

Women Entrepreneurship in National Park: Challenges, Motivations, and Growth Potential with special reference to Manas National Park, India.

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ABSTRACT

Women Entrepreneurs are one of the major contributors to revenue generation in India. Being one of the major contributors of revenue generation it has been seen in many places that women's entrepreneurship is still in a developing phase and needs attention for growth. The area which needs tremendous attention is rural women entrepreneurship in Manas National Park. Manas National Park one of the important destinations for wildlife tourists is at large in need of entrepreneurs to cater to the need of the services necessary for the tourists. Despite having so much business potential, it has been seen very few Women Entrepreneurs are operating in those areas. This study has been divided into two parts one-part concentrates on the women entrepreneurs in that region and their problems in setting up and running any enterprise, another part is divided on women who are interested to start an enterprise and the factors which motivate them in taking up Entrepreneurship.

Key Words: Women Entrepreneurs, Manas National Park, Business, Wildlife, Enterprise.

Introduction.

India, as a developing country, has witnessed remarkable growth in entrepreneurship over the past few decades. Startups have become a dynamic trend in many cities, driven by individuals with innovative ideas who coordinate efforts to create

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and sustain businesses. The concept of startups is rooted in entrepreneurship, as highlighted by Birley (1996). Entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in economic development by introducing market innovations, as suggested by Schumpeter (1934). Entrepreneurship involves the creation or extraction of economic value and is associated with risk-taking that extends beyond traditional business ventures, encompassing not only economic but also social and cultural value creation. An entrepreneur is defined as an individual with the aptitude and motivation to establish, manage, and grow a business venture while embracing the associated risks to achieve profits. Startups are a prime example of entrepreneurship, where innovators challenge the status quo with groundbreaking ideas. Entrepreneurs are instrumental in fostering economic growth, particularly in urban centers where facilities such as finance, infrastructure, and training are more accessible (Saxena, 2012). In Assam, rural entrepreneurship holds immense potential for transforming the socioeconomic conditions of its rural population (Kanagawa, 2008). With rural areas constituting a significant portion of Assam's population and widespread disguised unemployment in the agricultural sector, fostering rural entrepreneurship is crucial. By providing goods and services to rural communities, rural entrepreneurship can enhance the quality of life in these areas (Wortman, 1990). The literature has extensively examined the factors influencing rural women entrepreneurs, emphasizing their unique role in economic development.

Women entrepreneurship refers to the act of business ownership and creation that empowers women, enhancing their economic position and social standing (Deshpande, 2009). Women often venture into entrepreneurship driven by economic necessity, pushing them to achieve financial independence and contribute to society. This paper aims to explore the emergence of women entrepreneurs in the region surrounding Manas National Park, examining the factors and circumstances that have contributed to their growth and development in this area.

Located at the confluence of the Indo-Gangetic and Indo-Malayan biogeographic zones, the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary stands as one of India's most ecologically diverse and significant wildlife reserves. Nestled in the Himalayan foothills, it transitions from wooded hills to sprawling grasslands and tropical forests. The sanctuary is a haven for a wide range of wildlife, including endangered species such as the tiger, pygmy hog, Indian rhinoceros, and elephant. Situated 41 kilometers north of Barpeta Circuit and 175 kilometers northwest of Guwahati, Manas National Park is uniquely positioned along the Manas River, bordered by Bhutan's Royal Manas Wildlife Sanctuary to the north and a densely populated region of Bhutan to the south.

In the financial year 2022-23, the park achieved its highest-ever revenue of ₹1,35,84,450, reflecting a 4% increase compared to the previous year and an impressive 37% growth compared to the last seven-year average (Economic Survey of Assam, 2021). This economic growth underscores the park's potential as a hub for entrepreneurial ventures, particularly for women in the region.

