

Enhancing and sustaining entrepreneurial mindset and ecosystem through social capital: A case of rural women in North Gujarat, India



Tomo Kawane¹⁺

Rajib Shaw²

^{1,2}Graduate School of Media and Governance, Keio University 5322, Endo, Fujisawa, Kanagawa 252-0882, Japan.

¹Email: kawane@sfc.keio.ac.jp

²Email: shaw@sfc.keio.ac.jp



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 18 March 2024

Revised: 2 May 2024

Accepted: 30 May 2024

Published: 11 June 2024

Keywords

COVID-19 pandemic
Entrepreneurial mindset
Food processing business
India
Informal sector
Resilience
Rural Gujarat
Social capital
Vernacular interviews
Women entrepreneurs.

This empirical study on the business strategies and resilience of 25 rural women entrepreneurs who had no prior experience in doing business. Semi-structured interview of 25 women entrepreneurs of the Leuva Patel community in five villages in northern Gujarat was held face-to-face with the interviewees in Gujarati during February-March 2023 to evaluate the genesis and management of their processed food enterprises initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic in India. Repeated and prolonged lockdowns enforced social distancing abruptly halted daily movements and transportation of people, goods, and commodities. Yet, women could collaborate with fellow women, initiate their food-processing groups, and establish their regular source of income, a sustainable alternate source to support their families *while remaining in their villages and keeping their enterprises informal throughout*. The study found that women entrepreneurs' business decisions have been underpinned by their social capital, symbolized by trust, bonding, and linking among community members within and outside their villages: the community's entrepreneurial ecosystem has strengthened their resilience in exploring, capturing, and enhancing business opportunities. The study highlights why women entrepreneurs tend to stay in the informal sector and suggests future directions of research on entrepreneurial ecosystem and mindset. Suggested policy directions to enhance sustainable rural women entrepreneurship in formal sector are could be timely and valuable.

Contribution/ Originality: The study analyzes vernacular narratives of women entrepreneurs in rural Gujarat offered in Gujarati. It highlights rare accounts of women entrepreneurship in informal sector in rural India. Women entrepreneurs' resilience against the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is closely observed to understand their perspectives of social capital as resilient factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Global Issues for Women Entrepreneurs

1.1.1. Women Labor Force Faces the Gender Gap

The World Bank (2022) reported that the global labor force participation rate hugely differs between men (80%) and women (50%). It is acknowledged that women work force have shown following characteristics:

- Less likely to be engaged in formal employment,
- Having fewer opportunities for business expansion or career progression, and
- Making lesser income in comparison to men.

The largest gender gap in terms of labor force participation is observed in lower middle-income countries where India is the most populous country.

According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 rankings of 153 countries, out of the seven South Asian countries, only Bangladesh featured in the top 100, ranked at the 50th with overall score of 72.6%. The six other South Asian countries were ranked far lower: Nepal (68.0%, 101st), Sri Lanka (68.0%, 102nd), India (66.8%, 112th), Maldives (64.6%, 123rd), Bhutan (63.5%, 131st), and Pakistan (56.4%, 151st, only ahead of Iraq and Yemen) (The World Economic Forum, 2019). The data reveals the grave gender disparities in South Asian region.

It is significant to note the fact that three-fourths of 860 million South Asian women live in India and while literate population is reported to be 82% of men and 66% of women (The World Economic Forum, 2019). Thus, Indian women has the issue of lack of fundamental skills to be responsible for her own documents.

Further, if we consider the magnitude of 85 % of workers who are either self-employed or in casual work (International Labor Organization, 2019) poses a point of reflection how the issue of informality is dealt with by the rural women entrepreneurs. There are significant gap in economic participation and opportunity for women as “the providers of water, food, fodder and fuels” who have been affected by climate change (Sainath, 2020).

1.1.2. Gender-Based Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these gender gaps. Women were severely impacted in the following three aspects:

- (1) Employment: loss of employment and uncompensated labor.
- (2) Education: dropping out of school.
- (3) Justice: gender-based violence.

It was notable to see that the persistent gender gap was globally observed in employment as well as uncompensated labor where 26% of women reported loss of work in comparison with 20% of men during the period from March 2020 to September 2021 (Gregory, 2022).

1.1.3. Digitalization and Digital Gender Divide

India is predominantly an agrarian economy, accounting for a 18.8% (2021-22) in Gross Value Added (GVA) of the country, growing 3.6% in 2020-21 and 3.9% in 2021-22 (The Economic Times of India, 2022). According to the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM), the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) sector and the digital economy contributes over 13% of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its Information Technology (IT) industry is set to cross USD245 billion in 2023 based on an 8.4% annual growth rate (International Trade Administration U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023). Digitalization has several elements that benefit women entrepreneurs:

- (a) Access to information.
- (b) Access to training.
- (c) Access to support networks.
- (d) Fostering financial inclusion.

Pangestu (2022) points out that globally women are still 10 % less likely to own a mobile phone and 23% less likely to use the mobile internet, terming it as “digital gender divide”.

1.2. Issues of Women Entrepreneurs in Indian Context

1.2.1. Low Participation of Female Labor Force

Gender gap in labor force participation is alarming in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. India being the most populous country with 40% share of the global population of the lower-middle income group and reported a staggering 57% gender gap, just by excluding India from the group of lower-middle income countries,

the regional gender gap in the labor force participation is lowered by 10%. India attained only 36.7% parity on economic participation and opportunity according to the Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum on economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment of women (The World Economic Forum, 2023). Korreck (2019) indicates the significance of women's entrepreneurial empowerment in terms of enhancing the growth of Indian economy and summarizes the causes of low female entrepreneurship are attributed to the following factors:

- (1) Unconscious biases.
- (2) Low confidence in business skills.
- (3) Difficult access to finance and networks.
- (4) A lack of family support and child-care options.
- (5) Insufficient safety in work and public spaces.

1.2.2. Women Entrepreneurs Principally as Care Takers at Home

Taking care of family members is considered a fundamental duty as revealed by the study of 250 informal women workers in Ahmedabad city of Gujarat, eight informal worker leaders and 4 other key informants from government and academia, conducted by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) in cooperation with the Self-Employed Women's Association, during the COVID-19 pandemic that marked the increased responsibilities of women in households especially for cooking, cleaning, childcare, elderly care, and care of the sick (WIEGO, 2023). Looking after aged-in-laws, sick family members, and school-going children are prioritized over their business, considerably limiting their liberty and time to engage with their business. On average, not more than 5 hours could be spent on business.

1.2.3. Characteristics of Women's Enterprises in India

It is important to note that the women-dominated industries tend to rely on individual clients, having smaller entry barrier, and, hence, highly competitive: such characteristics of women's enterprises make them the most disadvantaged of most economies (Srinivasu, Bhatia, & Gupta, 2022).

Table 1 presents that economic participation and opportunity in India is greatly underrepresented by women. It is notable to see that only less than one third of women enter the labor market in comparison with men, though there is not much gender divide in the rate of unemployment. Women has far less chances in taking part in the decision-making processes such as becoming board members of listed companies, working in the firms with female majority ownership, or having top female managers.

Table 1. Gender comparison for economic participation and opportunity in India.

Factors	Women (%)	Men (%)	Value (Unit: One million)
Total population	649.6	703.1	1.14k
Labor force	79.86	287.4	0.22
Unemployed adults ratio (15-64 of labor force)	5.42	5.54	0.98
Board members of listed companies	13.80	86.20	0.16
Firms with female majority ownership	2.80	97.20	0.03
Firms with female top managers	8.90	91.10	0.10

Source: Prepared by authors from contextual data derived from The World Economic Forum (2019).

1.3. Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in India

1.3.1. Changing Agricultural Sector

Agricultural productivity has been, for long, considered as the source of development in rural areas in India, since agriculture has been the topmost source of employment in the country. As far as enterprises are concerned,

more than 63.3 million Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are registered in India, employing 120 million workers and about 94% of MSMEs are micro-enterprises (as of 31 March 2022) and out of 65% of them earn their livelihood from agriculture and allied sectors (Lingam, 2023). It is important to note that rural entrepreneurial ecosystem in India has undergone several challenges. In the study on the longitudinal study on agricultural productivity in local economic development in India, Blakeslee et al. (2023) highlight the heterogeneous impact on local economic development by extended irrigation networks through a study using higher resolution data that revealed dramatically varied features of urbanization and the impact of the level of agricultural yields. Their study informs us of the importance and necessity of case-specific region-focused study in rural-urban connections in India with updated data with the use of technology. The following features need to be taken into consideration in the study of rural India.

