

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN
ENTREPRENEURS IN MICROFINANCE PROGRAMS**

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RECOMMENDATION

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, the work reported in this thesis entitled “**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN MICROFINANCE PROGRAMS**” submitted to Office of the Dean, Faculty of Management, Tribhuvan University, is my original work done in the form of partial fulfillments of the requirement of the degree of Master of Business Studies (M.B.S.) under the supervision and guidance of Kamal Prakash Adhikari of Shanker Dev Campus, Tribhuvan University.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	:	Analysis of Variances
CBBL	:	Chhimek Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd.
CHA	:	Challenges
DEPROSC	:	Deprosc Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd
ED	:	Entrepreneurship Development
FY	:	Financial Year
GDI	:	Gender Development Index
GEM	:	Gender Empowerment Measure
GMFBS	:	Ganapati Microfinance Bittiya Sanstha Ltd.
MFI	:	Microfinance Institutions
N	:	Number of Observations
OPP	:	Opportunities
S.D.	:	Standard Deviation
SABSL	:	Sabaiko Lagubitta Bittiya Sastha Ltd.
SDLBSL	:	Sadhana Lagubitta Bittiya Sastha Ltd.
SLBBL	:	Sworojagar Laghu Bitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd.
VIF	:	Variance Inflation Factor
WEDTF	:	Women's Entrepreneurship Development Trust Fund
WEN	:	Women Entrepreneurship

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Microfinance, defined as the provision of financial services to economically active poor individuals who are excluded from mainstream financial institutions, has gained significant attention since the 1970s as a practical tool for poverty reduction and policy development (Sanyal, 2009). It is believed to positively impact recipients' livelihoods, leading to improvements in their quality of life and helping them escape poverty. Studies have shown that recipients of microfinance loans experience better socioeconomic status, including improved living conditions, health, and nutrition compared to non-recipients (Johnson et al., 2009). Additionally, microfinance programs enhance recipients' understanding of health and nutrition, thereby contributing to family food security and children's nutrition. Empowerment, particularly in the context of women's development, is a fundamental aspect of microfinance (Khan et al., 2020).

Despite the progress made in recent decades, gender inequality remains pervasive worldwide, with women facing disadvantages in various areas such as employment, education, health, and political representation. Microfinance programs have emerged as a notable approach to improving women's social and economic status, with a higher number of women borrowers than men (Khan et al., 2020). While microfinance advocates assert that these programs increase women's empowerment, some studies have highlighted challenges such as intimate partner violence faced by female recipients of microfinance loans. Nevertheless, the United Nations' sustainable development goals prioritize economic inclusion, recognizing it as a crucial enabler for achieving broader development objectives (Johnson et al., 2009).

The global food price crisis of 2007–2008 and subsequent economic challenges have disproportionately affected women, highlighting the need for gender-responsive policies and interventions. Structural adjustments and economic crises have demonstrated the vulnerability of female producers and consumers to external shocks, emphasizing the importance of addressing gender-specific vulnerabilities in economic policies (Sanyal, 2009). In light of these challenges, efforts to include inflation-adjusted values in economic analyses are essential for assessing the real impact of economic policies on vulnerable populations, including women entrepreneurs.

The core principle of microfinance is to empower individuals and communities by providing them with the financial tools and resources necessary to improve their livelihoods. By offering small loans and other financial services tailored to the needs of low-income households, microfinance institutions enable individuals to build assets, increase their income-generating activities, and ultimately break the cycle of poverty. Moreover, microfinance promotes financial inclusion by expanding access to financial services to those who are traditionally excluded from the formal banking sector (Acharya, 2008). This inclusive approach not only fosters economic development at the grassroots level but also contributes to broader social and economic empowerment, particularly among marginalized populations. Through microfinance, individuals have the opportunity to build a more secure and sustainable future for themselves and their families, thereby creating pathways out of poverty and towards greater financial independence (Karn , 2018).

Women's empowerment is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions, including economic, political, and social empowerment. However, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of women's empowerment, and the term itself may not even exist in many languages. Despite its widespread usage, particularly in discussions around gender equality, there remains a lack of comprehensive data on women's empowerment, especially at the global level (Kabeer, 2005). Most available data often focus on gender disparities rather than empowerment itself, highlighting the need for more robust measurement frameworks and indicators.

In different countries, women face diverse challenges and barriers to empowerment. In Japan, for example, despite high levels of education and skill, women grapple with societal expectations and pressures to fulfill traditional roles as mothers and wives, which can undermine their confidence and limit their opportunities in the workplace. In Mexico, while women have increased access to work opportunities, they contend with high rates of domestic violence and are often disproportionately represented in single-mother households, facing barriers to accessing justice and support systems (Kabeer, 2005).

Similarly, in the United States, women encounter ongoing challenges such as gender pay gaps, underrepresentation in public office, and unconscious biases in various spheres of life. Despite advancements, disparities persist, highlighting the need for continued efforts to address systemic inequalities. In Nigeria, many women are confined to traditional roles as homemakers, limiting their opportunities for personal and professional growth. While

some women strive to overcome these barriers, they often face gender discrimination and lack access to necessary skills and resources (Lamichhane, 2020).

In Nepal, women confront a myriad of challenges stemming from poverty, societal norms, and structural inequalities. Economic empowerment remains a significant issue, with women facing limited access to education, employment opportunities, and control over family assets. Moreover, social norms perpetuate gender disparities, leading to early marriages, restricted decision-making rights, and exclusion from public and political spheres. Despite these challenges, women in Nepal are resilient and resourceful, advocating for their rights and striving for greater empowerment amidst adversity (Acharya, 2008; Lamichhane, 2020).

This study focused into the challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs within microfinance programs, with a particular emphasis on exploring the dynamic interplay between various independent variables and women entrepreneurship. The independent variables under scrutiny encompass a spectrum of factors, ranging from the opportunities presented by microfinance activities, such as increased income, social network enhancement, and access to training opportunities, to the formidable challenges encountered by women in accessing financial resources, including inadequate access to finance, juggling multiple responsibilities, and grappling with limited educational opportunities. At the heart of this investigation lies the dependent variable of women entrepreneurship, which serves as the focal point for assessing the impact of these diverse variables on the entrepreneurial endeavors of women. By dissecting the intricate relationship between the opportunities and challenges within microfinance programs and their influence on women entrepreneurship, this study aims to offer valuable insights into enhancing the support mechanisms for women entrepreneurs, ultimately fostering their empowerment and economic advancement.

1.2 Problem Statement

Extensive research has been conducted on the impact of microfinance on poverty alleviation, yet there is a significant gap regarding how microcredit provision specifically contributes to women's empowerment in Nepal. While existing studies have assessed microfinance at various levels, including individual, household, institutional, and community levels, there is limited understanding of the nuanced relationship between

microfinance provision, women's empowerment, and the underlying variables within the Nepalese context (Lamichhane, 2020).

The conventional evaluation of microfinance institutions often prioritizes financial criteria, assuming that high rates of repayment and repeated borrowing indicate positive client satisfaction and valued service. However, this approach fails to address critical questions regarding the reach of microfinance programs and their impact on the lives of clients, particularly women (Karn, 2018). There is a need for a more comprehensive assessment that considers not only financial performance but also the tangible changes occurring in the lives of women beneficiaries.

Despite the surge in microfinance institutions and the portrayal of microcredits as a tool for poverty alleviation and women's economic empowerment in Nepal, there remains a gap in understanding the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs within microfinance programs (Acharya, 2008). While empirical evidence suggests that the poor can benefit economically and socially from microfinance, there is a need for a focused investigation into how microfinance initiatives can effectively address the unique needs and constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in Nepal, ultimately contributing to poverty eradication and sustainable development. The research questions asked for this study are as follows.

1. What are the status of challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurship in microfinance programs in Nepal?
2. Is there any relationship between challenges and opportunities of microfinance programs on women entrepreneurship in Nepal?
3. What is the impact of challenges and opportunities of microfinance programs on women entrepreneurship in Nepal?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows.

1. To examine the status of challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurship in microfinance programs in Nepal.
2. To analyze any relationship between challenges and opportunities of microfinance programs on women entrepreneurship in Nepal.

3. To analyze the impact of challenges and opportunities of microfinance programs on women entrepreneurship in Nepal.

1.4 Rationale of the Study

This study holds significant relevance for various stakeholders, including government bodies, policymakers, women entrepreneurs, social activists, researchers, students, and academicians.

Firstly, for government entities, this study offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing microfinance programs in empowering women entrepreneurs. By understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by women in accessing and benefiting from these programs, governments can refine their policies and interventions to better support female entrepreneurship and economic development.

Similarly, policymakers stand to benefit from the findings of this study as it can inform the design and implementation of targeted initiatives aimed at promoting women's participation in microfinance and addressing the barriers they encounter. Policy recommendations grounded in empirical evidence can lead to more inclusive and impactful programs that contribute to broader socioeconomic goals.

For women entrepreneurs themselves, this study serves as a resource to identify the specific hurdles they face within microfinance programs and explore potential avenues for growth and empowerment. By understanding the experiences of their peers and the systemic factors at play, women entrepreneurs can advocate for their needs and navigate the microfinance landscape more effectively.

Social activists and advocacy groups focused on gender equality and economic empowerment can leverage the findings of this study to amplify their voices and push for policy changes and institutional reforms that promote greater gender equity within the microfinance sector. By highlighting the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and advocating for solutions, these groups can drive positive change at both the local and national levels.

Researchers and scholars in the fields of gender studies, development economics, and entrepreneurship will find value in the empirical data and analysis presented in this study. It can serve as a foundational piece of research to build upon, offering new avenues for

inquiry and exploration into the complex dynamics of women's participation in microfinance and its implications for broader social and economic outcomes.

Finally, students and academicians can benefit from the insights and methodologies employed in this study to deepen their understanding of gender issues, economic development, and research methodologies. By engaging with the findings and contributing to ongoing discussions in the academic community, they can contribute to the body of knowledge and drive further research and innovation in this important area.

Overall, the rationale for studying the challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in microfinance programs extends across multiple dimensions, offering valuable insights and implications for diverse stakeholders committed to promoting gender equality, economic development, and social justice.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

Following were the limitation of this study.

- Primary data has been used in this study, so inherent limitation of primary data.
- The study focused only on women involved in microfinance activities in Gorkha district. This might mean the findings won't apply to women in other areas.
- All important factors that could affect women entrepreneurs might not be included in the study.
- There aren't many existing research articles on this exact topic, which makes it challenging to compare findings or build on previous work.
- The number of people studied might be small, so the findings might not represent all women entrepreneurs in microfinance.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Challenges for Women Entrepreneurs in Microfinance Services

Access to financial services is a crucial component of economic empowerment, poverty reduction, and overall development. However, women, particularly those residing in rural areas, face numerous challenges in accessing microfinance services. These challenges stem from various socio-cultural, legal, educational, and infrastructural factors, ultimately impeding women's financial autonomy and entrepreneurial endeavors (Dumbuya & Munu, 2024).

Socio-cultural norms and legal restrictions play a significant role in limiting women's access to financial services. Societal beliefs regarding gender roles often restrict women's mobility and decision-making power, consequently undermining their financial autonomy. Discriminatory inheritance practices and limited property rights further exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for women to access financial services (Ranabahu & Tanima, 2022).

Additionally, limited financial literacy and awareness pose significant hurdles for women in rural areas seeking access to microfinance services. Many women lack the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate financial institutions effectively, hindering their ability to make informed financial decisions. This knowledge gap further erodes women's confidence and financial independence (Karim et al., 2020).

Education also plays a crucial role in women's ability to access microfinance services. However, women in rural areas often face barriers to education, including social norms, distance to schools, and early marriage. Lack of education limits women's acquisition of essential skills, such as financial planning and record-keeping, which are vital for engaging with microfinance institutions (Dumbuya & Munu, 2024).. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure and technology pose significant challenges for women in rural areas. Limited physical bank branches and unreliable internet connectivity restrict women's access to microfinance institutions. Transportation networks and long distances to bank branches further exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for women to reach financial services physically (Karim et al., 2020). Additionally, limited access to

technology, such as smartphones or computers, hampers women's ability to utilize digital financial services effectively.

Gender bias and discrimination within microfinance institutions also contribute to the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. Bias against women by financial service providers, including loan officers and bank staff, can lead to differential treatment and denial of services based on gender stereotypes. Moreover, loan collateral requirements and lending practices often favor male borrowers, reinforcing gender inequalities in access to financial services (Ranabahu & Tanima, 2022).

Despite these challenges, microfinance has been recognized as a potential tool for women's empowerment. While some studies highlight its positive impact on increasing women's access to finance and enabling critical choices, others raise concerns about its effectiveness in challenging traditional gender roles. Nonetheless, microfinance has been shown to have tangible benefits for women, including increased savings, improved healthcare access, and enhanced school enrollments (Karim et al., 2020).

However, gaps remain in the concept of empowerment, particularly in the absence of a standardized tool to measure empowerment comprehensively. Existing indices, such as the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and the Gender Development Index (GDI), have limitations and may not capture the nuanced aspects of women's empowerment at the grassroots level. As empowerment is context-specific and multifaceted, this study focuses on women's economic and social empowerment within the microfinance context.

Addressing the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing microfinance services requires a multifaceted approach that addresses socio-cultural, legal, educational, infrastructural, and institutional barriers. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, stakeholders can work towards creating a more inclusive and empowering environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive in the microfinance sector.

2.1.2 Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in Microfinance Services

Access to financial services through microfinance institutions has the potential to transform the lives of the world's poorest women, enabling them to invest in businesses and escape poverty. Research conducted by leading organizations such as the UNDP, UNIFEM, and World Bank underscores the critical role of addressing gender inequalities in fostering economic growth and alleviating poverty. By providing women with access to capital, microfinance institutions contribute to women's economic development and

empower them to participate in productive segments of society, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty (Khan et al., 2020).

Moreover, microfinance plays a pivotal role in women's empowerment by addressing the disparities in employment rates between men and women. Women are often more disadvantaged in terms of employment opportunities, making access to financial services crucial for their economic inclusion. By providing financial services for income-generating activities, microfinance institutions empower women entrepreneurs and reduce their vulnerability to poverty. Women typically allocate a significant portion of their income to their families, leading to improved family welfare and overall well-being. Studies, such as one conducted by the Women's Entrepreneurship Development Trust Fund (WEDTF) in Zanzibar, Tanzania, have demonstrated that increased income from microfinance activities translates into positive outcomes for families, including improved access to education and basic necessities (Coleman, 2006).

Furthermore, the efficiency and sustainability of microfinance institutions are enhanced by the better repayment records of women borrowers. Women's repayment rates are typically superior to those of men, contributing to lower default loan rates and ensuring the smooth operation of financial institutions (Khan et al., 2020). This focus on women borrowers reflects the recognition of their reliability and the positive impact they have on the sustainability of microfinance operations.