The emergence of women entrepreneurs in Manas National Park has its roots in the socio-political struggles of the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, ethnic and political conflict disrupted conservation and management efforts until peace was partially restored in 2003. The unrest led to the withdrawal of administrative and security measures, and anti-poaching infrastructure was destroyed. This left the park vulnerable to deforestation, poaching, and habitat degradation, severely impacting its wildlife, including rhinoceroses, tigers, and swamp deer (Sarma, 2008). The aftermath of this conflict forced many families, including those of deceased poachers, to seek alternative livelihoods.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as AARANYAK, WWF, and MSKETS have since worked to raise awareness about the potential of entrepreneurship among local women, particularly those from the Bodo community. Traditionally patriarchal and patrilineal, Bodo women are known for their industrious nature. Beyond managing household chores, they actively participate in agricultural activities and are skilled in weaving, producing almost all necessary garments for their families (Sharma, 2010). Recognizing this expertise, organizations like the All Bodo Women Welfare Federation have encouraged women to explore entrepreneurial opportunities. Initiatives led by NGOs like AARANYAK have enabled women to contribute directly and indirectly to tourism-related revenue generation through various services and products.

Women entrepreneurs in the region can be categorized into three groups based on their motivations: chance entrepreneurs, forced entrepreneurs, and those drawn into entrepreneurship by opportunity (Rahman, 2022). This paper aims to explore the challenges and prospects faced by women entrepreneurs in Manas National Park, shedding light on their journey, contributions, and potential for growth in this unique ecological and socio-cultural context.

Objectives of the Study

1. To know about the problems and prospects of Women entrepreneurship in Manas National Park.
2. To know about the factors for taking up Entrepreneurship in Manas National Park by Women's.

Methodology**Primary Data**

This study is exploratory in nature and based on a mixed method that is qualitative and quantitative in nature. Qualitative method – 30 Women Entrepreneurs were being interviewed with a semi structure questionnaire and in-depth interviews has been done regarding the problems of Women Entrepreneurship in Manas National Park.

Quantitative Method: 30 number Entrepreneurs were interviewed with a structured questionnaire and different statements were put to derive the answers from them. 10-point scale was used for rating their statements which are put in different tables. (Manzoor, Shazia& Mehraj, Danish &Wali, Amira, 2018).

Secondary Data was obtained from the Internet, Books, Journals, etc.

Literature Review

| Sl No. | Study | Authors | Year | Methodology | Key Findings |
|--------|---|----------------------|------|---|---|
| 1. | Women Entrepreneurship In India-Problems And Prospects | Kalpana Koneru | 2018 | Conceptual Paper | The current need is for a revival of entrepreneurship, with a focus on educating and empowering women to recognize their strengths and important role in society and the economy. |
| 2. | Study on rural women entrepreneurship in India: Issues and Challenges | R. Gautam, K. Mishra | 2016 | Investigative Paper | Rural women entrepreneurs can contribute to the overall growth and leaving from poverty. |
| 3. | Women entrepreneurs in India - emerging issues and challenges: | V. Kannan | 2020 | Exploratory cum Descriptive | Women constitute only 14% of entrepreneurs in India due to social discrimination and various challenges they face. |
| 4. | Women Entrepreneurs in India: Approaches to Education and Empowerment | Sowjanya S. Shetty | 2019 | literature review and analysis of existing research | Highlights the need for skill and knowledge-based education to enable women to change their role from |

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| | | | | | homemaker to job maker, and the importance of active participation of women in economic activity and decision making to increase GDP growth. |
| 5 | Decision Making as a Contributor for Women's Empowerment: A Study in the Indian Context | Richa Misra et al | 2021 | Quantitative Paper | High social and policy importance for Indian women. |
| 6 | The practices of women entrepreneurship and the problems in India | N. Bhaskara Rao | 2018 | Review of existing literature | Lack of access to finance, limited networking opportunities, and societal barriers that hinder the growth of women entrepreneurship in India |
| 7 | Women Entrepreneurship Development in India | B. Parashuramulu | 2013 | Review paper | Emphasizes the need for promoting and developing entrepreneurship among women in India to contribute effectively to national prosperity |
| 8 | Women empowerment through entrepreneurship: case study of a social entrepreneurial intervention in rural India | Anirudh Agrawal | 2021 | Qualitative Paper | Social entrepreneurship has a strong potential to bring about social and economic change |

Findings and Discussions.

Problems of Women Entrepreneurship in Manas National Park.

