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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Women Entrepreneurs' Success Factors in Mullaitivu Post-War Development

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Abstract

The research explores the impact of post-war development in Mullaitivu District, Sri Lanka, on the success determinants of female entrepreneurs, identifying key components. The study utilized qualitative research methodology, focusing on 55 successful women entrepreneurs, and employed Reflexive Content Analysis (RCA) to identify trends and patterns in the data. Mullaitivu District's women's entrepreneurship is influenced by individual, institutional, technology, and family factors, each with specific context-specific dimensions in post-war development contexts. The study, focusing on a specific region and sample of successful female entrepreneurs, offers valuable insights for practitioners, decision-makers, and groups supporting female entrepreneurs. They emphasize how crucial it is to address institutional, familial, technological, and individual aspects to support prosperous post-war entrepreneurial endeavors. This study emphasizes the importance of laws and initiatives supporting women's business ventures by providing access to capital, education, and social support, contributing to gender-inclusive economic growth in post-war communities, particularly in Mullaitivu District, Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Challenges, Community Support, Economic Growth, Empowerment, Innovation, Mullaitivu, Post-War Development, Sri Lanka, Success Factors, Women Entrepreneurs*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women's entrepreneurship is broadly acknowledged as a pivotal force propelling economic growth, social integration, and sustainable development in both advanced and developing economies. Existing scholarship emphasizes women entrepreneurs as a vital yet underleveraged reservoir of economic promise, especially in settings where inclusive growth is indispensable for national reconstruction and sustained stability (Gupta & Mirchandani, 2018; Ogundana et al., 2021). In the past two decades, academic inquiry into women-founded and women-led enterprises has proliferated markedly, propelled by their contributions to catalyzing innovation, creating employment opportunities, and strengthening community resilience (Mahajan & Bandyopadhyay, 2021).

However, entrepreneurship represents a socially embedded phenomenon rather than merely an economic endeavour (Brush et al., 2009). Therefore, a nuanced understanding of women entrepreneurs' success requires context-sensitive analysis of the institutional, cultural, familial, and technological factors shaping entrepreneurial behavior. (Foss et al., 2019). While prevailing global scholarship on women's entrepreneurship offers valuable insights, these findings cannot be readily generalized to regions characterized by unique socio-political histories, particularly post-conflict contexts (Davidsson, 1995; Naidu & Chand, 2017).

In post-conflict environments, entrepreneurship frequently assumes a central role in facilitating economic recovery, livelihood rehabilitation, and social reconstruction (Castellanza, 2022). In particular, women entrepreneurs shoulder intensified economic and social responsibilities as household heads, primary income providers, and pillars of community stability. Nevertheless, the extant entrepreneurship literature remains predominantly oriented toward urban, metropolitan, and stable economic contexts, devoting insufficient attention to rural post-conflict areas and the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs therein. Sri Lanka exemplifies this issue. Despite comprising more than half of the national population, women exhibit markedly low participation in formal economic activities. They constitute only 34% of the labor force and contribute approximately 29% to the national economy among the lowest rates in the Asia-Pacific region (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2023; World Bank, 2011). These disparities are particularly pronounced in conflict-

affected regions, where protracted warfare has undermined livelihoods, depleted assets, and reconfigured family structures.

Mullaitivu District, situated in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, endured profound devastation from nearly three decades of civil conflict(Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2022; Mullaitivu District Secretariat, 2022). Following resettlement in 2011, women entrepreneurs in Mullaitivu began operating micro and small enterprises often with minimal capital, limited institutional support, and substantial familial responsibilities.

Despite a range of government and non-governmental programs aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship in post-conflict districts, these efforts have yielded inconsistent results. A primary shortfall of prevailing initiatives is their inadequate comprehension of the essence of entrepreneurial success in post-war settings, including the divergences in success factors from those prevailing in stable or urban economies. A substantial body of extant Sri Lankan entrepreneurship scholarship predominantly employs quantitative methodologies, yielding generalized metrics that overlook the nuanced meanings, motivations, and contextual intricacies underpinning women entrepreneurs' trajectories (Ranasinghe, 2012; Sarker & Palit, 2014).