Women empowerment through microfinance extends beyond economic factors to encompass decision-making, self-confidence, improved status within the household, and reduced domestic violence. Microfinance programs provide women with the autonomy to make decisions freely, without coercion, and contribute to the development of their self-confidence. Additionally, women's participation in income-generating activities strengthens their bargaining power within the household, leading to improved family relationships and a reduction in domestic violence (Adams & Von Pischke, 1992). Furthermore, women's involvement in microfinance activities enhances their status in the community, as demonstrated by studies conducted in various contexts.

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, originally coined by Nobel economist Gary Becker, posits that individuals possess a form of capital distinct from physical or financial assets: their

knowledge, skills, and abilities. This concept emphasizes the invaluable role of human resources in driving economic growth and development. Human capital is particularly crucial in the context of entrepreneurial ventures, where innovative ideas and skilled individuals are essential for success (Hatak & Zhou, 2021).

Radosavljević et al. (2022) asserted that human capital encompasses the accumulated knowledge and skills within the workforce, acquired through formal education, training, and practical experience. This includes both technical expertise and soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and leadership. Becker's pioneering work highlighted the significance of investing in human capital as a means to enhance productivity and foster innovation within organizations and economies.

In the context of entrepreneurship, human capital theory suggests that the quality and quantity of human capital possessed by individuals significantly influence their entrepreneurial activities (Aboobaker, 2020). Factors such as educational attainment, field of study, prior entrepreneurial experience, business acumen, and specific skills all play pivotal roles in shaping the type and success of ventures initiated. Educational attainment serves as a foundational component of human capital, providing individuals with the necessary knowledge base and analytical skills to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship. Moreover, the area of education can influence the development of specialized expertise relevant to specific industries or market niches, thereby shaping entrepreneurial opportunities pursued.

Beyond formal education, practical experience gained through previous entrepreneurial endeavors or business roles contributes to the accumulation of human capital. Entrepreneurial experience cultivates resilience, adaptability, and strategic thinking, essential qualities for navigating the uncertainties inherent in starting and managing ventures (Hatak & Zhou, 2021). Furthermore, specific business skills such as financial literacy, marketing acumen, and managerial competence are integral to entrepreneurial success. These skills enhance an individual's ability to identify market opportunities, develop viable business models, and effectively manage resources to achieve objectives.

Hatak and Zhou (2021) stated that human capital theory underscores the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship, where individuals leverage their unique blend of knowledge, experience, and skills to innovate and create value. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and skill development in adapting to evolving market

dynamics and technological advancements. Human Capital Theory highlights the critical role of individuals' knowledge, skills, and abilities in driving entrepreneurial activity and economic progress. By recognizing human capital as a fundamental driver of innovation and productivity, policymakers and practitioners can foster an environment conducive to entrepreneurship through investments in education, training, and skill development initiatives (Aboobaker, 2020). Ultimately, empowering individuals to enhance their human capital not only fuels entrepreneurial endeavors but also contributes to broader economic prosperity and societal advancement.

2.2.2 Social Network Theory

Social Network Theory, analyzes the relationship of interpersonal relationships and connections within individuals' families and communities. This theory posits that social networks play a pivotal role in facilitating information exchange, learning, and collaboration, ultimately shaping individuals' behavior and outcomes (Osei & Zhuang, 2020).

Li et al. (2021) asserted that social network theory emphasizes the importance of networks in facilitating communication, cooperation, and collaboration among individuals. These networks are influenced by various factors, including work, family, and social interactions, which collectively shape individuals' social capital and influence their access to resources and opportunities. One key aspect of social network theory is the notion that information exchange and learning occur within network structures. Individuals within these networks have access to diverse perspectives, knowledge, and resources, which can be instrumental in problem-solving, decision-making, and innovation.

Buttner and Moore (1997) explored how social networks influence women entrepreneurs' decisions and actions as they transition from corporate environments to entrepreneurial ventures. Their research highlighted the significant impact of social networks on women entrepreneurs' choice of industries and the development and sustainability of their enterprises.

To assess the structure and dynamics of social networks among women entrepreneurs, Buttner and Moore (1997) identified several key dimensions:

- **Propensity to network:** This dimension refers to individuals' inclination or willingness to connect with others. It reflects their proactive efforts to establish and maintain relationships within their professional and social circles.
- **Network activity:** This dimension measures the extent of individuals' networking activities, including the number of people they are connected to and the time they invest in making and nurturing contacts. High network activity indicates active engagement in building and leveraging social connections.
- **Network density:** This dimension assesses the depth and breadth of individuals' networks, including the degree to which they extend beyond immediate friends and associates. A dense network indicates a wide range of connections across different social groups or communities.
- **Network intensity:** This dimension focuses on the quality and longevity of individuals' relationships within their networks. It considers factors such as the duration of relationships and the frequency of interaction, reflecting the strength and depth of social ties. By examining these dimensions, researchers can gain insights into the structure, dynamics, and effectiveness of social networks among women entrepreneurs. Understanding how these networks influence entrepreneurial behavior and outcomes can inform strategies for building and leveraging social capital to support entrepreneurial endeavors.

Social network theory highlights the significance of social connections and relationships in shaping individuals' behavior and outcomes, particularly in the context of entrepreneurship (Osei & Zhuang, 2020). By recognizing the role of social networks in facilitating information exchange, collaboration, and resource access, policymakers, practitioners, and entrepreneurs can harness the power of social capital to drive innovation, growth, and success in entrepreneurial ventures.

2.2.3 Financial Capital Theory

Financial capital theory underscores the critical importance of access to financial resources in the initiation, operation, and success of businesses (Linder et al., 2020). Research consistently demonstrates that securing financial capital, both at the outset and throughout business operations, is a fundamental factor influencing sustainability and longevity. Various sources of financial capital are available to entrepreneurs, including

liquid assets, credit lines, loans, capital leases, financial management services, owner loans, credit cards, and trade credits. These resources serve as the lifeblood of enterprises, facilitating their establishment, growth, and viability over the long term.

For businesses, financial capital serves as a cornerstone enabling various activities crucial for success, such as initiating operations, expanding reach, and achieving sustainability with enduring objectives. However, women entrepreneurs often encounter discriminatory practices when seeking funding to establish or sustain their ventures. Numerous studies have highlighted this disparity, illustrating how women face significant obstacles in accessing the financial resources necessary for their businesses' growth and development (Dyer et al., 2024).

The challenges women encounter in securing financial capital contribute to disparities in entrepreneurial opportunities and outcomes, perpetuating gender-based inequalities in business ownership and success. Addressing these barriers is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial landscape, where women have equal access to the financial resources needed to realize their entrepreneurial ambitions (Linder et al., 2020). Efforts to mitigate discriminatory practices and enhance women's access to financial capital are vital for promoting entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, and gender equality. Through targeted interventions and supportive policies, stakeholders can work towards leveling the playing field and creating a more conducive environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive (Orser et al., 2006).

2.3 Empirical Review

Nwachukwu et al. (2024) conducted a research study focusing on the motivations, challenges, and strategies of female social entrepreneurs operating in the micro-lending sector in Southwest Nigeria. Employing in-depth interviews with 13 female social entrepreneurs, the study aimed to elucidate the drivers behind their engagement in social entrepreneurship and their responses to associated challenges. The research revealed that the primary motivations for female social entrepreneurs include financial empowerment for low-income earners, support for their families, and a desire to contribute to a better society. However, the study also identified various business and institutional challenges faced by these entrepreneurs, such as limited access to funding and infrastructure, gender bias, institutional corruption, lack of awareness about regulations, and bureaucratic hurdles. Despite these obstacles, female social entrepreneurs play a crucial role in

providing financial services to low-income segments of society and addressing societal issues in emerging market contexts. The study contributes to the understanding of the role of female social entrepreneurs in fostering economic and social development, particularly in regions with limited access to traditional financial services.

Aisyah and Almuzayyad (2024) conducted a study focusing on the social and economic transformation of women through microfinance, drawing lessons from the M. Yunus Economic Movement, particularly Grameen Bank. The objective was to explore the role of microfinance institutions (MFIs), particularly Grameen Bank, in providing financial access to marginalized women and enhancing their economic empowerment. Through an examination of MFIs' impact, the study aimed to highlight how financial access contributes to increased income and shifts power dynamics within households and communities. Despite significant progress, the researchers identified persistent challenges, including the risk of domestic violence, fraud, and the perpetuation of patriarchal norms. The study provided recommendations to address these challenges, such as enhancing awareness training on fraud and financial skills, and developing comprehensive social performance measurement criteria. By addressing these challenges, microcredit programs and other MFIs are expected to become more effective instruments in facilitating women's economic empowerment and fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth. This research contributes to understanding the complexities of women's economic empowerment and the role of MFIs in promoting gender equality and social justice.

Dumbuya and Munu (2024) conducted a study on the role of microfinance in women's empowerment in Bo City, southern Sierra Leone, focusing on market women in Bo Big Market Center. The objective was to examine how microfinance, specifically BRAC Sierra Leone's microfinance scheme, contributes to women's empowerment. The researchers collected primary data from 290 respondents, including microfinance beneficiaries and female business table owners, using questionnaire instruments and interviews. The study revealed that microfinance institutions (MFIs) have provided opportunities for women to explore additional resources, although challenges remain in accessing funds to transform their businesses meaningfully. Despite these challenges, MFIs have played a significant role in enhancing women's ability to start income-generating activities, contribute to their children's development, and improve decision-making in their communities. However, market women face obstacles such as loan

diversion, financial discipline issues, short repayment schedules, and unjustified deductions from expected funds. Recommendations include incorporating training programs for both clients and MFI staff, instilling financial discipline, continuous engagement between MFIs and clients, and implementing robust regulations to govern MFI operations and interest rates. This study underscores the importance of microfinance in promoting women's socioeconomic development in underserved communities like Bo City, Sierra Leone, while highlighting the need for addressing challenges to maximize its impact on women's empowerment.

Lamichhane and Lama (2023) conducted a literature review aiming to shed light on the challenges and prospects encountered by the Nepalese microfinance program. Employing a descriptive research design, the study delved into the multifaceted landscape of the microfinance sector in Nepal. By scrutinizing the sector's dynamics, the researchers unearthed a plethora of challenges such as geographical overcrowding, the proliferation of multiple banking entities, unhealthy competition, political unawareness, mission drift, high rates of member dropout and employee turnover, over-indebtedness, loan overdue, resource constraints, and the absence of entrepreneurial-centric programs. Despite these hurdles, this findings underscored the transformative potential of microfinance in poverty alleviation and women's empowerment. They advocated for microfinance institutions (MFIs) to cultivate a conducive environment rooted in social responsibility, urging them to embrace innovative strategies, including digitization, to extend financial services more efficiently to rural populations. The study's comprehensive analysis offers valuable insights applicable to financial institutions, microfinance experts, economists, regulators, and policymakers, contributing to informed decision-making within the Nepalese microfinance landscape.

Lamichhane et al. 2023) examined the impact of entrepreneurship development (ED) programs on the sustainability of Nepalese microfinance institutions (MFIs). Employing a descriptive research design and reviewing best practices, the study delved into the prospects and challenges faced by MFIs in fostering entrepreneurship. The findings unveiled a multitude of hurdles hindering entrepreneurship development within Nepalese MFIs, including unskilled human resources, low technical knowledge, financial constraints, and poor financial literacy. Despite these challenges, the study concluded that entrepreneurship development directly influences the viability and sustainability of MFIs through various channels such as loan disbursement scale, saving mobilization,

profitability for further investment, business development, market analysis, and compliance with regulatory requirements. These insights hold relevance for financial institutions, regulatory authorities, SME analysts, entrepreneurs, and planners, emphasizing the pivotal role of entrepreneurship in driving economic growth and poverty reduction in Nepal.

Kato (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis to investigate the potential of microfinance solutions in fostering urban women entrepreneurship development in East Africa. Utilizing a dataset comprising 402 articles indexed in the Scopus database from January 2003 to March 2023, the study aimed to examine recent trends and advancements in microfinance for women-owned enterprises, particularly in the context of evolving financial technologies. The findings underscored the significance of microfinance credit access for the prosperity of urban women-led enterprises across various countries. However, despite the importance of financial support, women entrepreneurs face numerous challenges when initiating or expanding businesses, hindering their ability to contribute to sustainable development. The study highlighted the necessity of financing strategies focused on facilitating access to microfinance credit for women entrepreneurs to enable economic freedom and promote sustainable business practices. It provided valuable insights for current and prospective entrepreneurs in bridging financing gaps in emerging economies, thereby strengthening the capacity of women entrepreneurs to pursue economic opportunities and foster sustainable business enterprises. Additionally, the research laid a foundation for future studies in the domain of entrepreneurial financing for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

Coronel-Pangol et al. (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis to explore the relationship between microfinance and entrepreneurship financing. Their study aimed to address the gap in literature concerning the role of microfinance in the entrepreneurial sector. Using a dataset from articles indexed in the Web of Science between 2017 and 2022, the researchers employed SCIMAT software for analysis. They identified driving themes such as microfinance institutions, education, entrepreneurship, organizational performance, business microcredits, and women microentrepreneurs. The findings revealed a growing interest within the academic community in understanding the dynamics of microfinance as an alternative financing option, with 2022 witnessing the highest number of publications on the topic. The study suggested future research directions, emphasizing the need for further exploration of the relationship between

microfinance and entrepreneurship, particularly in terms of its impact on organizational performance and the empowerment of vulnerable groups. This research contributes to advancing the understanding of microfinance's role in facilitating business start-ups, particularly among marginalized populations in impoverished regions, by providing access to financial products and promoting economic inclusion.

Fauzi et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive bibliometric analysis to examine the past, present, and future trends in women's entrepreneurship in developing countries. Utilizing citations, co-citations, and co-words, the study aimed to uncover significant publications in the field, map the knowledge structure, and propose future research directions. Drawing from 208 journal publications obtained from the Web of Science, the analysis revealed four main themes in both co-citation and co-word analyses. Co-citation analysis identified themes such as differences between men and women entrepreneurs, the development of women's entrepreneurship, challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in developing countries, and progress in women's entrepreneurship studies. Similarly, co-word analysis uncovered themes including innovation in women's entrepreneurship, women's entrepreneurship performance, empowerment of women entrepreneurs, and self-employment and assistance to women entrepreneurs. The study presents theoretical and practical implications for enhancing women's entrepreneurship participation in developing countries, offering valuable insights into the knowledge structure and future directions of research in this area. This review contributes to a deeper understanding of women's entrepreneurship dynamics, highlighting its pivotal role in economic and social development in developing and emerging economies.

