



PUNE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE



Case Study on
Women Social Innovators/
Entrepreneurs

November 2022

Dr. Vishal Gaikwad, Mr. Mandar Joshi,
Ms. Malavika Khatavkar



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Executive Summary

In recent years women are seen playing a top managerial role. In the business world, women's contribution is recognized and they are offered decision-making roles. According to International Monetary Fund Report 'Pursuing Women's Economic Empowerment' (2018), women's economic empowerment boosts productivity and increases economic diversification and income equality in addition to other positive development outcomes. Companies greatly benefit from increased employment and leadership opportunities afforded to women. Further, it is shown to increase organizational effectiveness and growth. It is estimated that companies with three or more women in senior management functions score higher in all dimensions of organizational performance (Women's Economic Empowerment UN 2018 Report). Guillen (2014) argued that in developing countries women entrepreneurs are important as they can truly make a difference.

Whenever entrepreneurship is discussed it is discussed in the context of the commercial and not in the context of the social context. Commercial entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship are different from each other. Social entrepreneurship refers to innovative activity with a social objective in either the for-profit sector, such as in social-purpose commercial ventures. Social entrepreneurship is growing rapidly and attracting increased attention from many sectors. Social entrepreneurial ventures in both developed and developing countries are key contributors to the creation and diversification of economic growth, emancipation and empowerment of women.

Understanding how women engage in social entrepreneurial activities which support the local developmental needs is necessary to be studied in detail (Amine & Staub, 2009; Huysentruyt, 2014). Understanding the entrepreneurs can help the policymakers to form the right policies for businesses and remove the loopholes in the existing policies to make them more effective. *This paper is an attempt to understand what has motivated these women to start a social start-up.*

For this study, we have selected three women entrepreneurs from three different fields. We first interviewed Akshita Sachdeva, founder of 'Trestle Labs, an Assistive Technology company enabling blind and visually-impaired people to access any type of content printed, handwritten, or digital anywhere. Second, we interviewed Saloni Sancheti, founder of 'BAANSULI' – Bamboo Artisan Socio-Economic Upliftment Initiative (Baansuli), and third, we interviewed Smriti Gupta, co-founder of 'Where Are India's Children' (WAIC).

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The present study explores the factors social (family background, role models), personal (education, experiences), environmental (government, financial institute, investors) and entrepreneurial learnings (actions, social and vicarious learnings) essentials for the development and sustainable growth of women social entrepreneurs.

This study adds value from the theoretical and policy perspectives. From the policy perspective, the study suggests that policymakers should emphasize promotional policies and developmental programs for encouraging women to become social entrepreneurs.





1. Introduction

The world is changing at lightning speed. Addressing complex and highly interconnected human developmental issues requires a fresh view, innovative approaches, a new type of leadership and an attitude that questions our very assumptions. It is highlighted and well-documented that women's leadership is more transformative than male leadership. There is empirical evidence which shows the positive influence of the participation of women in public affairs (Polas and Jahanshahi, 2020, Palacios et al. 2016). Women's participation in business and entrepreneurial activities has increased around the world (Abu-Hummour, 2019; Brush et al, 2009; Sarfaraz & Faghieh, 2011).

In recent years women are seen playing a top managerial role. In the business world, women's contribution is recognized and they are offered decision-making roles. According to International Monetary Fund Report 'Pursuing Women's Economic Empowerment (2018), women's economic empowerment boosts productivity and increases economic diversification and income equality in addition to other positive development outcomes. Companies greatly benefit from increased employment and leadership opportunities afforded to women. Further, it is shown to increase organizational effectiveness and growth. It is estimated that companies with three or more women in senior management functions score higher in all dimensions of organizational performance (Women's Economic Empowerment UN 2018 Report). Guillen (2014) argued that in developing countries women entrepreneurs are important as they can truly make a difference.

Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends survey, 2,250 adults ranked women better than or equal to men in seven of the eight primary leadership traits assessed throughout the survey. Recent studies have shown that female-led countries have performed better in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. The presence of women entrepreneurs is talked about in the context of commercial entrepreneurship and their role and presence in social entrepreneurship are often neglected.

Whenever entrepreneurship is discussed it is discussed in the context of the commercial and not in the context of the social context. Commercial entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship are different from each other. Social entrepreneurship refers to innovative activity with a social objective in either the for-profit sector, such as in social-purpose commercial ventures (Dees & Anderson, 2003; Emerson & Twersky, 1996) or corporate social entrepreneurship (Austin, Leonard, Reficco, & Wei-Skillern, 2004); or in the nonprofit sector, or across sectors, such as hybrid structural forms which mix for-profit and nonprofit approaches (Dees, 1998). Social entrepreneurship typically refers to the phenomenon of applying business expertise

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and market-based skills in the nonprofit sector such as when nonprofit organizations develop innovative approaches to earn income (Reis, 1999; Thompson, 2002).

Social entrepreneurship is growing rapidly and attracting increased attention from many sectors (Martin & Osberg, 2007). Social entrepreneurship was introduced in the 1970s to address the issue of social problems sustainably (Ebrashi, 2013). The book “The Sociology of Social Movements” written by Banks (1972) first time mentioned the term “social entrepreneur” to describe the need to use managerial skills to address social problems as well as to address business challenges. Social entrepreneurship practice flourished in the 1980s with the establishment of Ashoka, the first organization to support social entrepreneurs in the world. Drucker (1985) in his book ‘Innovation and entrepreneurship’ used the term ‘social innovation’ – the need for using management practices in nonprofit organizations to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of producing social good. The rise in social entrepreneurship forced traditional entrepreneurship to focus on innovation, risk-taking and large-scale transformation to social problem-solving (Makhlouf, 2011).

Social entrepreneurial ventures in both developed and developing countries are key contributors to the creation and diversification of economic growth, emancipation and empowerment of women (Datta and Gaily, 2012). Now, women’s entrepreneurship is growing in all fields in the world, especially in the field of social innovation.

