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An inter-state comparative analysis of women's entrepreneurship and access to finance in North-East India

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Abstract
Women's entrepreneurship contributes to employment, livelihoods and local economic development, but its scale and characteristics vary across states. This study examines inter-state differences in women's entrepreneurship and access to institutional enterprise finance in the eight North-Eastern states of India. Using recent state-level secondary data, the study compares women-owned micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), informal micro enterprises (IMEs), employment, investment, net turnover and participation in the Stand Up India scheme. A descriptive cross-sectional approach is employed, using seven derived indicators to assess enterprise structure, economic contribution and financing intensity. The results show that micro enterprises account for 99.38% of women-owned MSMEs in the region. Assam records the largest enterprise base and the highest aggregate employment, investment and turnover, while Tripura has the largest number of women-owned IMEs and the highest employment per MSME. Arunachal Pradesh records the highest investment and turnover per MSME. Women account for 58.69% of Stand Up India accounts and 57.90% of sanctioned finance, with considerable inter-state variation in average sanctions. The findings indicate that enterprise scale, economic contribution and institutional finance do not follow a common state-wise pattern, highlighting the need for differentiated approaches to women's enterprise development and finance.

Keywords: Women's entrepreneurship, Women owned MSMEs, Informal micro-enterprises, Institutional finance, Stand Up India, North-East India

Introduction
Women's entrepreneurship has become an important component of employment generation, livelihoods and local economic development in India. Women participate in economic activity through enterprises of different sizes and forms, ranging from formally registered MSMEs to small informal businesses. These enterprises, however, differ considerably in their capacity to generate employment, mobilise investment and generate turnover. Enterprise numbers alone therefore provide only a partial indication of women's participation in entrepreneurship; the structure of enterprises and the economic activity associated with them also need to be considered. Access to finance is an important part of this broader picture. Evidence from rural India indicates that proximity to formal banking facilities can influence participation in non-agricultural entrepreneurship, highlighting the role of financial infrastructure in entrepreneurial activity [1]. Women operating very small enterprises also continue to rely substantially on self-financing, while collateral requirements and institutional constraints can limit their access to formal sources of finance [2]. Research on Indian firms further indicates that gender and firm ownership are associated with differences in access to credit [3]. These findings suggest that the scale of women's entrepreneurship needs to be examined alongside the financial conditions under which enterprises are established and sustained.

This issue is particularly relevant to North-Eastern India, where enterprise and economic conditions differ substantially across states. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura vary in population size, market conditions, enterprise base and broader economic structure. Such differences may influence both the scale and form of women's entrepreneurship. The presence of informal micro-enterprises also adds an important dimension to the regional enterprise structure, particularly where entrepreneurial activity extends beyond formally registered enterprises. Studies from the region have likewise highlighted the importance of finance, education, training and institutional support in shaping women's entrepreneurial activity [4,5]. The economic significance of women-owned enterprises cannot be assessed from enterprise numbers alone. Employment, investment and net turnover provide complementary measures of the scale of economic activity associated with these enterprises. Examining these indicators alongside the number and structure of enterprises makes it possible to distinguish between states with a large enterprise base and those in which individual enterprises operate on a relatively larger or smaller scale. An inter-state comparison based on both aggregate and per-enterprise measures can therefore provide a more differentiated assessment of the economic contribution of women owned enterprises.

Finance represents a further dimension of this comparison. Participation in institutional enterprise finance may differ across states even where the number of women-owned enterprises is relatively similar. The Stand Up India scheme provides a useful basis for examining this dimension because information is available on both the number of accounts and the amount sanctioned to women. These measures capture different aspects of participation: a state may account for a relatively large share of women beneficiaries but a smaller share of the total sanctioned amount, or the two shares may be broadly comparable. Considering both measures therefore provides a more complete assessment of women's participation in institutional enterprise finance. Although research on women's entrepreneurship and access to finance in India has expanded, evidence remains fragmented across individual states, sectors and types of enterprise. Studies have examined credit access among women entrepreneurs [6-8], while research from North-East India has focused on particular sectors and entrepreneurial groups [4,5]. Less attention has been given to a common state-level assessment of all eight North-Eastern states that considers registered women-owned MSMEs alongside informal micro-enterprises and examines their employment, investment and turnover. Similarly, institutional enterprise finance has rarely been considered within the same comparative framework using both women's share of beneficiaries and their share of sanctioned finance.

The present study addresses this gap through an inter-state descriptive comparison of the eight North-Eastern states. It examines the scale and structure of women's entrepreneurship using women-owned MSMEs and informal micro enterprises, assesses the associated employment, investment and net turnover of women owned MSMEs, and examines women's participation in institutional enterprise finance through the Stand Up India scheme. Through consideration of these dimensions together, the study provides a comparative assessment of women's entrepreneurship in North-East India that goes beyond enterprise counts to consider enterprise structure, economic contribution and participation in formal enterprise finance.

