

Fostering Female-Led Ventures: The Role Of Entrepreneurship In Advancing SDG 5

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Abstract

Women-led entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical driver of inclusive growth and gender equality, directly aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). By enabling women to participate as economic decision-makers, entrepreneurs, and leaders, female-led ventures contribute to reducing structural inequalities and promoting sustainable development. This paper examines the role of entrepreneurship in fostering female-led ventures and advancing SDG 5, with a focus on the Indian context. Using secondary data and case-based analysis, the study reviews contemporary literature, identifies the need for gender-sensitive entrepreneurial ecosystems, examines illustrative Indian examples, and maps women entrepreneurship outcomes to SDG 5 indicators.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship; Female-led ventures; Gender equality; Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5); Inclusive growth; Entrepreneurial ecosystems; Social entrepreneurship; Gender-responsive policy

Introduction

The United Nation views gender equality as a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for peace, prosperity, and sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) was introduced in 2015 as part of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, officially adopted by all UN member states in September 2015 - focusing on equal access to education, health, work, and political representation, while combating violence and discrimination through policies, advocacy, and programs to empower women and girls globally, despite persistent challenges like wage gaps and conflict-related violence.

Gender equality has been a cornerstone of development and inclusive economic growth. The SDG 5 seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by addressing systemic barriers related to education, employment, leadership, and access to economic resources. Despite the global development, gender gaps persist, particularly in developing economies where women's labour force participation and entrepreneurial activity remain constrained.

Entrepreneurship has gained prominence as a powerful pathway for women's economic empowerment. Entrepreneurs, and the new businesses they establish, are now seen as an important source of economic growth and as critical in the development and well-being of their societies. As such, there is increased appreciation for and acknowledgement of the importance of new and small businesses in an economy. Female-led ventures not only generate income and employment but also challenge patriarchal norms, promote leadership, and enable women to exercise greater agency over economic and social decisions. In India, women

entrepreneurs are increasingly visible across sectors such as e-commerce, financial services, manufacturing, and social enterprise. This paper explores how fostering female-led ventures contributes to advancing SDG 5 and strengthens broader sustainable development outcomes.

Literature review

Emphasis has been on the multidimensional impact of women entrepreneurship on economic and social outcomes. Several studies highlight that women-owned enterprises contribute to poverty reduction, job creation, and inclusive growth, while simultaneously enhancing women's agency and social status.

Some of the latest global statistics on women's entrepreneurship are as follows:

Worldwide Entrepreneurial Activity

- According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2024/25 Women's Report, more than 250 million women worldwide are starting or running new businesses.
- Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rate (business creation) of women globally, is around 10.2%, the figure varies by region —sub-Saharan Africa (21.8%) being highest, followed by Latin America (17.3%), and lowest in Europe (6%).
- In many low-income countries, women's entrepreneurial participation is over 80% of men's, narrowing gender gaps in early-stage entrepreneurship.

Regional and Sectoral Patterns

- Women's business ownership is especially strong in wholesale/retail trade and services sectors, while representation in sectors like ICT and agriculture remains lower in many regions.

- Women entrepreneurs often operate as solo entrepreneurs (36.4% of women vs. 26.9% of men), reflecting either preference or necessity for independent enterprise.

Entrepreneurship is increasingly linked to sustainable development goals, arguing that women entrepreneurs act as change agents in achieving SDG 5 by fostering equitable workplaces, ethical business models, and community-oriented enterprises.

- Women entrepreneurs constitute around 37% of all entrepreneurs worldwide according to available global data.

Intentions and Perceptions

- Around 17.6% of women globally intend to start a business in the next three years, a rate approaching that of men in many regions.
- Opportunity perception and entrepreneurial skills confidence among women are increasing, though gaps with men remain.

Business Survival & Growth

- Women are slightly less likely than men to own established businesses (6.2% vs men's rate), reflecting ongoing growth barriers.
- Business discontinuance rates are somewhat lower for women (2.9% vs 3.2%), suggesting resilience despite challenges.
- Women entrepreneurs face a large global financing gap — estimated at approx. \$1.7 trillion — indicating significant unmet demand for capital worldwide.
- Women are underrepresented in high-growth and high-investment ventures compared to men, especially in sectors requiring scale and export potential.