This research bridges the identified gap through a qualitative, contextually attuned methodology to investigate the determinants of success among women entrepreneurs in Mullaitivu District. In particular, it examines the interplay between post-war developmental conditions and individual competencies, institutional frameworks, technological accessibility, and familial influences in configuring entrepreneurial outcomes. In this manner, the study surpasses mere descriptive contextualization, advancing theoretical insights by elucidating how post-conflict settings reshape established models of entrepreneurial success and underscoring the interconnectedness of social, institutional, and familial dynamics in entrepreneurial performance.

This research enriches the scholarship on entrepreneurship and post-conflict development by adapting prevailing frameworks of women's entrepreneurship to rural post-war settings, wherein traditional success paradigms frequently overlook experiential realities. It reveals

that entrepreneurial success in such contexts transcends individual endeavor, arising instead from the synergistic interplay of institutional support structures, familial fortitude, and profound community integration. Through the presentation of in-depth qualitative findings, this study contests generalized and context-insensitive models of entrepreneurial success, emphasizing the context-bound character of success factors in post-conflict contexts. By centering the real-life narratives of women entrepreneurs in Mullaitivu District, the research deepens theoretical comprehension and furnishes policy-oriented recommendations for academics, development professionals, and policymakers pursuing gender-equitable, socially grounded, and context-attuned economic rehabilitation in post-war locales.

1.1. Research Objectives

RO1: To identify the key factors that determine the success of women entrepreneurs in the post-war context of Mullaitivu District, Sri Lanka.

RO2: To examine the interaction between individual, institutional, technological, and family-related factors in shaping women's entrepreneurial success in post-war settings.

RO3: To analyze how post-war development conditions reshape and redefine traditional understandings of women's entrepreneurial success within rural, post-conflict environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Women's Entrepreneurship: Conceptual Foundations

Women's entrepreneurship is progressively acknowledged in scholarly discourse as a multifaceted socio-economic process that incorporates income generation, job creation, household stability, and community advancement (Tabares et al., 2022). Instead of seeing entrepreneurship just as a business or money-making thing, today's research views women's entrepreneurship as something deeply rooted in society, shaped by gender norms, family roles, institutions, and access to resources (Brush et al., 2009; Foss et al., 2019) This viewpoint recognizes that women entrepreneurs frequently reconcile entrepreneurial duties

with caregiving responsibilities and broader social commitments, thereby distinguishing their trajectories from those of male counterparts.

While traditionally perceived as a male-dominated domain, women's participation in entrepreneurship has markedly expanded across both developed and developing economies(Patil & Deshpande, 2021). In scholarly discourse, women's entrepreneurship is typically defined as economic activities undertaken and managed by women, either individually or collectively, aimed at sustaining livelihoods and creating employment opportunities(Julhas Miah et al., 2018; Mashapure et al., 2022). However, the academic literature continues to debate the key determinants of women entrepreneurs' success, reflecting the diversity of contexts in which they operate.

2.2. Key Determinants of Women Entrepreneurs' Success

The extant literature delineates several recurrent factors shaping women entrepreneurs' success, which can be broadly classified into individual, institutional, technological, and familial dimensions. Individual attributes including motivation, resilience, and educational attainment are frequently identified as pivotal internal factors (Tahir & Raharja, 2021). Moreover, access to pertinent entrepreneurial knowledge and education substantially bolsters performance and self-determination (Mashapure et al., 2023) However, recent scholarship underscores the imperative for more profound cognitive understandings of the interplay between resilience and women's entrepreneurship amid adversity, especially in underexplored contexts (Rosado-Cubero et al., 2024). This is especially critical, as resilience serves as a pivotal driver in surmounting entrepreneurial challenges and cultivating an equitable business environment (Mashapure et al., 2022; Rosado-Cubero et al., 2024)

At the individual level, factors such as education, prior experience, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and risk-taking propensity are routinely recognized as critical determinants of entrepreneurial success (Rashid & Ratten, 2020). Women entrepreneurs are frequently characterized as resilient agents who pursue entrepreneurial ventures not merely for profit, but also to secure family sustenance and enable social advancement. Nonetheless, the

literature emphasizes that individual competencies alone prove inadequate in the absence of enabling external conditions.

