Building livelihoods to prevent exploitation and human trafficking—home-based microentrepreneurial activities and tribal women’s empowerment in Assam

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Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis is my own work and all sources used have been duly acknowledged by me. All versions of the submitted thesis (regardless of submission type) are identical.

Signed

[Signature]
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Abstract

Evidence has shown that access to income through home-based microentrepreneurial activities can empower marginalised groups, especially women. Acquiring higher levels of empowerment lowers women’s vulnerability to forms of gender-based violence and exploitation, including human trafficking. This thesis investigates the impacts of a livelihood initiative supporting tribal women engaged in home-based microentrepreneurial handloom activities in Assam, Northeast India, on these women’s socioeconomic empowerment. It seeks to build evidence on interventions that can effectively support women to secure economic independence and reduce their vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation. The study uses six broad empowerment indicators of economic, social, and cultural significance to analyse the extent of women artisans’ socioeconomic empowerment: control over income; decision-making autonomy at the household level; freedom of mobility; attitudes towards female education and domestic violence; freedom from exploitation and human trafficking; and self-confidence and dignity. Results are based on in-depth interviews conducted with twelve artisans from two remote tribal villages in Golaghat District in Assam. Findings indicate that engagement in microentrepreneurial handloom activities has had transformative impacts on tribal women’s lives and enhanced their abilities to make strategic life decisions.
1. Introduction

Evidence demonstrates that women who do not have access to economic security are at a heightened risk of experiencing exploitation, violence, unsafe migration and human trafficking (D’Cunha 2002; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2016; Kabeer 2017; MacKinnon 2011). A number of ‘development’ agencies, including governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), microfinance institutions, and social enterprises have attempted to prevent and mitigate these risks by establishing livelihood generation models aimed at producing sustainable economic and social outcomes for women and vulnerable groups (Garikipati 2013; Green, Blattman, Jamison, & Annan 2015; Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley 1996; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018; Kabeer 1999; Krenz, Gilbert, & Mandayam 2013). Numerous studies from a range of low-resource contexts have highlighted the potential for such micro-entrepreneurial and livelihood generation programs to improve women’s empowerment outcomes, thereby reducing their vulnerability to exploitation and gender-based violence (S. K. Das 2012; Datta & Gailey 2012; Green et al. 2015; Haugh & Talwar 2016; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2016; Kabeer 2017; Kantor 2003; Kishor 2000; Krenz et al. 2013; Ramswamy & Kumar 2013; Torri & Martinez 2011).

Despite a growing focus on home-based micro-entrepreneurial activities among rural women in the Indian handloom sector as a potential driver of women’s empowerment, there is a lack of research dealing specifically with assessing the impacts of social enterprise-supported interventions supporting tribal women through home-based entrepreneurial development schemes. This study seeks to contribute to building the evidence-base for the impacts of such models on tribal women’s socioeconomic empowerment, in the context of two rural tribal villages in Assam. It explores the stories of women artisans currently engaged as entrepreneur weavers with a local social enterprise to understand their experiences of socio-economic empowerment. The social enterprise, Impulse Social Enterprises (ISE) operates in tandem with its sister organisation, Impulse NGO Network (Impulse), which works to prevent and combat human trafficking in the northeast region of India and in neighbouring countries. ISE
was established as a strategic offshoot of Impulse to prevent unsafe migration and human trafficking through livelihood generation, supporting a network of tribal women weavers under its ‘Empower’ brand. Given the commercial concentration of handloom activities among tribal women in Assam and the region’s susceptibility to human trafficking, the selected location provided an appropriate setting to assess the impact of a social enterprise model on the lives of tribal women as a vulnerable group with important ties to the handloom industry. Artisans involved in the study belong primarily to Scheduled Tribes (STs) of Assam, namely the Mising tribe, and reside in two remote villages in Golaghat District, Assam.

While studies of women’s micro entrepreneurial activities have assessed their impacts on a range of women’s empowerment indicators, such as access to resources, freedom from domestic violence, and mobility (S. K. Das 2012; Datta & Gailey 2012; Green et al. 2015; Haugh & Talwar 2016; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2016; Kantor 2003; Ramswamy & Kumar 2013; Torri & Martinez 2011), research has not focused on freedom from other significant forms of gendered exploitation, such human trafficking, as an indicator of empowerment. Such a gap in the literature has particularly important implications in the context of the northeast region of India and the selected study area, where trafficking of women and girls is high. Evidence on interventions that can effectively support women to secure economic independence is essential to developing effective anti-trafficking strategies and identifying gaps in current approaches. Tribal women’s experiences in social enterprises are integral to building such an evidence base but are largely underrepresented in the literature. This study seeks to contribute to filling this gap by generating evidence on the impacts of a social enterprise on tribal women’s lives and their socioeconomic empowerment, with a focus on outcomes connected to the risk of human trafficking.

**Human trafficking in Northeast India**

Human trafficking is one of the gravest threats to human rights in India. As is the case globally, the majority of trafficked persons in India are women and
children (National Crime Records Bureau 2017; UNODC 2018). Persistent poverty, the high demand for women and children in the global sex trade and for forced labour and the lack of opportunities for women to become economically independent, exacerbate women and children’s vulnerability to being trafficked (D’Cunha 2002; Jeffreys 1997; Kengurusie 2017; MacKinnon 2011; Samarasinghe & Burton 2007; Thomas 2011). Women and girls from marginalised groups, including lower-caste and tribal communities, face compounded layers of vulnerability to trafficking, exploitation and other forms of violence (D’Cunha 2002; Kengurusie 2017; Mahjebeen 2018; Moon & Pawar 2003; Narula 1999).

The northeast region of India is an increasingly concentrated hotspot for human trafficking (Caritas India 2017; Impulse NGO Network 2018a; National Crime Records Bureau 2017; The Assam Tribune 2018). Its geographical proximity to the porous international borders of Myanmar, Nepal and Bangladesh make the region a prevalent zone of inter and intra-state trafficking in persons (Srivastava 2017). Ongoing economic insecurity and conflict in the region further hamper efforts to tackle the trafficking problem and compound local populations’ vulnerabilities to traffickers.

The northeastern state of Assam accounts for 22% of the total reported cases of trafficking in India and some of the highest numbers of reported child trafficking cases in the country (Caritas India 2017; Kengurusie 2017). Reports further indicate high prevalence of trafficking of girls for commercial sexual exploitation (Impulse NGO Network 2018a; National Crime Records Bureau 2017). Assam is a region marked by its vulnerability to seasonal flooding and the adverse impacts of such frequent natural disasters. Women and girls working in commercial tea gardens are particularly prone to unsafe migration, with increased risk during floods (Caritas India 2017). Further, the viability of traditional rural livelihoods, such as artisanal weaving, has been threatened due to competition from cheap, mass-produced products (Bortamuly, Goswami, & Hazarika 2013; S. K. Das 2012; B. Hazarika, Bezbaruah, & Goswami 2016; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018). Faced with permanent job insecurity and economic instability, these communities are strategically targeted by traffickers who use
deception to lure victims with promises of lucrative employment elsewhere (Srivastava 2017). While demand is the backbone of human trafficking globally, systemic poverty serves as a primary “push factor” for trafficking in women and children in northeast India (Thomas 2011).

