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Nexus between floriculture and non-governmental organization (NGO) in Mizoram

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship in the area of floriculture is looked at as a path out of unemployment or poverty. Research has shown that entrepreneurship in the form of small and middle-sized enterprises can empower women and over time, change the power relations within the society and make it a place where the women can lead. Even in the case of Mizoram, entrepreneurship in the field of floriculture has started to gain prominence. It will therefore be interesting to know the genesis and the rise of entrepreneurship in floriculture in Mizoram. In this paper, we try to understand how NGOs formed in relation to floriculture, support the floriculturists in emerging as self-employed entrepreneurs. The paper also seeks to study how florist associations act as catalysts in creating an atmosphere conducive for entrepreneurship in floriculture and also try to understand the relationship existing between floriculture entrepreneurship and florist association as Non-Governmental Organizations.

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Introduction

Floriculture is becoming a fast-growing industry in India as a result of urbanization, rising living standards, and people's growing aesthetic sense, which has paved the way for increased demand for flowers and flower products, making it one of agriculture's most important commercial trades. Floriculture deals with the cultivation of blooming and ornamental plants for direct consumption or for use as raw materials in the cosmetics and perfume industries, as well as in the pharmaceutical business (Pusa, 2017) ^[15].

Globally, floriculture has evolved into an export-oriented agroindustry that is rapidly developing. In Europe, there is a considerable demand for floricultural products, which is fueled by urbanisation and affluence. India does not lag far behind and is currently establishing itself as a significant commercial crop sector. Floriculture has become a profitable commercial activity in India mainly because it satisfies the aesthetic needs of people and its ability to ensure higher rate of returns to farmers. Floriculture as a commercial industry is still in its infancy in India's North East. There are only a few established commercial floriculture businesses within the area. The region currently lacks the infrastructure required for commercial floriculture to thrive extensively.

The unemployment rate in Mizoram in 2022-2023 stands at a high 11.9%, where women unemployment rate stands at a much higher rate with 16.4% compared to the unemployment rate of their men counterpart which stands at 8.9% (CMIE). Similar to other states, Mizoram faces constant problem with unemployment among educated youth and low educated people in both rural and urban areas. Due to limited employment options, these unemployed persons are forced to pursue secondary careers as employees or entrepreneurs.

In such a situation, it is a fact that many young women entrepreneurs in Mizoram are expanding their entrepreneurial ventures beyond conventional industries like handlooms and handicrafts. The Mizoram government support startups and innovative projects, encouraging youth to become job creators rather than job seekers (Devi, 2024) ^[12].

In Mizoram, big businesses have little room for expansion, and as a result, micro and small businesses rule the industrial scene and play a significant role in the state's socioeconomic growth (Lalhunthara & Lalthakima, 2019) ^[8]. Women are pursuing entrepreneurial careers in an effort to find purpose in their lives and empower themselves. Housewives' conventional duties are gradually evolving into those of female entrepreneurs. The desire for additional income, improved education, and changing sociocultural values are some of the causes of these shifts (Suganthi, 2009) ^[17]. Individuals typically become entrepreneurs not because they want to, but rather because it's the only alternative accessible. The other reason may be there are not many work prospects. Majority of female entrepreneurs usually run small businesses. This may be because women choose to and are content with running their businesses on a small, localized level. Economic growth is the gradual expansion of the economy's potential for productivity. As a result, entrepreneurship, one of the production factors, can help reduce unemployment in situations where government jobs are unable to accommodate all applicants. It can also raise the standard of living in the region both directly and indirectly (Lalthanpari, 2019) ^[7].

Observations through field survey indicate that in Mizoram people develop entrepreneurial skills not because they desire to, but because in the present constant unemployment issue the region faces, it is an option the situation offers for young unemployed women and also due to the limited available opportunities in jobs. Thus, the contribution of Mizoram Florist Association (MFA) as Non-Governmental Organization in augmenting and encouraging entrepreneurship through floriculture is pertinent.

The paper seeks to answer questions such as what are the factors responsible for the development of floriculture entrepreneurship in Mizoram? Are the florist associations acting as catalysts in fostering an atmosphere that is conducive for entrepreneurship to the people? What drives individuals to pursue entrepreneurial careers in the midst of the current unemployment rate?

The present study aims to give a conceptual framework that supports the idea that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have a significant impact on entrepreneurship and to specify an interaction pattern that explains NGOs' influence on entrepreneurship. The relations between the existing florist associations in Mizoram as NGOs and entrepreneurship among women is an area which is largely understudied and literature on the subject scanty.

