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Factors Influencing Women Entrepreneurs of NGOs in India

Abstract

This article examines women entrepreneurs in the nonprofit sector. Entrepreneurial activity attracts certain kinds of individuals. Such self-selection is not a random event but is influenced by personal characteristics as well as socioeconomic and cultural factors. This article examines women entrepreneurs in a particular segment of the nonprofit sector in India to determine which factors influence such self-selection. Our research confirms findings by other scholars that nonprofit entrepreneurs receive a high payoff from promoting social causes. Furthermore, we find that previous experience in the sector, beliefs, culture, social class, education, and family background also play an important role. We explore some policy implications of our findings.

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Factors Influencing Women Entrepreneurs of NGOs in India
Femida Handy, Meenaz Kassam, and Shree Ranade

This article examines women entrepreneurs in the nonprofit sector. Entrepreneurial activity attracts certain kinds of individuals. Such self-selection is not a random event but is influenced by personal characteristics as well as socioeconomic and cultural factors. This article examines women entrepreneurs in a particular segment of the nonprofit sector in India to determine which factors influence such self-selection. Our research confirms findings by other scholars that nonprofit entrepreneurs receive a high payoff from promoting social causes. Furthermore, we find that previous experience in the sector, beliefs, culture, social class, education, and family background also play an important role. We explore some policy implications of our findings.

Women's nonprofit organizations have long played an important role in the lives of women in many parts of the world.

In India, well-educated and affluent women found socially sanctioned work outside the home in the voluntary sector. They worked as volunteers under the aegis of religious organizations and for social service nonprofits dedicated to the alleviation of poverty. Participation in nonprofits in India gave women an opportunity to enter the social and political spheres in ways often denied to them by the for-profit and public sectors.

Important changes in women's lives are a direct result of the intervention of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Many NGOs that deal with the alleviation of poverty for women often also focus on advocacy for women's rights as well as providing services for women (Carr, Chen, and Jhabvala, 1996). Although legislation in India protects and promotes women's rights in most cases, NGO intervention aids in enforcing such rights (Sinha and Commuri, 1998; Mishra and Mishra, 1998). And observers often credit the proliferation of NGOs with successfully altering the political context in which women live and function (Fisher, 1998).

In this research, we examine entrepreneurship involved in initiating such NGOs. *Entrepreneurship*, a much debated topic, has been defined in the for-profit literature as "the catalytic agent in society which sets into motion new enterprises, new combinations of production and exchange" (Collins and Moore, 1970). Although the concept of entrepreneurship is closely linked with the for-profit sector and may seem strange in the NGO world, it is not. The same entrepreneurial spirit is key to initiating projects and mobilizing

resources, whether it is for promoting a social cause in the nonprofit sector or promoting a profit-making enterprise. Both kinds of enterprises are the result of the entrepreneur's innovation, leadership, imagination, efforts, and ability. Thus, using the definition from the for-profit literature, we define a *nonprofit entrepreneur* as a self-directed, innovative leader who starts a nonprofit enterprise (Handy and Kassam, 2001).

We study individual women entrepreneurs who have successfully established NGOs in India and ask the following questions: What are the characteristics of women entrepreneurs in this sector? What motivates them? In addition, are there any structural and cultural factors relevant to women's entrepreneurship of NGOs? We also suggest policy recommendations to facilitate successful NGO start-ups. To answer these questions, we have chosen to study NGOs in the state of Maharashtra in India, where women play an important role in NGOs related to gender issues (Jani and Pedroni, 1997).

Entrepreneurs in both sectors face similar challenges: identifying opportunities, promoting innovative ideas, implementing ideas into viable enterprises, mobilizing resources, and undertaking risks inherent in starting a new project. This suggests that entrepreneurship in the for-profit or nonprofit sector are related, although the primary motivations in the two sectors differ—making profits versus promoting a social cause. Furthermore, entrepreneurs in both sectors are equally vulnerable to the personal, structural, and cultural environments in which they live.

