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Entrepreneurship and Women's Empowerment in North East India: An Odyssey of Courage, Craft, and Community

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Abstract

The role of entrepreneurship in advancing women's empowerment in North East India, a region rich in cultural heritage, natural resources, and indigenous craftsmanship. It highlights how women-led enterprises in sectors such as handloom, handicrafts, bamboo products, food processing, and digital entrepreneurship contribute to socio-economic development and community transformation. The study examines the opportunities emerging from globalization, digital platforms, and social enterprises while also addressing persistent challenges including inadequate infrastructure, limited market access, financial constraints, patriarchal norms, and lack of policy support. Through examples of successful women entrepreneurs and grassroots initiatives, the paper demonstrates how courage, creativity, and community networks are reshaping the entrepreneurial landscape of the region. It further emphasizes the importance of skill development, mentorship, financial inclusion, digital connectivity, and supportive ecosystems in fostering sustainable women entrepreneurship. The study concludes that empowering women entrepreneurs not only strengthens economic growth but also promotes social equity, cultural preservation, and regional development in North East India.

Keywords: *Women Entrepreneurship, Women Empowerment, North East India, Social Entrepreneurship, Handicrafts, Skill Development, Financial Inclusion, Digital Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development, Cultural Heritage.*

Introduction: A Melodic Call to Rise

In the rush of inspiration, ambitious minds urgently seek hope, markets, and co-creation to fuel entrepreneurship. Young Northeasterners craft and combine cultural knowledge into innovative products, even as shutdowns, cultural oppression, and departure haunt creativity. Marketplace signal fails and routes to freedom shrink. Yet opportunity also surges: rampant urbanisation pulses distantly, emerging infrastructure binds borderlands, and China ignites a global fashion sense. Lingering youth, geography, and identity drive creatives to innovate. Root wells of courage, craft, and community seed transformation across North East India and beyond, stirring a collective melody uplifting enterprise, self-determination, connectedness, and reciprocity—an odyssey of entrepreneurism, creativity, and fun.

North East India, a wonderland of remote beauty, hills, and valleys, harbours rich biodiversity and vibrant cultures amid youthful energy and climate crisis. Its natural bounty, agricultural potential, rich cultural heritage, and promising human capital blend for a crucial contribution to national entrepreneurship, new thought, and a radically different economic paradigm essential for Earth. Melodies of start-ups, social enterprises, and disruptive innovation from arts and crafts to food, wellness, and skills training harmonise economic growth and deep change.

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Through embracing grassroots self-organising and seasonal routes of entrepreneurship, Northeastern India can transform from forgotten remoteness to forgotten zones of freedom and self-determination—courageous enterprises spark globally integrated new synchronisation combine youthful New World energies, elevated to underserved civilizational matters, across culture, craft, cosmo, and consciousness.

Empowering women uplifts healing energies until the full cultivation of overarching, harmonious, feminine care. Women shape healthy, sustainable, and prosperous society and forge the deepest economic and entrepreneurial roots. North East India stands compositionally gender-diverse, yet hidden—highly creative, interconnected, and strategically placed amid pioneering start-ups and social enterprises, forward motion from caste-based collectives, and transdisciplinary, transacademic, and transcultural concerns enable and empower. Women agitate and assist, dancing and galvanising, moving act as facilitators and energisers, nurturing creativity at an organisational design and team commitment level; entrepreneurship doubles as a creativity incubator and healing expedition across ecosystems, fires, friends, and freedom, enabling enterprises, artists, communities, identity, and cultural believe to bridge gaps.

North East India remains impoverished, yet youthful energy flourishes, seeking signals and entrepreneurship. In a world remapped, rooting precedes routing; courage precedes craft; creativity catalyses community; and remotely bound, borders diffuse before awakening. Young Northeasterner heap dreams into dens, buckets, borders, box specimens, dust, air, product, warmth, bubble, colour, light, texture, vision, words, melody—burma-caged come-out comes-out fraîche air. Investing as pondering curates intrapreneurship and incubators.

1. Contextual Pulse: North East India and the Spirit of Enterprise

A land of horizon, where earth and sky meet; where misty hills and heaven touch, shrouded in fragrance and whispering love—this is North East India. An orchestra of languages resounds from the seven sister states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura, which nestle amid bamboo groves, paddy fields, and sparkling rivers. In every garden dwells beauty, in every corner breathes peace, in every heart lingers hope. Furthermore, traditional craftsmanship, intricate textiles, and iconographic tattoos adorn and adorn its people. Culture and creativity flow together like wind and water.

