

Role of Entrepreneurship Development Programmes in Enhancing Entrepreneurial Skills and Financial Independence among Rural Women



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Abstract

This study examines the role of Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs) in promoting sustainable entrepreneurial skills and financial independence among rural women in India, within the broader context of inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship in Asia. A quantitative research design was employed, and primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a Likert scale. Statistical techniques, including descriptive analysis, correlation, and multiple regression, were applied to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings indicate that EDPs significantly enhance entrepreneurial competencies such as financial literacy, decision-making, and business management. Entrepreneurial skills emerged as the strongest predictor of financial independence, highlighting the critical role of human capital development in achieving sustainable economic outcomes. However, the direct impact of EDP participation on financial independence was found to be moderate, suggesting that structural barriers such as limited access to finance, inadequate market linkages, and socio-cultural constraints continue to hinder the sustainability of women-led enterprises. The study contributes to the literature on sustainable entrepreneurship in developing economies by demonstrating that the effectiveness of EDPs depends on supportive institutional ecosystems. It offers important policy implications for designing integrated, sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship programmes that foster long-term economic empowerment and resilience among rural women in emerging Asian contexts.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs), Entrepreneurial Skills, Financial Independence, Rural Women Entrepreneurship, Economic Empowerment

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDP) has become one of the strategic measures of solving the intertwined problems of unemployment, gender equality, and marginalization in rural regions. In the developing economies like India where large percentage of the population dwells in rural areas, women are usually affected by structural obstacles such as low access to education, finances, markets and decision making platforms. These limitations limit their engagement in formal economic practices and make it difficult to gain financial self-sufficiency and socio-economic empowerment (Agarwal, 2018; Agarwal and Lenka, 2018).

EDPs are designed training programs that train entrepreneurial skills including an ability to recognize opportunities, risk-taking skill, financial literacy, business planning, and management. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and financial institutions usually carry out these programmes with the intention of encouraging self-employment and sustainable development of enterprises. Entrepreneurship has become an important focus of sustainable development in recent years, and especially among rural settings where women-led enterprises can be

associated with inclusive development and poverty alleviation (Bansal et al., 2019; Nayak and Nayak, 2025).

The importance of EDPs goes beyond skill development, since they also help in the creation of entrepreneurial ecosystems that foster the involvement of women in economic activity. It has been argued that gender-responsive entrepreneurship systems are critical in making women entrepreneurs succeed in their businesses despite their structural challenges (Brush et al., 2019; Elam et al., 2019). Also, international policy frameworks and institutional initiatives focus on the need to support women in entrepreneurship as a way of economic empowerment and sustainable development (World Bank, 2020; Gupta, 2024).

In this case, financial independence can be defined as the capacity to generate as well as command financial means and make independent economic choices. Research shows that the involvement of women in entrepreneurship activity has a major positive effect on their socio-economic status, bargaining power, and well-being (Yadav and Unni, 2016; Banerjee, 2018). Nevertheless, even with growing involvement in EDPs, there are a number of obstacles including low access to finance,

insufficient institutional backing and social-cultural barriers that still limit the sustainability of women-owned businesses (Kanth & Sinha, 2026).

It is encouraging to note that in the Asian context, especially in India, sustainable entrepreneurship among rural women is one of the policy priorities. Developing the entrepreneurial potential of rural women is a necessary step not only to the economic development but to the long-term sustainability and inclusive growth. This is why it is significant to discuss the role of EDPs in building entrepreneurial abilities and financial autonomy of rural women and take into consideration the structural challenges impacting their performance.

2. Literature review

The literature on entrepreneurship development has indicated its increased relevance in enhancing sustainable and inclusive economic development, especially among the rural women. Over the past few years, entrepreneurship has been perceived with the prism of sustainability in which entrepreneurial actions do not only contribute to the economic growth but also social change. Sustainable entrepreneurship focuses on the establishment of long-term value using innovative and socially responsible business approaches (Shepherd and Patzelt, 2017; Khokhar et al., 2025). Women entrepreneurs in the rural setting are vital towards ensuring inclusive development through the creation of livelihoods and the empowerment of local economies.