Understanding how women engage in social entrepreneurial activities which support local developmental needs is necessary to be studied in detail (Amine & Staub, 2009; Huysentruyt, 2014). Understanding the entrepreneurs can help the policymakers to form the right policies for businesses and remove the loopholes in the existing policies to make them more effective. This paper is an attempt to understand what has motivated these women to start a social start-up. What type of challenges did they face in terms of funding, trained human resources, government policies etc.? What kind of support did they receive from their family and others? These are complex questions which can be answered through sustained and intensive research. This paper attempts to fill this gap.





2. Methodology:

An inductive approach has been followed for this paper. The research strategy used is the 'case study approach'. The research on social entrepreneurship and social enterprises is primarily documented through case studies (Anderson, Dana, & Dana, 2006; Hockerts, 2010).

The case study is the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003); and it's difficult to de-contextualize social enterprises without losing valuable information, therefore, the case study approach is selected for this paper. Another reason was to understand the indigenous views and so, qualitative tools, such as interviews or focused group discussions (FGDs) are more suitable than surveys. The social entrepreneurship ventures which are at the early stage of development need to be documented in-depth to find the relationship that could lead to qualitative studies.



3. Selection of Social Entrepreneurs:

Since 2013, the Pune International Centre (PIC) has been organizing the ‘National Conference on Social Innovation’ in collaboration with the National Innovation Foundation & Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). Social innovators send their applications from all corners of the country. Every year twelve innovators from the Urban and Rural categories were selected for the final presentation after scrutinizing all applications. For this study, we have selected three women entrepreneurs from three different fields. We tried to find out the commonalities, for example, what motivates them to start a business? and what type of challenges and obstacles they face. and if there are any similarities between them. A common set of questions was asked to these three women entrepreneurs and their responses were noted.

We first interviewed Akshita Sachdeva, founder of ‘Trestle Labs, an Assistive Technology company enabling blind and visually-impaired people to access any type of content printed, handwritten, or digital anywhere. Second, we interviewed Saloni Sancheti, founder of ‘BAANSULI’ – Bamboo Artisan Socio-Economic Upliftment Initiative (Baansuli), and third, we interviewed Smriti Gupta, co-founder of ‘Where Are India’s Children’ (WAIC) .





Discussion:

Education and Motivation:

The family environment, education and role models play a critical role in shaping the entrepreneur's personality and making them feel to form and manage a new enterprise.

Education is the most important factor in the upbringing of social entrepreneurs. It continuously plays an important role as entrepreneurs try to deal with the challenges they face in their business and correct the deficiencies in business training. It must be noted that formal education is not a precondition to starting a new business or becoming a first-time entrepreneur. Education though does provide a good background and it is needed in the area of finance, strategic planning, marketing and management.

Past research has pointed out that personal values are important for entrepreneurs. Family background has a significant effect on business entrepreneurial propensity (Athayde, 2009). Childhood incidents leave deep marks on the mind which motivates entrepreneurs to start their ventures.

Existing research shows that people get motivated to start their venture when they experience multi-disadvantage or any kind of discrimination. When people encounter others' hardship they become sensitive towards others and this lead to starting their venture. Also, they are motivated when they get involved with community work. Scheiber (2016) mentions the "cumulative effect" of experiences, and classifies learning experiences as "direct experience with inequality, interaction with target populations, volunteer work, religious institutions, social activism, formal education, professional experience, reading, and intercultural interactions". We now record the statements of the three budding entrepreneurs in their own words.

1. Akshita Sachdeva:

When I was young, I lost my grandmother to cancer. When I grew up, I wanted to become a doctor because my grandfather would say if there was a doctor in our family, maybe my grandmother would have been alive. I grew up listening to that and always wanted to become a doctor.

I started pursuing biology in the 12th grade and was one day discussing with my Zoology professor that I wanted to work in the cancer space. She said it was not always about you knowing the best doctor because it was also about the time or the stage at which cancer gets

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diagnosed. That stayed with me and I started to understand the intervention that helps to diagnose cancer at an early stage.

There were a couple of mentors or professors that I spoke to during the second year of my Engineering. They said that to work in this space I have got to be a part of an innovation and incubation centre.

A team was working on persons with blindness and building a project for them. They were in dire need of somebody from a software engineering background to join the team. I was ok with the job. Anything in the healthcare space and if it gives me experience, I would be happy to do that.

For the College project that I undertook, we looked at an NGO working at a blind school in Delhi. There was this little kid. He used the device and said he wanted to talk to his dad. So, he called his dad and we were just listening to the conversation. He was saying, 'Dad, some scientists have come to my school and they have made gloves for all of us and now I can read on my own. I can travel.' He was super excited about it. Then, maybe his dad asked him something and he just turned around and asked, 'When can I get this?' That left me dumbstruck. I didn't have words to answer his question but it left a mark on me. It was like a pivotal moment in my life when I decided that instead of pursuing a career in the IT sector or taking up any other job I would rather find the answer to his question as well as answers to similar questions that people like him have. That motivated me to continue working in this direction.

I applied to Digital Impact Square, which is a TCS Foundation initiative in Nashik. That was where I got my team, the mentors, and the resources that helped me start Trestle Labs.

2. Saloni Sacheti:

Yes, I wanted to work with women and for women's empowerment. I wanted to start something of my own, I was sure, but perhaps not at an early age.

I started looking for fellowships and job opportunities in the social development sector, and a fellowship, SBI Youth for India Fellowship, came to my notice. I applied and went to Dang in Gujarat, where I was placed during my fellowship

I saw the condition of women and the tribe there. They were not paid well, did not have a regular source of income, and were doing seasonal migration. There were a lot of problems. There was no livelihood opportunity for them. That made me realize that I should start an



enterprise, not for me but them. There's a lot of bamboo in Dang. That's how we came up with the idea of doing something with bamboo and being a woman I thought of doing something related to bamboo jewellery. I decided we should make something with bamboo, make bamboo jewellery, and we initiated the process of marketing and production.

I was trained in the way I was because I come from a business family. I always liked to work with women and for women's empowerment and so always thought of that. Probably that helped me and showed me a way. I wanted to do just this in my life but to choose this path I had to go through different journeys. Then, inevitably, I homed back to my path to do what I always wanted to do.

