

Challenges and Prospects for Women Entrepreneurs in the Handicrafts Sector of Assam with Reference to Sustainability Promotion

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Abstract

A particular emphasis is placed on the development of sustainability over the course of this study, which investigates the difficulties and opportunities that women entrepreneurs in the handicrafts sector of Assam encounter. We used a mixed-methods approach to collect data from 120 female entrepreneurs. We used structured questionnaires to collect information, and we supplemented it with in-depth interviews. According to the findings, despite the fact that women face a variety of obstacles, including restricted access to raw materials, financial constraints, insufficient marketing support, and societal pressures, they are increasingly adopting sustainable practices such as the utilization of environmentally friendly materials, waste recycling, and fair trade collaborations. In addition, there are apparent potential for expansion in areas such as participation in government programs, internet marketing platforms, and networking with non-governmental organizations and self-help groups. As a result of thematic insights, it has been determined that cultural pride, resilience, and creativity are important factors driving sustained participation in the handicrafts sector. According to the findings of the study, it is vital to implement targeted interventions in the areas of skill development, digital inclusion, and policy assistance in order to empower female entrepreneurs and foster sustainable growth in the region.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Handicrafts Sector, Assam, Sustainability Practices, Entrepreneurial Challenges, Digital Inclusion, Government Schemes, Cultural Heritage, Mixed-Methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Assam's handicrafts industry is an essential component of the state's cultural identity, as well as the state's economic development and the provision of rural livelihood and employment opportunities. on this sector, which has traditionally been anchored on indigenous knowledge and artisanal skills, there has been a major engagement of women. Women not only contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, but they also contribute to the incomes of households and the development of communities. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they play a crucial role, female entrepreneurs in this industry continue to confront a multitude of obstacles that interfere with their expansion and capacity to remain in business. There are a variety of obstacles to overcome, including restricted access to raw materials, markets, and financial resources, as well as broader societal and infrastructure boundaries.

Over the past few years, the increasing worldwide emphasis on sustainable development has resulted in the creation of new prospects for handicraft businesses that are headed by women. The implementation of environmentally responsible practices, the recycling of waste, the utilization of energy-efficient techniques, and the principles of fair trade all present a promising road toward sustainable enterprise. Additionally, the availability of government assistance programs, digital marketing platforms, and partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and self-help groups (SHGs) all contribute to an increase in the potential for growth and resilience of these organizations.

With a particular emphasis on how women entrepreneurs in the handicrafts sector of Assam engage with sustainability promotion, the purpose of this study is to investigate both the obstacles and the potential that women entrepreneurs confront in the field. The purpose of this project is to provide a complete understanding of the structural barriers, adaptive techniques,

and future paths for women-led entrepreneurship in the region. This will be accomplished through the utilization of a mixed-methods methodology.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ihsan et al. (2015) studied the psychological aspect of self-confidence in the context of sports, specifically among athletes competing in field hockey; however, their findings also had larger implications for business owners and entrepreneurs. They discovered a strong connection between self-confidence and motivation, which led them to conclude that psychological preparation and inner belief were key drivers of success. This is an insight that can be considered applicable to women who are navigating the process of entrepreneurship in traditional sectors.

Istiqomah and Adawiyah (2018) An investigation of the growth of rural group entrepreneurship in Indonesia revealed a multitude of advantages, including the generation of revenue, the empowerment of individuals, and the consolidation of communities. However, they also point out that there are problems such as inadequate capital, poor infrastructure, and a lack of training. These are issues that closely resemble the institutional restraints that women entrepreneurs confront in similar contexts, such as the handicraft sector in India.

Itani, Sidani, and Baalbaki (2011) concentrated on female entrepreneurs in the United Arab Emirates and brought attention to the fact that they experience both motivation and frustration simultaneously. Many women claimed that they were constrained by societal expectations, a lack of institutional support, and limited access to finance, despite the fact that they were motivated by the need for economic contribution, self-fulfillment, and independence. The results of this study highlighted the ongoing gendered hurdles that hinder the success of entrepreneurs in a variety of cultural settings through their findings.

