



FROM ARTISAN TO ENTREPRENEUR: A HERITAGE-TO-ENTERPRISE FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AGENCY IN RURAL TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous and locally embedded knowledge constitutes an important but under-recognised economic resource in rural India. Women frequently possess and reproduce such knowledge through family, community and occupational networks, yet participation in heritage-based production does not necessarily translate into entrepreneurship, enterprise ownership or control over value capture. This paper develops a conceptual framework for understanding how women may move from artisan participation towards entrepreneurial agency in heritage-based rural economies. Drawing on literature on women's empowerment, capabilities, entrepreneurship, indigenous knowledge, handicrafts and sustainable livelihoods, the paper proposes a Heritage-to-Enterprise Framework that connects heritage knowledge with knowledge agency, opportunity recognition, innovation and adaptation, value addition, market agency, entrepreneurial control, value capture, women's economic agency and sustainable livelihoods. It identifies an artisan-entrepreneur gap, referring to the distance between women's capacity to create value through skilled production and their capacity to control and capture value through enterprise activity. The framework is contextualised through six heritage-based domains relevant to Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu: palm-leaf products, Chettinad textiles, traditional foods, brass and metal work, Manamadurai pottery and Athangudi tiles. These domains are proposed as fields for future empirical investigation rather than as evidence of established women-led enterprises. Seven research propositions are developed to guide subsequent field research. The paper argues that women's participation in heritage production should not be equated with entrepreneurship unless women exercise meaningful control over productive resources, enterprise decisions, markets, risks and income. The framework provides a basis for examining how heritage knowledge can be transformed into sustainable enterprise and greater economic agency without reducing cultural heritage to a purely commercial resource.

KEYWORDS: Women's Entrepreneurship; Indigenous Knowledge; Heritage Enterprise; Economic Agency; Craft Value Chains; Rural Entrepreneurship; Sustainable Livelihoods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous and locally embedded knowledge constitutes an important dimension of rural economic and cultural life. Traditional crafts, textile practices, food preparation, pottery, metal work and other locally developed skills represent accumulated knowledge concerning materials, techniques, design, production and adaptation. Such knowledge is commonly transmitted through families, communities and occupational networks and may remain embedded in everyday livelihood practices. In many rural settings, therefore, knowledge is simultaneously cultural, productive and economic.

Women occupy an important position within many of these knowledge systems. Their contribution may include production, weaving, processing, finishing, design, food preparation, packaging, sales and other specialised activities. Yet participation in production is not necessarily equivalent to entrepreneurship. A woman may possess considerable technical knowledge while having limited control over procurement of raw materials, pricing, marketing, finance, branding or enterprise ownership. Her contribution may therefore be substantial in terms of value creation while remaining limited in terms of value capture.



This distinction creates an important research problem for the study of women's entrepreneurship in heritage economies. Entrepreneurship involves more than productive skill; it generally includes opportunity recognition, resource mobilisation, decision-making, innovation, market engagement and responsibility for economic risk. Consequently, the presence of women in a craft or heritage sector cannot, by itself, establish that women are entrepreneurs.

The central question of this paper is therefore: Under what conditions can women transform heritage knowledge and production skills into entrepreneurship, enterprise ownership and greater economic agency?

The question is particularly relevant in rural Tamil Nadu, where heritage-based production intersects with changing consumer preferences, tourism, digital markets, geographical indications, institutional support and livelihood diversification. Sivaganga district provides a useful contextual setting because its rural and Chettinad economy contains several distinctive heritage-based activities. These include palm-leaf products, Chettinad textiles, traditional foods, brass and metal work, Manamadurai pottery and Athangudi tiles. The purpose of considering these domains is not to assume that women are already entrepreneurs in all of them, but to examine the conditions under which skilled participation may or may not develop into enterprise ownership and market agency.

The paper makes two related conceptual contributions. First, it introduces the artisan–entrepreneur gap as an analytical distinction between the ability to create value through skilled production and the ability to control and capture value through entrepreneurship. Second, it develops a Heritage-to-Enterprise Framework linking heritage knowledge to knowledge agency, opportunity recognition, innovation and adaptation, value addition, market agency, entrepreneurial control and value capture, ultimately connecting these processes with women's economic agency and sustainable livelihoods.