1. **Lack of Awareness:** The deficiency of cognizance amidst the inhabitants dwelling adjacent to Manas National Park, which mainly comprises of tribal communities, is a notable apprehension grounded in the underdeveloped characteristic of the region. The prevalent insufficiency of progress contributes to a restricted level of awareness, particularly among the women in these communities. The residents, who possess a profound connection to autochthonous lifestyles, tend to concentrate on conventional means of subsistence and deeds. Consequently, opportunities for learning and exposure to contemporary information remain restricted, impeding their admittance to comprehensive knowledge and awareness regarding conservation endeavors, ecological significance, and the essence of safeguarding the natural habitat of Manas National Park. To address this gap in awareness, targeted measures that take into account the cultural milieu and accord priority to community engagement are necessary to effectively impart pertinent information and instill a sense of environmental stewardship among these women.
2. **Infrastructural Problems:** The Manas National Park, a protected area located in a distant region of the state of Assam, is distinguished by its rugged topography and limited connectivity. An investigative report released by the esteemed Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change reveals that the geographical location of the park presents substantial infrastructural challenges that hinder the provision of fundamental necessities such as electricity, roads, and

internet connectivity. This dearth of infrastructure has a direct bearing on the capability of female entrepreneurs to avail themselves of online resources, establish connections with markets, and interact with potential customers.

3. **Gender Disparity** : The data procured from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) reveals a conspicuous gender disparity in the educational landscape of Assam, with women being relegated to the lower rungs of literacy rates as compared to their male counterparts. This dearth of educational opportunities, therefore, culminates in a scenario where women entrepreneurs are left with a dearth of competencies that are essential to navigate the dynamic business landscape, particularly in the spheres of technology and digital marketing. This lack of access to pertinent training and resources inevitably impedes their business growth prospects.
4. **Uneven Development of ranges**: The uneven development of the ranges within Manas National Park is a concerning issue due to the observed disparities in development among its various ranges. The Bansbari Range has undergone significant development, whereas the Panbari and Bhuyapara Ranges have not progressed at the same pace. These disparities in range development carry various implications, particularly for women entrepreneurs residing in the underdeveloped areas. Such a scenario poses a hindrance to their revenue-generating activities. The paucity of progress in Panbari and Bhuyapara Ranges has a direct impact on female entrepreneurs who inhabit these areas. These women frequently participate in ventures such as handicrafts, small-scale agriculture, and ecotourism, thereby providing a boost to nearby economies. Nevertheless, their endeavors to successfully carry out these income-generating undertakings are impeded by suboptimal infrastructure, limited connectivity, and inadequate facilities.
5. **Inability to take risk**: Risk taking factor is one of the major problem which acts as a barrier for development of Women Entrepreneurship in Manas National Park. The locals of the park are mostly from the economically backward class, the local people are engaged in petty work to run their families. The work includes mostly agricultural in nature and very few engage in different forms of daily labor work. Apart from that in the season time when the tourist footfall increases, they contribute significantly by providing services like lodging, safaris, boat excursions, cuisine, entertainment, and so on. Low-income residents in these areas have been forced to engage in a variety of economic activities in order to provide for tourists to the Manas National Parks.

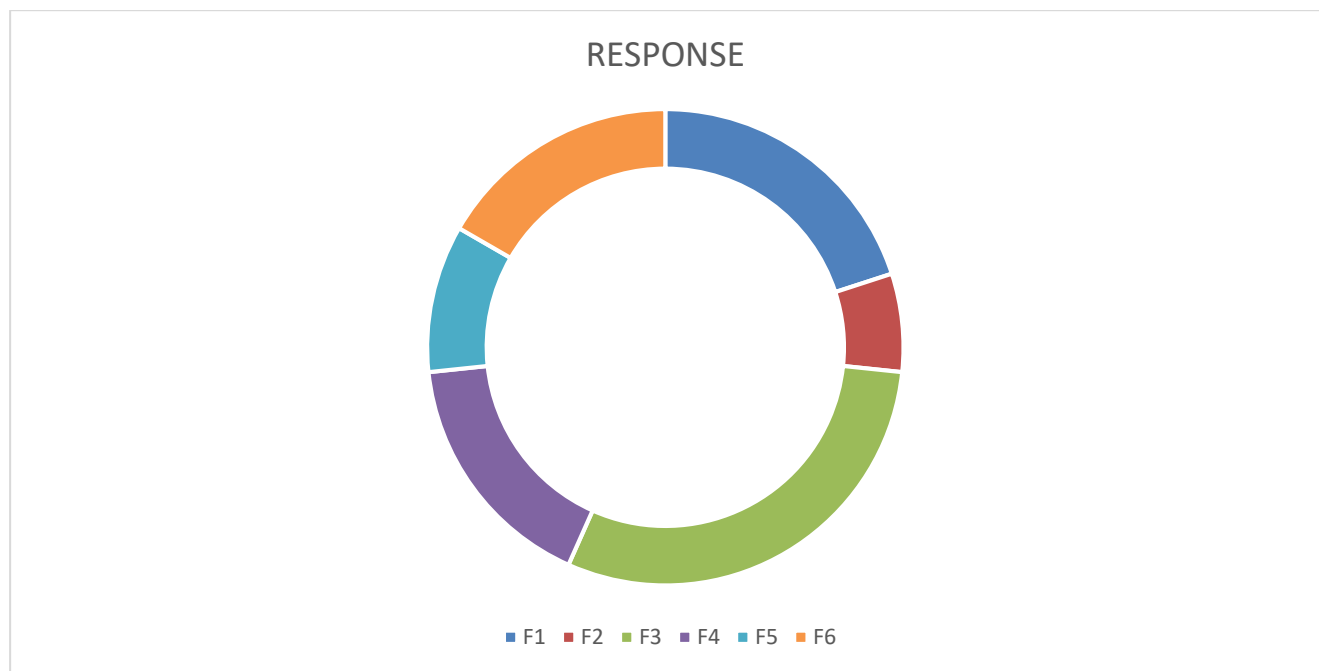
Factors influencing Women for taking up Women Entrepreneurship in Manas National Park.