3. Smriti Gupta:

I had a professor during my Engineering Bachelor's in New York. For a few months of the year, he would go from New York to Ghana in Africa and teach there, like so many people who I saw doing good social impact work.

I naturally gravitated towards college professors or people whose work had a social impact or brought about social change or social reform and were inspirational.

That served as the trigger but the interest was always there and when you have the interest throughout your life, you naturally gravitate or attach to people who think like that.

I think the desire to do something like this already existed. It's just that those are the people I naturally gravitated towards because of my interest.

It was perhaps during my pre-teen or teen years.

I think the desire to work in the social impact space was always there, since my childhood or teenage or college years. In college, some of my favourite professors, besides talking about semiconductors, electricity and all those things, would talk about social impact.

After I went through my daughters' adoptions, I realized that millions of abandoned and orphaned kids in India were not even coming into the legal adoption process. So, the personal experience of going through that and knowing what was missing in the ecosystem finally gave me the exact problem I wanted to work on.

Role Models and People Who Influenced:

Empirical studies show a link between the presence of role models and the decision to become an entrepreneur. These studies do not necessarily establish a direct link between the presence of a role model and the setting up of new firms/start-ups. Role models can be divided into two categories, one is icons with whom the entrepreneur is not familiar on a personal basis, models such as Melinda Gates and the second type where the relationship can be more personal for example if the role model belongs to the entrepreneur's direct environment, such as close family members, friends, teachers to which there develops a strong bond or to the entrepreneur's wider environment such as colleagues, where there is a weaker bond.

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) discusses that individuals are attracted to role models who can help them to further develop themselves by learning new skills and undertaking new tasks (Gibson, 2004). Role models extend practical support and advice as a mentor to a mentee i.e. learning by support (Nauta and Kokaly, 2001). It becomes essential to understand how role models influence entrepreneurs in their career choice. Perhaps with a bit of repetition, we quote from the budding entrepreneurs we already reported verbatim.

1. Akshita Sachdeva:

I started pursuing biology in the 12th grade and was one day discussing with my Zoology professor that I wanted to work in the cancer space. She said it was not always about you knowing the best doctor because it was also about the time or the stage at which cancer gets diagnosed. That stayed with me and I started to understand the intersection that helps to diagnose at an early stage.

There were a couple of mentors or professors that I spoke to during the second year of my Engineering. They said that to work in this space I got to be a part of an innovation and incubation centre.

2. Saloni Sacheti:

If I hand over the entire enterprise to them, there would be quarrels among them. They would not be able to handle it and the upper sections would always try to negotiate with them. That's why I decided that they needed an urban face. I started loving them because I spent around two years with them and they became my family. So, I decided that I should take over and continue with this and try to have a more elaborate enterprise. That's how I entered into this.



3. Smriti Gupta:

I had a professor during my Engineering bachelor's in New York. For a few months of the year, he would go from New York to Ghana in Africa and teach there, like so many people who I saw doing good and impactful social work.

I naturally gravitated towards college professors or people whose work had a social impact or brought about social change or social reform.

About the person or persons who influenced me, I would say it was my mother because I have seen her do so much for society and she taught me to do something for society. That thing about her made me work with women, and have an enterprise with a large number of women working with us. So, it was not about choosing the enterprise but about working with women and it was my mom who influenced me in that.

Motivation for Registering as a Start-Up:

Entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are highly valued but one question is asked more frequently, what are the driving forces behind starting the company? In other words, what are the reasons behind registering a company and starting a business? Formally and legally to start any business or venture one has to register his/her company with appropriate government departments, without that you won't be able to get donations, work orders, tax incentives etc. There are two types of incentives one is a 'necessity' incentive and another is an 'opportunity' incentive. Necessity can often mean an economic or regulating necessity and opportunity often means seeing and seeking favourable business opportunities.

We asked a question to our women entrepreneurs why they decided to register their venture.

1. Akshita Sachdeva:

We registered it on the 30th of November 2017 because when we had decided to launch the pilot version of the product on the 4th of January, the donor, the Vice Chancellor of YCMOU, Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, had committed to support our pilot if we did this. So, it would be a paid pilot. The VC would pay for the four devices that we built. They would have two in YCMOU and two in the National Association for the Blind in Nashik.

The VC was the same person who had donated additional Rs 1.5-lakh device to the NGO as well. So, that was promising and we had to register the company because we were about to receive money from an entity/ company. That is how we registered the company so that we

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could receive the payment and that journey was really interesting in the first six months from January 2018 to June when we were running the six-month pilot

From August to November 2018, we manufactured 12 units locally in Nashik and supplied them to customers, after which we realised that we had built something that was creating a difference, that people were ready to pay for it, and that now we needed to think about the manufacturing processes, supply chain, and that was a different journey altogether. That was how it all started, to the point where we finally decided to register the company, got our first set of customers, and had the initial manufacturing done locally.

We knew that we would register a company but didn't want to rush it. We wanted to have that external validation, where somebody else tells you that you are building something that they want, that will create some change in their life, and they are ready to pay for it. Only then the time would be ripe and when we wanted to register the company. We didn't want to rush because anyway, the first year goes into understanding the customers.

2. Saloni Sacheti:

I think I had never thought of it because I am largely influenced by myself. I always want to try something different and do something out of my league because I was the first person in my family who moved out to Delhi for studies. I was the first generation in my family to become a lawyer. So, I think being the first generation to do something new and different, was a reason for taking an innovative step or doing something out of my league.

This is an MSME registered as a sole proprietor enterprise. From 2017 to 2018, it was a project under the SBI Youth for India Fellowship supported by buyers. Then in 2019, I got registered as Baansuli under MSME as a sole proprietor enterprise. We have a trade mark for Baansuli. So since 2019, we have been operating as an MSME sole proprietor enterprise.

3. Smriti Gupta:

Yes, I would say that was the turning point in the sense that I finally figured out what problem I wanted to work on. I had wanted to work in the child protection space but it is such a big space. So, knowing where you want to work, that decision came through the adoptions.

