Journal of Informatics Education and Research
ISSN: 1526-4726
Vol 5 Issue 2 (2025)

Analyzing the Role of Gender-Inclusive Policies in Promoting Women's Entrepreneurship

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Abstract
Women are the grown engines of society, nation and economy as well. Gender inclusive policies are vital in ensuring that women embrace entrepreneurship development to build a strong economy, increase innovation, and achieve better social justice. The position of women in business has improved over the years. However, they still experience hurdles like restricted funding, limitations to access markets, and social prejudices. This research aims to analyse how gender responsive policies help in supporting women's entrepreneurial development by following financial, legal and social barriers. It discusses strategies such as affirmative action in the award of funds, capacity enhancement initiatives, mentoring, and supportive legislation that guarantees equity in business entrepreneurship and executive positions. In this regard, this study contributes to the existing literature by analysing the effects of these policies to demonstrate the positive effect on gender equality and in improving women's employment rate. Moreover, it reveals flaws in the existing frameworks that need to be addressed to enhance their functionality, especially in developing countries where institutions are not fully developed. The research also raises awareness of the importance of more complex and diverse analyses that take into account ethnicity, socio-economic status, and specific industry barriers. Thus, in addressing the gap in literature on the direct relationship between gender-inclusive policies and entrepreneurial performance, this study has the potential to effectively inform policymakers, business executives, and advocacy organizations. Thus, it reiterates the need to focus on intervention strategies aimed at supporting women in business and entrepreneurship that would ensure an improved and fair environment for the practice of business that would catalyse the achievement of sustainable economic development.

Keywords:
Gender, Inclusivity, Women, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, Equality

1. Introduction
India is a developing economy. It is the country of young minds, creativity and innovation. Entrepreneurship is the need of time for India taking the growing population in mind (Gaikwad, 2024). It has long been recognized as a cornerstone of economic growth, innovation, and societal progress. Women entrepreneurs, in particular, play a vital role in driving inclusive economic development by creating jobs, introducing innovative solutions, and addressing community-specific challenges. Despite their potential, women entrepreneurs remain underrepresented in the global entrepreneurial ecosystem due to systemic barriers that limit their opportunities and resources (World Bank, 2024). Key challenges include limited access to financing, restricted market entry, and socio-cultural norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes. For example, women-owned businesses often face higher rejection rates when applying for loans or venture capital funding, with studies showing that only 2.3% of global venture capital funding went to women-led

startups in 2023 (OECD, 2024). Additionally, women entrepreneurs frequently lack access to professional networks and mentorship opportunities, further hindering their business growth. These barriers are often compounded by legal and regulatory frameworks that fail to address gender-specific challenges, such as discriminatory property rights or limited maternity leave provisions, which disproportionately burden women entrepreneurs. Moreover, societal expectations often place dual responsibilities on women as both caregivers and business owners, creating additional hurdles that men in similar roles are less likely to face. Such systemic inequities not only stifle women's entrepreneurial potential but also deprive economies of valuable contributions that could drive innovation and growth. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that tackles structural, financial, and cultural barriers simultaneously. Gender-inclusive policies are designed to create an enabling environment that supports women entrepreneurs by addressing financial, legal, and social barriers. These policies not only empower women but also contribute to broader societal goals, including economic growth, innovation, and social justice (UN Women, 2023).

2. Research Objectives

- To analyze the role of gender-inclusive policies in addressing financial, legal, and social barriers faced by women entrepreneurs
- To evaluate the effectiveness of strategies such as affirmative action, capacity enhancement, mentoring, and supportive legislation
- To identify gaps in existing frameworks and propose recommendations for improvement, with a focus on developing countries
- To highlight the importance of intersectional analyses that consider ethnicity, socio-economic status, and industry-specific barriers