Jyoti, Sharma, and Kumari (2011) studied women entrepreneurs in rural India and identified various factors influencing their entrepreneurial orientation and satisfaction. Their research revealed that support systems, training opportunities, and market access significantly impacted women's motivation and long-term engagement in entrepreneurial ventures. They emphasized the need for policy-level interventions and grassroots initiatives to strengthen the ecosystem for rural women entrepreneurs.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The current investigation makes use of a descriptive research design and a mixed-methods methodology in order to investigate the quantitative and qualitative aspects of women's entrepreneurship in the handicrafts sector of Assam. It is reasonable to use this design in order to investigate the existing difficulties, practices that promote sustainability, and expectations for future growth. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which female entrepreneurs interact with sustainability, the challenges they confront, and the opportunities that are available to them for enhancing their entrepreneurial path.

3.2. Study Area

The research was carried out in certain regions of Assam that are well-known for the artisanal culture and handicrafts that they produce. Jorhat, Sivasagar, Barpeta, and Dibrugarh were among these cities. Kamrup (both rural and metro) was also listed. Because of the high number of traditional craft practices that are prevalent in these locations and the fact that women are actively involved in the handicrafts industry, these localities were selected.

3.3. Population and Sample

The population that was targeted consisted of female business owners that are actively involved in the manufacture and selling of handmade items. The approach of purposive sampling was utilized in order to guarantee that the sample was comprised of persons who had prior expertise in the industry that was pertinent to the study. Women who had been employed in the

handicrafts business for a period of at least two years were the only ones who were considered for selection. During the quantitative portion of the research project, a total of 120 female business owners were conducted interviews. In addition, ten of the respondents were chosen to participate in in-depth qualitative interviews in order to obtain specific insights into their personal experiences, cultural motives, and difficulties.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

a. Quantitative Data Collection

The information was gathered by means of a standardized questionnaire that contained questions with predetermined answers including demographics, corporate profile, operational issues, sustainable practices, and perceptions of growth potential. The questionnaire was distributed using a combination of in-person meetings and telephone interviews, with the distribution of the questionnaire being determined by factors such as accessibility and convenience. In order to ensure that respondents provided true and accurate responses, confidentiality was guaranteed to them.

b. Qualitative Data Collection

A total of ten respondents were chosen to participate in semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in order to enrich the survey data. The purpose of these interviews was to investigate more profound topics, such as personal resiliency, inventive methods, the pressures that come from family and society, and the obstacles that stand in the way of digital inclusion. In accordance with the preferences of the respondents, the interviews were carried out in Assamese, Hindi, and English. The interviews were subsequently transcribed for the purpose of theme analysis.

3.5. Tools of Analysis

a. Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data that was gathered from the surveys was imported into Microsoft Excel and then evaluated with descriptive statistical methods, especially focusing on frequencies and percentages. In order to highlight the most important issues, sustainable practices, and growth opportunities that were stated by the respondents, the results were presented in tabular format.

b. Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized in order to examine the qualitative data that was gathered from the interviews. In the process of manually identifying recurring patterns and themes, specific emphasis was paid to ideas such as resiliency, the digital gap, innovation, and cultural pride. These thematic insights helped provide a broader contextual understanding and added richness to the information that was obtained through numerical analysis.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

Respondents identified multiple structural and operational challenges affecting their entrepreneurial performance.

Table 1: Key Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Limited access to raw materials	26	21.7%
Inadequate marketing support	22	18.3%
Difficulty in accessing finance	30	25.0%
Lack of training or skill upgrade	24	20.0%
Societal/family restrictions	18	15.0%
Total	120	100.0%

