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Research Paper



Invisible Yet Essential: Understanding the Socio-economic Profile and Challenges of Tribal Women Street Entrepreneurs in Jhansi City, Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: According to the World Bank 2021, 35% of India's population, 1.4 billion people, live in urban areas. 80% of workers in urban regions are employed in informal employment, with street vending being one of the most accessible avenues for those with limited education and capital (Medoze & Dutta, 2024). The informal sector accounts for half of the nation's GDP. Women account for approximately 33% of all street vendors in India (Dimitrov, 2024). The main Purpose of this study is to determine the socio-economic profile of women street entrepreneurs in Jhansi District and to portray the challenges they face in street entrepreneurship. Methodology: The present study employed quantitative and qualitative methods, An Interview of 124 women in the year 2024 by utilizing an unstructured interview schedule with open-ended and closed-ended questions related to their socio-economic and occupational challenges. Results: The findings illustrate a weak socio-economic background of the tribal women street entrepreneurs. The data indicate limited education, modest income, housing security, and economic insecurity among this group. This emphasizes the need for targeted socio-economic support for tribal women entrepreneurs. Conclusion: We conclude that Tribal women street entrepreneurs work very hard for their livelihood and survival. They have a weak demographic profile, yet they struggle to ensure even two basic meals a day; otherwise, they are unable to even arrange two basic meals a day. Not only women, but also their children assist in this work rather than going to school to study and play. They lack access to any kind of infrastructure facilities, like clean water, toilets, and permanent housing.

Keywords: Street Entrepreneurs, Street Vendors, Informal Economy, Street Vending Challenges

Informal Sector and Street Vending

The term "informal sector" was introduced by Keith Hart in the 1970s. In this sector, selfemployment accounts for a higher percentage—except in agriculture—than waged employment across all emerging regions (INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE, 2002). The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) defines "informal employment" as jobs lacking social security, worker benefits, or stable contracts,

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and not associated with government enterprises. As urban populations grow, street vendors are increasingly drawn to vending activities because of their convenience (Kambara & Bairagya, 2021). A large proportion of informal sector workers are women, including subsistence farmers, street vendors, domestic helpers, and seasonal agricultural laborers (UN Women, 2015-2016). The informal sector employs over 80% of India's working women, with street vending being one of the most accessible avenues for those with limited education and capital (Medoze & Dutta, 2024). According to official figures, Street vendors account for two to twenty-four percent of all urban informal jobs in Latin American, Asian, and African cities. The majority of street vendors are women in several nations, particularly in Africa (Roever, 2014). Street vending is a global phenomenon; it occurs in all regions of the globe, mainly performed by internal rural migrants and by less educated people. Several studies have highlighted distinct differences in street vending between the Global South and the Global North. In southern countries, vending is often viewed as a long-standing and stable form of employment, frequently passed down through generations (Recchi, 2021). In contrast, in industrialized or developed nations, it is generally regarded as a temporary means of livelihood, commonly pursued by immigrants as an initial form of employment upon arrival. Furthermore, informal vending in the Global South constitutes a significant portion of the overall economy, whereas in developed countries, it represents only a small segment of the labor market (Temkin & Veizaga, 2010).

Street vending is widespread globally, especially in developing countries, providing livelihoods for marginalized populations despite existing in legally ambiguous spaces (Mubarack et al., 2023; Onodugo et al., 2016). Vendors often face harassment and insecurity due to unclear or discriminatory regulations, even where legal protections exist, such as in India under the 2014 Street Vendors Act (Anand et al., 2019; Maniktala & Jain, 2021). In cities like New York and Ahmedabad, inconsistent enforcement exacerbates their vulnerability (Devlin, 2010; Mahadevia & Vyas, 2017). Nonetheless, vendors actively resist exclusion through strategic adaptation, highlighting the need for inclusive urban planning (Bostic et al., 2016; Hayden, 2024). In public areas of cities all over the world, street vendors offer simple access to a wide range of products and services, including consumer products, prepared food, fresh fruits and vegetables, building materials, clothing, and crafts. Through their operations, local governments gain revenue, porters, guards, and transport operators are employed, and there is a need for both legal and informal suppliers.

