

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

## Rural Women Entrepreneurship in South Africa: Issues and Challenges

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### Abstract

Despite its importance in rural development, women's entrepreneurship has faced a series of problems in South Africa. For a holistic assessment of such problems, through a literature review approach, this study aimed to review prior research on women entrepreneurship, with a focus on the issues and challenges surrounding rural women entrepreneurship in South Africa. Secondary information sources, such as journal articles, theses, books, abstracts, and credible business-affiliated websites, were used to conduct the review. Among the results emerging from the study, some of the key challenges facing South African rural women entrepreneurs include a lack of adequate financing, education and training, gender bias, inadequate business skills, and difficulties in balancing family and business. In view of these challenges, this study recommends capacity-building programmes, a robust government policy framework, and opening wider channels of funding and awareness to foster entrepreneurial activities among rural women entrepreneurs in South Africa.

**Keywords:** rural women entrepreneurship; rural development; women empowerment; South Africa

### Introduction

One of the most important economic and social developments in Africa has been the rise of a sizable population of women entrepreneurs (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015; Mafukata, 2023). Women are starting and running businesses in numbers that were unimaginable only a few decades ago. A report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) showed that women-owned firms now make up between 25 to 30% of all formal economy businesses globally (Rugoho and Chindimba, 2018). This redefines not only the economic position of women but also the structure of the contemporary world economy. Patil and Deshpande (2018) opined that women are considered the fastest emerging entrepreneurs worldwide. In support, Sajjad *et al.* (2020: 35) aver that, "now it is acknowledged that women entrepreneurship is an important indicator for world development. Women entrepreneurs play a significant role in producing jobs, wealth, poverty reduction, human development, education, health, and nation's development especially in developing countries." Women entrepreneurs have contributed significantly to the success and sustainability of national economies, and the literature is abundant with many success stories of women entrepreneurs (c.f., Byrne *et al.*, 2019; Yousafzai *et al.*, 2022).

Despite the significance of female entrepreneurship and the rise in female-owned businesses globally, South Africa still has a male-dominated entrepreneurial culture (Diale and Carrim, 2022). The issue is that South African women business owners must still overcome obstacles that do not affect their male counterparts as they usually possess fewer resources. For instance, they are less privileged in a frequently patriarchal society and have less access to wealth, economic networks, and social standing (Zulfiqar, 2022). Furthermore, there is still a lack of adequate support, particularly for rural women entrepreneurship in South Africa (Diale and Carrim, 2022; Ijatuyi *et al.*, 2022). In support of Ijatuyi *et al.* (2022), Alao *et al.* (2022) alluded that a coordinated approach to firmly establish rural women's inclusion in the development of entrepreneurship, as well as to enhance the robust enterprise performance of rural women-owned small businesses, is largely lacking. While Karasi (2018) argued that specific

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challenges that South African rural women face when starting, running, and growing small businesses are not adequately considered. Prior research in South Africa (e.g., Phillips *et al.*, 2014; Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015; Swartz *et al.*, 2022) has mainly focused on identifying the issues and challenges facing women-owned businesses in general. However, little attention has been paid to how the environments in which these businesses operate impact their performance. These studies add to the body of knowledge but are unable to explain why there is a gender discrepancy in the chance of pursuing entrepreneurship and the resulting differences in firm performance by location (e.g. rural entrepreneurship vs. urban entrepreneurship). Mandipaka (2014) argued that most rural South African women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to the country's economy. As a result, their efforts should not be taken lightly and where possible, support must be rendered by both the public and private sectors (Bukari *et al.*, 2023).