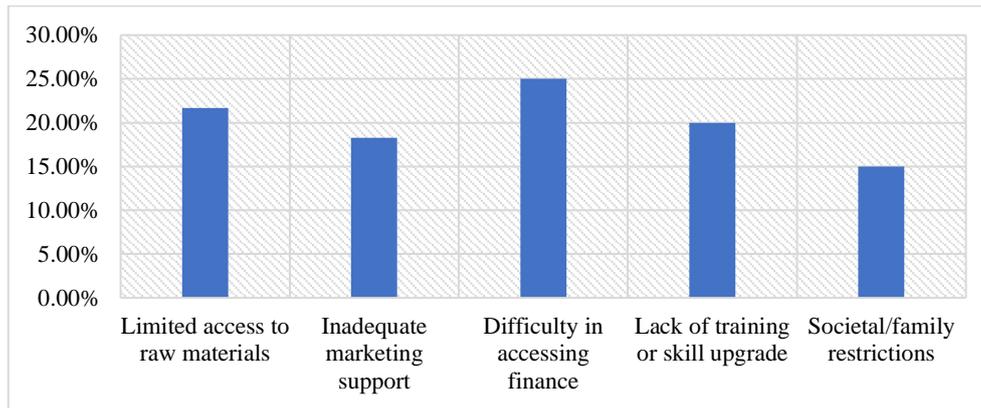


Figure 1: Key Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

According to the findings, the most major obstacle that women entrepreneurs in the handicrafts sector in Assam confront is the difficulty in gaining access to financial resources. This was reported by twenty-five percent of the respondents. Consequently, this is followed by a lack of training or skill upgrade (20%) and restricted access to raw materials (21.7%), all of which indicate systemic limitations in the availability of resources and the potential to expand their capacity. There is a continuous influence of social norms on women's entrepreneurial mobility, as seen by the fact that societal and familial restraints account for 15% of the total. Inadequate marketing support accounts for 18.3% of the total, which further hinders their capacity to expand market reach. In general, the data indicate that although economic and infrastructure hurdles are the most prominent, social challenges also play a significant role in determining the landscape of entrepreneurship for women in this area. It is vital to provide targeted interventions in areas like as financial access, skill development, and social empowerment in order to encourage their growth and ensure their continued existence.

4.2. Sustainability Practices Adopted

The study examined the extent to which women entrepreneurs adopted sustainability-oriented practices in their craft processes.

Table 2: Adoption of Sustainable Practices

Sustainability Practice	Adopted (Yes)	Percentage (%)
Use of eco-friendly raw materials	42	35.0%
Waste reuse/recycling	30	25.0%
Energy-efficient production methods	27	22.5%
Fair trade practices and community tie-ups	21	17.5%
Total	120	100.0%

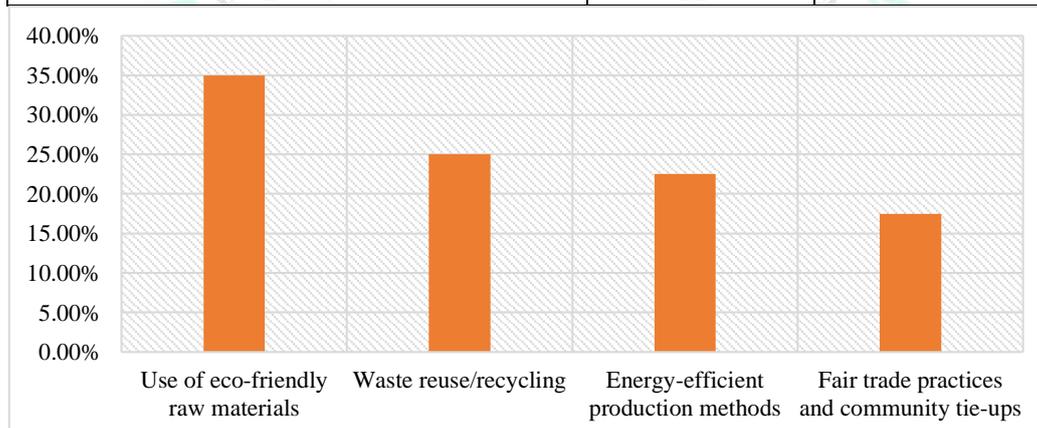


Figure 2: Adoption of Sustainable Practices

The statistics on the adoption of sustainable practices among women entrepreneurs in the handicrafts sector in Assam suggests a growing awareness and dedication to environmentally

and ethically responsible production methods. Among the practices that have been taken the most frequently, the utilization of environmentally friendly raw materials has been reported by 35% of respondents. This indicates an effort to limit the environmental impact at the source. The utilization of energy-efficient production processes (22.5%) and the reuse and recycling of waste (25%) are additional indications of a tendency toward resource optimization and sustainability. Nevertheless, only 17.5% of respondents embraced fair trade practices and community tie-ups, despite the fact that these measures are essential for social sustainability. This indicates that there is a need for increased knowledge and facilitation in this particular sector. Despite the fact that a sizeable proportion of business owners are already incorporating sustainable practices into their operations, there is a large amount of room for growth and institutionalization of these initiatives through the provision of training, governmental incentives, and market support.

