

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PRACTICES AND TRIBAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: AN EFFECTIVENESS STUDY

*** Parita Bheda & ** Dr. Monali Kakade**

**Students, ** Assistant Professor, Ashoka International Center for Educational Studies and Research, Nashik.*

Abstract:

The present study examines the effectiveness of sustainable livelihood practices in empowering tribal women, with a specific focus on textile waste recycling. Tribal women often face challenges such as limited employment opportunities, low income, and lack of access to skill-based work. In response, this study implements a practical and low-cost livelihood model that utilizes textile waste to create value-added products.

The intervention involved training tribal women to recycle discarded fabric into low-risk, marketable products such as scrunchies. These products were selected due to their minimal production cost, ease of learning, and consistent demand in the market. The study was conducted in the vicinity of ZP Thokarwadi, Kasara, over a period of three months.

Data was collected through interviews, observations, and questionnaires, and analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings indicate that the implementation of textile waste recycling as a livelihood practice led to improvements in skill development, income generation, confidence, and participation in economic activities among the women.

The study concludes that sustainable livelihood practices, particularly textile recycling through simple products like scrunchies, can serve as an effective, scalable, and environmentally responsible model for empowering tribal women and promoting self-reliance.

Keywords: Sustainable Livelihood Practices, Tribal Women Empowerment, Textile Waste Recycling, Skill Development, Women Empowerment, Environmental Sustainability, Micro-Entrepreneurship

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Introduction:

Sustainable livelihood practices and women empowerment are central to achieving inclusive and equitable development, especially within tribal communities. Tribal women often face multiple challenges such as limited access to education, lack of stable employment opportunities, low-income levels, and economic dependency. These factors not only affect their standard of living but also restrict their participation in decision-making processes within their families and communities. Therefore, there is a growing need for practical and sustainable approaches that can create income opportunities while enhancing self-reliance among tribal women.

Sustainable livelihood practices focus on the effective use of locally available resources, skills, and knowledge to generate continuous and reliable income. Such practices aim to ensure economic stability while also maintaining environmental balance. In recent years, increasing environmental concerns, particularly related to textile waste, have highlighted the need for innovative solutions that address both livelihood generation and sustainability.

Textile waste recycling emerges as a promising approach in this context. It involves converting discarded or unused fabric into useful and marketable products, thereby reducing environmental waste and creating economic opportunities. This practice not only minimizes waste but also requires low investment, making it accessible and feasible for underprivileged communities. By engaging in textile waste recycling, tribal women can develop practical skills, participate in income-generating activities, and gradually move towards financial independence. The present study focuses on examining the effectiveness of sustainable livelihood practices, particularly textile waste recycling, in empowering tribal women. It aims to assess how such practices influence their socio-economic status, including income generation, skill development, confidence, and participation in economic activities. By implementing and analyzing this model in a real community setting, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how sustainable livelihood practices can serve as a viable and impactful tool for empowering tribal women and promoting long-term development.

Objectives of the Study:

- To study the socio-economic background of tribal women in ZP Thokarwadi, Kasara, and to create awareness about employment opportunities.
- To implement the Sustainable Livelihood practices among tribal women to promote skill development and income generation.
- To analyze the effectiveness of the Sustainable Livelihood Practices in improving the socio-economic status of tribal women.

Review of Literature:

Machado, Ferreira, Carvalho, Braga, and Braga (2022), in their study *“Fashion Upcycling and Social Impact: A Case Study,”* found that upcycling of textile waste contributes significantly to environmental sustainability while also empowering women. The study highlighted that participation in upcycling activities enhances skills, creativity, and self-confidence among women, thereby improving both economic and social outcomes.

Kashaveni (2025), in the study *“Upcycled Fashion for a Sustainable Future: Bridging SDGs and Vikasit Bharat,”* emphasized that the fashion industry is a major contributor to environmental pollution and that upcycling offers a sustainable alternative. The study shows that upcycled fashion aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by reducing waste and promoting employment generation, especially among small-scale artisans and rural communities.

The research on *“Community Development and Empowerment of Women in Rural India Through a Recycle Textile Cooperative”* highlights that textile recycling-based livelihood models can improve income levels, promote skill development, and strengthen community participation among women. It further suggests that cooperative-based approaches enhance sustainability and collective empowerment in rural settings.

Panchal and Shah (2024), in their study on *“The Transformative Role of Tribal Women in Advancing Atmanirbhar Bharat,”* emphasized that tribal women play a vital role in achieving self-reliance. The study found

that access to skill development, economic participation, and market opportunities significantly improves financial independence and social status among tribal women.

Another study reflected that sustainable livelihood practices based on skill development and resource utilization help women generate income and improve their socio-economic conditions. It highlights the importance of practical, low-cost livelihood models in empowering underprivileged women.