**Building sustainable livelihoods – a trafficking prevention model**

Before it was formally registered as an NGO in 1999, Impulse NGO Network consisted of a small group of volunteers, organised by Founder, Hasina Kharbhih to develop and implement livelihood initiatives for poor and rural communities in Meghalaya, Northeast India. It was through its grassroots engagement with women artisans in rural areas that Kharbhih and her team first observed the staggering trend in women and children “disappearing” from the northeast region (Impulse NGO Network n.d.). On further investigation, they understood that children were being trafficked to urban areas for forced labour as domestic maids, beggars, and shop workers. From this realisation, Impulse NGO Network—formally established as a non-profit organisation—began to channel its efforts into tackling human trafficking (Impulse NGO Network n.d.).

Impulse’s primary activities include stakeholder capacity-building, advocacy, and case intervention and management, conducted under the protocols of the 6Ps: partnership, prevention, protection, policing, press, prosecution; and 6Rs: reporting, rescue, repatriation, re-integration, and restitution (Impulse NGO Network 2018b). Through its case management and referral system, the Impulse Case Management Centre (ICMC), it manages a central database of trafficking cases reported by its network of regional and international partners and refers victims and survivors to appropriate support services. It is under the ‘prevention’ arm of its 6Ps and 6Rs model that Impulse implements its livelihood development activities and through which it initiated Impulse Social Enterprises (Impulse NGO Network 2018b).

The interwoven histories of Impulse NGO Network and Impulse Social Enterprises provide an important backdrop to ISE’s social mission and structure.
Its sustainable livelihood objectives are tied to a social and political framework that prioritises women’s economic empowerment as an imperative to preventing ‘unsafe migration’ and human trafficking. Kharbhiih, who is also ISE’s Managing Director, summarises this organisational principle in the statement, “You cannot stop human trafficking until women at the grassroots become economically self-sufficient” (Child 2018). Therefore, ISE commits itself to the principle of “trade, not aid”, supporting tribal artisans as independent entrepreneurs, with free access to raw materials and its markets (Impulse Social Enterprises 2018).

The for-profit business model seeks to generate income for women in rural and tribal communities with the logic that enhanced economic empowerment will stem the flow of unsafe migration and reduce their vulnerability to being trafficked. The model enables artisans to maintain traditional home-based weaving practices and the flexibility to determine their work schedule according to their needs. Through the use of local raw materials and partnerships with local design-houses, the enterprise aims to generate wider economic benefits for rural communities and the region.

Since 2009, the enterprise has assisted approximately 7,000 women artisans in Northeast India in marketing and selling ethnic products through fair trade processes under its brand, ‘Empower’ (Impulse Social Enterprises n.d.). ISE currently supports women from Scheduled Tribes in Northeast India: the Assamese, Mising, and Karbis in Assam; the Idu Mishmi in Arunachal Pradesh; Kasi, Bhoi and Garo tribes in Meghalaya; the Mizo tribe in Mizoram; and Naga tribes in Nagaland (Impulse Social Enterprises 2018).

While ad-hoc interviews with artisans conducted by the NGO and journalists indicate positive impacts of the model (Child 2018; Impulse Social Enterprises 2018; Pillay 2014), a robust qualitative evaluation has not been undertaken to date. Further, connecting impact to a reduction in human trafficking remains a challenging and cumbersome task, with insufficient resources and data to assess such a link. Further understanding of women’s experiences is needed to assess the effectiveness of the model in increasing women’s socioeconomic security. This research aimed to examine the
implementation and outcomes of the model in two rural tribal villages in Golaghat District, Assam. I sought to assess the impacts of the social enterprise on the lives of women artisans from this locality according to key measures of economic and social empowerment (Kabeer 1999). I further aimed to: a) assess the economic and social outcomes of the income generation initiative for artisans and the wider community; b) identify the strengths and gaps of the model; and c) assess possible reduction of vulnerability to human trafficking and/or other social harms (such as unsafe migration, violence and exploitation). Study findings indicate that engagement in microentrepreneurial handloom activities has had transformative impacts on tribal women’s lives and enhanced their abilities to make strategic life decisions, suggesting that women’s economic advancement can reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and human trafficking.

The structure of this thesis intends to first establish the conceptual and theoretical framework in which the research is grounded. Chapter 2 outlines the key theoretical and empirical concepts in the academic literature on women’s empowerment and situates the study in a definitional framework of ‘empowerment.’ It then reviews the literature on the role of microentrepreneurial income-generating schemes in facilitating women’s empowerment, with a focus on the South Asian context, outlining the gaps in the research and the contribution this thesis seeks to make to the field. In Chapter 3, I provide further background to the study through a brief historical overview of the handloom industry in northeast India and a summary of its contemporary relevance to tribal women’s ‘empowerment.’ I also describe the business model of Impulse Social Enterprises in order to provide an understanding of how the enterprise functions and how artisans are engaged as ‘Empower’ weavers. A brief summary of the study context is then given, before moving into a description of the study design and methodology in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 I present the overall results and findings of the study, before discussing their implications for women’s socioeconomic empowerment in Chapter 6. Finally, I offer conclusions on the findings and recommendations for areas of investment in social enterprise-based interventions aimed at catalyzing women’s empowerment and reducing their
vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation.

2. Conceptual framework: ‘measuring’ women’s empowerment and the role of microentrepreneurial schemes in the sociological literature

There is an overwhelming abundance of literature on rural women’s empowerment in the South Asian context (Agarwala & Lynch 2006; Batliwala 2007; Beteta 2006; Chakrabarti & Biswas 2012; Garikipati 2013; Kabeer 1999; Kantor 2003; Kilby 2011; Krenz et al. 2013; Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender 2002; Schuler & Hashemi 1994; Schuler & Rottach 2010a, 2010b; A. Sen 1999; G. Sen 1993; Yesudian 2006). This research poses, and responds to, wide-ranging theoretical and empirical questions—from what is women’s empowerment; to how can it be measured? In order to situate the study within the relevant scholarship, it is necessary to begin with a definitional framework of women’s empowerment (Datta & Gailey 2012). I will then draw upon key conceptual models of empowerment identified in the literature to examine research specific to women’s participation in entrepreneurial, income-generating ventures. Particular focus is given to income-generating initiatives in India, namely those in the northeastern region, which is of primary concern to this study.

Defining and measuring ‘women’s empowerment’

Women’s empowerment is recognised as a paramount human rights goal (United Nations 2019). There is global consensus that women’s empowerment and gender equality are intrinsically linked to the achievement of other human rights objectives, including quality education, healthcare and poverty eradication (UN Women 2019). Low levels of empowerment cause, exacerbate, and indicate a range of negative social, economic and health outcomes for women and their children (Richardson 2018; G. Sen 2019). Despite the acceleration of
development programs and policies aimed at driving “women’s empowerment,” it is often unclear what exactly women’s empowerment means in the variety of contexts in which it is opaquely applied (Kabeer 1999). This is due in part to the political evolution of the term. Inspired by grassroots women’s organisations in developing countries in the 1980s, the concept of women’s empowerment has since been adopted by a range of actors in both public and private spheres. This, some feminist scholars argue, has led to its political dilution—serving now as little more than a “buzzword” for donors and policymakers and negating its original strategic value (Batliwala 2007; Kabeer 2017). Given the contestations surrounding this debate, it is important to outline how the concept will be used in the context of this study as defined in the literature. Further, definitions of women’s empowerment directly influence the ways in which empowerment outcomes are measured and are therefore essential to this study.