Institutional factors including access to finance, training programs, legal frameworks, business development services, and policy support profoundly shape entrepreneurial performance (Rambe & Ndofirepi, 2021). Empirical research consistently underscores limited access to finance, inadequate institutional support, and ineffective policy implementation as persistent barriers confronting women-led enterprises, particularly in developing economies. (Ekman & Hoxha, 2024).

In recent years, the technological dimension has assumed greater prominence, as access to digital technologies, the adoption of innovations, and technology-facilitated market access have emerged as critical enablers of entrepreneurial expansion. Women entrepreneurs who adeptly leverage such technologies exhibit enhanced market reach, operational efficiency, and sustainability (International Labour Organization, 2019). Nevertheless, technological exclusion persists as a formidable barrier in rural and marginalized contexts.

Familial and social dimensions likewise exert substantial influence on women entrepreneurs' success. Family support, domestic responsibilities, and societal endorsement can either facilitate or impede entrepreneurial pursuits. Empirical evidence indicates that women entrepreneurs tend to reinvest profits into their families and communities, thereby amplifying the socio-economic contributions of women-led enterprises (United Nations Development Programme, 2016).Conversely, constraining gender norms and disproportionate household labour responsibilities persist in impeding the expansion of women-led enterprises across diverse cultural settings.

2.3. Women's Entrepreneurship, Economic Growth, and Social Inclusion

An expanding corpus of scholarship positions women's entrepreneurship as a pivotal driver of job creation, poverty alleviation, and inclusive economic development. Women-owned enterprises play a crucial role in generating employment and fostering economic diversification, particularly via micro, small, and medium-sized businesses (Asian Development Bank, 2020). Furthermore, women entrepreneurs frequently embrace socially

responsible and sustainable business practices, thereby integrating entrepreneurial activities with overarching development objectives such as social equity and environmental sustainability (International Labour Organization, 2019).

International development institutions are progressively recognizing women's entrepreneurship as constituting "smart economics," with the capacity to augment productivity, alleviate gender disparities, and bolster household welfare (Anabestani et al., 2023; Aparicio et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the efficacy of entrepreneurship promotion programs exhibits considerable variation across different settings, thereby emphasizing the imperative for research that is localized and attuned to contextual specificities.

2.4. Post-Conflict and Rural Contexts: Gaps in Existing Literature

Although a substantial body of international scholarship exists on women's entrepreneurship, relatively little focus has been directed toward post-conflict and rural contexts, in which entrepreneurial conditions diverge substantially from those prevailing in stable or urban economies. Prevailing research tends to emphasize macro-level metrics or quantitative results, thereby furnishing limited insights into the strategies women entrepreneurs employ to address institutional fragility, social upheaval, and scarce resources(Rosado-Cubero et al., 2024).

Research in post-conflict environments reveals that women entrepreneurs confront multifaceted barriers, encompassing debilitated institutions, constricted market access, and enduring social fragilities. Nevertheless, extant scholarship in this domain is predominantly fragmented, exhibiting inadequate amalgamation of individual, institutional, technological, and familial elements into a cohesive conceptual framework. Moreover, the subjective experiences of women entrepreneurs in rural post-conflict locales remain largely unexamined, particularly through qualitative lenses attuned to discerning contextually embedded significances and adaptive tactics(Ranasinghe, 2012).

In summary, extant scholarship furnishes substantial insights into the determinants of women entrepreneurs' success, yet it remains predominantly marked by thematic fragmentation and contextual overgeneralization. Although individual, institutional, technological, and familial

factors are extensively documented, scholarly understanding of their interplay in post-war rural settings remains scarce. Furthermore, prevailing studies frequently neglect the manner in which post-conflict developmental dynamics reconfigure established models of entrepreneurial achievement.