Rural women in South Africa have been involved in entrepreneurship activities that have given them and their families the opportunity to earn income, find jobs, and support local cultural resources (Makandwa *et al.*, 2023; Mafukata, 2023). Mandipaka (2014) further noted that some of the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in South Africa are attributed to a lack of funds, difficulties in expansion, and failure to acquire physical premises to establish their enterprises. Against this background, this study advances the idea that for South Africa to fully realise its potential for economic and social growth, rural women entrepreneurs must receive comprehensive support to maintain and grow their businesses. As advanced by Othman *et al.* (2022), one approach to accomplish this is by making comprehensive efforts to gather up-to-date data on rural women entrepreneurs, including profiles, business effectiveness, problems, and the degree of their success. Any research results may aid those in charge of promoting rural and women's affairs in South Africa by creating efficient, targeted policy support systems meant to boost the growth and sustainability of rural, woman-owned small businesses. However, less attention has been paid to women's entrepreneurship, particularly in South Africa. This is concerning because it suggests a lack of scholarly focus on the unique challenges, opportunities, and contributions of women entrepreneurs in South Africa. Swartz *et al.* (2022) have suggested that historical legacies of apartheid and persistent gender disparities may be contributing to this lack of attention. Without dedicated research, policy gaps may emerge, hindering the effectiveness of policies aimed at fostering inclusive economic growth in South Africa. This study's specific aim was to examine previous research on rural women entrepreneurs and to add to the body of knowledge on the subject, specifically in the setting of South Africa. The following objectives served as the review's direction:

- To advance understanding into the significance of rural entrepreneurship in South Africa
- To bring into perspective the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurship in South Africa
- To suggest policy recommendations aimed at promoting rural women entrepreneurship development

Theoretically, this study provides an alternative perspective on women entrepreneurship by specifically advocating for rural women entrepreneurship research within the South African context. The study also supports the idea that encouraging rural women's entrepreneurial development in African nations is necessary, as suggested by earlier entrepreneurship studies. The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The article begins by highlighting a brief general review of the literature as it pertains to the study. The methodology is then explained followed by a review of literature aligned to the study objectives. Finally, policy recommendations are offered for development of rural women entrepreneurship in South Africa.

## **Women Empowerment and Rural Entrepreneurship**

Giving power is what the phrase empowerment signifies. It refers to having the ability and resources to shape one's life to achieve desired political, social, and economic goals or positions, as stated in Uma (2012). Therefore, giving women the ability and resources to direct their lives toward their desired goals is a key component of women's empowerment. Empowerment is "a process by which women gain greater control over resources (income, knowledge, information, technology, skill and training), challenge the ideology of patriarchy and participate in leadership, decision making process, enhance the self-image of women, to become active participants in the process of change and to develop the skills to assert themselves" (Sharma *et al.*, 2012: 117). Entrepreneurship is "a process of producing value by putting together a special combination of resources to take advantage of an opportunity. It may be a force that mobilizes other resources to meet unmet market need" (Levaku, 2019: 14).

Since female entrepreneurship has been acknowledged for the past ten years as a significant unexploited basis of economic development, the rise of women entrepreneurs and their contribution to the national economy are

extremely evident in South Africa (Irene, 2017; Maziriri *et al.*, 2019; Maziriri *et al.*, 2022). However, the social sciences and general culture have mainly ignored the role of women in entrepreneurship (Santhi, 2017). In addition to having lower involvement rates in entrepreneurship than males, women typically choose to launch and run businesses in sectors different from men. In line with Ganle *et al.* (2015), the development of rural women's entrepreneurship helps improve their individual capacities and raise their role as decision-makers in their families and society, which leads to overall empowerment. In the context of women's development, empowerment is a strategy for identifying, confronting, and dismantling obstacles in a woman's life so that she can improve her capacity to influence her life and environment (Khedri *et al.*, 2020). It is a multifaceted and active process that should help women reach their full potential and strength in every aspect of life. South Africa hopes for women's independence and self-reliance in the future (Urban and Nonkwelo, 2022). As acclaimed by Barkhuizen *et al.* (2022), it is sad that women's actual and potential roles in society have been overlooked for ages due to patriarchy, ignorance, and conservatism, preventing them from making their proper contributions to social and economic development. They are denied their rightful status and access to resources and services for growth because of misinformation about their contributions to family and society, which marginalises them (Kheni, 2016).