Street vendors and Street Entrepreneurs

Street vendors are individuals who sell goods and services in public spaces without permanent structures. These activities are typically informal, subject to eviction, and lack legal protection (Bhowmik, 2007). They play a vital role in urban economies by providing affordable goods and services, particularly to low-income populations (Roever & Skinner, 2016). Although commonly called entrepreneurs (Williams & Gurtoo, 2012). Street vendors are driven by motives different from those of formal entrepreneurs. Not all qualify as traditional entrepreneurs—the key differences lie in their intent, innovation, and economic strategies. Many are survivalists acting out of necessity, whereas street entrepreneurs demonstrate behaviors like innovation, business growth, market adaptation, and value creation (Bromley, 2000; Williams & Gurtoo, 2012). (Skinner, 2008) observes that this distinction can be blurry because many vendors operate in a grey area—sometimes motivated by necessity, by opportunity. Street entrepreneurs often engage in strategic planning, customer interaction, branding, and profit reinvestment to expand their businesses, even informally (Saha, 2011). Scholars emphasize the importance of policies that recognize the

entrepreneurial potential within informal vending, advocating for frameworks that go beyond mere regulation to address barriers such as access to finance, infrastructure, and legal recognition (Chen, 2012; Donovan, 2008). entrepreneurs. Under India's Street Vendors Act, 2014, vendors are formally recognized as urban micro-entrepreneurs, provided certain conditions such as enumeration and vending certificates. Figure 1 shows a comparison between street vendors and street This comparison is based on existing literature on street vendors and street entrepreneurs. It is clear from a practical viewpoint that both categories are identical in how they operate. However, from a conceptual and motivational standpoint, "street vendor" usually denotes livelihood activity with limited resources, but "street entrepreneur" implies agency, choice, and the possibility for creativity.

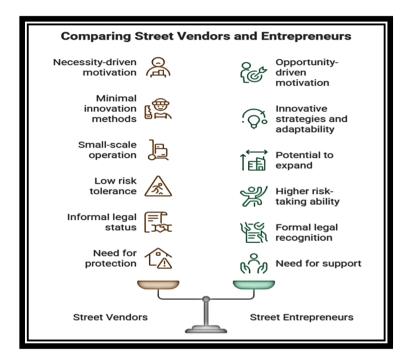


Figure-1 Comparison between Street vendors and Street Entrepreneurs

Tribal Women in the Informal Sector

Tribal women are vital to India's informal economy, significantly contributing to both economic survival and social change. Tribal business entities are achieving remarkable achievements, and are now practiced by many as a result of blurring the lines between business and tribal communities in India.

Many tribal entrepreneurs are transforming tribal India by utilising technology to link farm and forest produce with marketplaces, establishing self-help groups, empowering women, and developing self-sustaining businesses (Bhukya, 2021). These trends are transforming tribal economies and improving livelihoods.

Consequently, many with land migrate to cities and join the informal sector (Ashmarita, 2020).

Many women migrate to urban areas due to the availability of job opportunities, social improvement, and expansion of the IT industry, where people are more engaged in their

professions, which continues to attract migrants from nearby villages, both within the state and from adjacent states (Kambara & Bairagya, 2021), And also migration from tribal areas is increasing due to poor agricultural prospects, often caused by difficulties that hinder cash crop cultivation. Despite socio-economic hurdles, tribal women show resilience. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women-led households stayed economically active, supporting their families (Pattanaik, 2021). Many tribal women sell fruits, flowers, and everyday essentials through street vending as a survival tactic. Their participation is driven by necessity and shaped by systemic issues like limited education, fewer job opportunities, and skill gaps (Kasseeah & Tandrayen-Ragoobur, 2014; Aayushi Lyngwa & Bimal Kishore Sahoo, 2022; Charles Muyanja, Leontina Nayiga, Namugumya Brenda, et al., 2011). Many are widowed, unmarried, or single heads of households relying solely on vending income. Despite their informal status, they often earn competitively; women in this sector may earn more than men in this sector (*Periodic Labour Force Survey*, 2017-2018).