Research Gap:

Most studies on sustainable livelihood focus on traditional activities and often involve higher risk, external support, and limited innovation in product selection. There is little research on **non-traditional, low-risk products** that require minimal investment and are easy to adopt.

This study is stronger because:

- It is based on actual implementation at ZPD Kasara for a fixed period.
- It uses a low-cost model where raw material (cloth waste) is almost free.
- It is market-driven, meaning products are sold at real market prices.
- It focuses on tribal women, a group that needs more attention in research.
- It combines income generation with environmental sustainability.

Research Methodology:

The present study adopted the **Action Research Method**, as it involved both the **implementation of sustainable livelihood practices** and the **systematic observation of their impact** on the empowerment of tribal women. This method was suitable as it focuses on real-life problem solving through intervention and reflection.

Research Design:

The study followed a **pre-test and post-test design**, enabling comparison of participants' conditions before and after the intervention. This helped in assessing the **effectiveness of sustainable livelihood practices**.

Area of Study:

The research was conducted in the vicinity of **ZP Thokarwadi, Kasara**, focusing on tribal women from the local community.

Population and Sample:

The population consisted of **tribal women residing in the selected area and the sample was of 25 women to study, a purposive sampling technique** was used to select participants based on:

- Willingness to participate
- Availability
- Interest in skill-based activities

Phases of Research:

1. Planning Phase

Identification of problems, setting objectives, and preparation of tools.

2. Pre-Assessment Phase

Conducting pre-test to understand the initial socio-economic condition and skill level of participants.

3. **Awareness Phase**

Creating awareness about sustainable livelihood practices and motivating participants.

4. **Implementation Phase**

Training women in **textile waste recycling** to make low-risk products like scrunchies.

5. **Observation Phase**

Monitoring participation, skill development, and engagement during the process.

6. **Post-Assessment Phase**

Conducting post-test to measure improvement in skills, income, and confidence.

7. **Analysis Phase**

Analyzing data using quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate effectiveness.

Qualitative Data Analysis:

Qualitative data collected through interviews and observations will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The responses will be examined to identify common themes related to skill development, confidence, and empowerment among tribal women.

This will be helpful in understanding the experiences and changes after the implementation of the Sustainable Livelihood Model.

Quantitative Data Analysis:

A total of **25 tribal women** participated in the study. Each participant produced approximately **25 scrunchies** during the implementation phase, resulting in a total production of **625 scrunchies**.

The selling price of the scrunchies ranged between **₹30 to ₹50**, depending on the design and quality. Based on this, the total income generated was **₹28,750**.

On average, each participant earned approximately **₹750 to ₹1,250** during the study period.

Interpretation:

The findings indicate that sustainable livelihood practices through **textile waste recycling** can generate **meaningful income even at a small scale**. The use of low-cost raw materials and simple production techniques made the activity accessible and economically viable for the participants. This demonstrates that such practices are **low-risk, scalable, and effective** in contributing to the economic empowerment of tribal women.

Findings of the Study :

(A) Findings related to socio-economic background and awareness

- Most of the tribal women in ZP Thokarwadi, Kasara belong to economically weaker sections with limited and irregular sources of income.
- A majority of the participants have low educational backgrounds and limited exposure to formal employment opportunities.
- Initially, there was a lack of awareness among the women regarding alternative livelihood options and skill-based employment.

- After awareness sessions, the women showed increased interest and motivation to participate in income-generating activities.

(B) Findings related to implementation of Sustainable Livelihood Practices

- The sustainable livelihood practices were found to be practical and feasible to implement in the local setting.
- The women were able to learn textile waste recycling skills within a short duration with proper guidance and support.
- The use of cloth waste as raw material, sourced from scraps collected from nearby tailors, made the practices low-cost, accessible, and easy to sustain.

(C) Findings related to socio-economic improvement

- The implementation of sustainable livelihood practices resulted in initial income generation, which supported the household needs of the participants.
- There was a noticeable improvement in confidence, self-reliance, and willingness to work among the women.
- These practices contributed to both women's empowerment and environmental sustainability by promoting productive use of textile waste.

Conclusion:

The present study concludes that sustainable livelihood practices, particularly **textile waste recycling through low-risk products like scrunchies**, are effective in empowering tribal women. The implementation of the model in ZP Thokarwadi, Kasara demonstrated that women can acquire skills in a short duration and actively participate in income-generating activities.

The findings show improvements in **income, confidence, and self-reliance** among the participants. The use of low-cost raw materials, sourced from cloth scraps, made the practice economically feasible and sustainable. Additionally, the involvement of a **ZP institutional setting** provided a supportive environment for learning and implementation.

Overall, the study highlights that such **simple, scalable, and market-driven livelihood practices** can create meaningful socio-economic impact while also promoting environmental sustainability. Therefore, sustainable livelihood practices can be considered an effective approach for the empowerment of tribal women.

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