I started reaching out to people and, to be honest, my initial desire was not to start an organisation. It was to work in this space.

So, if there was already an organisation working in this space and if they had allowed me



to join them, I would have joined them. But I realised after the initial exploration that nobody else was precisely doing the kind of work I wanted. This work was not top of the mind for anybody. It was very new. People hadn't started thinking like this yet.

So, that is why it took a few months, at least a year, a year and a half, of exploration to get to a stage where I realised that if something has to be done in this area, then I would have to start something new if this does not exist.

I talked to enough people, and met people who thought like me, were passionate, and were also very interested when I talked about starting something. That is how all three partners of us got together and realised we have to do something formal and started the organisation.

Challenges:

With women entrepreneurship widely acknowledged to contribute to the economic development of any country, it follows that neglecting women in the development process constitutes human waste (Halkia et al, 2011). Many studies have shown that hindered business growth often led to the problems like low productivity, high rates of business failure and no access to credit growth (Dionco-Adetayo et al., 2005). There are many problems faced by women entrepreneurs right from gender bias, working capital, lack of trained human resources, legal formalities etc.

We asked our female entrepreneurs what type of challenges they faced in their businesses.

1. Akshita Sachdeva

I do not believe there is, at a base level, any gender to entrepreneurship. So like any entrepreneur, as a woman entrepreneur, I have had similar challenges and figured out my way through them.

The one thing that I constantly think about while thinking about impact is: how we get the money. How do we get the money to manufacture stuff? How do we get the money to pay salaries to our team?

At times we would feel that, as a social entrepreneur, thinking about money is not good. But I think it also fuels that impact that we generate and it is equally important. In that regard, I would constantly think about how we do that, and that keeps you on your toes to hustle around and get more customers because if you just sit in a lab, work on your technology and you are not able to sell it out, it gets difficult going forward

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Another thing about managing my business was hustling, selling the product on the ground, and making sure we have the best team and the best product. We were selling it in the best possible manner and that is when you realise when you need to scale that impact.

As a founder, while you have done your level best to reach out to customers, you also need your clones in the business development team who could take it up. And when you have to hire such people, you need more money. Then is the whole process around fundraising. I still struggle with this question of whether we need equity-based investment, or if we should just go the non-dilutive grant-based funding way.

The first of the four pillars that I manage my business around is the product. The product is the most important thing, building a strong product. The second is building a strong team because there is nothing without a team. The third is around fundraising. You should be very clear about your fund-raising goals – why you need funds and how you will generate them. Everybody has a different way of doing it.

Even after 10 months, we didn't have enough money to draw salaries.

This is especially so when you have two people hustling, living literally on nothing, and one person thinking about jobs and salaries and everything. It got difficult initially and then finally we were ok.

After registering the company, from the compliance perspective, we would have lost one year of tax exemption, which we get as a DIPP company. So, I thought it would be better if we register it when we start receiving money.

In terms of the challenges, getting the funds was one.

The first challenge came from being a woman entrepreneur. I think my male co-founders had similar challenges at their homes. I mean, lack of family support. It's difficult for your family members or your parents to digest what you are trying to do.

Their typical aim is, now that you have done your Engineering you should get settled in four to five years so that they can just get you married and be done with it. That sort of thing was on their minds and they found it slightly difficult to understand.

Secondly, about the financial support, you might ask what if we wouldn't be building the right company and doing the right pitch? These are the two challenges. If you have the right business and if you can pitch it well enough, it is the only way you can mitigate the challenge



of receiving funding. Otherwise, from my perspective, there is no other challenge.

2. Saloni Sacheti

Regarding the problems and the solutions that all start-ups work on, we look at what the problem is and how to resolve it. We go with a two-way problem and a two-way solution. The first problem comes with the artisans. They face the problem of having no regular source of income and seasonal migration.

The second was the problems of the consumers. They had stretched earlobes, which made them go for surgery. So, they are advised not to wear jewellery of more than 3 to 10 grams. We provide jewellery of not more than 3 to 10 grams, which you can put on either with Indian or Western wear.

For the jewellery, raw material is required. We need semi-precious stones, another material which we don't get in Gujarat and nearby areas.

Production was going on and we were about to give it to them and suddenly the lockdown happened and the order got cancelled. We had stock worth Rs 3 lakh ready and we needed to make the payment to the artisans. So, we made the payment to them but we had inventory and that is how we shifted to B2C.

We got active on our Instagram and Facebook and in DMing personally to people explaining the situation we were in and people started liking our products, buying our products and re-ordering our products, and we were able to sell Rs 3-lakh worth of products in around four months.

I have faced challenges every day because it's a challenging task especially when you are a sole entrepreneur, the lone person managing the post-production and the pre-production and even the dispatch and everything. The only way is to keep yourself motivated every day to work even harder.

Sometimes funds become a challenge.

I think a perfect partner, or a supporting family, helps you overcome this. Even your domestic help becomes a very big support when you are doing it from your home, or if you are doing right. Domestic help also supports you in all your work, and your daily chores, but when you talk about working with the artisans, they work with a very different mindset. They have very different thought processes and changing them and their thought process is a very

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difficult task because when I went there in the initial days, it was very difficult to make them understand the importance of regular income or even income.

There is a different dynamic altogether with working with the rural community. They have internal issues like, between two women, they will quarrel any day.

The challenge is to keep yourself balanced every time, not only with them and work but also personally because sometimes you are too overloaded with so many thoughts on your mind.

I was just thinking about it today because in India there is no concept of a sole proprietor. A sole proprietor doesn't come under a start-up. It either has to be an LLP, a private limited, or a partnership enterprise/ company.

So why doesn't the government introduce a start-up policy for women entrepreneurs who are sole proprietors? Because, they have seed funding of Rs 2 lakh for all the start-ups, right? But, we being sole proprietors, being woman entrepreneurs, cannot avail of it because we are not privately limited or anything. We are a sole proprietor.