Mamo et al. (2023) conducted a study evaluating capacity-building programs for women entrepreneurs and investigating the main challenges they face in Southern Ethiopia. Employing a two-stage selection technique, the researchers randomly selected 258 women entrepreneurs from six zones in the SNNPR. They utilized the Paper Assisted Personal Interview (PAPI) method to collect quantitative data from the entrepreneurs and conducted key informant interviews and focus group discussions with government officials and women entrepreneurs to gather qualitative data. The study employed inferential statistics such as proportion tests, pairwise proportion tests, and chi-square tests to analyze quantitative data, while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that training, marketplace, and cooperative services were relatively easily provided and implemented, whereas credit and market information posed

challenges for women entrepreneurs, with financial constraints being a major issue. The study highlighted that although efforts were being made by the government and other organizations to strengthen the capacity of women entrepreneurs, implementation remained a weak link.

Kivalya and Caballero-Montes (2023) conducted a systematic review to explore the dimensions of women entrepreneurs' empowerment within the context of microfinance. Their objective was to provide an overview of the dimensions necessary for the design of effective microfinance policies and strategies aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs, as well as to identify avenues for future research in this area. Following the guidelines for systematic reviews outlined by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA), the authors analyzed 87 empirical papers from six databases that investigated the impact of microfinance institutions on women entrepreneurs' empowerment. The findings suggest that the empowerment of women entrepreneurs is influenced by normative, cognitive, and regulative institutional logics. Moreover, the review highlights the need for more inclusive empirical studies in terms of geographical coverage, the range of microfinance services/products assessed, and the methodological designs applied. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the multidimensional nature of women entrepreneurs' empowerment in the context of microfinance and underscores the importance of considering various institutional logics in designing effective interventions and policies to support women's empowerment in entrepreneurship.

Fabian and Okpanaki (2022) conducted a study to investigate the impact of microfinance financial strategies on the business growth of women entrepreneurs in Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria. Employing a survey research design, the study collected data from 395 staff members of Registered Microfinance Banks (RMFBs) in Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria, over a period from January 2021 to January 2022. The population served as the sample size, and a questionnaire was used as the sole instrument for data collection from junior, medium, and top staff members of the sampled banks. Regression analysis was employed to analyze the formulated hypotheses. The findings indicated a significant association between soft loan financial strategy and the business growth of women entrepreneurs. Additionally, the study revealed that loan repayment strategy exerted a substantial influence on women entrepreneurs' business growth. However, management training strategy was found to have no significant effect on business growth. The study

concluded that soft loan financial strategy and loan repayment strategies are vital tools for achieving the business growth of women entrepreneurs in Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria. It recommended that Microfinance Banks in Gboko increase the number of soft loans administered to women entrepreneurs to foster optimal growth and sustainability in a challenging economic environment like Nigeria.

Noor et al. (2022) conducted a study focusing on women's economic empowerment in the agriculture sector of Pakistan, aiming to address the challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs. The researchers emphasized the significance of women's entrepreneurship in rural areas for economic empowerment and poverty alleviation. They highlighted gender inequality and social and cultural constraints as major obstacles hindering the entrepreneurial development of rural women. To improve the social and economic status of women, the study suggested interventions such as agricultural education and training, micro-financing, agriculture extension services, and the development of entrepreneurial and leadership capabilities. Furthermore, the researchers emphasized the importance of developing microenterprises to enhance the economic well-being of rural women and provide employment opportunities for the rural community. They advocated for addressing gender inequality and providing rural women with access to education, health, and income opportunities through government interventions, including legislation and policy measures. Additionally, the study recommended the development of a comprehensive and collaborative system by the government to support rural women, including providing grants or interest-free loans and imparting basic business skills to enhance their ability to utilize financial resources effectively.

Ranabahu and Tanima (2022) conducted a structured literature review utilizing the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) method to investigate the impact of vulnerabilities on women's microfinance-related entrepreneurial activities and economic empowerment. The study aimed to explore how factors such as physical impairments, age, widowhood, forced displacement due to war or natural disasters, and sexual orientation influence women's access to and utilization of microfinance services. Findings from the review revealed that while microfinance programs facilitate women's entrepreneurship, they also contribute to exclusion and discrimination. The study identified individual, household, institutional, and community-level structures that shape women's agency in accessing and utilizing loans for entrepreneurial activities, ultimately affecting their economic empowerment. The analysis

employed agency, resources, and achievement dimensions of empowerment to assess the outcomes.

Fieve and Chrysostome (2022) conducted a study to explore the impact of credit cooperative lending loans on women entrepreneurship in Africa, focusing specifically on the Ashaiman Municipality of Ghana. Employing semi-structured interviews with 14 women entrepreneurs affiliated with three Cooperative Lending groups, the researchers aimed to elucidate how these groups influence and support women entrepreneurship. The findings revealed that credit cooperative lending groups play a pivotal role in promoting women entrepreneurship by providing members with access to long-term interest-free credit, enabling them to initiate or expand their businesses. Moreover, these groups offer training and capacity-building opportunities, enhancing members' skills for sustainable business practices and increasing their income to repay loans. The study contributes to the literature by shedding light on the positive impact of credit cooperative loans in alleviating the financial constraints faced by women entrepreneurs operating in the informal sector of developing countries. By facilitating access to financial resources and providing support for skills development, credit cooperative lending groups significantly contribute to the advancement of women entrepreneurship in Africa.

Andriani et al. (2022) conducted a study to explore the relationship between entrepreneurial activities and women's empowerment in rural India, focusing on the interplay between microfinance and social capital. Recognizing the significance of women's empowerment for human development, especially in contexts with gender disparities, the researchers aimed to investigate how women's control over financial resources and engagement in entrepreneurial activities contribute to their empowerment. They conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with female members of group lending models of microfinance institutions in Uttar Pradesh, northern India. The interviews focused on understanding the role of social capital and economic conditions in facilitating women's empowerment within peer-group lending schemes. The findings revealed that social capital plays a vital role in accessing financial resources and ensuring loan repayment within peer-group lending schemes. However, the researchers observed that empowerment was only evident when women utilized the outcomes of social capital to pursue entrepreneurial activities and achieve self-determined goals. This study sheds light on the complex dynamics between microfinance, social capital, entrepreneurial activities, and women's empowerment in rural India, highlighting the importance of both

economic and social factors in facilitating women's empowerment through microfinance initiatives.

Fieve and Chrysostome (2022) conducted a study to investigate the impact of credit cooperative lending loans on women entrepreneurship in Africa, specifically in the Ashaiman Municipality of Ghana. Through semi-structured interviews with 14 women entrepreneurs from three cooperative lending groups, the researchers aimed to understand how these groups support and promote women entrepreneurship. The findings revealed that credit cooperative lending groups play a significant role in facilitating women entrepreneurship by providing members with access to long-term interest-free credit to initiate or expand their businesses. Additionally, these groups offer training and capacity-building opportunities, enhancing members' skills for sustainable business operations and increasing their income to repay loans. The study highlights the contribution of credit cooperative loans in alleviating the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing financial resources in the informal sector of developing countries. By shedding light on the positive impact of credit cooperative lending on women entrepreneurship, the research underscores the importance of such initiatives in fostering economic empowerment and financial inclusion among women in Africa.

Thaher et al. (2021) conducted a study to investigate the impact of microfinance services on women entrepreneurship and empowerment in Jordan, a developing country. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty-four women entrepreneurs to understand the effectiveness of microfinance services and their alignment with the needs of women entrepreneurs to enhance their performance. The study aimed to identify the types of services offered by microfinance institutions (MFIs) and assess whether these services catered to the actual needs of women entrepreneurs. The findings revealed that women entrepreneurs in Jordan expressed a need for both financial and non-financial services from MFIs. Financial services were deemed essential, with a focus on providing adequate financing, reducing interest rates, extending repayment periods, and offering flexible installment options. Additionally, non-financial services such as specialized training courses, counseling centers, marketing support, and psychological assistance were identified as crucial for enhancing women's entrepreneurship. The study concluded that the role of MFIs is significant in uplifting women entrepreneurs and addressing gender inequality by providing tailored financial and non-financial services that meet the specific needs of women entrepreneurs in Jordan.

Ghouse et al. (2021) conducted a study focusing on the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in Oman, aiming to move beyond traditional family roles and pursue growth opportunities. The research employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative analysis based on 183 survey responses with qualitative insights from interviews with 8 rural women entrepreneurs. Utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the study analyzed the quantitative data to construct a model illustrating the intensity of problems affecting business opportunities. Additionally, the qualitative interviews provided insights into the experiences of rural women entrepreneurs through seven detailed cases. The findings revealed various challenges hindering the ventures of rural women entrepreneurs, spanning aspects such as personality, family dynamics, education, socio-cultural factors, infrastructure, legal frameworks, financial constraints, organizational issues, and geographical limitations. Notably, household, organizational, and geographical challenges emerged as the most significant obstacles. The study also discusses entrepreneurial opportunities available to rural women entrepreneurs, providing practical implications for addressing the identified challenges and fostering their business endeavors. Overall, this research sheds light on the specific hurdles faced by rural women entrepreneurs in Oman and underscores the importance of tailored support mechanisms to enhance their entrepreneurial pursuits and contribute to their economic empowerment.

Bansal and Singh (2020) conducted an empirical study aimed at examining the impact of microfinance on the social and entrepreneurial development of women in the Indian context. Utilizing structured questionnaires and purposive sampling, data were collected from 117 women beneficiaries of microfinance institutions in the National Capital Region. The study revealed that microfinance played a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial skills among women, enabling them to establish microenterprises and support themselves and their families financially. Additionally, microfinance led to an enhancement in women's participation in household decision-making processes, contributing to their social development and empowerment. Moreover, the study found that microfinance had a positive effect on narrowing the gender gap. However, the findings were confined to the National Capital Region, limiting the generalizability of the results. Nonetheless, the study underscores the importance of microfinance in uplifting marginalized sections of society, particularly women, by facilitating their economic independence and empowerment. The research emphasizes the significance of ensuring

women's control over the usage of microfinance loans and highlights the pivotal role of microfinance institutions in enabling women to become self-reliant. This study contributes to understanding the transformative potential of microfinance in promoting the socio-economic development of women in India.

Guvaju and Sherpa (2020) conducted a study to examine the impact of microfinance on women empowerment in Nepal, recognizing the pivotal role microfinance plays in fostering economic self-reliance among rural women. Utilizing a quantitative research approach, the study aimed to analyze the contribution of women entrepreneurs to lifestyle changes, evaluate socio-economic activities, and assess the effectiveness of microfinance in improving women's living standards. Primary data was collected from three microfinance institutions, and Cronbach's alpha was employed to ensure questionnaire reliability. The study surveyed 100 respondents using a Likert five-scale questionnaire and employed descriptive statistics to analyze research objectives, including correlation analysis and ANOVA tests to explore relationships between variables and hypotheses. Multiple regression analysis was utilized to examine the significance level and relationships between predictor and dependent variables. Findings confirmed the hypotheses, indicating a positive impact of microfinance on women empowerment across various demographic factors. The study concluded by acknowledging research limitations and offering recommendations for future studies and microfinance initiatives. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, microfinance institutions, and researchers seeking to enhance women's empowerment through financial inclusion initiatives in Nepal.

Khan et al. (2020) conducted an empirical analysis to investigate the impact of microfinance facilities on rural women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. The study aimed to assess the outcomes of microfinance programs on female entrepreneurs' empowerment, measured through indicators such as income and consumption. Using the difference-in-difference method to address selection bias, the researchers analyzed the effects of microfinance on its recipients. The findings indicated that microfinance programs targeting women not only increased the income and consumption levels of female borrowers, leading to financial stability, but also benefited local stakeholders and created opportunities for the entire community. However, the study revealed that microfinance initiatives did not effectively reach the poorest of the poor women, failing to achieve some of its core objectives, such as poverty reduction among the extremely poor. Despite

the positive impact on female entrepreneurs' economic well-being and the broader community, the study suggests that microfinance should not be solely relied upon as a solution for poverty alleviation among the most vulnerable populations. This research contributes to the understanding of the effectiveness and limitations of microfinance interventions in empowering rural women entrepreneurs in Pakistan.

Owusu-Yeboah et al. (2020) conducted a study to evaluate the contributions of microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Ghana to the empowerment of Ghanaian women, focusing on challenges and prospects. Using a sample size of 210 respondents from three regions of Ghana, the study gathered perspectives from women beneficiaries of microfinance and MFI management. The research aimed to assess how microfinancing facilitates savings, provides loans, and offers business advice to women entrepreneurs. The study uncovered a notable role of microfinance in enhancing the lives of women by fostering savings habits, offering financial assistance, and providing entrepreneurial guidance. However, it also identified a mission drift among some MFIs, targeting clients who can afford their loans at high-interest rates, which may deter women from accessing loans for their businesses. The main challenges faced by women included high-interest rates and the requirement for guarantors and collateral for loans. Challenges within the microfinance industry included declining goodwill, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and high default rates leading to expensive loans. Despite these challenges, the study highlighted the potential of microfinance to economically empower women through savings and loans, provided the government implements strict supervisory and regulatory measures to protect the industry. The study recommended government and non-governmental support for private MFIs to establish specialized units for women, offering lower interest rates and extensive business support.

Siba (2019) analyzed emerging evidence from psychology and experimental economics to highlight the inadequacy of current women's economic empowerment interventions in overcoming obstacles faced by female entrepreneurs. The research emphasized the need for transformative interventions that move beyond providing basic access to financial and human capital to address central psychological, social, and skills constraints on women entrepreneurs. Drawing from experimental studies in Uganda, Tanzania, and Nicaragua, the findings underscored the limitations of interventions solely focused on financial capital and hard business skills for female entrepreneurs. For instance, while providing financial capital and business training had a positive impact on male-owned

microenterprises in Uganda and Tanzania, it did not significantly improve female-owned enterprise profits or sales. Conversely, a randomized field experiment in Nicaragua demonstrated that comprehensive business trainings, including components on business planning, networking, and access to new markets, significantly increased real income for self-employed men and women, with a higher impact for women. The research also highlighted inherent differences in constraints faced by male and female entrepreneurs, including access to capital, mindset constraints, and cultural factors. Overall, the findings underscored the importance of addressing multifaceted challenges and tailoring interventions to the unique needs and constraints of female entrepreneurs to achieve meaningful economic empowerment.

Brahmachary (2017) examined the challenges and opportunities associated with microfinance for women-owned small businesses in India. The study aimed to analyze the major problems faced by women entrepreneurs in India and the role of group-based microfinance in providing small finance to accelerate their businesses. The research highlighted the increasing participation of women in opening small businesses in India, which contributes to both production and employment on a macro level and enhances their self-worth and representation on a personal level. Despite the growing trend of women entering entrepreneurship, the formal financial sector in India often fails to provide adequate finance to small businesses, particularly those belonging to the informal unorganized sector. The study emphasized the significance of microfinance through self-help groups (SHGs) as a solution to address the financial needs of women-owned small businesses and protect them from usurious moneylenders. It also discussed the SHG-based microfinance program in India as one of the largest pro-poor initiatives globally, aimed at offering alternative financial services to the unbanked poor, especially women. The findings revealed that many women entrepreneurs in India venture into business out of necessity, lacking adequate preparation to tackle various social and financial challenges. Despite government and private sector efforts to promote microfinance, the supply of such initiatives still falls short of the total demand.

