Role of the Stand-Up India Scheme in Promoting Women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment

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Women entrepreneurship is an important key to inclusive and sustainable economic development in India. Nevertheless, limited access to funding has historically limited women's engagement in business and enterprise growth. In an effort to bridge the gap, the Government of India introduced the Stand-Up India (SUI) Scheme in 2016 with the target of promoting institutional credit to Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and women entrepreneurs. The present study specifically analyses the contribution of the scheme towards women's entrepreneurship and empowerment by analysing secondary data ranging from 2020–21 to 2024–25. Year-wise sanctioned accounts and sanctioned amounts of loans indicate a steady rise, and women beneficiaries demonstrate significant growth in both account numbers and sanctioned loan amounts. The reports note that women-owned accounts rose from 85,955 in 2020–21 to 234,255 in 2024–25 and the sanctioned loan amount went up from ₹19,594.27 crore to ₹56,701 crore for the same period. The trends indicate the enhanced role of the Stand-Up India Scheme in filling the gender financing gap and providing opportunities for women becoming independent entrepreneurs. The findings indicate that the scheme not only increased financial inclusion but also served as a driver for women's empowerment, leading to economic independence and inclusive development.

Key Words :- Stand-Up India Scheme, Women Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, Financial Inclusion

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is generally seen as one of the most potent tools to empower women economically as well as socially. Through entrepreneurial pursuits, women not only earn money and jobs for themselves but also significantly contribute to the overall socio-economic growth of the country. Women form almost half of India's population, but due to a variety of hindrances, their active engagement in entrepreneurship is minimal. Financial constraints, absence of collateral security, socio-cultural restrictions, restricted access to institutional credit, and insufficient business training are some of the major hurdles that limit women from attaining their entrepreneurial potential. This financial inclusion and economic participation gap prompted targeted interventions by the government to establish enabling mechanisms for women entrepreneurs.

With this pressing need, the Government of India initiated the Stand-Up India (SUI)

Scheme in April 2016. The scheme aims to provide institutional loans between ₹10 lakhs and ₹1 crore to one woman entrepreneur and one Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) entrepreneur per bank branch. This program is not limited to monetary support only; it involves provisions for handholding assistance, mentoring, and counselling to support the beneficiaries in setting up and running their businesses successfully. Merging finance inclusion with capacity development, the scheme aims to empower women especially and achieve inclusive growth throughout the economy.

The Stand-Up India Scheme is of special importance in the Indian context as it solves two critical issues at the same time: credit access and socio-economic empowerment. Women entrepreneurs, particularly residing in semi-urban and rural regions, frequently encounter difficulties in securing loans from conventional banking mechanisms. The scheme, thus, performs the role of a bridge by providing collateral-free loans, supported by government guarantee, that enhances confidence for financial institutions as well as women borrowers. Besides this, it favours businesses in industries like manufacturing, services, and trading, thus creating a broad range of opportunities for women.

A study of 2020–21 to 2024–25 secondary data indicates a steady increase in the number of women being covered under the scheme. As an example, the number of women account holders increased from 85,955 during 2020–21 to 2,34,255 during 2024–25, which is a significant increase. Concomitantly, the sanctioned amount for women increased from ₹19,594.27 crore in 2020–21 to ₹56,701.00 crore during 2024–25. The annual growth patterns further highlight the scheme's increasing reach. For instance, during 2023–24 and 2024–25, the number of women accounts increased by 33.46%, whereas the sanctioned amount showed a whopping growth of 40.87%. These statistics clearly indicate the scheme's increasing size and reach in supporting women's entrepreneurship.

Therefore, the Stand-Up India Scheme is pivotal in filling gender gaps in entrepreneurship, opening doors to formal finance for women, and empowering them to set up viable businesses. In addition to economic empowerment, the scheme promotes social empowerment by building women's confidence, decision-making capacity, and involvement in the process of development. Against this, the current study attempts to examine the contribution of the Stand-Up India Scheme to fostering women entrepreneurship and empowerment with an emphasis on the trends between the periods 2020–21 and 2024–25.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine year-wise trends in the performance of the Stand-Up India Scheme with special reference to women.
2. To study the percentage growth of women entrepreneurs and sanctioned amount to them.
3. To assess the contribution of the scheme towards the empowerment of women.

Review of Literature

- Dutta, J. (2018).[1] Women entrepreneurs and stand-up India scheme: a critical evaluation. *International Journal of Advanced Scientific Research and*

Management, *3*(7), 67-73.

The paper observes that while the scheme has broadened financial access and created opportunities, its implementation faces significant hurdles, including inadequate awareness among beneficiaries, bureaucratic complexities, and insufficient entrepreneurial training. These barriers limit the scheme's overall effectiveness in achieving inclusive growth. The study stresses that beyond financial assistance, institutional support, skill development, and mentoring networks are essential to nurture women entrepreneurs. By highlighting both achievements and shortcomings, the paper offers valuable insights into strengthening policy interventions for women's economic empowerment.

- Kaur, L., & Arora, J. (2022)[2] Women entrepreneurs and Stand-up India Scheme in Punjab: A critical review. *Gyan Management Journal*, *16*(1), 53-60.

Dutta (2018) evaluated the Stand Up India Scheme and argued that although it has widened financial opportunities for women entrepreneurs, structural barriers such as bureaucratic delays, insufficient awareness, and lack of entrepreneurial training hinder its success. Building on this, Kaur and Arora (2022) conducted a region-specific study in Punjab, revealing similar constraints including limited accessibility, procedural complexities, and absence of effective mentorship programs. Their findings underscore that the scheme's intended objectives remain partially unfulfilled due to weak implementation and inadequate support structures. Collectively, both studies highlight that beyond financial aid, comprehensive institutional support and skill development are crucial for sustainable women entrepreneurship.

