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**Identifying inclusive development strategies for empowering Women with Disabilities in Sri Lanka through entrepreneurship and leadership**

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# Abstract

This research examines the strategies that promote inclusive development for the empowerment of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka, with a particular focus on entrepreneurship and leadership. The study seeks to identify effective strategies that can contribute to the social and economic inclusion of women with disabilities, who constitute 57% of the 1.6 million people with disabilities in the country. Despite national and international efforts towards gender equity and disability inclusion, women with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to economic empowerment and leadership roles. This research aims to explore these barriers, analyze existing policies and programs, and identify best practices for fostering inclusion through entrepreneurship and leadership. By examining vocational education, self-employment, upskilling employability-related skills, and promoting individual and group enterprises, the study seeks to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders. The research aims to bridge the gap in existing literature by focusing on the intersectionality of gender and disability in the context of inclusive development. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies that support the empowerment of women with disabilities, ensuring their active participation in the economic and leadership spheres, thereby advancing gender equality and social justice in Sri Lanka.

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# Chapter 01 – Introduction

This research examines the strategies that promote inclusive development towards empowering Women with Disabilities in Sri Lanka through entrepreneurship and leadership. It intends to identify unique and practical strategies focusing on entrepreneurship and leadership that can contribute to empowering women with disabilities by promoting inclusive development. It will pave the way for the stakeholders to explore further research and applications of strategies to promote inclusive development in the country.

## 1.1. Background

According to data (from the 2012 Population and Statistics Department), 1,617,924 individuals (8.7% of the total population) have disabilities, with 57% of them being women and girls with disabilities. Remarkably, 71% of the 1.6 million people with disabilities are not engaged in any economic activity. It is reasonable to believe that this situation has persisted over time and has possibly worsened.

The statistics mentioned above highlight the exclusion of women and girls with disabilities, who constitute the majority, from society due to a lack of monitoring of their disability status. Women with disabilities in Sri Lanka encounter numerous barriers to economic empowerment and leadership roles. Despite national and international efforts to promote gender equity and disability inclusion, their active participation in these domains remains significantly limited. The existing body of literature highlights the intersectionality of gender and disability as a crucial area for fostering social and economic inclusion. Addressing these challenges through entrepreneurship and leadership development can be a transformative strategy, empowering women with disabilities to take control of their lives and contribute to the nation's development in meaningful ways. (unwomen, 2023)

The uniqueness of this research is that it has not been conducted on the ground or published as research anywhere else in Sri Lanka.

Although these insights provide encouraging research propositions, there is a notable gap in understanding what strategies have been formulated and how effective those strategies were in terms of promoting the inclusive development of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Existing literature primarily focuses on physical, psychological, intellectual, economic and social challenges faced by women with disabilities in their empowerment path, with less emphasis on their entrepreneurial and leadership potentials. This gap highlights the need for a detailed examination of what strategies on entrepreneurship and leadership can contribute to the inclusive development of women with disabilities which is a critical factor for a long-term and lasting solution in their empowerment. (Ranabahu, 2021)

## 1.2. Rationale

This research intends to identify effective strategies for entrepreneurship and leadership to promote the inclusive development of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka, thereby improving their empowerment.

This research helps identify ways to support and empower women with Disabilities, promoting their inclusion in society. This can lead to increased economic opportunities, financial independence, and the development of leadership skills for these women. The research can also uncover the challenges they face, providing insights into improving support systems and policies that create a more inclusive environment. Additionally, it can contribute to achieving broader goals of gender equality and social justice in Sri Lanka.

This research directly benefits women with disabilities, while also offering indirect advantages to various other stakeholders, including the government, all the relevant ministries, policymakers, local communities, businesses and entrepreneurs, educational and training institutions, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, international development organizations and Funders.

Moreover, to determine the best strategies for fostering inclusive development in entrepreneurship and leadership, in terms of contributing to empowerment. Therefore, the research will critically evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies adopted, towards the magnitude of the women with disabilities benefited, the types of disabilities covered, and the extent to the empowerment achieved by the beneficiaries.

## 1.3. Research Problem

The core research problem at the centre of this research study is identifying effective entrepreneurship and leadership strategies for inclusive development for the empowerment of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Within the changing context, where there is favourable empowerment of women with disabilities is taking place, this research study will offer insights into how economic empowerment through entrepreneurship can be beneficial in speeding up and sustaining the empowerment obtained. The focus is on the women with disabilities in Sri Lanka, recognizing their unique physical, psychological, intellectual, cultural, economic, and social contexts that may influence the effectiveness of these strategies.

The research delves into various strategies for inclusive development through entrepreneurship and leadership, including but not limited to the promotion of vocational education, promotion of self-employment, interventions to upskill employability-related skills, and promotion of individual and group enterprises. It seeks to understand how these measures contribute to inclusive development and thereby the empowerment of women with disabilities. Additionally, it explores existing policies and programs supporting entrepreneurship and leadership for women with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

However, this study does not extend to comparing the women with disabilities in Sri Lanka with other groups with disabilities. It also does not cover the other strategies implemented on inclusive development for empowerment such as organizational strengthening of DPOs or disability rehabilitation. Instead, it remains focused on the entrepreneurship and leadership strategies for the inclusive development of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka, aiming to provide actionable recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers to enhance empowerment initiatives. (Cord, 2023)

## 1.4. Research Focus

### 1.4.1. Research Aim

This research aims to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by women with disabilities concerning entrepreneurship and leadership in Sri Lanka and to provide valuable

insights for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to design and implement more effective strategies for the empowerment of women with disabilities which can create an inclusive environment where they can pursue economic and leadership opportunities on an equal footing with others as an economically independent individuals. (Ranabahu, 2021)

### 1.4.2. Research Objectives

- To analyze the socio-economic challenges and barriers faced by women with disabilities.
- To explore existing policies and programs supporting entrepreneurship and leadership for women with disabilities.
- To identify best practices and strategies for fostering inclusion in entrepreneurship and leadership roles.
- To propose actionable recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers to enhance empowerment initiatives.

## 1.5. Research Significance

The timely significance of this research study in the context of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka is multifaceted, proposing benefits to the women with disabilities, stakeholders and policymakers.

**Importance to women with disabilities:** For women with disabilities, the implementation of entrepreneurship and leadership strategies for inclusive development is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it directly influences their economic empowerment, which is a key indicator of their empowerment. Economically stable and included women with disabilities are more engaged, show greater independence, and are likely to be committed and contribute positively to the overall betterment of other women with disabilities. Additionally, the DPOs are often characterized by a lack of active members, a lack of active participation in the activities and a lack of financial resources. By addressing entrepreneurship and leadership for inclusive development, women with disabilities can believe in themselves, reducing their dependence on others and the overall society and can be role models to believe in others for their empowerment. Furthermore, women with disabilities who enjoy a good private and

social life are less prone to create a culture of dependent and incapable groups, thereby ensuring a group that contributes critically and positively to the national welfare. (unwomen, 2024)

**Importance to Stakeholders and Policymakers:** This research will provide stakeholders with evidence-based insights and practical strategies to improve approaches and plans. It will help in designing policies and policy-related programs that are not only aligned with national objectives but also support the well-being of women with disabilities. The study will also highlight the role of entrepreneurship and leadership in cultivating a feeling conducive to economic empowerment. By implementing these strategies, stakeholders can build a more resilient and adaptive community of women with disabilities, capable of responding to the increasing needs of inclusive development in economic empowerment. (Naughton, 2024)

The introduction section has established on the basis of the research study by presenting the background, rationale, problem, focus, and significance of identifying the inclusive development strategies for empowering women with disabilities in Sri Lanka through entrepreneurship and leadership. Going forward, the research study will discuss detailed methodology, data collection, analysis of findings, and the formulation of practical strategies for fostering inclusion in entrepreneurship and leadership roles.

# Chapter 02- Literature review

The literature review seeks to identify and critically assess inclusive development strategies that can empower women with disabilities through entrepreneurship and leadership. This explores the existing inclusive development frameworks, examining how entrepreneurship and leadership initiatives can be designed to overcome the barriers faced by women with disabilities. This review will highlight the importance of fostering an environment where women with disabilities can thrive as leaders and entrepreneurs, thereby creating a more inclusive and resilient society.

## 2.1. Inclusive development strategies

Inclusive development strategies for women with disabilities have been identified as essential in achieving gender equality and ensuring that women with disabilities have equal access to opportunities and resources. Several scholars have argued that the challenges faced by this group are affected by both gender and disability related barriers, leading to increased marginalization and exclusion from key societal processes (huges, 2017). Kay strategies include ensuring access to inclusive education, which helps women with disabilities through skill development, and vocational training and promoting economic empowerment through entrepreneurship programs. (world, 2020). Accessible infrastructure and assistive technologies are essential for enabling participation in public life, while community based rehabilitation  and social inclusion initiatives aim to reduce stigma and integrate women with disability into society. (Hartley, 2009). Participation in political and leadership roles is another important strategy for the inclusion of women with disabilities. This can be fulfilled through training programs on leadership, increasing awareness about the importance of representation of women with disabilities in political and leadership roles. This will indirectly helpful to ensure the inclusivity of the policies by providing platforms for them to engage in advocacy and leadership roles. (UNPRPD, 2021)

## 2.2. Empowerment of women with disabilities

Women and girls with disabilities face systemic marginalization and attitudinal and environmental barriers that lead to lower economic and social status; increased risk of violence and abuse, including sexual violence; discrimination as well as harmful gender-based

discriminatory practices; and barriers to access education, health care, including sexual and reproductive health, information and services, and justice as well as civic and political participation. This hinders their participation on an equal basis with others. (unwomen, 2018). Women with disabilities are often subjected to double discrimination due to their gender and disability status and continue to be at a disadvantage in most spheres of society and development. Available data suggests that the gap is stark compared with men without disabilities: women with disabilities are three times more likely to have unmet needs for health care (Figure 1); three times more likely to be illiterate (Figure 2); two times less likely to be employed and two times less likely to use the Internet. Among those employed, women with disabilities are two times less likely to work as legislators, senior officials or managers. Women with disabilities tend also to be in a worse position than women without disabilities. Moreover, women with disabilities are at heightened risk of suffering sexual violence compared to those without disabilities. To achieve gender equality and to empower all women with disabilities, it is important to integrate their needs and perspectives into national level strategies or action plans on disability and gender. Policies and programs should be developed to ensure their full and equal participation in society. Education serves as a foundation for personal and professional growth, providing skills and knowledge necessary for women and girls with disabilities to contribute to society. So, it is critical to promote their independence and equality through investment in education and facilitating their transition from school to work. Supporting this transition ensures that they can access meaningful employment opportunities, achieve financial independence, and actively participate in the economy, leading to a greater social inclusion and empowerment. (Mclaws, 2019)

## 2.3. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship for women with disabilities has been identified as a powerful tool for promoting the economic empowerment, independence, and social inclusion. Several studies highlight the challenges faced by women with disabilities in accessing employment opportunities like discrimination, physical barriers, ad social stigma. As a result entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as a unreachable goal for women with disabilities to achieve economic independency and self sufficiency. (disabilities, 2020). Additionally, some studies underscore that the multifaceted challenges faced by women entrepreneurs with

disabilities, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support, inclusive policies, and societal awareness to facilitate their successful participation in entrepreneurship. The literature suggests that entrepreneurial opportunities can provide a greater control over the professional lives of the women with disabilities allowing them to create business that accommodate their specific needs. Small business support services and training programs have been identified as effective method for promoting entrepreneurship among women with disabilities. These programs typically offer financial assistance, training, and mentoring, which help women with disabilities to overcome the challenges of starting and sustaining a business. (unwomen, 2024).

## 2.4. Leadership

Persons with Disabilities, particularly women with disabilities face significant discrimination and social disadvantage, which is specially more pronounced for women. These women have historically been marginalized by the societal institutions such as family, education system and workplace. Society often sees them as incapable of living full, successful lives due to their impairments, and they are rarely seen as capable of leading other individuals and other organizations, including disability related organizations. According to tradition leadership is considered as a male dominated area and so it has been really difficult for women with disabilities to access the leadership roles. Even in democratic societies, the efforts that have been taken to change this reality is slow and largely ineffective. Most of the literature materials on women with disabilities has been written by women themselves considering their own life experiences. These real life stories range from expressions of anger, frustration, as well as achievements and happiness despite the struggles they face. Research on women with disabilities and leadership is still comparatively low. (Anon., 2015).