Kabukuru and Afande (2016) conducted a descriptive survey to analyze the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing finance in Kenya, focusing on the beauty sector in Nairobi Central Business District. The study aimed to determine the impact of literacy levels, the number of lending institutions available, collateral requirements, and interest rates on access to finance by women entrepreneurs. Data was collected from 400

female-owned enterprises in the beauty sector through semi-structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression were used for data analysis. The findings revealed that a majority of women entrepreneurs in the beauty sector had attained at least a tertiary college qualification. However, lack of collateral security emerged as a significant constraint for young women entrepreneurs in accessing loans, leading to rejections of loan applications. The study concluded that alternative approaches to collateral security, such as emphasizing social capital tools like trust and network relations, could facilitate credit access for underprivileged women. Additionally, targeted training programs and supportive government policies were recommended to foster an entrepreneurship culture, create job opportunities, and encourage the establishment of more lending institutions. Overall, the research shed light on the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing finance in Kenya's beauty sector, offering insights for policy and practice aimed at addressing these barriers and promoting women's economic empowerment.

Kyalo and Kiganane (2014) conducted a study focusing on the challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs in Africa, with a specific emphasis on Kenyan women entrepreneurs. The research aimed to investigate various variables such as demographic factors, social networks, and access to finance as potential challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. Employing exploratory and descriptive research designs, the study utilized questionnaires as the primary data collection tool and employed a stratified sampling method to gather responses from 130 participants in Kenya. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, incorporating statistical techniques like chi-square, t-test, and logistic regression. The findings indicated that demographic factors and social networks were significant challenges for women entrepreneurs, while access to finance was not identified as a major obstacle, as women preferred internal sources of financing. Based on these findings, the study recommended strategies for women empowerment, including training and information sharing, provision of marketing networks, access to working areas near home locations, building self-confidence and esteem, and risk-taking training to improve access to formal market credits and foster enterprise growth. This research contributes to understanding the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Africa and provides valuable recommendations for addressing these challenges to support their economic empowerment.

Yogendrarajah and Semasinghe (2014) conducted a study focusing on empowering women entrepreneurs through microfinance in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka. The research aimed to identify the challenges and scenarios associated with the adoption of microfinance as a tool for empowering women entrepreneurs in a post-conflict setting. The study utilized both primary and secondary data, with a sample size of 76 women entrepreneurs involved in various self-employable activities in rural areas of Jaffna, Nallur, and Kopay Divisional Secretariat Divisions. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted to examine the results, and the validity and reliability of the quantitative analysis were checked using SPSS. The study employed correlation and regression methods to explore the association between entrepreneurship challenges, needs, and microfinance objectives. Additionally, three case studies were included to illustrate how women entrepreneurs improved their activities with the support of microfinance institutions despite facing challenges. The findings revealed that although there was no significant relationship between the objectives of microfinance institutions and the needs of the respondents, utilizing microfinance facilities led to the creation of job opportunities, diverse economic activities, and improvements in household education and welfare. However, challenges such as marketing activities, transport problems, and financial difficulties were identified. The study recommended raising awareness among women entrepreneurs on record-keeping, asset building, risk management, and savings to enhance their access to financial and non-financial services provided by microfinance institutions.

Ifelunini and Wosowei (2013) conducted a study aimed at examining the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing microfinance in the South-South region of Nigeria. Using exploratory factor analysis, the researchers identified four main constraint factors: technical, economic, managerial, and social. Technical constraints encompassed issues such as transportation costs, lack of trust, diversion of funds, and short payback periods. Economic constraints included protocol requirements for acquiring loans, high interest rates, limited loan amounts, and the need for collateral. Managerial constraints involved low accessibility to loans, delays in loan processing, discretionary loan amounts, and educational levels of entrepreneurs. Social constraints comprised factors like distance, securing guarantors, selective loan allocation, and excessive loan applications. The study recommended several measures to improve women entrepreneurs' access to microfinance services, including reducing interest rates, bringing microfinance

institutions closer to rural areas, easing loan access conditions, increasing awareness among women about microfinance, prioritizing women in loan allocation, and extending loan repayment periods. By identifying and addressing these constraints, the study aimed to enhance the effectiveness of microfinance services for women entrepreneurs in the South-South region of Nigeria, ultimately contributing to their economic empowerment and fostering entrepreneurship development.

Mwobobia (2012) conducted a study aimed at identifying the challenges faced by small-scale women entrepreneurs in Kenya and the initiatives implemented to address these challenges. The research employed desktop research methods, utilizing data from the Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) Baseline survey, which recorded a significant number of women operating in MSEs in Kenya. The study revealed that women predominantly engaged in enterprises associated with traditional gender roles, such as hairstyling. Despite the vital role played by small and micro-enterprises (SMEs) in the Kenyan economy, women entrepreneurs encounter various challenges, including financial constraints, discrimination, bureaucratic hurdles, and limited access to education. However, the study found that numerous stakeholders, both public and private, are involved in empowering women entrepreneurs in Kenya through initiatives like the Women Enterprise Fund, establishment of a women's university of science and technology, and financial support programs. The study recommends greater acceptance and financial support for women entrepreneurs, along with increased capacity-building efforts. Additionally, it suggests further research to delve deeper into this area, aiming to develop more comprehensive strategies for overcoming the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Kenya.

Waita (2012) conducted a study focusing on the challenges faced by women in accessing credit from microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Nakuru, Kenya. The research aimed to fill the gap in literature by critically highlighting the challenges affecting women borrowers and their impact on women-owned small and medium enterprises (SMEs), particularly in terms of women's empowerment. The study had two specific objectives: to determine the motivations of women entrepreneurs to borrow from MFIs and to examine the challenges encountered by women when accessing loans. Data was collected from 20 women entrepreneurs who had previously borrowed from ECLOF Kenya using a purposeful sampling procedure. The findings revealed that a significant challenge faced by women borrowers was the requirement of collateral, with 60% citing this as a major obstacle,

especially since the items required as security for loans were often owned by their husbands. Additionally, 70% of the respondents mentioned that fluctuations in business performance affected their ability to repay loans or access further credit. Environmental and sociocultural factors were also identified as significant impediments to women's access to loans. The study underscores the importance of designing appropriate financial products tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs and highlights the necessity of understanding contextual factors such as legal rights, social norms, and family responsibilities that shape women's access to and control over financial resources. The recommendations provided emphasize the need for development strategies that enhance women's direct access to financial services and address barriers such as collateral requirements, business skills, and cultural beliefs to facilitate women's economic empowerment.

Ahmad (2012) conducted a study focusing on the role of microfinance institutions (MFIs) in supporting women's micro and small-scale businesses in Yemen, along with the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing and utilizing microfinance services. The research involved a survey of 117 women entrepreneurs who had received support from MFIs programs, followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews with 27 respondents to assess the effectiveness of these programs. The findings revealed that while MFIs aim to alleviate poverty and facilitate women's entrepreneurship by providing credit for business start-ups, women entrepreneurs encounter various challenges in accessing and utilizing microfinance. These challenges include constraints within the financial environment and other external factors that hinder their business growth. Despite the efforts of MFIs, the study highlights the need for additional measures to address the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in Yemen, thereby enhancing their access to financial resources and fostering entrepreneurship development.

Table 1
Summary of Empirical Review

S.N.	Researcher/s	Title	Objective	Methodology	Findings
1	Nwachukwu et al. (2024)	Motivation, challenges and strategies of female social entrepreneurs in the micro-lending sector	To elucidate the drivers behind female social entrepreneurs' engagement and their responses to challenges	Analytical research design with the help of In-depth interviews with 13 female social entrepreneurs	Identified motivations include financial empowerment, support for families, and societal contribution. Challenges include limited funding, infrastructure, gender

S.N.	Researcher/s	Title	Objective	Methodology	Findings
					bias, and bureaucratic hurdles.
2	Aisyah and Almuzayyad (2024)	Social and economic transformation of women through microfinance: Lessons from the M. Yunus Economic Movement	To explore the role of microfinance institutions (MFIs), particularly Grameen Bank, in women's economic empowerment	Descriptive research design	MFIs provide financial access but face challenges like domestic violence, fraud, and patriarchal norms. Recommendations include awareness training and social performance measurement.
3	Dumbuya and Munu (2024)	The role of microfinance in women's empowerment in Sierra Leone: A case of market women in Bo City	To examine how microfinance contributes to women's empowerment	Explanatory research design with primary data from 290 respondents, including microfinance beneficiaries and female business owners	MFIs provide opportunities but face challenges like loan diversion and financial discipline issues. Recommendations include training and regulatory measures.
4	Lamichhane and Lama (2023)	Challenges and prospects of the Nepalese microfinance program	To shed light on the challenges and prospects encountered by the Nepalese microfinance program	Descriptive research design	The study identified challenges such as geographical overcrowding, proliferation of banking entities, unhealthy competition, political unawareness, mission drift, high rates of member dropout and employee turnover, over-indebtedness, loan overdue, resource constraints, and absence of entrepreneurial-centric programs. The study revealed hurdles hindering entrepreneurship development within Nepalese MFIs, such as unskilled human resources, low technical knowledge, financial constraints, and poor financial literacy.
5	Lamichhane et al. (2023)	Impact of entrepreneurship development programs on the sustainability of Nepalese microfinance institutions (MFIs)	To examine the impact of entrepreneurship development programs on the sustainability of Nepalese MFIs	Descriptive research design	

S.N.	Researcher/s	Title	Objective	Methodology	Findings
6	Kato (2023)	Unlocking the potential of microfinance solutions on urban woman entrepreneurship development in East Africa: A bibliometric analysis perspective	To investigate the potential of microfinance solutions in fostering urban women entrepreneurship development	Bibliometric analysis of 402 articles in the Scopus database	Microfinance credit access is crucial for urban women entrepreneurs' prosperity but faces challenges hindering sustainable development.
7	Coronel-Pangol et al. (2023)	Microfinance, an alternative for financing entrepreneurship: Implications and trends - Bibliometric analysis	To explore the relationship between microfinance and entrepreneurship financing	Bibliometric analysis of articles indexed in the Web of Science	Growing interest in microfinance as an alternative financing option, especially in terms of its impact on organizational performance and empowerment. Identified themes include differences between men and women entrepreneurs, challenges faced by women, and progress in women's entrepreneurship studies.
8	Fauzi et al. (2023)	Women and female entrepreneurship: Past, present, and future trends in developing countries	To examine past, present, and future trends in women's entrepreneurship in developing countries	Bibliometric analysis of 208 journal publications from the Web of Science	Identified themes include differences between men and women entrepreneurs, challenges faced by women, and progress in women's entrepreneurship studies.
9	Mamo et al. (2023)	Women entrepreneurs in Southern Ethiopia: Capacity building programs for women empowerment and challenges in implementation	To evaluate capacity-building programs for women entrepreneurs and investigate challenges	Two-stage selection technique and thematic analysis	Challenges include limited access to funding and financial constraints. Efforts are being made to strengthen capacity, but implementation remains a weak link.
10	Kivalya and Caballero-Montes (2023)	Understanding the dimensions of women entrepreneurs' empowerment: A systematic review of the microfinance literature and avenues for research	To provide an overview of the dimensions necessary for designing effective microfinance policies for women entrepreneurs	Systematic review of 87 empirical papers from six databases	Empowerment influenced by normative, cognitive, and regulative institutional logics.
11	Fabian and Okpanaki (2022)	Microfinance financial strategies and business growth of women	To investigate the impact of microfinance financial strategies on women	Survey research design and regression analysis	Soft loan financial strategy and loan repayment strategies significantly impact business growth. Management training

S.N.	Researcher/s	Title	Objective	Methodology	Findings
12	Noor et al. (2022)	entrepreneurs in Gboko, Benue State Nigeria Women economic empowerment: Challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector of Pakistan	entrepreneurs' business growth To address challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector	Descriptive Analysis	strategy has no significant effect. Identified challenges include gender inequality, social and cultural constraints, and lack of access to funding and infrastructure. Recommendations include education, micro-financing, and entrepreneurial development. Microfinance programs facilitate women's entrepreneurship but also contribute to exclusion and discrimination. Various factors influence women's access to and utilization of microfinance services. Agency, resources, and achievement dimensions are used to assess outcomes of microfinance initiatives on women's economic empowerment. Credit cooperative lending groups provide long-term interest-free credit, training, and capacity-building opportunities, enhancing women's skills and income for sustainable business practices. These groups significantly contribute to women entrepreneurship in Africa by alleviating financial constraints and fostering economic empowerment.
13	Ranabahu & Tanima (2022)	Empowering vulnerable microfinance women through entrepreneurship: opportunities, challenges and the way forward	To investigate the impact of vulnerabilities on women's microfinance-related entrepreneurial activities and economic empowerment	Structured literature review using PRISMA method	
14	Fieve & Chrysostome (2022)	Credit cooperative lending loans as challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurship in Africa: evidence from Ghana	To explore the impact of credit cooperative lending loans on women entrepreneurship in Africa	Semi-structured interviews with 14 women entrepreneurs from three cooperative lending groups	

S.N.	Researcher/s	Title	Objective	Methodology	Findings
15	Andriani et al. (2022)	Entrepreneurial activities and women empowerment in rural India between microfinance and social capital	To explore the relationship between entrepreneurial activities and women's empowerment in rural India	In-depth semi-structured interviews with female members of microfinance group lending models in Uttar Pradesh, India	<p>Social capital plays a vital role in accessing financial resources and ensuring loan repayment within peer-group lending schemes.</p> <p>Empowerment occurs when women utilize social capital outcomes for entrepreneurial activities and self-determined goals.</p> <p>Economic and social factors are crucial in facilitating women's empowerment through microfinance initiatives in rural India.</p>
16	Thaher et al. (2021)	The effect of microfinance services on women entrepreneurship: A case study in Jordan	To investigate the impact of microfinance services on women entrepreneurship in Jordan	Qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with twenty-four women entrepreneurs in Jordan	<p>Women entrepreneurs in Jordan need both financial and non-financial services from microfinance institutions. These services should include tailored financial assistance and various support mechanisms such as training, counseling, and marketing support to enhance women's entrepreneurship and address gender inequality effectively.</p> <p>Various challenges hinder rural women entrepreneurs in Jordan, including personality, family dynamics, education, socio-cultural factors, infrastructure, legal frameworks, financial constraints, organizational issues, and geographical limitations. Tailored support mechanisms are crucial for addressing these challenges and fostering women's entrepreneurial</p>
17	Ghouse et al. (2021)	Rural women entrepreneurs in Oman: problems and opportunities	To explore the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in Oman	Mixed-method approach combining quantitative analysis based on 183 survey responses with qualitative insights from interviews with 8 rural women entrepreneurs	<p>Various challenges hinder rural women entrepreneurs in Oman, including personality, family dynamics, education, socio-cultural factors, infrastructure, legal frameworks, financial constraints, organizational issues, and geographical limitations. Tailored support mechanisms are crucial for addressing these challenges and fostering women's entrepreneurial</p>