Indian Context: Studies reveal that Indian women entrepreneurs face constraints related to finance, mobility, digital access, and socio-cultural norms. However, digital platforms, self-help groups, and government schemes have significantly lowered entry barriers.

- India has around 8.05 million women entrepreneurs, representing about 14% of all entrepreneurs in the country.
- Women constitute roughly 14–20% of all MSME owners in India, with 2.2 crore registered women-owned MSMEs* on the Udyam portal (micro, small, and medium enterprises).
- Women-owned MSMEs employ an estimated 22–27 million people, showing significant employment impact.

Startups and Innovation

- As of late 2024 (latest government data cited in Economic Survey 2025), there were 73,151

startups recognised under Startup India with at least one-woman director, nearly half of all registered startups under the initiative.

- Funds invested in women-led startups include ₹3,107.11 crore via Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) and ₹227.12 crore under the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS).

Workforce Participation & Leadership

- Women's labour force participation rate (LFPR) has improved, with more states reporting 30–40% participation; some states exceed 40%, showing wider geographic spread.
- However, female entrepreneurship metrics still lag in some analyses: a study notes <1 % of women are actual entrepreneurs compared to men (around 3 %), indicating under-representation relative to global trends.

Sector and Ownership Patterns

- Among MSMEs, women own ~22% of enterprises overall, but ownership drops to 12% in small and 7% in medium businesses, suggesting size and scale gaps.
- In specific sectors like handloom, sericulture, and crafts, women constitute 50 %+ of workers and artisans, though formal ownership remains lower.

Regional Leadership

- States such as West Bengal show higher concentrations of women-owned MSMEs relative to other regions.
- In Karnataka, around 250 of every 1000 MSMEs are women-owned, above national averages.

While prior studies discuss women entrepreneurship and empowerment, limited research explicitly maps female-led ventures to SDG 5 targets in an integrated framework, particularly within the Asian and Indian context.

Need for the Study

Despite increasing policy attention, women-owned enterprises continue to represent a smaller share of formal entrepreneurial activity in India. Many women entrepreneurs operate in informal or micro-scale enterprises with limited growth potential. There is a need to critically examine how entrepreneurship can be leveraged not merely as income generation, but as a strategic mechanism for achieving SDG 5.

This study is particularly relevant in the context of India's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By mapping female-led entrepreneurial outcomes to SDG 5 indicators, the study contributes to policy discourse and academic literature on gender-responsive development strategies.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the role of female-led ventures in advancing gender equality and women empowerment.
- To review contemporary literature linking women entrepreneurship with SDG 5.
- To analyze Indian examples of female-led ventures contributing to SDG 5 targets.
- To map entrepreneurship outcomes to SDG 5 indicators.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design based on secondary data. A conceptual framework was developed to synthesize findings and illustrate the pathways through which female-led ventures contribute to gender equality. Government initiatives such as Stand-Up India and women-focused incubators have strengthened women's participation in formal entrepreneurship. The female-led ventures act as the central mechanism translating ecosystem support into SDG 5 outcomes such as leadership, economic empowerment, and equality. This aligns entrepreneurial outputs with SDG 5 targets, offering a structured evaluation tool.

Indian women entrepreneurs have emerged as influential contributors across diverse sectors, including fintech, edtech, healthcare, agri-business, and social entrepreneurship. Through innovative, women-led ventures, many have effectively leveraged digital platforms and inclusive business models to expand financial inclusion, improve access to healthcare services, and promote skill development and livelihood opportunities for women and underserved communities.

Women-Led Ventures: Key Insights

The following are a few celebrated, yet not much known women entrepreneurs, who have surely made their mark with a difference in the remotest areas using their limited resources.

