METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR ASSESSING THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

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Abstract

This article examines the methodological frameworks used to assess the development of women's entrepreneurship globally, focusing on frameworks from the International Labour Organization (ILO), Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), Global Entrepreneurship Development Institute (GEDI), and United Nations Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) project. These methodologies employ mixed methods, including surveys, interviews, and composite indices, to evaluate enabling environments, barriers, and outcomes for women entrepreneurs. Through a literature review, detailed methodology descriptions, country case studies, and analysis of challenges, the article highlights the critical role of gender-disaggregated data in informing policy. Recent sources up to 2025 reveal trends like digital integration and a focus on high-potential ventures, while identifying gaps in low-income countries. The article advocates for hybrid approaches to foster inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship drives economic growth, innovation, and social inclusion, yet systemic barriers such as limited access to finance, discriminatory regulations, and cultural norms hinder its development, particularly in low-income countries (World Bank, 2023). Assessing women's entrepreneurship requires robust methodologies that capture quantitative metrics (e.g., startup rates, business performance) and qualitative factors (e.g., policy environments, societal attitudes). These assessments inform targeted policies to close gender gaps, which remain significant despite a 70% increase in women's startup rates over two decades (GEM, 2024).

This article synthesizes four key frameworks: the ILO's Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) Assessment, GEM's global surveys, GEDI's Female Entrepreneurship Index (FEI), and the UN EDGE project. It reviews their methodological foundations, applications in countries like Georgia, Thailand, the United States, and Uzbekistan, and challenges like data scarcity.

Literature Review

The literature on women's entrepreneurship assessment has shifted from descriptive studies to multi-dimensional frameworks that integrate gender-specific metrics. Early research emphasized barriers in developing economies, where women face sociocultural constraints and limited resource access (Henry et al., 2013). Recent studies advocate for tailored interventions, with bundled support (finance and training) proving effective in low-income settings (We-Fi, 2022).

Institutional frameworks dominate the field. The ILO's WED framework, updated in 2022, provides a policy-oriented tool applied in over 70 countries, focusing on enabling conditions like legal systems and financial access (ILO, 2022a). GEM's longitudinal data tracks entrepreneurial activity across 120+ economies, revealing a 79% rise in women's perceived opportunities but persistent fear of failure (GEM, 2024). GEDI's FEI measures high-potential entrepreneurship, ranking countries on 31 pillars to highlight ecosystem gaps (GEDI, 2015). The UN EDGE project standardizes gender indicators, linking motivations to performance outcomes (UN Women, 2019).

Gaps include limited longitudinal data in low-resource contexts and underuse of digital tools for real-time analysis (ESCAP, 2023). Emerging research suggests integrating ecofeminist perspectives for sustainable assessments (Shiva, 2024).

Methodological Frameworks

ILO Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) Assessment

The ILO WED framework is a policy-oriented tool designed to assess and strengthen national ecosystems for women's entrepreneurship, updated in 2022 to incorporate digital and sustainability elements (ILO, 2022a). It evaluates six framework conditions:

Framework Condition	Key Indicators
Gender-sensitive legal system	Parity in business registration; awareness of rights (ILO, 2020).
Policy leadership	Inclusion in SME strategies; coordination mechanisms.
Financial services	Loan approval rates; collateral requirements.

Framework Condition	Key Indicators
Business development support (BDS)	Training uptake; gender-responsive content (ILO, 2016).
Market/technology access	Export participation; ICT adoption (World Bank, 2021).
Representation	Membership in associations; policy influence.

Methodology: Combines desktop reviews, surveys (1,000–2,000 women entrepreneurs), key informant interviews, and focus groups, stratified by firm size, sector, and location. Conditions are scored (1–5), aggregated into composite indices, and visualized (e.g., radar charts). Stakeholder workshops validate findings (ILO, 2022b). Applied in 70+ countries, it's ideal for developing economies (ILO, 2023).