S.N.	Researcher/s	Title	Objective	Methodology	Findings
					pursuits and economic empowerment.
18	Bansal & Singh (2020)	Examining the social and entrepreneurial development of women through microfinance in Indian context	To examine the impact of microfinance on the social and entrepreneurial development of women in India	Empirical study using structured questionnaires and purposive sampling from 117 women beneficiaries of microfinance institutions	Microfinance facilitates entrepreneurial skills among women, enhances their participation in household decision-making, and narrows the gender gap in India. Women's economic independence and empowerment are fostered through microfinance, emphasizing the importance of women's control over loan usage and the role of microfinance institutions in enabling self-reliance. Findings confirmed the positive impact of microfinance on women empowerment across various demographic factors. Microfinance programs increase income and consumption levels of female borrowers, benefiting both entrepreneurs and local stakeholders. However, these initiatives may not effectively reach the poorest women, highlighting the need for complementary poverty alleviation measures.
19	Guvaju and Sherpa (2020)	Impact of microfinance on women empowerment in Nepal	To examine the impact of microfinance on women empowerment in Nepal	Quantitative research approach	
20	Khan et al. (2020)	Microfinance facility for rural women entrepreneurs in Pakistan: An empirical analysis	To investigate the impact of microfinance programs on rural women entrepreneurs in Pakistan	Empirical analysis using the difference-in-difference method to assess the outcomes of microfinance programs on female entrepreneurs	

S.N.	Researcher/s	Title	Objective	Methodology	Findings
21	Owusu-Yeboah et al. (2020)	Microfinance and women's empowerment in Ghana: challenges and prospects	To evaluate the contributions of microfinance institutions in Ghana to the empowerment of Ghanaian women	Study with a sample size of 210 respondents from three regions of Ghana, gathering perspectives from women beneficiaries and MFI management	Microfinance enhances women's lives by fostering savings habits, providing financial assistance, and offering entrepreneurial guidance. However, challenges such as high-interest rates and mission drift among MFIs may hinder women's access to loans and overall empowerment. Government support and strict regulatory measures are recommended to maximize microfinance's potential in empowering women economically. Transformative interventions are needed to address psychological, social, and skills constraints faced by female entrepreneurs. Tailoring interventions to women's unique needs and constraints, including access to financial and non-financial support, is crucial for meaningful economic empowerment. Despite an increasing trend of women entering small businesses, the formal financial sector in India often overlooks them due to perceived risks, leading to difficulty accessing finance. Women entrepreneurs rely heavily on informal lenders, which can lead to exploitative practices. Self-help groups (SHGs) play a
22	Siba (2019)	Empowering women entrepreneurs in developing countries: Why current programs fall short	To highlight the inadequacy of current women's economic empowerment interventions	Synthesis of emerging evidence from psychology and experimental economics	
23	Brahmachary (2018)	Challenges and opportunities surrounding microfinance for women-owned small businesses in India	To understand the hurdles faced by women entrepreneurs in India and assess the role of group-based microfinance	Qualitative analysis	

S.N.	Researcher/s	Title	Objective	Methodology	Findings
24	Brahmachary (2017)	Microfinance for Women-Owned Small Business in India: Challenges and Opportunities	To analyze challenges and opportunities of microfinance for women-owned small businesses	Qualitative analysis	significant role in providing microfinance to women, but the supply of such services still falls short of demand, highlighting the need for greater support and resources. Despite the increasing trend of women entrepreneurship, formal financial sector in India often overlooks them, emphasizing the role of microfinance through self-help groups.
25	Yogendrarajah & Semasinghe (2014)	Empowering Women Entrepreneurs Through Microfinance in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka: Challenges and Scenarios	To identify challenges and scenarios associated with microfinance for women entrepreneurs	Quantitative and qualitative analyses	Utilizing microfinance facilities led to job creation and improvements in education and welfare despite challenges such as marketing and financial difficulties.
26	Kabukuru & Afande (2016)	Analysis of challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing finance in Kenya	To analyze challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing finance in Kenya's beauty sector	Descriptive survey	Lack of collateral security emerged as a significant constraint for young women entrepreneurs, recommending alternative approaches like emphasizing social capital tools.
27	Kyalo & Kiganane (2014)	Challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Africa: a case of Kenyan women entrepreneurs	To investigate challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Africa, specifically Kenya	Exploratory and descriptive research designs	Demographic factors and social networks were significant challenges, while access to finance was not a major obstacle as women preferred internal sources.
28	Ifelunini & Wosowei (2013)	Constraints to Women Entrepreneurs' Access to Microfinance in South-South Nigeria	To identify constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing microfinance in South-South Nigeria	Exploratory factor analysis	Constraints included technical, economic, managerial, and social factors, recommending measures to improve access to microfinance services.

S.N.	Researcher/s	Title	Objective	Methodology	Findings
29	Mwobobia (2012)	The challenges facing small-scale women entrepreneurs: A case of Kenya	To identify challenges faced by small-scale women entrepreneurs in Kenya	Desktop research methods	Women entrepreneurs encounter various challenges such as financial constraints, discrimination, and limited access to education, but initiatives aim to address these challenges.
30	Waita (2012)	Challenges facing women in accessing credit from microfinance institutions in Nakuru, Kenya	To determine challenges affecting women borrowers accessing loans from microfinance institutions	Purposeful sampling procedure	Significant challenges include collateral requirements and fluctuations in business performance, highlighting the need for tailored financial products.
31	Ahmad (2012)	Microfinance for women micro and small-scale entrepreneurs in Yemen: achievements and challenges	To assess the role of microfinance institutions in supporting women's entrepreneurship in Yemen	Survey and in-depth interviews	Women entrepreneurs face challenges in accessing and utilizing microfinance despite efforts of MFIs, emphasizing the need for additional measures.

2.4 Research Gap

In reviewing previous research within the realm of women entrepreneurship and microfinance programs, notable studies such as those conducted by Brahmachary (2017), Lamichhane and et al. (2023), and Guvaju and Sherpa (2020) have contributed valuable insights. However, a critical examination reveals several research gaps yet to be addressed comprehensively. One significant void, termed the context gap, pertains to the absence of a dedicated investigation into the "Challenges and Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in Microfinance Programs," as identified in this study. Despite the proliferation of research in microfinance and entrepreneurship, the specific intersection focusing on women entrepreneurs within microfinance remains largely unexplored.

Moreover, there exists a notable time gap, as many existing studies rely on data predating the latest available information. This study bridges this temporal void by utilizing the most recent data available as of 2024, ensuring relevance and accuracy in capturing the contemporary landscape of women entrepreneurship and microfinance. Additionally, a substantial variable gap is discernible, as previous research often overlooks key variables essential for a comprehensive understanding (Owusu-Yeboah et al. (2020); Siba (2019)). Specifically, variables such as increased income, social network enhancement, training

opportunities, and challenges like inadequate access to finance, multiple responsibilities, and lack of education remain underexplored or omitted in previous investigations.

Methodologically, a gap persists in the absence of studies employing a combined approach of descriptive statistics and causal comparative research design. While previous research may employ either descriptive or comparative methods individually (Brahmachary, 2017), this study fills a void by integrating both approaches to offer a more nuanced analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs in microfinance programs.

Overall, this study underscores the existence of significant research gaps across context, time, variables, and methodology within the domain of women entrepreneurship and microfinance (Thaher et al. (2021), Ghouse et al. (2021), Bansal & Singh (2020), Guvaju and Sherpa (2020). By identifying and addressing these gaps, this research endeavors to contribute meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge. Through a comprehensive examination of the challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs in microfinance programs, utilizing the latest data and incorporating a combined methodological approach, this study aims to offer fresh insights and a more holistic understanding of this critical intersection.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both descriptive research design and causal-comparative research designs to investigate the challenges and opportunities of microfinance in relation to women entrepreneurship. Descriptive statistics are utilized to assess the current status of challenges and opportunities within the microfinance landscape. Additionally, causal-comparative research design is employed to analyze the impact of these challenges and opportunities on women entrepreneurship facilitated through microfinance institutions. By integrating these research methodologies, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between microfinance, challenges, opportunities, and women entrepreneurship, ultimately contributing to informed decision-making and policy formulation in this domain.

3.2 Population and Sample, and Sampling Design

The study encompasses a population of 7,734 individuals served by six distinct microfinance institutions located at Gorkha district. Each institution, including Chhimek Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd. (CBBL), Sworojagar Laghu Bitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd. (SLBBL), Sabaiko Lagubitta Bittiya Sastha Ltd. (SABSL), Sadhana Lagubitta Bittiya Sastha Ltd. (SDLBSL), Ganapati Microfinance Bittiya Sanstha Ltd. (GMFBS), and Deprosc Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd. (DEPROSC), was sampled, with 40 individuals selected from each, totaling 385 participants. The sampling design employed in this study encompasses a convenience sampling, ensuring representative samples from each microfinance institution to facilitate comprehensive analysis and for easy data collection.

S.N.	Name of Microfinance	Population	Sample
1	Chhimek Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd.(CBBL)	1123	64
2	Sworojagar Laghu Bitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd. (SLBBL)	1349	64
3	Sabaiko Lagubitta Bittiya Sastha Ltd.(SABSL)	983	64
4	Sadhana Lagubitta Bittiya Sastha Ltd. (SDLBSL)	1309	64
5	Ganapati Microfinance Bittiya Sanstha Ltd. (GMFBS)	1514	64
6	Deprosc Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha Ltd. (DEPROSC)	1456	65
Total		7734	385

3.3 Nature and Sources of Data and the Instrument of Data Collection

The research adopted a quantitative nature of data. Primary data, obtained firsthand, served as the basis for the study, sourced through structured questionnaire surveys. These questionnaires were meticulously designed, drawing insights from previous research literature. Utilizing a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "agree," responses were quantified with strongly disagree assigned a value of 1, disagree as 2, neutral as 3, agree as 4, and strongly agree as 5.

3.4 Method of Analysis

After data collection, the data was presented in statistical software such as Microsoft Excel and SPSS. The collected data was analyzed with the help of statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, correlation, and multivariate regression models.

3.4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in microfinance programs. Specifically, mean and standard deviation were utilized as descriptive statistical tools to analyze the women entrepreneurs' perceptions towards challenges and opportunities in microfinance institutions. These measures helped provide a summary of the central tendency and variability of responses, allowing for a better understanding of the participants' perspectives on the challenges and opportunities within microfinance programs for women entrepreneurs.

3.4.1.1 Mean

The mean refers to the average of a set of values. It is calculated by adding up all the values in a dataset and then dividing by the total number of values. In the context of evaluating women entrepreneurs' responses towards challenges and opportunities in entrepreneurship through microfinance, the mean would provide a measure of central tendency. It indicates the typical or average response of the women entrepreneurs to the various challenges and opportunities identified within microfinance programs. By calculating the mean of their responses, researchers can gain insight into the overall perception or sentiment of women entrepreneurs regarding the challenges they face and the opportunities available to them within the realm of microfinance-supported entrepreneurship. It can be calculated as:

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{\sum x}{n}$$

Where,

X = Value of responses of each independent or dependent variable

n = Number of responses

3.4.1.2 Standard Deviation (S.D.)

Standard deviation, in statistical terms, measures the amount of variation or dispersion in a set of values. It quantifies how much individual values differ from the mean of the dataset. A low standard deviation indicates that the values tend to be close to the mean, while a high standard deviation suggests that the values are spread out over a wider range.

In the context of evaluating women entrepreneurs' responses towards challenges and opportunities in entrepreneurship through microfinance, the standard deviation provides a measure of the variability in their perceptions. It indicates how much the responses of women entrepreneurs deviate from the average or mean perception. A higher standard deviation would suggest that there is greater variability or disagreement among women entrepreneurs regarding the challenges and opportunities they encounter in microfinance-supported entrepreneurship. Conversely, a lower standard deviation would imply more consensus or agreement among women entrepreneurs in their perceptions of these challenges and opportunities. It can be calculated as:

$$\text{Standard Deviation}(\sigma) = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(X - \bar{X})^2}{n}}$$

Where,

X = Value of responses of each dependent or independent variable

\bar{X} = Mean value of responses of each dependent or independent variable

n = Number of responses

3.4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation is a statistical measure that quantifies the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. It assesses how changes in one variable correspond to changes in another variable. In this study, correlation has been employed to analyze the relationship between challenges and opportunities within microfinance programs and

women entrepreneurship development. By examining the extent to which variations in challenges align with variations in opportunities, researchers can determine whether certain challenges are associated with specific opportunities, or if they tend to occur independently.