The growth of rural women's entrepreneurship in South Africa has come about as a response to unprecedented levels of unemployment and some years of gradual economic meltdown. Women's engagement in rural small ventures has received potential benefits for South Africa as it will stimulate economic development not only for rural areas but also across the whole country, helping in the reduction of crime and the fight against unemployment (Mandipaka, 2014; Karasi, 2018). However, the nature of their entrepreneurship activities has seen them being concentrated in low-productive and low-return informal micro-sized ventures (Ganle *et al.*, 2015; Tuffour *et al.*, 2022). In concordance with Itani *et al.* (2011), this is a direct result of a lack of adequate government support, limited capacity building from civil society organisations, and inadequate funding of women entrepreneurial ventures. A study by Davis (2011) has shown sharp differences between rural women entrepreneurs and their urban counterparts with the former tending to be more vulnerable to entrepreneurial challenges. The major differentiating factors were identified as access to service delivery, access to information, access to funding, requisite business skills and networking opportunities (Shoma, 2019). Due to the differing nature of rural women entrepreneurship and of urban women entrepreneurship, rural-based enterprises are more vulnerable than urban-based enterprises (Karasi *et al.*, 2017; Makandwa *et al.*, 2023). Without adequate public and private formal support, rural women entrepreneurship in South Africa is highly likely to continue facing severe operating challenges as they will have no enabling environment and lack inclusive growth.

## Methodology

A detailed literature review serves as the foundation for the arguments in this paper. This study is qualitative in nature, and it followed a desktop literature review approach that is both explorative and descriptive (Gautam and Mishra, 2016). A literature review is a "planned technique of locating, gathering and appraising a collection of writings on a particular phenomenon to discover any interpretable patterns or trends with respect to a phenomenon" (Etim and Iwu, 2019: 3). King and He (2005) referred to this concept as one that is investigated using a variety of rigour standards, from finding a representative sample of a larger group of published works relevant to a specific area of study to their analysis to learn more about the phenomenon and/or arrive at reasonable conclusions. The ability of authors to assemble data from a body of knowledge that conveys a variety of viewpoints is fundamentally the strength of this type of review (Paré *et al.*, 2015; King and He, 2005). In essence, a literature review seeks to methodically identify, assess, and combine all pertinent publications on a particular subject. This methodology was adopted to conduct a critical, rigorous, and open evaluation of prior research in order to gain insight into the issues and challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in South Africa. The information sources were secondary in nature, with data derived mainly from articles, theses, and book chapters. The current review began by compiling a set of academic sources between 2013 and 2023 using the Google Scholar search engine, specifically articles, theses, book chapters, and abstracts. In searching the documents, the following keywords were used: "*rural women entrepreneurs, rural women entrepreneurship, rural women small business owners, rural women enterprises, South Africa*". The inclusion and exclusion criteria used in this study are shown in Table 2. This streamlined process of including and excluding studies ensured that the literature review focused on recent, geographically relevant, and methodologically sound research that specifically addressed the issues and challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in South Africa.

**Table1:** Review's inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<b>Relevance to Rural Women Entrepreneurship in South Africa:</b> The source included focused specifically on rural women entrepreneurs in South Africa.	<b>Irrelevance to Rural Women Entrepreneurship in South Africa:</b> Articles which did not specifically focus on rural women entrepreneurship in South Africa were excluded.
<b>Peer-reviewed Journals:</b> Only peer-reviewed academic sources were included to ensure the reliability and scholarly rigor of the information.	<b>Non-Peer-Reviewed Sources:</b> Non-peer-reviewed sources, such as magazine articles, and non-academic publications were excluded to maintain the academic quality of the review.
<b>Publication Currency:</b> Included studies published within the last ten years (2013-2023) to ensure the inclusion of recent research and current insights.	<b>Outdated Publications:</b> Studies published before 2013 were excluded to ensure the incorporation of recent developments within the rural entrepreneurial landscape in South Africa.
<b>Geographical Focus:</b> Studies specifically focusing on the South African context.	<b>Non-Specific Focus:</b> Studies with a broad focus on entrepreneurship in South Africa without specific attention to rural women entrepreneurs were excluded.
<b>Language:</b> Only studies published in English were included.	<b>Language Limitations:</b> Studies not published in English were excluded due to language limitations within the research team.