We need to have a mediator NGO who can supply our products through that channel and in that there is an issue of commission. So, we are not able to avail of the policies because there is no such policy for a sole proprietor or a woman entrepreneur in India.

3. Smriti Gupta

A little bit painful. What happens is, there is a lack of clear information on what exactly you need to do. After I decided to incorporate it as an NGO, if I talked to five to 10 different people, I would get 5 to 10 different answers.

So, there was just a lot of unclear information, and that is still our problem. We have been functioning formally for almost three years and I would say that is still our challenge, in terms of compliance, in terms of government rules, which one we are supposed to follow and how to follow it. That was a huge headache.

Yes, and consistent information is also an issue. Technically, I am getting information but if five people are telling me five different things, then it is going to give me a headache, not clarity.

As day-to-day expenses are going to increase as you grow, matching up to those expenses



and getting yourself properly funded to keep your passion and your cause intact is a day-to-day challenge for any entrepreneur or social innovator. That is what my experience has been because cash burns like crazy.

And one of the co-founders, Meera, who has been working full time on this, hasn't drawn any compensation from the NGO, partly because the NGO doesn't have the funds to compensate us. If we get the funds, we would first like to pay our employees and towards our programmes.

That is what is required but eventually, at some point, the organisation has to be self-sustaining enough or has to get enough donations so that it can compensate everybody working on it, not just the employees but anybody working full time on it. So, yeah, we were in a position where we could do that. We could say let us not take any compensation but we will work on it full-time for a few years.

You have to scale back your lifestyle, scale back the things you do. Those lifestyle adjustments you have to make but yes, we were able to continue this work because we had savings and because we have working spouses. I don't know how somebody who does not have a working spouse or savings, how would they start an NGO.

With passion, you need that support in terms of funds and other passionate people also because individually surviving with your passion is a big challenge in this. So, investors have got attracted towards the world of IT, and IT entrepreneurship.

Covid messed up my life. I am sure it messed up the life of every working parent in the world. Covid was tough. Covid has been tough but if we keep Covid aside for a second, the way I have managed it is with a combination of those child support things, schools, day-care, nanny, and then bifurcating my day.

So here, I can see a major difference when it comes to a woman social innovator or a woman social entrepreneur. And if it was her husband doing the same thing, he would have handled it differently, without having the additional responsibilities that Smriti has to bear.

Both our work was important in our domains and we were trying to figure out who gets to work first, who manages the kids and all that. And, the attitude of one of our relatives, who I guess saw us figuring this out, was like my husband's work comes first because that is the work that makes money.

We do not get ready staff and hiring will always be a challenge for us. We will need to hire

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smart people who we can train.

Networking with organisations is much harder because there is no one person there you can connect with. You have to somehow have the organisation come behind you. So, networking with individuals is doable. I would say networking with organisations is much harder.

The things that I find truly hard are compliance related. As I said, it wasn't just at the beginning, even now we are grappling with a couple of compliance issues or questions and we have talked to three different CAs, who have given us three different answers. We don't know what to do. That to me is the tough part, tough because I can't even take the next step because I don't know what it is.

Raining the Funds

The one major challenge faced by entrepreneurs highlighted above was capital. Lack of capital is the biggest problem faced by social entrepreneurs. The majority of the start-up's money comes from personal savings, credit, friends and relatives. With this kind of money, businesses do not survive long. Lack of working capital poses a risk of closing down the business. Although there are many initiatives taken by the government like 'Make in India', 'Start-Up India' still, the policies framed for social entrepreneurs are not enough as they struggle to get the funds. Traditional funding channels like banks and non-banking financial institutes (NBFC) required collaterals for the loan which most social start-ups lack.

Further, we asked how our respondents managed the funds

1. Akshita Sachdeva:

After PIC, we got a couple of other organisations to support us in the ecosystem. One of them was IKP Eden in Bangalore, which provided us with the first financial support through a grant programme, Niddhi Prayas, a prototyping grant by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. That is how we received the first grant, which gave us the funding to build our manufacturing processes and have our supply chains in place so that we were able to know the supply and demand we were generating through our team.

At times, we have also utilised a lot of brands to offer subsidies on our products to make sure that we can create an on-ground impact even for persons who come from low-income settings

And then we applied to this grants programme, which was at IKP Eden in Bangalore, and



we got a Rs 10-lakh grant. It was a prototyping grant.

I think a lot of people have different apprehensions about grant funding as well. They think grant comes slowly and investors invest and the money comes fast. I have almost been through both of them and chosen one.

2. Saloni Sacheti:

To make it sustainable, to carry on this project, we had funding of around Rs 80,000 given to us by BAIF to start the production and do the business and everything from that amount. Whatever revenue used to come, we would keep 20% of it to re-invest in the business and the rest was distributed or paid to the artisans.

When we changed the model and I became the sole proprietor, I also wanted to have my share but without reducing the pay of the artisans. If a product worth Rs 100 was selling before and is selling now, if I take a cut out of it, then it is obvious that there will be less for the artisans. So, we increased the price of the product.

3. Smriti Gupta:

We weren't asking for much because we were trying to keep our costs low. A lot of our founders spent our funds on this. So, overall, we kept the cost low. So, initially, it worked.

Now, it is going to become more of a priority for us. As we get into our third year, we need committed funds, large amounts.

It is tough to raise funds. I would say it is partly because there is this catch-22 when it comes to raising funds in India and starting as an entrepreneur.

To do work, you need money. How do you get that money without the certification? So, there is this chicken and egg problem that I think exists for NGOs specifically, where the government only gives you certifications after you have done the work. You need those certifications to get donor money, without which you can't do the work.

What do you do then when you have to go ask for money from people? Who is going to give you money without the tax exemption? And, who are going to be those people? They are going to be the people who personally like you or believe in your cause and it's hard to find such people.

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Initially, I and the co-founders met a lot of expenses out of our pockets and we just noted them down as expenses and figured whenever the money came, we would reimburse ourselves. That is not possible in every social innovator's case, in every scenario.