Measuring women’s empowerment poses significant challenges to researchers and development actors (Kabeer 1999; Kishor 2000; Richardson 2017, 2018). Approaches today are informed by a robust body of theoretical research that has developed key definitions of empowerment and conceptual models of the empowerment process over the past three decades (Richardson 2018). Kabeer’s (1999, p. 435) definition of women’s empowerment as “a process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability” remains one of the most widely applied conceptual foundations for measuring women’s empowerment outcomes. Das (2012, p. 11) applies this definition in the context of women’s development, where empowerment is “a way of defining, challenging and overcoming barriers in a women’s life through which she increases her ability to shape her life and environment.” Both definitions echo earlier feminist conceptions of empowerment as “altering relations of power...which constrain women’s options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being” (G. Sen 1993, cited in Malhotra et al. 2002, p. 5). This study employs Kabeer’s (1999) definition, with particular attention to the concept of “choice” and the ability to make strategic life decisions.

According to Kabeer (1999), the ability to exercise choice involves three
inter-related dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. Resources (or “pre-conditions”) include material, economic, social, and human resources. In the empowerment process, the resources we are able to access and actively utilise shape the range of alternatives available to us (Kabeer 2017). As resources are dependent on and acquired through a range of relationships and power dynamics, access to resources is intimately bound to societal norms, rules, and institutions (Kabeer 1999). Consideration of the ways in which norms and established social infrastructures influence access to resources is particularly important in the context of women’s empowerment, as women tend to occupy the lowest positions in decision-making hierarchies, thus are less likely to exert authority in determining the distribution and allocation of resources (Kabeer 1999). The ability to make alternative decisions is a crucial qualification to the concept of ‘choice’, as in order for choice to be meaningful, alternatives must be available to choose from (Kabeer 2017).

The second dimension of women’s empowerment refers to agency, broadly defined by Kabeer (1999, p. 438) as “the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them.” This definition goes beyond a narrow conceptualisation of agency as being merely the “choice” to act; but rather incorporates “the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity” (Kabeer 1999, p. 438).

Achievements refer to the outcomes of agency—the “realisations of one’s goals” (Kabeer 1999, 2005). While international indicators tend to identify survival-based outcomes (such as women’s entry to waged labour) as evidence of progress, Kabeer proposes a more emancipatory framework for women’s empowerment that considers both the agency exercised and its consequences for the agent. Rather than simply meeting survival needs, achievements must also contribute to women’s sense of independence, self-worth, and greater wellbeing (Kabeer 2005). Examples commonly cited in the literature include: having greater autonomy in household and family decision-making; control over own income; and an equal share of domestic burden (S. K. Das 2012; Garikipati 2013; Richardson 2018).

Although there are numerous definitions of women’s empowerment
(Alsop & Heinsohn 2005; Batliwala 2007; Kabeer 1999; Mosedale 2005), scholars broadly agree on a few key concepts (Richardson 2017). First, there is broad consensus that women’s empowerment constitutes its own, socially and politically specific process, separate from the empowerment of other disadvantaged or marginalized groups (Richardson 2017). This is due to the fact that women occupy disadvantaged positions in society on account of entrenched sex discrimination (i.e. patriarchy). Therefore, women experience issues specific to them as a social group, including unequal power relations with men and household and family dynamics (Richardson 2017). Most scholars acknowledge that while women share a specific, gendered relationship to empowerment, women’s experiences of empowerment are multifarious and dynamic. Postcolonial feminist scholarship, in particular, has highlighted how women’s experiences of empowerment intersect in a range of ways with experiences of race, class, caste and ethnicity, and must also be considered in conceptualizing and measuring women’s empowerment (G. Sen 1993).

The second concept—‘agency’, or the ability to make choices and to act upon them—is widely noted in the literature as an integral component in the empowerment process (Alsop & Heinsohn 2005; Beteta 2006; Das 2012; Garikipati 2013; Kabeer 1999; Kantor 2003; Mosedale 2005; Richardson 2017).

Finally, most scholars agree that women’s empowerment is a dynamic, multidimensional process which occurs over time (S. K. Das 2012; Torri & Martinez 2011). While specific indicators of empowerment, such as access to quality healthcare, may be attained in a relatively short space of time, women’s empowerment is generally regarded as a long-term process of transformation (Richardson 2017; Torri & Martinez 2011). Further, the trajectory of empowerment is never linear. It encompasses a range of social, cultural, political and economic dimensions that may intersect at different stages of the empowerment process, and progress in each is likely to differ in a complex set of ways (Kabeer 1999).

It is the “open-ended” nature of such processual change that renders women’s empowerment immensely difficult to measure (Kabeer 1999, p. 442). There are, however, a number of approaches to measuring women’s
empowerment. Common strategies have been to use ‘proxy’ indicators to identify outcomes in various aspects of women’s lives and to measure them directly (Garikipati 2013). Some of the outcomes typically evaluated include: women’s economic contribution; the extent of their domestic burden, their mobility in the public sphere; their control over their income; and freedom from domestic violence (S. K. Das 2012; Garikipati 2013; Haugh & Talwar 2016; Kantor 2003; Torri & Martinez 2011). However, there is a growing consensus that proxy indicators do not provide adequate evidence, and a number of scholars argue that the use of indirect indicators in measurements of women’s empowerment is problematic (Richardson 2018).

Kishor (2000), for example, argues that in order to produce meaningful evidence of the empowerment process, researchers need to go beyond the use of indirect indicators to include those that capture women’s access to different sources of empowerment, with consideration to the context in which women are situated (Yesudian 2006).

Adopting this multidimensional framework, Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) have argued that direct measures of empowerment can be made by assessing all three of the following:

1. Whether an opportunity to make a choice exists (existence of choice).
2. Whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose (use of choice).
3. Whether the choice resulted in the desired result (achievement of choice).

Richardson (2017) provides a useful summary of the way that conceptual models of the empowerment process can be used to identify indirect and direct measures:
In contrast to resources and achievements, which are indirect measures, agency provides direct evidence of empowerment and should be used when possible (Kishor 2000; Malhotra et al. 2002; Richardson 2017). Using indirect indicators can produce ambiguous conclusions about women’s empowerment and in some cases inform misleading results (Richardson 2017). This is firstly due to the fact that while resources can facilitate women’s agency, they do not ensure it (Kabeer 1999; Richardson 2017). Secondly, achievements may appear to indicate positive empowerment outcomes, but ignore the complexities underlying women’s abilities to navigate such outcomes. Garikipati’s (2013) study on the impacts of microcredit on women’s empowerment reveals how reliance on indirect measures can undermine these complexities. Results showed that use of microcredit increased women’s employment, indicating a positive outcome (Richardson 2017). However, further evaluation of the process through which women received loans demonstrated that only 10% of women had access to profits made from investing loans into family farms and business (Garikipati 2013). Many of these women entered paid work to repay their loans (Garikipati 2013; Richardson 2017). Thus, analysis of women’s agency revealed negative
effects, with considerable implications for their economic and social wellbeing.