Contextually, the entrepreneurship of women is very much entrenched in institutional and socio-cultural contexts. Contextual embeddedness is a notion that the success or failure of an entrepreneurial activity is influenced by the social norms, social networks, and institutional frameworks, especially in developing economies (Yousafzai et al., 2019). Local networks and place-based resources tend to help rural entrepreneurs to recognize and take advantage of business opportunities, and this fact increases their capacity to maintain business despite limited resources (Korsgaard et al., 2015).

Policy frameworks and entrepreneurial ecosystems can also be important in the development of entrepreneurial activities among women. Research mentioning that the supportive ecosystem such as finance access, training, mentorship, and market connections is necessary to enable women to succeed in their entrepreneurial activities (Henry et al., 2023; Ratten, 2020). Also, the networking of women has been found to be an imperative type of social capital which improves learning, knowledge exchange and business development (McAdam et al., 2019).

The advent of technology especially digital platforms and e-commerce has created new

opportunities to women entrepreneurs in rural areas, as it has helped them access larger markets and overcome the barriers to entry, which were traditional several years ago. Nevertheless, there are other obstacles, including digital illiteracy and infrastructural issues, that still limit the successful application of these technologies (Bhatia-Kalluri, 2021).

The attitudes toward genders and the perceptions of society are still factors that prevent women in business. The continued existence of gender expectations tends to restrict the resources, movement, and power to make decisions by women, thus influencing their entrepreneurship intentions and results (Kaiser and Mata, 2025). Recent studies also underline the increasing scholarly focus on the topic of women entrepreneurship, and some studies underline the importance of the latter in meeting the goals related to sustainable development and economic resilience (Prabha et al., 2025).

All in all, the literature indicates that even though women entrepreneurship can become a force of sustainable development, its success will be determined by a mix of personal abilities, institutionalization, access to technology and the socio-cultural change.

2.1 Objectives

- To study the influence of Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs) on the growth of entrepreneurial skills in rural women in the framework of sustainable entrepreneurship.
- To assess the role of EDPs in enhancing financial independence and income-generating capacity of rural women.
- To analyze the challenges and limitations affecting the effectiveness of EDPs in empowering rural women.

2.2 Hypothesis

- H₁: Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs) have a significant positive impact on the entrepreneurial skills of rural women.
- H₂: Participation in EDPs significantly improves the financial independence of rural women.
- H₃: The effectiveness of EDPs in empowering rural women is significantly influenced by structural and socio-economic barriers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study was a quantitative research design to explore whether Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs) can improve the level of entrepreneurial skills and financial independence among rural women.

Quantitative approach was deemed suitable because it helps to measure variables systematically and test relationship among constructs statistically. The research was aimed at determining the degree to which EDPs participation leads to skill development and financial performance.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Technique

The primary data was used in carrying out the study as the authors selected rural women who had attended Entrepreneurship Development Programmes. The stratified random sampling method was used in order to have representation on the various socio-economic backgrounds, age groups and entrepreneurial experience levels. This method has improved the validity and the generalizability of the results because it reflected different views among the target population. The sample size was the respondents who were considered to be sufficient to perform statistical analysis.

3.3 Data Collection Method

The structured questionnaire was used to collect data in accordance with the objectives of the study and the literature available. The questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale that encompassed strongly disagree to strongly agree to depict what respondents thought. It was subdivided into three key sub groups, which included entrepreneurship, financial autonomy, and EDP efficacy. The entrepreneurial abilities incorporated the decision-making ability, the capacity to take risks, financial literacy, and business management. Financial independence was measured in terms of income generation, savings behavior, and financial decision-making whereas EDP effectiveness measured in terms of the quality, relevance and applicability of training.