1. **Reduced Agricultural Income:** A precipitous and persistent decline in farm income and wealth due to long-term water loss in rural India was noted (Blakeslee, Fishman, & Srinivasan, 2020). Agricultural incomes have increased by less than one-third of non-agricultural incomes (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2022).
2. **Low Agricultural Labour Productivity:** Agriculture accounts for an estimated 42% of employment with its 18% share of GDP (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2022).
3. **Lack of Financial Support for Agricultural Produce:** The challenge has become multi-fold in the context of lack of financial support for loss of agricultural income.
4. **Market-driven Pricing for Agricultural Produce:** Support price for agricultural produce is market driven and farmers are completely at the mercy of the market for sale.
5. **Decline in Agricultural Workers:** Prime working-age adults (20-59 years) employed in the sector declined from 40% in 2004-05 to 23.3% in 2018-19, with much sharper decline in the share of young adults of 20-29 years, from 34% to 14.4% in 14 years with the increase of the median age of agricultural workers from 35 to 40 years (Mahambare, Dhhanaj, & Sharma, 2021).
6. **The Scarcity of Agricultural Land:** It needs to be remembered that the average agricultural landholding is just at 0.15 hectare per capita in India (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2022).

It is important to note that the weightage of the agricultural sector in Indian economy has gradually declined, mostly in favour of the service sector over the last two decades that has played a more important role in India's economic development than in most other major emerging economies. These factors have underlain the precarious economic situation before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 in India.

1.3.2. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Informal Sector in India

The job market in India got severely impacted and the manufacturing sector saw the total employment fell almost 6.5 million lesser than the level in February 2020. Reverse migration from urban areas to rural areas was caused because of the following three factors:

- (1) The lack of employment opportunities.
- (2) A slow rebound in the hospitality sector.
- (3) The lack of social security benefits.

Reverse migration due to the COVID-19 pandemic rendered agriculture as the biggest employer, absorbing farm labourers and daily wage labourers. It is important to note that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic in the financial year 2017-18, 97% of the employees in India engaged with agriculture were in the informal sector and above 85 % of the employees engaged with the trade, repair, accommodation, and food services sectors—the next biggest employers after agricultural sector—were in the informal sector (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India, 2022). It is important to mark the analysis by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that

India's relative low unemployment figure since the COVID-19 pandemic was on average about 6% in 2018-2020, which hid significant presence of informal employments (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2022).

1.4. Issues for Rural Women

1.4.1. Women Entrepreneurs in Rural India

It is important to note that there has been continuous institutional interest and financial support to enhance women entrepreneurship in rural India. Since 2003, the World Bank has provided USD 2.2 billion to support women's self-help group (SHG) in India. It helped mobilize 32 million rural women to form 2.9 million SHGs through several state and national projects. Apart from being engaged with sustainable livelihoods, such as looking after animals, helping rural people operate bank accounts, or operating canteens at government hospitals and offices, building toilets as masons, and so on, the World Bank has also supported to nurse entrepreneurial initiatives that helped the SHGs to access commercial finance, amounting over USD 14.5 billion. It was these projects that became the genesis of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) of the Government of India, the largest platform for women's social and economic empowerment in the world. NRLM supports over 91 million women through 8.4 million SHGs as of April 2023 (The World Bank, 2023). Having explained about such commitments on the part of financial institutions and government bodies, it is paramount to observe how rural women entrepreneurs have survived through different challenges.

1.4.2. Marital Status and Women's Work Participation

It is important to note that Labor Force Participation (LFP) has only fallen among married women in rural India (Afridi, Dinkelman, & Mahajan, 2018). Existing social norms have ambiguity towards the employment of women, unmarried, married or widowed, due to existing social norms.

Reed (2020) indicates the importance of considering marital status and women's employment and points out the substantial presence of widow population in India. The following elements explained in her work could help us understand what triggers women to work.

- (a) India's Biggest Widow Population in the World: 43 million widows in India is the largest widowed population in the world.
- (b) Widow Seclusion and Social Taboos for Widow Remarriage: 7.4% widows against 1.8 % widowers in India indicates social taboos for widow remarriage in India.
- (c) Younger Widow Population in India: In general, widows in India are younger than widow populations in other countries.
- (d) The Demise of The Spouse Relax Social Norms for Widows to Work: Some widows are pushed into the labor force, while other widows choose to enter the labor force because of no restriction after the demise of their spouse.
- (e) Difficulty in Securing a Collateral Loan Without Male Support(s) in the Family: While Reed (2020) indicates this as a source of struggle for widows and microfinance schemes could chip in to support them, the authors consider this could be the same for women in general.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze women social entrepreneurship in norther part of Gujarat, India with a social capital lens. Through detailed field survey and in-depth interviews along with a theoretical framework, this paper explores the policy support environment for flourishing women entrepreneurship in rural India.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Social Capital to Measure Microeconomic Activities of Rural Women Entrepreneurs

Coleman (1988) sees social capital as a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure, facilitating certain actions of actors—whether personal or corporate actors—within the structure.” This includes both positive and negative objectives, indicating that certain actions may be useless or even harmful to others.

Fukuyama (1999) maintains that “the economic function of social capital is to reduce the transaction costs associated with formal coordination mechanisms like contracts, hierarchies, bureaucratic rules, and the like.”

Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1993) defines the concept of social capital as a set of horizontal associations among people affected by the productivity of the community where networks of civic engagement and social norms are included.

Serageldin and Grootaert (2000) point out that different types of social capital coexist and mutually reinforcing, introducing the concept of *appropriate social capital*, and enhancing the efficiency of the combination process of the other factors of production.

“The key to determining what constitutes appropriate social capital is data—on both the composition and the level of the total stock. This information needs to be assessed in light of the other types of available capital in a country. We think that the most useful way to advance this notion is to undertake case studies in selected countries where a good bit of information on micro institutions is already available (Serageldin & Grootaert, 2000).”

Grootaert, Narayan, Jones, and Woolcock (2003) present that the survey tool for measuring social capital could capture the household level most accurately, overseeing the past survey tools for individuals, households, applied to regions, and entire societies.

The effects of social capital are measured through 1) sharing information, 2) coordinating activities, 3) making collective decisions for the provision of public goods, and the management of market externalities to enhance productivity.

2.2. Risk Management Framework Appreciates Social Capital with Grassroot Perspective

In the risk management framework, social capital with a grassroots perspective is found to be effective. Nakagawa and Shaw (2004) acknowledge the *increasing* importance of social capital in the modern world where social capital and leadership in the community could be basic and universal in nature—irrespective of the development stages of the country through the process of rehabilitation, while other factors such as government policy, the intervention of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or consultants exist as the variants that differ depending on the local settings (emphasis ours, p.29). For effective decision-making under the risk management framework, a policy framework for a four-tier system of community, local government, state government, and central government is proposed by Shaw and Sinha (2003) considering the social capital of the communities as an asset to enable policy formulation. From a grass-root perspective where the concerned community and its leaders bear the responsibility to increase and effectively use their social capital towards successful and sustainable recovery post the Gujarat Earthquake of 2001.