The correlation coefficient between two variables is also calculated by using the following formula:

$$\text{Correlation Coefficient}(r) = \frac{n \sum XY - \sum X \sum Y}{\sqrt{n \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2} \sqrt{n \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2}}$$

Where,

n = Number of responses

X = Value of independent variable

Y = Value of dependent variable

3.4.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is a statistical method used to examine the relationship between one dependent variable and one or more independent variables. It helps to understand how the value of the dependent variable changes when one or more independent variables are varied. In this study, regression analysis has been utilized to analyze the impact of challenges and opportunities within microfinance programs on women entrepreneurship development. By assessing how changes in challenges and opportunities relate to changes in the development of women entrepreneurship, regression analysis enables researchers to identify the specific factors within microfinance programs that contribute to or hinder entrepreneurship growth. The regression model is developed to analyze the effect of challenges and opportunities in microfinance on women entrepreneurship.

$$Y_{WEN} = \alpha + \beta_1 OPP + \beta_2 CHA + E \dots\dots\dots \text{Eq (1)}$$

Where,

WEN = Women Entrepreneurship

OPP = Opportunities

CHA = Challenges

β_1, β_2 = Beta Coefficients

α = Intercept Term

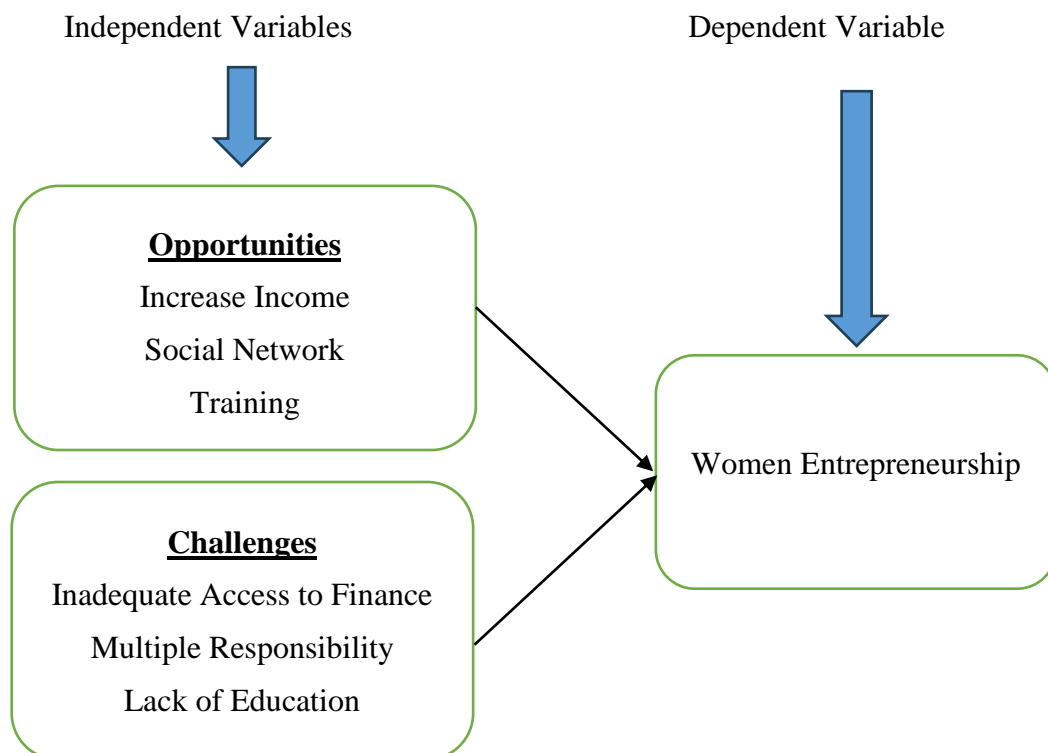
E = Error term

3.5 Research Framework and Definition of Variables

3.5.1 Research Framework

The research framework provides a structured approach for investigating the relationship between independent and dependent variables in a study. It outlines the key components and relationships under examination, guiding the research process and analysis.

This study has developed its research framework by combining elements from Khan et al. (2020) and Mwobobia (2012). The independent variables include opportunities of microfinance activities such as increased income, social network enhancement, training opportunities, and challenges of microfinance for women including inadequate access to finance, multiple responsibilities, and lack of education. The dependent variable is women entrepreneurship. This framework serves as a roadmap for understanding how these factors interrelate and influence women's entrepreneurship within the context of microfinance programs.



Source: Khan et al. (2020); Mwobobia (2012)

Figure 1. Research Framework of Study

3.5.2 Operational Definition of Variables

Independent Variables

Opportunities

Opportunities within microfinance programs for women entrepreneurs encompass a multifaceted approach aimed at fostering their economic empowerment and business success. One crucial aspect of these opportunities is the potential for increased income, which enables women to elevate their financial standing, invest in business expansion, and contribute to poverty alleviation and community development. Moreover, social networks play a pivotal role by providing women entrepreneurs with invaluable support, resources, and connections necessary for business growth and resilience. Leveraging these networks facilitates access to market insights, collaboration opportunities, and emotional support, ultimately enhancing women's confidence and capabilities in navigating entrepreneurial challenges. Additionally, structured training programs offered within microfinance initiatives equip women with essential skills, knowledge, and competencies vital for business management and success. By participating in such training activities, women entrepreneurs can enhance their decision-making abilities, adapt to market dynamics, and improve their business performance and sustainability. Overall, microfinance opportunities empower women entrepreneurs by providing avenues for increased income, leveraging social networks, and offering comprehensive training programs tailored to their specific needs and aspirations (Khan et al., 2020).

Challenges

Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in microfinance programs present formidable barriers to their business success and economic empowerment. One significant challenge is inadequate access to finance, where women encounter limited availability, accessibility, and affordability of financial resources and credit facilities. This constraint impedes their ability to start, expand, and sustain businesses, hindering their entrepreneurial aspirations and economic advancement (Mwobobia, 2012). Another notable challenge is the burden of multiple responsibilities, encompassing both business-related tasks and domestic or caregiving obligations. Balancing these responsibilities can drain women's time, energy, and resources, potentially limiting their capacity to focus on business growth and development (Mwobobia, 2012). Additionally, the lack of education

poses a significant challenge, as women entrepreneurs may lack formal education, vocational training, and entrepreneurial knowledge needed to effectively manage businesses and capitalize on growth opportunities. Educational disparities, cultural norms, and gender biases further exacerbate these barriers, hindering women's entrepreneurial endeavors within microfinance programs (Mwobobia, 2012). Overall, these challenges underscore the complex and multifaceted obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing microfinance and achieving business success.

Dependent Variable

Women Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurship encompasses the pursuit, establishment, ownership, and management of businesses and enterprises by women, including startups, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and microenterprises (Mwobobia, 2012). As the dependent variable in this study, women entrepreneurship represents the primary focus of analysis concerning the impact of microfinance opportunities and challenges on women's entrepreneurial endeavors. Women entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in driving economic growth, innovation, job creation, poverty alleviation, and gender equality, contributing significantly to sustainable development objectives (Khan et al., 2020).

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This study provides into a comprehensive examination of the collected data. Through meticulous presentation and analysis, the chapter provides insights into the key findings derived from the dataset. The data is systematically organized and presented using appropriate statistical tools and techniques. Moreover, the chapter offers a detailed analysis of the relationships between various variables, shedding light on the dynamics between challenges, opportunities, and women entrepreneurship within microfinance programs. Overall, this chapter serves as a crucial juncture where the raw data is transformed into meaningful insights, laying the groundwork for informed conclusions and recommendations in subsequent chapters.

4.1 Presentation of Data

In this chapter includes the presentation of data where the findings from the descriptive study are outlined. The data is organized in tabular form, providing a clear and concise summary of the key variables and their statistical measures. Following this, correlation and regression analyses are conducted to explore the relationships between variables. The outcomes of these analyses are also presented in tables, offering a detailed view of the statistical associations and predictive power of the independent variables on women entrepreneurship in microfinance programs. The analysis of these results is discussed to highlight significant trends, patterns, and implications for the research objectives.

4.1.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

In this section, the demographic profile of respondents, including variables such as age, educational qualification, occupation, location, employment in microfinance, income level (monthly), marital status, and number of dependents, has been thoroughly examined. This analysis provides a detailed overview of the respondent characteristics, offering insights into the diverse backgrounds and socio-economic conditions of the participants. The data is presented in a structured manner, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the demographic factors that influence women entrepreneurs in microfinance programs.

Table 2
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percent	
Age	20-30 Years	20	5.20
	31-40 years	77	20.00
	41-50 years	199	51.70
	51 Years or above	89	23.10
Educational Qualification	10+2 or Below	144	37.40
	Bachelor's Degree	157	40.80
	Master's Degree or above	84	21.80
Occupation	Microfinance entrepreneur	46	11.90
	Employee in a microfinance institution	62	16.10
	Business owner	80	20.80
	Student	91	23.60
	Social activist	78	20.30
Location	Government official	28	7.30
	Urban	179	46.50
	Rural	206	53.50
Employee in Microfinance	Less than 1 year	48	12.50
	1-5 years	120	31.20
	6-10 years	152	39.50
Income Level (Monthly)	More than 10 years	65	16.90
	Upto Rs. 40,000	159	41.30
	Rs. 40,001 to Rs. 70,000	167	43.40
Marital Status	Rs. 70,000 or above	59	15.30
	Single	88	22.90
Number of Dependents	Married	297	77.10
	1-2	140	36.40
	2-4	222	57.70
	5 and above	23	6.00

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of respondents across various variables. The distribution of respondents across different age groups indicates that 20 respondents (5.20%) fall within the 20-30 years category, 77 (20.00%) are aged 31-40 years, 199 (51.70%) are in the 41-50 years range, and 89 (23.10%) are 51 years or above. Among the respondents, 144 (37.40%) have educational qualifications of 10+2 or below, 157

(40.80%) hold Bachelor's degrees, and 84 (21.80%) have Master's degrees or above. The occupation distribution shows that 46 respondents (11.90%) are microfinance entrepreneurs, 62 (16.10%) work as employees in microfinance institutions, 80 (20.80%) are business owners, 91 (23.60%) are students, 78 (20.30%) are social activists, and 28 (7.30%) are government officials. Geographically, 179 respondents (46.50%) reside in urban areas, while 206 (53.50%) live in rural areas. Regarding experience in microfinance, 48 respondents (12.50%) have less than 1 year of experience, 120 (31.20%) have 1-5 years, 152 (39.50%) have 6-10 years, and 65 (16.90%) have more than 10 years of experience. Income-wise, 159 respondents (41.30%) earn up to Rs. 40,000 monthly, 167 (43.40%) earn between Rs. 40,001 to Rs. 70,000, and 59 (15.30%) earn Rs. 70,000 or above. The distribution of marital status reveals that 88 respondents (22.90%) are single, while 297 (77.10%) are married. Regarding the number of dependents, 140 respondents (36.40%) have 1-2 dependents, 222 (57.70%) have 2-4 dependents, and 23 (6.00%) have 5 or more dependents.

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics involve summarizing and organizing data in an informative way, typically through measures of central tendency (such as mean) and measures of variability (such as standard deviation). These statistics provide a simple overview of the sample and the measures. In this study, the opportunities and challenges of women empowerment through microfinance have been examined using descriptive statistics. Specifically, the mean and standard deviation have been calculated to analyze the central tendencies and variability of the data, providing insights into the general trends and spread of responses regarding the impact of microfinance on women's entrepreneurship.

4.1.2.1 Summary of Descriptive Statistics

In this section, a summary of women's perceptions towards opportunities, challenges, and women empowerment in the context of microfinance has been examined. Through a detailed analysis, the study explores how women view the benefits and obstacles associated with microfinance programs and their overall impact on empowering women entrepreneurs. The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' experiences and insights, highlighting key areas of improvement and success within microfinance initiatives.

Table 3*Summary of Descriptive Statistics*

Code	Variables	Mean	S.D.
OPP	Opportunities	3.613	0.661
CHA	Challenges	2.915	0.510
WEN	Women Empowerment	3.627	0.636

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4 presents summary of descriptive statistics of opportunities and challenges on women empowerment. The mean score for opportunities is 3.613 with a standard deviation of 0.661. This indicates that, on average, women perceive the opportunities provided by microfinance programs quite positively, suggesting a general agreement that these programs offer valuable opportunities for their empowerment. The moderate standard deviation signifies a fair level of consistency in responses, indicating that most women share similar views about the opportunities available to them through microfinance.

The mean score for challenges is 2.915 with a standard deviation of 0.510. This suggests that women have a relatively neutral to slightly negative perception of the challenges they face in microfinance programs. The lower mean score implies that the challenges are a significant concern, but the standard deviation being lower than that of opportunities indicates a somewhat more uniform perception among respondents. This could reflect common experiences or shared understanding of the obstacles present in the microfinance landscape.

The mean score for women empowerment is 3.627 with a standard deviation of 0.636. This demonstrates that women, on average, feel positively about their empowerment through microfinance programs, suggesting that these initiatives are effectively contributing to their sense of empowerment. The relatively low standard deviation indicates that this positive perception is fairly consistent across the respondents, highlighting a general consensus on the empowering effects of microfinance programs.

4.1.2.2 Descriptive Study of Opportunities on Women Empowerment

In this section, the descriptive study of opportunities for women's empowerment through microfinance has been examined. The analysis focuses on how various opportunities provided by microfinance programs contribute to enhancing women's economic and

social status. By evaluating these opportunities, the study aims to understand their effectiveness in empowering women entrepreneurs and promoting sustainable development.

Table 4

Descriptive Study of Opportunities on Women Empowerment

Statements	Mean	S.D.
Access to microfinance has significantly increased my income.	3.657	1.137
Participation in microfinance programs has expanded my social network.	3.543	1.115
The training provided through microfinance programs has enhanced my entrepreneurial skills.	3.517	1.146
Microfinance programs have provided me with opportunities for skill development.	3.616	1.154
Microfinance has helped me access resources that I wouldn't have had otherwise.	3.527	1.190
Through microfinance, I have been able to invest in my business and expand operations.	3.660	1.085
Microfinance has provided me with the necessary support to pursue my entrepreneurial goals.	3.605	1.102
Networking opportunities provided by microfinance have helped me find new business prospects.	3.694	1.097
Microfinance training programs have improved my understanding of business management.	3.647	1.134
Participation in microfinance programs has positively impacted my financial stability.	3.662	1.080

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4 presents the descriptive study of opportunities regarding women empowerment through microfinance programs. Among the statements surveyed, the one with the highest mean score, accompanied by its standard deviation, is "Networking opportunities provided by microfinance have helped me find new business prospects" with a mean score of 3.694 and a standard deviation of 1.097. This indicates that, on average, participants perceive a relatively strong positive impact of microfinance networking on discovering new business avenues, albeit with some variability in responses.

On the other hand, the statement with the lowest mean score, along with its standard deviation, is "The training provided through microfinance programs has enhanced my entrepreneurial skills" with a mean score of 3.517 and a standard deviation of 1.146. This suggests that while participants generally acknowledge the benefits of microfinance

training, there is comparatively less consensus on its effectiveness in enhancing entrepreneurial skills, with a wider range of responses.

Overall, the descriptive study indicates a generally positive perception of microfinance programs among the participants, with most statements receiving moderate to high mean scores. However, there is variability in the extent to which participants perceive the impact of microfinance on different aspects of women empowerment, highlighting the nuanced nature of the relationship between microfinance and women's socio-economic empowerment.

4.1.2.3 Descriptive Study of Challenges on Women Empowerment

In this section, the descriptive study of challenges on women's empowerment has been examined. The analysis delves into the various obstacles that women face within the realm of microfinance programs. By identifying and evaluating these challenges, the study aims to shed light on the factors that hinder women's empowerment and entrepreneurial success, providing insights for potential solutions and improvements in microfinance practices.

Table 5

Descriptive Study of Challenges on Women Empowerment

Statements	Mean	S.D.
Limited access to finance has hindered my business growth.	2.756	1.187
Juggling multiple responsibilities has made it difficult for me to focus on my business.	2.855	1.201
Lack of education has been a barrier to my success as a businesswoman.	3.603	1.099
Inadequate access to financial resources has restricted my business expansion plans.	3.153	1.186
Balancing family duties with business responsibilities has been challenging.	3.021	1.239
Limited financial literacy has made it difficult for me to manage my business finances effectively.	3.036	1.185
Insufficient support from financial institutions has impeded my business growth.	3.091	1.264
Gender bias in accessing finance has affected my business opportunities.	2.787	1.236
Lack of collateral has made it difficult for me to secure loans from financial institutions.	2.452	1.147
Inadequate training and resources have limited my ability to compete in the market.	2.397	1.141

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 5 presents the descriptive study of challenges regarding women empowerment in business. Among the statements surveyed, the one with the highest mean score, accompanied by its standard deviation, is "Lack of education has been a barrier to my success as a businesswoman" with a mean score of 3.603 and a standard deviation of 1.099. This indicates that, on average, participants perceive a significant challenge in achieving success as businesswomen due to inadequate education, with relatively consistent responses among participants.