1. Kanika Tekriwal – JetSetGo (Aviation & Mobility Services, India)

Kanika Tekriwal, co-founder and CEO of JetSetGo, represents a prominent example of Delhi based women-led entrepreneurship in India's high-growth aviation and mobility services sector. Often described as "the Uber of the skies," JetSetGo is a technology-enabled private aviation platform that has transformed access to business jets, helicopters, and specialised air services in India. It operates as a private aviation marketplace and concierge service, using digital platforms to seamlessly connect customers with charter aircraft operators. The company integrates end-to-end flight solutions, including aircraft chartering, airport handling,

ground logistics, trained cabin crew, and real-time flight coordination. Its technology-driven model enables efficient aircraft scheduling, dynamic pricing, and cloud-based aircraft management, thereby improving asset utilisation in a traditionally fragmented industry. Beyond luxury travel, JetSetGo plays a critical role in socially impactful aviation services, including medical evacuations, air ambulance operations, emergency response flights, and helicopter services for remote and inaccessible regions. This diversification highlights how female-led ventures can combine commercial innovation with public service delivery.

Kanika Tekriwal's entrepreneurial journey is also significant from a gender and resilience perspective. As a cancer survivor and one of the few women leaders in India's male-dominated aviation sector, she has actively challenged gender stereotypes associated with high-capital, technology-intensive industries. Her leadership has contributed to greater visibility of women entrepreneurs in aviation, a sector where female representation remains limited. JetSetGo supports - Target 5.5 (Women's leadership and decision-making) by placing women at the helm of strategic, technology-driven businesses; Target 5.b (Enabling technology) through the use of digital platforms to democratise access to aviation services; and Target 5.a (Access to economic resources) by creating employment opportunities and fostering participation of women professionals in aviation operations and management.

2. Aditi Gupta – Menstrupedia

Menstrupedia is a pioneering social enterprise founded by Aditi Gupta, with the objective of breaking the deep-rooted taboos surrounding menstruation in India. Inspired by her own experiences of silence, misinformation, and stigma around periods, Aditi Gupta conceptualised Menstrupedia as an educational and culturally sensitive platform to promote menstrual health awareness among young girls, parents, and educators.

Menstrupedia is best known for its flagship publication, Menstrupedia Comic: The Friendly Guide to Periods for Girls, which uses visual storytelling and simple language to explain menstruation in a non-threatening and engaging manner. Over the years, it has reached hundreds of thousands of girls, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas where access to menstrual education remains limited. The initiative has expanded beyond print to become a multi-platform educational ecosystem, operates through - A widely accessed digital platform and blog providing age-appropriate menstrual health content, Printed and digital comics used in classrooms and community programmes, Workshops and training sessions for teachers, parents, and adolescents and Collaborations with

government bodies, CSR initiatives, and international organisations working in the areas of health, education, and gender equality. To enhance inclusivity and accessibility, Menstrupedia content has been translated into multiple Indian languages as well as select international languages, enabling its use across diverse cultural and geographical contexts. The material has also been used in countries beyond India as part of global menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) initiatives.

Menstrupedia contributes directly to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by empowering girls with knowledge, challenging discriminatory social norms, and enabling informed participation in education and public life. It also supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education) by addressing menstrual health as a critical component of adolescent well-being and school retention.

3. Shukla Bose, Parikrma Foundation

Parikrma addresses the persistent and widening inequality in urban India between communities that have benefited from economic liberalization and those that continue to remain excluded from its gains. Despite significant growth in India's education sector, access to high-quality, English-medium education remains largely limited to children from economically advantaged backgrounds who can afford private schooling. In contrast, children from urban slums and marginalized rural communities predominantly attend government-run schools, where instruction is largely delivered in regional languages and is often constrained by resource limitations. While public schooling has expanded in coverage, gaps in learning outcomes, digital exposure, and English-language proficiency continue to restrict upward mobility and employability in an increasingly globalized and technology-driven economy.

The Parikrma Foundation, guided by its motto "A Life on Equal Terms," works to bridge this divide by providing holistic, high-quality education to children from underserved communities. What began in 2003 as a small rooftop school in Rajendranagar, Bengaluru, serving 165 children, has evolved into a well-established educational model. As of recent years, Parikrma operates four schools across Bengaluru—Jayanagar, Sahakarnagar, Koramangala, and Nandini Layout—educating over 1,700 first-generation learners from low-income backgrounds. Beyond academics, Parikrma adopts a comprehensive approach that integrates nutrition, healthcare, digital learning, life skills, and parental engagement.