To address these scholarly gaps, this study employs a qualitative methodology to investigate the success of women entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka's Mullaitivu District. Integrating diverse dimensions of success within a post-conflict rural milieu, it fosters a more refined, contextually attuned understanding of women's entrepreneurship, thereby advancing extant theoretical paradigms and guiding more efficacious policy and developmental initiatives.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the success factors of women entrepreneurs operating in the post-war context of Mullaitivu District, Sri Lanka. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of women entrepreneurs' lived experiences, meanings, and contextual realities, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods alone. The study focused on capturing how individual, institutional, technological, and family-related factors shape entrepreneurial success within a post-conflict rural environment.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives. Women entrepreneurs were operationally defined as "successful" based on clearly established criteria, including sustained business operation for a minimum of ten years, evidence of continuous profit growth and financial stability, generation of employment beyond self-employment, demonstrated business resilience through post-war recovery phases, and receipt of district-level, provincial-level, or national-level awards for entrepreneurial performance. Based on these criteria, a total of 55 women entrepreneurs managing micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Mullaitivu District were selected for the study.

Primary qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to allow methodological triangulation and depth of inquiry. Twenty individual interviews were conducted to capture personal entrepreneurial trajectories, motivations, and perceptions of success, while five focus group discussions were organized to explore shared experiences, collective challenges, and community-level dynamics. Each interview and focus group discussion lasted approximately 40 to 50 minutes. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, at which point additional interviews no longer generated new themes or insights. Saturation was identified through ongoing, iterative analysis conducted alongside data collection.

An interview guide and focus group discussion protocol were developed based on the literature and the study's research objectives and are presented in Appendix A. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. With participants' permission, interviews and discussions were digitally audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness of data. All recordings were transcribed verbatim to facilitate systematic analysis.

The data were analyzed using Reflexive Content Analysis (RCA), following the analytical framework proposed by (Nicmanis, 2024). RCA involves a hierarchical and iterative process of analysis progressing through increasing levels of abstraction. Initially, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data through repeated readings of the transcripts. Meaningful segments of text relevant to the research objectives were then labeled as initial codes. During subsequent analytical iterations, codes with similar meanings were compared, refined, merged, or reorganized. These refined codes were grouped into subcategories, which were further synthesized into broader analytical categories representing key dimensions of women entrepreneurs' success. Throughout the analysis, an audit trail was maintained to document coding decisions, category development, and analytical refinements, thereby ensuring transparency and rigor.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics review committee prior to data collection. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary

nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used, and all identifying information was removed from transcripts. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessed only by the research team. Potential risks to participants were minimized by conducting interviews in safe and familiar settings and by avoiding questions that could cause emotional distress.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, established qualitative research criteria were applied. Credibility was ensured through data triangulation between interviews and focus group discussions, prolonged engagement with the research context, and validation of key interpretations with selected participants. Dependability was strengthened through detailed documentation of the research procedures and analytical processes. Confirmability was supported by reflexive memo writing and maintenance of a clear audit trail linking findings to the original data. Transferability was facilitated by providing rich, contextual descriptions of the research setting, participants, and methodological procedures, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar post-war and rural contexts.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A wide range of female entrepreneurs with different ages, educational backgrounds, and work experiences made up the study sample. The participants were distributed throughout several age ranges, with 22% between 26 and 30 years old, 20% between 18 and 25 years old, and the remainder of participants in between. Geographically, the remaining 22% came from various Divisional Secretariat Divisions, with Oddusudan and Manthai East accounting for the majority. Experience ranged from 0–5 years for 29%, 6–10 years for 25%, and longer periods for the remaining participants in equal measure.

