

Empowerment through Entrepreneurship: A Qualitative study of women Artisan Entrepreneurial Ecosystem & their contribution towards economic and social development in the state of Sikkim & North Bengal Regions

(An ICSSR Sponsored Minor Research Project)

Dr. Pradip Kumar Das^{1*}, Dr. Nitya Sundar Nanda², Dr. S. S. Mohanty²

Faculty, Dept. of Management, Sikkim Central University,

Faculty, Vignana Jyothi Institute of Management, Hyderabad.

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship is universally considered a major force driving the progress of modern society. Entrepreneurs bring forth new ideas and solutions that constitute the very crux of enterprise development and economic growth creation. In the context of a developing nation like ours, North Eastern India, the empowerment of women entrepreneurs has become a core approach towards achieving sustainable development. The current study explores the evolving scenario of women artisan entrepreneurship, especially the determinants of its expansion. It seeks to understand the issues facing women in the entrepreneurial setup of Sikkim & North Bengal regions and their significant contribution to the same. The emergence of women artisan entrepreneurs not only adds to the economic independence of women but also enhances and fosters their exclusive capabilities, securing their livelihood and creating societal development. In responding to the main challenges facing women entrepreneurs, the current study seeks to sensitise policymakers and instill fresh initiative in this regard. Through the study of a few carefully selected case studies, the study focuses on the experiences, achievements, issues, and societal implications pertaining to women artisan entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, Eco system, social development, Artisan entrepreneurship.

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1. Introduction

The economy's globalisation, the fast evolution of new technology, and fierce competition have presented several difficulties for the cottage and rural craft sectors (Bhattacharjya et al., 2019). A creative sector that fosters cross-cultural connections worldwide is artisan entrepreneurship (Rashid & Ratten, 2021). Individuals with special talents for the natural manufacture of goods are known as artisan entrepreneurs (Pret & Cogan, 2018). Handcrafted goods are made by artisan business owners (Arias & Cruz, 2019) with the use of basic equipment or technology, such as useful jewellery or home items, or speciality foods, such as beers or artisanal baked goods (Hill, 2021). The initial purpose of handicrafts was to satisfy the requirements of the local populace; these goods are the outcome of crafts people's labour with naturally occurring resources (Marques et al., 2019). The handicrafts of the people, regions, and cultures they belong to define them (Igwe et al., 2019). So, they basically concentrate on producing and selling handcrafted, culturally inspired items like apparel and cuisine (Hoyte, 2019). The expansion of creative industries and a stronger focus on culturally

significant goods and services have increased interest in artisan business (Ratten et al., 2019). Investments in entrepreneurship, quality, and innovation are necessary for the artisan sector to flourish and move towards a worldwide market (Teixeira & Ferreira, 2019). Artisan entrepreneurship therefore incorporates a variety of goals, including protecting and passing down cultural traditions, tackling and enhancing economic difficulties, and promoting balanced local and regional development. It is founded on the distinct networks and abilities that individual entrepreneurs possess. Although artisan entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth in the cultural sector, rigorous and quantitative review guidelines are lacking (Yi et al., 2023). In order to integrate with the nation's R&D program, India's policy planners are unable to develop the essential policy reforms for rural traditional cottage industries, including the bell metal industry, wood carving, ceramics, blacksmithing, silk rearing, handlooms, and handicrafts. The traditional cottage sector has received surprisingly little attention in the Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (STI). Roughly 96% of Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSME) in the nation are not registered (Pachouri & Sharma,

*Corresponding Author

Dr. Pradip Kumar Das*

Email: pkdas@cus.ac.in.

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2016). This leads to a minimal or non-existent dissemination of technology in this industry. In this case, the majority of the craftspeople use labour-intensive, time-consuming, conventional, ancient tools (Bhattacharjya et al., 2019).