Parikrma schools consistently report attendance rates exceeding 95% and dropout rates below 1%, outcomes that compare favorably with national and urban government school averages. The foundation's emphasis on English-medium instruction,

technology-enabled learning, and long-term student mentoring has enabled many alumni to access higher education and skilled employment, thereby breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty. In doing so, Parikrma exemplifies how inclusive, community-centered educational interventions can contribute meaningfully to social equity and human capital development in urban India.

4. Chetna Gala Sinha, Mann Deshi Bank

Chetna Gala Sinha, a pioneering social entrepreneur, founded the Mann Deshi Mahila Sahakari Bank in Mhaswad, Maharashtra, India's first cooperative bank run by women and for women. Established to address the financial exclusion of rural women, the bank operates on a gender-responsive microfinance model that goes beyond conventional lending. It not only provides access to credit but also customizes repayment schedules to align with women's seasonal incomes, caregiving responsibilities, and livelihood patterns.

The bank offers loans for a wide range of purposes—from basic needs such as mobile phones and bicycles to enterprise creation in agriculture, dairy, retail, and micro-manufacturing. Over the years, it has emerged as a powerful catalyst for women's entrepreneurship and economic autonomy in rural India. As of 2024-2025, the bank has served over 500,000 women clients, operates through multiple branches across Maharashtra and Karnataka, and is supported by a strong grassroots network of trained field officers. It consistently reports a loan recovery rate of over 98%, reflecting high financial discipline and trust among women borrowers.

Beyond financial services, Mann Deshi Bank has institutionalized capacity building through the Mann Deshi Business School, including its innovative "Business School on Wheels," which delivers doorstep training in financial literacy, digital skills, entrepreneurship, and market access. The bank has received national and international recognition, including praise from the World Bank and UN agencies, and is widely cited as a best-practice model of inclusive finance contributing directly to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

5. Neha Juneja, Greenway Grameen

Greenway Grameen Infra Pvt. Ltd. is a socially driven enterprise engaged in the design, manufacture, and distribution of clean energy cooking solutions for rural and semi-urban households in India. The company's flagship product, Greenway Smart Stove, represents a modern, energy-efficient alternative to traditional mud stoves (chulhas), addressing critical challenges related to indoor air pollution, fuel inefficiency, and women's health.

Greenway stoves deliver up to 65% fuel savings and approximately 70% reduction in smoke emissions,

while remaining compatible with commonly used solid biomass fuels such as firewood, agricultural residue, and dung cakes. The technology is built on Greenway's patented air-regulation and combustion system, which significantly minimizes harmful emissions, improves thermal efficiency, and enhances everyday cooking convenience. These innovations contribute directly to improved respiratory health outcomes, reduced fuel expenditure, and positive environmental impact.

Since commencing operations in 2011, Greenway has reached over six lakh rural households, positioning itself as one of India's leading clean cookstove manufacturers. The enterprise has also expanded its footprint beyond India, entering international markets including Nepal, Bangladesh, and Mexico, thereby demonstrating the scalability of women-centric, sustainability-oriented innovation. Through its operations, Greenway contributes meaningfully to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by reducing women's unpaid care burden, SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and SDG 13 (Climate Action), while exemplifying the role of entrepreneurship in inclusive and sustainable development.

6. Mehwish Mushtaq, Dail Kashmir

Mehwish Mushtaq, a computer engineer from Srinagar, etched her name in history as the first Kashmiri woman to develop an Android application, creating the region-centric directory app "Dial Kashmir." The app functions as a comprehensive one-stop mobile directory for the Kashmir Valley, providing users with essential contact information — including addresses, phone numbers, and email IDs — across a wide range of services such as healthcare, education, transport, emergency services, government departments, private businesses, tourism, and lifestyle services. Mushtaq developed the app in 2013 after completing an online Android-development course, and it quickly became a valuable resource for locals and visitors alike by aggregating service information that was previously difficult to find in one place. Dial Kashmir has been well-received for its utility, earning positive user ratings and widespread downloads on the Google Play Store (historical data indicates thousands of downloads with strong ratings). In recognition of her innovation and entrepreneurial spirit, Mushtaq was honored with a Devi Award in 2025, one of 15 women nationwide acknowledged for their energy and innovative thinking. Her journey reflects both technological initiative and the breaking of traditional barriers for women in the tech and entrepreneurship ecosystem of Kashmir.