Of the participants, 29% had completed secondary and/or postsecondary education, 27% had a degree, and the rest participants had completed primary and secondary education. Regarding marital status, 36% of people were single and 64% of people were married. A sizable majority—55%—had a spouse who had vanished, and 60% of them were providing for two to five dependents. The majority of entrepreneurs ran medium-sized businesses (55

percentage), with the most prevalent industries being textiles and retailing (22% each), followed by food processing, agriculture, and services (18% each) (Refer to Table 1)

Table 1
Category of MSMEs owned by women in Mullaitivu District

Demographic variables	Categories	Numbers	Percentage
Age	18-25 years	11	20
	26-30 years	12	22
	31-35 years	10	18
	36-40 years	11	20
	Above 40 years	11	20
Divisional Secretariat Division	Maritimepattu	6	11
	Puthukkudiyiruppu	5	9
	Oddusudan	12	22
	Thunukkai	10	18
	Manthai east	12	22
	Welioya	10	18
Experience	0-5 years	16	29
	6-10 years	14	25
	11-15 years	12	22
	Above 15 years	13	24
Educational level	Primary education	13	24
	Secondary School education	12	22
	Tertiary education	15	27
	Degree holders	16	29
Marital status	Yes	35	64
	No	20	36
Living status	Living with spouse	10	18
	Separated /Divorced	15	27
	Spouse disappeared	30	55
No of dependence	2-5	33	60
	6-10	22	40
Types of enterprises	Micro	12	22
	Small	13	24
	Medium	30	55
Categories	Textiles	12	22
	Food processing	10	18
	Retailing	13	24
	Agriculture	10	18
	Service	10	18

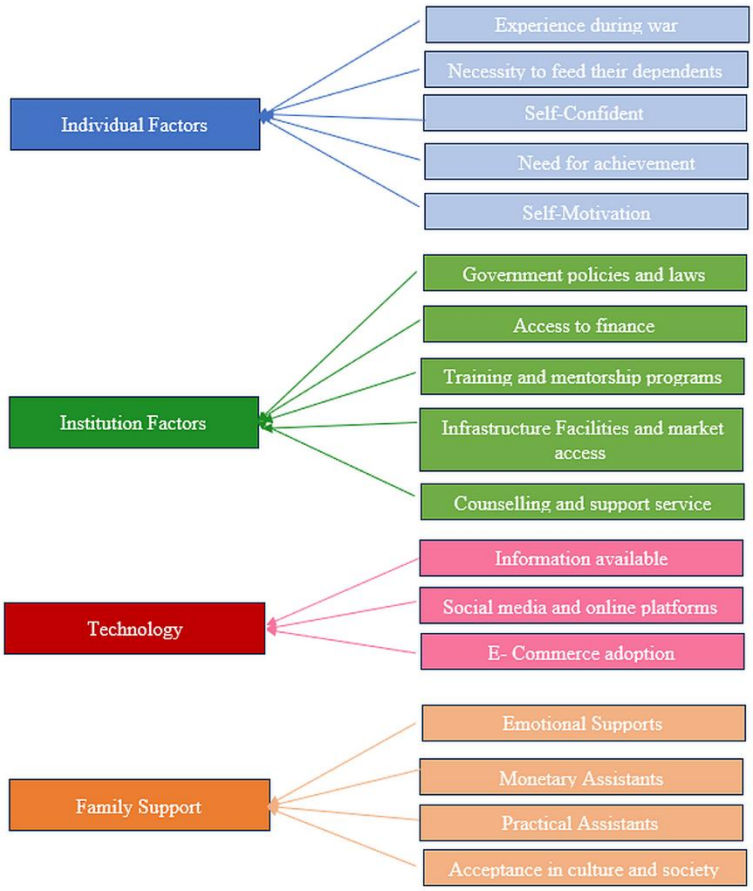
Analysis of qualitative data from the interview and focus group discussions with women-led MSMEs revealed four themes: 1. Individual factors, 2. Institutional factors, 3. Technology,

4. Family support. Direct participant quotes are used as evidence to support the research findings and are coded by an assigned serial number (Refer to Table 2).

