

Analyzing the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem for Women Entrepreneurs: A Case Study of Rural Areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

Access of women to enterprising opportunities and resources can have very different outcomes than men. The purpose of this research was to examine the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Peshawar, Pakistan, which includes policy, finance, institutions, human capital, culture, and markets, through a gender lens, assess women entrepreneurs' access to it, and assess the effectiveness of its components. The research uses a qualitative research approach. Data were gathered through desk research, thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and one focus group discussion with ten rural women entrepreneurs of rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. NVivo software was used to analyze the data, and content analysis was used to analyze that data. According to the findings, women entrepreneurs have limited access to entrepreneurship ecosystem. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of information among women entrepreneurs about available financial resources, a lack of knowledge about laws and policies, a lack of parental, institutional, and societal support for women in attempting to access the entrepreneurial ecosystem, a lack of quality business training, and a lack of physical and technological infrastructure in rural areas. Furthermore, there is a presence of stereotypical attitudes toward women entrepreneurs, and limited access to entrepreneurship. The existing entrepreneurial ecosystem in Peshawar could be enhanced through coordinated multi-stakeholder initiatives, interventions designed to increase awareness about resources, promoting an understanding of laws and regulations, making institutions more effective in providing services, establishing public-private partnerships, and providing women entrepreneurs with easy access to market and financial resources. While there have been studies on the problems faced by women entrepreneurs in Pakistan, as well as their motivation and objectives, there has been no research on their access to the entrepreneurial ecosystem as a whole.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, Women entrepreneurs, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.*

Introduction

As the gender equality movement gains attention throughout the world, resulting in more rights for women, the number of female entrepreneurs is increasing. The world is now recognizing and

appreciating the important role that women entrepreneurs play in economic growth, creation of jobs, gender equality, reduced poverty, and peacekeeping. It is seen to be a potential answer to the present global economic crisis (Jarboui and Morched, 2019). Involving women in business helps to preserve peace by favorably impacting economic growth, the sustainability of the country's GDP, the improvement of health status, and education. It is critical to economic growth, job creation, gender equality, poverty alleviation, and peacekeeping (Ambepitiya, 2016). Female company entrepreneurs are more likely to utilize their riches for charitable objectives, which leads to the improvement of society's well-being (U.S. Trust Insights on Wealth and Worth, 2018). Female entrepreneurs are more likely than male entrepreneurs to spend their money on their children's health, nutrition, and education (VanderBrug, 2013). However, financing in women's entrepreneurship has the potential to be the ultimate answer to nearly every significant problem in the world. Despite advancements and a rise in the number of women in business globally (Women Entrepreneurship Report, 2017), women entrepreneurs continue to confront major financial, infrastructural, and cultural hurdles in accessing entrepreneurial resources and opportunities. Women's problems have also been overlooked in the entrepreneurial literature, particularly in underdeveloped nations (De Vita et al., 2014). The effects of women entrepreneurs' access to resources and assistance differ from those of males (Manolova et al., 2012). Female entrepreneurs throughout Pakistan encounter tremendous hurdles from the time they establish their firm to the time they expand their operations. According to the World Bank, Pakistan ranks worst in the world for female entrepreneurship. Dell ranked Pakistan as the second-worst country in the world for female entrepreneurs (Anna, 2015).

Women entrepreneurs account for only 1% of all entrepreneurs, compared to 21% of male entrepreneurs. One may suggest that the problems faced by female entrepreneurs are not gender-specific and that there should be a unified strategy to strengthen the ecosystem regardless of gender (Yuan et al., 2022). However, there is enough evidence in the literature to show that these challenges are gender-specific, and if Pakistan wants to benefit from the true potential of entrepreneurship to solve its ongoing developmental crisis, it must develop gender-specific policies and close the access to resources gap (Quraishi et al., 2021). Removing the constraints that women entrepreneurs confront at the regional and international levels, as well as making it easier for them to integrate into international markets, boosts inclusion and development (Abney and Laya, 2018). The purpose of this study is to investigate women entrepreneurs' access to the entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) in Peshawar using a gender lens. An EE is made up of several interrelated factors that promote the growth and innovation of entrepreneurship in a certain region (Acs et al., 2017).