As artisan entrepreneurship keeps expanding and more people launch side projects or inherit existing firms, the makeup of artisan entrepreneurs is likewise shifting to include more women (Hoyte, 2019). Women artisan entrepreneurs are given considerably greater attention in emerging countries because of the significant percentage of women employed in the artisan industry (ILO, 2018). Female entrepreneurs broke gender gaps and time constraints, created improved standards of life for their families, supported a decent living at home, and created mobility and well-being through craft firms (Ruiz-Martínez et al., 2023). Changes in the homes and communities of the women artisans were part of the empowering process (Brogan & Dooley, 2024). The research tends to focus on women's artisan entrepreneurship, which is a relatively new and uncharted market. Women artisan business owners in Sikkim are a major force behind the state's social and economic advancement (Katre, 2018). Through appropriate financial inclusion, this particular field has enormous potential to empower women and change society. Since it has the potential to expedite the notion of financial inclusion and social development as a primary agenda item for the government and policy-making bodies, the study of the women artisan entrepreneur eco system is a topic worth pursuing.

2. Literature Review

Being able to craft and participate in "Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation" are becoming more and more important in the modern world (Xu, 2019). Artisan entrepreneurship has garnered more attention in the literature on management and entrepreneurship in recent years (Tregear, 2005; Hill, 2021; Igwe et al., 2019; Arias & Cruz, 2019). Among the attributes of the "craftsman spirit" are dedication, perfection, quality, and attention to detail (Zhu et al., 2022). Craftsman skills and practices that include local potential, culture, and authenticity are the focus of artisan enterprise in general. An artisan is a motivated individual whose handicrafts, pushed by the market, reflect the ideals and lessons of their community. The artisan and his or her craft are the main drivers of the development of the artisan's hometown, cultural heritage, and identity in a home setting, where innovation, technology, sustainability, and the principles of a circular economy converge with hard work, perseverance, dedication, and joy to create a unique identity (Rodrigues et al., 2024). Even when it is a sign of empowerment, craftsmen's feelings are not always immediately correlated with the development of their business skills (Banerjee & Mazzarella, 2022). Growing interest in artisan entrepreneurship has resulted from the growth of creative industries and the emphasis on culturally significant products and services (Ratten et al., 2019) these are the people who use both conventional and innovative talents (Ratten et al., 2019; Rashid & Ratten, 2021; Hoyte, 2019; Marques et al., 2019) cultural identities, and social networks (Hill, 2021; Rashid & Ratten, 2021; Bhattacharjya et al., 2019). One study's authors (Pret & Cogan, 2018) focused more on understanding the seven essential components of artisanal entrepreneurship: diversity, resources, development, motivation, behavioural context, and classification.

A study (Brogan & Dooley, 2024) stated that through the development of their skills, self-esteem, and leadership potential, artisan cooperatives have changed the lives of women. They first

learnt fundamental skills like measuring and cutting fabric, which are necessary for creating high-quality goods. They developed sophisticated skills over time, which allowed them to produce reliable, superior products for both domestic and international markets. Despite having no formal education, many women rose to positions of leadership and acquired the critical thinking abilities necessary to effectively solve problems. They were able to support their families, earn steady incomes, and dream of bigger dreams thanks to this growth. All things considered, their journey shows not only the growth of their skills but also a more significant change in their communities and lives.

Social capital can be easily transformed into economic capital with the help of family (Hill, 2021). For example, family artisan enterprise eventually contributes to the economic growth of the country, at least in the case of Macedonia, where many families own beekeeping enterprises, which means that the sector is likely to grow and provide new employment (Ramadani et al., 2019). The growth of small, art-based family businesses, which are fuelled by the artisans' character and the involvement of many generations, depends heavily on artisan entrepreneurship. However, entrepreneurship is influenced by the number of generations involved, which in turn influences how family enterprises grow (Gordini & Rancati, 2018). Studies reveal that artisan company owners in rural areas tend to work in low-skilled, informal, and family-oriented fields (Igwe et al., 2019). However, entrepreneurship in rural areas is still in its infancy, but artisan start-ups are becoming a more visible way to promote rural development. Through networks with regional craftspeople, these businesspeople create innovations and support regional customs for rural development using local resources, culture, and traditional knowledge (Marques et al., 2019). In order for neo-rural entrepreneurs to succeed, they need to be highly integrated into their local rural communities where artisan entrepreneur-mediators are involved in connecting artisans to rural and small city tourism. The degree to which these artisan entrepreneur-mediators are socially integrated in rural areas has a significant impact on their success (Bakas et al., 2018).