Review of literature

Research on women's entrepreneurship in India has examined the factors shaping entry into business, the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs and the role of finance in supporting enterprise activity. Financial access is particularly relevant because the availability of formal credit and banking facilities can influence whether individuals engage in non-agricultural entrepreneurship. Garg *et al*. [1], using village level Economic Census data, found that proximity to a banked centre increased non-agricultural entrepreneurship in rural India. Their analysis also showed that the effect for women was associated with the uptake of institutional credit, although the strength of this relationship varied with local social norms. The financing constraints faced by women-owned enterprises have also been documented at the enterprise level. The International Finance Corporation [2] reported substantial reliance on self-financing among women-owned very small enterprises in India and identified limited access to formal finance, collateral requirements and institutional constraints as important barriers. Chaudhuri *et al*. [6] similarly examined the relationship between gender, small-firm ownership and access to credit in India, showing that access to formal finance cannot be understood independently of the characteristics of the entrepreneur and the firm. Maurya and Mohanty [7] further examined spatial and temporal variation in credit access among unorganised women entrepreneurs, pointing to differences in the financial environment within which women owned enterprises operate.

The relationship between location and financial access has received more recent attention. Mallick and Ramachandran [3], using Sixth Economic Census data covering more than eight million women-owned micro and small enterprises, compared rural and urban women entrepreneurs and considered both formal and informal sources of finance. Their findings challenge the assumption that urban location necessarily provides women entrepreneurs with better access to finance: rural women entrepreneurs in their analysis had greater access, partly through government assistance, non-institutional lenders and self help groups. Dutta and Mallick [8] likewise examined perceived financial constraints among majority-female-owned Indian firms, extending the discussion beyond the availability of credit to the constraints perceived by women-owned businesses. Evidence from North-Eastern India points to the importance of these issues in a regional setting, although the existing literature is more sector and location specific. Goswami *et al*. [4], based on primary data from 332 handloom micro-entrepreneurs in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya, found that education, access to credit, training and income were associated with financial risk attitudes. The effects of credit and training were particularly pronounced among female micro-entrepreneurs. Sharma and Parida [5], examining female entrepreneurs in North-East India, also highlighted the role of education, finance and institutional support in women's entrepreneurial activity. These studies are useful for understanding the conditions surrounding women's entrepreneurship in the region, but their focus is primarily on individual entrepreneurs and particular sectors rather than on the overall enterprise structure of the eight states.

The existing literature therefore provides evidence on several important dimensions of women's entrepreneurship: the relationship between financial access and enterprise activity [1], financing constraints among very small and women-owned firms [2, 6-8], and the influence of credit, training and institutional conditions in the North-Eastern region [4, 5]. What remains less developed is a common state-level comparison that brings these dimensions together. In particular, there is limited evidence comparing all eight North-Eastern states using recent data on formally registered women-owned MSMEs alongside informal micro-enterprises, while also considering employment, investment and turnover associated with the registered enterprises. A further gap concerns the treatment of institutional enterprise finance. Existing studies have largely examined access to finance as a constraint, determinant or characteristic of individual enterprises. Less attention has been given to the distribution of women's participation in a formal enterprise-finance programme across the states of North-East India. Comparing both the share of women beneficiaries and the share of sanctioned finance is useful because the two measures capture different aspects of participation and may not produce the same inter-state pattern.

The present study builds on this literature through an inter-state descriptive comparison of the eight North-Eastern states. It combines information on women-owned MSMEs and informal micro-enterprises with measures of employment, investment and net turnover, and examines women's participation in Stand Up India through both beneficiary and sanctioned amount measures. The study consequently shifts the focus from individual level or sector-specific evidence to a broader state-level comparison of enterprise structure, economic activity and institutional enterprise finance.

Research Objectives

The present study aims to

1. Examine the scale and structure of women's entrepreneurship across the eight states of North-East India, with particular reference to women-owned micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and informal micro enterprises (IMEs).
2. Assess the economic contribution of women-owned enterprises in terms of employment generation, investment and turnover across the eight states of North-East India.
3. Examine women's access to institutional enterprise finance through the Stand Up India scheme, as reflected in the number of women beneficiaries and the amount of finance sanctioned, and assess inter-state differences.

Materials and Methods

Study Area and Research Design

The analysis covers the eight states of North-East India, which includes; Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. A descriptive cross-sectional design is used to compare women's entrepreneurship and access to enterprise finance across the region. The analysis examines three related aspects; the scale and structure of women owned enterprises, their economic contribution, and women's participation in institutional enterprise finance. The comparison is based on the latest available state-level data for the selected indicators. As the underlying datasets do not form a common annual series, the study is confined to an inter-state assessment and does not examine temporal trends or growth.