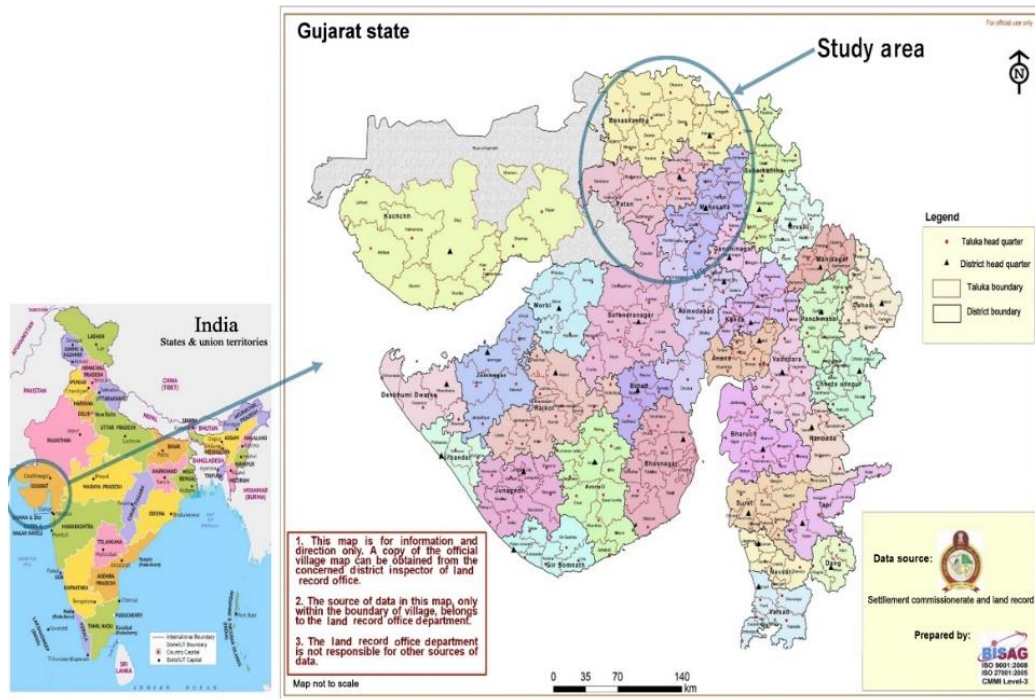


Figure 1. Map of the State of Gujarat.

Source: Gujarat State Map Revenue Department Government of Gujarat (2021).

Social capital, according to Putnam (1995) has a positive effect on the economy by 1) facilitating coordination to cooperate for mutual benefit, 2) solving dilemmas of collective action, 3) reducing the incentives for opportunism, and 4) reducing egoism (p.76). Rural women entrepreneurs united to recover from abrupt income loss through their collective actions did not show opportunistic or egoistic signs. Therefore, their action is considered a positive manifestation of the working of social capital. In the empirical study on Tosashimizu town of Kochi Prefecture, Japan, Mimaki, Takeuchi, and Shaw (2009) examined perceptions of risk, self-help, and mutual help, and studied the elements of participation in evacuation drills, communication among the neighborhood, trust in one's neighbors and neighborhood associations, and communal bonds. The study revealed Voluntary Disaster Preparedness Organization contributes both awareness of disaster preparedness and ties in the community.

2.3. Research Gaps

2.3.1. Social Capital Amalgamating Beliefs, Behavioral Rules, and Interpersonal Networks

Dasgupta (2000) warns that the temptation of considering the observed practices of informal institutions as socially optimal should be resisted, especially when their rationale is detected. Dasgupta emphasizes that the rationale for the existence of “informal institutions” has been carried out through a good deal of the literature concentrating on their virtues and further points out that identifying social capital with the features of social organization such as trust, norms, and networks that could facilitate coordinated actions to improve the efficiency of society has inherent weakness since “it encourages us to amalgamate incommensurable objects namely (and in that order), beliefs, behavioral rules and such forms of capital assets as interpersonal networks—without offering a hint as to *how they are to be amalgamated* (emphasis ours), (Dasgupta, 2000).” Through empirical studies, the authors try to elaborate on this aspect of amalgamation.

2.3.2. Paying Attention to Possible Negative Repercussions of Social Capital

As Dasgupta (2000) claims, while an accumulation of social capital is necessary if the private and public spheres, no matter how they are conceived, are to flourish, *it can also get in their way*. The character of social capital matters greatly. Chambers (1988) studied well-meaning economic aid for the recipients of aid turned destructive because

the routine auctioning of jobs to irrigation engineers, mostly on short-term assignments, harmed the course of those projects. Economic transactional activities could attract corruption, bribing, and surpassing rules and regulations, which could be also promoted by social capital.

2.3.3. The Recent Findings on Food-Processing Small Businesses

Here, it is relevant to refer to the state of innovation in India's manufacturing sector evaluated by the National Manufacturing Innovation Survey (NMIS) 2021-22 as a follow-up survey of the first Indian innovation survey conducted in 2011. It was conducted by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). The survey revealed that consumers tend to opt for healthier and more sustainable food. However, infrastructural issues prevented the processing food industry to cater to such choices of the consumers. The emergence of rural women entrepreneurs in this study reflects the trend that there is an increase in smaller, more personalized production methods. This is considered to have huge sustainability implications (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2023). In this context, it is important to see that sustainability as opportunity indicates that future generations must be provided with as much or more capital than the current generation, highlighting the importance of looking at a stock variable (wealth) as well as a flow variable (income) (Serageldin & Grootaert, 2000). It is in this broad context that the food processing business of rural women entrepreneurs could get a great push to expand their client reach. This could explain the background and the reasons why all the first-time entrepreneurs could establish food processing businesses in their villages.

2.3.4. Research Gaps in Women Entrepreneurship in Indian Context

Welsh, Kaciak, Fadairo, Doshi, and Lanchimba (2023) points out two major research gaps in entrepreneurship literature in the Indian context:

- (1) Neglect of the experiences of female entrepreneurs in urban India though 18% of urban MSMEs are owned by women (Government of India Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises, 2022).
- (2) No prior research hypothesizes and tests a comprehensive ecosystem approach in the Indian context.

Singh and Sebastian (2018) find that entrepreneurship for women in Gujarat is greatly influenced by father's background of owning a business, and secondly of anyone in the family owning business. The authors, therefore, find it meaningful to explore the possibility of rather ordinary women in rural areas in India to take up a call for trying their entrepreneurship as a resilience measure at the time of a crisis.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. The Study Area and Details

Throughout successive draughts, the massive earthquake of 2001, economic shocks such as the worldwide recession in 2008, demonetization in 2016, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the western state of Gujarat in India has shown its resilience. However, researchers have marked that in social sectors, especially health, and education, Gujarat has lagged behind many other Indian states (Visaria, 2021). Gujarat has also faced stagnation in agriculture because prime age working adults decreased from 42.9% in 2004-05 to 23.7% in 2018-19 (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2022). In this study, three northern districts (Patan, Banaskanta and Mahesana) have been chosen (Figure 1).

3.2. Rural Entrepreneurship Bridges Climate Risk and Lack of Employment

Atela, Gannon, and Click (2018) in their study on female-led micro, small and medium enterprise (MSMEs) in Kenya's semi-arid lands experience and response to climate risk point out structural exclusion that socially institutionalizes female-led MSMEs to remain smaller, informal enterprise deriving their financial support from

table banking initiatives. The area under the study has been semi-arid land, having experienced severe draughts in the past. Climate change has intensified the extreme weather condition in recent years. Yet the farmers are not able to be duly compensated since insurance could be only claimed against the damage of more than a third of their crops. The small landholder farmers are not able to cope if they have a tenth of their crop damage (Bachina, Srivastava, Bhatt, & Sheth, 2022). It is also important to note that the prime-age population, mainly women, are leaving paid employment in three relatively prosperous states, Gujarat, Haryana, and Karnataka, as well as most populous and relatively poor state of Uttar Pradesh that could be because of the non-availability of local jobs (Mahambare et al., 2021). Government of India Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (2023) reports Gujarat is the 7th state in terms of the number of MSMEs registered in the state and the potentials of processed food business has been perceived positive in enhancing entrepreneurship.

3.3. *The Rural Women Entrepreneurs under this Study*

The COVID-19 Pandemic posed risks in all spheres of human life, regardless of gender, creed, and profession. This study focuses on the rural women entrepreneurs of five villages of their marriage circle (*gol*) of the Leuva Patel community (Pocock, 1972) in north Gujarat who are mostly residing in Patan, Mehsana, and Banaskantha Districts, considered one of the leading communities in the region. Many of them have migrated to urban centers within the country but are also known as having many Non-Resident-Indians (NRIs) abroad. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with 25 women entrepreneurs who found their way out to cope with the sudden loss of sources of family income during the COVID-19 pandemic, seeking to establish a sustainable alternate source of income where agricultural income used to be the main sustenance of the local population. The interviews were conducted in February-March 2023.

The marriage circles of the Leuva Patel community have complete sets of records of all the members managed by their elected committee members and they have their registered societies under the Bombay Society Act of the Government of India. The authors choose not to mention the name of the marriage circle those women entrepreneurs belong to, as well as the names of the 5 villages, as it will easily identify the interviewees who have so far chosen to remain in the informal sector.