Arguably, in a developing country like India, the vast majority of the rural populations are indirectly dependent on natural resources and biodiversity elements (Bhuyan, 2018) but strict regulations have restricted the locals to use the park resources. The class of working individuals is scattered in the peripherals of Manas National Park. Manas National Park gave a tremendous opportunity for the locals to initiate business and also take up tourism entrepreneurship. Many entrepreneurs who were engaged in various types of work have been affected, and only a few start-ups have emerged that focus on activities with high demand in the area. The entrepreneurs in the region primarily engage in the following activities homestays, Jeep safaris, Restaurants, Elephant rides, etc. Many researchers have been conducted on the economic and Entrepreneurial activities of Manas National Park but very less emphasis is given to the Women Entrepreneurs who are directly or indirectly contributing to the revenue collection and providing services to the tourist. Women entrepreneurs can be divided into three categories based on their motivations: chance entrepreneurs, forced entrepreneurs, and those formed or pulled into entrepreneurship. (Rahman,2022). This resulted in the wife of the poacher's taking entrepreneurship. Women living in villages around Manas National Park of Assam had to soup up their traditional culinary skills to earn for their families. Two self-help organizations that focus on rural culinary tourism, Swankar Mithinga Onsai Afat (SMOA) and Somaina, both have female members. Traditional Bodo dances are also organised by Somaina for guests. In order to present traditional and authentic Bodo food and cultural performances at the Manas Spring Festival, the women from the two tribes came together in 2018 and established "Gungzema Kitchen." With the aid of her own well-known brand, "FoodSutra by Mitali," Dutta took care of the Gungzema Kitchen team's web promotion to the outside world while they focused on honing their talents. These initiatives have proven an encouragement and motivation to other Women in different villages in the peripherals of Manas National Park to start up different Entrepreneurial activities. In due course of time, women entrepreneurs has set an example of self-reliance and also contributed a lot in generating revenue and also attracting tourist. Tourist visiting wildlife has a different perspective in their mind. Many tourist visit national parks for spending time close to nature, some visit for the purpose of research, getting acquainted with the village life, get an overview of the food, culture, and traditions. In this respect, women entrepreneurs emerge as champions in satisfying the tourist. The women entrepreneurs goes one step further and provide the necessary facilities in experiencing food in the form of restaurants, traditional clothes in the form of small traditional cloth (Dokhna) outlets weaved by them, proving homestays to experience village life, and many more. This

proves every national park is dependent heavily on women entrepreneurs directly or indirectly. The important aspect that has to be studied is the driving force to be an entrepreneur. The women has been asked with a questionnaire about the different factors for choosing entrepreneurship over indigenous work in that region, it has been discussed below with taking consideration of scale of 10 (Manzoor, Shazia&Mehraj, Danish &Wali, Amira,2018) 1 to be the lowest and 10 to be highest, from women who are not entrepreneurs but want a career in this field are obtained. From the said source four factors are undertaken and different statements are taken which are explained below.