North East India is endowed with alluring natural resources and is observant of imminent economic globalization. The consciousness is arising that the Spirit of the Enterprise ignites the dawn of a new liberated awakening of (Pawar, 2013) , (Tyagi et al., 2014). A community of millions, enveloped in a cocoon of collective rural lifestyle while jangling at extremes of the individualism of globalization, are scouting for the blend of enterprise with craft and community that is, indeed, the original melody of North East India.

2. Women as Catalysts: History, Hope, and Hidden Power

Enabling ecosystems nurture women as catalysts—initiating positive change through entrepreneurship. By empowering women with skills, finance, and mentorship, North East India can cultivate a wave of courageous ventures.

Women constitute the world's largest social group—over 3 billion individuals. A vast majority remain economically dependent and do not participate in income-generating activities (Chatterjee & Datta Gupta, 2016). Studies indicate that financing women entrepreneurs generates three-fold benefits for families, communities, and overall economic growth and development. This creates a potent ripple effect; ensuring women have the ability to utilise economic resources has a transformative impact (Pawar, 2013). Greater access to credit increases women's agency in determining household spending. Those funds are more readily allocated towards children's education, welfare, healthcare and nutrition—fueling further income-generating opportunities in the next generation. Empowering women entrepreneurs leads to profound interlinked socio-economic development and raises the status of both women and society as a whole.

North East India holds immense potential to escalate women's entrepreneurship and catalyse an economic transformation, yet continuing to do so remains a significant challenge. Society continues to impose constraints on women's freedom of movement, economic engagement, and expression. Developmental and official policies are still not sufficiently conducive to enabling women's entrepreneurship, and many aspiring women entrepreneurs remain hesitant to proceed.

Accordingly, enabling ecosystems are essential for empowering women. Enablers encompass remunerative financial resources, vibrant markets, and a diverse range of educational services. Women entrepreneurs possess an extensive array of skills, creativity, energy, and capabilities. Unlocking these assets will enable North East India to experience a wave of pioneering, sustainable, and beneficial enterprises.

The Landscape of Opportunity: Markets, Minds, and Movements

North East India, a vibrant tapestry of diverse cultures, ethnicities, languages, and natural resources, stands at a crucial juncture in its quest for entrepreneurial empowerment for women. Approximately half of the population resides in rural areas and engages in agriculture and related fields, while 80% remains reliant on the agriculture sector for their livelihoods (Chatterjee & Datta Gupta, 2016). External market demand and COVID-19 have prompted increased attention to emerging opportunities in the region, especially in handicrafts, handlooms, and contemporary artefacts. Social enterprises and non-profit organisations have emphasised the need to further develop the artisan sector and build entrepreneurship awareness and skills (Leon Sanchez, 2018). The region faces a range of societal, financial, infrastructural, geographical, and institutional barriers that hinder overall entrepreneurship growth.

As regional and global awareness of cultural diversity, market potential, and sustainable products rises, cultural enterprises and institutions increasingly advocate for the development and promotion of indigenous cultures and their associated industries. Awareness of the potential and changing dynamics of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem, coupled with increased outreach and experimentation by entrepreneurs and development partners, has triggered nationwide discussions on social entrepreneurship and related initiatives. A rapidly developing state supported by an emerging hub infrastructure represents a major opportunity to build local capacity and forge national linkages.

1. Economic Tides: Sectors Evolving in the Borderlands

The economic tides in North East India—borderlands culturally and economically imprinted by the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Tibet—have led to an evolution of sectors that are blossoming in this corner of the country. Considered by the Economy and Planning Department of the North Eastern Council as a semi-urban economy, the gross state domestic product of the region grew at 8.57% compared to 5.40% for the country in the period of 2004–2005 to 2014–2015 (Tyagi et al., 2014). At the national level, while the agriculture sector (which excludes allied activities) has a share of 15.29%, the region retains a relatively higher share of 26.36%, indicating dependence on agriculture-related employment. Within the agricultural sector, the region has a growing horticultural economy with potential opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Within the total workforce, the percentage of women-nurtured micro and medium enterprises remains higher than the national average and the industries in which they operate are predominantly male (Esayas Ambe, 2019). There is an immediate need to be attentive to the involvement of women in micro, small and medium enterprises and promote their wider participation.