Besides, academic literature recognizes the significance of competencies, innovation, motivation, and entrepreneurial qualities within the context of their businesses, and also points to the challenges that artisan entrepreneurs encounter, such as a lack of resources, cultural identity issues, regulatory limitations, and environmental uncertainties (Hasanah et al., 2023). People are involved in non-agricultural and artisanal activities mostly as a pragmatic reaction to economics rather than to desire, as most of such activities are compelled by basic requirements. Therefore this suggests towards building enabling conditions for such activities (Igwe et al., 2019).

Artisan cooperatives are essential in enhancing the lives of women. They provide employment and basic services such as meals, childcare, and education, which are difficult to obtain in other forms of employment. Membership in cooperatives enables women to become economically independent, which enables them to feed their families and establish businesses. This enables them to be more independent and have a sense of community. Training programs are also essential in empowering women with skills beyond typical job training. The programs assist in addressing broader social issues and enhancing their general health. Research indicates that artisan cooperatives significantly transform the lives of women, demonstrating how they assist in advancing social and economic development in their communities (Brogan & Dooley,

2024). Meanwhile, entrepreneurial traits like being active, creative, risk-taking, and being good role models inspire women artisan entrepreneurs. Their families lead a better life, their living standards are better, social inequality decreases, and they become more prosperous and free (Yi et al., 2023). Empowering rural women artists is crucial for preserving cultural history, according to research. Economic, social, and human capital are the three most crucial ideas as they are necessary for stable lifestyles (Singh et al., 2025).

3. Research Methodology

The present study is a qualitative based study. Purposive sampling technique has been used for collecting the data. Hence, a semi structured questionnaire is used to interview the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of seven open ended questions. 41 women artisan entrepreneurs from 4 districts of Sikkim were interviewed for this study. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. First part consisted of the demographic profile of the respondents in order to get the overview of it. *Age, occupation, marital status,*

educational qualification and *state of domicile* are the demographic variables that were included for the study. And the second part of the questionnaire included seven open ended-questions. The analysis that follows is based on a strong methodological foundation, which guarantees that our results are both trustworthy and pertinent. We start by providing an overview of the data sources and the pre-processing procedures used to get the data set ready for analysis. We then use a range of statistical methods and analytical models to find trends, patterns, and connections in the data.

4. Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the replies tells the story of the report's data analysis. By combining these results, this research offers a thorough summary of the most important conclusions drawn from the information, emphasising how they relate to certain goals and queries raised in the report. In addition to addressing the main research issues, our goal in doing this study is to provide strategic suggestions that will inform future decisions and activities.

TABLE 4.1: Profile of the Artisan Women Entrepreneurs (N=41)

Particulars		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	Less than 30	4	9.8	9.8
	31 - 40 yrs	18	43.9	53.7
	41 - 50 yrs	12	29.3	83.0
	50 yrs and above	7	17.0	100.0
Total		41	100.0	
Occupation	Business	39	95.1	95.1
	Private job	1	2.4	97.6
	Retired Teacher/Social Worker/Business	1	2.4	100.0
Total		41	100.0	
Marital Status	Married	34	82.9	82.9
	Unmarried	5	12.2	95.1
	Widow	2	4.9	100.0
Total		41	100.0	
Educational Qualification	Under Matric	18	43.9	43.9
	Matric	8	19.5	63.4
	Class 12	3	7.3	70.7
	Graduation	10	24.4	95.2
	Post graduation	2	4.8	100.0
	Others	0	0.0	100.0
Total		41	100.0	
State of domicile	Yes	10	24.4	24.4
	No	28	68.3	92.7
	COI	3	7.3	100.0
Total		41	100.0	