EEs have grown in prominence in recent years as a result of their influence in policymaking, institutional infrastructure, and regional clusters that foster entrepreneurship. Based on recent research, it has been determined that, while there are research studies on women entrepreneurs' access to EE in other countries, no study has been undertaken in Pakistan, particularly in the setting of Peshawar. Furthermore, while several researchers have studied the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in Pakistan, as well as their motivations and perceptions, there has not been a comprehensive study of the entrepreneurial ecosystem as a whole and how female entrepreneurs access the resources available within it (Memon, 2020). To take advantage of the benefits of entrepreneurship, it is necessary to assess if our entrepreneurial ecosystem equally caters to women entrepreneurs and provides support systems that can assist them in growing and expanding their company operations. Boosting women's entrepreneurship may have a significant

influence not just on the national growth, but also on other socioeconomic sectors such as health, employment, and gender equality (Nassar & Malik, 2021). The purpose of the study is to examine the entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, from the perspective of women entrepreneurs. In this context, the two research objectives have been developed. To investigate the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (EE) and its components for women's entrepreneurship development. To suggest recommendations for improvements in the efficacy of current elements. This study used a case study research design of a qualitative approach. A case study is a research method for gaining a comprehensive, multi-faceted knowledge of a complicated subject in its real-world setting. A case study can be described in several ways, with the basic principle being the requirement to investigate an event or phenomenon in depth and its natural setting (Gannon, 2010). Primary data were collected through a combination of focus groups and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data were used to support the literature review and gain an understanding of the various elements that exist for women entrepreneurs in Peshawar, Pakistan's entrepreneurial ecosystem. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 female entrepreneurs were undertaken to better understand their interactions with the ecosystem. These interviews were conducted using the interview procedure; however, probing methods and supplementary questions were employed to get clarity as necessary. All of the interviews were conducted at the respondent's offices or their homes. The data were then analyzed using content analysis. The purpose of content analysis is to identify the words, themes, or concepts that are present in qualitative data (i.e., text). The study used content analysis to analyze specific words, themes, or concepts and quantify their presence, meaning, and relationships (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The codes were derived from interviews and after the open and axial coding, the family themes from interviews were generated, and at the end, the data was interpreted.

Literature Review:

Definitions Of An Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

The basics of the notion of an entrepreneurial ecosystem arose in the 1980s and 1990s when the focus of entrepreneurship research switched from an individualistic approach to a broader lens that included the involvement of economic, cultural, and social actors in the entrepreneurship process (Aldrich, 1990). Although there is no universal definition of an EE, scholars, researchers, and practitioners have defined it in various ways, and many analogies have emerged, including business ecosystems, industrial ecosystems, innovation ecosystems, and entrepreneurial ecosystems (Yuan et al., 2022). The term "ecosystem" originated in biology and was then used in other sectors such as human sciences, business, and economics (Willis, 1997). Entrepreneurial ecosystems are defined by academics as coordinated conditions that support productive entrepreneurship. An entrepreneurial ecosystem, according to Kantis and Federico, consists of components in the social, political, and legal settings that work together to promote entrepreneurship (Kantis and Federico, 2012). It is the environment that fosters a company's growth (Dodhy, 2016). An entrepreneurial ecosystem is an interconnected system of many components that support entrepreneurship in an area; it is the surrounding environment that is beyond the control of the business itself yet has a significant influence on the business's performance (Sami & Ahmad, 2021). Entrepreneurial ecosystems are concerted efforts to create conditions that foster the growth of new firms (Kuratko et al., 2017). EE, according to Audretsch and Belitski (2017), is a structure of organizations and institutions that uncover and exploit

entrepreneurial ideas. According to Cukier et al., (2016) EEs are defined by distances, i.e., within a 30-mile radius, and are developed by people, start-ups, and supporting institutions that constantly interact with one another to help existing ventures grow and support the formation of new companies. Cohen (2006) described an EE as a set of interrelated players within a certain community that fosters the establishment of new initiatives (Cohen, 2006). Dubini defined these ecosystems as conditions in which public policies create incentives to do business, hence promoting the spread of entrepreneurship (Dubini, 1989). After Daniel Isenberg's publication on EE and the Entrepreneurial Revolution, the notion of EE acquired prominence in literature (Isenberg, 2010). The presence of high-impact enterprises in an entrepreneurial ecosystem produces value for individual entrepreneurs and demonstrates public-private governance (Acs et al., 2017). Delgado et al. investigated the influence of clusters, or groups of industries that are closely connected, on entrepreneurship (Delgado et al., 2010).