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)

GEM provides annual, gender-disaggregated data on entrepreneurial activity across 120+ economies, using two surveys: the Adult Population Survey (APS, ~2,000 adults/country) and National Expert Survey (NES, 36 experts) (GEM, 2023). It tracks Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA), motivations, and high-potential ventures.

Methodology: APS measures behaviors (e.g., startup rates), while NES evaluates ecosystem conditions. Statistical analysis (e.g., regression) compares gender and income levels. The 2024/2025 report notes women's TEA at 10.4%, with 50% citing fear of failure and 33% leading high-growth ventures (GEM, 2024).

Indicator	Trends
Startup Rates	10.4% for women (2021–2023) (GEM, 2023).
Perceptions	+79% opportunities; 50% fear of failure (GEM, 2024).
High-Potential	33% growth-oriented ventures women-led.

GEDI Female Entrepreneurship Index (FEI)

The FEI measures high-potential female entrepreneurship in 77+ countries, focusing on quality over quantity (GEDI, 2015). It aggregates individual data (e.g., GEM) with institutional metrics (e.g., World Bank) into a 0–1 index across three sub-indices.

Sub-Index	Pillars
Environment	Opportunity perception; startup skills (GEDI, 2021).
Ecosystem	Finance access; tech absorption.
Aspirations	Innovation; internationalization (JRC, 2021).

Methodology: Uses principal component analysis on 31 pillars, normalizing data for rankings. It highlights gaps in scalable ventures, complementing broader indices (GEDI, 2023).

UN EDGE Project

The EDGE project develops gender-specific indicators for entrepreneurship, integrated into national surveys (UN Women, 2019). It focuses on three dimensions: determinants (motivations), characteristics (firm size), and performance (profits).

Methodology: Surveys include gender modules, analyzed via econometric models. Pilots show women-led firms have 20–30% lower profits, often due to necessity-driven motives (UN Women, 2023).

Dimension	Indicators
Determinants	Necessity vs. opportunity; barriers (e.g., childcare).
Characteristics	Firm size; sector.
Performance	Sales/profit gaps; innovation (ESCAP, 2023).

Country Case Studies
Georgia (ILO WED)

Application: A 2023 WED assessment, conducted by UN Women and ILO, used surveys, 23 key informant interviews, and three focus groups to evaluate enabling conditions (UN Women, 2023a).
Findings: Scored 3.25/5 for legal systems (equal laws, weak enforcement), 2.5/5 for financial access (high collateral), and 3.33/5 for representation. Rural women had 20% lower training access.
Impact: Informed gender-responsive financing and mentorship programs.

Thailand (GEM)

Application: GEM's 2023/2024 report surveyed ~2,000 adults, finding high women's TEA (15%) (GEM, 2023).

Findings: Women concentrated in retail (60%), with 45% citing fear of failure. High export orientation noted.

Impact: Shaped skills training policies for opportunity-driven ventures.

United States (FEI)

Application: FEI ranked the U.S. top in 2025, using GEM and World Bank data (GEDI, 2023).

Findings: Scored 0.83/1 for strong ecosystems; gaps in export-oriented firms (15% women-led).

Impact: Guided tech startup funding.

Uzbekistan (EDGE)

Application: A 2025 EDGE assessment analyzed women-led firms via national surveys (UN Women, 2023b).

Findings: 2.1 million women entrepreneurs; 25% lower profits due to necessity-driven motives.

Impact: Influenced SDG-aligned capital access strategies.

Conclusion

Challenges include data scarcity in low-income countries, cultural biases in reporting, and limited longitudinal studies (OECD, 2021). Digital tools and AI could enhance real-time monitoring, while ecofeminist frameworks may address sustainability (Shiva, 2024). Hybrid methodologies combining GEM's trends with ILO's diagnostics are recommended for comprehensive assessments.

The ILO WED, GEM, FEI, and EDGE frameworks provide robust tools for assessing women's entrepreneurship, revealing progress and persistent gaps. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, they inform policies that foster inclusive growth. Future efforts should address data gaps and leverage technology for dynamic, equitable evaluations.

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