The paper is conceptual and contextual. It does not claim to present field findings from Sivaganga. Instead, it develops a framework and research propositions that can guide subsequent empirical investigation under the broader ICSSR research project on localising Sustainable Development Goals through indigenous knowledge systems, craft value chains and women's entrepreneurship in rural Tamil Nadu. The framework is deliberately designed to avoid the assumption that all women engaged in heritage production are entrepreneurs.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the potential of indigenous knowledge for women's entrepreneurship in rural areas.
2. To analyse women's participation in selected heritage-based activities and their transition from artisans to entrepreneurs.
3. To develop a conceptual framework linking heritage knowledge with women's entrepreneurship and economic agency.
4. To identify key factors that can support women in converting heritage skills into sustainable livelihood opportunities.

3. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

3.1 Indigenous Knowledge as an Economic Resource

Indigenous and locally embedded knowledge is often discussed primarily in terms of cultural continuity, identity and community heritage. Such an approach is important, but it can obscure the productive and economic dimensions of knowledge. Knowledge concerning materials, production techniques, seasonal resources, design, local consumer preferences and customary methods may constitute an economic asset when it is mobilised within a livelihood strategy. The economic value of such knowledge, however, should not be assumed to arise automatically. Knowledge becomes economically consequential when individuals or groups possess the capabilities and institutional conditions required to use, adapt, exchange and protect it. In heritage economies, the movement from knowledge to enterprise may therefore depend on access to resources, markets, finance, information, technology and decision-making authority.

This perspective is consistent with the sustainable livelihoods approach, which views livelihood outcomes as emerging from the interaction between assets, capabilities, institutions and livelihood strategies (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998). Heritage knowledge can be treated as a form of locally embedded human and social capability that



interacts with physical, financial and market resources. Its economic potential depends on how these resources are combined.

3.2 Women's Economic Agency

Women's economic agency concerns more than income generation. Kabeer's (1999) framework distinguishes among resources, agency and achievements, emphasising the importance of the capacity to define goals and act upon them. Sen's (1999) capability perspective similarly places freedom and substantive opportunities at the centre of development.

Applied to heritage entrepreneurship, these approaches suggest that women's participation should be examined in relation to control and choice. Relevant questions include: Who owns the productive assets? Who decides what is produced? Who determines the price? Who negotiates with buyers? Who controls business income? Who bears financial risk? Who decides whether profits are reinvested? Who controls digital marketing accounts and customer relationships?

These questions move the analysis from participation to agency. A woman may contribute labour to a family enterprise while another household member controls pricing, finance and sales. In such a case, labour participation exists, but entrepreneurial agency may remain constrained.

3.3 Entrepreneurship as a Process

Entrepreneurship in heritage economies can be understood as a process rather than a single occupational category. The process may begin with recognition of an opportunity, followed by experimentation, value addition, market engagement, resource mobilisation and assumption of risk. This means that the transition from artisan to entrepreneur may occur gradually.

The framework therefore treats entrepreneurship as a continuum rather than a binary condition. A woman may occupy one of several positions: worker, skilled artisan, producer, market-oriented producer, entrepreneur or enterprise owner/manager. These categories should be empirically distinguished rather than treated as interchangeable.

4. FROM ARTISAN PARTICIPATION TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The distinction between artisan participation and entrepreneurship is central to this paper. An artisan primarily refers to a person possessing and applying specialised productive knowledge or skill. An entrepreneur, by contrast, undertakes a broader set of activities involving opportunity recognition, resource mobilisation, market decisions, innovation and risk.

The two roles may overlap, but they are not identical. A woman who weaves a textile for a contractor may be a skilled artisan without being the entrepreneur who purchases materials, determines production volumes, sets prices and markets the finished product. Similarly, women may participate extensively in food processing or pottery production while a trader or household member controls the enterprise.