Attitude towards Entrepreneurship

| | |
|---|------|
| Choices | N=30 |
| Entrepreneurship is a career of choice for me (F1) | 6 |
| I would feel satisfied being an entrepreneur (F2) | 2 |
| I would gladly choose entrepreneurship over others, as a career option (F3) | 9 |
| I would feel personally secure being an entrepreneur (F4) | 5 |
| Entrepreneurship would be enjoyable and exciting for me (F5) | 3 |
| I would rather be an entrepreneur than an employee (F6) | 5 |

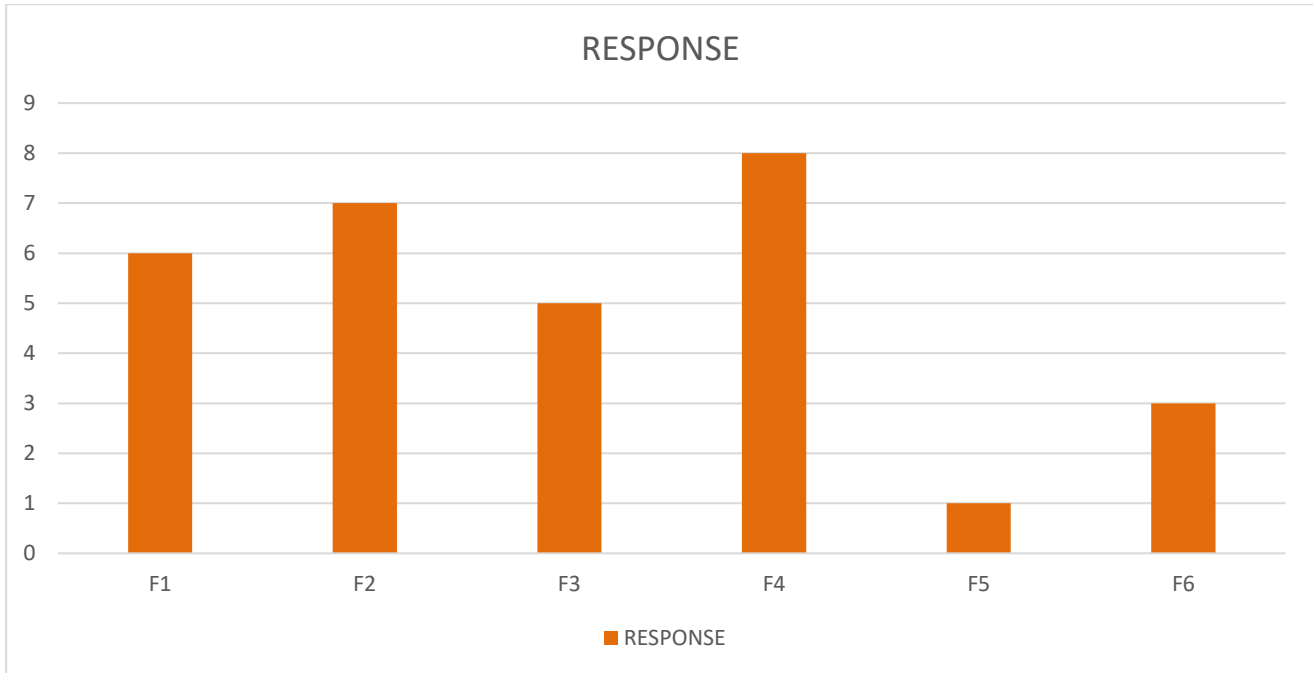


In relation to women's entrepreneurship within Manas National Park, the aforementioned responses encapsulate a range of attitudes towards selecting entrepreneurship as a career path. While certain individuals exhibit a strong inclination towards this pursuit (rated 9), others demonstrate moderate interest (rated 6, 5, and 3), influenced by their desires for personal satisfaction (rated 2) and a sense of security (rated 5). For women who reside in close proximity to the park, entrepreneurship presents a unique opportunity to leverage their traditional skills for innovative, culturally aligned businesses. The inclination towards entrepreneurship (rated 5) implies a valuation of autonomy and impact, while the enjoyment factor (rated 3) highlights the appeal of dynamic, eco-centric ventures. Customized support, encompassing skill development and networking, is essential in order to overcome obstacles and unlock the potential of women to create sustainable ventures that contribute to both their own progress and regional development.