Source: compiled and developed from the survey data

The age profile of the respondents indicates that 43.9% are between 31 and 40 years old, followed by 29.3% between 41 and 50 years, showing a high percentage of middle-aged individuals. Ninety-five percent (95.1%) are involved in business, indicating that the sample is mostly active entrepreneurs. The majority of the respondents are married (82.9%), showing a stable personal background. Educationally, a large majority (43.9%) has education lower than matriculation, whereas the majority (4.8%) have a postgraduate degree, reflecting comparatively low formal education levels among participants. In domicile status, 68.3% of respondents are not part of the state, whereas merely 24.4% are local residents, and 7.3% are Certificate of Identification (COI) holders, reflecting a heterogeneous mix regarding regional identity.

Qualitative Analysis (Semi-Structured Interview) (N=41)

Altogether, 41 number of artisan women entrepreneurs were contacted to collect their view regarding seven different open-ended statements and they are as follows:

A. *Kindly Provide a brief history of your business that includes (Name of your venture, Year of establishment, Employee profile & category, Business process, Annual turnover, Financial Benefits etc.)*

The image contains stories of various small business owners, primarily from rural or semi-rural areas, who started their enterprises in different industries like pickles, handmade goods, tailoring, crafts, food production, and traditional products. Many of these businesses faced challenges such as increased competition, impact from COVID-19, and difficulties in marketing and scaling up. Despite these challenges, some managed to turn a profit, particularly during peak seasons or by leveraging local resources and markets. Others, however, struggled to make significant profits due to market saturation or limited demand for their niche products. Some businesses also focused on social causes, like empowering women through employment. Overall, the stories highlight resilience, creativity, and the ongoing struggle of small-scale entrepreneurs to sustain their businesses.

B. *What are the objectives and inspirations behind to start the business (financial & non-financial)*

Personal Interests and Hobbies: Many individuals started their businesses driven by their personal interests, such as a fascination with nets, a passion for weaving, or a love for traditional crafts.

Financial Independence: A significant number of entrepreneurs aimed to achieve financial independence, either to support their families or to no longer rely on their spouses.

Empowering Women: Some business owners were motivated by the desire to provide employment opportunities for women in their communities.

Cultural Preservation: A few entrepreneurs were inspired by a desire to preserve and promote their state's culture and traditions through their businesses.

Social Impact: Some individuals were driven by the desire to help needy women and children, using their businesses as a means to support social causes.

Government Support and Inspiration: Several entrepreneurs were inspired by the support and training provided by government initiatives, which motivated them to start their businesses.

Passion for Food: A few business owners were motivated by a passion for food, such as making healthful homemade pickles or providing organic honey.

Overcoming Personal Challenges: Some individuals started their businesses during difficult times in their lives, which made them more committed to their ventures.

In summary, the motivations for starting these businesses are diverse, ranging from personal passions to financial needs, cultural preservation, social impact, and inspiration from government support.