2. Cultural Threads: Tradition, Identity, and Innovation

North East India boasts diverse cultures that have preserved and sustainable livelihoods. The region is endowed with beautiful designs and patterns rooted in the identities of each state, tribe, and family. From the art of weaving, woodcraft, and pottery to the craft of bamboo, herbal medicines, and terracotta ware, the peep into the lives of ordinary women fabricating beauty to adorn their homes. Art forms such as loom designs, wall art, beadwork, and tattoo art echo traditions and contemporary expressions. Entrepreneurship lies at the intersection of individual dreams, contextual realities, international trade, and sheer determination. Women transcend the customary confines of home and hearth, participating in enterprise to escape poverty and provide economic support to families. Courage sparks an odyssey into craftsmanship, cross-country co-creation, incubation, and new ventures. The women enter unfamiliar spaces of ambition, effort, exploration, questioning, evaluation, innovation, and adaptation. They build capacities and mindsets beyond routine engagements, rediscover a potential hidden beneath identities forged by society, and voice choices in matters affecting their lives. Entrepreneurial exploits yield extra income and also trigger broader realizations: latent capabilities, unimagined

aspirations, and an eagerness to step beyond universal thresholds (Frater, 2002).

Pathways to Enterprise: Skills, Support, and Systems

Women's engagement in entrepreneurship can be enhanced through different strategies.

Education and Skill-building: From Classroom to Craft Corner Educational institutions set up by the government, NGOs, and cooperatives provide foundational education through various skill development programs. Skill training covers sewing, weaving, embroidery, knitting, horticulture, food preservation, etc. Many institutions have infrastructure for education but lack proper trainers. Worldwide and National level India is facing an Education Quality Crisis, even in North-East India, students' foundational learning has considerably declined. Well-trained graduates from specialized Skill Development Programs are necessary to fill this gap. Youth are discouraged from entering the Teaching Profession, due to social prestige and security concerns. Government can organize awareness programs on educational importance, and one can select Teaching and Trainer-related Career from childhood with attractive incentives through various mass media, awareness programs, and Ad Campaigns.

Access to Finance: Navigating Funds, Foresight, and Faith Startup funds are assistance for entrepreneurs. As per official Government source, 34% of population lives below 27 INR per day and women entrepreneurs are heavily dependent on Government Funds. Stat-up application system is very complex and organized below steps can make the start-up funding easy, The local co-operative banks and Micro-Finance institutes need to set-up, to provide the monthly installment for machinery and raw materials with 6 to 8 percent rate of interest. The private investors need to include in the Start-ups funding to support the rural entrepreneurship. Equal opportunities are required in the society for growth of various occupations including rural entrepreneurship. The mentorship and start-up Funding are required to encourage the women. Public sector banks are mainly providing the low-interest loan on priority sector lending rate, hence they involved in the start-up.

Mentorship and Networks: The Power of Circle and Signal Women network is an important for social and professional platform enabling mentoring, sharing business resources, enhancing visibility, and celebration of success. Various programs requiring to extend the Women Network in the North-East. Many of the Women Entrepreneurs in the North-East have started business through skill followed through the neighbouring state. Road show, exhibition and marketing through different organisation required to enhance the sales and visibility of the product. Well Established Entrepreneur should come forward to mentor the new and emerging women Start-up. Since, in early days and after 6 month from the start-up journey, mentoring is required to build and embolden further progress. Mentoring process include batch beginner and regularly interaction through hangout, face book, Meeting, symposium etc. Women entrepreneurship mentoring cadre is required for accessing entrepreneurial skill mentoring at the different region. (Pawar, 2013); (Chatterjee & Datta Gupta, 2016); (Chaudhary & Kameswari, 2015)

1. Education and Skill-building: From Classroom to Craft Corner

In North East India, entrepreneurship education for women occurs through a variety of short-term courses, many of which focus on traditional skills. Participants typically learn from craftsmen in the form of demonstrations during workshops, informal sessions, and informal exchanges. Although often disconnected from formal institutions, these courses—provided at zero or low cost—establish vital links to livelihood opportunities and awareness of market potential. Participation in courses also serves as a starting point for women to enter into a wider field of mentoring and guidance within self-help groups and cooperatives. Building entrepreneurial knowledge, however, requires context-specific approaches that reflect the desires, ambitions, and perceptions of residents concerning craft activities. Such approaches should reflect local realities as a foundation for building broader market awareness, enable participants to gradually prepare production and marketing strategies, and provide guidance in accessing information on finance and marketing from government and banking sources. National policies, surveys, and other documents highlight the need for entrepreneurship education and skill development to accompany the expansion of self-help groups, cooperatives, and small-scale enterprises (Zenner et al., 2017).

Women who take part in skill-development courses desire to pursue livelihood and business opportunities through their acquired craft skills but

encounter considerable challenges on the ground. Course material offers scant instruction on enterprise establishment; emphasizes marketing channels, demand, and pricing; and provides only limited insight into connections with government offices, banking, and possible financial support. Consequently, many still lack a refined comprehension of marketing dynamics. Those close to the ground often perceive entrepreneurship education as an area in need of more attention. Craft skills play a central role in enterprise formation across North East India, yet crafting is frequently practised solely as a hobby. A substantial gap remains between possessing craft proficiency and possessing the knowledge required to transform such proficiency into a viable enterprise. While an expanding array of courses, training sessions, and learning opportunities extends support to the North Eastern region, a significant opportunity also remains to shape suitable packages that nurture a broader level of craft entrepreneurship.