The following conditions are necessary to focus on the resilience factor that drove them to initiate their own business in consideration of gender factors, social capital, and resilience framework:

1. The rural women entrepreneurs under this study are not the beneficiaries of any government or private project to promote entrepreneurship in India.
2. The research focuses to study on the business strategies and resilience of rural women entrepreneurs with no prior business experience.

In the process of interviewing the rural women entrepreneurs, the authors found that none of the women has an entrepreneur in her family. In the current study, social networks as women's groups and their own savings at home kept in cash became seed funding to initiate the rural women entrepreneurs' own business for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4. *The Interview of the Rural Women Entrepreneurs*

The in-depth interview as a qualitative data collection method was carried out in their vernacular language, Gujarati, by the authors, to gather rich insights regarding the entrepreneurial ecosystem and their entrepreneurship as women in rural settings. The interview location was coordinated with the interviewees at their common workplace while they were at work and in some cases at their home and do not have anyone around them so that the women could talk freely. Open-ended questions were asked to facilitate their narratives on their resilience and entrepreneurship as rural women entrepreneurs.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. *Background of Rural Women Entrepreneurship: Alienation from Agriculture*

The rural women entrepreneurs point out that the following issues discourage them to invest their time and money in agriculture.

1. **Climate Change:** Unpredictable weather makes farming/agriculture precarious, increasing uncertainties in securing family income through agricultural produce.
2. **Lack of Financial Support for Loss of Agricultural Income:** There is no real support from the government or insurance companies. Their compensation is hardly adequate.
3. **Water shortage:** Due to heavy demand, the water level has gone down and the cost of extracting water has increased.
4. **Diminishing Landholdings:** Day by day, the size of land ownership is diminishing, due to property division among family members.
5. **Unviable Agriculture:** Small-size land makes farming unprofitable. Income from small-size land is not sufficient to feed their family members, educate their children, or help plan any business.
6. **Market-Driven Agricultural Support Price:** Farmers are completely at the mercy of the market for sale since the actual return of their product depends on the market.

4.2. *Socio-Economic Constraints: Rural Women's Entrepreneurship and Informality*

4.2.1. *Remaining Informal in Patriarchal Society*

It is important to see what motivates women to take up work on their own. It is normally considered the last option of the women of the family to seek a regular source of income, so far as the major source of income is sustained to meet family expenses. In rural areas, it is a custom not to encourage women to go out to seek employment or earn money. That is considered undesirable because it will expose women to the outside world too much, to the gaze of strangers, especially men. Women at work for wages or financial gain is just like telling society that the male members of the family are not capable enough to earn a living for the family. Such a state could be considered a shame or not favorable in the eyes of others in society. Remaining informal, in a way, is an attempt on the part of women entrepreneurs not to hurt the self-respect and ego of their men at home. This could be possibly termed as cultural self-restraint to restrict the opportunities to grow more in their business on the part of women entrepreneurs.

4.2.2. *Choice of Business by Rural Women Entrepreneurs: Home-based Manufacturing/Food Processing Cottage Industries*

In rural areas, there was hardly any avenue for those returnees to start a business or find a job. This situation has compelled the women to seek the possibility of home-based manufacturing/food processing cottage industries to be the new avenue for the family of women entrepreneurs to tide over economic difficulties by creating another regular source of income to take care of the daily requirements of the family. The production of food items in cottage industries is considered an extension of household work and acceptable as it would not threaten the family system and gender-based role models and relationships at home beyond generations. Such observed domesticity is considered an affordable and amicable choice of business for women entrepreneurs. *Gruh Udhyog* (Home Industry) allowed them to work from home. It has been a convenient means for women to make efforts to create sources of income. Whether it was supplementing income or augmenting income, people are compelled to look for a job outside of their villages. Rural people will take up other jobs other than agriculture because they do not find the income from agriculture substantial to support their family and their needs. Normally men first go to seek jobs. If it is a private job, such job opportunities may not be open to all, and the seats are limited.

4.3. Reflecting Upon Vulnerabilities and Enablers for Women Entrepreneurs

It is important to observe what is considered vulnerability and what is regarded as an enabler for interviewed women.

- Social Vulnerability due to Family Obligations at Home: The women who have to take care of their aged in-laws, and/or look after school-going children, tend to be bound to spend certain hours at home and not able to devote more than 5 hours to the common premise of the enterprises. However, overall, women preferred to work together so that they can share their joy and worries with the other women entrepreneurs.
- Small Business Envisaged as Supplementary Source of Income: Started as a supplementary source of income, rather than an alternate source, such business was chosen that requires 1) no need for serious capital investment; 2) no need of procuring new equipment; 3) no need for extra training; and/or 4) located within walking distance from home. Supplementing income without investing so much capital, without the need of training, in the proximity of their local environment is considered.
- Hesitancy and Fear to Claim Her Own Business: All of them responded that they could not have started their own business at home due to lack of courage, funding, new ideas or self-motivation to handle the entire business process single-handedly. Among all, what has been most significant for them was their hesitancy to start a business on their own. This could possibly explain why they rather chose to keep their business informal. The idea of owning something of their own was exciting but it is accompanied by a certain amount of fear in their hearts.
- The Short Business Cycles with No Debt: The modus operandi of the business ethics of women entrepreneurs is not to remain in debt. As soon as the income arrives in their hands, their first move is to return the borrowed money. Even within the family, it is “a matter of pride” as one interviewee responded, to be able to return the debt as and when I have money at my disposal.” There are two implications as below:
 - Self-discipline: It indicates the healthy practice of running a business on the part of the woman entrepreneurs.
 - Fear of Failure: It reflects the fear of making a loss in business.
- Caste Factors Divides Organized or Unorganized Small Business: Organizing among themselves is allowed only within some communities of women who belong to a higher echelon of caste hierarchy in the villages. Those women who are not able to unite and work together because of their caste and origin are found to do their own business at a much smaller scale. For example, the villages under this study have some women entrepreneurs from other communities who work as vegetable sellers in the common space of the center of the villages. It was noted that such ladies are all doing their business single-handedly, not in a group or even in pairs. Since this paper has principally dealt with the women entrepreneurs of food business in a particular community, further study could be envisaged to analyze such women entrepreneurs who seem to be *not encourage to unite*, even in earning money for their sustenance and survival.

4.4. The Idea of Social Capital and Its Efficacy in the Indian Context

4.4.1. Social Capital for Ensuring Sustainability and Wealth Creation

The production of food items for sale has been carried out daily, entirely by the women entrepreneurs themselves from the community. By earning money through their newly started processing food enterprises, those rural women entrepreneurs are hailed as responsible individuals (*jawabdari*, meaning ‘answerable’ indicating ‘being responsible’ in the local vernacular, Gujarati language) who stood up to tide over such an unusual, but hopefully once-in-lifetime, biological hazard as the COVID-19 pandemic. Community people secured the place for them to assemble and work daily, timely mentoring them to run their enterprises, delivering the finished goods, spreading words about their products, assuring smooth financial transactions to secure payments, and intervening to negotiate on the price of raw materials.

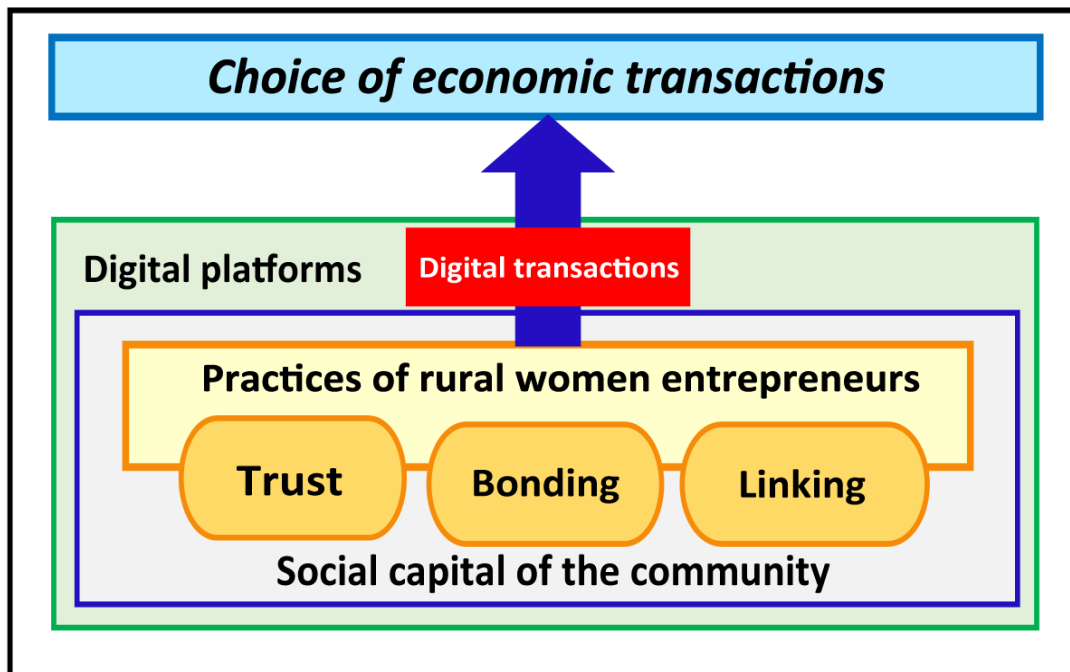


Figure 2. Economic transactions of rural women entrepreneurs in the informal economy with the help of social capital.