Data Source and Materials

The study is based primarily on secondary data published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India, in *Women and Men in India 2024*. The datasets provide state-wise information on women-owned micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), women-owned informal micro-enterprises (IMEs), and women's participation in the Stand Up India scheme. The MSME data cover enterprises registered and classified under Udyam between 1 July 2020 and 31 October 2024 [9]. They include information on enterprise category, employment, investment and net turnover. The IME data relate to the position as on 31 October 2024 and provide the number of women owned informal micro-enterprises and associated employment. The Stand Up India data refer to the position as on 30 November 2024 and provide the number of accounts and sanctioned amounts, including the corresponding figures for women.

The different reference periods are considered when interpreting the results. In particular, the MSME figures represent registrations and classifications accumulated during the specified period and are treated as a stock of registered/classified enterprises rather than annual observations. Consequently, annual growth rates are not calculated and no longitudinal trends are inferred.

Variables and Indicators

The analysis considers the following variables.

For women's entrepreneurship, the study considers:

1. number of women owned MSMEs
2. distribution of women owned MSMEs across micro, small and medium categories and
3. number of women owned IMEs.

The economic contribution of women owned enterprises is assessed through:

1. employment generated
2. investment and
3. net turnover.

Women's access to enterprise finance is assessed through:

1. number of women beneficiaries under Stand Up India
2. women's share of total Stand Up India accounts
3. amount of finance sanctioned to women and
4. women's share of the total sanctioned amount.

Derived Indicators

To facilitate meaningful inter-state comparison, selected indicators are derived from the reported data.

1. The proportion of women owned MSMEs classified as micro enterprises is calculated as:

$$\text{Micro}-\text{enterprise share} = \frac{\text{Women owned micro enterprises}}{\text{Total Women owned MSMEs}} \times 100$$

2. Employment per women owned MSME is calculated as:

$$\text{Employment per women}-\text{owned MSME} = \frac{\text{Employment generated by women owned MSMEs}}{\text{Number of Women owned MSMEs}}$$

3. Investment per women owned MSME is calculated as:

$$\text{Investment per women owned MSME} = \frac{\text{Total Investment in women owned MSMEs}}{\text{Number of Women owned MSMEs}}$$

4. Turnover per women owned MSME has been calculated as:

$$\text{Turnover per women owned MSME} = \frac{\text{Net Turnover of women owned MSMEs}}{\text{Number of Women owned MSMEs}}$$

5. For access to enterprise finance, the proportion of Stand Up India accounts belonging to women is calculated as:

$$\text{Women's account share} = \frac{\text{Women's Stand Up India accounts}}{\text{Total Stand Up India Accounts}} \times 100$$

6. The share of the sanctioned amount received by women is calculated as:

$$\text{Women's sanctioned amount share} = \frac{\text{Amount Santioned to women}}{\text{Total amount Santioned}} \times 100$$

(vii)The average amount sanctioned per women beneficiary is calculated as:

$$\text{Average finance per women beneficiary} = \frac{\text{Amount sanctioned to women}}{\text{Number of Women beneficiaries}}$$

Analytical Approach

The analysis is conducted in three stages. First, the scale and structure of women's entrepreneurship are examined through the number and composition of women owned MSMEs and IMEs. Second, the economic contribution of women owned enterprises is assessed using employment, investment and turnover, together with the derived measures of employment, investment and turnover per enterprise. Third, women's access to enterprise finance is examined through participation in Stand Up India, considering both the number of women beneficiaries and the amount of finance sanctioned.

Inter-state differences are examined using absolute values, percentages, ratios and derived indicators. State wise comparisons and rankings are used to identify differences in entrepreneurial scale, enterprise structure, economic contribution and access to institutional finance. A composite index is not constructed because the indicators represent distinct dimensions of women's entrepreneurship and financial access, and assigning arbitrary weights could obscure rather than clarify inter-state differences. Inferential statistical tests are also not employed because the study is designed as a descriptive comparative assessment of the eight states rather than a sample-based analysis intended for statistical inference.

Result and Discussion

1. Scale and Structure of Women's Entrepreneurship

Table 1 shows that women-owned MSMEs in North-East India are characterised by considerable inter-state variation in scale but a highly uniform enterprise-size structure. Across the eight states, 300,688 women owned MSMEs were registered and classified under Udyam during 1 July 2020-31 October 2024. Of these, 298,807 were micro enterprises, accounting for 99.38% of the regional total. Small and medium enterprises together accounted for only 1,881 units. The dominance of micro enterprises is consistent across all eight states, with their share ranging from 98.57% in Arunachal Pradesh to 99.69% in Manipur and Nagaland.