To some extent, you will put your money until so and so point but after that, you need to work on some model, where somebody is there to help and be passionate and be a part of your journey and fund this cause.

And in terms of fund-raising and all, I think it is getting difficult now. For the first two and a half years, the level of funds we needed, when we reached out to people and asked for donations, our network would support it. I feel we are reaching a stage where our immediate network will no longer be able to support the level of funds we need. So, fund-raising is going to get tough and now we will need large sums of money and we will need to approach established organisations.

Government Policies:

Most social entrepreneurs' start-ups faced lots of challenges because of a lack of clear guidelines and regulations. And many times it becomes difficult to get required permissions from government agencies as the officers lack clarity of the social innovative idea behind the business.

1. Akshita Sachdeva:

In terms of policy changes and also in terms of funding resources, I would say especially working with the government or in the government sector has been hard for us. Thankfully, we are not exclusively B2G. So, we do not have to deal with the government a lot.

The only experience we have had dealing with government agencies is around work orders, different competitions, and even lots of governments. Even Maharashtra has this Maharashtra Start-up Week that they organised for promoting entrepreneurship. So, a lot of efforts have been made in those directions as well.

But, I would say it is such a lengthy process around anything. It is hard even if you receive a work order grant from the government, any state government, or the Central government, if you want to get a loan from any of these government schemes around start-ups, if you have to receive any equity investment from these schemes like BIRAC and a couple of other like bodies under DST, DBT, who also have equity-based investments.



2. Saloni Sacheti:

My first would be the start-up India policy. That is because the start-up India policy does not consider sole proprietors as a start-up. That is the problem, but why not? Either amend the sole proprietor thing or amend the start-up thing because, generally, it is a very common thing.

Any woman who wants to start a business will first become a sole proprietor because if a private limited company is started, you want to have an AGM, the audit and everything. A woman entrepreneur would not be able to do all these. And if you are talking about women empowerment, how can you not do all this stuff? So, I want a sole proprietor start-up in India to become one part of it.

3. Smriti Gupta:

We talked to the government folks only once. Ours is a section 8 NGO. So, I don't think we go through the charity commissioner. We go through the IT department.

We didn't have that many government contact points because our CA was doing that.

Overall, getting approvals, going to the government, and getting them to say ok to a project was extremely hard. I would say that is the hardest part. Everything else we can manage but that was hard because it's just not under our control. We didn't know when they would give us time. We had to chase one particular government official for two years before she even agreed to our programme. So, that is there and I think that is just a manifestation of how government works.

I think the government officials, from what I have understood so far working with them, are generally loaded from, say, five different directions. So, the things they will act upon are normally when there is a drop-down pressure like, if the minister cares about something or if their boss cares about something, then that becomes a priority for them, or if there is a personal conviction that this work needs to be done. One or the other has to be there.

I also think she probably did not have a personal conviction about this cause, but I have seen her grow over time, as she is now a lot more helpful than she was probably a couple of years ago. Maybe something shifted in how she viewed this particular work or this particular area and then.

In contrast, in the WCD commissioner in Telangana, there was an older commissioner,

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a lady. When we approached her, she was completely dismissive of our work. She said this work was not even needed. She said there was no problem. But then, the new commissioner, another woman officer, acknowledged the problem in the first meeting. She said this was an issue and we need somebody to work on it because I think she had a conviction that this is an area that needs to be improved.

So, it's variable and depends upon what their convictions are, whether they have the conviction, whether they are just cruising through the job, or if they want to make a difference. It depends upon how much time they have, how much bandwidth they have, and what priorities their boss has set for them.

Further, we asked our respondents how they overcome the challenges they faced in their businesses. Some of it is inevitably repetitive to some extent.

1. Saloni Sacheti:

The second was the problems of the consumers. They had stretched earlobes, which made them go for surgery. So, they were advised not to wear jewellery of more than 3 to 10 grams. We provide jewellery of not more than 3 to 10 grams, which they could wear, either with Indian or Western wear.

I buy all this material locally and design things and send the raw material to tribals and women in Dang. They make the products and courier them to me in Jaipur. I do the quality checking and when the order comes, I dispatch it from Jaipur. This is how we manage the cycle.

I feared that when I was not there, other people might come and would offer to give the artisans more money. So, I wanted to make sure they keep on working with me. So, I told them that based on how much they make and send, I would pay them accordingly, but they would have to make and send that much. So, the model of payment changed. Earlier, based on how much sold, they would get that much only. So, those were the two different models. Nothing has changed as such.

Production was going on and we were about to give it to them and suddenly the lockdown happened and the order got cancelled. We had stock worth Rs 3 lakh ready and we needed to make the payment to the artisans. So, we made the payment to them but we had inventory and that is how we shifted to B2C.

We got active on our Instagram and Facebook and in DMing personally to people that this



and this happened to us and people started liking our products, taking our products and re-ordering our products, and we were able to sell Rs 3-lakh worth of products in around four months.

It was a huge time, though, because four months is a long time. Still, we could sell those Rs 3-lakh worth of products in four months. So, at that time, we realised it is good to have both B2B and B2C.

Ironically, the pandemic was great for us in a way as we could move to the hybrid model of B2B and B2C. We could make more designs in jewellery and were made to realise that we could work while we were sitting here, and work was happening easily because we were doing it on WhatsApp. I was just sending the design on WhatsApp and they were able to make it for me. Also, we could easily do an expansion in the product range. So that is how Covid was for us.

2. Akshita Sachdeva:

In terms of how I manage my business, there are a couple of things. It starts with me. I have to be passionate enough, motivated enough and hustling enough to make sure that we can generate impact and at the same time generate revenues for the company.

With my co-founders, we would be doing outreach camps. We did state-wide outreach campaigns. Initially, since it was a new product, it was not like a smartphone that you launch on social media, we had to reach out to customers. We had to go from college to college, NGO to NGO, giving demonstrations about the product. And, interestingly, if you build a strong enough product and when people see it, they know that they need to have it.