C. *Please explain a few success factors or factors that is supporting and complimenting to your business (Your skill set, innovations, availability of skilled workers, availability of desirable raw materials, Support of Govt. & local authorities/Angel Investors).*

The text discusses the experiences and factors contributing to the success or challenges faced by various entrepreneurs in their businesses:

1. **Interest and Passion:** A common theme is that personal interest or passion in their craft, such as knitting, weaving, or food preparation, has been a primary factor in managing and sustaining their businesses.
2. **Support Systems:** Many entrepreneurs credit their success to the support received from family members, especially spouses, parents, or friends, as well as from government departments like the DIC (District Industries Centre).
3. **Creativity and Differentiation:** Some individuals attribute their ability to survive in the market to their creativity and the uniqueness of their products, which help differentiate them from competitors.
4. **Quality and Hard Work:** The quality of their products and the hard work they put into their businesses are highlighted as significant contributors to their success.
5. **Challenges and Market Saturation:** A few entrepreneurs mention that despite their efforts, their businesses are struggling due to market saturation, low demand, or a lack of innovation in their industry. In some cases, businesses are maintained more for personal leisure than for profit.
6. **Long-Term Commitment:** The dedication and perseverance to continue in the face of challenges, along

with effective communication skills and the ability to build strong client relationships, have been essential for many in maintaining their businesses.

7. **Cultural and Traditional Influences:** Some businesses are deeply rooted in cultural practices, and the involvement of family members in traditional crafts plays a significant role in their continuation.

Overall, while interest and passion are fundamental to their entrepreneurial journey, external support, quality of products, and the ability to adapt and innovate are also critical to sustaining and growing their businesses.

D. *Explain your contribution as an entrepreneur to the society and mankind (may be in terms of employment generation, financial inclusion, women empowerment, Development of your state & Local Community)*

The text reflects a mix of sentiments from entrepreneurs regarding their ability to contribute to society:

1. **Limited Contributions:** Many entrepreneurs feel that they are unable to make significant contributions to society, often stating that their businesses primarily allow them to support themselves and their families.
2. **Providing Training and Employment:** Despite their struggles, several entrepreneurs contribute to society by offering free training, particularly to women, to help them acquire skills in tailoring, sewing, or other crafts. Some also create seasonal employment opportunities.
3. **Charitable Efforts:** A few individuals donate a portion of their earnings to charities, orphanages, or other community needs, even though they may not consider these contributions substantial.
4. **Challenges in Business:** Some entrepreneurs face difficulties in marketing and growing their businesses, which limits their ability to give back to society. They often express that their contributions are minimal because they are still in the process of developing their businesses.
5. **Empowering Women:** A significant number of entrepreneurs focus on empowering women by providing them with the skills needed to become financially independent, thus indirectly contributing to societal upliftment.

Overall, while many feel they are not yet able to make meaningful societal contributions, they still engage in various efforts to support and uplift others through training, employment, and charitable donations.

E. *What are the major challenges (may be like financial constraints, infrastructure, access & availability of raw materials, Access to market & customers) you used to face in your business operation especially during the pandemic period. Please highlight the strategies adopted to overcome it.*

The text highlights the various challenges faced by entrepreneurs in their businesses:

1. **Marketing and Competition:** Many entrepreneurs struggle with getting their products noticed in a competitive marketplace, building brand recognition, and differentiating themselves from well-known brands.

2. **Raw Materials and Logistics:** Obtaining raw materials is a significant challenge, especially for those located in remote or expensive regions, leading to high costs and logistical difficulties. Transportation and timely delivery of products are also major issues.
3. **Financial Constraints:** Limited funds for purchasing necessary equipment, packaging, and other business essentials are common obstacles, particularly for small-scale businesses.
4. **Product Development:** Entrepreneurs often face difficulties in perfecting the quality and finishing of their products, as well as being innovative to meet market demands.
5. **Government Policies:** Some businesses are affected by government policies, such as taxation and subsidies, which can create additional financial burdens.
6. **Seasonal and Local Challenges:** Some businesses are affected by seasonality or are constrained by the size and characteristics of their local market, making it difficult to grow.
7. **Minimal Challenges:** A few entrepreneurs report facing no significant challenges, particularly those operating on a small scale with locally available resources.

Overall, the text illustrates the diverse range of obstacles entrepreneurs encounter, from competition and marketing to logistical and financial issues.