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem And Women Entrepreneurs

After Daniel Isenberg's publication on EE and the Entrepreneurial Revolution, the notion of EE acquired prominence in literature (Isenberg, 2010). The presence of high-impact enterprises in an entrepreneurial ecosystem produces value for individual entrepreneurs and demonstrates public-private governance (Acs et al., 2017). Delgado et al. investigated the influence of clusters, or groups of industries that are closely connected, on entrepreneurship (Delgado et al., 2010). Women entrepreneurs encounter structural and political impediments that their male counterparts may not experience (Muntean, 2013). Women entrepreneurs do not even have access to the same financial resources as their male colleagues. They have limited access to bank finance as a result of bank workers' traditional attitudes regarding female entrepreneurs. Bank personnel's conservative attitudes, suspicion, and predetermined beliefs about women's entrepreneurship limit their access to educational capital (Raghuvanshi et al., 2017). Because many women entrepreneurs are not permitted to communicate freely, particularly with males, they have extremely limited funding and possibilities that exist inside external networks. They largely rely on resources inside their families to get supplies (Lindvert et al., 2017). Women's major influences may differ from that of males; for example, while markets, money, and management are crucial for entrepreneurs, societal institutions and familial background may be more significant for female entrepreneurs (Brush et al., 2009). For women entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial success is defined by improving the quality of life in their communities, therefore they prefer to adhere to societal rationale, which contributes to the ecosystem's cohesiveness (Roundy, 2017). Women's major influences may differ from that of males; for example, while markets, money, and management are crucial for entrepreneurs, societal institutions and familial background may be more significant for female entrepreneurs (Brush et al., 2009). To women entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial success is defined by improving the quality of life in their communities, therefore they prefer to adhere to societal rationale, which contributes to the ecosystem's cohesiveness (Roundy, 2017). Women entrepreneurs have a significant influence on their communities and the lives of other women, but institutional and cultural hurdles prevent them from obtaining resources. Because female entrepreneurs' motives, influences, and problems differ from that of male entrepreneurs, it is critical to view the entrepreneurial ecosystem via a gender lens to close the gender gap in access to the EE (Quraishi et al., 2021).

Models Of An Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

A variety of models of the entrepreneurial ecosystem have been proposed, each focusing on a distinct set of factors. For example, the Triple Helix model of innovation emphasizes the importance of relationships and coordinated efforts among companies, government, and universities in achieving long-term economic development and social (Etzkowitz&Leydesdorff, 1995). According to Baron and Shane, chances for innovation originate from three sources: technology changes, regulatory and political changes, and social and demographic changes (Baron and Shane, 2008). The core of the EE is regarded to be a network of interrelated components such as financing, supportive services, mentors, and leadership (Stam and Spiegel, 2016). According to the available literature, collaboration across various EE institutions and players is critical for good outcomes. If strong ties between EE actors do not emerge entirely, it might lead to systemic failure and have an impact on future breakthroughs. According to Mason and Brown, successful entrepreneurs who reinvest their experience, skill, and money to encourage new entrepreneurs, information that is shared and available, culture, financing, universities, and service providers are all vital components of an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Mason and Brown, 2014). The three most crucial foundations of an entrepreneurial environment are accessible marketplaces, human capital availability, and money (World Economic Forum, 2013). An effective and durable EE model does not arise overnight; rather, it is the result of years of consistent and concerted work (Neck et al., 2004). Stam's concept emphasizes wealth creation as part of the system and focuses on incidental links among different EE participants (Stam, 2015). Van de Ven's model (1993) consists of four elements: institutional structures, financial processes, consumer-provided market demand, and private entrepreneurs' research and development, marketing, and production. We chose Daniel Isenberg's (2011) entrepreneurial ecosystem model for this study since it is generally acknowledged and thorough. Successful entrepreneurship, according to Isenberg (2011) enriches all domains of the current ecosystem. He has classified the entrepreneurial environment into six categories: venture-friendly policies, financial resources, Institutional support, Skilled human capital, Culture conducive to entrepreneurship, Supportive markets. Individual stakeholders with an interest in the growth and advancement of additional organizations may be recognized in each domain. In the finance area, for example, these stakeholders may include banks and financial organizations who lend money to entrepreneurs and profit from their success. In the market, these might be executives from huge organizations interested in working with or purchasing successful enterprises (Yuan et al., 2022). In the human capital area, these might be institutions that gain from putting their graduates in these corporations or from getting research money through academic research collaborations.