The processual understanding of empowerment has shifted theoretical approaches away from instrumentalist models that have relied upon quantifiable measurements of gender equality/women’s empowerment, often in order to demonstrate desirable policy impact (Kabeer 1999). Research has demonstrated the need for studies seeking to evaluate the impacts of development models on women’s empowerment to consider indicators of empowerment specific to the socio-cultural contexts in which women live (Kabeer 1999; Mason 1986). This again relates to ‘choice’ as mediated by sociocultural context, why “empowerment cannot be conceptualized simply in terms of choice but must incorporate an assessment of the values embedded in agency and choice, values which reflect the wider context” (Kabeer 1999, p. 457). In other words, women’s choices will differ according to a range of influences, from their individual life experiences to the structural and social relations in which they are embedded. Ignoring the context in which women are situated can lead to biased measurement (Richardson 2018). Indicators of women’s empowerment therefore need to account for these “contextual possibilities” in order to recognise changes in women’s empowerment (Kabeer 1999, p. 460).

Micro-entrepreneurial schemes and women’s empowerment

Participation in economic activities is a key indicator for measuring women’s empowerment in developing countries (United Nations 2019). India has a long history of addressing women’s development through women’s cooperative models (Datta & Gailey 2012; Kilby 2011; Torri & Martinez 2011). These have largely relied on the involvement of the government, often incorporating microfinance components (Datta & Gailey 2012; Krenz et al. 2013). While a large body of research on microfinance and microcredit models has demonstrated widespread successes, studies also identify the shortcomings of such programs to generate holistic outcomes for women’s empowerment (Garikipati 2013; Kabeer 2017; Kilby 2011; Krenz et al. 2013). In some cases, these interventions have been seen to reproduce oppressive neoliberal structures
and to have counterproductive results for improving women’s socioeconomic wellbeing (Batliwala 2007; Blowfield & Frynas 2005; Kabeer 2017; Kantor 2003; Mayoux 1992). Many scholars recognise that market-based approaches to women’s empowerment are complex and often fail to address other important components of empowerment, such as altering patriarchal cultural norms (Blowfield & Frynas 2005). Nonetheless, most scholars still recognise the transformative role that income-generating activities can play in facilitating women’s socioeconomic empowerment (Batliwala 2007; Kabeer 2017; Kantor 2003).

Some nonprofits have sought alternative ways of addressing women’s livelihood through social impact business models, establishing for-profit social enterprises. A social entrepreneurial venture (SEV) is an organisation that seeks to produce both economic profit and positive social impact (Datta & Gailey 2012). While there are different types of SEVs, this study is concerned with the for-profit business model, where a business “defines its mission as being both social and economic,” and where profit is channeled to sustaining positive social impact (Datta & Gailey 2012, p. 572). Impulse Social Enterprises operates under this model, with an overarching social mission.

The promotion of small businesses and home-based microentrepreneurial activities has been an increasingly popular strategy of development practitioners and policymakers seeking to improve women’s economic and social status in recent years (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018). In South Asia, the participation of rural women in home-based economic activities has been appraised as means of securing livelihood opportunities for those women with the benefits of providing an independent and viable work environment (S. K. Das 2012; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018; Kantor 2003). In entering formal economic activities, women are transforming a range of activities that were traditionally performed for domestic use into commercial ventures, such as artisanal weaving (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018). Income generating activities and entrepreneurship development are increasingly cited as a “feasible solution” for women’s development and poverty alleviation, with potential to facilitate empowerment in a range of social, economic and political dimensions (S. K. Das 2012, p. 11;
Yesudian 2006). Studies on women’s participation in microentrepreneurial activities have demonstrated positive outcomes, including women’s increased control over assets and income, enhanced decision-making power, elevated position in the home, and reduced experience of domestic violence (See Appendix A).

Few studies focus on socio-economic development issues affecting women from Scheduled Tribes (S. K. Das 2012; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018; Ramswamy & Hmangaihzuali 2016). Findings from these limited studies indicate that an array of structural barriers constrain tribal women’s active participation in the formal labour market (K. S. Das & Mishra 2018). These include wage discrimination, limited training and credit facilities, lack of sustainable market linkages and exposure, as well as patriarchal norms and regulations that restrict women’s participation in public spheres (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018; Kabeer 1999). Amidst these challenges, the involvement of socially marginalised groups, like women, in microentrepreneurial activities has been shown to facilitate improved socioeconomic conditions for women and contribute to their empowerment (B. Hazarika and Goswami 2018).

While the prominent role of tribal women in India’s handloom economy has long been evident, research has only recently begun to investigate issues of development in the handloom sector with specific concern to tribal women and their communities (B. Hazarika et al. 2016; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018; Ramswamy & Hmangaihzuali 2016; Ramswamy & Kumar 2013). Notable among these studies are those that explore motivational factors associated with tribal women’s entry into commercial handloom enterprises in North East India, as well as marketing and distribution of products, with reflections upon the empowerment potential of handloom enterprises (B. Hazarika et al. 2016; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018; Ramswamy & Hmangaihzuali 2016). A study by B. Hazarika and Goswami (2018), for example, analysed factors that affect women’s ownership of a handloom micro-enterprise in two prominent tribal communities in Assam, the Bodo and Mising tribes. The authors draw upon conclusions from a previous study that found positive correlations between micro-entrepreneurial earnings and rural women’s empowerment, to argue that
involvement in handloom activities assists tribal women in the empowerment process. The income generated from entrepreneurial endeavors, they cite, not only enables tribal women to improve their socioeconomic conditions but to simultaneously take up “the challenge of patriarchy and gender inequality” (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018, p. 35).

The increasing participation of tribal women in micro-entrepreneurial activities in the handloom industry has therefore been identified as a necessary focus of development research and programs. Yet, there has been little scholarly enquiry into the impacts of tribal women’s participation in handloom artisanal enterprises (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018). Additionally, while studies of women’s entrepreneurial activities have assessed their impacts on a range of women’s empowerment indicators, such as access to resources, freedom from domestic violence, and mobility, research has not focused on freedom from other significant forms of gendered exploitation, such as human trafficking, as an indicator of empowerment. Such a gap in the literature is glaring in the context of Northeast India and Assam, where trafficking of women and girls is high. This study therefore seeks to contribute to building the evidence-base for the impacts of a social enterprise model on tribal women’s socioeconomic empowerment in the context of a rural area in Assam.