Table 1: Scale and Structure of Women-owned MSMEs in North-East India

State	Micro	Small	Medium	Total MSMEs	Micro share (%)
Arunachal Pradesh	5,234	70	06	5,310	98.57
Assam	192,920	1,206	86	194,212	99.33
Manipur	36,470	104	10	36,584	99.69
Meghalaya	10,566	97	13	10,676	98.97
Mizoram	14,615	67	03	14,685	99.52
Nagaland	11,657	33	03	11,693	99.69
Sikkim	4,270	30	02	4,302	99.26
Tripura	23,075	142	09	23,226	99.35
North-East India	298,807	1,749	132	300,688	99.38

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India, Women and Men in India 2024.
Note: Figures represent women-owned MSMEs registered and classified under Udyam from 1 July 2020 to 31 October 2024.

The scale of women owned MSMEs, however, differs markedly across states. Assam records 194,212 enterprises, including 192,920 micro enterprises, and alone accounts for approximately 64.6% of the regional total. Manipur follows with 36,584 enterprises and Tripura with 23,226. In contrast, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh record 4,302 and 5,310 enterprises, respectively. Thus, the regional distribution is strongly concentrated in Assam, whereas the smaller states contribute relatively modest numbers of women-owned MSMEs. The contrast between scale and structure is noteworthy: states differ substantially in the number of women-owned enterprises, but show little difference in the proportion constituted by micro enterprises. The presence of women owned enterprises beyond the micro category remains limited. Assam, despite having the largest enterprise base, records 1,206 small and 86 medium enterprises. The corresponding figures are 142 and 9 in Tripura and 104 and 10 in Manipur. At the other end of the distribution, Sikkim has only 30 small and 2 medium enterprises. The concentration of women owned MSMEs at the micro level therefore extends across states irrespective of the size of their overall enterprise base.

The figures indicate that the registered women-owned MSME base in North-East India is broad in numerical terms but overwhelmingly concentrated at the micro-enterprise level. This distinction is important for assessing the nature of women's entrepreneurship in the region, since a large number of registered enterprises does not necessarily imply a substantial presence in the small and medium segments. At the same time, the cross-sectional nature of the data does not permit conclusions about enterprise graduation, expansion or failure over time. The findings instead establish the size structure of the registered women-owned MSME base, against which subsequent differences in employment, investment, turnover and access to finance can be examined.

2. Informal Women's Entrepreneurship and Employment

Table 2 shows substantial inter-state variation in women owned informal micro-enterprises (IMEs) and the employment associated with them. Across the eight North-Eastern states, 304,594 women-owned IMEs were reported, providing employment to 349,712 persons. The distribution of IMEs is highly concentrated in a few states. Tripura records the largest number, with 133,410 women-owned IMEs, followed by Assam with 105,555 and Manipur with 27,227. Together, these three states account for a large majority of the women-owned IMEs reported for the region. At the other end, Sikkim records 4,724 IMEs, while Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh report 5,261 and 5,836, respectively. The pattern therefore indicates considerable differences in the scale of informal women's entrepreneurship across the eight states.

Table 2: Women-owned informal micro-enterprises and associated employment in North-East India.

State	Women owned IMEs	Employment associated with women owned IMEs
Arunachal Pradesh	5,836	7,004
Assam	105,555	121,190
Manipur	27,227	34,860
Meghalaya	5,261	6,079
Mizoram	8,474	10,080
Nagaland	14,107	16,118
Sikkim	4,724	5,195
Tripura	133,410	149,186
North-East India	304,594	349,712

Source: MoSPI, Government of India, Women and Men in India 2024.
Note: Figures refer to the position as on 31 October 2024.

The employment figures broadly follow the distribution of enterprises, but the relationship is not proportional across states. Tripura records 149,186 persons associated with women-owned IMEs, the highest in the region, while Assam records 121,190. Manipur accounts for 34,860, followed by Nagaland with 16,118 and Mizoram with 10,080. The smaller IME bases in Sikkim, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh are associated with 5,195, 6,079 and 7,004 persons, respectively. Thus, states with larger numbers of women-owned informal enterprises generally also generate more associated employment, although the employment associated with each enterprise varies. A comparison of the two columns further shows that the number of persons associated with IMEs exceeds the number of enterprises in every state. The regional figures correspond to roughly 1.15 persons per women owned IME. The state-level ratios range from about 1.10 in Sikkim to 1.28 in Manipur. This suggests that women-owned IMEs are predominantly very small-scale activities in terms of employment, with most enterprises associated with only a limited number of workers. Manipur records the relatively higher employment intensity among the eight states, whereas Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh show comparatively lower ratios.