The above Figure 2 shows how rural women entrepreneurs choose the manner of economic transactions in society. They have been guided by trust and bonding while linking interpersonal networks. Apart from utilizing social capital, digital platforms are recognized as having a much wider influence on the entire community including those women entrepreneurs.

4.4.2. ICT Compensates or Facilitates Social Capital

In the age of the Internet, economic transactions are not restricted to actual human interactions on the ground. It is vital to note that since long the application of social wealth has been extensively carried out, even though this process has not been assigned any particular name.

- Enhancing on-going business activities as well as customization: Informal financial transactions supported by the Internet have paved the way for rural women entrepreneurs to connect themselves directly to their clients and secure payment through digital platforms, not only against the delivery but even for booking bulk orders with advance payments towards the customized sale of processed food items.
- Digital Gender Divide creates another chain of support among themselves: It should be noted that there is an opening for rural women entrepreneurs to enter into economic transactions *only through digital platforms* as marked red in Figure 2. It is digital transactions that divide rural women entrepreneurs into two groups: one is digitally savvy and another with no access to smartphones or the Internet. In this case study, the observed digital divide has created another chain of support within the group of women entrepreneurs to assign the responsibility of digital transactions to two to three members of women who own appropriate gadgets and can afford to pay for the Internet connection on their own.

4.4.3. ICT at Hand: Commercial Transactions with Handsets

The rollout of 5G in India has been the fastest in the world. In October 2022, India launched 5G services to enhance digital connectivity and improve network infrastructure as well as access to high-speed internet (International Trade Administration U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023). This study found that penetration of information technology and availability of Internet connection in their villages enabled rural women entrepreneurs who have their handsets to utilize digital platforms for running their businesses.

- Social Distance As A Trigger For Online Interactions with Customers: The COVID-19 pandemic compelled them to do marketing their products and receiving orders from customers online, mainly through social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.
- Networking for Marketing Online: Increased online interaction reduced the chances of cold calls and in-person interactions for marketing and most of their orders come from WhatsApp contacts and groups.
- Time-saving and Increased Safety: Lesser in-person interaction is appreciated by the rural women entrepreneurs as well as by their family members.
- Acquiring Knowledge and Knowledge Sharing: They learn new techniques for packaging and pricing their products through YouTube videos together with fellow women entrepreneurs.
- Product and Process Innovation: Innovative ways of preparing processed food and using new ingredients are learnt through YouTube videos or posts from entrepreneurs on social media.

The usage of digital platforms by the rural women entrepreneurs under the study is summarized below in Table 2.

Table 2. Usage of digital platforms by rural women entrepreneurs interviewed.

Usage of digital platforms	Purpose	Social networking site (SNS)	Impacts
Audio call	➤ Informing clients about the products	WhatsApp	• Able to contact clients.
Video call	➤ Showing clients sample products	WhatsApp	• Able to cultivate new clients including first-time buyers.
Networking by messages and advertisements	➤ Creating networking groups ➤ Exploring new clients	WhatsApp groups Facebook Instagram	• Able to reach other community members in cities and abroad. • Get introduced by community elders or influential members. • Finding mentors and clients.
Marketing	➤ Marketing	WhatsApp Facebook Messenger	• Able to share visual images at no cost to advertising agencies.
Sales of the products	➤ Receiving orders	WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger	• Booking for festive seasons increased.
Receiving payment	➤ Receiving direct payment from clients against an order/orders ➤ Advance payment	Google pay PayTM	• Receipt of timely payment • Decreased the chances of borrowing money for business.
Making payment	➤ Making payments for raw materials to the wholesalers	Google pay net banking PayTM	• Shortened the waiting time after the clients buy the products. • Reduced the time for traveling. • Saved time can be utilized for production.
Learning	➤ Getting hints for new products as well as packaging ideas ➤ Checking attractive packaging and naming	YouTube TikTok (Before it was banned in India)	• Brainstorming for innovative products by browsing the Internet with keywords.
Production planning	➤ Plan for special production for festival seasons		
Advertising	➤ Creating visual advertisements	WhatsApp Facebook Messenger	• Able to find new customers. • Able to retain repeat customers.

There are several findings regarding the nature of digital transaction of the rural women entrepreneurs.

1. It was found that the level of digitization varies among the women.
2. The acceptance among the male family members is the key determinant for women to have access to digital gadgets, in this case of rural Gujarat, only smartphones.

3. The business of women entrepreneurs is appreciated if it contributes to family income.
4. The male members of their family, namely, husband, brothers, father-in-law, or even grown-up son(s) rather “let the women have their own handsets” in the words of some women.
5. The rural women entrepreneurs under the study are only able to do digital transactions in their vernacular language, Gujarati.
6. Other group members have entrusted those women with their own handsets to oversee all the digital transaction for their enterprise.
7. Each of the women entrepreneurs keep hand-written notes of their daily income and her own share of group investment for the next immediate production.

4.4.4. Challenges for Future Business

Seeking institutional funding becomes difficult because of the lack of records of their business growth, discouraging women entrepreneurs to convince creditors for financing them, which would have allowed them to adapt new technologies and inputs (Atela et al., 2018). The rural women entrepreneurs keep financial transaction details, such as daily income and payments towards material procurements, in handwritten notes and buy materials by cash. Rather than consolidated financial status as a group, they are principally motivated by their own daily profits that would decide the amount of individual monthly income. The rural women entrepreneurs face the following two challenges:

- Long-term Planning: Future vision or forecast is required to chart the ways to increase the profit of their enterprise.
- Risk-preparedness: Long-term business plan need to anticipate potential business risks.

4.5. In Search of Institutional Supports

It was striking to find that none of the rural women entrepreneurs thought to use smartphones to seek for information to get ideas about receiving government support or possibility of finance from the banks to facilitate their business. For such information regarding possible institutional supports, they first check with senior male community members of their villages. If any educated female community member is around within their villages, professionally successful and working in the fields such as education, medicines, banking and/or insurance sectors, she would be the first one to hear them out about their woes, more as their confidants and friends, rather than their advisors. There are two important aspects to be noted regarding seeking institutional support by the rural women entrepreneurs.

- No Direct Communication with Government Agencies and Financial Institutions: There is hardly any attempt on the part of the women entrepreneurs to establish direct communication with government agencies or financial institutions. The government schemes and financing options for small enterprises by banks hardly reach those who run such businesses in rural areas.
- Trust and Network Weigh Over Professional Support: It was found that the women entrepreneurs tend to seek information from rather familiar faces of the locality who may not necessarily have experience in running a business on their own but possibly be able to connect them to more resourceful persons with better knowledge about the subjects of the concerns of the rural women entrepreneurs.

This has made them justify their thinking that it is often approachable and reliable to depend on “those who are in the same village” and “our own people” for creating their own informal support system for advice and finance, as and when necessary, mainly through following three ways:

- Seeking some help among the same group of women entrepreneurs who run the business together.
- Requesting support from their financially capable family members or kins.
- Banking on the goodwill of community members who are elder and affluent.

All the rural women entrepreneurs interviewed acknowledge that establishing the current source of their regular income is due to the above three supports and are convinced to tread on the same path to rely on their informal supporters who would not charge them consultation fees or take advantage of their vulnerabilities, securing comfort and safety of the women.