Subjective Norm

| | |
|---|------|
| Choices | N=30 |
| I have access to information that will enable me to become an entrepreneur (F1) | 6 |
| My immediate family members support entrepreneurship as a career choice for me (F2) | 7 |

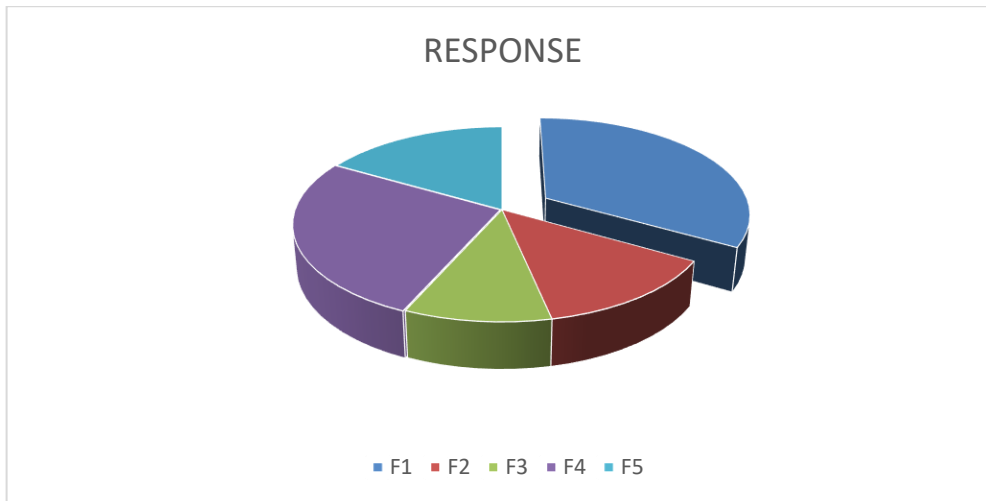
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|--|---|
| My close friends would appreciate it if I became an entrepreneur. (F3) | 5 |
| It is important for me to know my parent’s opinion in case I start my own business venture (F4) | 8 |
| It is important for me to know the opinion of close friends in case I start my own business venture (F5) | 1 |
| I have access to information that will enable me to become an entrepreneur (F6) | 3 |



The present responses provide insight into various factors that impact an individual's perspective on pursuing entrepreneurship. The individual harbors a moderately positive belief in their ability to access the necessary information for entrepreneurship (rated 6), indicating a potential willingness to acquire essential knowledge. Immediate family members offer significant support (rated 7), which suggests that they encourage entrepreneurship as a viable career option. The opinions of close friends exert a moderate influence, with some degree of appreciation (rated 5) for entrepreneurship. The individual assigns great significance to their parents' opinions (rated 8) when contemplating a business venture, thereby indicating a reliance on parental approval. However, the importance of close friends' viewpoints is notably lower (rated 1). Despite the perception of access to relevant information (rated 3), the responses suggest that familial and parental support are carefully considered when contemplating an entrepreneurial path.