Conversely, the statement with the lowest mean score, along with its standard deviation, is "Inadequate training and resources have limited my ability to compete in the market" with a mean score of 2.397 and a standard deviation of 1.141. This suggests that while participants recognize the importance of training and resources in competing in the market, there is less agreement on the extent to which this factor poses a challenge, with more variability in responses.

Overall, the descriptive study highlights various challenges faced by women in business, including limited access to finance, balancing multiple responsibilities, and gender bias in accessing finance. While some challenges, such as lack of education and inadequate support from financial institutions, are consistently perceived as significant barriers, others, such as insufficient training and resources, exhibit more variability in participant responses. This underscores the multifaceted nature of challenges encountered by women in their entrepreneurial endeavors.

4.1.2.4 Descriptive Study of Women Empowerment

In this section, the descriptive study of women's empowerment through microfinance has been examined. The analysis explores how microfinance programs contribute to empowering women, enhancing their financial independence, and fostering entrepreneurial growth. By utilizing descriptive statistics, the study provides insights into the impact of microfinance on women's lives, highlighting the progress and areas for further improvement in promoting women's empowerment.

Table 6
Descriptive Study of Women Empowerment

Statements	Mean	S.D.
I feel confident in my ability to succeed as a woman entrepreneur.	3.662	1.116
Microfinance has provided me with the necessary support to start my own business.	3.686	1.081
Being a part of microfinance programs has helped me overcome financial barriers to entrepreneurship.	3.639	1.047
Microfinance has empowered me to make independent business decisions.	3.719	1.065
Participating in microfinance programs has increased my entrepreneurial skills.	3.600	1.078
Microfinance has enabled me to access markets and customers for my products/services.	3.618	1.057
I have been able to grow my business with the help of microfinance support.	3.613	1.055
Microfinance has provided me with opportunities for business expansion and growth.	3.621	1.114
Through microfinance, I have been able to achieve financial independence.	3.525	1.111
Microfinance has played a significant role in my journey as a successful woman entrepreneur.	3.587	1.096

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 6 presents the descriptive study of women empowerment, particularly focusing on the impact of microfinance programs on women entrepreneurs. Among the statements surveyed, the one with the highest mean score, accompanied by its standard deviation, is "Microfinance has empowered me to make independent business decisions" with a mean score of 3.719 and a standard deviation of 1.065. This indicates that, on average, participants perceive microfinance as significantly empowering them to make autonomous business decisions, with relatively consistent responses among participants.

On the other hand, the statement with the lowest mean score, along with its standard deviation, is "Through microfinance, I have been able to achieve financial independence" with a mean score of 3.525 and a standard deviation of 1.111. This suggests that while participants generally acknowledge the role of microfinance in their entrepreneurial journey, there is comparatively less consensus on its effectiveness in achieving financial independence, with more variability in responses.

Overall, the descriptive study highlights the positive impact of microfinance programs on women empowerment, with participants expressing increased confidence, access to

support, and opportunities for business growth and expansion. While there is general agreement on the empowering effects of microfinance in areas such as skills development and market access, perceptions vary regarding its role in achieving financial independence. Nonetheless, the study underscores the significance of microfinance in facilitating women's entrepreneurship and fostering economic empowerment.

4.1.3 Correlation Analysis

In this section, the correlation between challenges and opportunities with women's empowerment in microfinance institutions has been examined. The analysis investigates how various factors, such as inadequate access to finance, multiple responsibilities, and training opportunities, influence women's empowerment. By using correlation analysis, the study aims to understand the relationships between these variables and how they collectively impact the empowerment of women participating in microfinance programs.

Table 7

Correlation Matrix

		OPP	CHA	WEN
OPP	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
CHA	Pearson Correlation	0.090	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.076		
WEN	Pearson Correlation	.707**	-0.070	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.017	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 7 presents the correlation between the independent variables, opportunities (OPP), challenges (CHA), and women empowerment (WEN). Focusing on the correlation between opportunities (OPP) and women empowerment (WEN), the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.707, indicating a strong positive correlation. This suggests that as opportunities for women empowerment increase, women's empowerment itself tends to increase significantly. The correlation is statistically significant at the 5 percent level, indicating a high likelihood that this relationship is not due to random chance.

The correlation between challenges (CHA) and women empowerment (WEN), the Pearson correlation coefficient is -0.07. This value suggests a weak negative correlation between challenges faced by women and their level of empowerment. While this negative correlation exists, it is notably weaker compared to the correlation between opportunities

and women empowerment. However, it is still statistically significant at the 5 percent level, indicating a slight tendency for women facing more challenges to exhibit slightly lower levels of empowerment, although this relationship is less pronounced.

4.1.4 Regression Analysis

In this section, regression analysis has been used to examine the impact of challenges and opportunities on women's empowerment through microfinance institutions. The analysis evaluates how factors such as inadequate access to finance, multiple responsibilities, and training opportunities affect women's empowerment. By employing regression techniques, the study aims to quantify the influence of these variables and determine their significance in enhancing or hindering women's empowerment within the context of microfinance programs.

Table 8

Model Summary of Regression Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.707	0.500	0.497	0.45106

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 8 provides the model summary of a regression analysis. The model includes predictors such as challenges (CHA) and opportunities (OPP) alongside a constant term. The coefficient of determination (R-squared) for the model is 0.500, indicating that 50% of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the predictors. The adjusted R-squared, which accounts for the number of predictors and the sample size, is slightly lower at 0.497. The standard error of the estimate, representing the average deviation of the observed values from the predicted values, is 0.45106. Overall, the model demonstrates a moderate level of explanatory power in predicting the dependent variable.

Table 9

ANOVA Table of Regression Model

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	77.640	2	38.820	190.805	.000
	Residual	77.719	382	0.203		
	Total	155.359	384			

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 9 depicts the ANOVA table of the regression model. The significance value (Sig.) associated is 0.000, which is less than the conventional threshold of 0.05. This indicates that the regression model is statistically significant, suggesting that at least one of the predictors contributes significantly to explaining the variance in the dependent variable. Therefore, the model is deemed fit for analysis.

Table 10

Beta Coefficient of Regression Model

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.149	0.176		6.530	0.000		
1 OPP	0.680	0.035	0.706	19.439	0.000	0.992	1.107
CHA	-0.076	0.045	-0.006	0.168	0.867	0.992	1.008

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 10 displays the beta coefficients, both unstandardized and standardized, along with the significance level and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for each independent variable in the regression model.

For the variable OPP (opportunities), the unstandardized beta coefficient is 0.68, indicating that for each unit increase in opportunities, the dependent variable is expected to increase by 0.68 units. The standardized beta coefficient (Beta) is 0.706, suggesting a strong positive impact of opportunities on the dependent variable. Additionally, the significance level (Sig.) is 0, indicating that the relationship between opportunities and the dependent variable is statistically significant at the 5 percent level. Moreover, the VIF value of 1.107 is less than the threshold of 10, indicating no multicollinearity issues. Overall, these findings suggest that increasing opportunities significantly contributes to the dependent variable, likely leading to positive outcomes such as enhanced women's empowerment and socio-economic advancement.

Regarding the variable CHA (challenges), the unstandardized beta coefficient is -0.076, suggesting that for each unit increase in challenges, the dependent variable is expected to decrease by 0.076 units. However, the standardized beta coefficient (Beta) is -0.006, indicating a very small negative impact of challenges on the dependent variable. Furthermore, the significance level (Sig.) is 0.867, which is much higher than the 5

percent threshold, suggesting that the relationship between challenges and the dependent variable is not statistically significant. Additionally, the VIF value of 1.008 is below the cutoff of 10, indicating no multicollinearity issues. Consequently, while challenges may have a slight negative influence on the dependent variable, this influence is not statistically significant. Thus, the implications of challenges on the dependent variable may be limited, with other factors potentially playing a more substantial role in determining outcomes.

4.2 Major Findings

- A significant proportion of respondents, accounting for 51.70%, fall within the 41-50 years age category, with 199 individuals in this range.
- Educational qualifications vary among respondents, with 40.80% holding Bachelor's degrees, equivalent to 157 individuals.
- Business owners represent 20.80% of the sample, totaling 80 respondents, indicating a notable presence of entrepreneurial activity.
- A slightly higher percentage of respondents, 53.50%, reside in rural areas, with 206 individuals living in these regions.
- The majority of respondents, comprising 39.50% of the sample, have 6-10 years of experience in microfinance, totaling 152 individuals.
- The most common income bracket among respondents is between Rs. 40,001 to Rs. 70,000 monthly, accounting for 43.40% of the sample, or 167 individuals.
- Marital status-wise, the majority, accounting for 77.10% of respondents, are married, with 297 individuals falling into this category.
- In terms of dependents, the largest proportion, at 57.70%, have 2-4 dependents, totaling 222 individuals.
- The mean score for opportunities in microfinance programs is 3.613, indicating a generally positive perception among women regarding the opportunities provided for their empowerment.
- Women perceive challenges in microfinance programs with a mean score of 2.915, suggesting a relatively neutral to slightly negative perception overall.

- On average, women feel positively about their empowerment through microfinance programs, as indicated by a mean score of 3.627 for women empowerment.
- The standard deviations for opportunities (0.661) and women empowerment (0.636) indicate a fair level of consistency in responses, suggesting a shared perception among respondents.
- The standard deviation for challenges (0.510) is lower compared to opportunities and women empowerment, indicating a somewhat more uniform perception among respondents regarding the challenges they face.
- The correlation between opportunities (OPP) and women empowerment (WEN) is strong and positive, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.707. This indicates that as opportunities for women empowerment increase, women's empowerment itself tends to increase significantly.
- The correlation between challenges (CHA) and women empowerment (WEN) is weak and negative, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.07. While a negative correlation exists, it is notably weaker compared to the correlation between opportunities and women empowerment. However, it is still statistically significant at the 5 percent level, indicating a slight tendency for women facing more challenges to exhibit slightly lower levels of empowerment, although this relationship is less pronounced.
- The regression model yields a coefficient of determination (R-squared) of 0.500, indicating that 50% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the predictors.
- The adjusted R-squared, which considers the number of predictors and sample size, is slightly lower at 0.497.
- The standard error of the estimate, reflecting the average deviation of observed values from predicted values, is 0.45106.
- Overall, the regression model demonstrates a moderate level of explanatory power in predicting the dependent variable.

- For the variable OPP (opportunities), the unstandardized beta coefficient is 0.68, suggesting that each unit increase in opportunities leads to a 0.68 unit increase in the dependent variable. The standardized beta coefficient (Beta) for opportunities is 0.706, indicating a strong positive impact on the dependent variable.
- In contrast, for the variable CHA (challenges), the unstandardized beta coefficient is -0.076, suggesting that each unit increase in challenges results in a 0.076 unit decrease in the dependent variable. However, the standardized beta coefficient (Beta) for challenges is -0.006, indicating a very small negative impact on the dependent variable. The relationship between challenges and the dependent variable is not statistically significant, with a significance level (Sig.) of 0.867.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study on challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in microfinance programs in Nepal. The analysis revealed a generally positive perception of opportunities, a weaker but still notable impact of challenges, and a strong positive relationship between opportunities and women's empowerment. Recommendations include targeted interventions to address challenges, leverage opportunities, and integrate gender-sensitive approaches into microfinance policies to enhance women's entrepreneurship and empowerment effectively.

5.1 Summary

This study provides an overview of the role of microfinance in poverty reduction efforts and its potential to empower marginalized individuals, particularly women. It underscores the persistent challenges of gender inequality globally and the significance of microfinance programs in addressing these issues. Despite the progress made, challenges such as gender-based violence and societal expectations continue to hinder women's empowerment. The study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs within microfinance programs in Nepal. Specifically, it seeks to assess the dynamic interplay between various factors, including access to financial resources, social networks, and training opportunities, and their impact on women entrepreneurship. Through this investigation, the study aims to contribute valuable insights to enhance support mechanisms for women entrepreneurs, ultimately fostering their empowerment and economic advancement.

The literature review of this study is structured into three main sections: conceptual review, theoretical review, and empirical review, with a subsection dedicated to identifying the research gap. In the conceptual review, the challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in microfinance services are explored, shedding light on the factors influencing women's participation in entrepreneurship within the microfinance context. Theoretical frameworks such as Human Capital Theory, Social Network Theory, and Financial Capital Theory are discussed in the theoretical review section, providing insights into the underlying mechanisms driving women's entrepreneurship and

empowerment in microfinance programs. The empirical review synthesizes existing research findings on women's entrepreneurship in microfinance, offering empirical evidence to support theoretical propositions and conceptual understandings. Finally, the identification of the research gap highlights areas where further investigation is needed to address gaps in current knowledge and understanding of women's entrepreneurship within microfinance services. Through this comprehensive review, the study aims to build upon existing literature and contribute new insights to the field of women's entrepreneurship and microfinance.

The research design for this study encompasses a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both descriptive and causal-comparative research designs. Descriptive statistics are utilized to assess the current landscape of challenges and opportunities within the microfinance sector, while causal-comparative research design is employed to analyze the impact of these factors on women entrepreneurship facilitated through microfinance institutions. The study's population comprises 7,734 individuals served by six distinct microfinance institutions located in the Gorkha district, with a sample of 385 participants selected through convenience sampling, ensuring representation from each institution for comprehensive analysis. Primary data, obtained through structured questionnaire surveys, forms the basis of the study, with responses quantified using a five-point Likert scale.

The research adopts a quantitative nature, and after data collection, statistical software such as Microsoft Excel and SPSS is utilized for data presentation and analysis, employing techniques such as descriptive statistics, correlation, and multivariate regression models to draw meaningful insights and conclusions. Through this comprehensive approach, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the dynamics between microfinance, challenges, opportunities, and women entrepreneurship, facilitating informed decision-making and policy formulation in this domain. The research framework of this study focusing on the dynamics between microfinance activities and women entrepreneurship. The independent variables encompass opportunities within microfinance programs, such as increased income, social network enhancement, and training opportunities, as well as challenges faced by women, including inadequate access to finance, multiple responsibilities, and lack of education.