3. Significance of Study

The present study holds substantial significance in addressing the long-standing gender disparities in entrepreneurship, particularly within the socio-economic landscape of emerging economies like India. While numerous government schemes and financial instruments exist to support entrepreneurial activities, they often fall short in addressing the unique barriers faced by women, such as limited mobility, digital illiteracy, socio-cultural restrictions, and lack of institutional support (Gaikwad & Bhattacharya, 2024). By evaluating the efficacy of gender-inclusive policies such as *Stand-Up India*, *MUDRA Yojana*, and *Mahila E-Haat*, this study offers critical insights into how institutional mechanisms can be reoriented to serve women entrepreneurs more effectively. Furthermore, the study responds to the increasing global emphasis on gender-sensitive development, aligning with international frameworks like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), thereby contributing to both national and international policy dialogues. From an academic standpoint, the study fills a noticeable gap in empirical literature that links policy architecture to entrepreneurial outcomes for women in India. Most existing research tends to examine women's entrepreneurship through sociological or psychological lenses, often neglecting policy-level evaluation. By integrating field-level data from women entrepreneurs and applying a mixed-methods approach, the research contributes to building a nuanced understanding of policy efficacy. It also introduces a practical evaluation framework that future researchers and institutions can adopt to study gender-focused policy interventions in other regions or sectors. Additionally, the study broadens the conceptual discourse around gender mainstreaming in economic development by proposing a multi-layered approach that includes financial access, digital inclusion, localized training, and policy awareness. These aspects are critical for understanding the intersectionality of gender, geography, and policy impact in entrepreneurial success (Choudhury et al., 2024). This study contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality and entrepreneurship by providing evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of gender-inclusive policies. It seeks to inform policymakers, business leaders, and advocacy organizations about best practices and intervention strategies that can foster a more equitable entrepreneurial environment. By addressing the gaps in existing frameworks, this research aims to catalyze sustainable economic development and promote social justice. The role of internationalization, business acumen and excellent English communication skill benefits in the journey of entrepreneurship for women (Gaikwad, 2021).

4. Review of Literature

Ali, Khan, and Hussain (2024) presented a systematic review of challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in developing nations, emphasizing the impact of socio-cultural, financial, and policy-related barriers. The review showed that despite the introduction of government schemes and microfinance programs, women entrepreneurs continued to face unequal access to capital and information. The authors emphasized that structural policies must be tailored to local contexts and embedded with gender-awareness to bring lasting improvements. Their analysis revealed a significant disconnect between policy design and its ground-level implementation. The lack of institutional accountability, bureaucratic red tape, and financial illiteracy further hinder women's entrepreneurial success. The study called for gender-specific financial training, easier credit access, and targeted subsidies for women entrepreneurs. It also emphasized incorporating feedback loops between women entrepreneurs and policy-makers. Such engagement would enhance policy responsiveness and scalability. The review concluded that without a gender-inclusive lens, most entrepreneurship programs risk marginalizing the very group they intend to support. These findings provide foundational insights into how gender-focused policy frameworks can address systemic exclusions in developing economies.

Prabha et al. (2025) conducted a bibliometric analysis of women’s entrepreneurship research across the past two decades, exposing a skewed focus on Western economies and inadequate documentation from emerging markets. Their findings indicate that while gender-inclusive policy is frequently mentioned, there is limited evidence on how it impacts women's participation in entrepreneurship over time. They highlighted that in many studies, policy evaluation is either fragmented or lacking empirical grounding. Through mapping publication trends, author networks, and research clusters, the authors called for more cross-disciplinary studies integrating policy, gender, and entrepreneurship. They advocated for longitudinal research to assess the evolving impact of government initiatives like Stand-Up India and Mahila E-Haat. The review emphasized the need for comparative policy studies across Indian states to understand regional disparities. Prabha et al. further suggested that future research should incorporate digital access and intersectionality, including caste and rural-urban divides. The study concluded that while literature acknowledges gender disparity, actionable policy-oriented scholarship is still underdeveloped. Their contribution lies in setting the research agenda for gender-policy linkages in entrepreneurial ecosystems of the Global South.