## Significance of Rural Women Entrepreneurship

Although more rural women are starting their own businesses, their socioeconomic contributions and entrepreneurial potential remain widely underappreciated. This section emphasizes the significance of rural women entrepreneurs in South Africa.

### ***Empowerment of women in rural areas***

In the framework of rural women's empowerment, rural women have already demonstrated increased dedication and ingenuity in exploring various ways to improve their livelihoods and deepen their contribution and engagement towards addressing family and community needs (Demedeme and Opoku, 2022). For instance, in South Africa, women's contributions to rural communities cannot be overstated, even though they have comparatively less economic power. To prioritise measures that would directly impact rural residents' livelihoods, policymakers and development partners will be able to prioritise the emancipation of women in rural communities (Demedeme and Opoku, 2022). Women's entrepreneurship in rural Asian regions, particularly in countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh has emerged as a potent force for multifaceted empowerment, transcending conventional limitations and achieving notable progress in economic, social, and cultural realms (Agrawal *et al.*, 2023). This transformative journey showcases the dynamic interplay between entrepreneurial endeavours and women's empowerment within their respective communities. Since most rural communities view women as inferior and some are even uneducated, rural women's entrepreneurship is a way to help women in isolated places realise their full potential and unleash their greatness. As previously noted, rural women who establish enterprises are better able to make decisions for their families and society as a whole, leading to overall empowerment (Ganle *et al.*, 2015). As purported by Dwivedi and Dwivedi (2011), it is true that when women are empowered, families, societies, and nations advance because women serve as engines for progress and strengthen local economies. Access to resources and markets, actual ownership, and active control are the three elements that may be crucial for the empowerment of women through entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs should consider their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats during the empowerment process and move forward to unleash their potential to reach their goals through self-development (Vaish and Arrawatia, 2021).

### ***Reduction of poverty***

In light of a study by Wu and Yan (2020), the unsurpassed way to reduce poverty across nations globally is by promoting women's entrepreneurship development and increased economic activity. Rural entrepreneurship in South Africa has helped reduce poverty by generating employment through the establishment of new businesses and the growth of other businesses that already exist in rural communities (Ngorora and Mago, 2018). By creating new markets, industries, techniques, institutional structures, jobs, and net advances in real productivity and profitability, it also raises social wealth and the standard of life for the populace (Ali and Ali, 2013). A study by Fiseha *et al.* (2019), for instance, revealed that rural women's entrepreneurship in the Eastern Cape Province has been instrumental in poverty reduction through the provision of alternative goods and services, job creation, social

responsibility, and income generation. In support, a study on challenges hindering women entrepreneurship sustainability in rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe established that the importance of rural women entrepreneurship is emphasized by its significant contribution in reducing poverty by developing long-lasting economic prospects and generating income in areas that have been traditionally disadvantaged (Mashapure *et al.*, 2022)

### **Reduction in the rate of rural-urban migration**

As mentioned earlier, rural residents most often move to cities in pursuit of better opportunities. This is because there are not enough jobs and economic activities in rural South Africa (Visagie and Turok, 2021). As more women strive to support themselves independently in the rural areas, engaging in rural women entrepreneurship helps to significantly prevent rural-urban migration (Mlambo, 2018; Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015; Rahabhi *et al.*, 2021). The battle for resources is also increasing in cities; therefore, an opportunity is being created for individuals to shun migration to urban areas as rural entrepreneurship activity is on the rise, particularly through an increase in women-owned rural small businesses (Lekhanya, 2018). In a study by Mugobo and Ukupere (2011: 34) on the opportunities and challenges of rural entrepreneurship in the Western Cape Province, it was noted that, "as the majority of the population in Africa and other developing continents still live in rural areas. Many governments have prioritised rural entrepreneurship as a vehicle for socio-economic development of their rural population in particular and their countries in general." It can therefore be inferred that when rural communities develop rural-urban migration, rural entrepreneurship by women has provided impetus towards rural development in South Africa (Makandwa *et al.*, 2023). This is not exclusive to South Africa, as empirical data indicates that women in Nigeria actively participate in rural economic development through diverse entrepreneurial endeavours, including agriculture, small-scale businesses, and crafts (Alozie and Ekumankama, 2022). The resulting employment prospects have served as a mitigating factor against migration pressures, as rural-urban migration is a prevalent occurrence in Nigeria, fuelled by factors such as inadequate access to resources and opportunities in rural areas (Dokubo *et al.*, 2023).