3.4 Measurement of Variables

The multiple-item scales were used to operationalize the key variables in the study. Entrepreneurial skills were assessed using indicators that measured cognitive, managerial and behavioural skills. The financial independence was considered through the financial resource management capabilities of the respondents, their capabilities to generate income, and control over economic decisions. The effectiveness of EDP was calculated based on the perceptions of the participants on the usefulness of training and its practicability. The constructs were derived based on the available literature so that they were conceptually valid.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Cronbachs alpha was used to determine the reliability of the measurement scales and all the constructs had a value above the acceptable level of 0.70 which meant that the measurement scales had high levels of internal consistency. Pilot testing and expert review were done to validate the instrument and refine the questionnaire to make it clear, relevant and accurate. The following steps strengthened the research instrument.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

The obtained data were processed with the help of such statistical software as SPSS. The characteristics of respondents were summarized with the help of descriptive statistics which were used to analyze the distribution of variables. The correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationships between variables, and the multiple regression analysis was used to determine the influence of the effectiveness of EDP and entrepreneurial skills on financial independence. Such methods allowed testing hypotheses and gave information about the power and the importance of the connections between the research variables.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

In the research process, strict consideration was given to ethical considerations. Informed consent was taken and the goal of the study was explained to the participants before they were given the data collection forms. The respondents were assured confidentiality and anonymity, and the data were not exploited.

4. Results

4.1 Reliability Analysis

The analysis of reliability was done by using Cronbachs Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the measurement scales as in Table 1. The values of all constructs are above the acceptable rate of 0.70 which means that the reliability is high. The highest internal consistency is shown by EDP Effectiveness (0.865), then Entrepreneurial Skills (0.842) and Financial Independence (0.817). This validates the fact that the items that were included in the questionnaire were free and always measured the constructs they were intended to measure.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis of Study Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Entrepreneurial Skills	6	0.842
Financial Independence	5	0.817
EDP Effectiveness	5	0.865

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

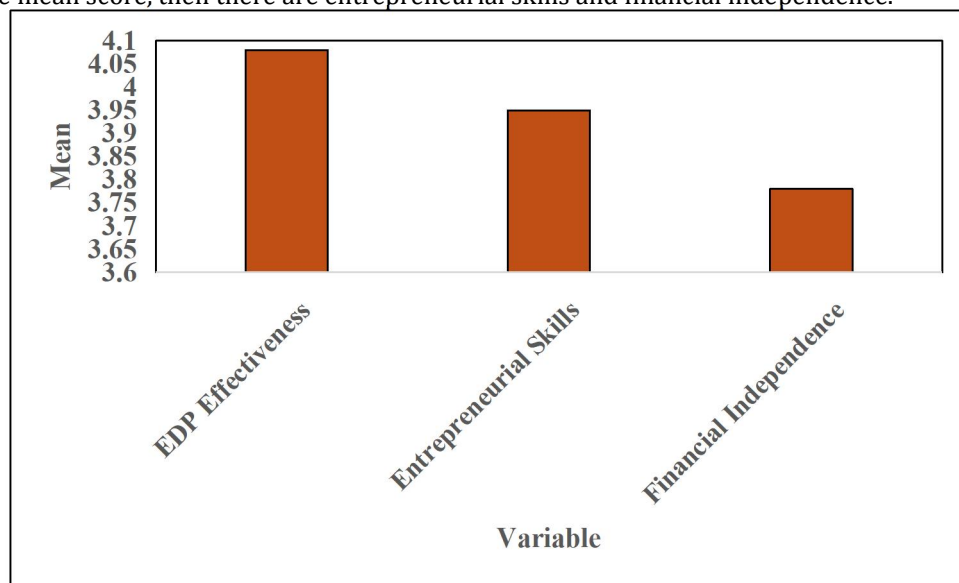
Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the key variables. The findings show that the respondents indicated that there was a high level of congruence about the effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (Mean = 4.08), which implies that the respondents found the programmes helpful. The mean of entrepreneurial skills is also

quite high (3.95) which implies that such competencies as decision-making, business planning, and financial literacy are improved. Nevertheless, the financial independence had a relatively lower mean (3.78), indicating that though the skills have also been enhanced, there is still an average translation of the skills to real financial gain.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
EDP Effectiveness	4.08	0.59
Entrepreneurial Skills	3.95	0.64
Financial Independence	3.78	0.70

These mean values are illustrated graphically in Figure 1. As shown in the figure, EDP effectiveness is the highest in terms of the mean score, then there are entrepreneurial skills and financial independence.