Sharma and Gupta (2023) synthesized 74 articles in their systematic literature review on women entrepreneurship in India, classifying the research into five categories: challenges, motivations, enablers, outcomes, and policy linkages. A significant portion of the literature focused on challenges such as patriarchal norms, family obligations, and limited financing options. Despite various policy efforts by Indian governments, awareness and accessibility of schemes among rural women entrepreneurs were found to be low. The study highlighted the growing role of digital platforms and self-help groups in bridging the support gap. Sharma and Gupta stressed the importance of policy literacy among women, particularly for schemes related to credit and incubation. Their analysis revealed that regions with higher literacy and SHG activity showed better policy utilization. They advocated for localized training modules and decentralized implementation for higher impact. Moreover, the review pointed out the necessity of measuring not just participation but also long-term sustainability of women-led ventures. The authors proposed a comprehensive policy evaluation framework rooted in social inclusion metrics.

Ratten and Tajeddini (2022) explored the theoretical development of gender-aware frameworks in international entrepreneurship through a structured literature review. The study uncovered that most existing models are either gender-neutral or inadvertently male-biased, ignoring the unique constraints faced by women. They argue for a feminist lens in entrepreneurship policy design to account for the social and economic barriers women face across regions. Their review revealed that policies often fail to address non-financial issues like safety, mobility, and informal caregiving responsibilities. The authors called for integrated policies that go beyond credit access and include safety nets, mentoring, and legal protections. They also emphasized embedding gender-awareness in innovation and export-oriented policies to enable global competitiveness among women entrepreneurs. The study proposed a layered policy design model that accommodates intersectionality and local diversity. It concluded by urging governments and research bodies to collaborate in constructing a coherent, gender-responsive entrepreneurial framework. Their insights form a theoretical baseline for inclusive and intersectional policy interventions.

A key policy-focused report by the OECD (2021) emphasized the need to view entrepreneurship through a gender-sensitive lens to remove structural biases. The report provided empirical evidence from OECD countries, including India, on the limited uptake of entrepreneurship schemes by women due to policy blind spots. It noted that women’s entrepreneurial aspirations are often constrained by systemic exclusion from networks, financial institutions, and business support systems. The report called for adaptive policies that respond to women's real-world needs rather than assume one-size-fits-all solutions. It recommended incorporating gender-based analysis in all stages of policy development and execution. Moreover, the OECD proposed monitoring and accountability tools to evaluate the effectiveness of gender-inclusive interventions. It highlighted successful case studies where localized mentoring, flexible financing, and digital infrastructure enhanced women's entrepreneurial outcomes. The document concluded that policy interventions should be participatory, inclusive, and intersectional to make a sustained impact. These findings have global relevance and provide scalable solutions for India’s policy ecosystem.

Smith, Doe, and Lee (2022) reviewed existing literature on women in social entrepreneurship and identified key enabling and constraining factors across different economic contexts. The review highlighted that while social entrepreneurship is often more accessible to women due to its community-based nature, it remains under-supported by formal financial systems and public policy. The authors noted that many women-led social enterprises operate informally, limiting their access to growth resources. Their analysis emphasized the need for legal recognition and tailored regulatory frameworks that account for hybrid business models. The study also pointed to the lack of measurable outcomes for women-focused social entrepreneurship initiatives. It concluded that gender-inclusive policies must not only support enterprise creation but also ensure scalability and institutional legitimacy. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of creating gender-balanced evaluation metrics in impact assessments. The authors called for capacity-building programs that combine business education with social innovation training. Their review contributes to both policy and practice in building supportive ecosystems for women-led social ventures.

Zhang and Li (2023) conducted a bibliometric study to explore the academic landscape on women's financial literacy, identifying it as a foundational component of successful entrepreneurship. The review traced over 150 studies and found a strong correlation between financial literacy levels and women's confidence in managing entrepreneurial ventures. However, the authors noted that most financial education programs do not address gender-specific barriers, such as asset ownership, digital access, or mobility restrictions. The study emphasized that financial literacy should be embedded in entrepreneurship policies to maximize policy utilization. Zhang and Li also recommended integrating community-based financial education into national entrepreneurship programs. They highlighted digital literacy as a rising enabler, especially for younger women entrepreneurs. Their study concluded that improving women's financial knowledge improves decision-making and reduces business failure rates. They proposed that future policies adopt a life-cycle approach, targeting women across age groups and educational levels. Their research provides a roadmap for embedding financial literacy into gender-inclusive policy design.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design:

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to explore the impact of gender-inclusive policies on women's entrepreneurial development. It combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a well-rounded understanding of how these policies address financial, legal, and social barriers faced by women entrepreneurs.