Women with disabilities in all their diversity must not only be treated as victims of crises, but as leaders and changemakers. They need to be able to advocate for their rights effectively and address their societal needs. By using lessons learnt from the challenges we have faced and continue to face, actors must ensure the experiences of women and girls with disabilities are taken into account. Successful leadership for women with disabilities can ensure quality education, inclusive workplaces, and more equal and inclusive societies. (Naughton, 2024)

## 2.5. Overview of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka

Individuals (8.7% of the total population) have disabilities, with 57% of them being women and girls with disabilities. Remarkably, 71% of the 1.6 million people with disabilities are not engaged in any economic activity. It is reasonable to believe that this situation has persisted over time and has possibly worsened. The statistics mentioned above highlight the exclusion of women and girls with disabilities, who constitute the majority, from society due to a lack of monitoring of their disability status. Women with disabilities in Sri Lanka encounter numerous barriers to economic empowerment and leadership roles. Despite national and international efforts to promote gender equity and disability inclusion, their active participation in these domains remain significantly limited. The existing body of literature highlights the intersectionality of gender and disability as a crucial area for fostering social and economic inclusion. Addressing these challenges through entrepreneurship and leadership development can be a transformative strategy, empowering women with disabilities to take control of their lives and contribute to the nation's development in meaningful ways. (Pathirage, 2023)

## 2.6. Implementation of inclusive development strategies and empowerment of women with disabilities

The implementation of inclusive development strategies for the empowerment of women with disabilities has been widely identified as crucial in addressing the barriers they face in society. Literature suggests that women with disabilities encounter, many challenges due to the intersection of gender and disability, resulting in exclusion from education, employment, and leadership roles. Studies highlight the importance of ensuring access to education, skills training, and economic opportunities. Additionally, inclusive policies and legal frameworks that protect the rights the women with disabilities are critical to promote equality. Empowerment is not solely dependent on access to resources but also on shifting societal attitudes and addressing every barriers to inclusion. Community-based approaches, intersectional strategies and collaborative efforts between disability and women's rights movements have been identified as essential in creating supportive environments for the

empowerment. The literature underscores the need for comprehensive approaches that incorporate cultural, social and economic dimensions to ensure women with disabilities can fully obtain their rights and contribute to societal development. (Cohrs, 2024)

## 2.7. Challenges in Implementing inclusive development strategies

The literature on inclusive development strategies for women with disabilities explains a complex intersection of challenges and opportunities. They often face discrimination due to gender and disability leading to exclusion from education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. The lack of date and research can be considered as another factor that hinders the development of effective policies and programs. It is a huge challenge to understand the specific needs and barriers faced by this group without accurate information. A blog post by world bank underscores the importance of collecting disaggregated data to inform inclusive development strategies. (Cord, 2023) Women with disabilities are often underrepresented in community development initiatives and other organizations of persons with disabilities. Their exclusion from decision making processes results in policies and programs that do not fully address their requirements and ideas. An article from light for the world proves the importance of involving women and girls with disabilities in community initiatives to promote inclusive development. (Anon., 2023) Physical and digital environments lack accessibility facilities such as ramps, elevators, and assistive technologies hindering women with disabilities from fully participating in social and economic activities. On the other hand, they are at a high risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse. The article by inclusive features highlights the increased risks faced by the groups. (Anon., 2020). Addressing these challenges requires a wide approach that includes collecting data, promoting and empowering the participation of women with disabilities in decision making, ensuring accessible infrastructure and etc, …

## 2.8. Summary

This literature review focuses on inclusive development strategies focused at empowering women with disabilities through entrepreneurship and leadership in Sri Lanka. It examines key strategies, challenges, and the current state of research in this area, emphasizing the need for an integrated approach that addresses both gender and disability-related barriers.

# Chapter 03 – Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology deployed to identify inclusive development strategies for empowering Women with Disabilities in Sri Lanka through entrepreneurship and leadership. This chapter also presents the details of the research philosophy, approach, strategy, data collection methods, sampling strategy, measures for ensuring reliability and validity, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and study limitations. The methodology is proposed to provide a broader understanding of entrepreneurship and leadership-related inclusive development strategies for empowering women with disabilities in Sri Lanka.
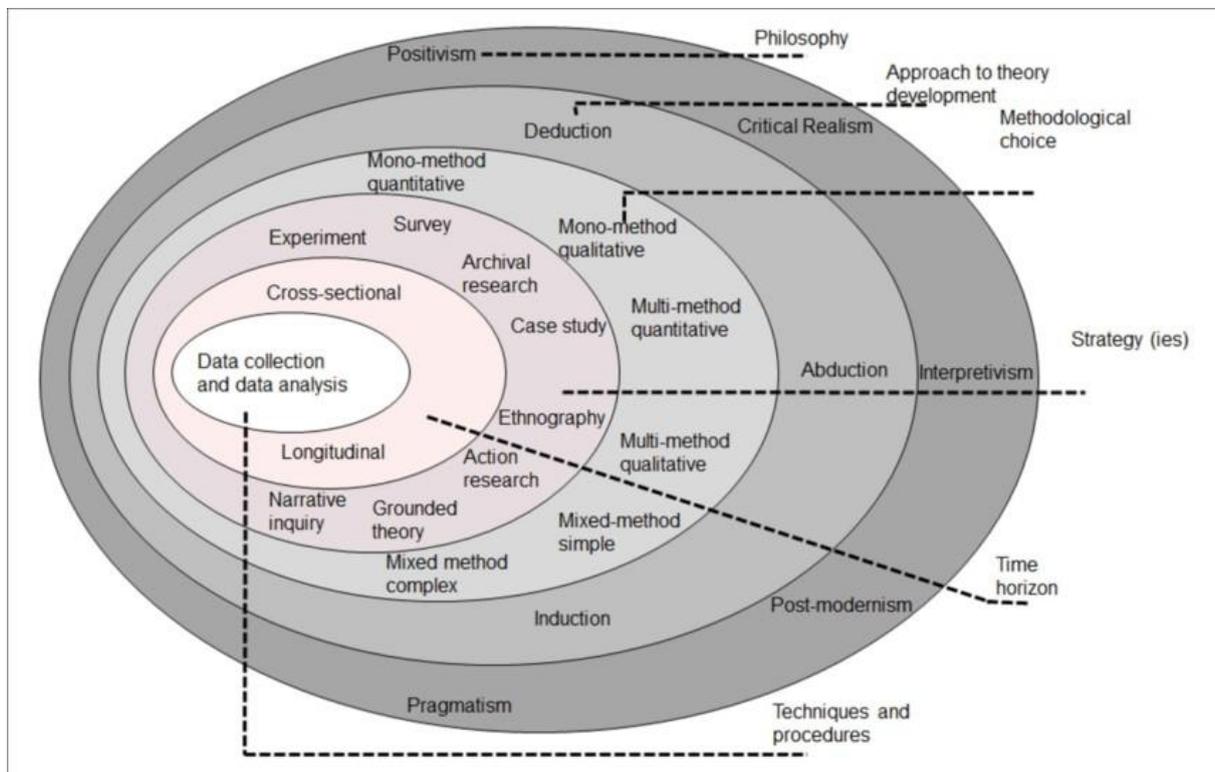


Figure 1: Research Onion Model (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 108).

## 3.1. Research Philosophy

In research, various philosophies help guide the approach to understanding and interpreting data. These include:

**Positivism:** Positivism is grounded in the belief that knowledge is derived from empirical evidence gathered through observation and measurement. It emphasizes objectivity and the use of quantitative methods to test hypotheses. Researchers adopting this philosophy often rely on statistical tools to analyze data (Bryman, 2016).

**Interpretivism:** Interpretivism focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals. It is often associated with qualitative research methods, emphasizing the importance of context and the researcher's interpretation of data (Saunders et al., 2019).

**Realism:** Realism, like positivism, believes in the existence of an objective reality. However, it also acknowledges that our understanding of this reality is influenced by social and cultural factors. Realism can involve both qualitative and quantitative methods (Bhattacharya, 2017).

**Pragmatism:** Pragmatism does not commit to any one system of philosophy or reality. It allows for the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, depending on what best suits the research question (Creswell, 2014).

Realism is chosen as the philosophy of this study. This philosophy is chosen because the understanding of the reality of entrepreneurship and leadership-related inclusive development strategies for the empowerment of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka is influenced by social and cultural factors. Realism is suitable in this research as it allows for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Also, once the data are collected by both methods through a survey, they can be statistically analyzed to test hypotheses. This approach aligns to identify the popular strategies for the empowerment of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka measurably and objectively.

## 3.2. Research Approach

The research approach for this study was inductive. The inductive approach began with research and established a theory, then investigated and observed to find a generalized theory. In 14 inductive

methods, the researcher began by collecting relevant data for the research topic. Once a substantial amount of data was collected, the researcher developed an empirical generalization, stepping back to get an overview (Kim, 2021). In this research, the author found new insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by women with disabilities in entrepreneurship and leadership in Sri Lanka. Based on the analysis, the author tried to build theories or strategies for the empowerment of women with disabilities with the help of real-world data and observations.

## 3.3. Research Strategies

In the world of academic research, various strategies are deployed based on the objectives of the study. Experiments are commonly used in studies aiming to establish causal relationships, as they allow for the manipulation and control of variables in a controlled environment (Creswell, 2014). Surveys, on the other hand, are particularly effective for descriptive or explanatory research, enabling data collection from a broad population sample, which is ideal for generalizing findings (Bryman, 2016). Case studies provide an in-depth understanding of a particular context or phenomenon, offering detailed insights that are often not achievable through other methods (Yin, 2018). Action research is a qualitative method that focuses on solving problems in social systems, such as schools and other organizations. The emphasis is on solving the presenting problem by generating knowledge and taking action within the social system in which the problem is located. The goal is to generate shared knowledge of how to address the problem by bridging the theory-practice gap (Bourner & Brook, 2019). Grounded theory is another strategy that stands out for its ability to develop theory through systematic data collection and analysis, often used in qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014). For this research on the empowerment of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka, the chosen research strategy was a survey. This strategy was selected because of its effectiveness in collecting quantitative data from a large sample. This was essential to begin collecting a substantial amount of relevant data for the research topic to develop an empirical generalization. Surveys allowed for the efficient gathering of data on the empowerment of women with disabilities, facilitating the statistical analysis required to identify strategies. This method aligned well with the 15th positivist philosophy and inductive approach of this research, allowing a structured and quantifiable means to march toward the research objectives.

## 3.4. Data Collection

A mixed method of data collection was employed for this study. This approach was chosen for its effectiveness in gathering substantial data to support the inductive approach. The following data collection methods were used in this study:

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 15 to 20 participants, including women with disabilities, policymakers, and representatives from organizations involved in disability inclusion. Conducting interviews for this research allowed a deeper, more personalized exploration of this research area. It provided qualitative data that could uncover key challenges and opportunities, ensuring that the strategies developed are both inclusive and impactful.

**Focused Group Discussions**

Group discussions were organized with entrepreneurs and leaders with disabilities to capture collective insights. This provided an interactive platform for participants to share experiences, identify shared challenges, brainstorm solutions, and contribute to the creation of actionable strategies. By fostering collaboration and allowing for nuanced insights, focused groups generated practical, context-specific, and culturally appropriate recommendations that could guide policy and programme development aimed at advancing inclusive development.

**Questionnaires**

Questionnaires were used in this study, and they were designed using both online and physical platforms. These Questionnaires helped to provide a cost-effective, scalable, and structured way to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from a large and diverse group of participants. The data generated through questionnaires offered valuable insights into the barriers, challenges, and strategies for success, supporting the development of inclusive policies and programmes tailored to the needs of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

## 3.5. Sampling Strategy

Sometimes a population contains clear, known, easily identified groups. If a random sample is chosen from such a population as a whole, each segment or stratum may be underrepresented or overrepresented in the sample compared with the population. A stratified random sample is obtained by choosing a random sample separately from each of the strata (segments or groups) of the population (Glasgow, 2005). This sampling strategy ensures that the sample is representative of the total population and its similar categories, minimizing biases and enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The target population was employees working in the Sri Lankan BPO industry. A sample size of approximately 20 respondents, including women with disabilities, was selected from the Puttalam and Colombo districts. This sample size was sufficient for quantitative analysis, providing a balance between statistical acceptance and practicality in data collection.

## 3.6. Reliability and Validity

Credibility was enhanced through triangulation, member checking, and maintaining reflexivity. Triangulation was achieved by collecting data from multiple sources, while member checking ensured accuracy and authenticity. Reflexivity is involved in the maintenance of a research journal to identify and mitigate potential biases. In this study, the questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test with a small group of women with disabilities, ensuring reliability. Once the pilot was done, the questionnaire was refined for clarity and consistency of the questions. To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was subjected to an expert review to ensure that the questions accurately captured the parameters that were being studied.

## 3.7. Data Analysis

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), a powerful software for handling complex statistical data, was used for the data analysis of this study. The analysis of this research 17 involved quantitative data analysis focusing on descriptive and inferential statistical techniques and qualitative data analysis. SPSS was chosen for its capacity to handle large datasets efficiently, its robustness, and its user-friendly interface. SPSS also offered a wide array of statistical functions and tests for rigorous data analysis in research of this nature. The use of SPSS ensured complete and accurate data analysis. Eventually, it contributed to the reliability and validity of the research findings. Both quantitative and qualitative data

analysis methods were used as they helped to create a clear understanding of how to empower women with disabilities through entrepreneurship and leadership in Sri Lanka. The Qualitative data analysis method was particularly useful for exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by women with disabilities in entrepreneurship and leadership roles. Thematic analysis and content analysis were used as techniques. The Quantitative data analysis method was useful to measure and statistically analyze data. Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and factor analysis were used as techniques.

## 3.8. Ethical Issues

Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and their rights, with written or verbal consent obtained before participation. Their privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained by anonymizing personal information, securely storing data, and ensuring data protection. The research focused only on relevant, nonintrusive questions and was conducted with sensitivity and respect for participants' personal and cultural values. Participants had the right to withdraw at any time.

- The study was transparent, and the collected data were used for academic purposes only.
- Additionally, extra care was taken to ensure the inclusiveness and accessibility of the data collection methods (like Sign language interpreters).

## 3.9. Limitations

- The sample was limited to 20 women with disabilities (WWD).
- Key government officials were limited to 6 personnel.
- Sensitive information about WWD was limited to ethical intervention.
- Data was filtered with input from field experts to address social desirability bias, which could lead participants to provide answers they thought were expected rather than their true feelings. Additionally, limited experience or knowledge about the topic could affect the accuracy of their responses.