The contrast between Tripura and Assam is particularly noteworthy. Tripura has fewer women owned registered MSMEs than Assam, as shown in Table 1, but it records substantially more women owned IMEs. This indicates that the scale of women's informal enterprise activity does not simply mirror the size of the registered MSME sector. The two forms of enterprise activity therefore capture different parts of women's participation in entrepreneurship. While the registered MSME data point to Assam as the dominant state in terms of formal enterprise numbers, the IME data place Tripura at the forefront of informal women-owned enterprise activity. The findings also suggest that enterprise registration status is important when assessing the overall scale of women's entrepreneurship in the region. The substantial number of women-owned IMEs reported across the eight states indicates that focusing only on registered MSMEs would leave out a sizeable segment of women's enterprise activity. At the same time, the data should be interpreted as a cross-sectional picture of informal micro-enterprises as reported for 31 October 2024 and do not establish whether enterprises subsequently formalise, expand or exit. The evidence instead highlights the continuing importance of small-scale informal enterprise activity in the structure of women's entrepreneurship in North-East India.

3. Economic Contribution of Women Owned MSMEs

Table 3 extends the comparison from the number of women-owned MSMEs to their associated employment, investment and net turnover. The regional total of 300,688 women-owned MSMEs is associated with 1,801,890 persons in employment, Rs 5,805.54 crore in investment and Rs 54,783.07 crore in net turnover. The state-wise distribution, however, shows that the economic contribution of women owned MSMEs is highly uneven across the region. This unevenness is closely related to differences in the size of the enterprise base, but the per enterprise indicators show that the relationship is not uniform.

Table 3: Economic contribution of Women-owned MSMEs and enterprise level indicators in North-East India.

State	Women owned MSMEs (No.)	Employment (No.)	Investment (Rs Crore)	Net turnover (Rs Crore)	Employment per MSME	Investment per MSME (Rs Crore)	Turnover per MSME (Rs Crore)
Arunachal Pradesh	5,310	39,011	320.42	1950.67	7.35	0.0603	0.3674
Assam	194,212	1,142,351	2,928.71	37,223.42	5.88	0.0151	0.1917
Manipur	36,584	227,470	950.10	4,502.72	6.22	0.0260	0.1231
Meghalaya	10,676	42,405	341.97	3,587.77	3.97	0.0320	0.3361
Mizoram	14,685	68,603	578.02	1587.64	4.67	0.0394	0.1081
Nagaland	11,693	65,062	245.11	969.93	5.56	0.0210	0.0829
Sikkim	4,302	23,018	148.59	781.50	5.35	0.0345	0.1817
Tripura	23,226	193,970	292.62	4,179.42	8.35	0.0126	0.1799
North-East India	300,688	1,801,890	5,805.54	54,783.07	5.99	0.0193	0.1822

Source: MoSPI, Government of India, Women and Men in India 2024.
Note: Investment and net turnover are reported in Rs crore. Per-enterprise indicators are derived from the reported state-level values.

Assam dominates the region in absolute terms. Its 194,212 women-owned MSMEs account for 1,142,351 persons in employment, Rs 2,928.71 crore in investment and Rs 37,223.42 crore in net turnover. Thus, Assam contributes the largest absolute amounts across all three economic measures. This is consistent with its much larger women-owned MSME base, which accounts for nearly two-thirds of all such enterprises in the region. Manipur ranks next in employment, with 227,470 persons associated with 36,584 women owned MSMEs, while its investment of Rs 950.10 crore and turnover of Rs 4,502.72 crore are also among the higher state level values. Tripura presents a different pattern; despite having only 23,226 women owned MSMEs, it records 193,970 persons in employment and a net turnover of Rs 4,179.42 crore. Its relatively large employment figure in relation to its enterprise base makes it particularly noteworthy. The per-enterprise measures provide a different perspective from these absolute values. Employment per MSME ranges from 3.97 persons in Meghalaya to 8.35 persons in Tripura, with the regional average at 5.99. Tripura therefore has the highest employment associated with each women-owned MSME among the eight states, followed by Arunachal Pradesh at 7.35. Meghalaya and Mizoram, at 3.97 and 4.67 respectively, have comparatively lower employment per enterprise. The variation indicates that differences in enterprise numbers alone do not fully capture the employment dimension of women-owned MSMEs.