**Figure 1.** Mean Scores of Key Variables

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The contribution of Table 3 presents the correlation between the study variables. There is a high positive correlation between EDP effectiveness and entrepreneurial skills ($r = 0.71$), meaning that the engagement in EDPs has a significant contribution to the development of skills. Moreover,

entrepreneurial skills are highly correlated with financial independence ($r = 0.76$) implying that the better the skills, the better the financial results are. Financial independence is also positively associated with EDP effectiveness in a moderate to strong way ($r = 0.63$). All the relationships are significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. EDP Effectiveness	1		
2. Entrepreneurial Skills	0.71**	1	
3. Financial Independence	0.63**	0.76**	1

Figure 2 is a visual representation of these relationships and points out the strength and direction of the correlations between the variables. The figure is a clear indication that all the relationships are positive and relatively strong.

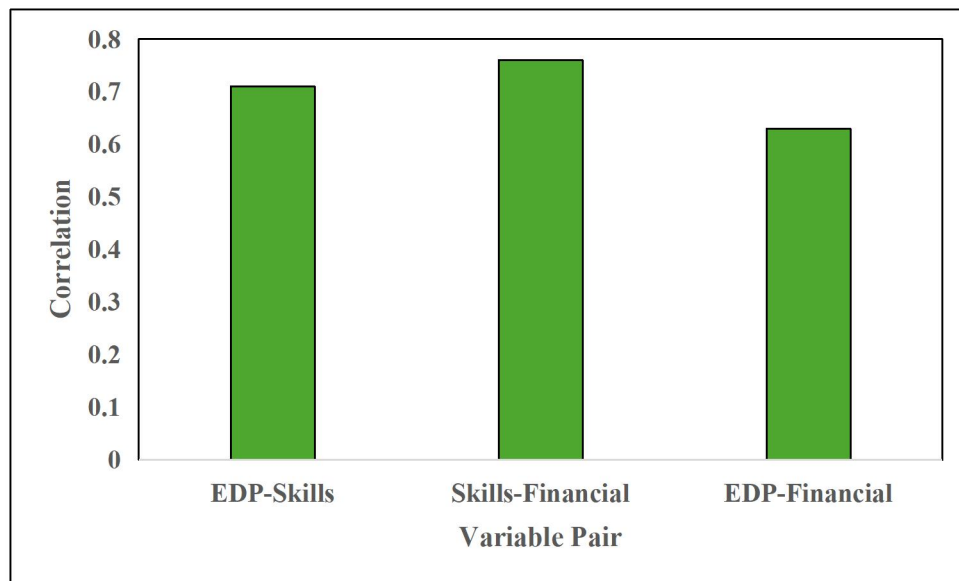


Figure 2. Correlation Between Variables

4.4 Regression Analysis

4.4.1. Model Summary

Table 4 illustrates the summary of the regression model. The model has high explanatory power as the R value is 0.781 and shows that there is high degree of correlation between the independent

variables and financial independence. $R^2 = 0.610$ implies that the model can explain 61 percent of the variation in financial independence. The value of adjusted R^2 (0.594) verifies the model stability whereas the low standard error (0.451) shows good predictive accuracy.

Table 4. Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.781	0.610	0.594	0.451

4.4.2. ANOVA Table

As indicated in Table 5, the results of ANOVA have the statistical significance of the regression model. The F-statistic of 128.21 with the significance level of less than 0.001 is evidence that the model gives a good fit. This implies that the independent variables collectively affect financial independence significantly.

Table 5. ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	52.184	2	26.092	128.21	0.000
Residual	33.356	164	0.203		
Total	85.540	166			

4.4.3. Coefficients Table

Table 6 gives the coefficients of the regression model. The findings show that the effect of EDP on financial independence is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.001$). Entrepreneurial skills have the highest impact ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), and it is therefore the most influential predictor.