Overall, the findings of this study shed light on the multifaceted relationship between challenges, opportunities, and women entrepreneurship within microfinance programs in Nepal. Regarding the first objective, the analysis reveals a generally positive perception

among women towards the opportunities provided by microfinance programs, indicating a satisfactory level of empowerment opportunities. However, there is a relatively neutral to slightly negative perception of the challenges encountered, suggesting room for improvement in addressing these obstacles. Despite this, women express a positive sentiment towards their overall empowerment through microfinance initiatives, indicating a satisfactory level of perceived empowerment. The second objective highlights a strong and positive relationship between opportunities and women empowerment, signifying that as opportunities for women empowerment within microfinance programs increase, women's empowerment itself tends to increase significantly. Conversely, while the correlation between challenges and women empowerment is statistically significant, it is weak and negative, indicating a slight tendency for women facing more challenges to exhibit slightly lower levels of empowerment. Lastly, the analysis of the third objective indicates that opportunities within microfinance programs exert a strong and positive influence on women entrepreneurship. However, challenges have a weak negative and statistically insignificant impact on women entrepreneurship.

This study highlights the importance of addressing challenges and maximizing opportunities within microfinance programs to enhance women's entrepreneurship and empowerment. Practically, it underscores the need for tailored interventions to address specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, while also leveraging opportunities to further support their socio-economic advancement. Theoretical implications suggest the necessity of integrating gender-sensitive approaches into microfinance policies and programs to ensure their effectiveness in promoting women's empowerment. Overall, this study emphasizes the significance of proactive measures aimed at fostering a conducive environment for women's entrepreneurship within microfinance initiatives.

5.2 Conclusion

The first objective of this study is to examine the status of challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurship in microfinance programs in Nepal. The findings reveal a generally positive perception among women regarding the opportunities provided by microfinance programs, indicating a satisfactory level of empowerment opportunities. However, there is a relatively neutral to slightly negative perception of the challenges encountered, suggesting room for improvement in addressing these obstacles. Despite this, women express a positive sentiment towards their overall empowerment through microfinance initiatives, indicating a satisfactory level of perceived empowerment. The

consistency in responses, as indicated by the standard deviations for opportunities and women empowerment, suggests a uniform perception among respondents, which could facilitate targeted interventions to enhance empowerment initiatives. However, the lower standard deviation for challenges implies a more consistent perception among respondents regarding the challenges they face, which may require tailored strategies to address specific concerns and improve overall program effectiveness.

The second objective of this study is to analyze any relationship between challenges and opportunities of microfinance programs on women entrepreneurship in Nepal. The correlation analysis reveals a strong and positive relationship between opportunities (OPP) and women empowerment (WEN), indicating a significant and favorable association between the two variables. This suggests that as opportunities for women empowerment within microfinance programs increase, women's empowerment itself tends to increase significantly. Conversely, the correlation between challenges (CHA) and women empowerment (WEN) is weak and negative, albeit statistically significant at the 5 percent level. This indicates a slight tendency for women facing more challenges to exhibit slightly lower levels of empowerment, although this relationship is less pronounced compared to the positive association observed between opportunities and women empowerment. Overall, the findings suggest a robust and positive relationship between opportunities and women empowerment, with challenges exerting a weaker, albeit still notable, influence on women's empowerment within the context of microfinance programs.

The third objective of this study is to analyze the impact of challenges and opportunities of microfinance programs on women entrepreneurship in Nepal. The analysis indicates that opportunities within microfinance programs exert a strong and positive influence on women entrepreneurship. Conversely, challenges have a weak negative and statistically insignificant impact on women entrepreneurship. While opportunities significantly contribute to women's empowerment and socio-economic advancement, challenges appear to have limited implications for women entrepreneurship within microfinance programs. These findings underscore the importance of fostering opportunities to support women entrepreneurs and addressing challenges to enhance their participation in microfinance initiatives effectively.

5.3 Recommendations

- Implement targeted initiatives to enhance access to financial resources for women entrepreneurs within microfinance programs, addressing challenges such as inadequate access to finance.
- Develop tailored training programs aimed at equipping women entrepreneurs with essential skills and knowledge to overcome barriers and capitalize on available opportunities within microfinance.
- Strengthen social network enhancement activities within microfinance programs to foster collaboration, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing among women entrepreneurs, thereby facilitating their empowerment and success.
- Introduce policies and strategies to mitigate challenges related to multiple responsibilities faced by women entrepreneurs, including childcare support, flexible working arrangements, and access to affordable healthcare.
- Enhance educational opportunities for women entrepreneurs by providing access to formal and informal education initiatives, vocational training, and skill-building programs tailored to their specific needs and aspirations.
- Promote gender-responsive approaches in microfinance programs to address gender-based violence and discrimination, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive.
- Expand outreach and awareness campaigns to educate women entrepreneurs about available opportunities within microfinance programs, empowering them to make informed decisions and maximize their potential.
- Foster partnerships between microfinance institutions, government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders to create a supportive ecosystem for women entrepreneurs, leveraging resources and expertise to address challenges and enhance opportunities effectively.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of microfinance programs on women entrepreneurship, gathering data on key indicators and outcomes to inform evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Questionnaire

Dear Mam/Miss

I am conducting research for my Master's degree dissertation on the topic "**Challenges and Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in Microfinance Programs**" and would greatly appreciate your assistance.

Your expertise and insights would be invaluable to my study, and your participation would involve sharing your experiences, perspectives, and insights related to women entrepreneurs and microfinance programs. Your input will contribute significantly to the depth and richness of my research findings.

The information you provide will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences.

If you are willing to participate or have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me. Your time and contribution are sincerely appreciated, and I look forward to the possibility of working together on this important research endeavor.

Thank you very much for considering my request.

Warm regards

Kamala Dahal

Part I Demographic Profile

Please put a tick mark (✓) in the box in an appropriate option for each of the following.

1. Age:

20-30 years

31-40 years

41-50 years

51+ years

2. Educational Background:

- 10+2 or Below
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Master's degree or higher
- 3. Occupation:**
- Microfinance entrepreneur
 - Employee in a microfinance institution
 - Business owner
 - Student
 - Social activist
 - Government official
- 4. Location:**
- Urban
 - Rural
- 5. Experience in Microfinance:**
- Less than 1 year
 - 1-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - More than 10 years
- 6. Income Level:**
- Low-income
 - Middle-income
 - High-income
- 7. Marital Status:**
- Single
 - Married
- 8. Number of Dependents:**
- 1-2
 - 2-4
 - 5 and above

Part II Core Questions of Microfinance

Please put a tick mark (✓) in the box in an appropriate option for each of the following.

[Source: Modified by researcher based on Khan et al. (2020); Ekpe (2011); (Dumbuya & Munu, 2024)]

S.N.	Opportunities	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Access to microfinance has significantly increased my income.					
2	Participation in microfinance programs has expanded my social network.					

3	The training provided through microfinance programs has enhanced my entrepreneurial skills.					
4	Microfinance programs have provided me with opportunities for skill development.					
5	Microfinance has helped me access resources that I wouldn't have had otherwise.					
6	Through microfinance, I have been able to invest in my business and expand operations.					
7	Microfinance has provided me with the necessary support to pursue my entrepreneurial goals.					
8	Networking opportunities provided by microfinance have helped me find new business prospects.					
9	Microfinance training programs have improved my understanding of business management.					
10	Participation in microfinance programs has positively impacted my financial stability.					
S.N.	Challenges	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Limited access to finance has hindered my business growth.					
2	Juggling multiple responsibilities has made it difficult for me to focus on my business.					
3	Lack of education has been a barrier to my success as a businesswoman.					
4	Inadequate access to financial resources has restricted my business expansion plans.					
5	Balancing family duties with business responsibilities has been challenging.					

6	Limited financial literacy has made it difficult for me to manage my business finances effectively.					
7	Insufficient support from financial institutions has impeded my business growth.					
8	Gender bias in accessing finance has affected my business opportunities.					
9	Lack of collateral has made it difficult for me to secure loans from financial institutions.					
10	Inadequate training and resources have limited my ability to compete in the market.					
S.N.	Women Entrepreneurship	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I feel confident in my ability to succeed as a woman entrepreneur.					
2	Microfinance has provided me with the necessary support to start my own business.					
3	Being a part of microfinance programs has helped me overcome financial barriers to entrepreneurship.					
4	Microfinance has empowered me to make independent business decisions.					
5	Participating in microfinance programs has increased my entrepreneurial skills.					
6	Microfinance has enabled me to access markets and customers for my products/services.					
7	I have been able to grow my business with the help of microfinance support.					
8	Microfinance has provided me with opportunities for business expansion and growth.					

9	Through microfinance, I have been able to achieve financial independence.					
10	Microfinance has played a significant role in my journey as a successful woman entrepreneur.					

Appendix I: Frequency Table

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-30 Years	20	5.2	5.2	5.2
	31-40 years	77	20.0	20.0	25.2
	41-50 years	199	51.7	51.7	76.9
	51 Years or above	89	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	385	100.0	100.0	

		Educational Qualification			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	10+2 or Below	144	37.4	37.4	37.4
	Bachelor's Degree	157	40.8	40.8	78.2
	Master's Degree or above	84	21.8	21.8	100.0
	Total	385	100.0	100.0	

		Occupation			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Microfinance entrepreneur	46	11.9	11.9	11.9
	Employee in a microfinance institution	62	16.1	16.1	28.1
	Business owner	80	20.8	20.8	48.8
	Student	91	23.6	23.6	72.5
	Social activist	78	20.3	20.3	92.7
	Government official	28	7.3	7.3	100.0
	Total	385	100.0	100.0	

		Location			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Urban	179	46.5	46.5	46.5
	Rural	206	53.5	53.5	100.0
	Total	385	100.0	100.0	

		Employee in Microfinance			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 1 year	48	12.5	12.5	12.5
	1-5 years	120	31.2	31.2	43.6
	6-10 years	152	39.5	39.5	83.1

More than 10 years	65	16.9	16.9	100.0
Total	385	100.0	100.0	

Income Level (Monthly)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Upto Rs. 40,000	159	41.3	41.3	41.3
Rs. 40,001 to Rs. 70,000	167	43.4	43.4	84.7
Rs. 70,000 or above	59	15.3	15.3	100.0
Total	385	100.0	100.0	

Marital Status

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Single	88	22.9	22.9	22.9
Married	297	77.1	77.1	100.0
Total	385	100.0	100.0	

Number of Dependents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1-2	140	36.4	36.4	36.4
2-4	222	57.7	57.7	94.0
5 and above	23	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	385	100.0	100.0	

Appendix II: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Access to microfinance has significantly increased my income.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6571	1.13737
Participation in microfinance programs has expanded my social network.	385	1.00	5.00	3.5429	1.11517
The training provided through microfinance programs has enhanced my entrepreneurial skills.	385	1.00	5.00	3.5169	1.14580
Microfinance programs have provided me with opportunities for skill development.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6156	1.15369
Microfinance has helped me access resources that I wouldn't have had otherwise.	385	1.00	5.00	3.5273	1.19020
Through microfinance, I have been able to invest in my business and expand operations.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6597	1.08545
Microfinance has provided me with the necessary support to pursue my entrepreneurial goals.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6052	1.10160
Networking opportunities provided by microfinance have helped me find new business prospects.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6935	1.09667
Microfinance training programs have improved my understanding of business management.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6468	1.13417
Participation in microfinance programs has positively impacted my financial stability.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6623	1.08025
Limited access to finance has hindered my business growth.	385	1.00	5.00	2.7558	1.18701
Juggling multiple responsibilities has made it difficult for me to focus on my business.	385	1.00	5.00	2.8545	1.20097
Lack of education has been a barrier to my success as a businesswoman.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6026	1.09948
Inadequate access to financial resources has restricted my business expansion plans.	385	1.00	5.00	3.1532	1.18581
Balancing family duties with business responsibilities has been challenging.	385	1.00	5.00	3.0208	1.23936
Limited financial literacy has made it difficult for me to manage my	385	1.00	5.00	3.0364	1.18530

business finances effectively.					
Insufficient support from financial institutions has impeded my business growth.	385	1.00	5.00	3.0909	1.26431
Gender bias in accessing finance has affected my business opportunities.	385	1.00	5.00	2.7870	1.23589
Lack of collateral has made it difficult for me to secure loans from financial institutions.	385	1.00	5.00	2.4519	1.14719
Inadequate training and resources have limited my ability to compete in the market.	385	1.00	5.00	2.3974	1.14131
I feel confident in my ability to succeed as a woman entrepreneur.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6623	1.11582
Microfinance has provided me with the necessary support to start my own business.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6857	1.08129
Being a part of microfinance programs has helped me overcome financial barriers to entrepreneurship.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6390	1.04684
Microfinance has empowered me to make independent business decisions.	385	1.00	5.00	3.7195	1.06520
Participating in microfinance programs has increased my entrepreneurial skills.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6000	1.07819
Microfinance has enabled me to access markets and customers for my products/services.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6182	1.05681
I have been able to grow my business with the help of microfinance support.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6130	1.05492
Microfinance has provided me with opportunities for business expansion and growth.	385	1.00	5.00	3.6208	1.11411
Through microfinance, I have been able to achieve financial independence.	385	1.00	5.00	3.5247	1.11104
Microfinance has played a significant role in my journey as a successful woman entrepreneur.	385	1.00	5.00	3.5870	1.09608
OPP	385	1.70	5.00	3.6127	0.66082
CHA	385	1.60	4.20	2.9151	0.50993
WEN	385	1.80	5.00	3.6270	0.63607
Valid N (listwise)	385				

Appendix III: Correlation Analysis

		Correlations ^b		
		OPP	CHA	WEN
OPP	Pearson Correlation	1	0.090	.707**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.076	0.000
CHA	Pearson Correlation	0.090	1	-0.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.076		0.017
WEN	Pearson Correlation	.707**	-0.070	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.017	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

b. Listwise N=385

Appendix IV: Regression Analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.707 ^a	0.500	0.497	0.45106

a. Predictors: (Constant), CHA, OPP

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	77.640	2	38.820	190.805	.000 ^b
	Residual	77.719	382	0.203		
	Total	155.359	384			

a. Dependent Variable: WEN

b. Predictors: (Constant), CHA, OPP

		Coefficients ^a					Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	1.149	0.176		6.530	0.000		
	OPP	0.680	0.035	0.706	19.439	0.000	0.992	1.107
	CHA	-0.076	0.045	-0.006	0.168	0.867	0.992	1.008

a. Dependent Variable: WEN

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION 1.1 Background of the Study Microfinance, defined as **the**

provision of financial services to economically active poor individuals who are excluded from mainstream financial institutions, has gained significant attention since the 1970s as a practical tool for poverty reduction and policy development (Sanyal, 2009). It is believed to positively impact recipients' livelihoods, leading to improvements in their quality of life and helping them escape poverty. Studies have shown that recipients of microfinance loans experience better socioeconomic status, including improved living conditions, health, and nutrition compared to non-recipients (Johnson et al., 2009). Additionally, microfinance programs enhance recipients' understanding of health and nutrition, thereby contributing to family food security and children's nutrition. Empowerment, particularly in the context of women's development, is a fundamental aspect of microfinance (Khan et al., 2020). Despite the progress made in recent decades, gender inequality remains pervasive worldwide, with women facing disadvantages in various areas such as