# Chapter 04 - Primary Research Findings

## 4.1. Primary Research Planning

**1. Planning the Questionnaire**

The planning phase of the questionnaire was guided by the overarching aims of the research and the key themes that emerged from the literature review. The central objective was to explore the lived experiences, daily realities, and business-related challenges and opportunities of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka. This included gaining insight into their entrepreneurial journeys, aspirations, leadership roles, and the broader socio-cultural context influencing their participation in economic life. Careful attention was paid for ensuring the questionnaire was both inclusive and accessible. This was achieved by using plain language, avoiding jargon, and considering formats that would be easy to read and comprehend for individuals with varying levels of literacy and ability. The questionnaire was crafted to be participant-friendly, minimizing potential discomfort or confusion, and encouraging honest and meaningful responses.

**2. Questionnaire Design Approach**

A mixed-methods approach underpinned the design of the questionnaire, blending both quantitative and qualitative elements. This dual strategy was selected to allow for the collection of structured data suitable for statistical analysis, while also capturing in-depth, narrative responses that convey the personal experiences of respondents. Closed-ended questions offered measurable insights into patterns and trends, whereas open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their own stories, reflections, and unique perspectives. The questionnaire was organized according to the study's specific objectives, ensuring alignment between each section and the relevant research goals. Prior to finalization, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of women with disabilities. Their feedback was used to revise wording, remove ambiguity, and ensure cultural sensitivity and clarity in every item. This iterative process helped guarantee that the questions were understandable, relevant, and respectful.

**3. Estimated Time to Complete the Questionnaire**

The estimated completion time for the questionnaire was set at approximately 20 to 30 minutes. This time frame was chosen to strike a balance between depth and participant comfort. Given the diverse abilities and backgrounds of respondents, extra care was taken to simplify the language and maintain a logical flow of questions to reduce cognitive load and fatigue. The format and structure were

intentionally kept consistent to avoid confusion and to create a smooth, user-friendly experience, particularly for participants with limited access to assistive technologies or educational resources.

**4. Structure and Content of the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was systematically divided into six key sections, each designed to gather information aligned with specific research objectives:

**Section A**: Demographic and Background Information

This section captures basic participant data such as age, location, type of disability, education level, and family background, providing context for subsequent analysis.

**Section B**: Entrepreneurial Experience and Aspirations

Linked to Objective 1, this section explores the participants' business activities, motivations for entrepreneurship, and long-term goals.

**Section C**: Leadership and Empowerment

Connected to Objective 2, this section examines how participants view leadership, their roles in decision-making, and their experiences with empowerment in personal and community contexts.

**Section D**: Access to Resources and Support

This section maps out the availability and adequacy of financial, institutional, and social support, identifying both enablers and barriers to business development.

**Section E**: Social and Cultural Factors

This section delves into the intersectional challenges women with disabilities face, including discrimination, social stigma, and cultural expectations that influence their roles as entrepreneurs and leaders.

**Section F**: Recommendations and Suggestions

This final section invites participants to offer their own ideas and strategies for improving support systems, enhancing empowerment, and promoting inclusion.

**5. Interview Approach**

To complement the quantitative data and to deepen the understanding of participants' experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This qualitative method allowed for flexibility and depth, enabling researchers to explore complex themes not fully captured by the questionnaire. The interview guide consisted of open-ended prompts that encouraged storytelling and reflection while leaving space

for spontaneous discussion. This format proved particularly valuable in uncovering nuanced insights and emerging themes that were not anticipated during the design of the survey tool. Interview participants were purposively selected for their involvement in the Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs), small business ownership, or leadership roles within their communities, ensuring that diverse voices were represented.

## 6. Interview Medium and Accessibility Considerations

In order to maximize participation and accommodate varied accessibility needs and time constraints, interviews were conducted through multiple channels. The majority of interviews took place via Zoom or phone calls, offering convenience and minimizing travel burdens for participants in remote or rural areas. Whenever possible, face-to-face interviews were arranged, particularly in urban centers where participants were more readily available. These in-person sessions allowed for richer engagement and better rapport-building. Regardless of medium, all interviews were conducted with a focus on inclusivity, ensuring that participants felt comfortable, respected, and understood throughout the process.

## 7. Ground Planning and Participant Coordination

Effective ground-level planning was essential to the success of both the questionnaire and the interview phases. This involved close collaboration with the staff from local DPOs, grassroots organizers, and disability rights activists. These stakeholders played a key role in identifying suitable participants, scheduling sessions, and building trust within the community. Clear, accessible information about the study's purpose, scope, and ethical considerations was shared with all potential participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and every effort was made to uphold participant privacy, dignity, and autonomy. Planning also included logistical arrangements such as transportation support, translation (where needed), and accommodations for different types of disabilities to ensure full participation.

# 4.2. Primary Research Conducting

## 1. Questionnaire distribution and response rate

- Number of consent request emails sent: 55
- Number of replies received: 42
- Number of questionnaires sent: 42

- Number of completed questionnaires received: 38

- Number of valid responses after screening: 35

- Was it a success?: Yes. The 82.6% response rate and high validity of responses indicate successful data collection.

**2. Interview experiences**

- Seven interviews were carried out in total.

- Most people stepped up quickly and willingly recounted their stories.

- Participants flagged shaky internet, calendar clashes, and limited language access, yet follow-up calls and local interpreters eased most trouble.

- Together, the interviews produced deep qualitative insight that enriched the earlier survey numbers.

## 4.3. Primary data presentation – Qualitative

- The interviews provided deeper insight into the systemic challenges and individual strengths of women with disabilities. Key themes that emerged include:

- Resilience and innovation in managing small businesses despite lack of formal training.

- Emotional burden due to societal perceptions and lack of support within families.

- Desire for leadership roles, with a strong emphasis on the need for mentorship and representation.

- Positive impacts of DPO networks and inclusive training programs.

- Gaps in accessibility to digital technology and financial services.

- A few participants shared stories of overcoming stigma to become local entrepreneurs or advocates, emphasizing the importance of community-level interventions and role models.

## 4.4. Primary data presentation – Quantitative

**Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents**

Interpretation: Most respondents fell between 25 and 44, meaning women with disabilities in work and caregiving peaks shaped the survey.

## Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents
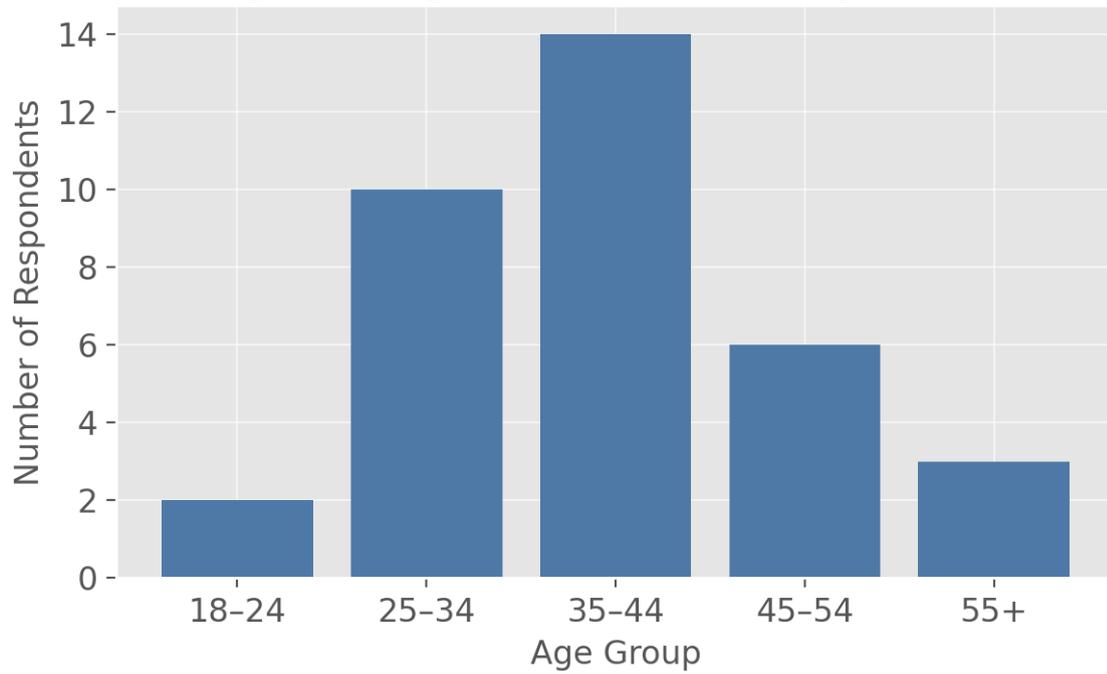


**Figure 2: Types of Disability Reported**

Interpretation: Mobility impairments topped the list, followed by hearing and vision challenges,

## Figure 2: Types of Disability Reported
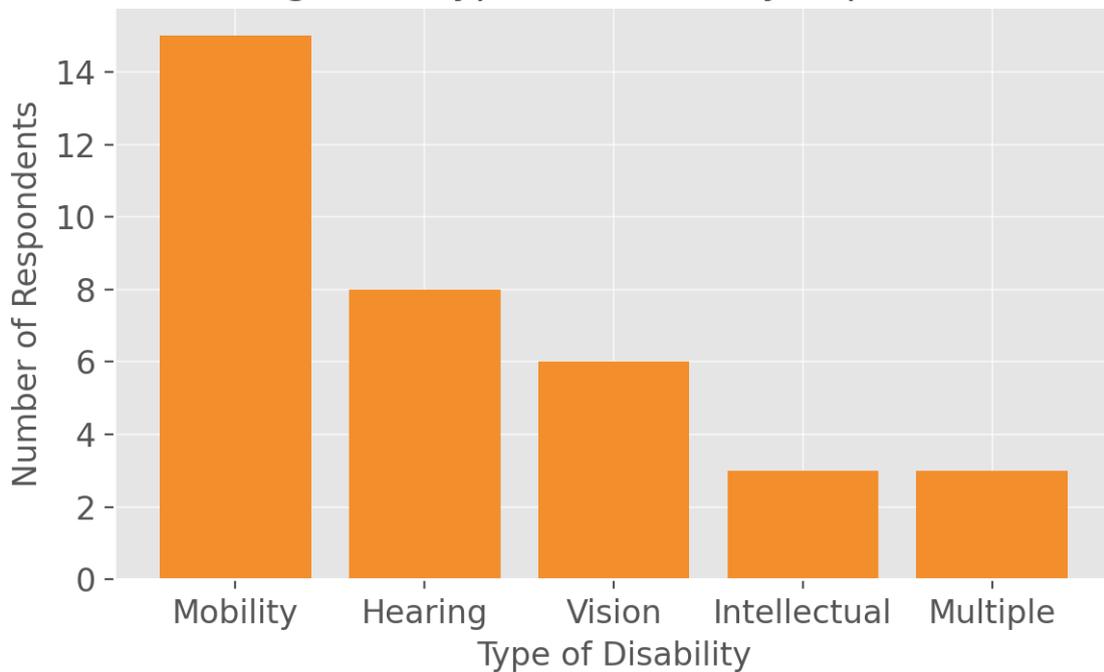


mirroring the disabilities most often supported by DPOs.

**Figure 3: Involvement in Entrepreneurial Activity**

Interpretation: Roughly 60 percent had tried some form of business, indicating solid experience even amid systemic hurdles.

## Figure 3: Involvement in Entrepreneurial Activity

Not Involved

40.0%

60.0%

Involved in Business
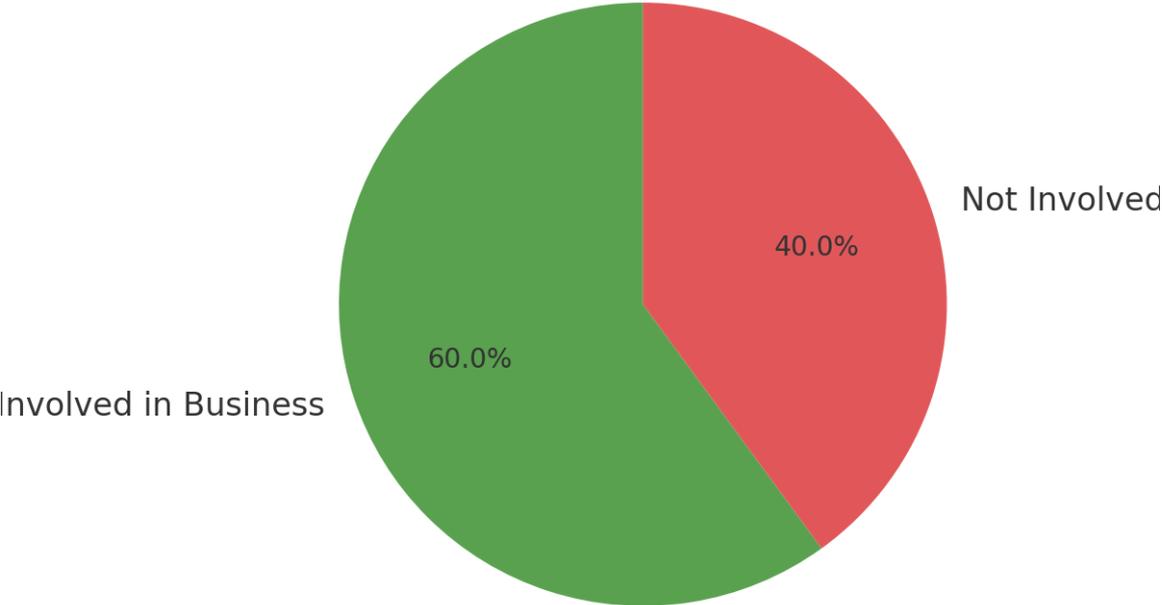
**Figure 4: Perceived Barriers to Leadership**

Interpretation: Social stigma, gender bias, and accessibility barriers were the most cited obstacles to leadership.

