

Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in a Globalized Era: A Focus on North East India

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Abstract

In the contemporary globalized landscape, women entrepreneurs in India, particularly in the region of North East India, navigate a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges influenced by rapid technological advancements and integration into international markets. This review investigates the pivotal factors that shape the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in this context, with a focused exploration on the specific barriers they face, the support mechanisms available to them, and the policy implications crucial for their advancement. Geographically isolated and characterized by diverse cultural norms, North East India presents unique challenges such as infrastructural limitations and traditional gender roles that affect women's access to resources and entrepreneurial opportunities. Despite these challenges, initiatives by governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and community-driven efforts play a pivotal role in providing financial support, skill development, and networking platforms tailored to enhance the entrepreneurial capabilities of women in this region. Effective policy interventions aimed at promoting gender equality, improving infrastructure, and fostering a propitious business environment are essential to bolstering women entrepreneurs' participation and success in the globalized economy, thereby driving sustainable economic growth and social development in North East India.

Key words: Women entrepreneurs, North East India, globalization, empowerment strategies, support mechanisms

Introduction

The entrepreneurial landscape has undergone profound transformations driven by globalization and technological advancements, presenting a myriad of opportunities and challenges globally, particularly for women entrepreneurs (Smith, 2020; Johnson, 2021). Within the Indian context, and specifically in North East India, these shifts have brought about significant implications. North East India, renowned for its rich cultural diversity and complex socio-economic challenges, emerges as a vibrant setting for entrepreneurial endeavours, with women increasingly assuming pivotal roles (Das, 2019; Devi, 2021). Empowering women entrepreneurs in this region transcends mere economic growth; it plays a pivotal role in fostering inclusive development. Here, the intersection of North East India's abundant natural resources and deep-rooted cultural heritage creates a unique backdrop where traditional knowledge intertwines with contemporary entrepreneurial practices. Despite grappling with infrastructural limitations and geographical isolation, women entrepreneurs in sectors such as handicrafts, agribusiness, and eco-tourism have adeptly leveraged local resources to establish sustainable enterprises (Chowdhury, 2018; Barua, 2020).

The present study emphasises the significance of empowering women entrepreneurs in North East India within the broader frameworks of globalization and technological advancement. It highlights the critical importance of understanding the local context and addressing region-specific challenges. The review will delve into significant factors influencing women's entrepreneurship in North East India, encompassing socio-cultural dynamics, governmental policies, and the efficacy of support systems. Through this exploration, the objective is to provide nuanced insights into how empowering women entrepreneurs can contribute not only to economic development but also to social empowerment and the preservation of cultural heritage in this distinctive region.

In the Indian context, several studies have emphasized the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs, particularly in North East India. According to Devi (2021), women in this region often leverage their traditional knowledge and cultural heritage to create unique business opportunities, especially in handicrafts and eco-tourism. The socio-cultural dynamics, as explored by Das (2019), play a significant role in shaping entrepreneurial activities, with women often relying on community support and local networks to overcome challenges. Further research by Sen (2017) has shown that the socio-cultural constraints in North East India are deeply rooted in traditional gender norms, which can both hinder and motivate women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Policies aimed at gender equality, as highlighted by Kapoor (2019), are crucial for creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs. However, these policies must be tailored to address the specific socio-economic conditions of the region. The role of governmental policies is critical in this context. According to Sharma et al. (2021), effective policy interventions that prioritize infrastructure development, access to finance, and skills training are essential for empowering women

entrepreneurs. These findings are supported by Singh and Kaur (2021), who demonstrated that targeted initiatives by governmental bodies and NGOs have significantly enhanced the entrepreneurial capabilities of women in North East India. Chowdhury (2018) and Banerjee (2017) further emphasized the importance of local resources and community-driven initiatives in overcoming infrastructural and geographical challenges. For example, micro-financing programs and local training workshops have been instrumental in supporting women entrepreneurs in this region (Gupta, 2019). These programs not only provide financial assistance but also equip women with the necessary skills and knowledge to run sustainable businesses.

Recent studies by Patel and Mehra (2021) highlight the critical role of technology in bridging gaps and creating new opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Digital platforms and e-commerce have opened up new markets, enabling women to reach a wider customer base and expand their businesses beyond local boundaries. Iyer (2020) underscores the potential of digital tools in enhancing business operations and connecting women entrepreneurs with global markets. The preservation of cultural heritage is another important aspect of women's entrepreneurship in North East India. According to Rao and Sen (2021), women entrepreneurs play a vital role in maintaining and promoting traditional crafts and practices, which are integral to the region's cultural identity. This not only fosters economic growth but also ensures the continuation of cultural traditions and knowledge.

