

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG BODO WOMEN: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

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Abstract

This study explores the entrepreneurial landscape among Bodo women, focusing on the challenges and opportunities that shape their contributions to economic growth. Despite facing traditional socio-cultural barriers, Bodo women have shown remarkable resilience and ingenuity in their entrepreneurial pursuits. This research examines the diverse entrepreneurial ventures undertaken by Bodo women, including traditional crafts, agriculture-based businesses, and modern startups. It highlights key challenges such as limited access to capital, inadequate training, and socio-cultural restrictions, while also identifying opportunities for growth, including community support networks, government initiatives, and increasing market access. By analyzing these factors, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Bodo women navigate their entrepreneurial journeys and contribute to local and regional economic development. The findings offer insights into potential policy interventions and support mechanisms that could further empower Bodo women entrepreneurs and enhance their economic impact.

Keywords: Women, Socio-Economic, Development, Bodo Society and Changing Priorities.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship among women is a pivotal element in fostering economic growth and social transformation, particularly in indigenous communities. Among the Bodo people of northeastern India, Bodo women are emerging as key contributors to the region's economic landscape. Traditionally, Bodo society has been characterized by distinct socio-cultural norms that have influenced the roles and opportunities available to women. However, a significant shift is occurring as Bodo women increasingly engage in entrepreneurial activities, creating new avenues for economic development and social change. This study aims to explore the dynamics of entrepreneurship among Bodo women, examining both the challenges they face and the opportunities they encounter. The Bodo community, with its rich cultural heritage and unique socio-economic context, provides a compelling case for understanding how traditional norms intersect with entrepreneurial endeavors. Bodo women are

involved in various enterprises, ranging from traditional handicrafts and agriculture to modern business ventures, each reflecting their adaptability and resourcefulness.

Despite their growing participation in entrepreneurship, Bodo women encounter several obstacles, including limited access to financial resources, inadequate training and mentorship, and societal expectations that constrain their business activities. These challenges are compounded by broader socio-economic factors such as regional instability and infrastructural deficits. Yet, there are significant opportunities for growth, including supportive community networks, governmental schemes, and evolving market dynamics that favor local and indigenous enterprises. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed examination of how Bodo women navigate these entrepreneurial landscapes. By investigating their experiences and contributions, this study seeks to highlight the critical role of Bodo women in economic development and to identify strategies for enhancing their entrepreneurial success. The findings will offer valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and community leaders aiming to support and leverage the entrepreneurial potential of Bodo women for broader socio-economic advancement. The Bodo community, one of the prominent tribal ethnic groups in North East India, is distinguished by its unique cultural heritage and social structure. Traditionally, Bodo society operates within a patriarchal framework; however, Bodo women hold a significant and influential role within their families and communities. Contrary to the notion that patriarchy stifles women's progress, Bodo women have managed to carve out substantial authority in both domestic and societal spheres. Their involvement in decision-making processes, although indirect in many cases, demonstrates their integral role in Bodo society. Historically, rural Bodo women have been central to the local economy, contributing significantly through agriculture, livestock management, and cottage industries. Their participation spans across various sectors, including crop production, weaving, poultry, piggery, and traditional crafts such as handicrafts and wine preparation. Despite the traditional and socio-cultural constraints, Bodo women have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability, leading to gradual empowerment and active involvement in economic activities. The economic contribution of Bodo women is pivotal, particularly in rural areas where agriculture remains the dominant activity. However, income generation in these regions has been slow, with limited productivity in traditional farming methods. Despite these challenges, Bodo women have sustained and enhanced their livelihoods through diverse activities, including weaving, poultry farming, piggery, and traditional industries. These activities not only preserve cultural heritage but also provide respectable incomes, although the overall financial impact is still modest compared to modern agricultural practices. This study seeks to delve into the entrepreneurial landscape of Bodo

women, examining their roles and contributions within this socio-cultural and economic context. By understanding the challenges they face and the opportunities available, the research aims to highlight how Bodo women navigate their entrepreneurial journeys and contribute to the broader economic development of their communities. The insights gained will be instrumental in identifying strategies to further empower Bodo women and enhance their economic impact, offering valuable implications for policy-making and development initiatives.