Through their work, tribal women support their families and help preserve traditional knowledge and indigenous products like honey, herbs, and bamboo crafts, highlighting their entrepreneurial spirit. (Lyngwa & Sahoo, 2024) It was discovered that street vendors typically become street vendors to improve their standard of living due to a lack of work prospects, poor educational background, and low level of acquired skills. The Majority of women are middle-aged and were either unmarried, widowed, or divorced. In addition, they were the sole self-sufficient earners and occasionally the heads of their households; they were motivated toward street vending due to the lack of skills, unemployment, and low-level education attained (Kasseeah & Tandrayen-Ragoobur, 2014; Charles Muyanja, Leontina Nayiga, Namugumya Brenda, et al., 2011).

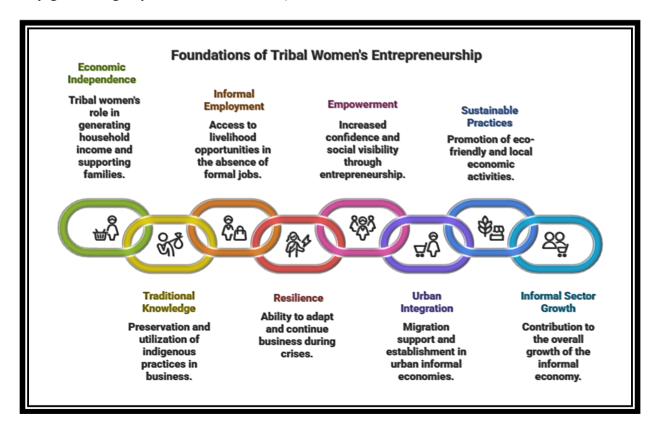


Figure 2- The Base for Entrepreneurship among Tribal Women

Challenges faced by tribal women in street vending

Tribal women in rural areas face numerous challenges that limit their involvement in entrepreneurial activities and that threaten their livelihoods & well-being. They often lack awareness of available financial resources, confidence, and access to business management training, which further marginalizes them socially and economically (Bhukya, 2021). Deeprooted discrimination and cultural barriers continue to restrict their potential in various sectors (Mishra & Nag, 2017).

Women street vendors, in particular, rely on informal credit sources with high interest rates due to a lack of capital, and their focus on perishable goods results in minimal profits. Adverse weather conditions, irregular customer flow, and inadequate storage facilities worsen their hardships (Sarkar et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these difficulties. Women lost livelihoods, accumulated debts, had limited access to healthcare, and endured long, foot-based commutes due to transportation shutdowns (Pattanaik, 2021). They also found it hard to balance domestic chores with their work (Chordiya, 2013). Most operate in the informal sector without job security, health benefits, or other employment protections (Nayak & Paltasingh, 2024). Furthermore, street vendors often work in unhygienic conditions, risking health hazards for themselves and consumers because of poor food handling and a lack of training in hygiene practices (Kitagwa et al., 2006; Charles Muyanja et al., 2011). Despite these obstacles, their work remains vital for ensuring food security and income generation.

Challenges in the workplace

They often encounter issues such as limited space, lack of sanitation, and inadequate workplace security (Chordiya, 2013). In some cities, women vendors even lack designated markets (Kamei, 2016). They are often mistreated by police, particularly minority women from remote hill district villages, who also lack vending licenses issued by the Municipal Council. Without proper shelter, non-licensed vendors are frequently subject to police raids and pressured into bribery to continue their activities within certain city areas (Valte, 2020). They are also often ridiculed by authorized street sellers for perceived threats to their revenue and sales.