Investment per MSME shows an even wider difference in average investment levels. Arunachal Pradesh records the highest value at Rs 0.0603 crore per enterprise, equivalent to about Rs 6.03 lakh, followed by Mizoram at Rs 0.0394 crore and Sikkim at Rs 0.0345 crore. Tripura records the lowest value at Rs 0.0126 crore per enterprise, while Assam records Rs 0.0151 crore. The pattern is important because Assam, despite having the largest total investment, does not have a high investment figure when measured per enterprise. Its large aggregate investment is therefore primarily associated with the very large number of women-owned MSMEs rather than a high average investment per enterprise. A similar contrast is visible in net turnover. Arunachal Pradesh records the highest turnover per MSME at Rs 0.3674 crore, followed closely by Meghalaya at Rs 0.3361 crore. Mizoram has the lowest value at Rs 0.1081 crore. Assam, despite generating by far the highest total turnover of Rs 37,223.42 crore, records only Rs 0.1917 crore per enterprise, below Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. This distinction between aggregate and per-enterprise performance is central to interpreting the regional pattern: a state may have a large economic contribution because it has many enterprises, without having a correspondingly high average scale of individual enterprises.

The comparison of the three per-enterprise indicators also reveals that the dimensions of enterprise scale do not necessarily move together. Tripura records the highest employment per MSME but the lowest investment per MSME, whereas Arunachal Pradesh combines relatively high employment per enterprise with the highest investment and turnover per enterprise. Meghalaya has the lowest employment per MSME among the eight states but the second-highest turnover per enterprise. These differences suggest that women-owned MSMEs across the region operate at varied scales and with different relationships between employment, investment and turnover. The indicators should therefore be read as complementary measures rather than as a single measure of enterprise performance. The findings in Table 3, shows that the economic significance of women-owned MSMEs in North-East India has two distinct dimensions. Assam is the principal contributor in absolute terms because of the exceptional size of its women owned MSME base, while several smaller states display higher values on one or more per enterprise measures. The findings therefore caution against assessing women's entrepreneurship solely by the number of enterprises or aggregate economic totals. At the same time, the per-enterprise indicators are descriptive measures of average enterprise scale and should not be interpreted as measures of profitability or productivity. The cross-sectional nature of the data also prevents any assessment of whether these differences reflect differences in enterprise growth, persistence or changes over time.

4. Women's Participation in Institutional Enterprise Finance

Table 4 presents women's participation in the Stand Up India scheme across the eight North-Eastern states in terms of the number of accounts, the share of accounts held by women, the amount sanctioned to women and their share of total sanctioned finance. The regional figures show that women account for 4,820 of the 8,214 Stand Up India accounts, representing 58.69% of the total. They received Rs 1,026.80 crore out of the total sanctioned amount of Rs 1,773.41 crore, giving women a 57.90% share of sanctioned finance. Thus, at the regional level, women's share of accounts is broadly comparable with their share of sanctioned finance, although the relationship differs considerably across states.

Table 4: Women's Participation in Stand Up India and Enterprise Finance in North-East India.

State	Total accounts	Women's accounts	Women's account Share (%)	Total sanctioned Amount (Rs Crore)	Amount sanctioned to women (Rs Crore)	Women's Sanctioned Amount Share (%)	Average Amount Sanctioned Per woman (Rs lakh)
Arunachal Pradesh	869	283	32.57	169.06	56.30	33.30	19.89
Assam	3,453	2,587	74.92	786.57	584.21	74.27	22.58
Manipur	461	300	65.08	100.28	61.93	61.76	20.64
Meghalaya	633	303	47.87	146.90	70.74	48.16	23.35
Mizoram	649	241	37.13	153.03	53.24	34.79	22.09
Nagaland	916	377	41.16	203.15	75.17	37.00	19.94
Sikkim	641	326	50.86	99.41	49.10	49.39	15.06
Tripura	592	403	68.07	115.01	76.11	66.18	18.89
North-East India	8,214	4,820	58.69	1,773.41	1,026.80	57.90	21.30

Source: MoSPI, Government of India, Women and Men in India 2024.

Note: Stand Up India data refer to the position as on 30 November 2024. Average amount sanctioned per woman is calculated from the amount sanctioned to women and the number of women's accounts; amounts are converted from Rs crore to Rs lakh.

The state wise figures reveal substantial variation in women's participation. Assam records the largest number of women's accounts, with 2,587 out of 3,453 total accounts, giving women an account share of 74.92%. It also records the largest amount sanctioned to women, at Rs 584.21 crore, corresponding to 74.27% of the total sanctioned amount in the state. Tripura follows a similar pattern, with women accounting for 68.07% of accounts and 66.18% of the sanctioned amount. Manipur also records relatively high participation, with women holding 65.08% of accounts and receiving 61.76% of the sanctioned amount. These figures indicate that women constitute a substantial share of beneficiaries in these states and that their participation in the number of accounts is accompanied by a broadly comparable share of sanctioned finance. The position is markedly different in Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. In Arunachal Pradesh, women hold 32.57% of the accounts and receive 33.30% of the sanctioned amount, while in Mizoram the corresponding shares are 37.13% and 34.79%. Nagaland also records a relatively low women's account share of 41.16%, although its sanctioned-amount share is slightly lower at 37.00%. These states therefore show comparatively lower representation of women within the Stand Up India account base than Assam, Tripura and Manipur.

