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Entrepreneurship a catalyst for Economic Empowerment: Evidence from women-led Enterprises in East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh, India

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Abstract

Women entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as an important instrument for achieving inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment in developing economies. Despite considerable policy attention, evidence from district-level entrepreneurial ecosystems remains limited. This study examines the relationship between women entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh, India, while also investigating the influence of entrepreneurial challenges on enterprise growth and development. Primary data were collected from 504 women entrepreneurs through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, regression, chi-square, and one-way ANOVA were employed to analyze the data. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between women entrepreneurship orientation and economic empowerment. Women exhibiting stronger entrepreneurial orientation reported higher levels of financial independence, decision-making capability, and perceived improvement in quality of life. The study further demonstrates that entrepreneurial challenges significantly influence future growth intentions and development outcomes. Financial management, marketing capability, and customer relations emerged as the most prominent barriers affecting enterprise sustainability. The results suggest that entrepreneurship contributes substantially to women's empowerment; however, long-term sustainability requires targeted interventions that extend beyond microfinance and focus on capability development, mentoring, market access, and institutional support. The study contributes to entrepreneurship literature by providing district-level empirical evidence and offers practical recommendations for policymakers, development agencies, and entrepreneurship promotion institutions seeking to strengthen women-led enterprises in emerging regional economies.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship; Economic Empowerment; Entrepreneurial Orientation; Women-Led Enterprises; Enterprise Growth; East Godavari District

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has long been regarded as a critical driver of economic development, employment generation, and innovation (1,2). In recent decades, women entrepreneurship has emerged as an equally important area of scholarly inquiry due to its contribution to inclusive growth and social transformation (10,18,21). Across developing economies, women-owned enterprises have become increasingly visible in sectors such as retail trade, food processing, handicrafts, agriculture-related activities, personal services, and micro-manufacturing (14,15).

The significance of women entrepreneurship extends beyond income generation. According to Sen's Capability Approach, economic participation expands individual freedoms and strengthens individuals' ability to make meaningful life choices (4). Entrepreneurship enables women to access financial resources, develop managerial competencies, participate in decision-making processes, and improve their social standing within households and communities (4,6).

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Globally, governments and development institutions have recognized the importance of supporting women entrepreneurs. Organizations such as the World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) identify entrepreneurship as a key mechanism for achieving gender equality and sustainable development (12,15,16,20). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 and Goal 8, emphasize women's economic participation and entrepreneurial opportunities (15).

In India, women entrepreneurship has received considerable policy attention through initiatives promoting financial inclusion, microenterprise development, skill enhancement, and self-help groups (11). Programmes such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), MUDRA Yojana, and Stand-Up India have attempted to create a supportive environment for women-led enterprises (11). Andhra Pradesh, with its extensive SHG network, provides a strong foundation for grassroots entrepreneurship among women (9).

Despite these efforts, women entrepreneurs continue to face barriers including limited access to formal credit, inadequate business skills, restricted market access, household responsibilities, and socio-cultural constraints (12,18,21). While many women successfully establish micro-enterprises, sustaining and scaling these ventures remains challenging (9,18).

2. Literature Review

Women entrepreneurship has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past three decades because of its contribution to economic development and social transformation (10,18,21). Early entrepreneurship theories focused primarily on innovation, risk-taking, and opportunity recognition, often overlooking gender-specific dimensions of entrepreneurial activity (1,2). More recent studies acknowledge that women entrepreneurs operate within distinct social, cultural, and institutional environments (10,18).

Schumpeter viewed entrepreneurs as innovators who introduce new combinations of resources into the economy (1). Later, Drucker emphasized entrepreneurship as a process of systematic innovation and opportunity exploitation regardless of enterprise size (2). Together, these theories provide a foundation for understanding entrepreneurship as both an economic and social phenomenon.

Research consistently highlights the role of entrepreneurship in economic empowerment. Kabeer defined empowerment as the process through which individuals gain the ability to make strategic life choices that were previously unavailable to them (6). Economic empowerment includes greater access to income, control over resources, enhanced decision-making capacity, and increased participation in economic activities (6). Entrepreneurship facilitates these outcomes by enabling women to generate independent income and develop managerial capabilities (18,21).