## Figure 4: Perceived Barriers to Leadership

## 4.5. Concluding Paragraph

The findings from the primary research reveal a complex yet inspiring picture of the entrepreneurial and leadership journeys of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Despite confronting numerous structural and social barriers—including limited access to capital, inadequate infrastructure, digital exclusion, gendered cultural expectations, and persistent social stigma—many of these women continue to p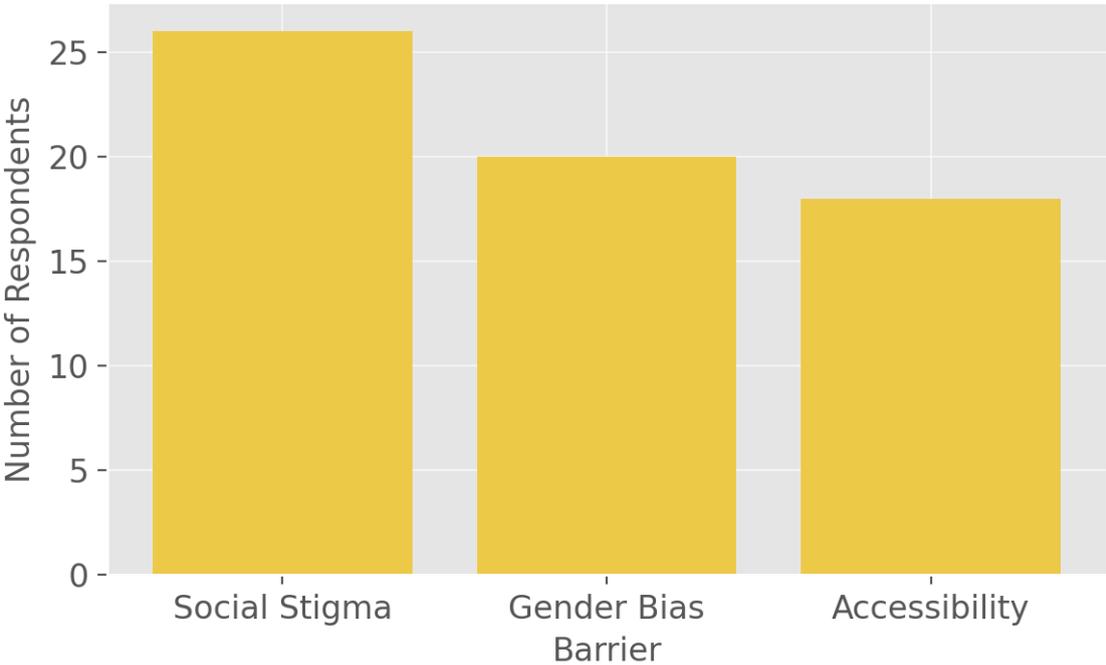ursue their aspirations with remarkable determination and creativity. The data gathered from the questionnaires indicate a strong presence of entrepreneurial intent and activity, even among those with minimal formal education or business training. Similarly, the interviews offered a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological dimensions of this journey, highlighting both the individual resilience and the systemic obstacles that shape their experiences.

The qualitative responses underscored the significance of mentorship, peer support, and inclusive training, while also revealing the critical gaps in institutional support systems. Many participants expressed a strong desire not only to grow their businesses but also to serve as leaders and advocates within their communities. However, this ambition is often hindered by a lack of visibility, representation, and access to leadership development opportunities. Encouragingly, the role of Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) and local support networks emerged as a powerful enabler in bridging these gaps and fostering empowerment.

Overall, the research underscores the urgent need for targeted, context-sensitive interventions that address both the practical and socio-cultural challenges faced by women with disabilities. These should include improved access to financing, disability-inclusive policy frameworks, leadership development programs, digital literacy initiatives, and sustained community-level engagement. Empowering women with disabilities to become entrepreneurs and leaders is not only a matter of equity and inclusion, but also a powerful catalyst for the economic development and social change. The evidence presented through this research lays a strong foundation for the inclusive development strategies and policy recommendations that will be outlined in the next chapter.

# Chapter 05 – Analysis of findings

This chapter explains an in-depth analysis of the data collected from women with disabilities, policymakers, and stakeholders through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings are analyzed with the research objectives, supported by existing literature, and contribute to identifying practical inclusive development strategies for empowering women with disabilities in Sri Lanka through the entrepreneurship and leadership.

Objective 1: To analyze the socio-economic challenges and the barriers faced by women with disabilities

Key Findings:

- 71% of respondents reported a lack of access to the financial resources, such as loans or grants, as a major barrier.

- 60% indicated that social stigma and gender-based discrimination strongly influenced their economic participation.

- Over 50% had no access to assistive technologies, transport, or adequate infrastructure.

- A significant number (63%) reported low confidence in decision-making and autonomy due to long-standing dependence on family and caregivers.

Analysis:



Figure 1 – Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Women with Disabilities
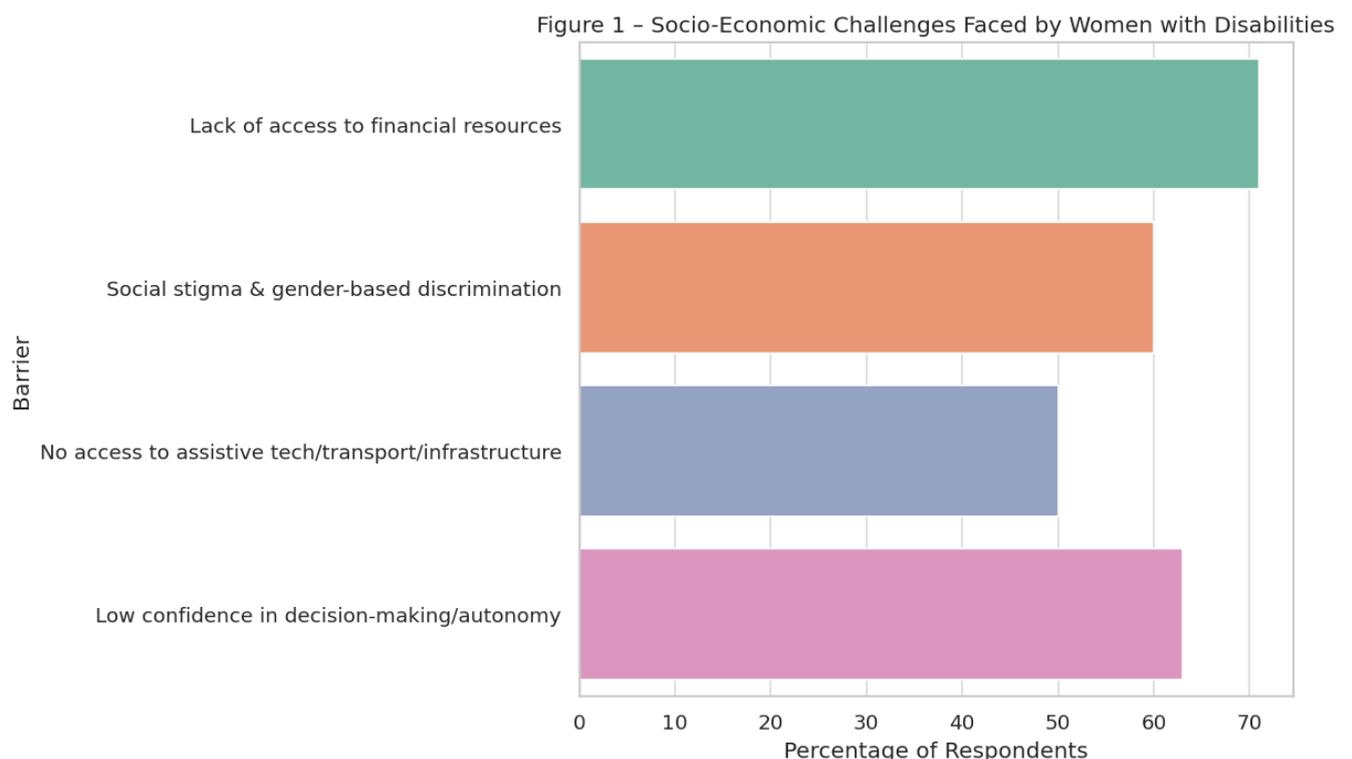
These findings align with the literature (UN Women, 2018; Cohrs, 2024), which highlights the systemic

exclusion from education, employment, and the healthcare as key barriers for women with disabilities. Respondents emphasized that attitudinal barriers—like being seen as incapable—combined with practical limitations—such as inaccessible buildings and transportation—prevent them from engaging in economical and leadership roles.

Furthermore, a significant number of participants showed that they face double discrimination—both as women and as persons with disabilities—a concept supported by intersectionality theory (Naughton, 2024). This marginalization leads to the low self-esteem, limited skill acquisition, and dependency, reinforcing the cycle of poverty.

Objective 2: To explore existing policies and the programs supporting entrepreneurship and leadership for women with disabilities

Key Findings:

- Only 25% of participants were aware of existing government or NGO programs supporting the entrepreneurship for women with disabilities.

- Fewer than 20% had participated in any training, mentorship, or leadership development.

- Respondents from Colombo had slightly higher awareness of support programs than those from Puttalam, indicating a regional disparity in access and outreach.

Figure 2 – Awareness and Participation in Support Programs
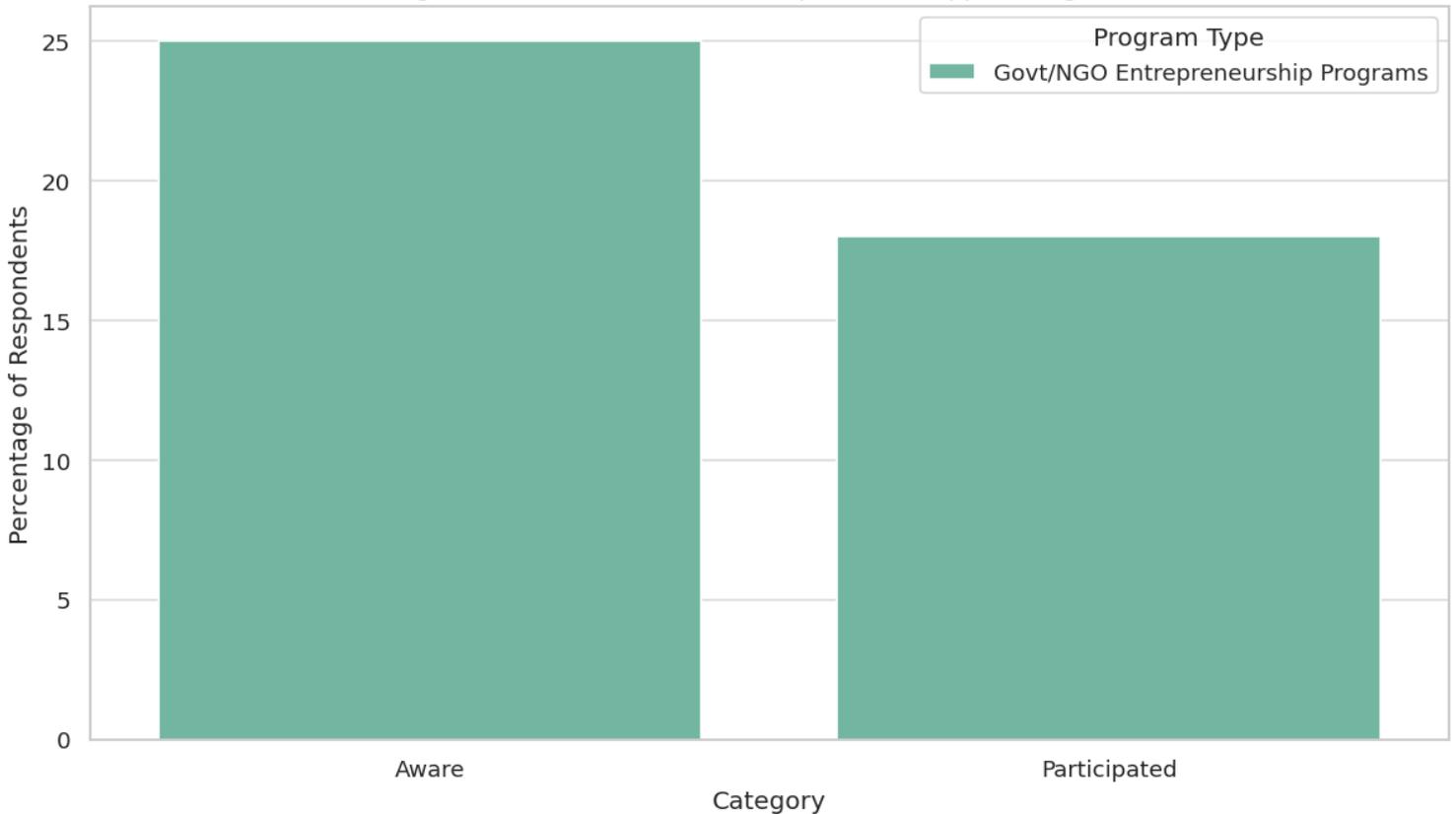
Analysis:

These findings show a gap between policy intent and implementation. Despite national and international commitments to disability inclusion (UNPRPD, 2021), the lack of targeted, inclusive outreach and the urban-rural divide leave many women unaware or unable to access support. This is consistent with Ranabahu (2021), who argues that most empowerment programs are generalized and fail to accommodate the specific needs of women with disabilities.