Table 2
Coding Structure of Women Entrepreneurs' Success Factors in Post-War Mullaitivu

Theme	Category	Illustrative Codes (First-Order Codes)
Individual Factors	Experience during war	Loss of family members; displacement experiences; exposure to violence; survival under uncertainty; coping with trauma; learning adaptability from war
	Necessity to feed dependents	Breadwinner responsibility; need to support children; absence/disappearance of spouse; household survival pressure; income necessity
	Self-confidence	Confidence built through small successes; risk-taking ability; belief in own skills; overcoming fear of failure; leadership confidence
	Need for achievement	Goal setting; desire for recognition; aspiration for business growth; community role-modeling; personal fulfillment
	Self-motivation	Inner drive; persistence despite setbacks; willingness to learn; long-term commitment; passion for entrepreneurship
Institutional Factors	Government policies and laws	Gender-focused policies; women-friendly regulations; women's chambers of commerce; legal protection; business registration support
	Access to finance	Microloans; low-interest loans; subsidies; credit guarantees; financial independence; capital for expansion
	Training and mentorship programs	Entrepreneurship training; vocational skills training; financial literacy; leadership development; mentorship guidance
	Infrastructure facilities and market access	Road connectivity; transport facilities; utilities access; trade fairs; export assistance; local and external market access
	Counselling and support services	Psychological counselling; trauma support; peer support groups; conflict management assistance; stress reduction
Technology	Information availability	Online learning resources; access to business information; market research online; webinars; digital literacy
	Social media and online platforms	Social media marketing; virtual networking; online branding; customer engagement; digital payments
	E-commerce adoption	Online stores; digital transactions; national/global market reach; flexible work arrangements; platform usage
Family Support	Emotional support	Encouragement from family; moral support; confidence building; emotional reassurance; belief in entrepreneur
	Monetary assistance	Start-up capital from family; emergency financial help; family savings; informal loans
	Practical assistance	Childcare support; household task sharing; accounting help; operational assistance; time management support
	Acceptance in culture and society	Family approval; social legitimacy; acceptance of women's leadership; networking through family ties

Figure 1
Thematic Map



Source: Developed by the author

Examination of qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions with women-led micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises in Mullaitivu District identified four interconnected themes affecting entrepreneurial success: individual factors, institutional factors, technology, and family support. Far from functioning independently, these themes interact dynamically in the post-war setting, thereby cultivating women entrepreneurs' resilience, opportunity recognition, and enduring business viability.

4.1. Individual Factors: Adversity as a Source of Entrepreneurial Capability

Women entrepreneurs attributed their success to resilience gained from war, displacement, and loss. These experiences-built adaptability, risk tolerance, and problem-solving skills. One participant stated:

[I learned to be tough and flexible from surviving the war. These traits have really helped me handle my business risks and challenges creatively, without needing big resources thanks to that experience]

Rather than viewing women solely as conflict victims, the findings show that wartime experiences reshaped their entrepreneurial identity and behavior. This supports Agarwal et al., who argue that hardship fosters entrepreneurial alertness and resilience in post-conflict settings. In Mullaitivu, resilience developed as a context-specific capability from repeated exposure to uncertainty, not as an innate trait. This viewpoint concurs with scholarship on trauma-informed entrepreneurship, wherein individuals harness prior adversities to foster resilient coping mechanisms and innovative business approaches (Ayadurai & Sohail, 2006) This deep understanding of adversity enables these entrepreneurs to anticipate market shifts and manage operational challenges more effectively than peers in stable environments. Moreover, this adaptability is vital for navigating the volatile economies typical of post-conflict regions, where infrastructure and markets remain underdeveloped (Althalathini, 2024).These women entrepreneurs are distinguished by their capacity to transform personal experiences of adversity into distinctive competitive advantages, enabling them to discern unmet needs in their communities and devise culturally attuned solutions (Mashapure et al., 2023). This inner strength, forged in adversity, empowers them to spot and seize business opportunities others miss (Koch & Kuckertz, 2024)

The need to support dependents further fuelled entrepreneurial motivation. These women viewed entrepreneurship not just as a source of income, but as a moral duty that strengthened their persistence and discipline. One respondent explained:

[I knew I had to step up when my husband disappeared. My five children and I waited for him for a long time, then I realised that we needed an income source forever. My primary driving force became my need to feed my kids.]