Literature review

Within the complex fabric of India's socioeconomic environment, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have become indispensable in directing development programmes. Their diverse achievements go beyond improving society to include actively advancing the country's economy. In India, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are essential in promoting entrepreneurship, especially in rural and marginalised areas. They help small-scale industries flourish by giving aspiring entrepreneurs financial support, mentoring, and training. NGOs' contribution to India's economic growth is dynamic and ever-changing. They are agents of change, driven by values based on empathy, diversity, and sustainability.

Non-Governmental Organizations are becoming increasingly important in the field of development. They are an important

link between the state and people at the grassroots level. They are diverse in terms of organisational structure and culture as well as in terms of the issues they cover. Their involvement is seen in the formulation of public policies, implementation of governmental programmes, dialogues and even in the enforcement of social legislation. They play a vital role in encouraging local initiatives in terms of mobilization and environment building. The local persons or the stakeholders can bring about meaningful changes.

At the same time, NGOs in different parts of the world have also become active in a wide range of other, more specialized roles, such as emergency response, conflict resolution, human rights and so on (Lewis et.al., 2021) ^[6]. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are autonomous development actors that operate independently of the government and businesses, on a non-profit or for-profit basis, with a focus on voluntarism and community development work or development advocacy (Munyoro et.al, 2017) ^[9]. Non-governmental organizations, formed voluntarily undertake voluntary work in the society and they possess attributes not possessed by the government. NGOs undertake activities which are not normally undertaken by the government (Durgam, 2000) ^[3].

Diverse in their functions and purposes, they serve primarily a vast and assorted population of informal workers. Without the participation of women in the development process, society as a whole cannot be said to develop holistically. India is one of the developing countries where the societies are predominantly patriarchal in structure. The NGOs have a huge role in stimulating and nurturing the spirit of entrepreneurship among women. An integrated approach is necessary for making the movement of women entrepreneurship a success.

Over the last decade, the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in development has been widely recognized. The NGOs serve as a catalyst by mobilizing the existing physical and human resources, creating a favorable environment for entrepreneurship, and generating fresh opportunities. The microenterprise sector's contribution has prompted numerous state and national governments to look to non-governmental organizations for support in an effort to accelerate economic development (Mukherjee, 2009) ^[10].

Entrepreneurship

Establishing a new industry, service, or company is entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is the process of starting and running a new business with the goal of seizing an exceptional, creative opportunity. There are several requirements that must be met for entrepreneurship to thrive, including funding, incentives, infrastructure, equal opportunity, education and training, and support from major organisations (Preethi, 2016) ^[14]. The idea that entrepreneurship is the process of executing new combinations—which can include new goods, procedures, markets, organisational structures, or sources of supply—was first put forth by Schumpeter in the 1930s (Auplat, 2006). Individual entrepreneurial behaviour, according to Reynolds (1991) ^[16], refers to an individual's pursuit of new economic ventures, which might vary from self-employment to the establishment of a major organization. He notes that entrepreneurship is a major occupational choice for a large number of people.

Entrepreneurial abilities consist of the drive for success, the urge to take on responsibility, the inclination for risk, the

feedback-driven stimulation, the focus on the future, and the managerial excellence (Kumari & Shetty, 2023) ^[5]. A powerful tool for encouraging women to become financially independent is entrepreneurship. The development of skills is a necessary precondition for the growth of entrepreneurship (Nandan & Khushwaha, 2017) ^[13].

Entrepreneurship is a combination of attributes needed to be creative, launch a new business, take on challenges, and manage risk. Thus, invention and creativity are essential to the process of entrepreneurship and call for specific abilities. A person with entrepreneurial competence is able to take advantage of an idea and launch a business venture for social and developmental as well as personal benefit. Entrepreneurial behaviour defines as actions that combines creativity, risk-taking, and proactiveness (cited in Cuervo, Ribeiro & Roig 2007:3) ^[2].

The paper delves into how the aesthetic interest in flowers has led to the growth of entrepreneurship in the field of floriculture among women in Mizoram. We also try to understand how NGOs formed in relation to floriculture, support the floriculturists in emerging as self-employed entrepreneurs and try to open up opportunities for them to develop their floriculture entrepreneurship.

Methodology

The present research was carried out at Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram. The nature of the study is exploratory and descriptive. Interview schedules have been administered to the stakeholders that is, 153 actual floriculture entrepreneurs and the office bearers of the three prominent florist associations namely, the Mizoram Florist Association, Pangpar Zuar Association, Zo-Anthurium Growers Co-operative Society as Key Informants. The nature of the data is both qualitative and quantitative. The study focuses more on the qualitative data which have been collected from the categories of respondents or sample which have been purposively selected.