The following continuum is therefore proposed:

Worker → Skilled Artisan → Producer → Market-Oriented Producer → Entrepreneur → Enterprise Owner/Manager

The continuum is not intended to imply that one occupational position is inherently superior to another. Rather, it provides an analytical device for identifying differences in control, responsibility and value capture. The same individual may move between positions over time.

The transition may be influenced by several factors: productive asset ownership, access to finance, entrepreneurial knowledge, market information, digital capability, social networks, collective organisation, institutional support, confidence and the ability to bear risk. The key issue is whether women can convert their productive knowledge into decision-making and market power.

5. THE ARTISAN-ENTREPRENEUR GAP

The artisan-entrepreneur gap refers to the distance between the capacity to create value through skilled production and the capacity to control and capture value through entrepreneurial activity.

The gap may appear in several forms. A woman may have technical skill but not own tools or productive assets. She may produce a high-quality item but have no role in pricing. She may sell through intermediaries without direct customer access. She may contribute to a family enterprise but have limited authority over investment decisions. She may receive wages or piece-rate payments while the enterprise owner captures most of the commercial value.

The gap is therefore not simply an income gap. It is a multidimensional control gap involving resources, decisions, markets, finance, risk and income.

This concept helps avoid a common analytical error: treating women's presence in a craft sector as evidence of women's entrepreneurship. Participation statistics may conceal hierarchical relationships within production and value chains. An empowerment-oriented analysis must therefore examine who controls the stages through which value is created and captured.

The artisan-entrepreneur gap also provides a useful empirical lens. Future field research can classify respondents according to their actual role and then examine whether higher levels of entrepreneurial control are associated with greater economic agency.

6. FROM HERITAGE PRESERVATION TO HERITAGE ENTERPRISE

Heritage preservation and heritage enterprise are related but distinct concepts. Preservation focuses on continuity of knowledge, practices and cultural identity. Heritage enterprise adds a market and livelihood dimension: it asks how heritage-based knowledge can support contemporary economic activity while retaining meaningful participation and agency for knowledge holders.

Commercialisation, however, can create tensions. Market demand may encourage standardisation, substitution of materials or redesign that weakens traditional characteristics. At the same time, adaptation may be necessary for products to remain economically viable. The relevant issue is therefore not whether heritage should remain unchanged, but how innovation can occur without eliminating the role and agency of the people who hold the knowledge.

A heritage enterprise approach should satisfy at least four conditions. First, knowledge holders should participate meaningfully in decisions concerning production and adaptation. Second, value addition should increase rather than merely relocate value away from producers. Third, market development should create opportunities for direct or stronger market participation. Fourth, economic benefits should contribute to sustainable livelihoods.

This perspective is particularly important for women because heritage knowledge may be embedded in forms of unpaid or under-recognised household labour. Transforming such knowledge into enterprise requires more than training; it requires changes in access, control and market participation.

7. HERITAGE-TO-ENTERPRISE FRAMEWORK

The Heritage-to-Enterprise Framework developed in this paper conceptualises the transition from heritage knowledge to women's economic agency as an interconnected and iterative process. The framework is not a deterministic linear model. Instead, each stage can influence the others, and progress may be interrupted or reversed by resource constraints, market shocks, institutional barriers or household responsibilities.

The framework contains ten linked stages:

1. Heritage Knowledge – traditional skills, cultural practices, local materials and accumulated knowledge.
2. Knowledge Agency – learning, confidence, self-efficacy and the ability to use and adapt knowledge.
3. Opportunity Recognition – identification of market needs, consumer preferences, emerging trends and underused value.
4. Innovation and Adaptation – modification of products, processes, designs or business models.
5. Value Addition – improvement of quality, packaging, branding, differentiation and product positioning.

6. Market Agency – access to customers, promotion, negotiation, distribution and customer relationships.
7. Entrepreneurial Control – decision-making over resources, production, finance, risk and enterprise direction.
8. Value Capture – income, profit, asset accumulation and the ability to retain a meaningful share of created value.
9. Women's Economic Agency – enhanced voice, confidence, mobility, decision-making power and economic independence.
10. Sustainable Livelihoods – economic resilience together with social and environmental well-being.