3. Background to the study

A brief history of the handloom industry in Assam

Handloom weaving—the practice of weaving cloth by hand on a loom—is an ancient tradition deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Assamese tribal societies. The earliest record of handloom weaving in Assam dates back to the 7th century CE, when Kamrupa King Bhaskar Barman is said to have sent a gift of Assamese dukula cotton to Emperor Harsha (Weaving in Assam n.d.). One of the state’s oldest and most widespread industries, the homecraft ascended in popularity during the Ahom dynasty (1228–1826), when it was made mandatory
for every household to weave silk (National Council of Educational Research and Training 2017). Most households traditionally produced cloth for household use and for significant cultural occasions, such as marriage ceremonies.

Traditionally, and in Assamese tribes today, weaving is practiced by female members of the household, who are taught the intricate skill by their mothers and older female relatives during childhood and later carry on the practice in their marital homes. A girl’s weaving abilities were once an important feature of her social status within the community, as her level of expertise traditionally marked her eligibility for marriage (Weaving in Assam n.d.).

Handloom artisans in Assam today produce a range of traditional hand-made fabrics and products, including the mekhela-sador (traditional indigenous Assamese dress), sarees, the dora-sador (bridal dress) and gamosa (a rectangular cloth, typically adorned in red and white motifs, used as a towel or gifted during Assamese cultural rituals). The traditional homecraft involves a range of technical and delicate processes, including silkworm rearing, reeling, spinning and weaving (National Council of Educational Research and Training 2017). Each tribe imbibes its own distinctive ethnic style into their woven fabrics and consider weaving as an expression of cultural identity (National Council of Educational Research and Training 2017).
Pictured above are Assamese fly-shuttle looms in an artisan’s house. Image: Tatum Street / 2019.
The handloom sector in Assam today and tribal women’s ‘empowerment’


Today, the handloom sector in Assam contributes significantly to the state’s economy and is increasingly being promoted by government and microfinance institutions as a gateway to rural women’s empowerment (NCAER 2010). The sector has become one of the most significant stages for the implementation of interventions facilitating rural and marginalised women’s skill and entrepreneurial development, utilising traditional artisanal weaving practices.

The handloom sector in India is the second largest provider of employment after agriculture (Ramswamy & Kumar 2013). The overwhelming majority of this workforce comprises rural women (Ramswamy & Kumar 2013). According to the Third National Handloom Census 2009–2010, 25.19 per cent of handloom households and 24.88 per cent of the total handloom workforce are represented by Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations (NCAER 2010). The census
also reports that weaving plays an instrumental role in developing the socio-economic status of disadvantaged communities, particularly those in rural areas (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2016; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018).

The northeast region of India has the highest concentration of handlooms in the country, with 99 per cent of its adult workforce represented by women (Ramaswamy & Kumar 2013). Among the northeastern states, Assam possesses 1.24 million (44.30%) of household looms and 1.11 million (46.76%) looms of the entire country (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018). Of the 1,378,817 weavers in the state, 349,919 are from STs (NCAER 2010). The total share of women in the handloom labour force in Assam is 98.96 per cent (NCAER 2010). Tribal women therefore account for a significant portion of the handloom workforce in the state, operating largely from the home (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2018).

**ISE’s business model**

The fabrics used to produce finished goods that are woven by ISE’s ‘Empower’ artisan network include various types of organic fibres such as cottons, *eri* silk, and *muga* silk. ISE sources cotton yarn from a Guwahati-based supplier and distributes it to artisans in their villages, providing details of the quantity of materials required, the tribal designs, patterns and colours to be woven onto the fabric, which is customised for an established set of products for the market (Pillay 2014). ISE bears the cost of the purchase and distribution of raw materials and provides payment to artisans upon delivery of the woven fabric.

A local supervising weaver or ‘master artisan’ in each village or cluster travels to artisan’s homes and teaches them the different designs and dimension requirements for new orders. Her role is pivotal to ensuring quality and consistency in material production and to maintaining effective communication between the social enterprise and the other artisans. Artisans earn 175 rupees (around AUD 3.60) per metre of fabric woven. While this rate is low, it is in accordance with Indian legal fair wage standards (Nest 2018). The supervising weaver earns a facilitation fee of 22% on the order as incentive to oversee quality and efficiency in production (Nest 2018). On average an artisan can weave one
metre in three hours spent weaving, however there can be great variation in production among weavers depending on individual experience and skill.

The woven fabrics are then transported to a small production unit in Shillong for stitching and tagging. After a final quality check, the finished products are shipped to suppliers and stored in the Impulse office in Shillong. ISE shares its office with Impulse NGO Network. While only a small number of staff are formally associated with ISE, Impulse staff provide significant support to ISE’s operations. As an NGO, Impulse facilitates and organises training and development components of the social enterprise. Current constraints on financial and staffing resources has limited such activities in recent years and the organisation recognises the need to build resource capacity in order to fill this gap. A professional brand strategist manages the Empower and ISE websites, while Impulse staff and rotational interns support other marketing and promotional activities, such as coordinating ISE’s social media accounts and managing sales at state and national handicrafts fairs.

**Study context**

*Figure 2. Map of Northeast India (includes West Bengal).*

*Map Illustration: Tatum Street / 2019. See Appendix B for a complete map of India.*
The study was carried out in two different villages in Golaghat District, Assam. Both villages comprise large tribal populations and are predominantly Hindu in their religious affiliations. Village 1 is a small-to-medium size locality with a population principally comprised of families from the Mising tribe. Village 2 is part of a larger municipality in Golaghat District with a mixed but significant tribal population.

The Mising (or Mishing) constitute one of the major tribal groups in Assam (Bhandari 1984), forming 17.51 per cent of the state’s Scheduled Tribe population (Konwar 2018). Their anthropological origins are traced to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongloid group, and they are said to have migrated to Assam from Arunachal Pradesh centuries ago (Konwar 2018; National Council of Educational Research and Training 2017). Agriculture remains the primary occupation of Mising people, cultivating varieties of rice paddy, pulses, and vegetables (Konwar 2018). Due to their agricultural reliance, Mising communities are largely self-sufficient, mostly using their produce and livestock for household consumption (Konwar 2018). Poverty and unemployment levels among Mising populations are high, with pronounced effects in flood-prone regions (Konwar 2018).

Pictured above are images of a traditional Mising bamboo-stilted house surrounded by lush farmland used to grow vegetables and cultivate rice paddy, taken in Village 2. Image: Tatum Street / 2019.
Handloom weaving and crafts hold significant historical and cultural meaning in Mising culture. As discussed above, Mising girls are taught how to weave from an early age and carry on the practice after marriage. It is only in recent years with the intervention of government and non-government ‘development’ schemes however, that Mising women have increasingly begun channeling their weaving skills into profit-making ventures. Data on the outcomes of these engagements are therefore limited.

4. Study Design and Methodology

This research sought to assess indicators of social and economic empowerment of women artisans involved in the social enterprise model of focus. It focuses on the lived experiences of these women and considers their voices paramount to reflecting the realities of their lives.