Table 6. Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
(Constant)	0.842	0.271	—	3.11	0.002
EDP Effectiveness	0.284	0.080	0.29	3.54	0.001
Entrepreneurial Skills	0.517	0.088	0.52	5.87	0.000

The standardized coefficients are presented in Figure 3 in a visual way. As the figure illustrates, entrepreneurial skills are more influential than the EDP effectiveness, which means that they play the leading role in the financial independence.

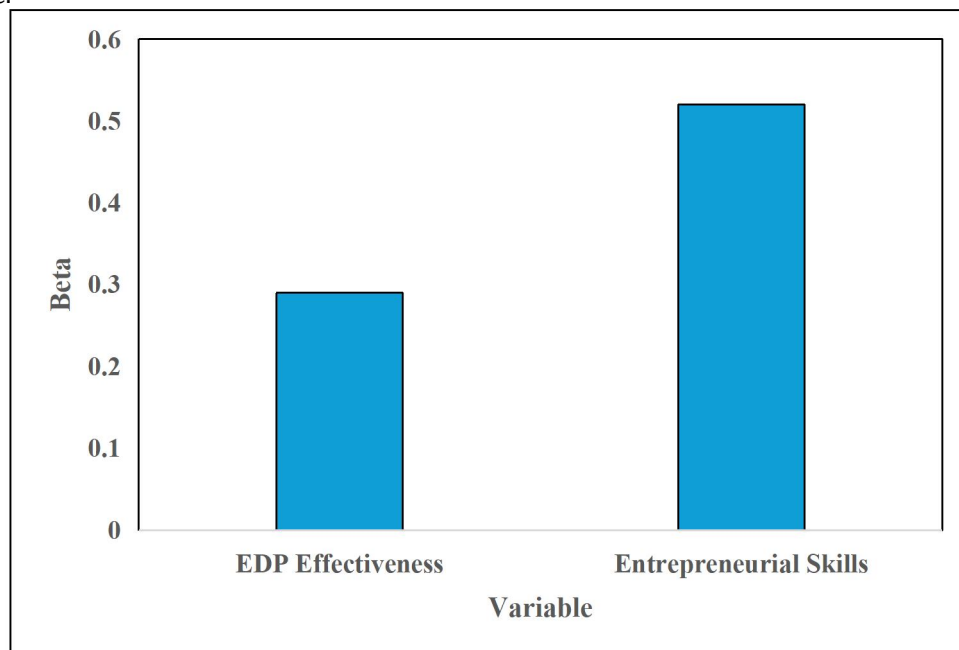


Figure 3. Standardized Regression Coefficients

In general, the findings affirm that EDP efficiency and entrepreneurial ability have a substantial effect on financial independence, and entrepreneurial ability is a more significant predictor of the effect.

5. Discussion

The results of this research have a great empirical evidence of the effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDP) in empowering women in rural areas of India in the context of development of entrepreneurial skills as well as financial independence. Placed in the larger framework of sustainable and inclusive entrepreneurship, the findings have indicated the value of skill-based intervention to empower women to be meaningfully engaged in economic activities. The research establishes that EDPs play a significant role in the acquisition of vital competencies like financial literacy and decision-making capacity and business management, which are vital in the success of entrepreneurs and their long-term viability. It conforms to the previous studies highlighting the importance of social entrepreneurship and capability building to attain sustainable economic results (Dwivedi and Weerawardena, 2018; Goyal et al., 2017).

One of the insights gained during the analysis is that entrepreneurial skills are the most powerful predictor of financial independence, which is even stronger than the direct effect of EDP participation. This observation highlights the main importance of developing human capital as a means of realizing long-term economic results. It postulates that EDPs

are actually facilitating mechanisms that empower an individual to increase their capabilities instead of being drivers of financial independence. This compares with the findings of studies that found individual competencies and decision-making skills to be a factor affecting the results of entrepreneurship (Apostol, 2022).

Another gap that is evident in the study is the deficiency between the acquisition of skills and financial results. Although the improvement in the entrepreneurial skills levels was relatively high, the level of improvement of financial independence was somewhat moderate, as reported by respondents. This shows that the external structural conditions are very vital determinants of outcomes. The barriers to the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programmes remain low access to finance, low institutional support and socio-cultural constraints. The findings can be supported by the studies highlighting the significance of institutional quality and ecosystem support in the process of defining entrepreneurship outcomes (Chowdhury et al., 2019; Hossain et al., 2025).