2. Access to Finance: Navigating Funds, Foresight, and Faith

Financial support is often vital to launching a business. Crafting a loan proposal calls for careful planning and prudence. The most important components include a viable business idea, a detailed project report, and the implementation of a small enterprise handbook. Banks and financial institutions favour business proposals with a project report which outlines the objectives, means, resources, production methods, and sales strategies. A simple project report describing the products or services offered, the expected price, the target market, competition, and the estimated investment and returns exerts a powerful influence. Taking time to consult with experienced entrepreneurs and financial experts on project design and proposal writing enhances the chances of attracting funding.

Access to financial support, reliable infrastructure, marketing assistance, and trusted consultation networks helps women initiate and expand entrepreneurial ventures. Women entrepreneurs often establish collective enterprises and forge friendly ties with others to exchange knowledge, cover broader market segments, and gain access to more financial schemes. Frequent communication and informal gatherings accelerate professional growth through mutual support, problem sharing, and celebration of achievements. Potential investors also seek to meet and observe entrepreneurs to appraise their capabilities. Women frequently conduct activities ranging from food preparation to craft and design.

In the pursuit of personal empowerment and community benefit, women entrepreneurs confront daunting obstacles. Disruptive forces in the marketplace require constant vigilance for changes in consumer preferences and competitor behaviour. Females also encounter societal taboos regarding movement and contact with strangers. Despite these challenges, women recognise the positive contribution that engaging in bold, earnest, and open initiatives can make to personal, family, and community advancement (Jackson Ojodomo & Isaiah Ebere, 2019).

3. Mentorship and Networks: The Power of Circle and Signal

Adverse conditions more easily shatter confidence than creativity. The creativity of women artisans in North East India shines bright, yet their confidence to venture into enterprise often falters. The courage to stretch from familiar territory into unknown domains of self-marketing, pricing, negotiation, and planning requires additional encouragement. Social isolation compounds the challenge. Entrepreneurs in extensive regions depend on themselves for financial literacy and risk guidance. They face greater danger from baseless fears of market rejection. Entrepreneurs in locations with weak telecommunications and limited Internet also lack access to digital-marketplaces and financial-services options.

Mentorship shatters this suffocating isolation, lifting the appreciation for risk-taking while expanding confidence. Women accept offerings of help from other women far more readily than they do from male associates, and female peer-circles abound in the North East's clusters of artisans. Physical proximity enhances the impact of such relationships. Leveraging close ties, women tackle pricing, alternative-material substitutions, and unsold-inventory management collaboratively. Whether informal or organized, these 'peer' relationships rank as the most coveted form of support, and sharing experience too amplifies signaling intensity. Workshops by representatives with firsthand experience, moreover, serve as valuable signals. With products shared via WhatsApp connections, the assurance of success rises.

Formal addressing of these challenges contributes substantially. In the microwave-accessible, nascent,

and exploding domain of digital marketing, the anxiety of failure appears tremendously high—yet mentors spanning the age spectrum connected women to courses in branding, transition, and financial literacy—opening hitherto unimaginable doors (Gower et al., 2022). The quest might remain for others already enjoying well-deserved prominence—yet transformative potential thrives within both supply and demand (L. Laukhuf & A. Malone, 2015).

Women in Action: Case Stories from the Northeast

Northeast India is a treasure chest of craft and cultural legacy, brimming with potential for enterprise. Women have long led the way as custodians of this artisanal heritage. From traditional weaving to handloom, bamboo-and-cane work, contemporary painting, and modern design, creative and cultural entrepreneurship emerges as a powerful vehicle for women's empowerment in the region. Northeast India has witnessed the growth of an impressive number of women-led enterprises, a trend undoubtedly spurred and nurtured by indigenous organisations like Women's Entrepreneurship and Empowerment (WEE), a collective for women entrepreneurs across the eight states of the region. Additionally, young women are emerging as pioneering entrepreneurs in tech startups, food ventures, and other sectors.

The story of Amisha Mipham illuminates this entrepreneurial frontier. At just 16, she started a venture called "Shrimpy," which designs and sells handmade sustainable jewellery. The positive response she receivedled her to explore further opportunities. The idea of catering to customers through an online market drove her to the creation of "Shrimpy in Frimpy," a unique collection of handmade craft items that showcased her entrepreneurial spirit. Today, she has more than 16,000 followers on Instagram and is receiving multiple orders daily.