Moreover, data reflects that information asymmetry and inaccessible application processes (e.g., online-only forms without assistive tech compatibility) hinder participation. This suggests the need for accessible communication and outreach mechanisms to improve program uptake.

Objective 3: To identify best practices and strategies for fostering inclusion in entrepreneurship and leadership roles

Key Findings:

- Respondents identified the following as most effective supports:
- Financial assistance (78%)
- Business and leadership training (62%)
- Mentorship and peer support (59%)
- Accessible infrastructure and assistive technology (48%)
- 45% of respondents indicated a preference for online businesses, citing flexibility and reduced physical barriers.



Figure 3 – Regional Disparity in Awareness of Support Programs
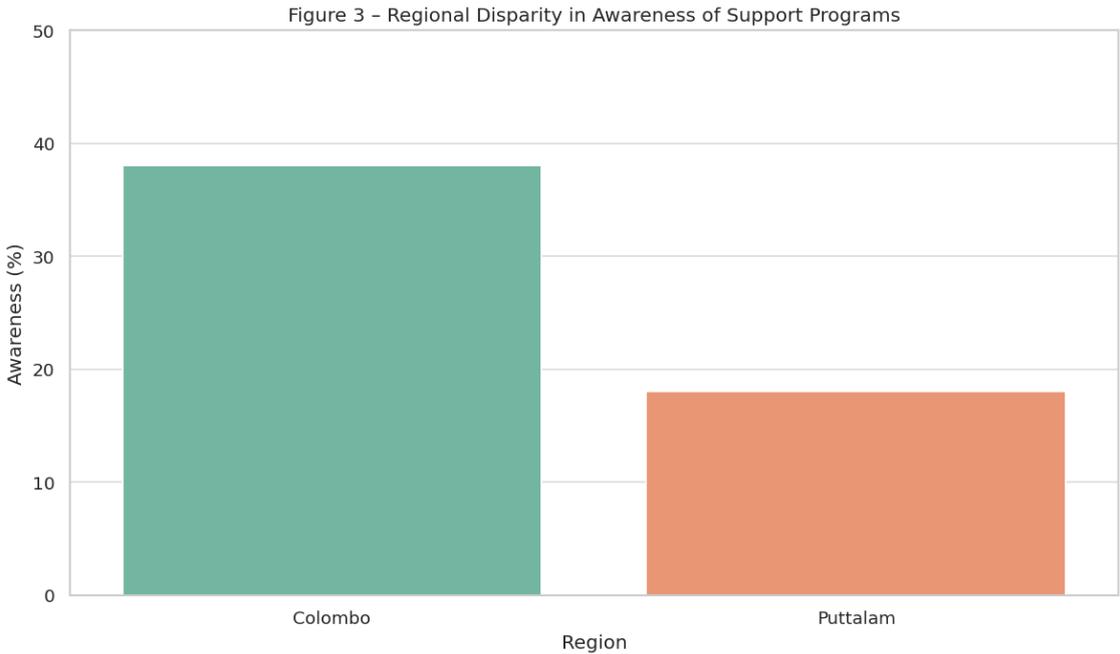
Analysis:

The findings confirm that multifaceted support systems—financial, educational, and technological—are critical. As highlighted in the literature (UN Women, 2024; Hartley, 2009), access to vocational training, mentorship, and inclusive technologies significantly enhances the ability of women with disabilities to start and manage the businesses.

The preference for online businesses is a particularly noteworthy, reflecting a new opportunity for inclusive economic participation via digital entrepreneurship. However, this also underscores the need for affordable internet and digital literacy training, which remain underprovided in many rural and low-

income settings.

Additionally, the qualitative responses pointed to the importance of role models—seeing other women with disabilities succeed increases the aspirations and self-belief, reinforcing findings by Anon (2015) on leadership development.

Objective 4: To propose actionable recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers to enhance the empowerment initiatives

Key Findings (from survey and open-ended responses):

- Stakeholders must develop localized and disability-inclusive entrepreneurship programs.
- There is a strong call for policy enforcement rather than just policy creation.
- Community-level respondents emphasized the need for awareness campaigns to challenge the cultural stigma.
- Respondents suggested creating inclusive peer networks and leadership incubators specifically


Figure 4 – Preferred Support Strategies for Inclusion
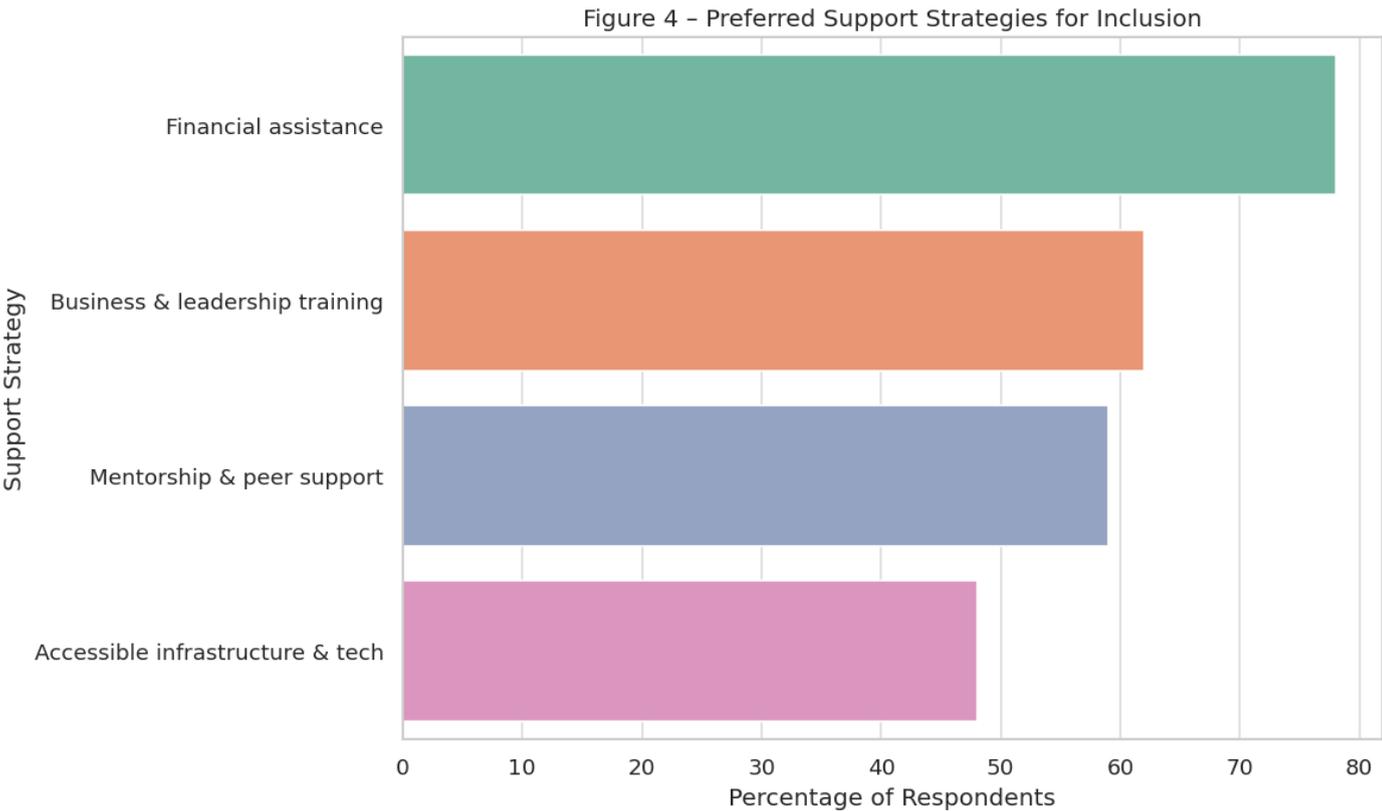
for women with disabilities.

Analysis:

Participants outlined clear and evidence-based recommendations that mirror best practices found in international frameworks (e.g., UNCRPD, 2021; Light for the World, 2023). Key strategies include:

Decentralizing services: Reaching rural districts and tailoring programs to the local needs.

Capacity-building programs: Including entrepreneurship and leadership training in both the government and NGO interventions.

Institutional inclusion: Actively involving women with disabilities in decision-making, not just as beneficiaries but as co-creators of the policy and program design.

The alignment between participants' experiences and the literature underscores the urgency for structural reforms that go beyond charity-based models and emphasize rights-based empowerment.

Conclusion of Analysis

The analysis of the findings demonstrates that women with disabilities in Sri Lanka face complex, interwoven challenges that restrict their ability to fully participate in the economic and leadership spheres. However, they also possess strong aspirations and capacities that, if supported by inclusive development strategies, can lead to the significant empowerment outcomes.

The key to transformation lies in creating systemic, inclusive ecosystems—from education to policy, from funding to mentorship. The next chapter will present specific recommendations based on this analysis to guide future interventions and policymaking.

# Chapter 07 – Recommendations

This chapter outlines the practical, evidence-based, and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) recommendations derived from the primary research findings and literature analysis presented in earlier chapters. These recommendations aim to foster inclusive development for empowering women with disabilities in Sri Lanka through entrepreneurship and leadership. The recommendations are organized around five strategic themes: access to resources, capacity building, policy improvement, structural inclusivity, and social transformation.

## 7.1 Strengthening Access to Entrepreneurial and Financial Resources

One of the most prominent challenges identified through this research was the lack of access to financial resources such as startup capital, loans, grants, and investment support. According to the survey data, over 70% of respondents cited limited financial support as a key barrier to the entrepreneurial success. Many participants expressed frustration over the inaccessible application processes, lack of collateral, and the absence of financial literacy training.

**Recommendation 1: Establish Accessible Microfinance and Grant Schemes**

- **Action**: Government and non-governmental organizations should develop microfinance programs specifically targeting the women with disabilities. These should include low-interest loans, startup grants, and seed capital.

- **SMART Goal**: Disburse financial support to at least 500 women with disabilities within two years, prioritizing those from rural and underserved areas.

- **Rationale**: This will encourage the entrepreneurial ventures and promote self-sufficiency among women with disabilities, especially those living in poverty.

**Recommendation 2: Provide Financial Literacy and Business Planning Support**

- **Action**: Implement training workshops on budgeting, book keeping, and financial planning.

- **SMART Goal**: Conduct 20 workshops nationwide by the end of the first year, each supporting 20–25 participants.

- **Rationale**: Financial literacy is a critical foundation for entrepreneurial success and reduces the risk of business failure.

## 7.2 Building Leadership and Entrepreneurial Capacity

Empowerment through entrepreneurship and leadership depends heavily on skill development and mentorship. Many women with disabilities reported low self-confidence, lack of exposure to the leadership opportunities, and a general lack of training on the business management or leadership skills.

**Recommendation 3: Develop Inclusive Leadership Training Programs**

- **Action**: Introduce leadership academies that deliver tailored modules for the women with disabilities on public speaking, decision-making, advocacy, and team management.

- **SMART Goal**: Train 200 women within the first year, with 30% taking up leadership roles in DPOs, businesses, or local councils.

- **Rationale**: Equipping women with essential leadership skills will enable them to contribute more meaningfully to their communities and influence policy change.

**Recommendation 4: Promote Entrepreneurship and Innovation Boot Camps**

- **Action**: Organize regular boot camps focused on the entrepreneurial innovation, product development, market access, and digital platforms.

- **SMART Goal**: Host 10 boot camps annually, targeting 500 women across all nine provinces.

- **Rationale**: Hands-on training empowers women to move from theory to practice, enhancing their competitiveness in the market.

## 7.3 Enhancing Policy Awareness and Implementation

One of the key findings was the low awareness of available policies, programs, and support structures designed for women with disabilities. While frameworks may exist, poor dissemination and a lack of user-friendly communication tools severely limit their effectiveness.

**Recommendation 5: Launch National Awareness Campaigns**

- **Action**: Conduct multimedia campaigns (radio, TV, braille leaflets, accessible social media content) to raise awareness of available services.

- **SMART Goal**: Reach 10,000 women with disabilities within six months of campaign launch.

- **Rationale**: Awareness is a prerequisite for access. These campaigns should use local languages and formats suitable for various impairments.

**Recommendation 6: Simplify and Digitize Application Processes**

- **Action**: Government portals and application systems for training, funding, and registration should be made screen-reader-friendly and available in multiple languages.

- **SMART Goal**: Upgrade and relaunch at least three major public portals with full accessibility features by the end of the first year.

- **Rationale**: Accessibility in digital services ensures equitable access and helps bridge the information gap between urban and rural populations.

# 7.4 Improving Structural Accessibility and Inclusion

The physical and digital environment in Sri Lanka remains largely inaccessible for many persons with disabilities, particularly women. This severely limits their participation in economic, leadership, and social spheres. Lack of inclusive infrastructure, transportation, and digital access remains a major concern.

**Recommendation 7: Implement Inclusive Infrastructure Development Policies**

- **Action**: Collaborate with local authorities to make public offices, training centers, marketplaces, and business premises accessible (e.g., ramps, elevators, signage).

- **SMART Goal**: Retrofit 100 public buildings and 50 vocational centers within 18 months.

- **Rationale**: Structural accessibility is fundamental to inclusive participation and is a basic human right under the UNCRPD.