The comparison between account share and sanctioned-amount share provides an additional dimension to the analysis. In several states, the two shares are relatively close, suggesting that women's representation in the number of accounts is broadly reflected in their share of sanctioned finance. In Tripura, for example, women account for 68.07% of accounts and 66.18% of the sanctioned amount. In Assam, the corresponding figures are 74.92% and 74.27%. By contrast, Sikkim records a women's account share of 50.86% but a lower sanctioned-amount share of 49.39%, while Nagaland shows a larger difference between the two measures, with women holding 41.16% of accounts but receiving 37.00% of the sanctioned amount. These differences suggest that participation by number of accounts does not always translate into an equivalent share of the total finance sanctioned. The average amount sanctioned per woman further highlights differences in the scale of financing. Meghalaya records the highest average sanction at Rs 23.35 lakh per woman, followed by Assam at Rs 22.58 lakh and Mizoram at Rs 22.09 lakh. Sikkim records the lowest average at Rs 15.06 lakh. The remaining states fall within a relatively narrow range, from Rs 18.89 lakh in Tripura to Rs 20.64 lakh in Manipur. The variation indicates that differences in women's participation in institutional finance are not confined to the number of beneficiaries; the average size of sanctioned finance also differs across states.

Table 4 indicates considerable inter-state differences in women's participation in institutional enterprise finance. Assam combines the largest absolute scale with a high representation of women, while Tripura and Manipur also show relatively high women's participation. Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland have lower women's shares of accounts and sanctioned finance. At the same time, the average sanction figures demonstrate that the scale of finance available to individual women beneficiaries varies independently of the number of women participating in the scheme. The results therefore suggest that women's access to institutional enterprise finance should be assessed through both participation and the scale of financing, rather than through beneficiary numbers alone.

5. Inter-State Comparison of Women's Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Finance

Table 5 brings together the seven derived indicators to provide a comparative picture of women's entrepreneurship and enterprise finance across the eight North-Eastern states. The comparison shows that the states do not occupy the same position across the different dimensions. While the micro-enterprise share is uniformly high across the region, substantial differences are evident in employment per MSME, investment and turnover per MSME, and women's participation in institutional enterprise finance. The results therefore point to a differentiated rather than uniform pattern of women's entrepreneurship across the region.

Table 5: Inter-state comparison of derived indicators of women's entrepreneurship and enterprise finance in North-East India

State	Micro enterprise share (%)	Employment/ MSME	Investment/MSME (Rs crore)	Turnover/MSME (Rs Crore)	Women's account share (%)	Women's sanctioned amount share (%)	Average sanction/ Woman (Rslakh)
Arunachal Pradesh	98.57	7.35	0.0603	0.3674	32.57	33.30	19.89
Assam	99.33	5.88	0.0151	0.1917	74.92	74.27	22.58
Manipur	99.69	6.22	0.0260	0.1231	65.08	61.76	20.64
Meghalaya	98.97	3.97	0.0320	0.3361	47.87	48.16	23.35
Mizoram	99.52	4.67	0.0394	0.1081	37.13	34.79	22.09
Nagaland	99.69	5.56	0.0210	0.0829	41.16	37.00	19.94
Sikkim	99.26	5.35	0.0345	0.1817	50.86	49.39	15.06
Tripura	99.35	8.35	0.0126	0.1799	68.07	66.18	18.89

Source: Derived from Tables 1, 3 and 4.

The micro-enterprise share shows the greatest degree of similarity among the states. It ranges from 98.57% in Arunachal Pradesh to 99.69% in both Manipur and Nagaland. The narrow range indicates that the overwhelming concentration of women-owned MSMEs in the micro category, identified in Table 1, is a region wide structural feature rather than a characteristic of only a few states. Differences between states therefore become more visible when the analysis moves beyond enterprise composition to measures of enterprise scale and financing. Employment per MSME shows considerably greater variation. Tripura records the highest value at 8.35 persons per MSME, followed by Arunachal Pradesh at 7.35 and Manipur at 6.22. Meghalaya records the lowest value at 3.97, while Mizoram has 4.67. This indicates that the number of persons associated with an average women owned MSME differs substantially across states. Tripura's position is particularly notable because its high employment per enterprise occurs despite its relatively low investment per MSME.