4.6. Innovation and Entrepreneurship

On the other hand, once they find comfort within their reliable network of supporters within their own community, they aggressively exploit opportunities to expand their reach to new customers, which could be considered as a sign of strong entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs started improvising the ingredients for their products. Some wild plants which could be used for food intake have been also introduced into the production process. This has been appreciated by the local people a lot as they have seen how those women make efforts to prick such plants early in the morning, some of them even getting their arms scratched by the sharp thorns of the trees and bushes in the process.

4.7. SWOT Analysis of Rural Women Entrepreneurs

The informal business practices of rural women entrepreneurs under this study are found to have strong relation with social capital, considerably influenced by beliefs, behavioral rules as well as interpersonal networks of the society. It is also important to acknowledge the presence of virtual platforms though the *digital gender divide* exists despite of accessibility of the Internet. Lack of personal gadgets for some rural women entrepreneurs does not allow all of them to be fully conversant with digital transactions for their business.

The case studied in this research is examined by Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis (SWOT analysis) and its outcome is summarized below:

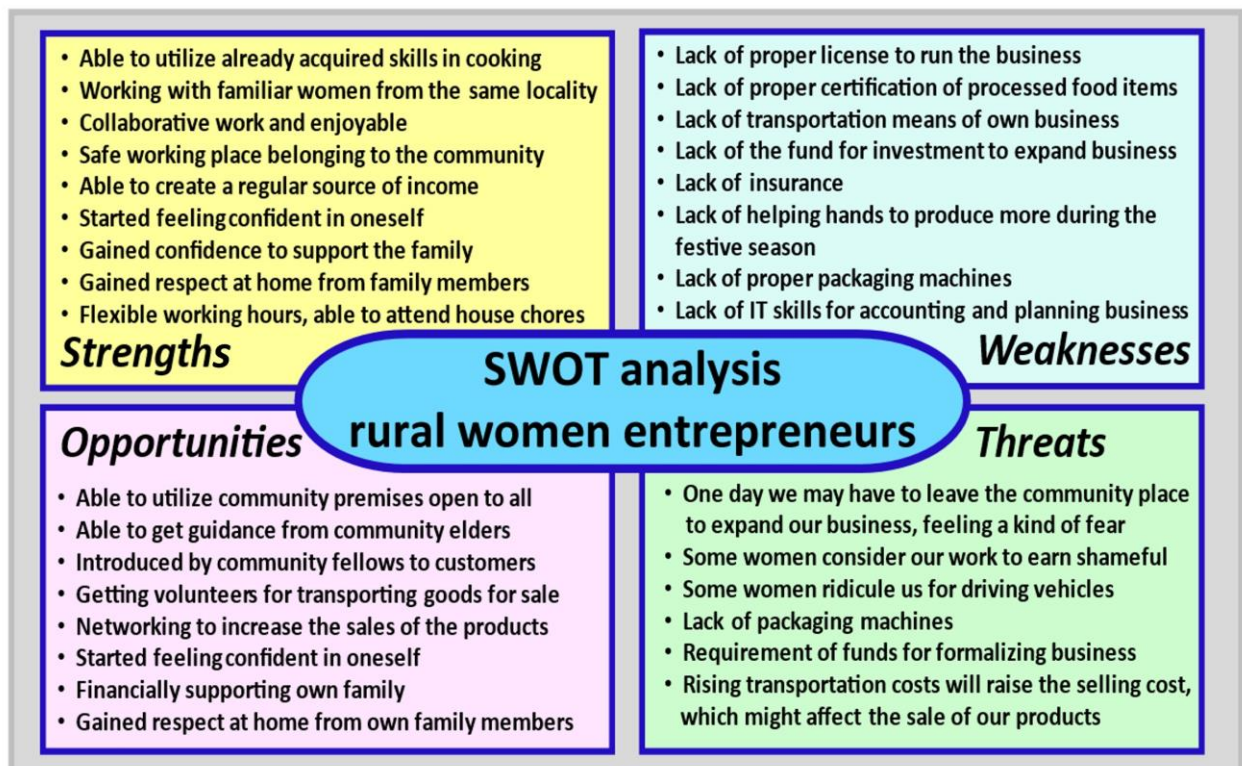


Figure 3. SWOT analysis of rural women entrepreneurs in the informal economy in rural North Gujarat, India.

Figure 3 illustrates the rural women entrepreneurs try to balance their efforts and energy to look after the needs of family and community members: they opted for food processing business which was easy to be started at

home or at community premises, ensuring their safe space and work within the range of what they could afford in terms of finance, skills, space, and time. There are following characteristics observed:

1. Familiarity and safety are the two key crucial elements valued by the rural women entrepreneurs.
2. Respect from family and community members enhances the confidence of the rural women entrepreneurs.
3. Family needs are to be prioritized and planned in their business schedules.
4. Community help is actively sought in terms of time, space, mobility, as well as professional help to enhance business strategy.
5. Financial support from the others outside of their own enterprise members would be always the last resort for the rural women entrepreneurs.

It is important to note that the SWOT analysis has indicated the rural women entrepreneurs face two types of challenges as below:

- A. On personal front: Going beyond the traditional roles as women is criticized by some of their fellow community women, which initially bothered them. But at some point, being entrepreneurs, they seem to have reconciled with such discord and rather aspire to excel in their business.
- B. On professional front: Those professional tasks such as licensing, certification, logistics, financial support, insurance, long-term business strategies, accounting, planning, introducing new tools/equipment/machineries, handling additional manpower other than their own members, or outsourcing some services like packaging and transport required for business planning, are beyond the comfort zone of the rural women entrepreneurs.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Formal-Informal Dichotomy and Social Capital

Wealth Creation and Wealth Sharing: The study revealed that social capital enables wealth creation and wealth sharing through kinship, which has worked favorably for women entrepreneurs though their business remains informal. India has a vast informal space of entrepreneurship where social capital plays a significant role in initiating, sustaining, as well as expanding the business of the rural women entrepreneurs.

Business Management of the Rural Women Entrepreneurs: Self, Family, and Work: Formalizing their business is perceived as a cumbersome process and the rural women entrepreneurs are rather keen to compensate the lack of formality by being resilient in practicing certain values and disciplines applying their own rules to maintain punctuality, regularity, availability, and adaptability. Business management and strategies are perceived as more of their own self-management. Balancing family and work could facilitate them to establish a viable economy in the informal sector. Their motivation to start their own enterprises.

5.2. Community Support

Securing Safe Space and Enhancing Public Contacts: Securing a safe space to work is the biggest accelerator for the rural women entrepreneurs to initiate their own business. Incurring extra financial burden to travel a distance to a workplace would have prohibited them to do business as they could not do justice with attending domestic needs. That could have considerably discouraged their family support to accept that the women could spend time for their business. In this case study, their work venues are either at the common premises secured by the community or the homes of their own or of their fellow women entrepreneurs. In the environment that secures easy access to their workspace not only for themselves but also for their family members and other community members, the women entrepreneurs could have opportunities to present their products in the public space under the constant gaze of the community people and village populace.

Supporting Women's Business Equals to Giving Back to the Community: Community members living abroad or in other city centers where their processed food products could have potential affluent customers are willing to make

payment for their products even at much higher pricing. That is considered a kind of contribution to support their homeland (*vatan sewa* in Gujarati/Hindi, meaning 'service to the homeland'). Similar spirit was found among other community members who are significantly influential and considered respected figures thanks to their seniority, professional success, and/or service to the community who willingly volunteered to support the rural women entrepreneurs.

5.3. Processed Food Business with Consolidates Indian Lineage and Indian Heritage

The generational transfer of traditional culinary expertise to the next generation is dwindling, and nowadays fewer people can prepare *baji*, *laddu*, *papad* (local edible product) etc., that have been the staple food of Indian households. There are fewer living examples of expert cooks in the family. A similar decline in expertise at home could be observed in sewing, crochet making, and other handicraft works. It could be possibly argued that such a choice of buying processed food products from rural women back home indicates that cosmopolitan South Asian women's attempt to be socially [read communally] acceptable models of domesticity, by not indulging themselves in the process of the labor to sustain their own food culture abroad. As the younger generations assimilate themselves more into the cultures of the foreign lands that have become their adopted homes or birth countries, these informal transactions of processed food will give a vital source of business expansion for rural women entrepreneurs back in India. Similar examples from other regions with other processed food products could show us more linkages between local culture and the immigrants of Indian origin who seek and favor affordable and flavored ways of sustaining cultural connections with their ancestral land.