F. *What is the future prospect of your business or where you want to see yourself after a few years down the line & your expectation towards the contribution of govt. and authorities regarding this.*

The text reflects various entrepreneurs' aspirations and challenges for their business futures:

1. **Brand Establishment and Expansion:** Many entrepreneurs aim to establish unique brand identities, expand their product lines, and gain recognition locally, nationally, or even globally.
2. **Business Growth:** Plans include expanding their businesses by opening larger factories, shops, or exporting products to other states and countries. Some also aim to create more jobs and provide training to others.
3. **Challenges in Implementation:** Despite their ambitions, several entrepreneurs face obstacles such as financial constraints, competition, and lack of resources, which make it difficult to realize their goals.
4. **Uncertainty and Contentment:** A few entrepreneurs' express uncertainty about the future or contentment with their current business scale, without strong plans for expansion.

Overall, the text highlights a mix of ambitious plans and challenges faced by entrepreneurs as they seek to grow their businesses and establish their brands.

G. *What do you expect from the state government to increase the scale of business.*

The text reflects mixed sentiments among entrepreneurs regarding government support:

1. **Requests for Government Support:** Many entrepreneurs express a desire for financial assistance, marketing support, training, and resources such as equipment and subsidies to help grow their businesses. They also mention the need for better infrastructure, like road facilities, to reduce logistics costs.
2. **Frustration and Scepticism:** Some entrepreneurs are frustrated with the government, citing corruption, lengthy processes, and unfulfilled promises as reasons for their skepticism. They feel that government resources often go to those with political connections, leaving small business owners unsupported.
3. **Independence and No Expectations:** A significant number of entrepreneurs state they have no expectations from the government, either because they have managed without government help so far or due to a lack of trust in the government's ability to provide meaningful support.

Overall, the text highlights a mix of hope for assistance and a strong sense of self-reliance, coupled with disappointment in the government's role in supporting small businesses.

5. Discussion

Together, 41 women artisan entrepreneurs shared their opinions on seven open-ended questions regarding their entrepreneurial experiences. These women, mostly from rural or semi-rural backgrounds, are working in different industries such as handmade products, food production, tailoring, pickles, and traditional crafts. Each business has a varied origin story, including information such as the business name, year of operation, employee profiles, working process, yearly revenue, and economic returns. Despite several challenges such as rising competition, the COVID-19 pandemic, and difficulties in accessing wider markets, most of these women have survived their businesses. While some entrepreneurs have earned seasonal profits through efficient use of local materials, others continue to remain plagued by market oversaturation or limited demand. Notably, most businesses have social goals in mind, including empowering women and community involvement. Overall, these stories demonstrate resilience, resourcefulness, and the tireless efforts of small-scale female entrepreneurs to survive and make it through.

The numerous reasons for setting up such enterprises are incredibly diverse. Most women were driven by hobbies and interests such as weaving, traditional crafts, or cooking. The desire for economic independence and the necessity to take care of their families became strong motivating factors. Moreover, the desire to empower other women through the generation of jobs or the development of skills was also a driving force for some entrepreneurs. The desire to preserve cultural heritage was also a driving force for some individuals who sought to preserve traditional art and culture. Social causes were also the driving force for some entrepreneurs who used their ventures as a way of advancing the cause of underprivileged women and children. Government incentives and training programs were also driving forces among many who went into business, with the assistance of developing confidence and gaining useful skills. Personal setbacks were, in some cases, the driving force that compelled individuals

into going into business, leading to the entrepreneurial experience being transformative and empowering.

Several key factors have supported and reinforced these entrepreneurial activities. A passion and enthusiasm for their respective art have been a cornerstone in the sustenance of their businesses. A considerable number of entrepreneurs highlighted the importance of support from the family, spouses, parents, and friends, as well as support from governmental agencies like the District Industries Centre (DIC). The development of creativity, the uniqueness of a product, and the ability to differentiate from other competitors were also highlighted as crucial factors for survival. The quality of products and hard work have played a great role in sustaining and growing these businesses. Although some people maintain their endeavors for personal satisfaction, others face challenges like market over-saturation and limited innovation. Persistence, good communication skills, and the development of client trust have been found to be crucial for sustaining businesses. In addition, strong cultural foundations and traditional practices, supported by family involvement, have played a vital role for many entrepreneurs.