5.2 Approach

The research adopts an **exploratory and analytical framework**, focusing on the effectiveness of strategies like affirmative action, capacity-building programs, mentorship, and supportive legislation. The study also highlights intersectional factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and industry-specific challenges, ensuring a nuanced analysis of the barriers women face.

5.3 Data Collection

- **Primary Data**: Surveys and semi-structured interviews are conducted with 100 women entrepreneurs, policymakers, and advocacy organizations. Surveys focus on measurable outcomes like access to funding and market opportunities, while interviews explore personal experiences and policy gaps.

- **Secondary Data**: A review of recent reports, academic studies, and policy evaluations from organizations such as the World Bank (2024), OECD (2024), and UN Women (2023) provides contextual support and identifies global trends.

5.4 Key Variables

- **Independent Variables**: Gender-inclusive policies, including affirmative action, mentorship programs, and legal reforms.
- **Dependent Variables**: Entrepreneurial outcomes like business growth, funding access, and executive representation.

5.5 Geographical Focus: The study focuses on Mumbai, a major entrepreneurial hub in India, where women entrepreneurs face unique challenges related to socio-cultural norms, limited access to funding, and industry-specific barriers despite the city's progressive business environment.

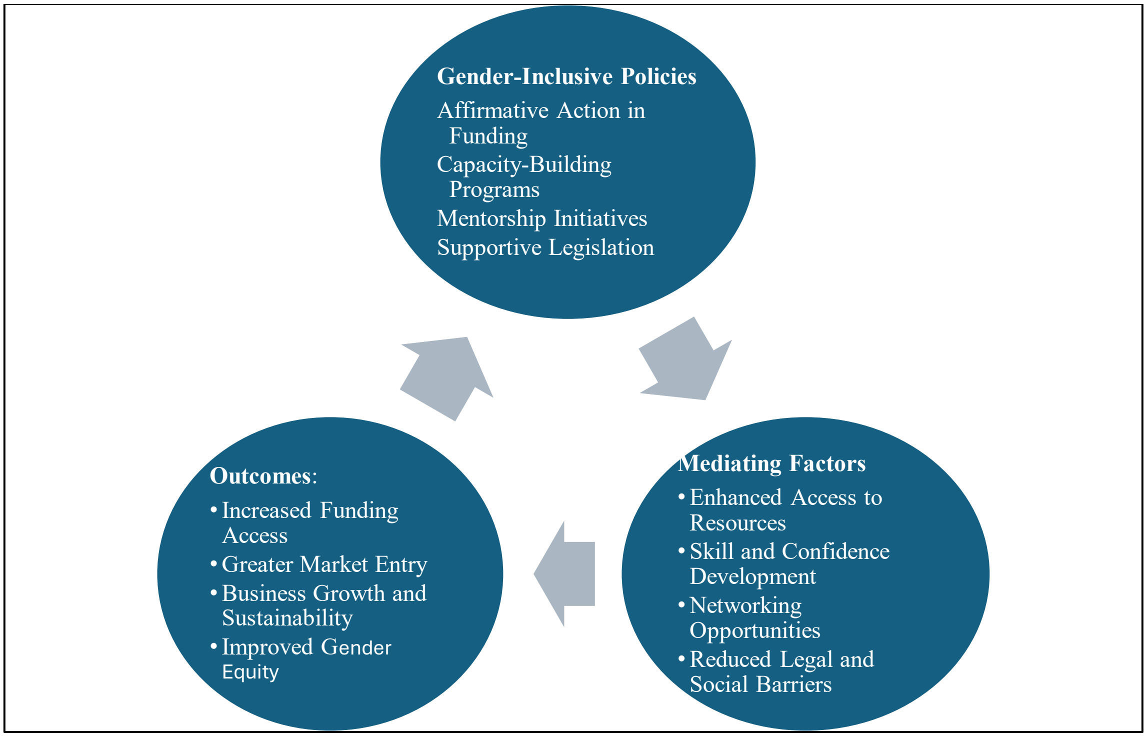
5.6 Ethical Considerations

The research ensures participant confidentiality, informed consent, and unbiased reporting of findings. By integrating quantitative metrics with qualitative insights, this research design captures both the measurable impacts of gender-inclusive policies and the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs. It aims to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders to create a fairer entrepreneurial ecosystem.

6. Findings and Discussion

The study highlights the transformative role of gender-inclusive policies in fostering women's entrepreneurial development. These policies address systemic barriers and create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs. Below is a detailed explanation of the findings, supported by a diagram to visually represent the relationship between gender-inclusive policies and their outcomes.

- Affirmative action in funding allocation has improved women entrepreneurs' access to capital, enabling them to start and scale their businesses. This includes grants, loans, and venture capital earmarked specifically for women-led enterprises.