Given the paucity of entrepreneurial literature in the nonprofit sector, especially in the less industrialized countries, we look for insights in for-profit entrepreneurship studies done in less industrialized countries by Berger (1991), Gupta (1991), Shabbir and Di Gregorio (1996), and Naffziger and Terrell (1996). From these studies, we find that cultural values and norms are critical in explaining entrepreneurship. This literature suggests that the individual's decision to start a business is affected by factors such as family support, qualifications, business experience, and socioeconomic and personality characteristics. Although these studies are based on entrepreneurs of for-profit enterprises, we expect many of these factors to influence nonprofit entrepreneurs as well.

In addition to the factors mentioned in the for-profit literature, nonprofit literature suggests that nonprofit entrepreneurs are driven by their beliefs, personal experiences, perceptions of community needs, and desire to provide services to others. They are as likely as for-profit entrepreneurs to be willing to take risks, self-directed, and innovative. However, their focus is on what they can do for others (Young, 1983; Pilz, 1995; Bilodeau and Slivinski, 1996; Kassam, Handy, and Ranade, 2000).

Specifically, because our study deals with NGOs pursuing women's issues and rights, we expect that our women entrepreneurs will have values that are aligned with feminist goals. And given that our study is located in India, we expect caste, which plays a signifi-

cant role in the nation's cultural context, to be an important determinant of NGO entrepreneurship.

Cultural Context in India

To understand the relevance of caste as a cultural influence, we briefly describe the caste system in India. First envisioned in the Vedas (an ancient Aryan religious scripture composed around 1300 B.C.) by Manu, society was divided into four categories of persons: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Shudras. Membership in the caste became hereditary and fixed for life. Such division explained broad differences among attitudes, behaviors, and preferences. This led to a natural self-selection into four professional categories:

- Brahmins as the intellectuals
- Kshatriyas as the warriors
- Vaisyas as the traders
- Shudras as the manual laborers

Over time, these professions also became hereditary, rigid, and hierarchical and developed into an immutable caste system. Consciousness of caste membership is emphasized by caste name, and the relative prestige of different castes is well established and jealously guarded. A person's name and profession usually signal the individual's caste, and though urbanization and legislative changes have rendered names and professions less identifiable, caste still remains ascribed.

Individuals are often pressured into professions prescribed by caste through societal norms that reinforce their attitudes and expectations. A hierarchical and stable caste system strongly influences and constrains individual choice and does not permit a Vaisya to attain the profession of a priest, which is reserved for Brahmins. Caste thereby becomes a cultural determinant that often explains the choice (or lack thereof) of the person's profession. However, since the 1960s and 1970s, this influence is waning.

Despite legislation outlawing certain religious and traditional practices such as widow burning and dowry, and despite regulations promoting affirmative action to counter the effects of caste, a woman's life remains influenced by the religious tradition of subordination to the male members of the family. In India, the bride's family can end up in debt and poverty after giving a dowry of gold, cash, and other assets to the groom's family. If a promised dowry does not materialize, a bride may suffer cruelty and abuse. Hinduism places a great emphasis on a woman's subordination to the men in the family—father, husband, and sons—at different stages in life. A woman's life is also affected by the caste into which she is born, influencing who she marries, her occupation, her economic well-being, and even her freedom of movement.

A woman's class, an outcome of caste to a large degree, strongly

affects her opportunities for an education. For example, women born into the Brahmin caste, generally equated with the intellectual and priestly class, may not become priests but are expected to be educated and can easily participate in professional, social, and cultural life. This in turn translates into privilege and status. High caste also gives her the opportunity to marry into elite families of prestige, wealth, and status. Lower caste women, especially rural women, do not have access to education and other resources and are often less emancipated from male subordination than the higher educated and higher caste women. Income and caste are generally related, mediated by access to education and social capital. However, the late 1980s and early 1990s have seen limited upward mobility of lower castes due to affirmative action plans (Assayag, 1995).

Study Overview and Methodology

This research is designed to further our understanding of women entrepreneurs of NGOs in India. We chose one subsector of NGOs, those dealing with women's issues, to control for the variance of external circumstances that may arise in studying entrepreneurship in different subsectors. Because the principal source of satisfaction for NGO entrepreneurs comes from the pursuit of the mission (Young, 1983), limiting NGOs to one subsector better controls for the differences arising among entrepreneurs attributable to different (or even competing) missions.