5.4. Public Stigma: Gender-based Role for Women and Fear of Failure

Public stigma and fear of business failure was studied by Simmons, Wiklund, Levie, Bradley, and Sunny (2019) examining the reentry decisions of 8171 entrepreneurs from 35 countries with an ecosystem framework and stigma theory: it is significant to note that the study found the evidence of gender gaps vary across ecosystem framework conditions. Here lies an important indication for future course of studies on women entrepreneurs.

The entrepreneurial ecosystem of the women entrepreneurs under the study showed *public fear of losing dignity as a community member*. It is related to honor (*ijjat*) and reputation (*pratiṣṭhā*) not only as an individual, but also, and primarily, as a member of the community. The rural women entrepreneurs hesitate to start a business due to (1) the lack of courage, (2) fund shortage, (3) the lack of new ideas, and (4) the lack of confidence. The idea of owning something of their own appeals to them, but fear of possible business failure grips them more than the excitement of owning something they can call their own. Furthermore, the fear of making a loss in business drives them to rely more on their community members whom they can trust.

Therefore, the authors suggest that it is important to consider following three factors in the study on women entrepreneurs:

- Public stigma of business failure: The rural women entrepreneurs try their best not to make any business failure because it stigmatizes themselves as well as their family and kins.
- Public fear of business failure: The rural women entrepreneurs consider business failure as a shame in the public sphere.
- Public fear of losing dignity: The authors observed that some other women in the same villages showed great concern over the women entrepreneurs' involvement in manual labor: those women would not tolerate such work as they regard the rural women entrepreneurs degrade the social status of their community.

5.5. The Fear of Failure Drives Women Entrepreneurs to Social Capital

The fear of failure on the part of women entrepreneurs led them to rely more on social capital. Since their working environment is exposed to immediate family members and community people, the rural women

entrepreneurs are found to be extremely conscious not to make the kind of mistakes that would put themselves as well as their family members in an awkward situation that may lead their community people consider disgraceful. It seems that there is a curious mixture of fear, comfort, and resolve in carrying their business forward by deriving credible source of strength by networking with community members including their own family members. Combined with limited available resources during the COVID-19 pandemic, their determination and commitment to engage themselves to compensate the loss of family income drove them to find comfort in asking trusted members of community or kinship. This was especially so when they had the fear of failure in their heart. It is important to note that such “social risk” impacting humans and society could become the main drive for the rural women entrepreneurs to initiate their own business without any prior experience.

6. CONCLUSION

This example of interconnected resilience against the COVID-19 pandemic and entrepreneurship has successfully negated the challenges of their access to infrastructures to support their business, required capital, markets, new technology and educational opportunities for innovation. In this study, agricultural constraints due to climate change, diminishing landholdings, financial constraints, lack of earning male members in the family, and penchant for migrating abroad for the prospects of the following generations are acknowledged as the background factors that motivate rural women to initiate business. Social capital sustained and encouraged engagement among the community members by rendering support to rural women entrepreneurs through networking based on trust and bonding, strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the rural women entrepreneurs. It effectively enhanced the productivity of their enterprises. It is important to note that those associations include “networks of civic engagement” as well as social norms.

6.1. Implications for Policy Directions

Development Policies Need to Learn About Social Capital at Work in Informal Sector: Providing access to working capital and other possible resources could potentially enhance the entrepreneurial performance of low income households in informal sector. So far, development policies have not taken account of the impact of social capital at work in society and this knowledge gap needs to be taken care of. Some case examples could be the milestones for policy makers. In Malaysia the study on women entrepreneurs in manufacturing, retailing, wholesale, agriculture, and service industries conducted by Mamun et al. (2016) revealed empirical evidence of enhanced entrepreneurial competencies thanks to structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions of social capital. In India, in Rajasthan, Krishna and Uphoff (1999) researched on the database of 2397 individuals (both men and women in equal ratio) and 64 focus group interviews with village leaders on watershed conservation, mainly using a relatively observable structural dimension as ROLES, SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS as SOCIAL NETWORKS, and PRECEDENTS and cognitive dimension of social capital with its focus on TRUST/RECIPROCATION and SOLIDALITY which lead to actions of COOPERATION and GENEROSITY (pp.51-52) to understand mutually beneficial collective action (p.13). There should be more empirical studies on microenterprises in India to understand the working of the informal economy to formulate effective interventions utilizing social capital.

Informal Institutions on Economic Development: The women entrepreneurs showed their resilience attitude through resourcefulness thanks to networking, adaptability to change, consistency in their endeavors, and continuity as a group. The significant presence of self-employed, micro-enterprise owners was acknowledged as the outcome of the 2006-07 all-India survey on the informal sector. Revealing the strategic acumen of informal sectors, Gurtoo (2009) proposed a framework that balances the entrepreneurial spirit of the individuals, market dynamics of the economy, and socio-economic imperatives for a developing nation. In this context, it is worth looking at International Labor Organization (2019)’s recommendations:

1. Supporting small economic units should be the focus of economic and social development strategies.

2. Access to finance and markets should be facilitated to help advance women's entrepreneurship so that their enterprises will become formal and environmentally sustainable.
3. This will lead to understand a wider ecosystem to support productivity of those enterprises.

6.2. Implications for Further Research Directions

Being Informal in Developing Economies: More than a decade ago, India's informal economy was "extensive, persistent and even growing in many populations" (Williams & Gurtoo, 2011) and this trend continues in India. More comparative empirical studies need to be conducted on the genesis and prevalence of informal business practices of women entrepreneurs in India. Comparative studies between self-employed women and as the women who are waged informal employees could highlight the entrepreneurial mindset of women entrepreneurs in particular regional settings and reveal the factors that keep their productive activities in the informal sector.

Limited Acceptance of Consumable Goods in Caste-Ridden Ecosystem: The authors observed that only such food items prepared by the higher caste communities could be traded and consumed by the public in general. Thus, manufacturing/preparing food items and selling them in rural areas is possible for women from certain communities who are allowed to cook and be acknowledged in the public scene. It is important to note that this could further restrict lower caste women to explore affordable earning opportunities in rural society where people know the birth and family history of each and everyone. Further empirical studies on the comparison among communities of the same villages could show how such acceptance is determined according to the castes and communities of the women entrepreneurs.

Nostalgia for Indian Culture Enhances Business Opportunities for Processed Food Products: The study finds there has been a constant and growing demand among the people of Indian origin living abroad to source processed Indian food items from rural artisans like the rural women entrepreneurs under this study. Buying the processed food products prepared by the women of their community has been appreciated as a symbol of supporting Indian lineage as well as appreciating Indian heritage. That is especially so when the migrated community members have started losing touch with elaborate time-consuming preparation of such food products (Srinivas, 2006). The ever-increasing demand for processed food products in domestic and international markets gives a big impetus for the processed food sector to become even more important for India's economic growth, further encouraged by supportive government policies (Naren, 2023). It will be a theme of further study on the relationship between migrated community members and homemade food products.

Funding: This research is supported by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (Grant number: 23K11610).

Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the Keio University, Japan has granted approval for this study on 16 January 2023.

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: Conceptualization, methodology, writing—review and editing and supervision, T.K. and R.S.; interviews, formal analysis, writing—original draft preparation, T.K.; funding acquisition, R.S. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Afridi, F., Dinkelman, T., & Mahajan, K. (2018). Why are fewer married women joining the work force in rural India? A decomposition analysis over two decades. *Journal of Population Economics*, 31, 783-818. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-017-0671-y>
- Atela, J., Gannon, K. E., & Click, F. (2018). *Climate change adaptation among female-led micro, small and medium enterprises in semi-arid areas: A case study from Kenya*. Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy Working Paper No. 338 (Online) and Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment Working Paper No. 304.