Numerous studies (Bhagat, 2017; Kambara & Bairagya, 2021; Recchi, 2020) on native and migrant street vendors across northern and southern regions indicate no significant income difference between locals and migrants, although migrants tend to invest more capital to earn comparable earnings (Kambara & Bairagya, 2021).

In Indian society, women fulfil diverse roles (Mishra & Nag, 2017). While the government is increasingly focusing on its development through rural and community programs, active engagement at all levels is crucial for achieving meaningful socioeconomic progress.

By implementing targeted economic and financial policies for street vendors, such as improving basic workplace amenities, implementing safety measures, and conducting awareness initiatives for both vendors and consumers (Aayushi Lyngwa & Bimal Kishore Sahoo, 2022). Women vendors, in particular, lack dedicated marketplaces, face police mistreatment, especially from minority groups from distant hill villages, and operate without vending licenses (Kamei, 2016). To address these issues, the government is investing in the development of new markets in Imphal and allocating spaces for both licensed and unlicensed vendors, centralizing vendor transactions in one location (Kamei, 2016). Local

authorities should also provide infrastructure support, including well-maintained restrooms, waste disposal, water supply, and vending facilities. Ensuring access to clean, safe water is critical for reducing foodborne illnesses linked to street food.

Promoting education on hygiene and safety is an effective way to improve street safety; the government should run education programs aimed at both the public and vendors. Additionally, safety protocols and guidelines should be developed to enhance overall security in street vending (Charles Muyanja, Leontina Nayiga, Brenda Namugumya, et al., 2011).

During lockdowns, many vendors received support from local organizations, churches, NGOs, restaurant owners, trade unions, and neighbours. Essential supplies and food deliveries helped sustain them. Trade unions have played a vital role during shutdowns by raising awareness of financial schemes, organizing seminars, and providing training. These lessons must be implemented effectively at local levels, including tribal areas, and future strategies should remember these measures (Aayushi Lyngwa & Bimal Kishore Sahoo, 2022).

Objectives of the study

- 1. To study the socio-economic profile of tribal women street entrepreneurs.
- 2. To identify the challenges that Tribal Women face during street vending.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study comprises of descriptive research design, which is mentioned below through the subheadings given hereunder.

Description of Tribal Women Street Entrepreneurs and Vending Zones in Jhansi City-Based on (MoSPI, 2024) and (ILO, 2023), nearly 90% of India's workforce participates in the informal sector, with smaller cities like Jhansi, especially in urban areas, heavily relying on informal work due to limited formal employment options. Jhansi, a tier-two city in Uttar Pradesh, depends significantly on its informal economy, particularly for marginalized groups. It has a population of approximately 1.999 million (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner & Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011). Jhansi's informal economy is influenced by its semi-urban landscape, historical trade routes, and limited industrial base. A significant proportion of the workforce engages in street vending, selling items like vegetables, clothes, and plastic goods. In Jhansi city, women street vendors operate in both stationary and mobile modes.

Jhansi city, located in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh, is home to a significant tribal population engaged in various informal economic activities. Among them, tribal women play a crucial role in sustaining household incomes through street-based micro-entrepreneurship. These women are often involved in physically demanding and skill-based occupations such as bartering utensils for old clothes, refurbishing and reselling second-hand garments, and crafting traditional items like stone grinders (silbatta) and iron utensils. Their work is typically carried out in public spaces such as street markets, weekly bazaars, and roadside vending spots.

Study Population- In this study, the focus is on tribal women street entrepreneurs, these entrepreneurs practised micro- level entrepreneurship in Jhansi, particularly those who engage in the barter of utensils for old clothes, which they subsequently clean, pack, and

resell, and tribal women who manufacture and sell iron utensils on the streets, as well as those who independently craft stone grinding tools (silbatta) and other kitchen utensils themselves. In this study we include Gujrati Kacchi, Baghri community women who indulge in street entrepreneurship, they sell these items either independently or along with their husbands in street markets. This study emphasised on analysing their socio-economic profiles and the various challenges they encounter in their economic activities. Data has been collected from 124 women, these women sell these items either independently or along with their husbands in street markets.