The 1996 Directory of Organizations (India) identifies NGOs in and around the city of Pune, Maharashtra (population 1.56 million in 1991). To include NGOs established after 1996, we used telephone directories and referrals. From this database, we chose organizations whose mission dealt with women's issues and whose founders were women. We arrived at a final list of twenty-six NGOs.

Twenty of the NGOs (77 percent) agreed to participate in our study, given the usual caveats of confidentiality. We conducted indepth interviews with the founders about the founding of the NGO and the factors that affected and motivated their decisions. We used two instruments to ascertain organizational dimensions as well as socioeconomic characteristics of the founder, including a selfevaluation of personality characteristics and cultural and family history.

We conducted follow-up interviews with staff to obtain information on programs, check for reliability and validity of the data, and obtain missing information.

We conducted interviews in the language more familiar to the respondent, Marathi or English. The author familiar with both languages did coding of transcripts of interviews for open-ended questions.

We used a simple tabulation for close-ended data questions.

Findings

Following a brief overview of the sample characteristics, we organize our findings as follows. First we report on the socioeconomic variables, motivations, and self-evaluation. Next we report on social and cultural factors that may influence entrepreneurship.

The twenty NGOs in our sample range in age from three to thirty-five years. They are involved in providing basic services for mainly rural women and children, including counseling, primary health services, family planning, literacy training, and a variety of legal and administrative services. Many are also involved in advocacy of women's rights with local politicians and the judicial system. The women started their NGOs at ages ranging from twenty-four to sixty-five years. Although they came to entrepreneurship through a variety of paths, they shared the feminist conviction that attention to women's issues is paramount for social justice. Their commitment to further the cause of women is evident from their personal histories, self-evaluation, and professional experiences. Most came from family backgrounds that shaped their worldview regarding social justice.

Socioeconomic Variables

In this section we examine a variety of socioeconomic variables, including education, work experience, income, and marital and family status, to determine their influence on women entrepreneurs of nonprofit organizations.

Education and Experience. Eighteen of the twenty entrepreneurs (90 percent) had university degrees; thirteen (65 percent) had postgraduate degrees. Educational abilities mirror those for for-profit women entrepreneurs (Hisrich, 1986). In a heavily bureaucratic country like India, only highly educated entrepreneurs could successfully negotiate the administrative requirements necessary in founding and running an NGO.

All but six women had previously worked as social workers, either as professionals or volunteers. All the respondents were volunteers in social movements and had been activists for change. This experience gave them insights into current social issues and pathways for social change. One woman reported: "I worked [volunteered] in the Youth Social Movement against corruption, dowry, and caste and to provide a common platform for women who are restricted on the basis of caste. This gave me my first look at women's problems. I could not have done this from my regular workplace." When describing the skills and experience that had best served in founding a successful NGO, the founders overwhelmingly chose interpersonal skills (80 percent) and education (80 percent). This was followed with administrative skills (70 percent), experience in the nonprofit sector (60 percent), experience in leadership roles (50 percent), and business skills (50 percent).

Income. Most of the founders came from either upper- (30 percent) or middle-income groups (55 percent); only three (15 percent)

came from the lower-income groups. Sufficient family income allowed seventeen of the women (85 percent) to pursue their goals in starting NGOs and forgo higher market incomes. In the three cases in which family income was insufficient, human capital (two had postgraduate degrees, and all three were social work professionals) allowed them to pursue income-producing employment at the same time as founding the NGO.

This finding underscores the importance of women's financial security in undertaking entrepreneurial activity (in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors) as found in many studies on entrepreneurs (Blanchflower and Oswald, 1998; Bilodeau and Slivinski, 1996; Pilz, 1995; Hisrich, 1986). This quote from one of our interviewees is suggestive of a recurrent theme: "I received financial support from my family at the time of starting. I was not expected to contribute to the family income."