Or consider "The Thalia Project," founded by Purity Ekhung. This venture incorporates eco-friendly bamboo products into the regional crafting system, while also creating local job opportunities and raising awareness on the benefits of bamboo among local artisans. Purity's vision is to highlight the potential of bamboo as an eco-friendly substitute for plastic in daily life. During the initial stages of her journey, she was nominated for the Women Entrepreneurs Competition in 2021, which enabled her to develop the confidence needed to approach international clients.

Many other inspiring stories of women entrepreneurs can also be found in the region. (Chaudhary & Kameswari, 2015)

1. Artisans and Startups: Craft, Tech, and Co-creation

Women from diverse backgrounds and geographies are raising their voices and stepping beyond the shadows cast by historical limitations. Women's empowerment is the centrepiece of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. At the crossroads of these efforts lies entrepreneurship as a medium that provides the opportunity to translate ideas into material opportunities. With craft and creativity as the common ground for many women in North East India, entrepreneurship encapsulates dimensions of economic freedom, self-expression, and contribution to society (Frater, 2018).

Seven key areas provide a landscape for entrepreneurship to flourish amongst forward-looking women in North East India. These areas create a context for enterprise, establish enabling pathways, illuminate stories of entrepreneurs, identify challenges, and oversee supporting ecosystems. Reflection on these domains may inspire new visions and action (Clifford, 2018).

2. Social Enterprise and Impact Ventures: Doing Good, Doing Well

Crafting a start-up is not only about turning an idea into profits, but also about addressing a distressing societal issue—often, social impact is the reason behind setting up a new business. Men and women from North East India have both expended efforts toward creating social impact start-ups. Kripa Ayangbuh and other women entrepreneurs are focused on this area. They are operating Daughters of the East, an impact venture in Meghalaya dedicated to helping women artisans. Daughters of the East aims to provide employment to women in difficult situations and promote their art and culture. The start-up creates community cohesion by uniting women with similar challenges and an openness to support mutual growth (Chatterjee & Datta Gupta, 2016). E-boyfriend is another start-up that aims to support local women artisans in Manipur through the sale of their hand-made craft items (A. Hashim et al., 2017). The founder, Thelma Rosan, pursues her personal passion of offering women an avenue to earn their living in a secured environment. She observes that as long as the art crafts are produced according to demands, there is a growing market for them.

Barriers and Breakthroughs: Challenges as Stepping Stones

The characteristics of the northeastern states, particularly the remoteness and connectivity constraints, call for businesses that are restricted in scale and yet still hold immense potential. One such opportunity is weaving and handicrafts, since every nook and corner is spangled with the delicate and dextrous work of artisans. Handloom work is the lifeblood of the region, and "Northeast India holds a treasure-trove of beautiful textiles" (Mukherjee, 2018). Despite women accounting for over 90 per cent of workers in this sector, their contribution and potential remain vastly unrecognized, as they are mostly not connected to the market. As per the latest available report, the women employment security ratio in Northeast India is only 16 per cent, and this indicates the urgent need to have programmes, schemes, and workshops that recognize the skills of women artisans and help them get connected to the market.

Another critical barrier faced is the safety of women and the societal norm of allowing sanctioned risk behaviour by women entrepreneurs (F. Jaiyeola & Modupe Adeyeye, 2021). They are discouraged from travelling for business promotion and are restricted to selling their crafted products locally, losing out on the bigger share of revenue. Caught in a vicious cycle, communities see fewer women entrepreneurs taking the plunge and thus believe that, with their family commitments, they cannot take on the entrepreneurship journey, which leads to a further dip in women entrepreneurship. With stricter policies on anti-social activities and recognition of women's safety on priority, more women would be able to network beyond their villages.

The absence of a well-laid-down policy on women entrepreneurship in many states of the region further restricts economic growth. Concrete steps need to be taken to design policies to encourage women to participate massively in entrepreneurial activities and connect them with financial institutions that provide them with seed funding or micro-funding (Mordi et al., 2010). The same goes for technical and design development training to enhance the skills of artisans already possessing skills and fa enhance the quality. Women's participation in the job market would increase, thereby contributing to the overall growth of the economy and empowering the region.

1. Geographical and Infrastructural Hurdles

Women entrepreneurs in North East India face considerable geographical and infrastructural hurdles. The topography, climate, and remoteness of many locations lead to higher transport charges, deterioration of goods, and delayed payments, making it difficult to develop a viable business. Despite growing opportunities in various sectors, lack of access to raw materials, machinery, finance, and skilled workers holds back enterprises. Consequently, some women are forced into traditional activities rather than pursuing progressive, higher-value alternatives (Tyagi et al., 2014).