- Bachina, V., Srivastava, S., Bhatt, M., & Sheth, M. (2022). *Living between draughts and floods: Differentiated impacts of co-located hazards in Gujarat, India*. *Institute of Development Studies*. Retrieved from <https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/living-between-droughts-and-floods-differentiated-impacts-of-co-located-hazards-in-gujarat-india/>
- Blakeslee, D., Dar, A., Fishman, R., Malik, S., Pellegrina, H. S., & Bagavathinathan, K. S. (2023). Irrigation and the spatial pattern of local economic development in India. *Journal of Development Economics*, 161, 102997. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2022.102997>
- Blakeslee, D., Fishman, R., & Srinivasan, V. (2020). Way down in the hole: Adaptation to long-term water loss in rural India. *American Economic Review*, 110(1), 200-224. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20180976>
- Chambers, R. (1988). *Managing canal irrigation: Practical analysis from South Asia*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120. <https://doi.org/10.1086/228943>
- Dasgupta, P. (2000). Economic progress and the idea of social capital. In P. Dasgupta & I. Serageldin (Eds), *Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspective*. In (pp. 325-424). Washington D.C: The World Bank.
- Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India. (2022). *An analysis of India's labour market*. Retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/in/Documents/about-deloitte/in-soe-labour-market-noexp.pdf>
- Fukuyama, F. (1999). *Social capital and civil society*. *The Institute of Public Policy*. George Mason University. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/seminar/1999/reforms/fukuyama.htm#figl>
- Government of India Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises. (2022). *Annual report 2021-22*. Retrieved from <https://msme.gov.in/sites/default/files/MSMEENGLISHANNUALREPORT2021-22.pdf>
- Government of India Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises. (2023). *Annual report 2022-23*. Ministry of MSME, Government of India. Retrieved from <https://msme.gov.in/sites/default/files/MSMEANNUALREPORT2022-23ENGLISH.pdf>
- Gregory, A. (2022). *Covid has intensified gender inequalities, global study finds*. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/02/covid-intensified-existing-gender-inequalities-global-study-finds>
- Grootaert, C., Narayan, D., Jones, V. N., & Woolcock, M. (2003). *Measuring social capital: An integrated questionnaire*. The World Bank Working Paper No.18. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- Gujarat State Map Revenue Department Government of Gujarat. (2021). *Map of the state of Gujarat*. Revenue Department, Government of Gujarat. Retrieved from https://revenuedepartment.gujarat.gov.in/downloads/state_of_gujarat_map_2021.pdf
- Gurtoo, A. (2009). Policy support for informal sector entrepreneurship: Micro-enterprises in India. *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, 14(02), 181-194. <https://doi.org/10.1142/s1084946709001223>
- International Labor Organization. (2019). *Small matters: Global evidence on the contribution to employment by the self-employed, micro-enterprises and SMEs*. *International Labor Organization*. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_723282.pdf
- International Trade Administration U.S. Department of Commerce. (2023). *India country commercial guide. (Leading Sectors for US Exports & Investments, Information and Communication Technology)*. Washington, D.C: International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Korreck, S. (2019). Women entrepreneurs in India: What is holding them back. *Observer Research Foundation Issue Brief, Forthcoming*, 1(317), 1-10.
- Krishna, A., & Uphoff, N. (1999). *Mapping and measuring social capital: A conceptual and empirical study of collective action for conserving and developing watersheds in Rajasthan, India*. *The World Bank Social Development Family Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network*. Retrieved from <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/416881468752419130/pdf/multi0page.pdf>
- Lingam, P. (2023). *Developing rural entrepreneurship in India*. *The Times of India*. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/developing-rural-entrepreneurship-in-india/>

- Mahambare, V., Dhhanaj, S., & Sharma, S. (2021). *Workers are moving off Indian farms but where are they going?* Retrieved from <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/workers-are-moving-off-indian-farms-but-where-are-they-going-11616603448650.html>
- Mamun, A. A., Muniady, R. A. L., Permarupa, P. Y., Zainol, N. R. B., Nawi, N. B. C., & Malarvizhi, C. (2016). Social capital and entrepreneurial competencies: A study among women micro-entrepreneurs in Malaysia. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 50(5), 363-370. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jda.2016.0050>
- Mimaki, J., Takeuchi, Y., & Shaw, R. (2009). The role of community-based organization in the promotion of disaster preparedness at the community level: A case study of a coastal town in the Kochi Prefecture of the Shikoku Region, Japan. *Journal of Coastal Conservation*, 13, 207-215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11852-009-0065-8>
- Nakagawa, Y., & Shaw, R. (2004). Social capital: A missing link to disaster recovery. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies & Disasters*, 22(1), 5-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/028072700402200101>
- Naren, V. (2023). *India's food processing industry in 2022: Challenges, opportunities, and the way ahead*. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/indias-food-processing-industry-in-2022-challenges-opportunities-and-the-way-ahead/>
- Pangestu, M. E. (2022). *Meet the women entrepreneurs who are breaking down 'glass walls'*. 25 March 2022, published by world economic forum in collaboration with Thomson Reuters Foundation trust.org. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/inclusive-recovery-empower-women-entrepreneurs/>
- Pocock, D. F. (1972). *Kanbi and Patidar: A study of the Patidar community of Gujarat*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Putnam, R., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. (1993). *Making democracy work: Civic transitions in modern Italy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65-78. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0002>
- Reed, M. N. (2020). The labor force participation of Indian women before and after widowhood. *Demographic Research*, 43, 673-706. <https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2020.43.24>
- Sainath, P. (2020). *NCRB stats over past 3 years 'unusable', women are single largest exclusion in India's farmer suicides data*. First Post. Press Trust of India. Retrieved from <https://www.firstpost.com/india/ncrb-stats-over-past-3-years-unusable-women-are-single-largest-exclusion-in-indias-farmer-suicides-data-p-sainath-7985371.html>
- Serageldin, I., & Grootaert, C. (2000). Definition of social capital: An integrated view. In *Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspective*, edited by P. Dasgupta and I. Serageldin. In (pp. 40-58). Washington D.C: The World Bank.
- Shaw, R., & Sinha, R. (2003). Towards sustainable recovery: Future challenges after the Gujarat earthquake, India. *Risk Management*, 5, 35-51. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.rm.8240155>
- Simmons, S. A., Wiklund, J., Levie, J., Bradley, S. W., & Sunny, S. A. (2019). Gender gaps and reentry into entrepreneurial ecosystems after business failure. *Small Business Economics*, 53, 517-531. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-018-9998-3>
- Singh, R., & Sebastian, T. (2018). Familial legacies: A study on Gujarati women and family entrepreneurship. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, 8, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40497-018-0090-x>
- Srinivas, T. (2006). As mother made it: The cosmopolitan Indian family, 'authentic' food and the construction of cultural Utopia. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 32(2), 191-221.
- Srinivasu, B., Bhatia, S., & Gupta, A. (2022). Collision of the COVID 19 lockdown on women entrepreneurship in Uttarakhand: A micro-level analysis. *Arthaniti: Journal of Economic Theory and Practice*, 09767479211065970. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09767479211065970>
- The Economic Times of India. (2022). *India's changing agricultural landscape and way to inclusive growth*. The Economic Times. Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/markets/commodities/views/indias-changing-agricultural-landscape-and-its-way-to-inclusive-growth/articleshow/95622420.cms>

- The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2022). *Agricultural policy monitoring and evaluation 2022: Reforming agricultural policies for climate mitigation*. 14. India. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2c4c5c42-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/2c4c5c42-en>
- The World Bank. (2022). *The gender data: Female labor force participation – World Bank Gender Data Portal*. Retrieved from <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/data-stories/flfp-data-story/>
- The World Bank. (2023). *The world bank in India*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview#3>
- The World Economic Forum. (2019). *Global gender gap report 2020: Insight report*. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf
- The World Economic Forum. (2023). *Global gender gap report 2023: Insight report June 2023*. Geneva: The World Economic Forum.
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization. (2023). *Indian food & beverages sectoral system of innovation (IFBSSI). Measurement, Analysis and Policy Recommendations (UNIDO-DST Survey Report)*. United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) & Department of Science & Technology, Government of India. Vienna: Austria. March 2023. Retrieved from <https://hub.unido.org/sites/default/files/publications/Food%20SSI%20Report.pdf>
- Visaria, L. (2021). Gujarat's development story. *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, 23(1), 1-3.
- Welsh, D. H., Kaciak, E., Fadairo, M., Doshi, V., & Lanchimba, C. (2023). How to erase gender differences in entrepreneurial success? Look at the ecosystem. *Journal of Business Research*, 154, 113320. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113320>
- WIEGO. (2023). *COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy: Informal workers in Ahmedabad, India*. Retrieved from https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/WIEGO_FactSheet_Ahmedabad%20for%20web.pdf
- Williams, C. C., & Gurtoo, A. (2011). Evaluating women entrepreneurs in the informal sector: Some evidence from India. *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, 16(03), 351-369. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2290543>

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of Asian Social Science shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.