Marital Status and Family Responsibilities. In examining family responsibilities for women entrepreneurs, we recognize that family arrangements differ in India from highly industrialized countries. In India, the cultural norm dictates that young couples live with the husband's family as an extended family, which involves shared domestic and financial responsibilities. Furthermore, upper and middle-income households have access to inexpensive labor to help with household and childcare chores. Twelve women (60 percent) in our sample were married; three (15 percent) were single; and five (25 percent) were previously married but currently single. Furthermore, our findings show that although the majority of women had children (75 percent) at the time of starting the NGO, the issue of childcare was not pivotal in their decision making. All ten women with young or school age children (50 percent) lived in extended families; this allowed them to work outside the home. Of the ten others, five women (25 percent) had adult children when they founded the NGO, and five had no children. Thus, marital status and childcare responsibilities did not affect our sample's decision to start an NGO, as scholars of women entrepreneurs have suggested is true in Western countries (Caputo and Dolinsky, 1998).

Financial Capital and Personal Connections. Access to, or the lack of, financial capital is not a crucial factor in the decision making for many of these NGO entrepreneurs. This finding contrasts with findings for for-profit entrepreneurs (Blanchflower and Oswald, 1998).

Nearly all of the NGOs started with little financial capital because their needs were minimal. Start-up financing from other NGOs was common for these needs. In most cases, the NGOs often relied on volunteer labor; this often included recruiting friends and family. Personal connections gave many of the women (65 percent) access to volunteer labor and donations, as also found by studies of nonprofit entrepreneurs in the West (Pilz, 1995).

Role Models. The for-profit literature suggests that entrepreneurial husbands or other family members positively affect women's decisions in becoming entrepreneurs. This is also true for the nonprofit

sector. Despite the diverse family backgrounds, many of our entrepreneurs (85 percent) come from families in which parents were highly involved in either providing or advocating for social services. Parents, as role models, are highly influential in shaping the values of social justice among the women entrepreneurs. Parental influence, they claim, “made me decide to do social work and volunteer.” Thus, in the nonprofit sector, the human capital (influence) of parents differs from the for-profit sector, where the parents provide skills and experiences of running a for-profit enterprise (Cooper, Gimeno-Garçon, and Woo, 1994). In the nonprofit sector, parental influence helped shape values and actively supported the mission of the NGO; this was critical to the founding of the NGO. And in a practical way, parents often helped by volunteering at the NGOs and sometimes donating money.

Motivations

We asked respondents to elaborate on what motivated them to start an NGO.

Desire to Serve Others. All twenty women were motivated by the need to serve others and believed they could best do so under the aegis of an NGO. One woman said, “I want to provide female leadership in the work for the downtrodden”; another claimed, “I want to make women’s groups . . . powerful tools of empowerment for women and children.” Some reported frustrations in the jobs they had held previously. Although these jobs were often in the field of social work, many of the women (60 percent) believed their work did not address problems relevant to them such as “make them [women] conscious of the human and constitutional rights,” hence their wish to start their own enterprise. The desire to serve others is also found by other scholars in the nonprofit sector (Young, 1983; Pilz, 1995).

Needs in Community. Many reported that they perceived a need in the community that was not being fulfilled. This replicates the findings by Pilz in the nonprofit sector (1995). Many of the women (80 percent) are motivated by the rural women’s needs, which have been ignored or call for specific political or judicial action. Our respondents claim a “great need to bring about self-awareness among women” and “stimulate a wider and deeper knowledge of the problems faced by women and children.”

Self-Actualization. Given that all twenty of our respondents see themselves as feminists, social justice issues concerning women are significant to them. Thus, it is not surprising that fifteen women (75 percent) reported that starting an NGO dealing with women’s issues was a process of self-actualization for them. One respondent believes that “only women can create a platform and empathize with other [women] at a grassroots level” and that “women require women

to create space for themselves.” They felt they were accomplishing highly useful work by founding an NGO with a mission congruent with their beliefs, a finding repeatedly suggested in the nonprofit literature (Young, 1983; Pilz, 1995; Bilodeau and Slivinski, 1996).