When questioned regarding their contribution to society, most women felt that they had a limited contribution, owing to their primary concern being survival of the family. Nevertheless, some entrepreneurs make a significant contribution by providing free training in sewing, crafts, and other activities to women. Some also offer seasonal employment opportunities and give a share of their profits to community welfare, like orphanages or charitable trusts. In spite of the difficulties they encounter, most are dedicated to empowering women and financial inclusion. Although these people may perceive their contribution as limited, these efforts are significant in uplifting and supporting communities.

Entrepreneurs specified the principal issues that faced them, specifically during the pandemic. Brand promotion and the achievement of recognition in competitive markets posed a notable challenge. Raw material procurement, especially in remote areas, and logistical management caused economic constraints. The quality of products, packaging, and product development were challenges encountered by entrepreneurs with limited finance. Besides, policies from governments regarding taxation and lack of subsidies posed extra challenges. For businesses susceptible to seasonality or hindered by narrow local markets, growth has proved toughest. But there were also a few women that indicated little to no problem, especially when working on an extremely small level within local bases. These indicate the multifaceted challenges entrepreneurs experience in carrying on their business ventures.

Looking towards the future, the women entrepreneurs believe in a variety of ambitions. They all wish to expand business activities, establish powerful brand names, and make a name at local, national, or global levels. Their dreams are to enhance production, establish special stores or production units, penetrate foreign markets, and provide employment. Financial limitations, poor infrastructure, and competition, nevertheless, do not permit these ambitions to materialize. Some are uncertain or content with their current business situation, while others are genuinely determined to expand in spite of prevailing challenges. Overall, their ambitions reflect an energetic entrepreneurial spirit influenced by optimism and perseverance. Corresponding to the requirements of the state government, the majority of the entrepreneurs perceived a requirement for better support mechanisms. They want better

access to financial support, skill development programs, marketing support, and infrastructure development. In addition, they ask for support in the marketing of products, exposure to exhibitions and trade fairs, and entry into government procurement plans. Better transport and logistics, easier taxation systems, and fewer licenses were also mentioned as significant requirements. Entrepreneurs are of the opinion that with government support on a long-term and sustained basis, they will be able to develop their businesses and contribute more to their localities and the state's economic development.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the stories of these 41 women artisan entrepreneurs depict a journey of resilience, innovation, and unrelenting commitment to personal and communal goals. Despite being faced with numerous challenges, such as limited resources, market oversaturation, and the COVID-19 pandemic, these women have been able to keep their businesses afloat through passion, family support, and community support. Their businesses not only reflect economic aspirations but also symbolize efforts to promote cultural preservation and the empowerment of other women. Despite financial and infrastructural challenges still being a hindrance to their growth, their will and hope are unbroken. With adequate support from government agencies and institutions, these entrepreneurs can be a game-changer for local economies and social development.

7. Recommendations

First and foremost, there is an urgent need for targeted financial assistance realized through low-interest loans, subsidies, and grants to ease capital deficiencies.

Skill development training programs designed in line with market forces, branding, digital literacy, and product innovation must be made accessible to all. Marketing support in the form of online selling platforms, trade fair participation, and brand development activities can provide access to large markets.

Government authorities must simplify tax laws and formalities for licensing to reduce bureaucratic hurdles. Infrastructure development, especially in rural and semi-rural areas like transport and logistics, is essential to improve access to markets.

Finally, regular mentorship, networking, and publicity programs can empower these women with self-confidence and resources to start and maintain businesses in the long run.

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