### **Employment creation**

Rural women entrepreneurship necessitates employment creation, which could assist in addressing rural unemployment and under-employment (Karasi, 2018; Shenbei *et al.*, 2023). According to a survey conducted by Lionesses of Africa, a network of more than 1.3 million female entrepreneurs across Africa, together with New York University and ABSA, most South African female entrepreneurs said that creating jobs was a "very important" factor when they launched their firm (Majola, 2021). Due to unemployment concerns in rural areas, starting a business in a rural location can enable women to work for themselves while at the same time creating jobs for others (Mlambo, 2018; Rahman *et al.*, 2023). The fact that rural women's entrepreneurship has created employment in rural South Africa cannot be doubted, as there are empirical findings to that effect. For instance, a study concerning the prospects of entrepreneurship in rural South Africa by Ngorora and Mago (2018) established that rural entrepreneurial activities contribute immensely to employment and subsequent wealth creation for women in the Nkonkobe Municipal area located in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. In support of this, research in other contexts, such as China (Chen and Barcus, 2024), Brazil (França-Marques *et al.*, 2021), Ghana (Okyireh and Simpeh, 2016), and Malaysia (Ariffin *et al.*, 2020) concurred that the role of rural women entrepreneurship is of paramount importance in generating employment opportunities worldwide, and it has a significant impact on economic growth, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment.

### **Enhancement of quality of life**

Rural women's entrepreneurship contributes to raising the level of living within rural communities, thereby enhancing quality of life (Ahman *et al.*, 2022). This is because rural women entrepreneurs can financially support themselves through their small businesses. In addition, they can take their children to school, thus encouraging more locals to become more literate and creating a community of educated people (Ajani *et al.*, 2021). It is also crucial to remember that when rural communities earn money for themselves, they can afford to properly feed themselves well and become healthier. This then enhances, lengthens, and increases living standards. A study by Nomnga (2021) revealed that to empower rural women in the hospitality small business industry in the Eastern Cape Province, the Morgans Bay Bed and Breakfast programme was launched which saw standards of living of many rural-based households improving. After realising the benefits brought about by rural women entrepreneurship, most women wanted to be part of the programme, as it proved to be a source of a better livelihood.

### **Balanced regional development**

Rural entrepreneurship prevents industrial concentration in urban areas and promotes balanced regional economic development (Kushalakshi and Raghurama, 2012). Effective entrepreneurship development initiatives can support balanced regional growth by creating small-scale units in isolated rural areas. Rural women's entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in rural development by eliminating the imbalances and discrepancies in development between regions (Rahman *et al.*, 2023). In a study by Madzivhandila and Musara (2020), it was noted that, "Local economic development policies around the world increasingly emphasise entrepreneurship as a tool to mobilise local and indigenous economic potential." This has seen local municipalities in South Africa spearheading rural entrepreneurship as a way to prevent development. Hlanyane and Acheampong (2017) argue that rural municipalities in South Africa are plagued by unemployment and poverty; therefore, the employment possibilities that women entrepreneurs can offer are vital to addressing these social issues. Similarly, Mehtap *et al.* (2017) established that the emergence of rural women entrepreneurship in Jordan has served as a catalyst for promoting regional development, thereby fuelling economic growth and empowerment in areas that have traditionally been underserved.