Findings and Analysis

Policy

Socioeconomic and cultural obstacles have been seen to have an impact on policy effectiveness. Some female entrepreneurs stated that although the government initiates the productivity of an individual or training, women in their communities will be hesitant to participate due to family representatives' opposition, demonstrating that perhaps the legislative framework can only function successfully if women are getting societal support. But on the other hand, certain government programs are expected to produce positive results. For example, in the Finance Supplemental information Bill 2019, the tax rate on bank lending to small firms was decreased from 35% to 20%. This will encourage banks to provide additional financial services to small

businesses. However, additional reductions in taxes or incentives for banks to lend to women-owned businesses will boost financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs. The following are the primary themes highlighted under "policy": When questioned about their awareness of laws and policies, the majority of respondents had no idea what sorts of regulations existed or how they could aid them. Women who had gotten practical education or had participated in some type of business training were found to be more knowledgeable about the laws and regulations of running a business than those who had not had business education. According to one interviewee:

"We were sharing the facility with a woman entrepreneur who was working with the chamber of commerce. She assisted us in registering our company. She also went over the necessary legislation with us, which was quite useful."

An interviewee said,

"The government provides no incentive. Not for women-owned businesses. Not even for male business owners. For us, overseas transactions have become extremely tough. If there is a transaction, it must first pass via a certain bank before being put into our account. It has made dealing with overseas clients extremely difficult for us."

Participants were asked to propose some projects or programs that they would want to see implemented in the policy environment. The majority of female entrepreneurs proposed entrepreneurship training programs, particularly those connected to technology, networking opportunities, finance initiatives, and the granting of tax breaks.

Finance

All of the responders employed unofficial sources of funding. Approximately 60% borrowed from their funds, while 40% borrowed from relatives and friends. Most female entrepreneurs lacked awareness of financial intuitions and were hesitant to engage in formal borrowing. Respondents reported apprehension about borrowing from financial institutions and a lack of information about the many types of accessible financial resources, regulations, and processes for obtaining external finance. An extract from an interview follows:

"I do not wish to take out a loan or make an investment. It's a bunch of unnecessarily protracted processes. I don't want to go through all of this trouble."

Respondents claimed that women were subjected to investor bias just because investors questioned their capacity to manage a successful firm, but male entrepreneurs are not subjected to the same assessment standards. Investors prefer to appraise males based on their potential, but women are judged based on their experience and track record of accomplishment. Women entrepreneurs are also barred from entering men's associations and are so denied investment chances. Navigating patriarchal institutions is equally difficult for them. The data suggest that there is still discrimination towards female entrepreneurs. Investors have a preexisting bias against the abilities of female entrepreneurs and are often more likely to invest in enterprises managed by entrepreneurial ventures (Brooks et al., 2014).

Support

The respondents were also asked regarding their national infrastructure availability, the strength of the power grid in the regions where individuals run their business operations, the support they have received, and their perceptions of institutions such as universities, venture capital, and business incubators. The respondents, particularly those residing in distant areas, and the focus group discussion participants lamented the inadequate infrastructure and how it impacts their day-

to-day company operations. Women entrepreneurs faced problems due to a lack of electricity, increasing taxation on prepaid network services, and a lack of safe and affordable public transportation. For women living in distant places, transportation was the most pressing infrastructure challenge. Women stated there is no public transportation even closer to their villages, and they frequently had to go a significant distance to catch a rickshaw in an emergency. Even rickshaws are not a viable alternative for them regularly, given their salary. Several women claimed that ride-hailing services like Careem and Uber had made it simpler for them to travel. They discussed the difficulties women had before the availability of these services, such as the fact that they had to rely on males in their family to attend meetings or travel to the marketplace, and those alternative modes of public transit were not a feasible choice for them. Individuals can now travel without relying on others thanks to the introduction of Careem and Uber, which saves them time. According to one interviewee:

"Careem has made it quite simple for me to organize my travel. I might not have to work around my father's schedule, and I can go to the marketplace whenever it becomes convenient for me."