Microfinance has emerged as a major mechanism supporting women entrepreneurship in developing economies. Yunus demonstrated how access to small-scale credit can help economically disadvantaged individuals engage in income-generating activities (3). Studies have shown that microfinance programmes improve household welfare and encourage entrepreneurial participation among women (3,9). However, access to finance alone is insufficient for long-term business success. Enterprise sustainability also depends on training, mentoring, market access, and institutional support (18,20,21).

Social Capital Theory emphasizes that networks, relationships, and trust facilitate access to resources and opportunities (7). Family support, community acceptance, peer networks, and participation in self-help groups often influence entrepreneurial outcomes among women (6,9). Strong social networks can compensate for resource limitations by providing information, emotional support, and market connections (7).

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor reports increasing contributions of women entrepreneurs to economic activity worldwide, although significant gender disparities persist in access to finance, training, and business ownership (14,22). Similarly, OECD highlights that women-owned enterprises remain concentrated in smaller-scale and lower-growth sectors, underscoring the need for targeted policy interventions (12,13).

Within India, self-help groups have played a crucial role in promoting women entrepreneurship. NABARD reports consistently demonstrate the contribution of SHGs to financial inclusion and enterprise creation (9). However, many SHG-linked enterprises continue to operate at subsistence levels and face difficulties in achieving sustained growth (9).

Recent studies further demonstrate the transformative role of women entrepreneurship in promoting financial inclusion, social mobility, and sustainable development (18,20,21). Entrepreneurial ecosystems, digital inclusion, and institutional support significantly influence enterprise performance (17,18). Access to training, mentoring, and financial services contributes positively to sustainability and empowerment outcomes (18,21). Post-pandemic studies also highlight the importance of resilience, innovation, and digital adoption among women entrepreneurs (19,20).

Existing literature identifies several barriers affecting women entrepreneurs, including limited access to formal credit, inadequate business knowledge, marketing constraints, work-life balance challenges, and socio-cultural expectations (12,18,21). Financial literacy and business management skills are frequently identified as critical determinants of enterprise success (18,21).

2.1. Research Gap

Existing studies predominantly focus on national and state-level analyses of women entrepreneurship. Limited attention has been paid to district-level entrepreneurial ecosystems where local economic structures, social conditions, and institutional arrangements influence entrepreneurial outcomes. Furthermore, many studies examine either empowerment outcomes or entrepreneurial constraints independently, rather than investigating the relationship between entrepreneurship orientation, economic empowerment, and enterprise growth within a unified framework.

The present study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence from East Godavari District and integrating descriptive, correlational, and inferential analyses to understand the dynamics of women entrepreneurship and economic empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the demographic and socio-economic profile of women entrepreneurs in East Godavari District.
- To analyse the relationship between women entrepreneurship orientation and economic empowerment.
- To assess the influence of entrepreneurial challenges on enterprise growth and development outcomes.
- To propose policy recommendations for strengthening women entrepreneurship ecosystems.

Hypotheses

- H01

There is no significant relationship between women entrepreneurship orientation and economic empowerment among women entrepreneurs.

- H02

There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial challenges and enterprise growth and development outcomes.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative, descriptive, and analytical research design to examine the relationship between women entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh. While descriptive analysis was employed to understand the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents, inferential statistical techniques were used to examine the relationships among entrepreneurship orientation, economic empowerment, growth aspirations, and entrepreneurial challenges.

The study is grounded in the assumption that entrepreneurship is not merely an income-generating activity but a multidimensional process that influences women's economic agency, decision-making capacity, social standing, and future development prospects.

3.2. Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to women entrepreneurs operating in East Godavari District. The survey was conducted between April and October 2025 and generated 504 valid responses.

The respondents represented various enterprise categories including retail trade, food processing, tailoring, handicrafts, home-based production, agricultural allied activities, and service enterprises.

The questionnaire consisted of four broad sections:

- Demographic and socio-economic profile
- Entrepreneurship orientation indicators
- Economic empowerment indicators
- Growth challenges and future business plans
- Sample and Sampling Technique

The study utilized a sample of 504 women entrepreneurs. Given the objective of capturing diverse entrepreneurial experiences, respondents were selected from different mandals and enterprise categories across the district. The sample size provides adequate representation for statistical analysis and the minimum threshold commonly recommended for social science research involving multivariate analysis is met.