This finding aligns with Ismail et al., who observe that necessity-driven entrepreneurship in post-conflict contexts often becomes sustainable when paired with strong familial duties.

Self-confidence and need for achievement developed gradually. Women gained confidence from incremental successes, not prior self-belief.

[Even though I knew I had to take that risk, I was afraid of failing. With every minor victory, my confidence increased, and today I find it impossible to regret taking the chance]

This supports (Kusmulyono et al., 2024) who emphasize confidence as a socially constructed entrepreneurial resource, reinforced through recognition and achievement rather than individual disposition alone.

4.2. Institutional Factors: Support Structures and Symbolic Legitimacy

Institutional support such as government policies, financial access, training, and infrastructure played a key role in women's entrepreneurial success. Yet, the findings show that institutions also provided symbolic legitimacy and built confidence, beyond material resources.

Women emphasized the role of women's chambers of commerce and collective platforms:

[One important step in promoting the interests of female entrepreneurs has been the creation of women's chambers of commerce. These rooms offer a forum for group support and action.]

Such platforms enhanced visibility, negotiation power, and social recognition, echoing Meyer and Hamilton's (2020) argument that institutions shape entrepreneurship by legitimizing women's economic participation.

Access to finance emerged as a decisive factor enabling business initiation and gradual scaling:

[For me, having access to microloans changed everything. It gave me the financial backing I required to launch my company and grow it gradually.]

Consistent with (Abebe & Kegne, 2023) financial inclusion strengthened women's autonomy and decision-making capacity, allowing reinvestment in technology and market expansion.

Training and mentorship programs facilitated skill acquisition and strategic thinking:

[The entrepreneurship training program I attended equipped me with the skills and knowledge needed to run my business successfully.]

These programs enhanced capabilities, transforming survival-oriented enterprises into growth-oriented MSMEs (Elliott et al., 2020)

4.3. Technology: Overcoming Spatial and Structural Constraints

Technology served as a key enabler, helping women entrepreneurs overcome geographic isolation and institutional weaknesses. Online information and digital platforms improved learning, marketing, and networking opportunities. Adopting information and communication technologies gave entrepreneurs a significant competitive advantage by streamlining operations and expanding market access, especially in developing regions (Dong et al., 2024)

[I signed up for several online classes in digital marketing and business management. I gained the information I needed from these classes to launch and expand my business.]

Social media and e-commerce platforms facilitated market access beyond local boundaries:

[Creating an online store on Shopify allowed me to reach customers beyond my local area, significantly boosting my sales.]

These results back up Shukla et al., who say tech helps women entrepreneurs beat structural barriers. Tech works best paired with institutional training and family support, showing how these success factors all connect. Digital literacy and affordable internet access are crucial for women entrepreneurs to fully utilize these technologies (Dong et al., 2024)

4.4. Family Support: Informal Institutions in Post-War Contexts

Family support emerged as a critical but often under-theorized success determinant. Emotional encouragement reduced fear of failure and strengthened self-belief:

[The support of my family was essential. They supported me through my doubts and believed in my vision, which got me through difficult times.]

Financial assistance from family members often enabled business start-up during periods of economic instability:

[My spouse gave me the first money I needed to launch my company. It could never have started without his financial assistance.]

Practical assistance with childcare, accounting, and operations allowed women to focus on strategic tasks:

[I get financial planning and budgeting advice from my aunt, a retired accountant. We have been able to invest in business expansion while staying within our budget thanks to her counsel.]

These findings align with (Sa'diyah et al., 2025) who argue that family support functions as an informal institutional substitute**,** particularly in contexts where formal systems are weak.