### **Challenges faced by Rural Women Entrepreneurs**

Numerous challenges must be overcome to run a successful business, and these challenges are increasing for women (Fallah and Soori, 2023). According to Adikaram and Razik (2023), it is well known that female entrepreneurs encounter particular difficulties that frequently differ from those faced by their male counterparts. However, women have succeeded in the business sphere despite all the odds, demonstrating their business savvy (Bhatnagar, 2020). The following is a list of some of the main obstacles faced by rural South African women business owners:

#### **Lack of funding**

Most of the time, women in rural South Africa lack finance to spearhead their entrepreneurial activities (Abor and Quartey, 2010; Mafukata, 2023). Both local and foreign funders occasionally tend to disregard women working on minor business initiatives in rural areas. Even in their own communities, because of the marginalisation of women, people are less likely to encourage or financially back them when they start their own businesses, because they believe that women are pursuing pointless projects (O'Neill and Viljoen, 2001). A study by Karasi (2018) on rural women entrepreneurs in the Vhembe district conducted noted that 54% of rural women entrepreneurs lacked adequate financing to commence their business ventures. Mandipaka (2014) argued that there is little or no financial support from third parties for South African rural women, who are forced to rely on their own savings to initiate businesses. Unlike South Africa and other countries in emerging economies, several developed nations have acknowledged the crucial role that rural women entrepreneurship plays in promoting economic development and community growth (Raman *et al.*, 2022). To empower and improve the lives of women in rural areas, developed nations allocate specific funds to rural women entrepreneurs, recognising the potential for substantial change that results from economically empowering women in regions that have been historically disadvantaged.

#### **Gender bias**

The current literature reveals that female business owners are keenly conscious of the gender inequality concerns that influence the growth of rural entrepreneurship in South Africa (Karasi, 2017). This is due to societal beliefs, which identify the role of women as primarily domestic (Nomnga, 2021). However, fostering women's businesses becomes crucial as it reduces women's dependency and helplessness in the country (Futha, 2021). Literature demonstrates that women-driven entrepreneurship exhibits gender-based discrimination from an entrepreneurial standpoint (Mandipaka, 2014). Therefore, a collectivist strategy is required to oppose gender-oppressive regimes. For instance, the government and other stakeholders should raise public awareness of the need for gender equality in SMMEs whether they owned by men or women. This will change the long-held belief that SMMEs owned by women are less significant than those owned by men (Chimucheka and Magadla, 2021).

#### **Lack of education and training**

A greater proportion of women in rural areas of South Africa lack adequate formal education, as parents tend to place greater emphasis on the education of their sons than their daughters. As a result, girls and women lack knowledge of most business skills and company management expertise (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015). Consequently, they lack adequate business skills, which makes it difficult for these rural women to pursue

entrepreneurship. The study by Nomnga (2021), which focused on women entrepreneurship in the tourism sector within the Eastern Cape province, for instance, revealed that most rural women failed to obtain meaningful ventures as they lacked sufficient education and only ended up in low-skilled business ventures. Due to insufficient education, rural women business owners are unable to adopt new manufacturing techniques, marketing trends, or government initiatives that would otherwise encourage them (Irene, 2017). Furthermore, as attested by Karasi (2018), many women in South African rural communities lack adequate training because of their educational background, which is an obstacle to women starting their own businesses because few banks want to fund people who have no formal training or skills. Chimucheka and Magadla (2021) alluded that female enterprises would benefit from training that stresses developing business skills in a competitive environment, the capacity to analyse an industry for possible market possibilities and niches, and the capacity to utilise information to strengthen an organisation's competitive edge.

### **Poor managerial abilities**

Ojah and Mokoaleli-Mokoteli (2010) proffered that because most rural women lack administrative skills and education, some women find it challenging to run, oversee, coordinate, and supervise their businesses. Sometimes, they also lack adequate training, and as a result, a potential firm collapses owing to a lack of management abilities. As reported by Nomnga (2021), "the limited education and lack of business skills were noted as hindrances for women who intend to establish rural SMMEs; therefore, it is the government's obligation to support women as part of enhancing socio-economic development." Karasi (2018) also noted that most rural women entrepreneurs in South Africa had less access to training facilities, which could have gone a long way in capacity building for them to manage their small businesses efficiently. Karasi's (2018) findings are supported by Gavigan *et al.* (2023) who established that managerial abilities lack among rural women entrepreneurs. The study further suggests that entrepreneurship training increases entrepreneurial skillsets by 25% and that further training and educational opportunities may improve managerial abilities, which in turn would enhance the social standing and living standards of rural women entrepreneurs in Uganda.