3.3. Measurement of Variables

Three composite indicators were developed:

- Women Entrepreneurship Orientation (WE Score)
- The entrepreneurship orientation score was developed using indicators relating to:
- Entrepreneurial attitude
- Awareness of support schemes
- Participation in training programmes
- Enterprise planning
- Technology utilization
- Economic Empowerment (EE Score)
- The economic empowerment score incorporated:
- Financial independence
- Household contribution
- Quality of life improvement
- Decision-making participation
- Growth and Development (GD Score)

Growth and development indicators captured:

- Future expansion intentions
- Business development aspirations
- Enterprise sustainability perceptions
- Statistical Tools: The study employed multiple statistical techniques:

Table 1 Statistical techniques used

Tool	Purpose
Frequency & Percentage	Profile analysis
Cronbach Alpha	Reliability testing
Spearman Correlation	Relationship analysis
Pearson Correlation	Linear association
Multiple Regression	Predictive analysis
Chi-Square Test	Association testing
One-Way ANOVA	Group difference testing

The combination of descriptive and inferential methods enabled a comprehensive examination of entrepreneurship and empowerment dynamics.

4. Results

4.1. Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile reveals a distinctive pattern of entrepreneurship among women in East Godavari District. Most respondents belong to the 31–40 age group (64.48%), followed by those aged 21–30 years (22.22%), while only a small proportion fall within the 41–50 age category (13.29%).

The findings are consistent with GEM observations that entrepreneurial activity among women is highest during middle adulthood when family responsibilities and economic aspirations converge (14,22).

The marital profile indicates that 98.41% of respondents are married, while nearly 98% belong to nuclear families. This highlights the dual burden often carried by women entrepreneurs who simultaneously manage enterprise responsibilities and household obligations. Similar findings have been reported by Kabeer (2012), who emphasized that women's economic participation frequently occurs alongside continuing domestic responsibilities.

Educational attainment is concentrated at the secondary level (62.70%), with limited representation of graduate and postgraduate respondents. This finding suggests that entrepreneurship in the district is accessible even to women with moderate educational backgrounds. However, it also underscores the importance of practical skill-building interventions rather than highly technical entrepreneurship programmes.

Perhaps the most striking finding concerns entrepreneurial experience. Nearly 98.02% of respondents reported less than one year of entrepreneurial experience. This indicates that the entrepreneurial ecosystem is populated largely by new entrants who remain highly vulnerable to business failure and market uncertainty.

4.2. Financial Ecosystem and Enterprise Formation

The analysis of financing sources reveals that 91.07% of respondents initiated their enterprises through micro-loans, while only 5.95% utilized bank loans and 2.98% relied on personal savings. The dominant role of microfinance and SHGs in enterprise formation supports the arguments of Yunus regarding the importance of small-scale credit for entrepreneurial participation (3). Similar trends have been reported by NABARD studies on SHG-linked entrepreneurship in India (9).

However, the findings also reveal a structural concern. Heavy dependence on microfinance suggests that women entrepreneurs remain largely disconnected from formal banking systems. While micro-loans facilitate entry into entrepreneurship, they may not provide sufficient capital for expansion and long-term business development. The high prevalence of SHG membership (90.08%) further demonstrates the importance of collective financial mechanisms in promoting entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, participation in business-oriented networks remains relatively weak, indicating that financial inclusion has progressed more rapidly than entrepreneurial ecosystem development.

4.3. Social Constraints and Entrepreneurial Challenges

Entrepreneurship among women is shaped not only by financial factors but also by social and institutional conditions.

The study identifies several significant challenges:

- Credit barriers (59.13%)
- Traditional gender expectations (57.14%)
- Family resistance (34.92%)
- Need for financial support (36.71%)

The identified barriers are consistent with OECD findings that women entrepreneurs continue to face financial, social, and institutional constraints (12,13). Similar observations have been reported in recent studies on women entrepreneurship in emerging economies (18,21).

Family resistance remains particularly significant. In many developing regions, entrepreneurship challenges traditional gender roles by increasing women's economic visibility and decision-making authority. Consequently, family support often becomes a critical determinant of entrepreneurial success.