In terms of sustainability, the results indicate that women entrepreneurship does not only generate income but also inclusive development and reduction of poverty. Resource-constrained entrepreneurship can be a route to social change and economic stability (Kimmitt et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the facilitating environment is necessary to realize sustainable results in terms of enterprise development. Policies and government funding can be very important in empowering

women in entrepreneurship, especially in third-world economies like India (Gochhayat & Rout, 2025).

The paper also emphasizes the role of entrepreneurial ecosystem and situational aspects in determining the engagement of women in the economic activities. The access to resources and opportunities is usually affected by socio-cultural environments in which women entrepreneurs may be operating. The studies have shown that gender norms and cultural limitations have a strong influence on entrepreneurial behavior and performance (Oad et al., 2023). Correspondingly, general research on marginalized populations, such as refugee women, shows that structural obstacles have the potential to restrain entrepreneurial success, even in the presence of skills and motivation (Al-Hamad et al., 2024).

Innovation and technological advancements are also becoming significant factors that affect entrepreneurship. Although the current study is based on the traditional EDPs, recent studies indicate that digital technologies and new tools like artificial intelligence can change the way entrepreneurs conduct their business and help them become more efficient (Kusetogullari et al., 2025). Nevertheless, such technologies are not equally available, especially in the rural regions, which can further increase the disparity between the acquisition of skills and financial performance.

Moreover, the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship is becoming more and more associated with larger environmental and social objectives. Awareness, attitudes, and behavioral intentions have a role in the integration of sustainability into entrepreneurial activities, and recent conceptual frameworks have outlined this (Islam and Mehdi, 2024). This implies that EDPs ought to consider the use of sustainability-oriented training to maximize the long-term impact.

The other significant implication of the research is that it is necessary to combat poverty and inequality by using entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurship of women is important in dealing with socio-economic inequalities especially in developing areas. Nevertheless, its effectiveness will be determined by the effectiveness of person-level capabilities in conjunction with support systems (Lortie and Cox, 2018). Thus, the only way to realize significant results is to develop a holistic approach that would address both the development of skills and the support of institutions.

Finally, the research shows that although Entrepreneurship Development Programmes have the capacity of improving entrepreneurial skills, structural, institutional, and socio-cultural factors mediate the effects of such programs on financial independence. Entrepreneurial abilities prove to be

the most important factor in financial performance, yet they can only be successful when supported by the relevant ecosystems. Those results show the necessity of comprehensive policy measures that can unite skill building with access to finance, technology, and market driven entrepreneurship in rural women in order to facilitate sustainable and inclusive entrepreneurship.

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed how Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs) can be utilized to empower rural women in India in terms of entrepreneurial skills and financial independence as part of sustainable and inclusive entrepreneurship. The results of the study give a solid empirical evidence that EDPs play a crucial role in the development of the necessary entrepreneurial skills, such as financial literacy, decision-making skills, and business management skills. The abilities are essential in empowering the rural women to engage in income-generating activities and enhance their economic status. Nevertheless, the research also shows that, although EDPs are successful in developing skills, their direct influence on financial independence is not high. Entrepreneurial skills proved to be the most important predictor of financial results, which means that the success of EDPs is mediated by skill development, but not involvement only. In addition to this the study also notes the existence of structural and socio-economic barriers, which limit the ability of women to convert the acquired skills into sustainable economic results which includes but is not limited to; lack of access to finance, poor market linkages and socio-cultural constraints. The results highlight the necessity of a better integrated and ecosystem-oriented approach to developing entrepreneurship, which involves skill training and institutional support, financial inclusion, and market access. Considering the case of the developing Asian economies, women entrepreneurship must be encouraged to ensure inclusive economic growth and sustainability over the long term. Thus, policymakers and practitioners have to make interventions that are holistic and sustainability-based, which not only develops the capacity of women in rural areas as entrepreneurs, but also provide the enabling environment of long-term economic empowerment of rural women.

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