Desire to Achieve Change. Because all of the respondents had some previous experience in social movements and many came from families involved in issues of social justice, many stated that they were motivated to found the NGO in order “to achieve change” (80 percent). For example, one respondent said she was motivated to “change people’s outlook towards unwanted children”; another believed that it was necessary to “make changes in the structural and legal facilities to fight injustices towards women.” Respondents were in consensus that the lack of education and resources, combined with an unsympathetic police and judicial system, make lower caste rural women vulnerable to social abuse and that change was paramount in achieving social justice.

Other. Over half the respondents (65 percent) said that creating the NGO allowed them to enhance their social connections and “try something new,” and half said that they were “expected to do social service” by their peers. Less than half mentioned the desire for independence as a motivating factor (35 percent), which suggests that, unlike the for-profit sector (Hisrich and Brush, 1984), independence may not be an important motivating factor in founding an NGO.

Self-Evaluation

We asked the respondents to elaborate on the characteristics that best describe themselves. All twenty saw themselves as hardworking and persistent in achieving their goals. Many saw themselves as selfconfident (95 percent) and extroverted (80 percent), enabling them to marshal resources and confront many levels of bureaucracy, especially in rural areas where women rarely partake in public or political action. They also described themselves as taking risks (80 percent) and being ambitious (65 percent). These findings replicate the findings by Pilz (1995) and McClelland (1987). Surprisingly, less than half of the women see themselves as altruistic (40 percent).

Cultural and Social Factors

We have already described the caste system in India and its likely relevance to nonprofit entrepreneurship. Our findings on caste and religion are striking. We first note that nineteen of the twenty women (95 percent) are Hindus, and one is Christian. For the nineteen Hindus, where caste is a relevant issue, we find that fifteen are Brahmins; four are Kshatriyas; and one is a Shudras. This finding, of nearly 80 percent Brahmins, suggests that certain factors may make it likely that women of higher castes are attracted to, and are successful at, NGO entrepreneurship in India. Pragmatic reasons of social status

make higher caste women more likely to have the power to combat traditionalist forces and legitimize socially controversial issues related to women. We find that lower caste women founders may have significant educational backgrounds that may compensate for their lower status when dealing with local authorities and obtaining resources.

Hinduism is the religion of the majority of the population of India; however, a significant minority population (23 percent) consists of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and so on. Although the overwhelming majority of our sample are Hindus, our respondents did not offer religion as a motivator for or a factor in their actions. This is in contrast to Gupta (1991), who suggests that religion is an important factor in explaining for-profit entrepreneurship in India.

Unlike religion, feminist ideology is overwhelmingly offered as the motivating and rationalizing factor. Our entrepreneurs show a deep and long-term commitment to feminist ideology. Many of them were involved in social movements and came to their feminist beliefs during this time; others developed their ideology through workplace experience and at home. Entrepreneurial women in the for-profit sector in the West also often see themselves as feminists who undertake unconventional roles (Brush, 1992; Fischer, Reuber, and Dyke, 1993; Allen and Truman, 1993; Moore and Buttner, 1997).

Although feminism is a universal concept, the cultural and historical context in India gives rise to certain divergences in the meaning of oppression and social justice (Gedalof, 1999; Niranjana, 1998; John, 1998). Feminist ideology, as our respondents understand it, recognizes this difference as is evident in their concern for the oppression of lower caste women often resulting from the values and norms held in society. For example, they were cognizant of the problems faced by poor lower caste rural women due to the traditionalist social and political institutions that recognize and often promote the subordination of the women to male family members. This awareness, combined with their experience and ideology, spurred them to do something to alleviate the problems of women. They did so by founding NGOs whose missions and goals actualized their feminist beliefs.

Given a small and geographically limited sample, we cannot say whether our findings on caste and religion indicate a preponderance of one religious group or caste among women entrepreneurs of NGOs or if the findings are representative of the population. However, our findings do indicate that caste (and maybe religion) should be further investigated as possible determinants of NGO entrepreneurship in India, and more specifically in Maharashtra, which contains a greater proportion of Hindus than many other states in India.