In Pakistan, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a critical role in the empowering of female entrepreneurs. ICT enables women to start new businesses without having to meet in person, which is beneficial in traditional settings where women have minimal mobility and privacy concerns (Sardar et al., 2019). Women expressed how having an online business gives them more protection and privacy than creating a physical outlet for their endeavor.

"I launched an internet business since I don't have the authorization to run a traditional business. Because I can't have such a store or even a shop, keeping it online is easy, effective, and secure."

Through community mobilization and organization, NGOs have a wide reach in distant regions, and they are a valuable source of offering assistance to women entrepreneurs in locations that would otherwise go ignored. Some female entrepreneurs stated that the only assistance they have gotten has been from local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This assistance includes everything from modest microfinance to entrepreneurship training and financial literacy programs. According to one interviewee,

"An organization in our community assisted several women in launching their businesses. Almost all of these ladies were widows with nowhere to turn, and it is only with the help of non-governmental organizations that these women can now sustain themselves and their children. We've not seen the government do anything at all to help us. They just show up when they need votes, make huge promises, and then go."

Human Capital

Respondents were questioned about their entrepreneurship experience, prior training, academic education, and how simple or hard it is for them to locate trained individuals to work for their organization to assess the availability and accessibility of qualified human capital. Participants who got a business degree or entrepreneurial skills said it helped them grasp the basics of beginning and running a firm, but they needed help comprehending more sophisticated issues. Women entrepreneurs who had never received any type of training highlighted how entrepreneurial education programs might help them develop their businesses and explore new options. Participants were asked what type of practice they thought would be beneficial to them. The majority of them highlighted financing, e-commerce, business expansion, marketing, and

internet promotional training. Women entrepreneurs who may have recently experienced entrepreneurship training stated that all of those training programs do not cover the specific challenges that women face, such as obtaining familial and societal support, responding to stereotypical investor attitudes, harassment that they face daily in markets or from other stakeholders in the supply chain, and operating in a male-dominated business environment. They stated that they must learn to negotiate these problems on their own and that if they receive sufficient training based on the ground realities, they would be better prepared to conduct their firm in a far more successful manner. One commenter stated:

"We had these two training courses nearly everyday, and that was quite beneficial. They taught us about marketing, communication tactics, and how to locate investors. These trainings were led by mentors from both Pakistan and outside. However, these practice sessions did not address gender-specific issues for women."

The importance of universities in entrepreneurship was stressed by the respondents. Someone with master's degrees expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of a practical approach to teaching and learning. However, they discovered that studying business helped them with the fundamentals of beginning a firm, but they highlighted that information was insufficient. Respondents with technical backgrounds stated that if they've been taught about entrepreneurship throughout their school, they would have a better understanding of how to start and run a firm. According to one interviewee:

"I had no idea how to create a business plan. We knew nothing at all about starting a business. My company partner and I are both self-taught entrepreneurs."

According to a respondent, universities do not support innovation or creativity:

"The issue begins at the tertiary level. If we want to work on anything creative, we don't have a lot of resources. I was not permitted to leave the house throughout my studies. I needed to seek outside assistance to create the type of material I desired for my product. In university, I was not taught new software languages. And I was not permitted to seek assistance from market software houses."

The necessity of getting access to qualified and specialized human resource departments was emphasized by female entrepreneurs. They discussed how a lack of access to economic networking impacts their ability to hire talented staff. They also discussed how a lack of market understanding found it challenging for them to operate their firm at first, and how they overcame the challenge with the help of others.