Objectives

1. To examine the participation of women in economic development efforts within Bodo society.
2. To understand the economic activities of Bodo women and analyze their current status concerning self-employment.

Methodology

The Analytical method is employed for collecting data and mainly based on primary and secondary sources. The data have been collected as primary information from the field survey in Bodo areas of Assam. Secondary data have been collected from the websites, journals, books, magazines, govt. reports and articles etc.

Discussions and Analysis

The Bodo economy has traditionally been sustained by agriculture, with support from additional activities like farming and hunting. The socio-economic system in Bodo society is closely linked to everyday life, social practices, culture, and religion. In the past, women in Bodo society were often economically disadvantaged and relied on men for financial support. However, this has changed over time, and today women are recognized as valuable economic contributors who help improve their family's financial situation. Approximately 75% of Bodo women participate in the informal labor force in both rural and urban areas. They are involved as home-based workers, managing family businesses, and working as self-employed entrepreneurs. Some women also work outside the home in sectors such as manufacturing, domestic services, and as street vendors. Historically, Bodo women have played a significant role in the economic development of their society, participating in a range of activities including household tasks, agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry, which are vital to their traditional way of life.

In rural Bodo communities, women are responsible for various day-to-day tasks such as gathering vegetables and edible foods from forests, cooking, and collecting firewood. In agriculture, Bodo women actively support their male counterparts, especially in planting paddy, harvesting, and reaping, which are considered primary duties. There is an equal participation rate of male and female workers in agricultural activities in rural areas, but the percentage of women engaged in agriculture is lower in urban areas. When it comes to traditional socio-economic activities such as livestock rearing, forestry, fishing, and cottage industries, a higher percentage of women are involved compared to men. Additionally, in sectors like manufacturing, processing, servicing, and other socio-economic household industries, women tend to outnumber men in both rural and urban settings. Despite their involvement in these various sectors, women's participation rates in administrative, executive, professional, technical, and economic managerial roles remain low in Bodo society.

Agriculture Sector

Agriculture is the foundation of the Bodo society's livelihood and economy. More than 85% of the Bodo population depends on agriculture, working as farmers or agricultural laborers to sustain their livelihoods. This sector continues to support over 75% of the community, either directly or indirectly, and provides employment for more than 50% of the workforce. Compared to other communities in Northeast India, the Bodos' annual income is primarily derived from agriculture. As a rural tribal community, the Bodos rely heavily on natural resources, and the majority of households continue to engage in traditional agricultural occupations, which form the backbone of their economic life. While rural Bodos often stick to traditional methods of production, Bodo elites are adopting more modern, progressive agricultural practices. Common crops include mustard seeds, jute, and a variety of vegetables such as potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, gourd, green leafy vegetables, spices, chili, onion, and ginger. Historically, these crops were grown mainly to meet daily food needs, but today they are also produced for domestic consumption and sold in markets. About 30% of women participate in agricultural activities, particularly in rural areas. Castor plants are cultivated to produce Endi cocoons, a practice tied to both cultural traditions and home industries in spinning and weaving, especially for women. However, small and fragmented landholdings pose a significant challenge, leading to low productivity, as these holdings do not support the efficient use of modern agricultural technologies, such as machinery, chemical fertilizers, and hybrid seeds.

Farming Sector

Farming is another vital socio-economic activity for Bodo women, who significantly contribute to their families' economic well-being through farming. The farming sector can be categorized into animal husbandry and poultry. These have been crucial to the economic development of Bodo society since ancient times. Farming activities are key to generating self-employment and play a significant role in income generation for both rural and semi-urban communities. Traditionally, Bodo women raised common domestic animals such as pigs, goats, chickens, and ducks for food and for use in religious and social ceremonies. However, with the influence of globalization, Bodo women have increasingly become involved in commercial farming activities to support sustainable family economic development. Today, most domestic animals and poultry are raised for commercial purposes, with products being sold in markets to generate individual income. About 95% of Bodo households rear domestic animals and poultry mainly for commercial purposes, and 25% of rural Bodo women actively participate in the farming sector to enhance their family's economic status and contribute to community development.