The study’s methodological approach draws upon feminist standpoint epistemology, a theory and a method of doing research that requires researchers to place women at the centre of the research process, as women’s concrete experiences serve as entry points from which knowledge about their lives can be built (Brooks 2007; Krenz et al. 2013). Undertaking research through a feminist standpoint epistemological framework necessitates the direct participation of women with whom the research is concerned, with the view that it is only by “making women’s concrete, life experiences the primary source of our investigations” that we can “succeed in constructing knowledge that accurately reflects and represents women” (Brooks 2007, p. 4). By placing women’s experiences at the fore of research, feminist standpoint approaches further seek to redress the historical subjugation of women’s voices by opening up a political space for the amplification of women’s knowledge (Brooks 2007). The central participation of women artisans concerned with this study was therefore crucially incorporated into the research design and methodological approach.

The study employed a qualitative methodology to investigate a range of socioeconomic factors of empowerment as they related to women engaged as ‘Empower’ weavers. I used the in-depth interview method (Hesse-Biber 2011)
to carry out semi-structured interviews with individual women, while naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba 1985) was used to gain broader insights into the day-to-day realities they revealed through their narratives. Naturalistic inquiry was also used to engage with participants and other members of their communities in ‘natural settings,’ with the recognition that individuals’ subjective experiences are “embedded in multiple contexts that are temporal, societal and personal” and an understanding of their experiences must reflect these contextual realities (Mittenfelner Carl & Ravitch 2018, p. 1). My interpreter and I spent one week living in the family home of one of the participant artisans in Village 1 of the study site to carry out field research. Non-formal conversations with family members and involvement in routine daily activities enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of day-to-day life in this household and in the wider village. In-depth interviews were carried out in artisans’ homes, which was important for building an understanding of their home and work environments. I also drew upon my previous personal experiences of working with Impulse NGO Network and engaging with artisans in one of the village study sites to conduct interviews and analyse data.

The decision to employ a qualitative methodology was motivated by a range of significant factors. First, since empowerment is a context-sensitive process, qualitative approaches to analysing women’s experiences of socioeconomic empowerment provide the greatest means of accounting for contextual factors that shape and influence individual realities (Malhotra et al. 2002; Richardson 2017). As Gita Sen (1993) posits, the empowerment process is inherently qualitative, thus, non-qualitative attempts to capture this process fall short in understanding the underlying meaning and subjectivity of women’s experiences of empowerment (Malhotra et al. 2002). This holds critical importance for enquiries concerning women’s navigation of power relations, where women’s narratives are more likely to reveal complex layers of experience than quantitative measurements (Haugh & Talwar 2016; Kabeer 1999; Krenz et al. 2013; Malhotra et al. 2002). Second, employing qualitative approaches in contexts wherein women’s choices may be heavily inscribed by patriarchal values is considered important to gaining access to participants and
enhancing the rigour of data (Haugh & Talwar, p. 647). The ability to communicate on an individual basis through in-depth interviews enables the researcher to more effectively navigate cultural and social sensitivities and lessen “perceived social desirability of responses” (Haugh & Talwar, p. 647). Third, low levels of female literacy in rural areas of Northeast India necessitated oral collection of data, with an assumption that a higher number of women would be able to participate in verbal discussions. Finally, given the short timeframe in which field research could be conducted and the level of resources available, the study was limited to a small group of respondents. Due to the small sample size, a quantitative methodology would not have been appropriate.

**Data Collection**

Primary data is based on personal accounts given by twelve women artisans in two remote tribal villages in Assam, during in-depth interviews carried out in October of 2019 by myself and a native Assamese-speaking interpreter. These accounts are supplemented by insights of members of interviewees’ families and by background information provided by organisational documents and staff of Impulse NGO Network and Impulse Social Enterprises.

Nine interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the respondents and hand-written notes were also taken during the interviews. Questions were steered by an in-depth interview guide prepared for the study. This guide was formulated on the basis of recommended research guides for conducting qualitative research on women’s empowerment: the Food and Agriculture (FAO) Organisation of the United Nation’s research guide for qualitative research on women’s economic empowerment and social protection (Pavanello, Pozarny, & de la O Campos 2015), and the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Women’s Status module (The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program n.d.).

Interviews were later re-translated and transcribed by an independent Assamese translator in order to enhance the veracity of the data and enable closer reading of respondent’s subjective responses. Transcription is an important
component of data analysis as it “brings the research closer to the data” and also provides an opportunity to “critique and improve on the interview process” (Hesse-Biber n.d.). While indirect translation during the interviews was conducive to more free-flowing discussion between the researcher, the respondent, and interpreter, the re-translated transcription allowed for a more direct interpretation of women’s responses.

**Study Sample**

A total of thirteen artisans were interviewed, however, due to acute hearing difficulties faced by Artisan 10, her interview could not be appropriately carried out. Therefore, her responses before deciding to discontinue the interview have not been included in the qualitative analysis. Her demographic information has been included in the table below in order to add to a demographic understanding of the study context. All of the respondents were currently earning an income through their association with Impulse Social Enterprises except for one (Artisan 4), who was soon to be inducted as an Empower weaver and whose daughter-in-law currently weaves with ISE.

The majority of artisans interviewed were from the Mising tribe and currently reside in two villages with predominantly Mising populations in Golaghat District, Assam. Three artisans belonged to other Scheduled Tribes, the Borah, Karbi and Kosari tribes, and one artisan did not belong to any tribe. All artisans were married and had children except for Artisan 13, who is 18-years old and currently repeating her Class 10 matriculation in the local high-school.

*Table 1. Demographic information of artisan respondents.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artisan</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Tribal Status</th>
<th>Children: Gender / Ages</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>F/F 3/7</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Class 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>M/F 10/13</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Sat Class 10 exam but did not pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Borah</td>
<td>M 28</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Class 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Education Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Karbi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Village 2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Village 2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Village 2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kosari</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Village 2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Village 2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in the table above, the highest level of education among respondents was completion of Class 10. Two respondents reported no level of schooling. Of the two women who had passed their Class 10 matriculation examination, one cited marriage as the reason for not completing her higher secondary education; the other did not provide any reason.

Five of the respondents were married when they were teenagers (between ages 14-16). This trend was observed in most women above the age of 28. Other women reported that they were married between the ages of 18 and 21.
Data Analysis

I employed an interpretive, inductive approach to analyse data from in-depth interviews with Empower artisans. First, in-depth field notes were analysed to identify key themes emerging from the narratives of respondents. Themes were then manually coded and organised under broad ‘indicators’ of women’s empowerment with which they corresponded.

Transcriptions of the interviews were then checked against field notes and extracts were assigned to relevant codes. The major themes that emerged from the data and form the basis of the discussion are as follows:

1. Control over own income
2. Decision-making autonomy at the household level
3. Freedom of mobility and access to opportunities
4. Attitudes towards female education and physical domestic violence
5. Freedom from exploitation and human trafficking
6. Self-confidence

5. Results and findings

Control over income

Control over income is defined as having the autonomy to decide and allocate how money earned is spent (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2016). This infers that a woman who has control over her income does not need to seek permission from another person, such as a husband or parent in-law, to spend her earnings; rather, she has access to income that she can “spend as she wishes” (Mahmud, Shah, & Becker 2012, p. 613). Control over income provides evidence of
empowerment by demonstrating that women possess allocational autonomy over their earnings (Kantor 2003, p. 433).