Perceived Behavioral Control

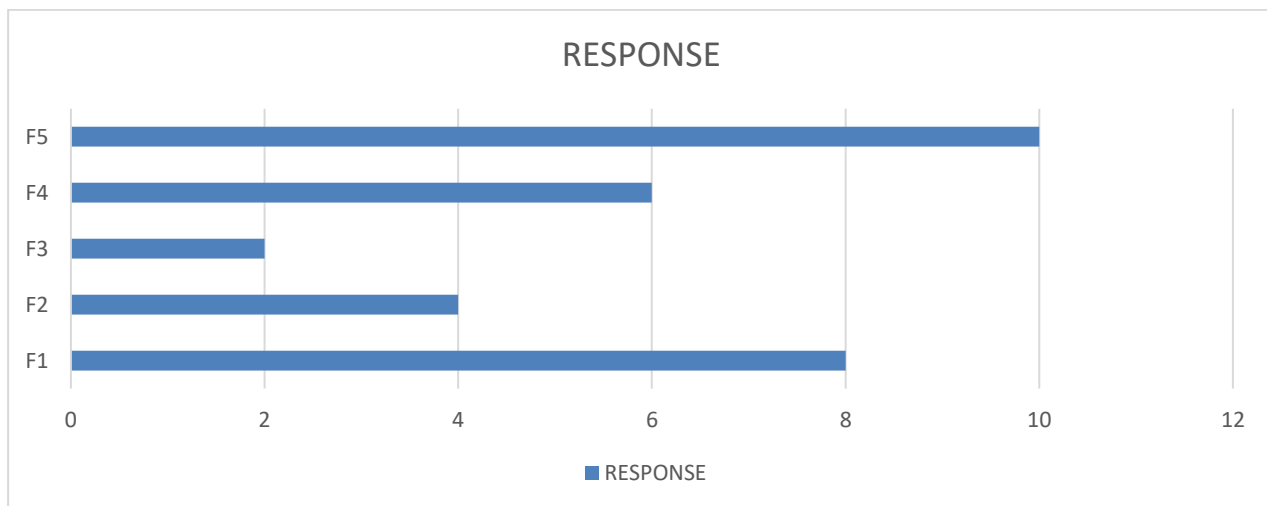
| | |
|---|------|
| Choices | N=30 |
| I am motivated to start my own enterprise (F1) | 10 |
| I have hands-on information about starting my own enterprise (F2) | 4 |
| I have the know-how of developing a business project. (F3) | 3 |
| I am convinced of being successful in case I start my business (F4) | 8 |
| It would be an easy exercise to start and work for my enterprise I can manage the creation process of a new enterprise (F5) | 5 |



The responses provided collectively illustrate the mindset and readiness of the individual with regards to initiating their own enterprise. The individual exhibits a high level of motivation (rated 10) to embark on this entrepreneurial journey, thereby demonstrating a strong internal drive. Although possessing some practical knowledge (rated 4) on starting a business, it may not be entirely comprehensive. The individual possesses a certain degree of understanding in developing a business project (rated 3), indicating familiarity with key aspects, yet lacking complete expertise. The individual exudes a significant level of confidence in the potential success (rated 8) upon launching their business, which suggests a positive self-assessment. While expressing a moderate level of ease in the creation process (rated 5), implying the ability to manage it, additional clarity or assistance may be required in certain areas. On the whole, the responses reflect a blend of motivation, foundational knowledge, confidence in success, and a relatively cautious outlook on the ease of starting and managing their enterprise.

Entrepreneurship Readiness

| Choices | N=30 |
|--|------|
| My career aim is to become an entrepreneur. (F1) | 8 |
| I am seriously contemplating starting an enterprise after the completion of my studies. (F2) | 4 |
| I am convinced to start my business venture in the future. (F3) | 2 |
| I will put in all my efforts to start and sustain my own business venture. (F4) | 6 |
| I see myself as an entrepreneur in the next 5 years. (F5) | 10 |



The responses given by the individual collectively convey their aspirations and commitment towards pursuing entrepreneurship as a career path. The individual has expressed a significant career goal of becoming an entrepreneur, which has been rated at 8, indicating a strong ambition towards this direction. Although the individual has shown consideration towards starting a business after their studies with a rating of 4, there might be some uncertainties or factors influencing their decision. Even though the individual holds a conviction towards initiating a business venture, with a rating of 2, there seems to be some level of doubt or reservations. The individual's dedication towards investing effort into starting and maintaining their own business, rated at 6, indicates a willingness to work hard for their entrepreneurial pursuits. The individual has a strong conviction of envisioning themselves as an entrepreneur in the next five years, rated at 10, which underscores a high degree of self-assuredness in their entrepreneurial journey. Collectively, these responses suggest a mix of determination, contemplation, and optimism in their pursuit of entrepreneurship, perhaps with some ongoing deliberation about the feasibility and timing of their venture.

Conclusion

The diversity of attitudes and perceptions towards women's entrepreneurship highlights a range of aspirations and considerations within adjacent communities. The responses demonstrate varying levels of interest, motivation, and self-assuredness regarding entrepreneurship as a career option. These sentiments emphasize the potential for leveraging the region's unique cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and indigenous skills to foster innovative and sustainable business ventures. By acknowledging the inclination towards entrepreneurship and addressing the need for tailored support systems, such as skill development, mentorship, and access to resources, the communities surrounding the park can harness the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs. This not only contributes to their personal growth and economic empowerment but also aligns with the broader goals of conservation and regional development, creating a symbiotic relationship between women's entrepreneurship and the preservation of Manas National Park's ecological and cultural richness.

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