The expression of feminist beliefs and a deep commitment to dealing with social justice issues in our sample suggests that nonprofit entrepreneurs get great satisfaction in pursuing a cause in which they believe. This finding closely relates to the believer typology suggested by Young (1983) in his study of nonprofit entrepreneurs and confirms the findings in the literature of nonprofit

entrepreneurs (Pilz, 1995; Weisbrod, 1988; Frank, 1996; and Bilodeau and Slivinski, 1996).

All the women in our sample reject conventional female roles typical in the cultural context of India, where women have few rights in practice. In this respect, our women entrepreneurs are closely allied with the profile of radical entrepreneurs described by Goffee and Scase (1985). The women in our study also correspond to traditionalists, as described by Carter and Cannon (1992). Most came from families that are involved with social justice issues and social movements and see their entrepreneurial choices as keeping with their family values.

In a study of women for-profit entrepreneurs in Pakistan, Shabbir and Di Gregorio (1996) find that women undertake to start enterprises for different personal goals—such as freedom, security, or satisfaction—and are affected by structural factors such as culture and family. We also find that the women entrepreneurs start NGOs to achieve personal goals and are equally vulnerable to similar structural factors. However, in one respect, the Pakistani for-profit findings stand in sharp contrast to ours. Our findings show that the personal goals of women are fairly homogeneous (the desire to serve others combined with the desire to achieve change), whereas the women in Pakistan had varying goals for starting a business. Furthermore, the factors affecting nonprofit entrepreneurship are primarily internal resources: education and experience as well as relational, family, and social connections. Traditional external resources that are crucial for for-profit entrepreneurs, such as loans, have little impact on nonprofit entrepreneurs. Financial stability in the household and family support are essential for most women in pursuing the mission of the NGO.

Conclusion

Can we say anything about entrepreneurs in the nonprofit sector based on these findings on women entrepreneurs of NGOs in India? Given the limitation of our data to one geographical region, it is difficult to generalize; nevertheless, we suggest that the data points in a certain direction and that some conclusions can be drawn. We offer the conclusions with the usual caveats regarding a small sample and consequent limitations.

The salient factor in our study is that all our women entrepreneurs share a feminist ideology and a desire to help others.

By founding an NGO whose mission is closely related to their ideology, they are able to actualize their beliefs, and this affords them a high level of satisfaction and accomplishment. Earnings and independence seem to be secondary to pursuing the mission of the NGO. Lack of access to financial capital does not pose a major challenge to entrepreneurs in this sector; what is essential is access to volunteers and donations, initially through personal networks.

Neither the number of young children nor the presence of a husband affects women in their decision to start an NGO in India. It is not that the women are immune to childcare and domestic responsibilities but that they receive help from either their husbands or family members by living in the extended family structures that are common in India. This gives them the flexibility to pursue their goals of starting and running the NGO. Thus, their choice is not contingent on childcare costs or household responsibilities. These resources, however, would also have been available for other kinds of employment, and thus this factor does not completely explain why women choose entrepreneurship in the nonprofit over the for-profit sector.

Parental role models and early professional and volunteer experience served to raise their awareness and motivate many of these women to pioneer NGOs to pursue social justice. Because they are self-professed feminists, it is not surprising that they choose to start NGOs addressing women's issues to remedy social injustices and work for change.

Our NGO entrepreneurs describe themselves as persistent, hardworking, and willing to take risks. They are self-confident, extroverted, and energetic. All of them feel that their interpersonal skills were paramount in their starting NGOs, especially because they had to mobilize resources such as volunteer labor and donations through the help of family, friends, and others.

A significant proportion of them are Brahmins, and this is not a surprise in the cultural context. In India, despite the many attempts to rid society of the ramifications of the caste system, the system continues to operate subtly (and not so subtly) at many levels. The elite in India are often the educated Brahmins, the Brahmin being the highest caste. They enjoy certain privileges of social connections among themselves and are respected as leaders and intellectuals. Because starting an NGO requires an unusual reliance on friends and the local community to mobilize resources, being educated and belonging to a high caste provides the required connections to facilitate this resource mobilization.