4.5. Conceptual Integration and Theoretical Implications

This study shows that women entrepreneurs' success in post-war Mullaitivu arises from an interconnected system of resilience-based personal skills, supportive institutions, strategic technology use, and family support. Unlike linear factors, these elements interact to offset contextual constraints and enhance entrepreneurial capacity.

The findings challenge universal entrepreneurship models that emphasize individual agency alone. Instead, they support a socially embedded, context-dependent model of women's entrepreneurship, extending embeddedness theory and feminist perspectives to post-conflict

rural settings. Women entrepreneurs serve not only as economic actors but also as agents of social reconstruction, promoting household stability, community resilience, and post-war economic recovery.

This conceptual framework advances theories of women's entrepreneurship by illustrating that, in post-conflict rural settings, entrepreneurial success arises from the collective interplay of adversity-driven personal attributes, social networks, institutional supports, and technological resources. It contests universal, individual-focused models of entrepreneurship while proposing a context-specific, socially embedded approach tailored to post-war development contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

This study identifies key success factors for women entrepreneurs in post-war Mullaitivu District. It examines how personal strengths, institutions, technology, and family support interact and reveals how post-war changes redefine business success. Drawn from thriving women-led small businesses, the findings prove that success in conflict zones is deeply social and context-driven, far beyond individual effort or markets alone.

In addressing the first research objective, women entrepreneurs' success stems from resilience gained in wartime and post-war periods, need-driven motivation to support dependents, rising self-confidence, and ongoing self-motivation. These traits help them manage uncertainty and scarce resources. For the second objective, institutional supports including finance access, training, mentorship, infrastructure, and counseling strengthen these individual strengths. Technology aids success by reducing geographic isolation and improving market and information access, while family support provides informal stability. Overall, these results meet the third objective: post-war conditions make entrepreneurial success a collective, relational process, not just individual effort.

This research enriches the scholarship on women's entrepreneurship and post-conflict development by adapting social capital and embeddedness theories to a rural post-war setting. It illustrates how women entrepreneurs' achievements arise from the interplay of personal

hardships, familial bonds, institutional structures, and technological resources. Centering women's firsthand accounts, the study critiques overly generalized and individualistic entrepreneurship paradigms, advancing a context-specific model wherein success is collectively shaped by social ties, institutional validation, and resilient adaptability. Ultimately, it deepens theoretical insights into entrepreneurship as a mechanism for both economic revitalization and social reconstruction in post-conflict contexts.

The findings recommend practical and policy actions. Women's organizations and agencies should develop programs integrating mentorship, financial literacy, digital skills, and market access, while addressing post-war challenges. Financial institutions should provide customized products such as microfinance, grants, and low-interest loans along with financial literacy training. Policymakers should reinforce gender-sensitive policies, sustain institutional support in post-war areas, and integrate mental health and psychosocial services into entrepreneurship initiatives. Improving infrastructure and digital connectivity is vital for sustaining women-led businesses in rural post-conflict settings.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. First, the sample included only successful women entrepreneurs, creating selection bias and limiting generalizability to unsuccessful or emerging ones. Second, the focus on one post-war district prevents broader regional application. Third, as a qualitative study using self-reports, the findings may involve subjective interpretation despite efforts to ensure reliability. Future quantitative research could mitigate these limitations by exploring a wider array of entrepreneurship stages and employing mixed-methods designs to triangulate data and enhance external validity across diverse post-conflict regions.

Future research could address these limitations by comparing successful and unsuccessful women entrepreneurs, using longitudinal designs to track business changes over time, and applying mixed-methods to test the proposed model. Further studies could examine the long-term effects of women's entrepreneurship on family welfare and community strength, plus comparisons across post-conflict areas.

In conclusion, this study highlights women entrepreneurs' key role in post-war recovery. In Mullaitivu, resilience, social capital, institutional support, technology, and family ties enable business success and foster social stability, gender equality, and sustainable economic development in post-conflict societies. Thus, supporting women entrepreneurs with targeted programs and policies is essential for rebuilding society and securing lasting peace.

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