Sampling Technique- Random and Snowball Sampling was used, where from four major market areas of Jhansi City, these respondents were pitched.

Data Collection- Primary data collected through a field survey facilitated through an Unstructured Schedule in Jhansi City of Uttar Pradesh, India. The data collection was done in the year 2024.

Statistical Analysis- The data was analysed using a simple Descriptive table and percentage method, supported by images clicked during the field survey and a literature review to summarise the results.

The table below shows the socioeconomic and demographic factors of the 124 tribal street vendors surveyed in Jhansi. The information provides a basic overview of the respondents' background and living conditions by highlighting important variables such as age, marital status, education level, family structure, monthly income, and monthly expenditure.

Demographic Profile of Tribal Street Entrepreneurs in Jhansi City

Table 1- Demographic Profile of Tribal Women Street Entrepreneurs

					Std.		
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Deviation	Frequency	Percent
Age	124	18	60	34.52	0.91		
Below 25						22	17.74%
25 to 35						47	37.90%
35 to 45						32	25.81%
45 & above						23	18.55%
Marital							
Status	124	1	3	1.28	0.05		
Married						101	81.45%
Unmarried						11	8.87%
Widow						12	9.70%
Education							
Level	124	1	6	2.62	0.16		
No Formal							
Education						49	39.51%
Primary							
School						29	23.38%
Secondary School						34	27.42%
High School						11	8.88%
Intermediate						1	0.81%

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					Std.		
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Deviation	Frequency	Percent
Family Types	124	1	3	1.24	0.05		
Nuclear						100	80.64%
Joint						18	14.52%
Single Parent						6	4.84%
Monthly							
Income	124	1	4	2.49	0.08		
Below 5000						18	14.52%
5000-10000						49	39.52%
10000-15000						35	28.22%
Above 15000						22	17.74%
Monthly							
Expenditure	124	1	4	2.25	0.07		
Less than							
10000						22	17.74%
10000 -							
15000						59	47.58%
15000 -							
20000						34	24.42%
Above 20000						9	7.26%

Source- Field Survey

The demographic profile of tribal street entrepreneurs in Jhansi (N = 124) shows a mainly young to middle-aged group, with an average age of 34.52 years. About 37.90% are between 25 and 35 years old, and 25.81% are between 35 and 45. Most are married (81.45%), while a smaller percentage are widowed (9.70%) or unmarried (8.87%). Educational levels are generally low, with only 8.88% completing high school, 23.38% having primary education, and 39.51% lacking formal education. The majority, 14.52%, belong to nuclear families, followed by 14.52% in joint families and 4.84% in single-parent households. Regarding income, 39.52% of women earn between ₹5,000 and ₹10,000 monthly, 28.22% earn between ₹10,000 and ₹15,000, and 17.74% earn above ₹15,000. Many women spend more than they earn; 47.58% spend between ₹10,000 and ₹15,000, and 24.42% spend between ₹15,000 and ₹20,000, highlighting financial vulnerability. Overall, the data indicate limited education, modest income, and economic insecurity among this group, emphasizing the need for targeted socio-economic support for tribal women entrepreneurs.

Challenges Faced by Tribal Women Street Entrepreneurs

Tribal women street entrepreneurs walk a fine line—while offering a path to empowerment, they also face deep-rooted structural barriers like gender discrimination, ethnic marginalization, and class-based exclusions (Abebe, 2017; Maviya & Simbanegavi, 2024; Pasha et al., 2023). They encounter a variety of domestic, economic, gender, legal, regulatory, and workplace challenges that threaten their livelihoods and well-being.

