. Therefore, collaborative efforts from governments, NGOs, financial institutions, and community leaders are crucial in driving significant change and enabling illiterate women to lead financially independent and dignified lives.

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