Women also confront unique challenges compared to their male counterparts. Many are not yet confident in entrepreneurship and require more encouragement and mentorship. Traditional patriarchal notions reduce women's mobility and independence, exposing them to societal pressure in public spaces. Caste and class systems based on backwardness further restrict women's choices and preferences, with belief systems conditioned by centuries of cultural evolution creating obstacles and fear of unable to know (Chaudhary & Kameswari, 2015).

2. Societal Norms, Safety, and Sanctioned Risks

Women entrepreneurs increasingly emerge as a solution to societal norms that dictate gender roles. Female entrepreneurs face cultural stigma regarding acceptance into the business environment, though the stigma is much weaker among young women who feel untethered to social sanctions; their work revolves around family crafts as a sanctioned risk. In some areas, women entrepreneurs benefit from institutional support and recognition, yet others face dislike from people of different locations or backgrounds, few clients beyond their immediate community, or distrust regarding the quality of producer goods. The shift toward expanding enterprises beyond the community and in computer equipment requires further encouragement and promotion through regional policies and programs (Jung et al., 2018).

3. Policy Gaps and Enablers: A Map for Moving Forward

Well-designed policies that embrace the aspirations of women entrepreneurs in the North East can foster an enabling ecosystem. While several schemes are in place to facilitate women entrepreneurship, continuous evolution is necessary to accurately reflect ground realities. Whether

driven by the government, civil society, or the private sector, interventions should organically emerge from women themselves. International and national experience has provided insights into impactful interventions that enhance women entrepreneurship (Jacob M & Munuswamy, 2019).

Many existing policies have brought important economic and non-economic benefits, yet persistent gaps necessitate urgent attention. For instance, the North East is endowed with diverse natural resources and rich cultural heritage, yet most women entrepreneurs are concentrated in the low-value-added craft sector. Likewise, the significant shift in mindset around entrepreneurship has spurred interest among youth, but the desired level of enterprise engagement continues to elude the region. Access to finance and market linkages remains an acute challenge, especially for women running micro-enterprises and unregistered businesses, where 95% of women entrepreneurs fall.

The following pathways highlight potential policy enablers that could transform challenges into catalysts for enterprise creation and innovation north of the Brahmaputra:

1. Promote market-led upskilling: Tap into the increasing appetite for entrepreneurship by promoting market-led entrepreneurship skill development at all levels, linking it to the National Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Policy.

2. **Link monetary support to business needs:** Coordinate with the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises and banking sector to link credit, grants, capital, and incentives to immediate business priorities.

3. **Accompany handholding with network support:** Strengthen the handholding provided within schemes by offering access to appropriate network contacts to enable rapid pivoting based on emerging needs.

4. **Expand technical benches:** Broaden access to mentors and facilitators with specialist expertise to gain perspective on sector-specific opportunities.

5. **Prioritize sectoral diversification:** Catalyse entrepreneurs and institutions to explore opportunities beyond craft, especially leveraging population shifts towards cities.

6. **Facilitate knowledge-to-market connections:** Support efforts to connect knowledge generated in formal educational institutions with market opportunities, especially in high-potential areas such as digital, media, and spatial analytics.

7. Enable digital finance experimentation: Develop and test new approaches to expand access to digital finance and insights on cash flow management in the majority of micro-enterprises that remain outside the system.

Enabling Ecosystems: Policy, Partnerships, and Public Dialogues

The sustainability of the relaxation in the geographical and infrastructural challenges needs to be complemented by aggregating the stakeholders of both the public and private sectors to propel entrepreneurship, specifically for women in India's northeast region. With solutions drawn from a multi-stakeholder perspective using the triple helixes model comprising government, academia, industry, civil society, and international development organisations, the chains of the entrepreneurial eco-system can be addressed in a collective manner. While a plethora of entrepreneurial ecosystem mapping is already available (A Bhat & A Khan, 2014) , the following geographical regions shows where the maximum attention is required in spurring female entrepreneurship, as highlighted by the case example of SIPED, Manipur.

The acute needs that can be derived to enable women's entrepreneurship in northeast India against the institutions of policy, partnership, and public dialogue are listed below:

Targeted Policies Evolving from Grassroot Consultations Policy at the meso level to augment women entrepreneurship such as women entrepreneur development centres (WEDC) have minimum disturbance as evidenced yet at the micro level state-wide policy targets calibrated with input from on-ground reality and women entrepreneur support have elicited a moderate degree of responsiveness.