1. Marginalization & Identity Intersectionality

Tribal women street vendors experience triple marginalization—stemming from their tribal identity, gender, and low socio-economic status—which hampers their access to resources and economic development (Jagati, 2024).

Community standards uphold strict gender roles. Women vendors often encounter discrimination from customers, competitors, and society at large, perpetuating stereotypes and reducing opportunities (Dimitrov, 2024). These norms also limit women's decision-making power within their households and discourage participation in activities outside traditional roles (Nayak & Nayak, 2025).

2. Limited Access to Capital & Finance

Financial inclusion is severely limited: lack of collateral, property ownership, and banking infrastructure make it hard to access credit. The main obstacle is a lack of funds (Maviya & Simbanegavi, 2024; Prabhakar et al., 2023). Over 80% depend on personal savings or informal loans because they are excluded from formal banking systems (Husain et al., 2015). Many turn to informal credit or microfinance, with mixed results. Collateral rules and bureaucratic hurdles worsen this gap. Female vendors mainly seek financing to invest in their businesses (Bhowmik & Saha, 2011).

3. Educational & Skill Gap

Illiteracy and poor schooling in tribal regions limit human capital development (Kaviraj & Raj, 2010; S. Temsusenla Ao, 2023; Singsit & Prasain, 2024). Limited formal education hampers their ability to learn entrepreneurial and financial skills (Khan et al., 2024). A lack of targeted training programs further hampers market adaptability and business growth (Majumdar & Mittal, 2024; Nayak & Nayak, 2025).

4. Legal and Institutional Challenges

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, exists, but enforcement remains weak at the street level. Many tribal women are unaware of their legal rights, leading to frequent evictions and a lack of formal recognition. About 70% are unaware of the Act, making them vulnerable to eviction and extortion by authorities (Mr. T.Krishna Kumar & Dr. R. Florence Bharathi, 2022; Ravichandran & Das, 2024). Moreover, harassment from municipal authorities, police, and local bodies is a major concern, with 18.75% encountering such issues (Banerjee, 2014; Ravichandran & Das, 2024). Limited formalization and participation in town vending committees add to market instability (Jamir & Soundari, 2022).

5. Infrastructure & Safety Concerns

Vendors in semi-urban areas face fewer challenges than those in city centers (Gehlot et al., 2023) but still lack basic infrastructure (Jamir & Soundari, 2022; Singsit & Prasain, 2024). Vending zones are often poorly enforced, and street vendors work in inadequate, overcrowded, and unsanitary spaces—often on street corners, sidewalks, or sheds—with limited access to clean water, toilets, or shelter, raising health risks like urinary and kidney infections and restricting personal care (Niumai, 2024; Odyuo & Thangkhiew, 2025; S. Temsusenla Ao, 2023).

6. Patriarchal Influence

The livelihoods of women vendors are heavily influenced by patriarchal norms that restrict their movement and job options, even in informal markets that offer flexibility. While women can make decisions, societal expectations and institutional pressures strongly influence their choices (Borborah & Das, 2022; Ravichandran & Das, 2024).

7. Vulnerability Factors

Their vulnerability stems from living conditions, mobility restrictions, and marital status, beyond income or health issues (Odyuo & Thangkhiew, 2025). Stable infrastructure, secure housing, adequate income, safe vending zones, and proactive policy enforcement are crucial for their well-being.

8. Limited Market Access & Technology Gaps

Many tribal entrepreneurs lack market linkages, with 90% not engaged in e-commerce. Limited awareness and digital exclusion hinder their ability to expand their business or enter broader markets. Lack of ICT access and Digital literacy restricts opportunities for growth or online presence (Makoza & Chigona, 2011; Neog & Sahoo, 2020).