In these views, the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in North East India is a multifaceted process that requires a comprehensive understanding of local socio-cultural dynamics, effective policy interventions, and the integration of modern technological advancements. By addressing these factors, it is possible to create an enabling environment that supports women entrepreneurs, promotes inclusive economic development, and preserves the rich cultural heritage of the region. This review aims to shed light on these critical aspects, providing valuable insights into the unique entrepreneurial landscape of North East India.

Literature Review

In recent years, scholarly discourse has increasingly emphasized the transformative impact of globalization and technological advancements on the entrepreneurial landscape, particularly in empowering women entrepreneurs (Smith, 2020; Johnson, 2021). This review situates itself within this evolving discourse, focusing on North East India as a pivotal case study while extending its analysis to encompass the broader South Asian region. Here, women entrepreneurs navigate a complex interplay of global economic dynamics and intricate regional socio-cultural contexts. North East India, celebrated for its rich cultural diversity and intricate socio-economic fabric, provides fertile ground for entrepreneurial ventures (Das, 2019). Despite the region's inherent opportunities, women entrepreneurs face formidable challenges arising from geographical isolation and inadequate infrastructure, which disproportionately hinder their entrepreneurial activities (Chowdhury, 2018). These challenges are compounded by entrenched traditional gender norms and disparities in access to resources, presenting significant barriers to women's full participation in entrepreneurial endeavours. Recent studies have shown that the geographical isolation of North East India poses unique logistical and infrastructural challenges for entrepreneurs. According to Devi (2021), the difficult terrain and poor connectivity hinder market access and supply chain efficiency, making it challenging for women entrepreneurs to scale their businesses. Additionally, Sinha (2020) observed that the lack of adequate infrastructure, such as roads and communication networks, exacerbates these difficulties, particularly for women who may also face societal mobility restrictions.

However, diverse stakeholders including governmental bodies, NGOs, and community-driven initiatives have implemented targeted support mechanisms aimed at enhancing the entrepreneurial capabilities of women in North East India. These initiatives encompass a broad spectrum of interventions such as financial aid, skills development programs, and networking platforms tailored to address the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs (Chowdhury, 2018). For instance, the Government of India's initiatives under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) have been pivotal in providing financial and infrastructural support to women entrepreneurs (Das, 2019). Programs like the North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP) have successfully integrated women into entrepreneurial activities by offering microfinance and skill development training (Rao and Sen, 2021).

Recent research also emphasises the crucial role of effective policy interventions in creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs across South Asia. Policies that prioritize gender equality, invest in infrastructure development, and facilitate equitable business opportunities are crucial for improving women's access to resources and fostering their robust engagement in the global economy (Smith, 2020; Johnson, 2021). For instance, Sharma et al. (2021) highlight how cultural and institutional barriers significantly impact the entrepreneurial landscape for women in India, suggesting strategies for overcoming these hurdles and promoting inclusive growth. These strategies include the implementation of gender-sensitive policies that provide financial incentives and support services tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs. Additionally, Patel and Gupta (2020) argue for customized policy frameworks that address

regional disparities within South Asia, advocating for targeted interventions to support women's entrepreneurial activities. In North East India, initiatives such as the North East Venture Fund (NEVF), which focuses on providing venture capital to startups in the region, have been instrumental in fostering a conducive environment for women entrepreneurs (Singh and Kaur, 2021). These tailored interventions are crucial in addressing the specific socio-economic and cultural challenges that women entrepreneurs face in this region. This literature review emphasizes the importance of comprehensively understanding local nuances and addressing region-specific challenges to empower women entrepreneurs not only in North East India but also throughout the broader South Asian context. An examination of socio-cultural factors reveals that the cultural diversity inherent to North East India enriches entrepreneurial ventures while also posing unique challenges that necessitate targeted interventions. Studies by Kapoor (2019) and Thomas (2021) indicate that local cultural practices and traditions can both support and restrict women's entrepreneurial activities, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive approaches.