Three enabling conditions cut across the framework: access to productive resources; digital and financial capability; and collective/institutional support. These conditions can affect movement through multiple stages rather than only one stage.

The central theoretical proposition is that heritage knowledge becomes a basis for women's economic agency not simply when women possess skills, but when knowledge is combined with opportunity recognition, innovation, value addition, market agency and entrepreneurial control. Value capture is especially important because enterprise activity can generate sales without necessarily increasing the economic agency of the producer.

The framework also incorporates iterative learning. Market experience can stimulate new innovation; innovation can alter value addition; improved products can strengthen market agency; and stronger market agency can increase entrepreneurial control and value capture. Thus, the pathway is better understood as a dynamic process of learning, adaptation and accumulation than as a one-way sequence.



Figure 1. Heritage-to-Enterprise Framework for Women's Economic Agency

Source: Author's conceptualisation based on the literature reviewed in this paper.

8. SIVAGANGA AS A CONTEXTUAL SETTING

Sivaganga district provides a relevant contextual setting for examining heritage-based women's entrepreneurship because its economic and cultural landscape includes several craft and knowledge traditions associated with Chettinad and neighbouring rural communities. The district is associated with distinctive textile, pottery, palm-leaf, food, metal and architectural craft traditions.

The presence of a heritage activity should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that women in that activity are entrepreneurs. The contextual purpose of the six domains is to identify different points along the artisan–entrepreneur continuum and to examine the institutional, market and household conditions shaping women's agency.

The selection also permits comparison across activities with different production structures. Some may be home-based; some may involve workshops; some may depend on intermediaries; and others may be more strongly linked to tourism, direct retail or contemporary design markets. Such variation can help future empirical research identify why entrepreneurial transitions occur in some settings but not others.

9. SIX HERITAGE DOMAINS FOR FUTURE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

The proposed empirical investigation can examine six heritage-based domains:

1. Palm-leaf/Kottan – weaving, design, production and potential direct marketing.
2. Chettinad textiles/Kandangi sarees – weaving, finishing, design and market participation.
3. Chettinad traditional foods – preparation, processing, packaging and enterprise development.
4. Brass and metal work – finishing, design, sales and possible movement into higher-value functions.
5. Manamadurai pottery – production, design, finishing, product innovation and marketing.
6. Athangudi tiles – production and finishing, with particular scope for examining the difference between skilled participation and enterprise ownership.

These domains are deliberately treated as prospective research fields. The study should establish through field evidence which roles women actually occupy, how many exercise entrepreneurial control and how value is distributed across the relevant value chains.

10. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE HERITAGE DOMAINS

The six domains provide contrasting opportunities for studying the artisan–entrepreneur gap.

Palm-leaf products can illustrate the relationship between traditional skill, product design and contemporary market demand. A key empirical question is whether women involved in weaving and finishing have opportunities to develop products, brand them and reach customers directly.

Chettinad textiles provide an important setting for examining the relationship between heritage identity and value capture. Kandangi sarees have recognised geographical indication status, creating a formal heritage and market context. Yet recognition of a product does not automatically establish women's control over production, pricing or marketing. The empirical question is who captures value at different points in the textile chain.

Traditional foods provide an opportunity to examine how household and community knowledge may be converted into packaged, branded and market-oriented products. Here, the transition from household production to enterprise may depend on food safety requirements, packaging, finance, market access and digital promotion.

Brass and metal work can be examined in relation to gendered divisions of labour and access to higher-value functions. Women may participate in finishing, design or sales without controlling the enterprise. The research can therefore examine whether training and market access create movement towards greater entrepreneurial control.

Manamadurai pottery offers a distinctive setting for examining the relationship between traditional production, product innovation and institutional marketing. Its geographical indication status also creates an opportunity to examine whether formal heritage recognition translates into producer-level economic benefits.