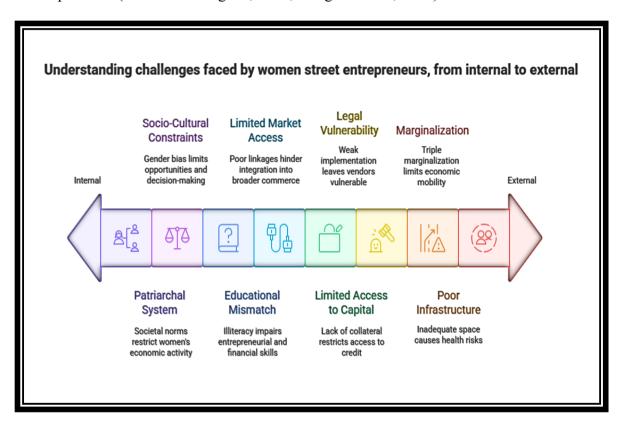


Figure- 3 Challenges faced by women street entrepreneurs



Picture-1

Rather than being in school or play, the children are engaged in physical labour. These children are also contributing to their household's street vending activities, as they are economically disadvantaged, so every supports the family's survival member efforts.

Source: Filed Survey

November, 2024 (Jhansi, UP)



Picture-2

Two tribal women engaged in preparing secondhand clothes for resale in the informal market. Two women are seen folding, sorting, and arranging old clothes systematically on the ground. Their focused engagement shows their role in the value addition process before selling. These women are part of the informal economy, where they often exchange old clothes for utensils and later clean, fold, and pack these clothes for resale in local street markets.

Source: Filed Survey

November, 2024 (Jhansi, UP)



Picture-3

Field interaction with tribal women street vendors in Jhansi City. In this image, a tribal woman who makes iron utensils and works in an informal street-based occupation often lacks access to basic infrastructure and support systems. Despite having a weak socio-economic profile, they demonstrate resilience and hard work to sustain their families, often with the help of their children.

Source: Filed Survey

November, 2024 (Jhansi, UP)



Picture-4

This image shows poor infrastructure in an urban tribal settlement. Their house is made up of Makeshift shelters, made from tarpaulins, plastic sheets, old fabric, and metal sheets. A shared handpump, the absence of sanitation, drainage, and electricity highlight poor living conditions. Overcrowding and limited access to clean water severely impact health, hygiene, and quality of life, especially for women and children in the community.

Source: Filed Survey November, 2024 (Jhansi, UP)



Picture-5

Micro-level entrepreneurship is practiced by tribal women to sustain livelihoods without formal employment. The woman seated in the image is working with handcrafted stone slabs and grinders (chakki or sil-batta). She is working under a makeshift tent of tarpaulin and wooden poles, offering minimal protection from weather conditions. The floor is uneven stone, and tools and finished products are placed on the ground, indicating a lack of formal workspace or infrastructure support.

Source: Filed Survey December, 2024 (Jhansi, UP)

CONCLUSION

The findings illustrate that tribal women engaged in micro-level street entrepreneurship, they come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The data indicate there, low levels of education, limited income, housing insecurity, and overall economic vulnerability. In conclusion, tribal women street vendors work tirelessly to sustain themselves and their families. Despite having a poor demographic profile, they often struggle to secure even two basic meals a day. In many cases, their children also assist in the work, rather than getting education. These women lack access to essential infrastructure, including clean drinking water, sanitation facilities, and stable housing.

This underscores the urgent need for focused socio-economic interventions to support tribal women entrepreneurs. The government, NGOs and Trade unions must actively protect and support them. Promoting education on hygiene and safety is an effective way to improve street safety; the government should run education programs aimed at both the public and vendors. Additionally, safety protocols and guidelines should be developed to enhance overall security in street vending (Charles Muyanja, Leontina Nayiga, Brenda Namugumya, et al., 2011). Gendered-specific policies must be frame and implemented and should address their economic and social vulnerabilities by improving workplace infrastructure, ensuring access to clean water, sanitation, and designated vending spaces. Women who face police harassment and don't have legal license need special attention.

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Conflict of Interest

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