The data also reveal that financial management emerged as the dominant operational challenge among respondents. This suggests that the primary constraint is not merely access to capital but the ability to effectively manage financial resources. Women entrepreneurs may obtain loans but lack sufficient knowledge regarding budgeting, working capital management, pricing, and record keeping.

4.4. Economic Empowerment Outcomes

One of the most important contributions of the study is its examination of empowerment outcomes associated with entrepreneurship.

The findings indicate that:

- 90.87% reported improved quality of life.
- 55.56% reported increased support to family income.
- 65.87% agreed that entrepreneurship enhanced decision-making participation.
- 44.25% perceived improved social standing within the community.

The empowerment outcomes support Sen's Capability Approach, which argues that economic participation expands individual agency and freedom (4). The findings also align with Kabeer's conceptualization of empowerment through enhanced decision-making and resource control (6).

The evidence therefore suggests that women entrepreneurship should be viewed as a multidimensional development strategy rather than merely a livelihood intervention.

4.5. Reliability Analysis

Before testing the hypotheses, the reliability of the composite scales was examined using Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 2 Reliability Analysis of Composite Scales

Scale	Items	Cronbach Alpha
EE Score	4	0.762
WE Score	4	0.581

The Economic Empowerment scale achieved a reliability coefficient of 0.762, which exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 and indicates satisfactory internal consistency.

The Women Entrepreneurship scale recorded a coefficient of 0.581. Although lower than the ideal threshold, this result is understandable because entrepreneurship orientation encompasses diverse dimensions including attitudes, awareness, planning behaviour, training participation, and technology adoption. These components may not necessarily move together in a highly consistent manner.

Consequently, the reliability results support the use of both scales while suggesting opportunities for refinement in future research.

4.6. Hypothesis Testing

H01: There is no significant relationship between women entrepreneurship orientation and economic empowerment.

The Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.556 indicates a moderate-to-strong positive relationship between entrepreneurship orientation and economic empowerment.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis

Test	Statistic	p-value
Spearman Correlation	0.556	<0.001
Pearson Correlation	0.577	<0.001

The result suggests that women who demonstrate stronger entrepreneurial orientation tend to report higher levels of financial independence, decision-making capacity, and overall empowerment.

This finding is consistent with international evidence indicating that entrepreneurship contributes positively to empowerment outcomes among women. The result also aligns with GEM (2023), which identifies entrepreneurial engagement as a major pathway toward economic participation and self-determination.

Therefore, the relationship is both statistically significant and practically meaningful.

4.7. Regression Analysis

To further validate the relationship, a regression model was estimated.

Table 4 Regression analysis

Model	Coefficient	p-value
WE Score → EE Score	1.078	<0.001

The positive coefficient indicates that entrepreneurship orientation significantly predicts economic empowerment even after controlling for age and education.

This result strengthens the interpretation because it demonstrates that the relationship is not merely a reflection of demographic differences. Entrepreneurship remains a significant contributor to empowerment irrespective of age or educational attainment.

Accordingly, H01 is rejected.

H02: here is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial challenges and growth and development outcomes.

Table 5 Chi-Square Analysis

Test	Statistic	p-value
Challenge Area × Future Plan	$\chi^2 = 20.497$	0.001

The significant chi-square result demonstrates that entrepreneurial challenges are associated with future growth intentions.

Women experiencing financial management difficulties are less likely to pursue aggressive expansion plans, while those facing marketing and customer-related challenges demonstrate different growth behaviours.

The result indicates that growth aspirations cannot be understood independently of the constraints experienced by entrepreneurs.

Table 6 ANOVA Analysis

Test	Statistic	p-value
GD Score by Challenge Area	F = 3.225	0.0071

The ANOVA result indicates significant variation in growth and development outcomes across challenge categories.

This finding supports a differentiated intervention approach. Women entrepreneurs facing financial management challenges require different support compared to those struggling with customer acquisition or marketing.

The result is consistent with contemporary entrepreneurship literature emphasizing ecosystem-specific and entrepreneur-specific support mechanisms rather than uniform interventions.

Therefore, H02 is rejected.

5. Integrated Discussion

The combined findings provide a coherent picture of women entrepreneurship in East Godavari District. Entrepreneurship is contributing meaningfully to economic empowerment, yet the ecosystem remains fragile. Most entrepreneurs are first-generation business owners, heavily dependent on microfinance, and operating with limited experience. At the same time, they demonstrate strong aspirations for growth and increased economic participation.