Analysis of governmental policies and evaluation of support systems offer critical insights into how strategic interventions can drive economic development, promote social empowerment, and safeguard cultural heritage in this vibrant and diverse region of South Asia. For example, Bhattacharya (2021) discusses how policy frameworks that integrate traditional knowledge systems with modern entrepreneurial practices have proven effective in fostering sustainable development. Similarly, Roy (2018) emphasizes the role of inclusive policies that ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for women entrepreneurs, thereby promoting both economic and social development. The evolving discourse stresses the need for holistic approaches that integrate both macro-level policies and micro-level support mechanisms to effectively empower women entrepreneurs and catalyse their pivotal role in regional development. These perspectives underscore the ongoing evolution and adaptation required to sustainably empower women entrepreneurs in diverse socio-economic landscapes, emphasizing the need for context-specific strategies tailored to the unique challenges of each region. By focusing on localized solutions and inclusive policies, it is possible to create an enabling environment that supports the growth and sustainability of women-led enterprises, thereby contributing to broader economic and social goals (Iyer, 2020; Mitra, 2019).

Objectives

This review work aims to study the entrepreneurial landscape in North East India by identifying critical factors influencing women entrepreneurs' empowerment, evaluating the effectiveness of support mechanisms and policies designed for women's entrepreneurship, and analysing the impacts of globalization and technological advancements on the region. It seeks to provide insights into how socio-cultural norms, access to resources, governmental initiatives, and global economic trends shape opportunities and challenges for women entrepreneurs. Ultimately, this review also aims to inform policy-making, enhance support mechanisms, and promote sustainable empowerment initiatives tailored to the unique socio-economic and cultural context of North East India.

Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted in this review paper aimed to comprehensively explore the entrepreneurial landscape of women in North East India. It involved a thorough literature review encompassing academic journals, reputable organization reports, and case studies to gather a diverse range of scholarly insights. Employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the methodology sought to synthesize data effectively: qualitative analysis delved into empowerment strategies and challenges through methods like interviews and thematic analysis, revealing socio-economic dynamics and cultural contexts influencing entrepreneurial activities. Concurrently, quantitative analysis utilized survey data and databases to empirically assess the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms and policies. This dual approach aimed to provide valuable insights for developing effective policies and initiatives tailored to enhance women entrepreneurs' empowerment within the unique socio-economic and cultural context of the region.

Results and Discussion

The analysis draws on a comprehensive review of literature, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to understand the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in North East India. This methodology aligns with the approaches of Das (2019), who highlighted the importance of mixed methods in studying entrepreneurship, and Smith (2020), who advocated for the integration of qualitative and quantitative analyses to capture the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial empowerment. The qualitative analysis, following the framework of Johnson (2018), focused on the socio-economic dynamics and cultural contexts that shape the entrepreneurial landscape, while the quantitative analysis, inspired by the work of Brown and Williams (2021), examined statistical trends and empirical evidence on support mechanisms and policy effectiveness. Additionally, recent studies by Patel and Mehra (2021) have underscored the

criticality of a dual approach to comprehensively address both the macro and micro factors influencing women entrepreneurs.

The qualitative analysis revealed that women entrepreneurs in North East India face significant challenges, including infrastructural limitations and traditional gender roles, as noted by Chowdhury (2018) and Banerjee (2017). These findings echo the observations of Kapoor (2019), who identified similar barriers in other parts of India. Sinha (2020) further emphasized that these barriers are deeply entrenched in the socio-cultural fabric, making policy interventions complex but necessary. For instance, Kapoor (2019) highlighted that infrastructural challenges such as inadequate transportation and lack of market access are particularly pronounced in rural areas, impeding women's entrepreneurial activities. Similarly, Sinha (2020) discussed how societal expectations and gender norms restrict women's mobility and access to resources, further complicating their entrepreneurial endeavours.

However, the analysis also highlighted the resilience and adaptability of these entrepreneurs, who leverage local resources and community support to overcome these barriers, consistent with the conclusions of Sharma (2020) and Patel (2016). Recent contributions by Rao and Sen (2021) also illustrate how community networks and local knowledge systems play pivotal roles in overcoming these challenges. For example, Sharma (2020) emphasized the role of community-based organizations in providing support and resources to women entrepreneurs, facilitating knowledge sharing and collective problem-solving. Patel (2016) demonstrated how local cultural practices and traditional skills, such as weaving and handicrafts, are harnessed by women entrepreneurs to create unique products that appeal to broader markets.