Furthermore, many of the issues that the NGOs take on are deeply embedded in the traditional, cultural, and religious fabric of society, and rallying the support of local communities in rural areas is often extremely difficult. Women who take a stand against the local practices are often subject to harassment from the community and receive little or no support from the local police when filing complaints or seeking help from local public agencies. Thus, feminist, educated, self-confident, and affluent Brahmin women, from respected echelons of society, are more likely to succeed in dealing with local bureaucracies and the police on socially controversial issues.

Thus, it is likely that the woman entrepreneur of an NGO dealing with socially sensitive and controversial issues is an educated individual who comes from a middle- to upper-income household.

Being of high caste and highly educated, she is respected and can exercise power and mobilize resources.

The entrepreneurial women in our study can be classified as what others have termed a traditional, a radical, and a believer. The first two classifications suggest that typologies developed for the for-profit sector are also relevant to the nonprofit sector. This finding, along with certain similarities of entrepreneurs in the two sectors, underscores the likelihood that entrepreneurs share certain characteristics in general, an assertion we made early in this article. Thus, nonprofit entrepreneurship can be partially understood from our knowledge of entrepreneurs in the for-profit sector.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Given that our study looked only at women nonprofit entrepreneurs, we cannot draw any conclusions about nonprofit entrepreneurship in general. We cannot even say that our findings are unique to women because we have no comparative data on male entrepreneurs in the nonprofit sector in India. Moreover, our NGOs are all from one subsector (dealing with women's issues); thus, our results may or may not be applicable to NGOs in other subsectors. This points to a number of questions for further research on nonprofit entrepreneurship. Comparative studies of male and female entrepreneurs in a variety of NGOs is necessary to shed light on what factors are truly unique to women entrepreneurs. Comparative studies of nonprofit entrepreneurship in developed and less developed countries will indicate those factors that can be associated or determined by culture and those that can be attributed to structural factors and personal characteristics. In general, the paucity of nonprofit entrepreneurship suggests that many interesting questions remain to be researched.

Policy Implications

Despite these limitations, we can make certain policy suggestions of interest to government and donors. Governments in many countries, due to poverty or ideology, do not provide many social services for the poor. They may see NGOs as alternative providers of public services and sometimes encourage such activity through tax subsidies and other means. Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume, from a public policy perspective, the need to encourage the founding of such NGOs and to ensure that those founded are sustainable and successful. Furthermore, donors local and international who are keen to promote women's issues are interested in encouraging start-ups and ensuring that the NGOs they fund are successful. Thus, from the donor and government perspectives, this research provides some insights on how to facilitate the growth and success of NGOs. Because the initial volunteer experience seems to be a factor that helps women see the need to start NGOs, policies that expose more young women to volunteer work in social service will increase the number who may eventually start social service organizations. For

example, international donors can help existing NGOs to recruit more volunteers and offer interested volunteers training in the different skills they will need—interpersonal skills, negotiating bureaucracies, legal and administrative aspects of starting, managing, and running an NGO. Governments can make volunteering part of educational training so as to expose youth to social problems and thereby increase the pool of likely entrepreneurs. Volunteering may also give women a chance to expand their social connections, which is necessary in recruiting volunteers and donations.

Although existing progressive affirmative action programs help many persons of lower castes achieve social and financial status in India by providing entry into elite professions and the political arena, more attention should be paid to the education and empowerment of lower caste women in rural areas. Governments and donors can make an effort to ensure that more women, especially of lower castes, receive higher education and training in interpersonal skills and are recruited to volunteer. This may help reduce the tendency for only upper caste women to start NGOs. Furthermore, there is a need for public support to enable wider diffusion of some of the key themes that are part of the feminist perspectives, namely, concern for equity and social justice. If more people, both men and women, are exposed to such ideology, more may take action in the form of starting NGOs or support the entrepreneurs that do.

It may be of value to ensure that those involved in social work and in volunteering be targeted to receive publicly available resources to support the formation of organizations. These include training programs and mentoring services to facilitate the formation of NGOs. If such programs can be made available to those who are contemplating starting NGOs, or who are in the process of doing so, they may be able to increase the new entrepreneurs' chances of success. Although this study cannot shed light on NGOs that were started but were unsuccessful, it sheds some light on where to direct information and training resources so that the likely pool of NGO founders is targeted early on, when making good decisions is critical.

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