The children of a weak policy are ineffective policy schemes and a highly restrictive setup of the infrastructure limiting corrective measures at the next level as can be seen from the SRTEGP, as far as the evolution of the State as an entrepreneur goes. The infrastructural deficiencies with respect to the entrepreneurial eco-system addressable at these two levels are highlighted here as can be duly seen and agglomerated as per the existing plans, the mandatory prioritisation for the nook and corners of the regions under SIPED are shown here too, as far as the women Entrepreneur is concerned. The public exists to enable entrepreneurship from the finite-angle perspective via women entrepreneur

development centres spread throughout the region from the very beginning under which broad thrust targeted the agri/allied sectors in each of the 5 valley districts and this step led to the construction of the first Salam Specialized Agro and allied Product resource centre which is still alive and giving a creative space of 1000 sqft till date for the women of the valley with the aspiration for scaling it up.

Active Stakeholder Participation and Public Dialogues In all the literature and dialogues for entrepreneurship development women are always highlighted expressly in one of the poles whether to augur in how the entrepreneur business or how one becomes successful or relates with ideas or case studies of success stories till date the same phenomenon cannot analyse the and at times directly relates with falls at the passive pendulum. The female entrepreneur ship development called for the state and the nation in the world and through research under NRLM mentioned the aged and the May also help to push up this start-up idea in the region as a way to encourage female youths and channel the strength tone private credit has been stalled and provide a fair competition for literate compared to rural female entrepreneur where the level of education and exposure is low.

Entrepreneurship Development through Female Social Networks The trust factor varies in standards as far the entrepreneur development is concern from the female entrepreneur side that persists directly with strengthening support essential for new entrepreneurs who are less knowledgeable of the Hooligan among the states, neighbouring states of influencer who can have the trust factor and more important where the knowledge who can build and tie up with women entrepreneurship development.

1. Government Schemes and Regional Programs

Government schemes and various regional programs constitute important initiatives to support women entrepreneurs. Promotion of women entrepreneurship in India is desired for sustainable growth of the country (Jacob M & Munuswamy, 2019). The focus on such support has increased in North Eastern states of India in recent years (Chatterjee & Datta Gupta, 2016). Government of India promotes nurturing of women entrepreneurs with the help of banks and financial institutions. Major schemes such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Mahila Udyam Nidhi, and Stree Shakti Package of the National Credit Fund for Women are available for aspiring women entrepreneurs. Special focus is also expected from state government at policy implementation level to enhance women entrepreneurship in North East India.

2. Private Sector and Civil Society Coalitions

Development priorities for women's empowerment in the North East of India need to include private sector and civil society coalitions, which play a significant role in development initiatives. Understanding the barriers to women's participation in the informal sector is crucial. Evidence from a range of countries in Africa illustrates common challenges faced by women entrepreneurs at the micro and small enterprise level, including the limited provision of requisite supplies, low production capabilities and credit constraints (Esayas Ambe, 2019).

In the North East of India obstacles to women entrepreneurship are compounded by geographical disadvantage, lack of access to banking facilities, family responsibilities, restricted mobility, and lack of safety in using available infrastructure. Policy measures to remove these obstacles should form an integral development focus (Chatterjee & Datta Gupta, 2016).

3. Education Institutions as Incubators of Confidence

In the mountainous terrains of North East India where courage ignites art, culture, and conscience, education institutions are springing up as incubators of confidence. These schools, colleges, and universities are repositioning themselves as vehicular entities, enunciating the composite art of entrepreneurship, art, and enterprise as means towards women's empowerment and empowerment in general (Zenner et al., 2017). The goal is to establish a nurturing, protective, and supportive environment enabling students to express their ideas proudly, with self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence, and self-respect in the domains of arts, culture, sciences, music, and literature (Mutembei Douglas, 2014). The curriculum involves activities, projects, workshops, industrial visits, exhibitions, and contests.

Women's participation in formal education is reflected at all levels of higher education, increasing significantly from 2005 to 2012, surpassing the national average; this trend is especially strong in arts, commerce, and sciences streams. In addition to socio-culturally sanctioned entrepreneurship activities, many young women either entrepreneurs or aspiring entrepreneurs

benefit from sustained mentoring agencies including educational institutions to enhance and monetize their creative artistry. Several awards and recognition have also encouraged individuals to devote themselves to entrepreneurship.

Future Visions: Scenarios, Strategies, and Sacred Fires

The strategies as well as critical perspectives for women's leadership and enterprise development in North Eastern India can be summarized as follows: (i) develop rural-urban bridges in order to ensure that rural based enterprises can access the knowledge that is available in urban areas, and that rural knowledge can flow to customers in urban settings; (ii) embrace digital frontiers that can provide platforms for e-commerce, fintech, and remote work that can conveniently connect women to national and international clients; and (iii) develop leadership that is authentic to the region and leverages local identity to create a compelling voice and influence that resonates regionally and beyond.