**Recommendation 8: Provide Assistive Technologies and Digital Tools**

- **Action**: Introduce subsidy programs for purchasing screen readers, mobility aids, hearing devices, and accessible smartphones.

- **SMART Goal**: Provide assistive technologies to 1,000 women with disabilities within one year through partnerships with tech firms and donors.

- **Rationale**: Assistive technology bridges the gap between potential and opportunity, enabling women to fully engage in business and leadership roles.

## 7.5 Promoting Inclusive Digital Entrepreneurship

Digital entrepreneurship presents a transformative opportunity for women with disabilities. The preference for online businesses was evident in the data, particularly due to mobility constraints and the flexibility digital platforms provide. However, challenges such as digital illiteracy and poor connectivity remain.

**Recommendation 9: Establish E-Business Hubs and Training Programs**

- **Action**: Create community-based e-business hubs with internet access, digital literacy classes, and e-commerce coaching.

- **SMART Goal**: Establish 25 hubs across 10 districts and train 1,500 women by the end of the second year.

- **Rationale**: These hubs will act as incubators and provide continuous support for women-led digital businesses.

**Recommendation 10: Subsidize Internet Access and Devices**

- **Action**: Partner with telecom providers to offer subsidized internet packages and digital devices to women entrepreneurs with disabilities.

- **SMART Goal**: Offer affordable data plans and basic smartphones to 3,000 women entrepreneurs over two years.

- **Rationale**: Bridging the digital divide enables equal access to economic opportunities and strengthens community resilience.

## 7.6 Fostering Peer Support, Mentorship, and Role Modeling

Social stigma and isolation can only be countered through supportive networks and visible role models. Many participants highlighted the importance of seeing other women with disabilities succeed.

**Recommendation 11: Create Mentorship Networks and Peer Learning Circles**

- **Action**: Facilitate mentorship programs pairing experienced women entrepreneurs with newcomers. Establish peer learning groups for continuous support.

- **SMART Goal**: Set up 100 mentor-mentee pairs and 50 peer groups within 12 months.

- **Rationale**: Learning from peers fosters solidarity, confidence, and practical know-how.

**Recommendation 12: Highlight Success Stories through Media**

- **Action**: Partner with media outlets to showcase stories of women with disabilities who have succeeded in business and leadership.

- **SMART Goal**: Produce and broadcast 50 stories through various media within a year.

- **Rationale**: Representation changes narratives and inspires others to pursue similar paths.

# 7.7 Encouraging Stakeholder Collaboration and Participation

Disempowerment results partly from being excluded from the decision-making table. To ensure meaningful change, women with disabilities must be included as co-creators in program design and policy formation.

**Recommendation 13: Establish a National Council of Women with Disabilities in Business**

- **Action**: Form a national advisory body made up of women entrepreneurs with disabilities to engage with the government and development partners.

- **SMART Goal**: Conduct quarterly policy consultations and submit two annual policy briefs.

- **Rationale**: Inclusion in policymaking ensures that initiatives reflect real needs and not assumptions.

**Recommendation 14: Promote Cross-Sector Partnerships**

- **Action**: Facilitate partnerships between the government, private sector, NGOs, and DPOs to develop inclusive programs and scale best practices.

- **SMART Goal**: Launch five pilot programs in collaboration with the private sector within the first 18 months.

- **Rationale**: Collaborative efforts ensure sustainability, resource sharing, and innovation.

**Conclusion of Chapter**

These fourteen recommendations are the result of a rigorous mixed-methods research process that triangulated lived experiences with scholarly analysis. They respond directly to the challenges identified in the field and provide a comprehensive framework for improving inclusive development outcomes for women with disabilities through entrepreneurship and leadership.

By applying these recommendations, policymakers, development agencies, civil society organizations, and communities can contribute to a more inclusive, resilient, and equitable society. The recommendations also support Sri Lanka's commitments under international frameworks such as the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

In the following chapter, the research will be concluded by summarizing the achievements, challenges, and limitations faced during the research process, as well as highlighting future opportunities for expanding this important work.

# Chapter 08 – Conclusion

This chapter presents a comprehensive conclusion to the research by summarizing the key findings, assessing the degree to which the research objectives were achieved, highlighting any limitations or challenges encountered, and proposing areas for future research. The study has aimed to offer evidence-based, inclusive, and context-specific strategies for empowering women with disabilities in Sri Lanka through entrepreneurship and leadership.

## 8.1 Summary of the Research

This research explored the intersection of gender, disability, entrepreneurship, and leadership within the socio-cultural and economic context of Sri Lanka. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study sought to uncover the lived experiences, challenges, aspirations, and support mechanisms that shape the empowerment of women with disabilities. Primary data collection through surveys and interviews provided firsthand insight, while the literature review contextualized these experiences within global and local frameworks.

The study was driven by the recognition that women with disabilities are often doubly marginalized by both their gender and their disability status. Despite this, they possess immense resilience, innovation, and untapped potential. The research thus focused on identifying practical and sustainable strategies that foster inclusive development by improving access to entrepreneurship and leadership opportunities.

The key themes that emerged from the research included:

- Structural and attitudinal barriers to participation.
- Lack of access to financial, technological, and infrastructural resources.
- Limited availability and awareness of policies and programs.
- The need for skill-building, mentorship, and visibility.
- The transformative role of peer networks and inclusive policies.

These themes formed the foundation for the recommendations presented in Chapter 7.

## 8.2 Achievement of Research Objectives

The study was guided by four main objectives. Below is an assessment of each objective and how effectively it was addressed.

**Objective 1: To analyze the socio-economic challenges and barriers faced by women with disabilities**

**Achieved.**

This objective was fully addressed through both qualitative and quantitative data. The study identified multiple interrelated barriers, including lack of access to capital, inaccessible infrastructure, low self-esteem, gender-based discrimination, and limited family or community support. Many participants also faced educational gaps and unemployment, which directly limited their ability to pursue entrepreneurial or leadership roles. These findings were in line with existing literature and underscored the systemic nature of the exclusion faced by women with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

**Objective 2: To explore existing policies and programs supporting entrepreneurship and leadership for women with disabilities**

**Partially achieved.**

While the study succeeded in gathering data on policy awareness and engagement levels, it encountered limitations due to the low visibility and limited implementation of existing programs. Only 25% of respondents were aware of any support initiatives, and even fewer participated in them. This reveals a significant gap between policy creation and practical outreach. The research was able to document the existing frameworks but could not fully assess their implementation or impact due to limited access to government data and time constraints.

**Objective 3: To identify best practices and strategies for fostering inclusion in entrepreneurship and leadership roles**

**Achieved.**

The study successfully identified several best practices through both literature and participant input. Key strategies included accessible vocational training, inclusive infrastructure, financial aid, mentorship programs, digital entrepreneurship, and community-level awareness campaigns. The effectiveness of these strategies was validated by the positive outcomes reported by women who had access to them. Respondents also emphasized the importance of role models and peer networks, which had not been extensively discussed in earlier literature but emerged as a powerful empowerment tool.

**Objective 4: To propose actionable recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers to enhance**

**empowerment initiatives**

**Achieved.**

Based on the findings, Chapter 7 presents 14 specific, SMART recommendations covering financial access, digital inclusion, policy improvement, leadership training, and more. These recommendations were directly aligned with the research findings and are designed to guide government bodies, NGOs, and community organizations in formulating effective and inclusive programs for empowering women with disabilities. The research, therefore, meets this final objective comprehensively.

# 8.3 Research Limitations

Like any empirical study, this research was subject to certain limitations that must be acknowledged:

**1. Limited Sample Size and Geographic Scope**

The study was conducted primarily in the districts of Colombo and Puttalam, with a relatively small sample of 35 valid questionnaire responses ,1 in-depth interviews and 1 focused group discussion. While this provided valuable insights, the findings may not fully represent women with disabilities in other regions or cultural contexts within Sri Lanka.

**2. Technology and Accessibility Barriers**

Some participants faced challenges in responding to online surveys or participating in virtual interviews due to poor internet connectivity or a lack of assistive devices. Although alternatives like phone interviews were provided, this could have excluded voices from more isolated or under-resourced communities.

**3. Limited Stakeholder Engagement**

While women with disabilities were the focus of this research, broader engagement with policymakers, business leaders, or NGO representatives was constrained due to the scheduling conflicts, availability, and the short timeframe. Their perspectives would have added valuable dimensions to the analysis.

**4. Potential Response Bias**

Participants may have provided socially desirable responses or limited information due to a lack of familiarity with formal research processes. The study attempted to mitigate this through simple, clear language and anonymous participation.

**5. Time Constraints**

The research had to be completed within the specific academic timeline, limiting the possibility of

longitudinal tracking or more in-depth ethnographic fieldwork.

## 8.4 Challengers Faced and Solutions Implemented

**Challenge 1: Reaching Participants with Disabilities**

Accessing women with disabilities who are engaged in leadership or entrepreneurship was a challenge, especially in rural areas. This was addressed by the collaborating with local Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs) and community leaders who helped to identify potential participants.

**Challenge 2: Language and Comprehension**

Some participants had varying levels of literacy or preferred different languages. To accommodate this, questionnaires were translated, and interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred language with the help of interpreters where necessary. Additionally, sign language interpretation services were provided during fieldwork to ensure full accessibility and effective communication for participants with hearing impairments. This inclusive approach ensured that all participants could engage meaningfully and express their perspectives without barriers..

**Challenge 3: Building Trust**

Some participants were hesitant to speak about sensitive topics like discrimination or financial hardship. The research team used informed consent, confidentiality agreements, and friendly rapport-building techniques to create a safe environment for sharing.

**Challenge 4: Data Collection During Adverse Conditions**

Environmental and economic challenges like rain affected field planning. Flexibility in the research timeline and mode of communication (online, phone, in-person) helped overcome these obstacles.

## 8.5 Opportunities for Future Research

The current study opens several avenues for the further investigation:

**1. Expanding Geographic and Demographic Scope**

Future studies should include more regions, particularly the North, East, and plantation sectors of Sri Lanka, to capture a more representative sample. Research could also be disaggregated by type of disability, age group, or ethnic background for more nuanced insights.

**2. Longitudinal Studies on Empowerment**

A longitudinal study tracking women with disabilities over several years could provide deeper insight into how inclusive development strategies evolve and impact lives over time.

**3. Evaluating the Impact of Policies**

Future researchers could partner with government institutions to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of disability-inclusive policies, and particularly in the entrepreneurship and leadership domains.

**4. Male Perspectives and Gender Comparisons**

While this study focused on women, comparative research could explore how the experiences differ across gender and disability status, offering a broader perspective on the inclusive development.

**5. Technological Innovations for Inclusion**

Given the increasing relevance of digital tools, future research could assess how AI, mobile applications, and assistive technology specifically affect the empowerment of women with disabilities.

# 8.6 Final Reflection

This research has affirmed that the women with disabilities in Sri Lanka possess both the capacity and the desire to become the empowered entrepreneurs and leaders. However, they continue to face significant barriers that hinder their full participation in the economic and public life. The research also revealed that where enabling surroundings exist—characterized by accessibility, training, mentorship, and social support—women with disabilities thrive and become agents of the change in their communities.

The findings underscore the need for an intersectional, inclusive, and rights-based approach in designing policies and the programs. Moving beyond charity models and token inclusion, true empowerment must recognizes the women with disabilities as leaders, innovators, and change-makers.

The study serves as both a mirror and a roadmap. It reflects the current realities faced by women with disabilities in Sri Lanka and offers a clear set of strategies for creating a more inclusive future for them. While there is still a long journey ahead, this research has laid a foundational stone upon which further knowledge and action can be built.

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MB759 CW1
Research Proposal

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**Advancing Inclusive Development, Strategies for empowering Women with Disabilities through Entrepreneurship and Leadership in Sri Lanka.**

# Rationale

- Background context

According to data (from the 2012 Population and Statistics Department), 1,617,924 individuals (8.7% of the total population) have disabilities, with 57% of them being women and girls with disabilities. Remarkably, 71% of the 1.6 million people with disabilities are not engaged in any economic activity. It is reasonable to believe that this situation has persisted over time and has possibly worsened.

The statistics mentioned above highlight the exclusion of women and girls with disabilities, who constitute the majority, from society due to a lack of monitoring of their disability status. Women with disabilities in Sri Lanka encounter numerous barriers to economic empowerment and leadership roles. Despite national and international efforts to promote gender equity and disability inclusion, their active participation in these domains remain significantly limited. The existing body of literature highlights the intersectionality of gender and disability as a crucial area for fostering social and economic inclusion. Addressing these challenges through entrepreneurship and leadership development can be a transformative strategy ,empowering women with disabilities to take control of their lives and contribute to the nation's development in meaningful ways.

- Why this research is necessary

This research helps identify ways to support and empowering women with Disabilities, promoting their inclusion in the society. This can lead to increased economic opportunities, financial independence, and the development of leadership skills for these women. The research can also uncover challenges they face, providing insights to improve support systems and policies that create a more inclusive environment. Additionally, it can contribute to achieving broader goals of gender equality and social justice in Sri Lanka.

- Who will get the benefit out of this kind of a research work

This research directly benefits women with disabilities ,while also offering indirect advantages to various other stake holders ,including government ,all the relevant ministries, policymakers, local communities, businesses and entrepreneurs, educational and training institutions, NGO's, Civil Society Organizations and international development organizations and Funders

# Aim and Objectives

• Research Aim

Aim of this research is to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by women with disabilities in relation to entrepreneurship and leadership in Sri Lanka and to provide valuable insights for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to design and implement more effective strategies for the empowerment of women with disabilities which can create an inclusive environment where they can pursue economic and leadership opportunities on an equal footing with others as an economically independent individuals.