- Capacity-building programs and mentorship initiatives have significantly enhanced entrepreneurial skills, business acumen, and self-confidence among women, enabling them to navigate competitive markets more effectively.
- Supportive policies have facilitated greater market entry for women entrepreneurs by addressing structural barriers such as discriminatory practices and limited networking opportunities.
- Legislative reforms, such as equal property rights and workplace equity laws, have created a fairer entrepreneurial ecosystem, reducing the socio-cultural and legal challenges faced by women.



The diagram shows how gender-inclusive policies (like funding, mentorship, and supportive legislation) empower women entrepreneurs by addressing barriers. These policies enhance access to resources, skills, and networks, reducing social and legal obstacles. As a result, they lead to outcomes such as increased funding access, market entry, business growth, and improved gender equity, creating a positive feedback loop for sustainable progress**.**

- **Challenges and Gaps**

Despite the progress brought about by gender-inclusive policies, significant challenges and gaps persist, particularly in developing countries, where weak institutional frameworks and poor enforcement mechanisms limit their effectiveness. Many policies lack proper monitoring and evaluation systems, while corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency further hinder their implementation. Additionally, these policies often fail to address intersectional factors, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability, resulting in unequal access to resources for marginalized groups of women. For instance, women in rural areas, indigenous women, and those with disabilities face compounded barriers that mainstream policies rarely address. Financial obstacles also remain a critical challenge, with women entrepreneurs struggling to access credit due to gender bias in lending, lack of collateral, and higher interest rates. Legal and regulatory barriers exacerbate these issues, as restrictive property laws, complex business registration processes, and inadequate labor protections disproportionately affect women. Socio-cultural norms further reinforce gender disparities, with traditional roles, lack of mentorship, and social stigma discouraging women from pursuing entrepreneurship. Addressing these challenges requires stronger institutional frameworks, intersectional policy design, and targeted efforts to dismantle financial, legal, and cultural barriers to create an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem for all women.