7. Pabiben Rabari, Pabiben.com

Pabiben Rabari, founder of Pabiben.com, represents one of India's earliest examples of a female-led artisan enterprise rooted in indigenous knowledge

systems. Based in Bhadroli village, Kutch district of Gujarat, her venture is deeply embedded in the cultural traditions of the Rabari community, renowned for its intricate embroidery practices. Kutch itself is globally recognised for its vibrant art forms, crafts, music, and resilient pastoral communities.

Pabiben began her entrepreneurial journey in 1998 with the objective of preserving and revitalising Rabari embroidery while creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for rural women. By organising Rabari women into a collective, she transformed a traditionally undervalued domestic craft into a viable economic activity. Operating from her native village of Kukadsar, Pabiben.com currently provides employment to over 60 rural women artisans, many of whom are first-generation income earners. The enterprise produces more than 25 design variations, offering handcrafted products such as bags, purses, toiletry kits, durries, quilts, cushion covers, and lifestyle accessories. Through participation in exhibitions, collaborations with designers, and the use of digital platforms, the enterprise has successfully connected rural artisans to formal and global markets, ensuring fair wages, skill development, and income stability.

For her sustained contribution to rural entrepreneurship and women's socio-economic empowerment, Pabiben Rabari was conferred the IMC Ladies' Wing 24th Jankidevi Bajaj Puraskar for Rural Entrepreneur of the Year in 2016. Her enterprise demonstrates how women-led ventures rooted in cultural heritage can simultaneously achieve economic viability, social empowerment, and sustainable development.

Pabiben.com illustrates a strong alignment between female entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development Goal 5. By enabling women artisans to become income earners and skilled producers, the enterprise contributes directly to Target 5.1 (ending discrimination against women) through enhanced economic autonomy. Pabiben's leadership as a founder and community mobiliser exemplifies Target 5.5, which emphasises women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership. Access to steady income, fair wages, and market linkages supports Target 5.a, which focuses on women's rights to economic resources. Furthermore, the use of digital platforms and modern supply chains to market traditional crafts aligns with Target 5.b, which promotes the use of enabling technologies to empower women.

8. Thinlas Chorol, Ladakhi Women's Travel Company

The Ladakhi Women's Travel Company (LWTC) is a pioneering women-owned and women-operated tourism enterprise based in Ladakh, India. Founded in 2009 by Thinlas Chorol, one of Ladakh's most

experienced and respected female trekking guides, the company represents a transformative model of gender-inclusive and community-based tourism in a traditionally male-dominated sector. Thinlas Chorol is widely recognised as Ladakh's first professionally trained female trekking guide, having built her career in high-altitude guiding at a time when women's participation in adventure tourism was extremely limited.

LWTC specialises in responsible tourism experiences, particularly homestay-based treks led by trained women guides and porters, ensuring that tourism revenues flow directly into local households. The enterprise places strong emphasis on eco-tourism principles, including low-impact travel, cultural preservation, and environmental sensitivity in fragile Himalayan ecosystems. By integrating traditional hospitality with professional guiding services, LWTC has created a distinctive tourism model that balances livelihood generation with sustainability.

Since its inception, the company has focused on creating local employment opportunities for women without requiring migration from their villages, thereby strengthening rural economies and preserving community structures. Over the years, LWTC has trained and employed a growing cohort of women, including qualified guides, trainee guides, and support staff, and today sustains livelihoods for approximately 20 women, including full-time employees and seasonal workers. Beyond income generation, the enterprise provides women with training in leadership, safety, communication, and environmental stewardship, contributing to long-term capacity building.

Thinlas Chorol's contribution to women's empowerment has received national recognition, including awards from the Ladies' Wing of the Indian Merchants' Chamber, acknowledging her role in expanding economic and professional opportunities for women in remote and high-risk occupations. Extending her commitment beyond entrepreneurship, she also co-founded the Ladakhi Women's Welfare Network in 2013, an organisation that supports women's rights, facilitates reporting of gender-based violence, and works toward broader social and legal awareness among women in the region.

The Ladakhi Women's Travel Company exemplifies how female-led enterprises in the tourism sector can advance Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) by enabling women's leadership, economic independence, access to non-traditional occupations, and participation in sustainable local development. The case highlights entrepreneurship as a powerful tool for gender-responsive development in geographically remote and ecologically sensitive regions.