You have to go there, talk to people, show them the product, demonstrate it, and sell it. That is how we also generate impact. It is not just about you selling it and then you get the money. It is also about if you don't sell it, it is sitting in your office. Then you don't generate impact. So, it is both ways.

Another thing about managing my business was hustling, selling the product on the ground, and making sure we have the best team and the best product. We were selling it in the best possible manner and that is when you realise when you need to scale that impact.

We have had a bootstrap venture for the past four years and have received support from good government and private companies who have supported us through their grants programmes, the social entrepreneurship sector, the women entrepreneurship sector, and also the IT sector.

3. Smriti Gupta:

I think a perfect partner, or a supporting family, helps you overcome this. Even your domestic help becomes a very big support when you are doing it from your home, or if you are doing right. Domestic help also supports you in all your work, and your daily chores, but when you talk about working with the artisans, they work with a very different mindset. They have very different thought processes and changing them and their thought process is a very difficult task because when I went there in the initial days, it was very difficult to make them understand the importance of regular income or income itself.

I think staying motivated every day and waking up with positive thoughts will help overcome all the challenges.

As I said, Meera and I worked for quite a long time in the high-paying corporate sector. That helped. Second, we have spouses. Our spouses draw a salary. My husband has his start-up and all that.

One of the things I learnt was that I can't do this meeting at 9 a.m., then at 2 p.m., then at 6 p.m., and then at 9 p.m. I have to say I am going to work from 9 to 5, then from 5 to 9 p.m. Until my kid sleeps, I can't take meetings or work. So, I have had to block off hours in my life.

Training them on the field becomes part of our job of making them understand.

I would say that anybody working in any very specific NGO field, will have to train their people and for us that is even more applicable.

Leadership Qualities:

Entrepreneurs need to have the leadership qualities needed to make company formation possible and to run the company successfully. Knowledge acquired from formal education and previous work experience makes an entrepreneur feel capable of forming and managing a new business.

We asked our interviewees, what leadership qualities are needed by social women entrepreneurs.

1. Saloni Sacheti:

About the two leadership or management qualities, if you talk about what I possess and how I am handling things, I can relate to any emotional, financial or mental problem with



anybody. So, if you can, instead of sympathising, empathise with people, it is very important when you are leading a team.

Secondly, I am a good decision-maker. If I am making any decisions, I will try to make them as soon as possible and not worry about whether it is good or bad or even ugly. But, I will try to the best of my capability and capacity to work hard to make it correct and to make it work.

I think the decision-making power of a leader and trying to execute that decision in your everyday life are the two beautiful parts of skills.

2. Smriti Gupta:

I would tell women, and entrepreneurs, that their work is work irrespective of whether somebody is compensating them for it or not.

The second leadership quality I think worked in our favour is looking at everything in a professional light.

Experience with PIC

Our three interviewees participated in the ‘National Conference on Social Innovation’ which PIC hosted in collaboration with the National Innovation Foundation and TISS. These three social start-ups received after-conference training and support from PIC to run their businesses. Each start-up was assigned one mentor who will help the entrepreneurs in solving their business difficulties. We asked interviewees about their experience with PIC.

1. Akshita Sachdeva:

I would say the first people to believe in us after Digital Impact Square was PIC, we got to know this through and during the NCSI conference. I mean, I got to be a part of PIC. So, PIC has been the first people, the first organisation to believe in us and support us in our journey. After we received support from PIC, we also got mentorship from Mr Sanjay Kanvinde sir.

I don’t know if without PIC we would have been able to reach out to him because the relationship that we have with him went beyond PIC. So, while it was a six-month thing, it has gone on and on and I would still find myself texting him, saying, ‘Sir, I have an urgent thing. Can we have a quick five minutes call?’ And it would end up being a 30-minute call and, thankfully, he would not mind that. That was the relationship we had with him and also the team and everybody around it.

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The support that we have received from PIC has been the basis of everything.

And, the mentorship that we have received from Sanjay sir has gone beyond PIC, beyond our expectations because when it had all started, when we applied to NCSI, PIC, we didn't even know or expect that this is the kind of support we would receive.

The second thing is about the grant money, that PIC supported us with the award money. That was helpful.

The first one to believe in the company Trestle Labs was PIC. The role that PIC has played in our journey has been beyond what we thought it would be.

2. Saloni Sacheti:

I became a PIC top 18 social innovator, it was a good accolade that added to my portfolio and my profile. I was mentored by Anil Kulkarni sir, who gave me feedback on various procedures to work on.

Recently, I benefitted from their social welfare initiative, where I was able to get my website done. It was because I was a part of PIC Pune. I could make a website with the help of their Shared Service Centre. They not only help their recent winners but also their past winners. Nobody does that. I think nobody in the entire fraternity or this industry has been helping or incubating people like that. I have never seen any institution that is helping their winners, innovators, from three to four years back. PIC is helping them and that is a wonderful thing.

3. Smriti Gupta:

The journey overall in PIC was good. PIC was very, very supportive.

What was hugely helpful was the networking. Our mentors put us in touch with the right people and that was hugely beneficial. The government official who finally talked to us after two years happened because of PIC.

The benefits I already talked about. Another benefit I missed mentioning is that it is always good to have somebody brainstorm things with you, which is what our mentors did with us. Not everything would result in something but that brainstorming helped keep us on our toes. We are talking to our mentors once a week or two and these are the things we go and work on. So, that brainstorming and that accountability helped



5. Findings:

Women social entrepreneurs are playing an important role in economic, societal and environmental value creation worldwide. It is widely recognized that women face more challenges compared to their male counterparts in their entrepreneurial endeavours. For many women entrepreneurs, striking the balance between work and family is difficult. For this study, we have selected three women entrepreneurs from three different fields. We interviewed them to find out the commonalities, for example, what motivates them to start a business? What type of challenges and obstacles do they face? And if there are any similarities between them. Our findings are as follows.