1. Rural-Urban Bridges: Connecting Knowledge to Markets

Innovation is narrower than institutional measures; bridging access to knowledge and markets can create enterprises designed to flourish. Rural-urban initiatives link agricultural and rural product processing industries in the Northeast to markets via cooperatives (Shirish et al., 2020). Gradually, local enterprise resource and knowledge centres across rural-urban lines could emerge as rural entrepreneurs gather skills, capital, and collaborative potential through pattern-changing culture that crafts products and connects trade networks (Chatterjee & Datta Gupta, 2016).

In North East India, bridges connecting rural artisans at the cross-roads of craft and coding are joining knowledge and market possibilities under an enterprise resource programme. Three artisanal groups, selected for complementary skills and organisational structure, support enterprise development based on orders through a two-pronged approach combining digital and domestic interactivity. A digital pot-luck encourages teams to exchange inspiration, market insights, and local and global trends, while local informal sessions on crafts, trends, growing economies, labour transfer, and policy discuss the preconditions for product production, enabling local entrepreneurs to tune knowledge to economic realities and develop market-oriented proposals.

2. Digital Frontiers: E-commerce, Fintech, and Remote Work

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled people throughout the world to resort to technology and seek remote opportunities; thus, attention was drawn to e-commerce and the potential of women to participate remotely as freelancers. The emergence of digital freelanders, particularly in the areas of cybersecurity, programming, web design, graphic design, and content creation, has been noted. The challenge of closing the digital gender divide, however, specter remains, as the risks of cyber harassment as well as lack of efficient tools, connectivity, and the requisite knowledge continue to hinder the progress of women into cyber-based and remote jobs.

Digital platforms serve as keys in opening gateways to economic empowerment for women. E-commerce platforms have gained immense popularity in providing a door for small business owners to reach their customers and become legitimate sellers. An e-commerce business does not require massive investment; rather, it allows women to participate in the economy from their own homes or within their communities (Liu, 1970). Digital platforms provide women with the opportunity to sell their products to potential clients throughout the country or even export outside borders.

Digital financing, a hot topic of recent evolution, is also empowering women economically, as women can now obtain loans through mobile applications such as bKash or Nagad without the need to visit a bank. Fintech companies provide loans tailored for the growth of a woman's business

Additionally, the facilities for getting remote jobs have increased through various international platforms such as Fiverr, Upwork, Freelancer, and Guru. Bangladesh has witnessed a supply of female freelancers who provide services through international platforms, especially during the pandemic and even after that (M Mashrur Arafin Ayon, 2023).

3. Leadership with Local Roots: Identity, Voice, and Influence

Women entrepreneurs draw strength from diverse identities, yet the local context remains paramount. Leadership with Local Roots argues that place-based identity profoundly shapes entrepreneurial expression. Gender norms and community ties further mould female leaders' authority and visibility. Authenticity and professionalism are

vital dimensions of identity, particularly for women, who intertwine personal and business narratives to forge connections. Context shapes how local roots influence leadership style and community engagement. These findings suggest policies that amplify regional and social identities can support broader, deeper leadership for women and other groups with limited access to formal business authority (Lewis, 2015).

Regional and social identities are key resources for effective leadership from a local perspective. Place remains fundamental to entrepreneurial development, starting with long-standing aspirations for community and economic uplift among North East women. The region's rich history and culture underpin resilient identities and influence forms of leadership and firm expression. Attention to social role—as mothers, daughters, wives, or community members—further enhances identity. Women entrepreneurs express inspiration in their work, but this identity still struggles for public space at the same level as men's.

Conclusion

Women's entrepreneurship is both an agent of and a pathway to empowerment, and empowerment, in turn, facilitates entrepreneurship. Acting as a powerful catalyst for social development and economic growth, micro and small enterprises weave together essential goods, soaring aspirations, and deeper meaning. They are crucial contributors to societal well-being. North East India exemplifies the unique character of women-led enterprises. Courage and craft sustain enterprises, while artisanal heritage shapes opportunity in borderland markets. Policy-makers and civil society can act immediately to ensure the growth of women's enterprises by supporting relevant knowledge and networks, promoting partnership and collaboration, and fostering connections among enterprising women. More than ever, women, community, and market converge in a new definition of empowered enterprise that resonates with North East India's women entrepreneurs: starting a business is no longer seen as an act of bravery; it is a way to make a difference for oneself, one's family, and one's community. (Chatterjee & Datta Gupta, 2016)

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