### **Balancing between family and career**

Women entrepreneurs in rural South African societies sometimes struggle to balance their families and careers. As alluded by Karasi (2018), in rural areas, women are usually in charge of looking after their houses and family, thereby creating problems with work-life balance on their part. They occasionally devote most of their time to caring for their children and the elderly, and maintaining the cleanliness of their homes, which results in any business prospects failing at the periphery stages (Rudhumbu *et al.*, 2020). Due to the constrained time that South African rural women entrepreneurs have to balance their family and career, the potential of their business ventures is often hindered. Globally, the challenges of balancing family and career are considerable, but there is a growing awareness of the importance of adopting more inclusive and adaptable approaches to entrepreneurship (Rahman *et al.*, 2023). A combination of supportive policies, cultural changes, and personal strategies can help foster an environment that enables women entrepreneurs to achieve success in both their personal and professional lives (Sobhan and Hassan, 2024).

For rural women to participate in the development of entrepreneurship, their growth and development as entrepreneurs must be encouraged; otherwise, this would remain a distant dream. In addition to eliminating gender bias, supporting female rural entrepreneurs in South Africa is crucial for social and economic growth. Actually, the success of women-owned businesses is likewise essential to the progress of any nation's economy and society (Shakeel *et al.*, 2020). To increase the performance of women-owned small businesses, the South African government should work with the private sector and non-governmental organisations to find strategies to unleash the potential of rural female entrepreneurs. This study provides the following policy recommendations:

- The government is encouraged to adopt a uniform approach to support women's entrepreneurship development in South Africa. This will go a long way to ensure that no marginalisation of any rural community occurs. Additionally, government policies to promote rural women empowerment should conform to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 5 to achieve gender equality, social inclusion, and human rights (Pathania, 2017).
- For the convenience of rural entrepreneurs, there is a need for significant investment in social infrastructure, particularly in the building of roads and other facilities. The South African government should realise that

encouraging rural entrepreneurship has a significant impact on the country's growth and that efforts must be made to ensure that these businesses are effectively supported.

- With a systematic approach that aims to support rural women entrepreneurs who may then activate entrepreneurial activities within the larger local community environment, the government should facilitate the development of community capacity and stimulate rural women's entrepreneurship.
- The Department of Small Business Development should organise more workshops to help rural women entrepreneurs enhance their skills and offer advice when necessary while also allowing the community a chance to take the initiative and come up with their own solutions.
- To manage connections between rural entrepreneurship and local economic development, a more comprehensive approach to rural development is required, tying the internal operations of different council departments together through a "Supporting the Local Economy Panel."
- In addition to taking into consideration the challenges resulting from characteristics of the rural environment itself, policy measures aimed at promoting the establishment, expansion, and survival of women-owned enterprises in rural regions must also consider the characteristics of rural businesses. These include the small size of regional markets, lack of trading prospects with other companies, and shortage of skilled workers in regional labour markets.

## Conclusion

The review unequivocally demonstrates how crucial rural women's entrepreneurship development is a force behind employment creation and economic growth in South Africa. The study is significant because it examines the discourse surrounding rural entrepreneurship in greater detail than just a brief story of individual entrepreneurs. Instead, it conducts a thorough analysis of how rural entrepreneurship can be used to advance economic development. However, as is evident from the literature review, women entrepreneurs continue to face various challenges that affect their rural-owned small businesses. These challenges include a lack of adequate financing, education and training, gender bias, inadequate business skills, and difficulties in balancing family and business. Consequently, the South African government must play a crucial role in resolving the issues faced by rural women entrepreneurs. Some of the recommendations intended for the government that have been put forward in this paper encompass the strengthening of policies to promote rural women empowerment, utilising a systematic strategy to promote community capacity building and the acceleration of rural women's entrepreneurship, a need for the implementation of a more comprehensive strategy for rural development, and facilitating more training and skill acquisition workshops for rural women entrepreneurs. Finally, it is essential to promote the establishment and development of rural women's businesses in order to build better rural economies and communities in South Africa, achieve gender equality, and create good and productive employment.

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