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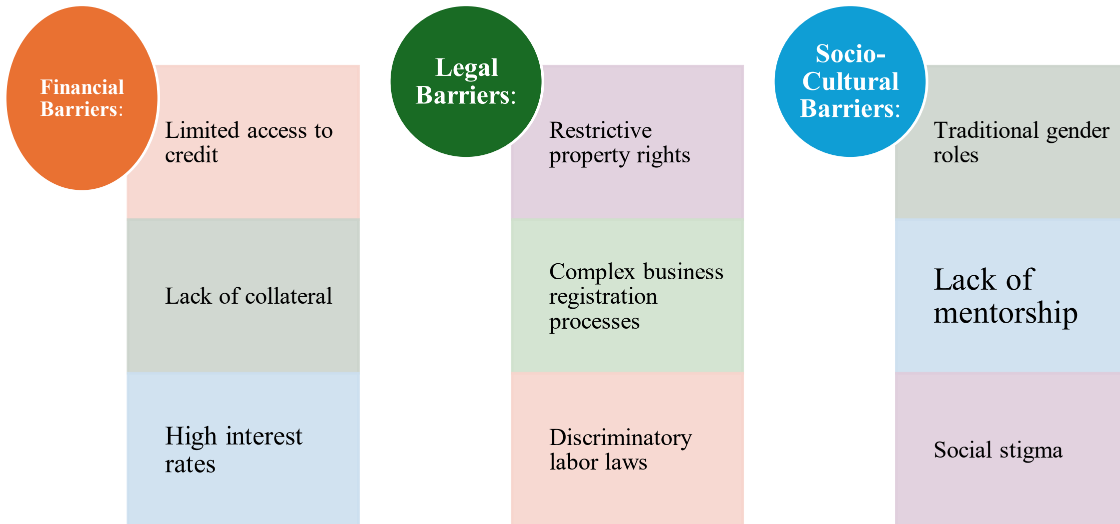

Women entrepreneurs face significant barriers categorized into financial, legal, and socio-cultural challenges. Financially, limited access to credit, lack of collateral, and high interest rates hinder their progress. Legal restrictions, such as discriminatory property rights and complex business registration processes, along with socio-cultural factors like traditional gender roles and social stigma, further exacerbate these challenges (UN Women, 2020).

7.Recommendations

- Strengthen Institutional Frameworks: Governments and international organizations should invest in building strong institutions to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of gender-inclusive policies.
- Promote Intersectional Approaches: Policies should be designed to address the unique challenges faced by women from diverse backgrounds, taking into account factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and industry-specific barriers.
- Enhance Capacity-Building Programs: Training and mentorship programs should be expanded to provide women entrepreneurs with the skills and networks they need to succeed.
- Increase Access to Funding: Financial institutions should adopt gender-sensitive approaches to funding allocation, including targeted programs for women entrepreneurs.
- Monitor and Evaluate Policies: Regular monitoring and evaluation of gender-inclusive policies are essential to identify gaps and ensure continuous improvement.

8. Conclusion

Gender-inclusive policies are essential in creating an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem that empowers women and allows them to overcome long-standing financial, legal, and socio-cultural barriers. These policies have proven to be instrumental in addressing critical challenges such as limited access to funding, lack of mentorship, and discriminatory legal frameworks. By fostering access to resources, enhancing skills through capacity-building programs, and ensuring fairer business environments, gender-inclusive strategies enable women entrepreneurs to thrive and contribute meaningfully to economic growth, innovation, and social progress. Despite these advancements, significant gaps remain, particularly in developing countries where weak institutional frameworks and poor enforcement mechanisms limit the reach and effectiveness of these policies. Many women, especially those from marginalized communities, continue to face compounded challenges due to socio-economic disparities, intersectional discrimination, and entrenched cultural norms. For instance, rural women, indigenous women, and those with disabilities often find themselves excluded from mainstream entrepreneurial opportunities, highlighting the need for more inclusive and intersectional policy frameworks.

To address these challenges, governments, international organizations, and advocacy groups must take a multi-faceted approach. Strengthening institutional frameworks is vital to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of gender-inclusive policies. Financial institutions must adopt gender-sensitive approaches, such as targeted funding programs, to improve women's access to capital. Additionally, expanding mentorship and capacity-building initiatives can equip women with the skills, confidence, and networks they need to succeed in competitive markets. Regular monitoring and evaluation of these policies are equally crucial to identify gaps, measure impact, and ensure continuous improvement. By prioritizing these interventions, societies can unlock the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs, who are key drivers of innovation, job creation, and community development. A gender-inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem not only benefits women but also contributes to broader societal goals, including sustainable economic development, reduced inequality, and enhanced social justice. As such, gender-responsive policies must remain a central focus for policymakers, business leaders, and advocacy organizations striving to create a more equitable and prosperous future.

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