Investment per MSME presents a different ordering. Arunachal Pradesh has the highest value at Rs 0.0603 crore per enterprise, followed by Mizoram at Rs 0.0394 crore and Sikkim at Rs 0.0345 crore. Tripura has the lowest value at Rs 0.0126 crore, closely followed by Assam at Rs 0.0151 crore. The contrast with employment per MSME is noteworthy. Tripura combines the highest employment per enterprise with the lowest average investment, whereas Arunachal Pradesh records both relatively high employment and the highest investment per enterprise. The figures therefore do not indicate a uniform relationship between the average employment and investment associated with women owned MSMEs. Turnover per MSME further changes the relative position of the states. Arunachal Pradesh records the highest value at Rs 0.3674 crore per enterprise, followed by Meghalaya at Rs 0.3361 crore. Assam records Rs 0.1917 crore and Sikkim Rs 0.1817 crore, while Nagaland has the lowest value at Rs 0.0829 crore. Thus, a high number of women owned MSMEs does not necessarily correspond to a high turnover per enterprise. Assam, despite its dominant enterprise base and the highest aggregate turnover, occupies a middle position when turnover is expressed on a per-enterprise basis. Conversely, smaller states such as Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya record substantially higher average turnover per enterprise.

The finance indicators reveal another pattern of inter-state differentiation. Women's account share under Stand Up India is highest in Assam at 74.92%, followed by Tripura at 68.07% and Manipur at 65.08%. Arunachal Pradesh has the lowest share at 32.57%, followed by Mizoram at 37.13% and Nagaland at 41.16%. The sanctioned amount shares broadly follow the same ordering: Assam records 74.27%, Tripura 66.18% and Manipur 61.76%, whereas Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland record 33.30%, 34.79% and 37.00%, respectively. This broad correspondence suggests that states with a higher representation of women among Stand Up India accounts also tend to have a higher share of sanctioned finance going to women. Average sanction per woman, however, produces a different ordering. Meghalaya records the highest average amount at Rs 23.35 lakh, followed by Assam at Rs 22.58 lakh and Mizoram at Rs 22.09 lakh. Sikkim records the lowest at Rs 15.06 lakh, while Tripura stands at Rs 18.89 lakh. The variation demonstrates that a higher proportion of women among beneficiaries does not necessarily imply a larger average amount sanctioned to each woman. Meghalaya, for example, has a substantially lower women's account share than Assam and Tripura but records the highest average sanction per woman.

The seven indicators show that the inter-state differences cannot be reduced to a single hierarchy of women's entrepreneurship. Tripura stands out for employment per MSME and relatively high participation in institutional finance, while Arunachal Pradesh records the highest investment and turnover per MSME. Assam combines overwhelming scale with high women's participation in Stand Up India, but its per enterprise investment and turnover are more moderate. Meghalaya has relatively low employment per MSME but high turnover and the highest average sanction per woman. Sikkim, Mizoram and Nagaland occupy intermediate or lower positions on different indicators rather than forming a single homogeneous group. The synthesis therefore reinforces an important feature of the regional picture: scale, enterprise intensity and financial participation represent related but distinct dimensions of women's entrepreneurship. A state with many women-owned enterprises is not necessarily the state with the largest average enterprise scale, while a high share of women beneficiaries in institutional finance does not necessarily correspond to the highest average financing per woman. The inter-state comparison consequently supports a multidimensional assessment of women's entrepreneurship in North-East India rather than a single ranking of states.

Conclusion

The study shows that women's entrepreneurship in North-East India is substantial in numerical terms but overwhelmingly concentrated in micro enterprises, which constitute 99.38% of the region's women-owned MSME base. Considerable inter-state differences are evident in the scale and nature of entrepreneurship. Assam accounts for nearly 65% of women-owned MSMEs and records the highest aggregate employment, investment and turnover, whereas Tripura has the largest number of women-owned informal micro-enterprises and the highest employment per MSME. Arunachal Pradesh records the highest investment and turnover per MSME, illustrating that a smaller enterprise base can nevertheless be associated with relatively higher enterprise-level economic indicators.

Women's participation in institutional enterprise finance also varies considerably across states. At the regional level, women account for 58.69% of Stand Up India accounts and 57.90% of sanctioned finance, but the average amount sanctioned per woman ranges from Rs 15.06 lakh in Sikkim to Rs 23.35 lakh in Meghalaya. These differences show that women's access to enterprise finance cannot be assessed only by the number or share of beneficiaries; the scale of financing is equally important. The findings establish a differentiated pattern of women's entrepreneurship across North-East India, in which enterprise scale, employment generation, investment, turnover and financial access do not necessarily move together. Strengthening women's entrepreneurship therefore requires attention not only to expanding participation but also to enabling enterprise growth, improving productive investment and ensuring access to appropriately scaled institutional finance. The study provides a recent inter-state baseline for these priorities, while the cross sectional nature of the data limits conclusions about changes over time.

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