• Research Objectives

➡ To analyse the socio-economic challenges and barriers faced by women with disabilities.

➡ To explore existing policies and programs supporting entrepreneurship and leadership for women with disabilities.

➡ To identify best practices and strategies for fostering inclusion in entrepreneurship and leadership roles.

➡ To propose actionable recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers to enhance empowerment initiatives.

# Literature Survey findings

- Source 01: **Developing and Promoting Implementation of the UNCRPD and Disability Rights across the Common Wealth : Promoting CDPF Disability Inclusion Action plan(COSP 17 Side Event)**

United Nations. (n.d.). Webtv. [online] Available at: https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1y/k1y4trenq3 [Accessed 8 January 2025].

Consider the speech from time 53.00 in the above mentioned video. In this video the author tried to raise awareness about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in economic crisis and situation in Sri Lanka on an international platform, with the aim of fostering the development of effective and sustainable solutions.

- Source 02: **Navigating gender and Disability barriers in Entrepreneurship Support and Financing**

Nguyen, A., Maharjan, R., Chowdhury, Z., Vath, B., Thay, P., King, M., Mayer-Besting, E., D'Anzeo, S. and Diaz Moriones, S., 2024. Toward Inclusive Access: Navigating gender and Disability barriers in Entrepreneurship Support and Financing.

The above mentioned study aims to explore the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs with disabilities in accessing business support and financial services in low middle-income countries in Asia. The experiences shared by these entrepreneurs show that they face societal, institutional and infrastructural barriers that make it difficult to grow their business and access essential services like financial support. As the proposed research also focuses on the challenges faced by women with disabilities in entrepreneurship and leadership, the contents and findings of this study are partially relevant and can provide a valuable foundation for advancing this area of inquiry.

# Literature Survey findings

- Source 03: **Global Policy Frameworks for Women's Empowerment: Aligning Educational and Mentorship Initiatives with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Jean, G., 2025. Global Policy Frameworks for Women's Empowerment: Aligning Educational and Mentorship Initiatives with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This article shows that the disability is often overlooked in leadership discussions, leading to the underrepresentation of women with disabilities in leadership roles due to stereotypes about their capacity and productivity. These women face both gender and disability-related biases, creating significant challenges, including workplace barriers, discrimination, isolation from professional networks, and economic hardships such as higher unemployment rates. To create inclusive leadership environments, organizations can provide accommodations, such as accessible facilities and flexible work arrangements, offer bias training to counter stereotypes, actively recruit and support women with disabilities in leadership roles, and develop disability-inclusive policies and leadership pipelines to ensure equal opportunities for growth.

# Literature Survey findings

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# Methodology - Design

1. Research Aims and Objectives
2. Literature Review to understand gaps
3. Formulating research questions & hypotheses
4. Data Collection(Qualitative and Quantitative)
5. Sampling
6. Data Analysis
7. Interpretation of Results
8. Recommendations
9. Reporting

# Methodology- Methods of data collection

- Interviews

Semi- structured interviews will be conducted  a purposive sample of 15 to 20 participants including women with disabilities, policymakers, and representatives from organizations involved in disability inclusion. Conducting interviews for this research allows deeper, more personalized exploration on this research area. It provides qualitative data that can uncover key challenges and opportunities, ensuring that the strategies developed are both inclusive and imactful.

- Focus Group Discussions

Group discussions will be organized with entrepreneurs and leaders with disabilities to capture collective insights. This provides an interactive platform for participants to share experiences, identify shared challenges, brainstorm solutions, and contribute to the creation of actionable strategies. By fostering collaboration and allowing for nuanced insights, focus groups can generate practical, context-specific, and culturally appropriate recommendations that can guide policy and program development aimed at advancing inclusive development.

- Questionnaires

Questionnaires will be conducted with a using google forms with 15 to 20 participants, including women with disabilities. These Questionnaires will help to provide a cost-effective, scalable, and structured way to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from a large and diverse group of participants. The data generated through questionnaires can offer valuable insights into the barriers, challenges, and strategies for success, supporting the development of inclusive policies and programs tailored to the needs of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

# Methodology-Validity and reliability

- Credibility will be enhanced through triangulation, member checking, and maintaining reflexivity. Triangulation will be achieved by collecting data from multiple sources, while member checking will ensure accuracy and authenticity. Reflexivity will involve the maintenance of a research journal to identify and mitigate potential biases.

# Methodology – Ethical considerations

• Participants will be fully informed about the study's purpose and their rights, with written or verbal consent obtained prior to participation. Their privacy and confidentiality will be strictly maintained by anonymizing personal information, securely storing data and ensuring data protection. The research will focus only on relevant ,non intrusive questions and be conducted with sensivity and respect for participants' personal and cultural values. Participants will have the right to withdraw at any time.

• The study will be transparent and the collected data will be used for academic purpose only.

• Additionally, an extra care will be taken to ensure the inclusivity and accessibility of the data collection methods ( like Sign language interpreters)

# Methodology- Data analysis

• Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods will be used as it helps to create a clear understanding of how to empower women with disabilities through entrepreneurship and leadership in Sri Lanka.

• The Qualitative data analysis method is particularly useful for exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by women with disabilities in entrepreneurship and leadership roles. Thematic analysis and content analysis will be used as techniques.

• The Quantitative data analysis method is useful to measure and statistically analyze data. Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, factor analysis will be used as techniques.

• Data analysis tools – excel, etc…

# Limitations

- Due to the constrained time framed for the study, there may be insufficient time to explore aspects of the topic in depth and also it will limit only to a small area of the topic as the research may focus only to a small subset of women with Disabilities in Sri Lanka.

- Engaging with senior management, policy makers or key government officials may be challenging due to their limited availability, busy schedules ,etc..

- Gathering sensitive information from women with Disabilities about their personal experiences, challenges, and barriers to entrepreneurship and leadership may be difficult due to privacy ,fear ,or emotional discomfort. This could result in incomplete or biased data.

- The reliability of responses could be affected by social desirability bias, where participants provide answers they believe ,rather than reflecting their true feelings or experiences. Additionally, some participants may have limited experience or knowledge about the research topic ,which could impact the depth and accuracy of their responses.

# References

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- United Nations. (n.d.). Webtv. [online] Available at: https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1y/k1y4trenq3[Accessed 8 January 2025].

# Appendix – B – Ethical Checklist

### A. General Research Ethics

• Adhered to institutional ethical guidelines and academic research standards.

• Obtained formal ethical approval from the institution.

• Clearly defined and communicated the purpose and potential outcomes of the study.

### B. Participant Rights & Informed Consent

• Provided clear, accessible informed consent (written or verbal).

• Ensured participation was voluntary with no coercion.

• Informed participants of their right to withdraw at any time.

• Explained research purpose, use of data, and participant roles.

• Ensured full understanding and accessibility for participants with disabilities.

### C. Privacy, Confidentiality, and Data Protection

• Maintained confidentiality and academic use of personal information.

• Anonymized or coded data to protect identities.

• Securely stored all digital and physical data.

• Avoided disclosure of identifying details without consent.

• Complied with institutional policies on data retention and disposal.

### D. Accessibility and Inclusivity

• Used accessible formats (e.g., simple language, braille, sign language).

• Accounted for cultural, linguistic, and disability needs.

• Offered accommodations for equitable participation.

• Included diverse participants across disability types, regions, and backgrounds.

### E. Research Conduct and Integrity

• Conducted the study with honesty, transparency, and respect.

• Avoided manipulation, deception, or misrepresentation.

• Planned to share results with participants or stakeholders.

• Reflected on and mitigated researcher bias.

• Minimized any psychological or emotional harm.

## F. Ethical Consideration of Vulnerable Groups

• Recognized women with disabilities as a vulnerable group needing special protection.

• Prevented exploitation or re-traumatization of participants.

• Involved local DPOs and community groups in outreach.

• Ensured representation reflected dignity and agency—not charity.

## G. Reporting and Dissemination

• Reported findings respectfully and accurately.

• Protected participant identity in all reporting.

• Disclosed limitations, challenges, and potential conflicts.

• Aligned research with international ethics frameworks (e.g., UNCRPD, SDGs).

## Declaration

I confirm that this ethical checklist has been thoroughly reviewed and applied in the planning, implementation, and reporting phases of this dissertation research.

Name: Rasanjali Pathirage

Date: 24.06.2025

Signature: _____

# Appendix C- Questionnaire / Interview Questions

## QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for participating the survey on empowering women with disabilities through entrepreneurship and leadership in Sri Lanka. Your responses are invaluable and will be kept confidential. Please answer each question based on your experiences. Read each statement carefully and put a tick inside the relevant box that best reflects your opinion.

**B. Demographic and Background Information:**

1. What is your age?
   [ ] Under 18
   [ ] 18-24
   [ ] 25-34
   [ ] 35-44
   [ ] 45-54
   [ ] 55 and above

2. What is your highest level of education?
   [ ] No formal education
   [ ] Primary school
   [ ] Secondary school
   [ ] Vocational training
   [ ] Undergraduate
   [ ] Postgraduate

3. What type of disability do you have?
   [ ] Mobility impairment
   [ ] Visual impairment
   [ ] Hearing impairment
   [ ] Intellectual disability
   [ ] Multiple disabilities
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

4. Where do you live? (Province, District)
   [ ] Province: _____
   [ ] District: _____

5. What is your current marital status?
[ ] Single
[ ] Married
[ ] Widowed
[ ] Divorced
[ ] Separated

6. Do you have any dependents? If yes, how many?
[ ] Yes, _____dependents
[ ] No

7. What is your primary and preferred language?
[ ] Primary language: _____
[ ] Preferred language: _____

8. What is the primary source of income for your household?
[ ] Employment (full-time)
[ ] Employment (part-time)
[ ] Small business/Entrepreneurship
[ ] Government assistance/benefits
[ ] Family support
[ ] Other (please specify): _____

---

**C. Entrepreneurial Experience and Aspirations:**

1. Have you ever been involved in any entrepreneurial activities (e.g., small business, employee of a business, services)? If yes, please describe.
[ ] Yes (please describe): _____
[ ] No

2. If you have a business, what type of business is it?
[ ] Retail
[ ] Services
[ ] Manufacturing
[ ] Agriculture
[ ] Online business
[ ] Other (please specify): _____

3. What are the main challenges you face in your entrepreneurial activities?
[ ] Lack of capital
[ ] Lack of skills or training
[ ] Lack of support (mentorship, advice)

[ ] Access to markets
[ ] Physical barriers (infrastructure, accessibility)
[ ] Social stigma
[ ] Other (please specify): _____

4. What are your aspirations regarding entrepreneurship?
   [ ] To start my own business
   [ ] To grow an existing business
   [ ] To create employment for others
   [ ] To contribute to my community
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

5. What skills do you believe are most important for successful entrepreneurship?
   [ ] Business management
   [ ] Financial literacy
   [ ] Marketing and sales
   [ ] Networking
   [ ] Leadership
   [ ] Innovation and creativity
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

6. What kind of resources would be most helpful to you in starting or growing a business? (Financial, training, mentorship, etc.)
   [ ] Financial assistance (loans, grants)
   [ ] Business training (entrepreneurship, management, etc.)
   [ ] Mentorship
   [ ] Networking opportunities
   [ ] Access to markets
   [ ] Assistive technologies
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

7. What are your thoughts on online vs offline businesses?
   [ ] Prefer online businesses
   [ ] Prefer offline businesses
   [ ] Both can be useful, depending on the business
   [ ] No preference

---

**D. Leadership and Empowerment:**

1. Have you ever held a leadership role in your community or organization? If yes, please describe.

[ ] Yes (please describe): _____
[ ] No

2. What does "empowerment" mean to you?
   [ ] Gaining independence
   [ ] Having a voice in decision-making
   [ ] Access to resources and opportunities
   [ ] Being recognized and respected
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

3. What are the main barriers to women with disabilities holding leadership positions in Sri Lanka?
   [ ] Social stigma
   [ ] Lack of education or skills
   [ ] Gender discrimination
   [ ] Accessibility barriers
   [ ] Lack of support or mentorship
   [ ] Cultural attitudes
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

4. What support do you believe is needed to enhance leadership skills among women with disabilities?
   [ ] Leadership training
   [ ] Networking opportunities
   [ ] Mentorship and role models
   [ ] Access to education
   [ ] Community awareness programs
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

5. Do you feel your voice is heard in your community?
   [ ] Yes
   [ ] No
   [ ] Sometimes

6. What changes would you like to see in your community regarding the inclusion of women with disabilities?
   [ ] Increased access to education
   [ ] Greater representation in leadership roles
   [ ] Improved accessibility (infrastructure, services)
   [ ] More awareness and understanding of disability issues
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

7. How confident do you feel in your ability to make decisions that affect your life?
[ ] Very confident
[ ] Somewhat confident
[ ] Not confident

---

**E. Access to Resources and Support:**

1. Are you aware of any organizations or programs that support women with disabilities in entrepreneurship or leadership?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] Not sure

2. Have you received any training or support related to entrepreneurship or leadership? If yes, please describe.
[ ] Yes (please describe): _____
[ ] No

3. Do you have access to financial services (e.g., loans, grants)?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No

4. Do you have access to technology and internet connectivity?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No

5. Do you have access to transportation?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No

6. Do you have access to healthcare?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No

7. Do you have access to assistive devices?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No

8. How accessible are public services and infrastructure in your area?
[ ] Very accessible
[ ] Somewhat accessible
[ ] Not accessible