9. Lakshmi Menon, PURE Living

Founded in 2012, PURE Living (Products Up-cycled, Recycled and Economised) is a Kerala-based women-led social enterprise established by Lakshmi Menon with the objective of addressing the environmental harm caused by disposable plastic pens. The enterprise is widely recognised for its innovative development of plantable paper pens that transform into plants once discarded, thereby integrating principles of circular economy, waste reduction, and environmental sustainability.

PURE Living up-cycles paper waste sourced from printing presses to manufacture eco-friendly pens made entirely from biodegradable materials, except for the refill. Each pen contains a seed capsule that germinates when planted after use, effectively converting waste into green assets. By combining environmental innovation with social inclusion, the enterprise has positioned itself at the intersection of sustainable consumption, climate action, and social entrepreneurship.

A distinctive feature of PURE Living is its inclusive employment model. The enterprise provides livelihood opportunities to elderly women, differently-abled women, and children from orphanages, many of whom face barriers to formal employment. Through skill training and decentralised production, the enterprise enables marginalised groups to participate in income-generating activities while fostering dignity of work and social integration. Despite its handcrafted and sustainable production process, the pens are priced affordably, making them accessible for educational institutions, corporates, and awareness campaigns. Lakshmi Menon's work has received national recognition for its social and environmental impact. She has been honoured with awards such as the Kairali TV Woman Social Entrepreneur of the Year and the JWALA Award (2015) for her project Ammommathiri/Wicksdom. She was also felicitated by Amitabh Bachchan on the television programme Aaj Ki Raat Hai Zindagi (Star Plus, produced by BBC World) in 2015, bringing mainstream attention to her model of purpose-driven entrepreneurship.

PURE Living exemplifies how female-led social enterprises can deliver scalable solutions to environmental challenges while simultaneously advancing women's economic empowerment and inclusive employment, reinforcing the role of entrepreneurship in achieving sustainable development goals.

Scope and Limitations

- The study focuses primarily on India and may not capture regional variations across Asia.
- Reliance on secondary data limits causal inference.
- Future research may include empirical surveys and cross-country comparisons.

Conclusion

Women have made significant and measurable contributions to entrepreneurship and the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), through their leadership of inclusive and impact-oriented ventures. Female-led enterprises emerge as powerful catalysts for change by fostering women's economic empowerment, leadership, and social inclusion. The evidence discussed in this study demonstrates that women-led ventures translate gender equality objectives into tangible development outcomes at the grassroots level. Beyond income generation and employment creation, these enterprises challenge entrenched gender norms, elevate women into decision-making roles, and integrate marginalized and underserved communities, thereby operationalising SDG 5 within diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Entrepreneurship, as reflected through the experiences of women-led ventures, functions as a strategic mechanism for gender-responsive sustainable development, rather than merely an economic activity. Female entrepreneurs act as transformative agents who combine cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and social innovation within inclusive business models. Through enhanced access to productive resources, markets, skills, and technology, women-led ventures contribute directly to key SDG 5 targets, including women's leadership (Target 5.5), access to economic resources (Target 5.a), elimination of discrimination (Target 5.1), and the use of enabling technologies (Target 5.b). Importantly, the impact of women's entrepreneurship extends beyond SDG 5, generating positive spillovers across SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

The study offers a structured analytical lens that enables policymakers, development institutions, and researchers to assess the effectiveness of women-focused entrepreneurial interventions. By positioning female-led ventures at the centre of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, the framework highlights the critical role of integrated support systems encompassing finance, skills development, technological access, and market linkages. However, while women have already demonstrated their capacity to drive entrepreneurship and sustainable development, the findings underscore the need for stronger and more targeted policy support. Gender-responsive entrepreneurial ecosystems must move beyond access-oriented schemes and address issues of scalability, leadership development, and long-term sustainability of women-led enterprises.

Overall, recognising, strengthening, and systematically supporting female-led ventures is essential not only for achieving SDG 5, but also for

accelerating inclusive and sustainable development in emerging economies such as India. Enhanced policy commitment and institutional support will be critical to unlocking the full potential of women entrepreneurs as drivers of equitable growth and sustainable development.

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