Relationship between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and floriculture entrepreneurship in Mizoram

Mizoram as one of the states in North East India, has a total population of 1,097,206 according to the 2011 census, where 555,339 are males and 541,867 are females (Mizoram Economic Survey, 2023-24). Unemployment is a crucial problem in Mizoram, about 23 percent of the persons in the workforce are without any gainful employment (Devendiran, 2015). 80% of the state's business enterprises are engaged in small industries like tailoring, carpentry, vehicle repairs, steel fabrication, baking, handloom weaving, blacksmithing and others.

Encouraging young people and unemployed women to become entrepreneurs is essential to foster economic development on a local and national level. To combat the high women unemployment rate in Mizoram, unemployed women having aesthetic interest in flowers prefer to embark upon entrepreneurial activities to generate self-employment in the region. Women's entrepreneurial business involves taking risks, pursuing opportunities relentlessly and being creative in order to survive.

Having traced the trajectory, the development of floriculture as an entrepreneurship is a relatively new phenomenon in Mizoram. With both native and modern flowers having a high demand in the hospitality and wedding industry, floriculture wave is being said to have been boosted in the socio-cultural

and religious context in contemporary Mizoram. In the context of Mizoram, floriculture sector as an entrepreneurial activity has emerged and gained significance as it has great potential for generating gainful self-employment especially among women. Mizoram is blessed with rich biodiversity and favourable climatic conditions, making it conducive for floriculture activities.

Entrepreneurial initiatives in floriculture contribute to income generation and livelihood improvement, especially for small-scale farmers and women in the region. The present research deals with floriculture entrepreneurs who were interviewed and interacted upon through administration of interview schedule. The study reveals that most of the women involved in floriculture come from a disadvantaged section of the society who are not highly educated and with scanty knowledge of entrepreneurial skill. Hence, the role of NGOs is significant to promote their entrepreneurial skill and also to find ways to collaborate with the Government to develop their entrepreneurial skill and provide subsidies to these unskilled entrepreneurs.

In the context of floriculture in Mizoram, there are three prominent NGOs which specifically focus their attention to work for the interest of entrepreneurs. These are the Mizoram Florist Association (MFA), the Pangpar Zuar Association (PPZA) and Zo-Anthurium Growers Co-operative Society (ZAGCS). In this paper, amongst the three NGOs, an in-depth study on the role played by the pioneer association that is, Mizoram Florist Association for the development of entrepreneurs in floriculture will be taken into account.

The Mizoram Florist Association (MFA), born on 14th November 1997 has holistic development of floriculture as its main focus and objective. Mizoram Florists' Association as the pioneer association was established to promote members' shared objective giving utmost priority to one's own creation through propagations of stem cuttings of plants and flowering plants, building unity and strength in their pursuit of common interest. MFA since its inception plays a significant role in encouraging entrepreneurship in floriculture in the state.

One of the most significant steps taken by MFA in fostering entrepreneurship and creating a platform for the growth of floriculture is organising florist fairs annually at least three to four times. Florist fairs encourage entrepreneurs to showcase and exhibit their creations, their propagated young flowering plants and also provide a platform to make significant sales of their products and thereby generate sufficient income.

To promote entrepreneurs in floriculture, the MFA also tries to work in tandem with the government, lobbying the Government to provide necessary inputs to these entrepreneurs to help them promote and augment their small businesses. MFA play a crucial role as a non-profit driven organization in representing and meeting the needs of its members and supporting entrepreneurship. Being the first registered florist association in Mizoram, the state government also acknowledges and tries to meet their needs and demands as far as possible. MFA leaders occasionally submit written appeals to the Horticulture Department, Government of Mizoram to obtain essential good quality inputs such as greenhouse material, good quality flower seeds, potting media like coco peat and other incentives that are out of the price range of small florist entrepreneurs and distribute them to needy entrepreneurs at a subsidized rate.

In response to MFA's request, the government provides accessible inputs for the Association's members through the

Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) schemes. MFA's request to the government to initiate cultivation of curcuma flowers to meet the high local demand, has materialized into reality. Curcuma flower rhizomes have been imported from Thailand and as a pilot project the Horticulture Department have started to distribute them to twenty selected beneficiaries.

To develop the entrepreneurial skill and to create awareness on the profit of taking up floriculture and floristry, the MFA frequently organizes seminars and trainings on various aspects of floriculture management such as method of flower seed germination, management and care of flower seedlings. Besides these seminars, training on flower arrangement and floral arts are frequently organized by MFA and Department of Horticulture, Government of Mizoram for the benefit of its unemployed participants interested in floristry to encourage entrepreneurship in this field.