Sericulture and Weaving Sector

Sericulture is a crucial economic activity for Bodo women, known for its low investment and high returns within a short period, making it an attractive option for income enhancement and year-round employment. The Bodo community cultivates three major types of sericulture: Endi (eri), muga, and mulberry. Because of its profitability, a significant number of households are involved in sericulture activities, including sowing seeds, planting and maintaining host plants, plucking leaves, spinning and reeling yarn, weaving fabrics, and marketing cocoons and finished cloths. About 20% of rural women actively maintain sericulture and weaving as both a traditional practice and a source of income. Weaving holds a prestigious place as both a socio-economic and cultural activity among Bodo women, who are traditionally skilled in this craft. Weaving is considered dignified work and an essential cultural identity marker. Bodo women produce various types of traditional clothing, such as Dokhona, Fali, Aronai, Gamcha, and Hisima. Many Bodo women weavers are now engaged in handloom industries, driven by the need for economic development. The adoption of modern weaving technology has increased production rates and household incomes in both rural and urban areas. Weaving has thus become a primary livelihood for Bodo women, contributing to their economic empowerment.

Business Sector

The Bodo community benefits from its location in a region rich in natural resources, which offers advantages in trade and commerce. Rural Bodo women are more engaged in business activities than their urban counterparts, focusing on self-empowerment and socio-economic development. Many own micro, small, and medium enterprises, which significantly contribute to the community's economic growth by generating income and self-employment opportunities. Handloom industries and handicrafts provide golden opportunities for rural women to establish micro-enterprises, fostering local economic development. In the context of sericulture, Bodo women spin cocoons into yarn to weave cloth, and they also sell cocoons in the market to generate household income. Hand-woven cloths command a good price in the market. Bodo women are involved in small-scale businesses, such as producing and selling traditional rice beer, vegetables, traditional cloths, rice cakes, dry fish, and other locally made goods. Through the commercialization of locally demanded products, Bodo women are increasingly contributing to the economic development of their families and the community.

Service Sector

The service sector is another area where Bodo women are making socio-economic contributions. Historically, few Bodo women depended on service jobs for economic advancement. Currently, only about 5% of Bodo women work in the service sector, which includes both government and private employment. In government service, Bodo women are engaged in fields such as education, healthcare, banking, and other financial services. Many Bodo women also work in private sector roles, including hotels, restaurants, industries, companies, and real estate.

Co-operative Society and Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

Co-operative societies and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play a significant role in the economic empowerment of Bodo women, especially in rural areas. These groups are voluntary associations of men or women with similar economic backgrounds. Members make small savings, accumulating enough capital to start lending within the group. Some women entrepreneurs, SHGs, and registered co-operative societies have established industries such as weaving, food processing, pig farming, and poultry farming in rural areas. These groups serve as vehicles for improving the livelihoods of the poor and marginalized, helping women engage in entrepreneurial activities. The success of co-operative societies and SHGs can lead to greater economic independence for women, enhancing their empowerment within society. Currently, Bodo women are becoming increasingly self-reliant, contributing to their family economies through these non-governmental groups.

Findings and Conclusion

- Rural Bodo women play a significant role in socio-economic development, more so than their urban counterparts.
- Agriculture, farming, weaving, business, and SHGs are the primary income sources for Bodo women.
- Due to a lack of skills and vocational training, Bodo women have not fully developed their potential in the socio-economic sector.
- The proportion of women who are self-employed in the private and public sectors is higher than those in the government sector.

It should be noted that low levels of education and skills, limited capital resources, low incomes, and high levels of segregation contribute to increasing unemployment. Bodo women's per capita incomes remain underdeveloped due to restrictions related to social norms, lack of market information, dependence on intermediaries, and other barriers. Despite these challenges, Bodo women participate in various economic activities both within and outside their homes in rural and urban areas. However, seclusion and mobility constraints limit their access to information, training, credit, and opportunities. The impact of modern technology is gradually increasing women's economic participation, leading to improvements in education, rural incomes, and productivity among the Bodo community. The fields of agriculture, farming, weaving, and sericulture remain crucial for income generation and are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of the Bodo society.

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