The quantitative analysis supported these findings, showing that targeted initiatives by governmental bodies, NGOs, and community-driven efforts have significantly contributed to enhancing the entrepreneurial capabilities of women in this region, corroborating the studies by Singh and Kaur (2021) and Rao (2020). For example, Gupta (2019) demonstrated through empirical data that micro-financing and training programs led by NGOs significantly improved business sustainability among women entrepreneurs. Mehta (2018) and Narayan (2020) further provided statistical evidence that policies promoting gender equality, improving infrastructure, and fostering a conducive business environment are effective in increasing women's participation in entrepreneurship. Their studies indicated that such policies could lead to a substantial increase in women's entrepreneurial activities, directly contributing to regional economic development. Singh and Kaur (2021) highlighted that access to microfinance significantly improved the ability of women entrepreneurs to invest in and grow their businesses, while Rao (2020) showed that infrastructure development, such as improved roads and internet connectivity, directly impacted the success rates of women's enterprises.

The discussion emphasizes the importance of understanding the local socio-cultural context and addressing region-specific challenges to empower women entrepreneurs in North East India, as argued by Sen (2017) and Thomas (2021). Sen's analysis of socio-cultural constraints and Thomas's examination of regional policy impacts both underscore the necessity of context-specific strategies. The interplay of globalization and technological advancements presents both opportunities and challenges, necessitating tailored support mechanisms, a view supported by Kumar (2019) and Iyer (2020). Iyer's (2020) work, in particular, highlighted how digital tools can be leveraged to bridge infrastructural gaps and provide new market opportunities for women entrepreneurs. The analysis underscores the critical role of policy interventions in creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs, echoing the findings of Roy (2018) and Bhattacharya (2021). Roy's (2018) exploration of policy frameworks and Bhattacharya's (2021) study on the implementation of gender-specific policies both emphasize the necessity of comprehensive and inclusive policy measures.

Effective policies that prioritize gender equality, infrastructure development, and business opportunities are essential for promoting economic growth and social development, as highlighted by Narayan (2020) and Mitra (2019). Desai (2017) and Banik (2021) further reinforce that such policies must be dynamically adapted to the evolving socio-economic landscape to remain effective. Narayan (2020) showed that gender equality policies led to increased female participation in the workforce, while Mitra (2019) demonstrated the positive impact of infrastructure investments on local economies. Desai (2017) argued for continuous policy evaluation and adaptation to address emerging challenges, and Banik (2021) highlighted the importance of inclusive policy frameworks that cater to diverse regional needs. Thus, empowering women entrepreneurs in North East India not only drives economic progress but also fosters social empowerment and preserves cultural heritage, reinforcing the arguments of Desai (2017) and Banik (2021). This highlights the need for continued support and strategic interventions in this unique socio-economic landscape, a recommendation also made by Goswami (2020) and Verma (2021). The continued evolution of policy frameworks and support mechanisms, as suggested by recent literature, will be pivotal in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in North East India, ensuring their sustained growth and contribution to the region's development. Goswami (2020)

emphasized the importance of tailored interventions that address specific regional challenges, while Verma (2021) called for ongoing policy innovation to adapt to the dynamic needs of women entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

Empowering women entrepreneurs in North East India is a multifaceted endeavour that extends beyond economic growth to include inclusive development and cultural preservation. This review highlights the significant impact of globalization and technological advancements on the region's entrepreneurial landscape, presenting both unique challenges and opportunities for women. Through a mixed-methods approach, the analysis reveals the socio-economic dynamics, cultural contexts, and policy environments influencing women's entrepreneurial activities. Despite considerable infrastructural constraints and persistent gender norms, women entrepreneurs in North East India demonstrate remarkable resilience, utilizing local resources and community support to overcome obstacles. Governmental initiatives, backed by NGOs and community efforts, have significantly enhanced women's entrepreneurial capabilities. These initiatives underscore the critical role of effective policy interventions in creating a supportive environment for women entrepreneurs. Policies focusing on gender equality, infrastructure development, and business opportunities are essential for increasing women's participation in entrepreneurship and driving regional economic growth. Targeted support mechanisms, tailored to address region-specific challenges and leveraging digital innovations, are crucial for bridging infrastructural gaps and enhancing women's success in entrepreneurship. Understanding the unique socio-cultural context of North East India and implementing context-specific strategies are vital for successful empowerment initiatives. Beyond economic outcomes, empowering women entrepreneurs fosters social empowerment and preserves cultural heritage. To sustain and amplify these impacts, policy frameworks and support mechanisms must evolve in response to changing socio-economic conditions. A holistic approach, integrating both macro-level policies and micro-level interventions, is necessary to create a supportive ecosystem where women entrepreneurs can thrive, thereby contributing significantly to the overall development of North East India.

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