The NGOs are instrumental in encouraging unemployed aspirants to take up floriculture as their primary or supplementary source of income. The MFA has published five books, two as commemoration of its 10th and 25th anniversaries and these souvenirs consists of articles on various issues on flower cultivation. Two manuals on flower arranging called "The Florists- Pangpar Khawi Bu" with visual pictures have been published. A significant publication called 'Pangpar Chingtute Thian' contain different tips and articles on flower cultivation. These publications have been instrumental in assisting beginners and inexperienced floriculture entrepreneurs. Besides, MFA does benevolent works by planting and beautifying with flowers the state's airport surroundings, hospitals, state government office front yards and orphanage homes, motivating and inspiring possible aspirants. The functional aspects of MFA are manifested along these lines which have promoted flower cultivation increasingly in the state.

The existence of multiple floral associations in the Mizo society such as MFA, Pangpar Zuar Association (PPZA), Zo-Anthurium Growers Co-operative Society (ZAGCS), and other small associations like Orchid Society of Mizoram, Cactus and Succulent Society of Mizoram and Bonsai Association of Mizoram is a result of growing aesthetic sense in flowers and opportunity for entrepreneurial activity offered by floriculture. These associations exist side by side, however functioning parallel to each other with similar goals.

Pangpar Zuar Association (PPZA) was formed in 2017 and not yet registered with 180 members in the city. PPZA too, encourage entrepreneurship in floriculture and it works for the welfare of its members by organizing PPZA florist fair at least four times annually for members to exhibit their goods and generate income. Leaders of the NGO often approach the Horticulture Department of the state government representing needy members for necessary inputs but are not successful in all their attempts. Unlike the MFA, PPZA and the state government does not have collaborative work in other areas.

The Department of Horticulture, government of Mizoram introduced a commercial scale cultivation of Anthurium flowers in 2002 under the Technology Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture in north-eastern states of India. Anthurium was initially cultivated by 24 farmers in 2002, and the number of growers increased over the years. Zo-Anthurium Growers' Co-operative Society (ZAGCS) was formed by Anthurium plant growers in 2002 with 80 active

members currently in Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram. The society is registered under Mizoram Co-operative Society. Unlike the other associations, members of ZAGCS export their Anthurium cut products to other metropolitan cities like Bangalore, Delhi, Kolkotta and others, export rejected products are vended in local markets.

ZAGCS organizes Anthurium fair once annually which serves as the platform for members to exhibit their potted anthurium plants and anthurium foliage. ZAGCS members participate in the annual Anthurium festival organized by the Tourism Department, Government of Mizoram, an opportunity to showcase their products generating income at the same time. The ZAGCS works in collaboration with the government, and the department of Horticulture provides the initial planting materials and other necessary inputs free of cost to beneficiaries. Leaders of the Society often approach the Government to provide necessary inputs at subsidized rates to needy Anthurium farmers. In collaboration with the State's Horticulture Department, Horticulture Awareness Campaign is conducted often in other districts to promote entrepreneurship in Anthurium cultivation.

Conclusion

Though a relatively new phenomenon in Mizoram, the progression of floriculture entrepreneurship has been remarkable with the MFA and other associations acting as catalysts fostering an environment conducive for its continued growth. With limited employment options for unemployed low educated people, women entrepreneurs with aesthetic sense in flowers have turned their attention to this entrepreneurial endeavour looking at it as a path out of unemployment. Women are pursuing floriculture entrepreneurship as a small micro enterprise in an effort to empower themselves, generate additional income for the family, gain financial independence and be more productive in their lives.

The problem of unemployment has been one the biggest challenges of the country. Development of entrepreneurs has been a necessity to combat the problem of unemployment. As have been discussed, the growth of entrepreneurs in the field of floriculture has been an important remedy to combat this problem. In this connection, MFA constantly collaborates with the state government to promote entrepreneurship amongst unemployed not highly educated disadvantaged women in the region. Such entrepreneurs involved in floriculture opine that with hard work, determination and the entrepreneurial skill, the entrepreneurship in this field is viable for self-employment and generate regular income.

Despite the infrastructure deficiencies, the bureaucratic hurdles and delays it faces in operation, one cannot ignore the important role played by NGOs in nurturing entrepreneurship in floriculture. Nevertheless, the growth of entrepreneurship in Floriculture in Mizoram is because of the distinguished roles played by three actors: the NGOs, the government and also the aspiring and enthusiastic disadvantaged entrepreneurs.

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