The statistical evidence confirms that entrepreneurship orientation significantly enhances empowerment outcomes, while entrepreneurial challenges significantly influence growth prospects. Together, these findings suggest that entrepreneurship promotion programmes must move beyond loan disbursement and focus on capability development, mentoring, market integration, and business management support.

The East Godavari experience therefore illustrates a broader lesson relevant to many developing regions: entrepreneurship can serve as a powerful instrument of women's empowerment, but its long-term impact depends on the strength of the supporting ecosystem.

5.1. Policy Implications

The findings of this study provide important implications for policymakers, development agencies, financial institutions, and entrepreneurship promotion organizations seeking to strengthen women entrepreneurship ecosystems. The evidence demonstrates that women entrepreneurship contributes positively to economic empowerment; however, enterprise sustainability and growth remain constrained by financial management challenges, market-related barriers, and limited institutional support.

While the majority of respondents accessed microfinance as their primary source of business capital, dependence on small loans alone may not support enterprise expansion. Policymakers should therefore design graduated financing mechanisms that allow successful entrepreneurs to transition from microcredit to formal banking systems. Credit enhancement programmes, collateral-free business loans, and enterprise growth financing schemes may facilitate this transition.

The findings also highlight the importance of strengthening entrepreneurial capability. Financial literacy, bookkeeping, inventory management, pricing strategies, customer relationship management, and digital marketing emerged as critical areas requiring intervention. Entrepreneurship development programmes should therefore prioritize practical skill-building rather than focusing exclusively on motivational training.

Another important implication concerns the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Although SHGs have been highly successful in promoting financial inclusion, their potential as enterprise development platforms remains underutilized. Existing SHGs can be transformed into business development networks through mentoring programmes, market linkage initiatives, peer-learning forums, and collective branding mechanisms. Such interventions may help women entrepreneurs move from subsistence-oriented activities toward growth-oriented enterprises.

The significant association between entrepreneurial challenges and growth outcomes suggests that support programmes should be differentiated rather than standardized. Entrepreneurs facing financial management problems require different interventions compared to those facing marketing, customer relations, or operational challenges. A diagnostic approach to enterprise support may improve programme effectiveness and resource utilization.

Thus the need for capability development beyond microfinance is consistent with previous findings that access to finance alone does not ensure enterprise sustainability (3,18,20,21). The proposed strengthening of SHGs aligns with evidence reported by NABARD regarding their role in entrepreneurship promotion (9).

6. Practical Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

6.1. Enterprise Survival Support Package

Given that nearly all respondents possess less than one year of entrepreneurial experience, early-stage support should receive priority. A structured enterprise survival package should include:

- Business registration assistance
- Bookkeeping support
- Working capital management guidance
- Basic digital literacy training
- Customer acquisition strategies

These interventions can reduce business failure rates during the initial stages of enterprise development.

6.2. Financial Capability Development

Since financial management emerged as the dominant challenge among respondents, specialized financial capability programmes should be introduced. Training modules may cover:

- Cash flow management
- Pricing decisions
- Cost control
- Loan utilization planning
- Debt management
- Savings and reinvestment strategies
- Improved financial capability is likely to enhance enterprise sustainability and profitability.

6.3. Market Access and Digital Inclusion

Women entrepreneurs should be provided access to:

- E-commerce platforms
- Digital payment systems
- Social media marketing tools
- Online customer engagement strategies

Digital entrepreneurship has become increasingly important in contemporary business environments, and women entrepreneurs should be equipped to participate effectively in digital markets.

6.4. Mentorship and Business Networking

The establishment of district-level women entrepreneur networks can facilitate knowledge exchange, peer learning, and market access. Experienced entrepreneurs can serve as mentors to newly established enterprises, reducing uncertainty and improving business performance.

6.5. Cluster-Based Enterprise Development

Sector-specific clusters can be developed around dominant local economic activities such as:

- Food processing
- Fisheries-related enterprises
- Handicrafts
- Tailoring and garment production
- Agro-based businesses

Cluster-based development can improve economies of scale and strengthen market competitiveness.

6.6. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several contributions to entrepreneurship and empowerment literature.