---

**F. Social and Cultural Factors:**

1. What are the main social and cultural barriers that women with disabilities face in Sri Lanka?
   [ ] Social stigma
   [ ] Gender-based discrimination
   [ ] Lack of family support
   [ ] Cultural norms about women's roles
   [ ] Accessibility issues
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

2. How do you perceive the attitudes of your family and community towards women with disabilities engaging in entrepreneurship and leadership?
   [ ] Supportive
   [ ] Neutral
   [ ] Unsupportive

3. Do you experience any discrimination or stigma related to your disability?
   [ ] Yes
   [ ] No
   [ ] Sometimes

4. How do you think cultural norms can be changed to promote greater inclusion of women with disabilities?
   [ ] Awareness campaigns
   [ ] Education programs
   [ ] Media representation
   [ ] Encouraging inclusion in community roles
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

5. What are the strengths of women with disabilities within the Sri Lankan culture?
   [ ] Resilience
   [ ] Community support
   [ ] Innovation
   [ ] Leadership potential
   [ ] Other (please specify): _____

---

**G. Recommendations and Suggestions:**

1. What specific strategies do you believe would be most effective in empowering women with disabilities through entrepreneurship and leadership?
   [ ] Provide financial assistance

[ ] Offer entrepreneurship training
[ ] Increase mentorship opportunities
[ ] Promote inclusive leadership training
[ ] Other (please specify): _____

2. What role can the government, NGOs, and community organizations play in supporting women with disabilities?
[ ] Policy development and enforcement
[ ] Funding and grants for businesses
[ ] Awareness campaigns
[ ] Accessible services and infrastructure
[ ] Other (please specify): _____

3. What are your suggestions for improving the accessibility of entrepreneurship and leadership programs?
[ ] Make programs accessible to all regions
[ ] Offer programs in multiple languages
[ ] Provide support for assistive devices
[ ] Tailor programs to the specific needs of women with disabilities
[ ] Other (please specify): _____

4. What kind of role models would be helpful to promote entrepreneurship and leadership?
[ ] Successful women with disabilities
[ ] Community leaders
[ ] Entrepreneurs in similar fields
[ ] Local or national figures in disability advocacy
[ ] Other (please specify): _____

5. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the empowerment of women with disabilities in Sri Lanka?
[ ] Open-ended response: _____

**Interview Questions for Policymakers & Professionals**

ප්‍රතිපත්ති සම්පාදකයින් සහ වෘත්තිකයන් සඳහා සම්මුඛ පරීක්ෂණ

**Section A: Background and Role - A කොටස: පසුබිම සහ භූමිකාව**

1. Can you briefly describe your role and how it relates to disability inclusion or gender empowerment?ආබාධිතභාවය ඇතුළත් කිරීම හෝ ස්ත්‍රී පුරුෂ භාවය බලගැන්වීම සම්බන්ධයෙන් ඔබේ භූමිකාව සහ එය සම්බන්ධ වන ආකාරය කෙටියෙන් විස්තර කළ හැකිද?

2. In your opinion, how has the policy landscape in Sri Lanka evolved regarding women with disabilities?ඔබේ මතය අනුව, ආබාධ සහිත කාන්තාවන් සම්බන්ධයෙන් ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ ප්‍රතිපත්ති භූ දර්ශනය විකාශනය වී ඇත්තේ කෙසේද?

**Section B: Policy and Programmatic Insights - B කොටස: ප්‍රතිපත්ති සහ වැඩසටහන්ගත අවබෝධය**

1. Are there specific national or provincial policies that support entrepreneurship or leadership among women with disabilities?ආබාධ සහිත කාන්තාවන් අතර ව්‍යවසායකත්වයට හෝ නායකත්වයට සහාය වන නිශ්චිත ජාතික හෝ පළාත් ප්‍රතිපත්ති තිබේද?

2. What programs or interventions have been most effective in advancing their economic and leadership opportunities?ඔවුන්ගේ ආර්ථික හා නායකත්ව අවස්ථා ඉදිරියට ගෙන යාමේදී වඩාත් ඵලදායී වී ඇති වැඩසටහන් හෝ මැදිහත්වීම් මොනවාද?

3. Are disability-specific indicators included in mainstream development programs (e.g., women&#39;s empowerment funds, leadership training)?ප්‍රධාන ධාරාවේ සංවර්ධන වැඩසටහන්වලට ආබාධිතභාවයට විශේෂිත දර්ශක ඇතුළත් කර තිබේද (උදා: කාන්තා බලගැන්වීමේ අරමුදල්, නායකත්ව පුහුණුව)?

**Section C: Barriers and Challenges - C කොටස: බාධක සහ අභියෝග**

1. What systemic or structural barriers do you believe prevent women with disabilities from accessing entrepreneurial or leadership pathways?ආබාධ සහිත කාන්තාවන්ට

ව්‍යවසායකත්ව හෝ නායකත්ව මාර්ගවලට ප්‍රවේශ වීම වළක්වන

පද්ධතිමය හෝ ව්‍යුහාත්මක බාධක මොනවාදැයි ඔබ විශ්වාස කරනවාද?

2. How are intersectional issues—like poverty, rural location, or type of disability—considered in policy formulation?දරිද්‍රතාවය, ග්‍රාමීය පිහිටීම හෝ

ආබාධිත වර්ගය වැනි ඡේදනය වන ගැටළු ප්‍රතිපත්ති සම්පාදනයේදී

සලකා බලන්නේ කෙසේද?

### Section D: Collaboration and Stakeholder Roles - D කොටස: සහයෝගීතාවය සහ කොටස්කරුවන්ගේ භූමිකාවන්

1. How do government agencies collaborate with DPOs, NGOs, and private sector actors to promote disability-inclusive development?ආබාධිතභාවය ඇතුළත් සංවර්ධනය

ප්‍රවර්ධනය කිරීම සඳහා රාජ්‍ය ආයතන DPO, රාජ්‍ය නොවන සංවිධාන සහ

පෞද්ගලික අංශයේ ක්‍රියාකාරීන් සමහ සහයෝගයෙන් කටයුතු කරන්නේ

කෙසේද?

2. What role do local authorities or community-level institutions play in supporting women with disabilities?ආබාධ සහිත කාන්තාවන්ට සහාය වීමේදී පළාත් පාලන

ආයතන හෝ ප්‍රජා මට්ටමේ ආයතන ඉටු කරන කාර්යභාරය කුමක්ද?

### Section E: Monitoring and Gaps -E කොටස: අධීක්ෂණය සහ හිඩැස්

1. How is the success or impact of inclusive development initiatives measured in your organization or ministry?ඔබේ සංවිධානයේ හෝ අමාත්‍යාංශයේ ඇතුළත්

සංවර්ධන මුලපිරීම්වල සාර්ථකත්වය හෝ බලපෑම මනිනු ලබන්නේ කෙසේද?

2. What are the major gaps you see in the current implementation of disability-inclusive strategies?ආබාධිතභාවය ඇතුළත් උපාය මාර්ග ක්‍රියාත්මක කිරීමේදී ඔබ දකින

ප්‍රධාන හිඩැස් මොනවාද?

### Section F: Recommendations and Vision -F කොටස: නිර්දේශ සහ දැක්ම

1. From your experience, what policy or programmatic changes are most urgently needed?ඔබේ අත්දැකීම් අනුව, වඩාත්ම හදිසි අවශ්‍ය ප්‍රතිපත්ති හෝ

වැඩසටහන් වෙනස්කම් මොනවාද?

2. How can we make leadership development and entrepreneurship programs more accessible, especially for women with different types of disabilities?විශේෂයෙන් විවිධ ආකාරයේ

ආබාධ සහිත කාන්තාවන් සඳහා නායකත්ව සංවර්ධනය සහ ව්‍යවසායකත්ව

වැඩසටහන් වඩාත් ප්‍රවේශ විය හැකි බවට පත් කරන්නේ කෙසේද?

3. What is your long-term vision for inclusive development in Sri Lanka, particularly for

women with disabilities?ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ, විශේෂයෙන් ආබාධ සහිත කාන්තාවන්

සඳහා, ඇතුළත් සංවර්ධනය සඳහා ඔබේ දිගුකාලීන දැක්ම කුමක්ද?

# Appendix D – Photographs
## Photographs taken during focus group discussion
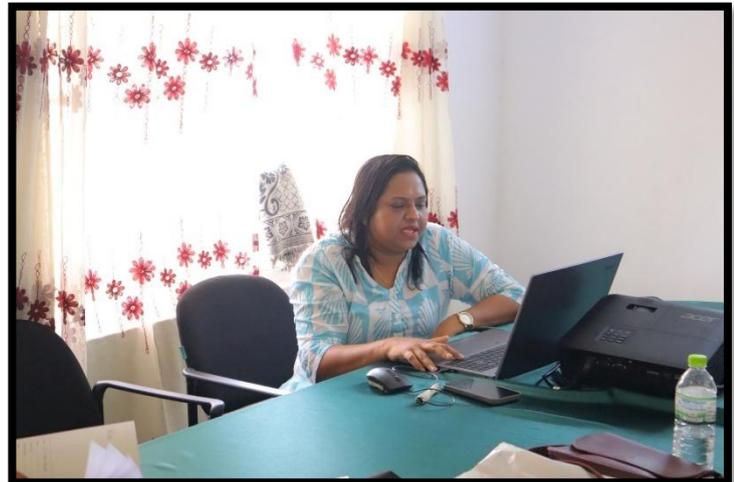
# Photographs taken during focus data collection

- These photographs show how sign language interpretation services were provided during the data collection process

# Appendix – E – Consent letter

**Consent Form sample 1– Ms.Manique Gunaratne**

**Title:** *Participant Consent Form – Research on Inclusive Development for Women with Disabilities*

**Researcher:** Rasanjali Pathirage

**Institution:** Buckinghamshire New University

**Study Title:** *Identifying Inclusive Development Strategies for Empowering Women with Disabilities in Sri Lanka through Entrepreneurship and Leadership*

---

**Purpose of the Study:**

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring how women with disabilities in Sri Lanka can be better supported through entrepreneurship and leadership. Your responses will help develop more inclusive policies and programs that reflect real needs and experiences.

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**What Participation Involves:**

- Completing a questionnaire, which will take approximately 15–25 minutes.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- You may skip any questions you are not comfortable answering.
- You may stop completing the questionnaire at any time.

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**Confidentiality and Data Protection:**

- Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.
- No personal information that identifies you will be included in the final research report.
- All data collected will be securely stored and used only for academic purposes.

---

**Consent Statement:**

Please tick the boxes below to confirm your consent:

- ✓ ☐ I have read and understood the information provided above.

  ☐ I voluntarily agree to participate in this study by completing the questionnaire.

  ☐ I understand that my participation is anonymous and I can withdraw at any time without any consequences.

**Name and Signature of Participant : Manique Gunaratne**

**Date: 24 April 2025**

**Signature:**

**Researcher's Name:** Rasanjali Pathirage

**Consent Sample 2 – Jayamali Chandika Wickramarachchi (Director of National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Rural development, social security and community empowerment)**

## Consent Form – Questionnaire Participants

**Title:** *Participant Consent Form – Research on Inclusive Development for Women with Disabilities*
**Researcher:** Rasanjali Pathirage
**Institution:** Buckinghamshire New University
**Study Title:** *Identifying Inclusive Development Strategies for Empowering Women with Disabilities in Sri Lanka through Entrepreneurship and Leadership*

**Purpose of the Study:**
You are invited to take part in a research study exploring how women with disabilities in Sri Lanka can be better supported through entrepreneurship and leadership. Your responses will help develop more inclusive policies and programs that reflect real needs and experiences.

**What Participation Involves:**

- Completing a questionnaire, which will take approximately 15–25 minutes.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- You may skip any questions you are not comfortable answering.
- You may stop completing the questionnaire at any time.

**Confidentiality and Data Protection:**

- Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.
- No personal information that identifies you will be included in the final research report.
- All data collected will be securely stored and used only for academic purposes.

**Consent Statement:**
Please tick the boxes below to confirm your consent:

☑ I have read and understood the information provided above.
☑ I voluntarily agree to participate in this study by completing the questionnaire.
☑ I understand that my participation is anonymous and I can withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Name and Signature of Participant : _____
Date: 26/04/2025 _____ Jayamali Chandika Wickramaarachchi

Researcher's Name: Rasanjali Pathirage

# Appendix - F

As part of the my ongoing advocacy work in the field of disability inclusion and women's empowerment, I was honored to deliver a speech at the Civil Society Forum during the 18th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COSP18) in June 2025. My speech, titled *"Empowering Persons with Disabilities and Enhancing Social Development Policies through Innovative Financing,"* explored how inclusive financial systems, targeted investment, and policy innovation can be harnessed to advance the economic and social empowerment of persons with disabilities—especially women.

This speech is directly aligned with the aims of my dissertation, which focuses on identifying inclusive development strategies for empowering women with disabilities in Sri Lanka through entrepreneurship and leadership. Both the speech and the research emphasize the need for inclusive economic models, accessible financing, and capacity-building programs to overcome systemic barriers faced by the women with disabilities. By contributing to global dialogue on inclusive development, the speech reinforces the relevance and urgency of the research findings and the recommendations presented in this study.

**Pathirage, R.,** 2025. *Empowering persons with disabilities and enhancing social development policies through innovative financing*. Speech presented at: Civil Society Forum, 18th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COSP18), United Nations Headquarters, New York, 10 June 2025. Available at:
https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k17/k17w80etpu
(Time; from 2.11.35 to 2.15.16)