Culture

Almost every piece brought up the cultural angle. Women discussed how cultural conventions, distorted religious values, and male supremacy influence every aspect of their businesses. The findings indicate that restrictive societal and cultural standards stifle the growth of female entrepreneurs. Women also emphasized how difficult it is for them to balance their obligations at home and work. Women entrepreneurs expressed how their family's support is important in their business practices. Many female entrepreneurs' majority of the respondents did not receive adequate support from their family members because their families did not view entrepreneurship as a viable career option. Some respondents also stated that many of their business decisions are influenced by the level of support they receive from their family members. Families, according to Cesaroni and Paoloni, have a crucial impact in molding one's job choice. As a result, the level of family support received by female entrepreneurs influences important decisions in beginning and

developing their businesses (Cesaroni and Paoloni, 2016). We discovered that many women entrepreneurs, particularly particular young, who began their businesses out of a desire to help others, had difficulty convincing their families in the early phases. Furthermore, their families believed that running a firm should be a part-time endeavor, therefore they did not fully support them to pursue entrepreneurship as a full-time job. In response to her choice to extend her company activities, one person stated:

"My family still believes that I am running my business as a pastime and that I would abandon it as soon as I become tired with it. They don't realize how much I enjoy conducting business and how much I wish to do something for the rest of my life. They continuously pushed me to look for work and start a side business. I want to grow my business to other places, but I wouldn't have enough support from family members, particularly from my father, and I'll have to wait another year before I can do that on my own."

Respondents discussed the difficulties they confront when interacting with male investors. The number of investors is males, and they preferred to invest in enterprises managed by men because they are skeptical about women's potential and capacity to operate large corporations. As mentioned by one responder below, the socio-cultural context, particularly in male-dominated nations, creates significant hurdles for women's entrepreneurship (Nasir et al., 2019).

Approximately 60percent of the total female entrepreneurs reported encountering improper behavior or harassment while running their businesses. Such occurrences compound the difficulties that women entrepreneurs encounter and have an impact on their level of stress, mental wellbeing, and self-confidence. In response to one such instance, a responder stated:

"Assumptions are made about you. I've been misjudged several times. I met with investors, but instead of questioning me regarding my company, they asked me personal questions. They weren't concerned with my business; they just wanted to chat with me. It's quite depressing. You are spending not just your time but also your efforts. You do presentations and are passionate about your company, but in the end, you discover that they don't care about your company at all. Women must use extreme caution in these situations. They must ensure that the persons they are contacting are trustworthy. This adds to the pressure."

Several women entrepreneurs also talked about how being improperly touched in public areas impairs their ability to perform the rest of the day. Respondents who manage internet companies talked regarding how they get unsolicited advice on their company pages about how they should act, not upload images, and cover their heads. They also stated the non-serious messages they receive from males who are not interested in purchasing the things but more in conversing with them.

Markets

Respondents emphasize the importance of and need for business network support as well as improved market access. They also mentioned how important internet networks can be, particularly for online enterprises. Women entrepreneurs also discussed how being linked to other female entrepreneurs through Facebook groups provides them with good emotional support as they navigate the ups and downs of their businesses. Women individuals are more likely to help other female entrepreneurs by pooling their resources. Popular online networking services that let women access shared resources include Fempro, She Means Business, and Connected Women -

Pakistan. Due to travel restrictions, women entrepreneurs have limited access to markets, business networks, and suppliers. According to the findings, women must ask permission from male members of their family (spouse, father, or brother) every time they leave the house and frequently rely on them to drive them to meetings with vendors and suppliers. This reliance causes several problems and delays. They lack access to business networks and hence are unaware of what is going on in their field. Women are unable to openly communicate with suppliers and merchants since they are all men. According to one interviewee:

"I didn't know many individuals and didn't have a large network. If you come from a conservative household in Pakistan, you must limit your network. I wasn't permitted to go out much or give out my phone number to guys, so I couldn't directly interact with suppliers or shopkeepers for raw materials. I call a supplier using my husband's phone since he won't allow me to use my number. I'll have to wait till my spouse gets home before I can converse."

Because all of the women had the same type of instruction (stitching/tailoring training), every one of the women began sewing their garments, and no one in that community paid for fitted clothing. As a result, the market got saturated since numerous female entrepreneurs ran the same type of business and sold the same product, resulting in essentially nil demand. Instead, if the NGO had considered women entrepreneurs' access to other aspects of the entrepreneurship ecosystem before offering the training and varied it, the market saturation may have been avoided. While some women stated that they learn about market dynamics using the internet and have a Facebook profile to engage with clients and sell their goods, the majority of women stated that they do not know how to utilize the internet to research industry trends. They lacked an understanding of the markets, client demands, and current developments in their business. Even those who utilized the internet stated that their expertise was insufficient. They stated that they want assistance in identifying markets and promoting their goods, as well as in cost-cutting and cost-effective marketing tactics. According to one interviewee:

"I had no idea what marketing was. I lacked the funds to engage experienced marketers or pay for marketing. My family was also unresponsive. My three children were extremely small when I started school. I used to travel from one house to the next and tell everyone about it. My children used to accompany me because there was no one to look after them at home. This was how I used to promote."