Athangudi tiles are especially important as a boundary case. Women may participate as skilled workers or artisans even where ownership and entrepreneurial control are concentrated elsewhere. Rather than excluding such a domain because women entrepreneurs may be relatively few, the study can use it to examine why skilled participation does



not necessarily become entrepreneurship. This is precisely the analytical problem addressed by the artisan–entrepreneur gap.

The purpose of these observations is not to predetermine empirical findings. Field research must establish the actual participation, ownership, decision-making and value-capture patterns within each domain.

11. VALUE CREATION AND VALUE CAPTURE

A central distinction in the framework is between value creation and value capture. Women can create economic value through labour, skill, design and knowledge without capturing a proportionate share of the final value.

Value creation occurs when skills and resources are transformed into products or services that buyers value. Value capture concerns the ability to retain economic returns from that value. It is affected by bargaining power, market access, pricing, ownership, branding, distribution and control of customer relationships.

For example, a producer may make a technically sophisticated craft item but sell it to an intermediary at a low price because she lacks access to final markets. Another producer with direct customer access may receive a higher return despite using similar production skills. The difference is not necessarily skill; it may be market agency.

The framework therefore treats value capture as a critical mechanism between entrepreneurship and economic agency. Future empirical research should measure not only income, but also who sets prices, who owns the business, who controls sales channels, who manages financial accounts and who decides how profits are used.

12. DIGITALISATION AND MARKET AGENCY

Digital technologies can potentially reduce some of the distance between producers and consumers by enabling online promotion, direct communication, digital payments, cataloguing and customer relationship management. However, digital access should not be equated automatically with entrepreneurial empowerment.

Digital capability requires more than owning a smartphone. Women may need skills in photography, product presentation, pricing, social-media communication, online payments, order management, customer service and logistics. They may also need control over digital accounts and business information.

Accordingly, the framework treats digitalisation as an enabling capability that can strengthen market agency when combined with entrepreneurial control. Guha, Mandal and Kujur (2021), for example, show the relevance of social media marketing strategies for handicraft products, including their relationship with brand-related and purchase-related outcomes. Parthiban et al. (2024) similarly demonstrate how digital and organisational processes can help mobilise indigenous knowledge for market-oriented activity.

The empirical question is therefore not simply whether women use digital tools, but whether digital capability changes their relationship with markets and value capture.

13. COLLECTIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Collective organisation can provide an alternative route to overcoming individual constraints. Producer groups, cooperatives, self-help groups, associations and other collective arrangements may improve access to inputs, finance, training, technology, market information and bargaining power.

However, collective production does not automatically imply collective empowerment. Internal governance matters. Women may belong to a group while having limited influence over pricing, procurement, marketing or distribution decisions. The framework therefore distinguishes membership from meaningful participation in collective governance.

Collective entrepreneurship is most relevant when women can participate in decision-making and when the organisation strengthens their capacity to negotiate and capture value. Future empirical research should therefore examine both the existence of collective institutions and the quality of women's participation within them.

14. HERITAGE ENTERPRISE AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

The sustainable livelihoods perspective provides an important outcome dimension for the framework. Chambers and Conway (1992) and Scoones (1998) emphasise capabilities, assets, strategies, institutions and sustainability in understanding rural livelihoods. Heritage enterprise can contribute to livelihoods when it creates income, strengthens productive assets, diversifies economic opportunities and improves resilience.

Sustainability should not be reduced to income alone. A heritage enterprise may generate revenue but create excessive workload, environmental pressure or cultural loss. Conversely, a small enterprise may generate modest monetary returns while strengthening household resilience, skills, social networks and women's decision-making power.

The framework therefore links economic agency to broader livelihood outcomes. This also permits future empirical research to examine how enterprise development relates to social and environmental dimensions of sustainable rural development.

15. RELATIONSHIP WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The framework has relevance to several Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those concerning poverty reduction, gender equality, decent work, sustainable communities, responsible production and partnerships. However, SDG alignment is treated here as an outcome and policy context rather than as the principal theoretical contribution. This distinction is important because the present paper develops a specific entrepreneurship and agency framework. Its central concern is the transformation of heritage knowledge into entrepreneurial control and value capture. SDG localisation can subsequently be examined as one consequence of such transformation.