- Kumar, R. (2018)[3] Stand up India programme – An address to financial problems of micro and small-scale manufacturing and production units. *International Journal of Mechanical and Production Engineering Research and Development, 8*(1), 1271–1278.

Kumar (2018) analyzed the Stand Up India Programme and emphasized its contribution to addressing financial issues of micro and small-scale production and manufacturing units. The paper clarified that credit access is one of the largest hurdles for small entrepreneurs, particularly women and marginalized communities. The scheme offers institutional assistance in the form of bank loans to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment. Kumar stressed that although the initiative has opened up opportunities, its success is subject to effective awareness, training, and monitoring. The study concluded that Stand Up India can be a significant instrument for inclusive growth if implemented properly.

- Giglio, F. (2021)[4] Access to credit and women entrepreneurs: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Economics and Finance, 13*(10), 12–12.

Giglio (2021) discussed numerous studies on female entrepreneurs and their issues in securing credit. The discussion indicated that women tend to encounter significant challenges in securing loans due to less collateral, social inhibitions, and gender discrimination by the lenders. The challenges make it difficult for women to establish or expand their businesses. The study further clarified that government schemes and microfinance enable women to secure loans easily. But financial support is not sufficient;

women also require training, advice, and networking opportunities. Giglio argued that women's entrepreneurship requires a combination of financial and non-financial assistance.

Data and Methodology

The research relies on secondary data gathered from official reports of the Stand-Up India Scheme. The data spans the years 2020–21 to 2024–25 and comprises the sanctioned accounts and sanctioned amount for SC, ST, and Women entrepreneurs. A comparative study is presented through tables and graphical presentation.

Table 1 Data of number of accounts and amount sanctioned

Year	Women – No. of A/cs	Women – Sanctioned Amount (in Cr.)
2020–21	85,955	19,594.27
2021–22	106,126	24,343.08
2022–23	127,165	29,297.69
2023–24	175,530	40,251.02
2024–25	234,255	56,701.00

(Source: Annual Report of dept. of Finance)

The above table indicates the performance of female beneficiaries of the Stand-Up India Scheme between the five years 2020–21 and 2024–25. There is a positive trend both in the number sanctioned accounts and the amount sanctioned, indicating growing outreach and coverage of the scheme in encouraging women entrepreneurship.[5]

In 2020–21, a total of 85,955 accounts were sanctioned with a value of ₹19,594.27 crore. The base year itself indicates such a high level of participation, but the pace picked up even more in the later years. By 2021–22, the accounts had reached 1,06,126, an increase of approximately 24% from before, while the sanctioned amount climbed to ₹24,343.08 crore, an approximate increase of 24% from the previous year.

The rising trend continued in 2022–23 with 1,27,165 accounts and a sanctioned amount of ₹29,297.69 crore. This proves to be a consistent growth in women entrepreneur credit support. The increase became more significant in 2023–24, with the accounts reaching 1,75,530 and the sanctioned amount crossing ₹40,251.02 crore, indicating increased institutional support and demand. Lastly, during 2024–25, the scheme reached its maximum performance with 2,34,255 accounts and ₹56,701 crore sanctioned, reflecting nearly a threefold increase in accounts and sanction amounts within only five years.

Overall, the statistics reflect that the Stand-Up India Scheme has emerged as a major facilitator of women's entrepreneurship, continuously improving financial inclusion and women's empowerment countrywide.

Year	Women – No. of A/cs	Increase in A/cs	Growth % (A/cs)	Women – Sanctioned Amount (Cr.)	Increase in Amount (Cr.)	Growth % (Amount)
2020–21	85,955	–	–	19,594.27	–	–
2021–22	1,06,126	20,171	23.47%	24,343.08	4,748.81	24.24%
2022–23	1,27,165	21,039	19.82%	29,297.69	4,954.61	20.35%
2023–24	1,75,530	48,365	38.03%	40,251.02	10,953.33	37.39%
2024–25	2,34,255	58,725	33.46%	56,701.00	16,449.98	40.87%

Findings

The study of the Stand-Up India Scheme between 2020–21 and 2024–25 reflects a remarkable increase in women's involvement and institutional finance accessibility. The accounts of women beneficiaries rose from 85,955 in 2020–21 to 2,34,255 in 2024–25 with an improvement of over 170 percent. Equally, the amount of sanctioned loans grew from ₹19,594.27 crore to ₹56,701 crore over the same period, showing an overall growth of a staggering almost 190 percent. The year-on-year studies show steady growth, with the most dramatic increase seen in 2023–24 and 2024–25, where both accounts and sanctioned values showed more than 30 percent increase each year. The trend shows increasing efficiency of the scheme in supporting women entrepreneurship and facilitating access to credit. The evidence clearly confirms that the Stand-Up India Scheme not only expanded financial inclusion but also served as a catalyst for women empowerment and economic independence through entrepreneurial development.

Conclusion

Stand-Up India Scheme has emerged as one of the critical instruments for the promotion of women entrepreneurship and empowerment of women in India. Aspects of SC, ST, and women helped to expand the boundaries of financial inclusion and bring self-reliance. Women have dominated continuously both in terms of account numbers and amounts sanctioned compared to other categories, which indicates that the scheme has a strong impact on women's participation in entrepreneurship.

Despite this, there are still issues related to awareness, capacity development, and handholding assistance. Focusing on these areas will further increase the efficiency of the scheme in pursuing its objective of inclusive growth and empowerment.

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