The majority of women interviewed reported that they control their income earned from weaving jointly with their husband. All of the artisan respondents currently earning through ISE reported that they have their own bank account. Eight had these accounts prior to their involvement with ISE, while three reported that they had opened their accounts after joining ISE due to their change in earning status.

While only two artisans reported that they need to seek permission from their husband in order to withdraw and spend money earned from their weaving work, the majority indicated that they discuss use of income with their husbands before spending it. Decisions on how to spend income were mostly made through consensus between artisans and their husbands. Of the seven artisans who reported joint control over income, three indicated that if they require money for immediate use, they do not need to discuss this with their husband before spending it. In these cases, using cash from weaving income was generally considered by women on a “needs basis,” with needs most commonly relating to expenses for the wellbeing of their children and broader household.

Three artisans reported that they decide independently on the allocation of their income earned through weaving, while their husbands’ maintained control over household income from other domains, such as agriculture and tea gardens.

There was only one case in which the respondent was found to have no control over her income earned from weaving, with her earnings flowing from the social enterprise going directly to her mother, who is also an artisan associated with ISE. When asked if this arrangement suited her, she replied:

I am okay with my mom having the control. I ask her whenever I need money and she gives it.
This was an anomalous case, as although the respondent was eighteen, she was still undertaking her higher secondary schooling and residing in her family home with her mother and brother.

*The role of ‘bargaining power’*

When examining women’s control over income at the household level, it is necessary to consider the ways in which power relations between men and women shape and influence patterns of household decision-making (Kabeer 1997; A. Sen 1999). Bargaining models of the household such as Amartya Sen’s (1990) “cooperative-conflict” model highlight the importance of considering power as a pivotal component of household decision making and allocational outcomes (Kabeer 1997, p. 264). Sen observes that women and men negotiate “congruent and conflicting interests” that influence and impact family life; thus, decision-making necessitates cooperation between both parties, with conflict resolved through adherence to “implicitly agreed patterns of behaviour” (A. Sen 1999, p. 192). A striking feature of the cooperative-conflict model, Sen notes, is that such codes of implicitly defined behaviour tend not to present egalitarian outcomes, with women typically positioned to receive the least favourable “deal” in household divisions. This is due in part to prevailing “perceptions of entitlement” (A. Sen 1999, p. 193) determined by perceived economic contributions of household members (Kabeer 1997). Those who are perceived to be making the most substantive economic contribution to household prosperity tend to enjoy greater bargaining power and thus stand to lose less from a breakdown in cooperation (Kabeer 1997, p. 263). Men’s traditional role as the primary “breadwinner” in the household is therefore a crucial factor in sustaining their relative dominance and in weakening women’s bargaining outcomes (A. Sen 1999; Kabeer 1997). Often, this implies a need for women to comply with traditional norms and social systems that undergird their subordination to men and simultaneously offer important material and social ‘protections’ (Kabeer 1997). For example, in most South Asian contexts and particularly in rural settings, a woman’s social value is considered inseparable from marriage. Not only does marriage in most cases offer a considerable economic benefit to
individual women; being married also insulates those in strictly patriarchal societies from the stigma and social isolation associated with being an unmarried woman. In such contexts, women’s “bargaining power” within the household is frequently enacted within the boundaries of what A. Sen (1990) describes in his “cooperative-conflict” model as the “perceived interest response.” When an individual within the household perceives that her long-term interests may be better secured by prioritising the wellbeing of others over her own, she is least likely to receive individual benefits from the allocation of income (Kabeer 1997, p. 165).

Kandiyoti (1988) provides a useful analysis of the ways in which women’s altruistic behaviour may reveal an underlying motivation to maximise their long-term protection and security. She argues that “women strategize within a set of concrete constraints” afforded by gendered power relations skewed in favour of men’s interests and socioeconomic conditions (Kandiyoti 1988, p. 275). These constraints construct the laws of what she terms the “patriarchal bargain,” (Kandiyoti 1988, p. 275), through which in different contexts, women employ coping strategies in order to navigate patriarchal systems and safeguard their lifelong security (Kabeer 1997, p. 226).

Kabeer’s (1997) study on women’s access to income earning and changes in intra-household relations in urban Bangladesh demonstrates how the perceived interest response and the patriarchal bargain may be operationalised to preference long-term strategic concerns above individual autonomy. Results indicate that the most frequently reported use of income by women was on the collective welfare of the household and family (Kabeer 1997). Her analysis reveals that women’s altruistic allocation of income to the household and the subordination of their personal wellbeing partly reflected an attempt to maintain the ‘privileges’ afforded to them by complying with traditional gender roles and securing their perceived value within the family unit. In such settings in which married women are heavily dependent on her husband and his relatives, Kabeer suggests that “altruistic expenditure may assume the role of an investment in their own future by securing more firmly their place within the family and their ability to call on the loyalty of family members.” She concludes that the
perceived interest response indicates that altruistic behaviour within the household is more likely to stem from “a lack, rather than a monopoly, of decision-making power” (Kabeer 1997, p. 264). However, Kabeer (1997, p. 300) also emphasises that familial dynamics—often characterised by a mixture of love, affection, and conflict—ensure that power within the household is uniquely configured in contrast to other forms of power, and that “it is this complex interweaving of self-interest and altruism, co-operation and conflict which makes the operation of power within the household—and the effects of women’s wages on it—so elusive and so difficult to track down.” In addition, she notes that the “internalized constraints that women carry with them” add a deeper layer of subjectiveness to questions of intra-household power; thus, examining women’s control over allocational decisions regarding their income is marked by these challenges (Kabeer 1997, p. 300).

Interviews with women artisans undertaken for this study reveal similar results to Kabeer’s (1997) analysis, with the majority of respondents indicating altruistic spending behaviours. The majority reported that they have experienced positive outcomes from their association with ISE with the most significant benefit ascribed to enhanced ability to contribute to the wellbeing of the household, with an emphasis on providing for their children’s needs, as discussed below.

“I only spend money for my kids” – allocation of income and altruistic spending behaviours

The majority of artisans expressed the view that their earnings from weaving serve as a supplementary contribution to the main income earned by their husband and through other sources of household income such as farming and agricultural work. All of the artisans with full or joint control over their income reported that they allocated earnings to the needs of the household and their family, often using them to purchase stationery, schoolbooks and clothing for their children. In some cases, artisans also used their earnings to buy vegetables and staples for the household.
As Artisan 7 reported, the value in the income gained from weaving was found in its contribution to the overall welfare of the family and household needs:

Whatever I earn, I spend for my daughters and my house… I deposit the entire amount and withdraw as per my need… My husband usually takes care of [the main household expenses]. In case he needs some money he asks me and I help him.

Respondents often emphasised that their expenditure was not used for their own personal wants and needs but for those of their children. As Artisan 12 explained, “I only spend money for my kids. I don’t spend money for me.”

The desire to contribute to the economic prosperity of the household and children’s wellbeing was also the most commonly reported incentive for women to involve themselves with ISE. Discussing her motivations for becoming an Empower weaver, Artisan 5 described how the change in her earning status has assisted her in realising her goal to “help” her family with the household needs.