Family background plays a great role in shaping entrepreneurship qualities. There is a piece of strong evidence that entrepreneurs tend to start their venture when they are self-employed or they have entrepreneurial parents. The independent nature and flexibility of self-employment by parents are ingrained at an early age. When parents are supportive and encourage independence, achievement and responsibility appear to be very important for female entrepreneurs (Hisrich & Brush, 1986). The education of entrepreneurs is an important factor which plays a major role in an entrepreneur's life. Personal values are very important for social entrepreneurs. Apart from the family members teacher can significantly influence the person with regards not only to business careers but to entrepreneurship as one possible career path. Earlier research suggests that generally male entrepreneurs tend to start their first significant venture in their early 30s, whereas female entrepreneurs tend to do this in their mid-30s (Hisrich, 1990). Now women entrepreneurs are starting their businesses in their early 30s.

Though the desire for making difference in society is generated from the culture, family, and teachers and in the environment you are operating but the important question is what makes it possible to form a new company? Several factors like government, marketing, support and finances contribute to creating new ventures. Government policies play an important role. It has been observed that there are many policies and initiatives taken by the government to encourage new entrepreneurship. But these policies and schemes are not enough for budding social entrepreneurs, especially sole female ones. Government need to come up with new policies targeting social entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. This is especially true because social entrepreneurship is different from traditional entrepreneurship. Many times government officials do not understand the nature of social enterprise therefore government officials need the training to handle the issues faced by social enterprises. Working capital is the main challenge in front of social entrepreneurs. Most of the time, they manage from their savings. They do experience difficulties and often fail to attract financial support from formal agencies. The demand for collateral makes things difficult for social entrepreneurs.

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Training and mentorship programs play a significant role in nurturing and sustaining enterprises rather than in creating them. To encourage the social women entrepreneur and entrepreneurship there should be tailor-made training and mentorship programs. It is evident that women are willing to take up businesses and not only contribute to the nation's growth but also they want to create a difference in society. Women social entrepreneurs work for the oppressed and often neglected class of people. The entrepreneurial training will help them to become successful.





6. Key Policy Recommendations:

Based on the discussion with these three women entrepreneurs, policy measures to support women's entrepreneurship can go along with some different lines. Policymakers can

- Listen to the voice of women entrepreneurs. Work on creating better possibilities for women entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs.
- Incorporate a women's entrepreneurial dimension in the formation of all SME-related policies.
- Promote the development of women entrepreneur networks. Entrepreneur's networks are one of the main sources of knowledge about women's entrepreneurship and valuable tools for its development and promotion.
- Periodically evaluate the impact of SME-related policies the on the success of women-owned businesses and the extent to which such businesses take advantage of them.
- Give training to the government official to understand the nature and activities of social entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship.



7. Conclusion:

The present study explores the factors social (family background, role models), personal (education, experiences), environmental (government, financial institute, investors) and entrepreneurial learnings (actions, social and vicarious learnings) essentials for the development and sustainable growth of women social entrepreneurs.

This study adds value from the theoretical and policy perspectives. From the policy perspective, the study suggests that policymakers should emphasize promotional policies and developmental programs for encouraging women to become social entrepreneurs. Mentorship programs created by PIC are one good example. The key focus of this study is to understand the issues faced by social women entrepreneurs. This study has a few limitations indicating new opportunities and directions for conducting further research. This study employed qualitative analysis that highly depends on the skills of the researcher that may provide a subjective outlook. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies follow a semi-qualitative or quantitative approach. There is also a need for a comparative study between men and women entrepreneurs to analyze the conceptual framework. In entrepreneurial research, a substantial contribution has been made by this study, there is a need for a longitudinal study.





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Annexure:

Organisation name- WAIC

Director and Co-founder, Smriti Gupta

WAIC is registered as Child Welfare and Action Foundation. WAIC are working to ensure that abandoned and orphaned children are accounted for and reach a positive outcome in the best interest of the child, they are focusing on a three-pronged approach. Their team consists of people passionate about child welfare, who have a common vision that we as individuals and society must protect and ensure a future for every vulnerable child. Their team is distributed pan-India and includes entrepreneurs, technologists, campaigners, counsellors, business heads, and strategists.

Organisation name: Trestle Labs Pvt. Ltd.

Co-founder, Akshita Sachdeva

Ms. Akshita and team have developed their solution 'Kibo – A one-stop solution to access any kind of printed, handwritten and digital content'. Kibo comprises 2 products: Kibo Kibo XS device. Kibo mobile-app is a one-stop solution to access any kind of Printed, Handwritten and Digital content, in real-time, through audio, across multiple Indian and overseas languages, with an immersive reading and learning experience at par with sighted peers. While bringing access to 1 Million+ accessible books in collaboration with online digital-libraries to download and listen in audio, it also reads any digital document – PDF, ePub, Daisy, Docx, Txt, Images and Audio across multiple Indian and overseas languages. While Kibo mobile-app also offers Capture and Read feature, not many of our Visually-impaired friends are dextrous enough to capture photos using their phone, and the task is even tougher when the content is huge (for Higher-education, Competitive-exams and Workplace scenarios). So, for Educational and Workplace scenarios, we have developed Kibo XS which is a table-lamp like device that reads any Printed and Handwritten Content across 12 Indian and multiple overseas languages in real-time through audio, translates text across 100+ languages and helps download the same across Editable formats like Doc, Docx and even PDF, while giving an option to save the documents on Kibo-cloud for multi-device access.



Organisation name: Baansuli- Bamboo Artisan Socio-Economic Upliftment Initiative

Co-founder, Saloni Sancheti

Dang is one of the most economically distressed districts out of 640 districts in India having 98% of the tribal population. The major source of income is agriculture but due to hilly terrain, post monsoon Dang faces water scarcity creating discouragement for cultivation practices. As a result, Dangs observes seasonal migration of cultivators and agriculture laborers. Ms. Saloni Sacheti observed that this area is bamboo abundant and decided to use bamboo as a source of income generation for the tribal people. She founded a project called 'Baansuli-Bamboo Artisan, Socio-economic Upliftment Initiative' in which uniquely handcrafted bamboo earrings made from locally sourced variety of Manvel bamboo. This contemporary jewellery uses german silver, semi-precious stones, tussles etc. to make it more attractive.





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