First, it extends the Capability Approach by providing empirical evidence that entrepreneurship contributes to multiple dimensions of empowerment, including financial independence, decision-making authority, and perceived quality of life. The findings support the argument that economic participation enhances individual agency and expands opportunities for self-determined action.

Second, the study contributes to Social Capital Theory by demonstrating the importance of family support, SHG participation, and community relationships in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes. The findings suggest that entrepreneurship cannot be understood solely through economic variables; social relationships and institutional structures play an equally important role.

Third, the study contributes to entrepreneurship literature by integrating entrepreneurship orientation, economic empowerment, and growth constraints within a single analytical framework. Existing studies often examine these dimensions separately. By analysing their interrelationships, the present research provides a more comprehensive understanding of women entrepreneurship in developing regions.

Finally, this study extends the Capability Approach proposed by Sen (4) and supports Kabeer's empowerment framework (6). It also contributes to Social Capital Theory by demonstrating the importance of social networks, SHGs, and family support in entrepreneurial success (7,9). Furthermore, the findings support Microfinance Theory as articulated by Yunus (3).

Limitations of the Study

Like all empirical investigations, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged.

- First, the study is geographically restricted to East Godavari District. While the findings provide valuable insights into women entrepreneurship within this context, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to other regions with different socio-economic conditions.
- Second, the research relies primarily on cross-sectional survey data. As a result, the findings identify associations rather than definitive causal relationships. Longitudinal studies would provide a deeper understanding of how entrepreneurship and empowerment evolve over time.
- Third, although entrepreneurship orientation and economic empowerment were measured using composite scales, the entrepreneurship scale recorded moderate reliability. Future research may refine the measurement framework by incorporating additional indicators and separating entrepreneurial attitudes, capabilities, and behaviours.
- Fourth, the study primarily focuses on quantitative evidence. Qualitative investigations involving interviews and case studies could provide richer insights into entrepreneurial experiences and contextual factors influencing empowerment.

Despite these limitations, the study provides robust evidence regarding the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic empowerment among women entrepreneurs.

6.7. Future Research Directions

Several avenues for future research emerge from the present study.

Future studies may examine:

- Longitudinal changes in entrepreneurial performance and empowerment outcomes.
- The impact of digital entrepreneurship on women-owned enterprises.
- Comparative analysis across districts or states.
- The role of family support in enterprise sustainability.
- Sector-specific determinants of entrepreneurial success.
- The effectiveness of government entrepreneurship programmes.
- The influence of social capital on enterprise growth.

Researchers may also employ advanced statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), Path Analysis, and Multilevel Modelling to explore complex relationships among entrepreneurial variables.

6.8. Originality and Contribution of the Study

The present study contributes to the entrepreneurship and empowerment literature in several important ways. First, it provides district-level empirical evidence based on primary data collected from 504 women entrepreneurs in East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh. While many studies focus on national or state-level trends, localized evidence remains relatively limited, particularly in the context of women-led micro and small enterprises.

Second, the study integrates entrepreneurial orientation, economic empowerment, and enterprise growth challenges within a single analytical framework. Existing research frequently examines these dimensions independently; however, the present study demonstrates how they interact to influence entrepreneurial outcomes.

Third, the research identifies an important aspiration–preparedness gap among women entrepreneurs. Although respondents exhibit strong intentions to expand their enterprises, they simultaneously face significant financial, managerial, and market-related challenges. This finding offers valuable insight for policymakers and entrepreneurship support institutions.

Finally, the study extends existing theoretical perspectives on entrepreneurship and empowerment by providing empirical support for the Capability Approach, Social Capital Theory, and Microfinance Theory in a district-level entrepreneurial ecosystem. The findings contribute to both academic scholarship and evidence-based policy formulation aimed at strengthening women-led enterprises and promoting inclusive economic development.

7. Conclusion

The findings confirm that entrepreneurship serves as an important pathway for women's economic empowerment and socio-economic advancement. Strong entrepreneurial orientation is associated with greater financial independence, decision-making authority, and quality of life. The results also demonstrate that entrepreneurial challenges significantly influence enterprise growth and sustainability, consistent with recent international evidence on women entrepreneurship. While financial inclusion remains important, sustainable empowerment requires complementary investments in capability development, mentoring, market integration, and institutional support.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Participation was voluntary and respondents provided informed consent prior to data collection.

Data Availability

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request.

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