Conclusion and Recommendations

Entrepreneurship has evolved into a valuable asset in the creation of work chances; hence, it aids in the improvement of the labor market as well as the country's economy. Furthermore, with the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, starting a firm now necessitates not just financial resources, but also a diverse set of skills such as creativity and ingenuity (Elnadi&Gheith, 2021). An entrepreneurial ecosystem is a social and economic environment that influences entrepreneurship in a particular place. Entrepreneurial ecosystems are described as a collection of interconnected factors that work together to promote productive entrepreneurship within a specific area. Entrepreneurship is frequently reduced to high-growth startups or scale-ups by the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which claims that this sort of entrepreneurship is a key source of innovation, productivity growth, and employment (Yuan et al., 2022). Despite progress and an increase in the number of women in business throughout the world, women entrepreneurs still face significant financial, infrastructure, and cultural barriers to accessing entrepreneurial tools

and opportunities (Abney & Laya, 2018). Women's issues have also been disregarded in the literature on entrepreneurship, particularly in developing countries. The impact of women's access to resources and help differs from that of male entrepreneurs. From the moment they start their business until the time they grow their operations, female entrepreneurs in Pakistan face significant challenges (Tunio, 2020). According to the World Bank, Pakistan has the lowest rate of female entrepreneurship in the world. Pakistan is the world's second-worst country for female entrepreneurs (Quraishi et al., 2021). However, there is enough evidence in the literature to show that these challenges are gender-specific, and Pakistan must develop gender-specific policies and close the access to resources gap if it wants to benefit from the true potential of entrepreneurship to solve its ongoing developmental crisis. Inclusion and development are boosted by removing the barriers that women entrepreneurs face at the regional and international levels, as well as making it simpler for them to integrate into worldwide markets (Sami & Ahmad, 2021).

After examining the data from the research study, it is possible to infer that the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, partially exists for women. There is a larger requirement for the pieces to work together. Women entrepreneurs confront significant challenges in terms of access to funding and cultural difficulties. For future study, we advocate analyzing quantitative data to determine the true scope of the problem, investigating gaps in the functioning of different aspects of EE, and examining entrepreneurial ecosystems in other cities or provinces. There are some recommendations for improving women entrepreneurs' access to the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Peshawar, Pakistan. Making microfinance loan lending more transparent, identifying who is the end-user of loans, and addressing gender-biased lending practices. In addition, there is a need to encourage government institutions to purchase a particular amount of their goods from women-owned enterprises on an annual basis. It is also advised that legislation be translated into local languages so those female entrepreneurs may understand them and legally expand their company. Increasing the number of women on decision-making and advisory committees to guarantee gender equality in the policy-making process. More specialized funding schemes for various sectors and businesses, together with suitable training and assistance for updating current technology and materials. Financial assistance can be made more accessible via industry-specific specialization. Experts in these disciplines are capable of resolving industry-related issues. However, more gender-based research and data are being initiated to inform methods for evidence-based policymaking and program development. Providing tax breaks and export incentives to women entrepreneurs and businesses that buy from women-owned small and medium-sized businesses. Women are empowered by collaborative networks of like-minded people and organizations that connect them with entrepreneurial opportunities and resources. Success stories can be featured on online platforms that provide tools for women entrepreneurs, information on start-up events, and information on available funding. Assisting women in reaching worldwide markets and arranging export seminars to educate women entrepreneurs on export procedures, legislation, and possibilities.

Improving ICT to allow women to access larger markets, lower costs, and realize their full potential in tech-related companies. Women entrepreneurs in rural Sindh fall far behind in the use of contemporary technologies in their businesses and rely on antiquated marketing, production, and sales practices. Women entrepreneurs can grow up their firms and enhance their earnings via ICT initiatives.

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