4.3. Prospects for Growth and Sustainability

The respondents highlighted several opportunities for future growth and sustainability in the handicrafts sector.

Table 3: Growth Prospects for Sustainable Development

Growth Prospect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Participation in government schemes	30	25.0%
Access to online marketing platforms	40	33.3%
Participation in trade fairs/exhibitions	28	23.3%
Collaborations with NGOs/SHGs	22	18.3%
Total	120	100.0%

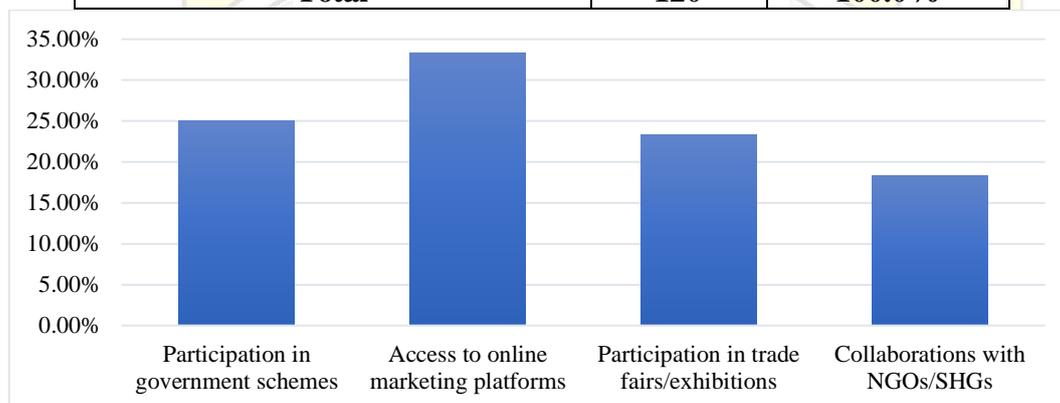


Figure 3: Growth Prospects for Sustainable Development

According to the statistics on growth potential for sustainable development among women entrepreneurs in the handicrafts sector of Assam, there is a significant desire in extending market access and institutional support. Access to online marketing platforms was regarded as the most important opportunity by 33.3% of respondents, demonstrating that there is a rising realization of the importance of digital tools for the expansion of businesses and greater exposure. A large number of people believe that participation in government programs (25%) and trade fairs or exhibitions (23.3%) are important channels for gaining visibility, receiving financial assistance, and making networks. In the meantime, collaborations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and self-help groups (SHGs) (18.3%) indicate that community-based support networks play a role that is moderate but significant. These observations highlight the significance of digital inclusion, policy-driven schemes, and platform-based exposure in the process of boosting the sustainability and scalability of handicraft businesses that are headed by women.

4.4. Thematic Insights from Interviews

From the qualitative interviews, several themes emerged:

- **Resilience and Innovation:** Despite structural barriers, many women developed innovative designs and repurposed waste materials creatively.
- **Digital Divide:** There was strong interest in digital marketing, but gaps in digital literacy and smartphone access persisted.
- **Cultural Motivation:** Many women felt pride in promoting traditional crafts, which encouraged them to sustain their work despite economic uncertainties.

5. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the study underscores the fact that women entrepreneurs in the handicrafts sector of Assam suffer a combination of structural and operational obstacles. These challenges include limited access to raw materials, poor marketing support, and financial restraints. In spite of these challenges, a significant number of women have adopted sustainable habits, such as recycling waste, encouraging fair trade, and utilizing materials that are favorable to the environment. This demonstrates a growing awareness of the importance of social and environmental responsibility. The opportunities for expansion are encouraging, notably through participation in government programs, internet marketing platforms, and engagement with non-governmental organizations and self-help groups (SHGs). Despite the fact that deficits in digital literacy and support infrastructure continue to be critical areas for governmental intervention, thematic insights further demonstrate the resiliency, cultural pride, and innovative spirit that are present among these entrepreneurs. Generally speaking, women-led handicraft businesses in Assam have a significant potential to promote sustainable development and preserve cultural heritage if they are provided with targeted support and strategies that are inclusive.

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