The framework therefore complements, rather than duplicates, broader SDG-oriented analysis of indigenous knowledge and women's entrepreneurship.

16. RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

- P1. Possession of heritage knowledge does not necessarily lead to entrepreneurship unless women have meaningful control over productive resources and enterprise decisions.
- P2. Women's transition from artisan to entrepreneur is more likely when knowledge agency is combined with market agency and financial control.
- P3. Innovation and value addition strengthen the potential for heritage knowledge to generate women-led enterprise opportunities.
- P4. Direct market access increases women's potential to capture a greater share of value generated through heritage-based production.
- P5. Digital market capability can strengthen women's market agency when accompanied by financial, logistical and entrepreneurial capabilities.
- P6. Collective entrepreneurship can strengthen women's bargaining position when collective governance provides meaningful participation in decision-making.
- P7. Entrepreneurial control is a critical mechanism linking heritage knowledge with women's economic agency and sustainable livelihood outcomes.

17. PROPOSED EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SIVAGANGA

The conceptual framework can be operationalised through a mixed-method empirical design in the subsequent stage of the ICSSR study. The quantitative component can distinguish respondents according to their actual role: worker, artisan, producer, market-oriented producer, entrepreneur or owner-manager. This classification is essential because the research question concerns transition and control rather than simple participation.

The questionnaire can examine five broad domains: heritage knowledge and production; enterprise and market behaviour; control and value capture; enabling conditions; and economic agency and livelihood outcomes. Measures can include knowledge transmission, productive asset ownership, enterprise ownership, innovation, value addition, pricing authority, market access, direct selling, digital marketing, finance, decision-making, risk-bearing, control over income, institutional support and livelihood outcomes.

The qualitative component can examine how women interpret their own occupational roles and transitions. Interviews and case studies can explore pathways from skill to enterprise, barriers to market entry, household negotiation, experiences with intermediaries, collective organisation and the meaning of economic agency.

The resulting data can be analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential methods. Where measurement quality and sample characteristics permit, multivariate approaches such as structural equation modelling may be considered. Qualitative data can be thematically analysed to identify mechanisms and contextual explanations. The empirical design should be allowed to determine whether the propositions are supported, modified or rejected.

18. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The framework suggests that policies aimed at women's entrepreneurship in heritage sectors should move beyond skill training alone.

First, training should include enterprise capabilities such as costing, pricing, branding, market negotiation, digital marketing, financial literacy and business planning.

Second, programmes should address productive resource constraints. Access to tools, raw materials, working capital, common production facilities and market information can influence whether skill becomes enterprise.

Third, policy should strengthen direct market access. Producer exhibitions, institutional procurement, tourism-linked markets, digital platforms and collective branding can reduce excessive dependence on intermediaries where appropriate.

Fourth, support should be sensitive to the distinction between workers and entrepreneurs. Women workers may require different interventions from women who own or manage enterprises.

Fifth, collective institutions should strengthen women's decision-making rather than merely increase membership numbers.

Finally, heritage policy and entrepreneurship policy should be connected carefully. Cultural recognition can support market visibility, but economic benefits should reach the communities and knowledge holders who sustain the heritage.

19. ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Universities can act as intermediaries between heritage knowledge, research, innovation and enterprise development. Their role can extend beyond conventional training to include product development, design support, market research, digital capability, incubation, documentation and evaluation.

Departments of Women's Studies can contribute by bringing an agency and gender perspective to enterprise development. Departments of rural development, economics, management, design, technology and social sciences can contribute complementary expertise.

University-community partnerships can also create spaces in which women producers participate in documenting their knowledge, testing innovations and assessing market opportunities. Such partnerships should recognise women as knowledge holders and economic actors rather than treating them only as beneficiaries.

For Sivaganga, a university-based heritage enterprise initiative could potentially connect women producers with design students, digital marketing support, business mentors, local institutions and appropriate market channels. Such an approach would also provide a practical setting for testing the Heritage-to-Enterprise Framework.

20. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The paper contributes to the literature in three principal ways.



First, it brings together heritage knowledge and women's entrepreneurship through an agency-centred perspective. Rather than treating indigenous knowledge as a static cultural asset, it examines the conditions under which knowledge can become an economic capability.

Second, the artisan–entrepreneur gap provides a conceptual distinction between production participation and entrepreneurial control. This helps explain why high levels of women's labour participation may coexist with limited ownership and value capture.

Third, the Heritage-to-Enterprise Framework integrates knowledge agency, opportunity recognition, innovation, value addition, market agency, entrepreneurial control and value capture with women's economic agency and sustainable livelihoods. It therefore provides a bridge between entrepreneurship studies, gender and empowerment research, indigenous knowledge studies and rural livelihood analysis.

The framework is intended to be testable and revisable. Its value lies not in assuming that every heritage activity will produce women-led enterprises, but in identifying the mechanisms and enabling conditions that can be examined empirically.

21. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The paper is conceptual and does not provide empirical validation of the framework. The six heritage domains are contextual research fields rather than confirmed categories of women-led enterprise. The framework also cannot assume that all women experience the same constraints or opportunities within a particular craft sector.

Future research should therefore establish the actual distribution of women's occupational roles, ownership patterns, market relationships and value capture. It should examine differences by age, education, household position, access to assets, location, social networks and market orientation where appropriate and ethically justified.

Longitudinal research could be especially valuable for examining transitions from artisan participation to enterprise ownership. Comparative research across heritage domains could identify which institutional and market conditions are associated with stronger entrepreneurial agency.

Future research should also examine whether formal heritage recognition, digital market participation and collective organisation actually improve producer-level value capture. Such questions can transform the framework from a conceptual model into an empirically grounded explanation of women's enterprise development.

22. CONCLUSION

Heritage knowledge can be an important economic resource in rural economies, but its possession or transmission does not automatically create entrepreneurship. The central challenge is the movement from skilled participation to meaningful control over enterprise decisions and value capture.

This paper addresses that challenge through the Heritage-to-Enterprise Framework and the concept of the artisan–entrepreneur gap. The framework proposes that heritage knowledge can contribute to women's economic agency when it is supported by knowledge agency, opportunity recognition, innovation, value addition, market agency, entrepreneurial control and value capture. Productive resources, digital and financial capabilities, and collective or institutional support operate as enabling conditions throughout the process.

The framework also highlights an important methodological principle: women's participation in a heritage sector should not be equated with women's entrepreneurship. Empirical research must establish who produces, who owns, who decides, who markets, who bears risk and who captures value.

For Sivaganga, the proposed examination of palm-leaf products, Chettinad textiles, traditional foods, brass and metal work, Manamadurai pottery and Athangudi tiles provides a diverse field for testing these propositions. Some domains may reveal stronger pathways towards women-led enterprise, while others may demonstrate persistent gaps between skill and control. Such variation is not a weakness; it is central to understanding how heritage economies work.

The broader significance of the framework lies in connecting cultural continuity with contemporary economic agency. Heritage enterprise should not be understood simply as commercialising tradition. It should be understood as creating conditions in which knowledge holders—particularly women—can participate meaningfully in innovation, markets, enterprise decisions and value capture. In this sense, moving from artisan to entrepreneur is not merely an occupational transition. It is a transition in agency, control and the capacity to shape one's economic future.

Table 1. Prospective Heritage Domains and Entrepreneurial Questions

Heritage domain	Potential women's role	Key entrepreneurial question
Palm-leaf/Kottan	Weaving, design, production, marketing	Can production skill become direct market agency?
Chettinad textiles	Weaving, finishing, design	Who controls pricing and market access?
Traditional foods	Preparation, processing, packaging	Can household knowledge become enterprise?
Brass and metal work	Finishing, design, sales	Can women enter higher-value functions?
Manamadurai pottery	Production, design, finishing	Can innovation create women-led enterprises?
Athangudi tiles	Production and finishing	Why might skilled participation not lead to ownership?

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