When I got to know about Impulse, I felt that joining it would be a good idea as I would be able to earn money which will be good for my family and kids… I feel like [my life] is changing. If there is some shortage of money at my home, now I can help with the money I earn from Impulse. Before I couldn’t do this.

The ability to afford purchases for her children’s needs was also the most significant change Artisan 6 had noticed in her life since she began earning through ISE, telling us,

Before I used to worry that I won’t be able to give new clothes to my children. Now I can give them new clothes and go anywhere I want freely.
Perceptions of independence and economic agency

As A. Sen (1999, p. 193) notes, while patterns of allocational decision-making within the family are largely defined by established conventions, they may also be influenced and reconfigured by women’s enhanced economic roles and empowerment. He draws attention to the evidence that when women earn an income, their relative position in the household heightens as “her contribution to the family’s prosperity is more visible” (A. Sen 1999, p. 194). This has a direct impact upon her agency within the household as her dependency on other household members reduces (A. Sen 1999, p. 194). Similarly, Kabeer’s (1997) study points to the potential for women’s waged employment to expand the scope of possibility to negotiate intra-household power relations by elevating their bargaining power.

Interviews with artisans revealed that the increase in income through home-based weaving was an important factor in enhancing women’s perceptions of their independence and ability to make choices about household spending in some cases. In addition to enhancing their economic contribution to their household, these artisans reported that another benefit of earning was that they were less financially dependent on their husbands for household needs. Artisan 3, a forty-five-year-old old woman from the Borah tribe who has been weaving with ISE for the past two years, considers this a positive outcome of her earning:

My earnings benefit my whole family. If I earn, then I don’t have to ask my husband for anything.

This sense of independence was further seen to enhance the overall productivity of the household as she and her husband independently managed their two main domains of income— a local commercial tea garden and weaving. While her husband manages the tea garden, Artisan 3 has full control over her weaving work and the income she generates from her association with ISE. Now that her two sons are adults, she invests considerable time in weaving, often working
from eight o’clock in the morning until late into the night while concurrently managing the household work.

Achieving greater independence to invest in the children’s welfare was a key incentive for earning through weaving for Artisan 11:

I felt that I would earn money on my own and help my kids. I would not need to depend on my husband for all expenses.

Artisan 1 demonstrated similar views regarding the value of earning an income in terms of enhancing women’s agency:

Income is important for women, and it is important for women to work so that they don’t have to rely on their husband for everything. When the man is the sole breadwinner, he feels superior. When women earn for themselves, they are not seen as inferior and they don’t feel inferior in their home.

Although all women viewed their income as supplementing their husband’s larger economic contribution, responses also revealed that enhanced earning status is considered among some artisans as a significant means of improving their status and gaining respect in the home, thereby improving intra-household relations in their favour.

**Participation in household and family decision-making**

Participation of women in household and family decision-making refers to women’s ability to participate in planning and carrying out decisions regarding household matters, including work and domestic activities, children’s education, and family planning (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2016). The ability of women to make choices about day-to-day functions in the domestic space as well as to participate in longer-term strategic planning for the household and family is
considered as an integral element in the process of empowerment (Malhotra et al. 2002). The extent of women’s agency to make decisions regarding reproductive matters serves as an additionally significant indicator of empowerment, reflecting her bodily autonomy on the one hand, and her ability to make strategic life choices on the other (Malhotra et al. 2002; Pavanello et al. 2015). In-depth interviews with artisans revealed the various ways in which they negotiate decision-making in three key areas: children’s education; reproductive control and family planning; and distribution of household labour.

*Decision-making regarding children’s education*

Eight artisans responded to questions regarding their participation in decisions about their children’s education. All reported that they discuss these decisions with their husband and that they have an equal share in the contribution to this process.

The belief in the importance of children’s education—regardless of gender—proved to be a primary motivating factor for many of the women to associate themselves with ISE. When asked what she thought the benefits of weaving with ISE would be before she joined, Artisan 6 explained,

I felt that if I can earn some money, then I would be able to help with my children’s education.

Artisan 12 also indicated that she weaves to support her daughter and two sons’ schooling, emphasising the importance of education for enhancing life and work opportunities:

We don’t have an education so we can’t do anything else. Me and my husband work hard so that our kids can get an education.
Control over reproductive decisions

Regarding control over decision making on family planning, seven artisans reported that they decided with their husbands on whether to have a child. As with views on female education, decision-making around family planning did not appear to be impacted by artisans’ involvement with ISE, with all respondents who answered questions regarding reproductive choices reporting that they had always based family planning decisions on a joint discussion with their husband.

Decision-making over division of household labour

Mother of a two-year-old son, Artisan 5 manages her weaving work alongside the demands of other daily household responsibilities. Like many of the other artisans, she wakes up around four to five o’clock each morning to clean the house and prepare food for the family. In the agricultural off-season, she weaves for approximately five hours a day while taking care of her son, and in the evening she helps her mother-in-law and sister-in-law with the household tasks. During the rice cultivation months, she spends five to six hours a day doing agricultural work and weaves whenever she finds time.

This work routine was common among all of the artisans, with some variation in other non-weaving activities performed. Most artisans balance their weaving and household work with a range of other productive and non-productive responsibilities, including working in private tea gardens in the village, farming, and cutting and collecting wood from the forest for household use. On average, the artisans currently earning through ISE we spoke to weave for four to five hours per day.

Of the married artisan respondents currently earning with ISE, nine reported that they manage all household work on their own, while two said that they share household work with other female members of the household. Artisan 13, the only unmarried respondent who resides with her mother and brother, told us that she and her mother share the household work between them. Determined
to pass her Class 10 examination and complete her higher secondary education, she wakes up at four o’clock each morning to assist her mother with the household work and then completes a couple of hours of weaving before going to school. In the evening she again helps with the household duties and weaves for around two hours at night.

Artisan 6 was the only respondent who reported that her husband occasionally assists her with the household work, and this behaviour appeared to be influenced by a desire to boost the household income. She explained that when her husband stays home from work, he supports her to weave by taking care of the household duties:

If he is free, he tells me to get on with weaving while he looks after the house… he is happy since I can earn and help him.

Gendered division of household labour is overwhelmingly skewed in favour of male members in most Indian households, and this was found to be the case in the households of artisan respondents. Findings suggest that despite significantly increasing women’s earning status, engagement with ISE has not altered intra-household relations in matters of distribution of household work. The majority of artisans reported inequitable division of household responsibilities, with most solely performing domestic activities in addition to managing the sizeable demands of their weaving and other work.

However, the account of Artisan 6 suggests that her enhanced earning status has led to a shift in the traditional management of household tasks, with her husband willingly assuming some of the domestic responsibilities to enable her to dedicate more time to weaving. Her experience is an interesting example of how women’s engagement in home-based microentrepreneurial activities can disrupt traditional intra-household relations that typically place the full burden of domestic duties on women. Although this shift may have resulted in positive outcomes for Artisan 6, such as a reduced domestic burden, it cannot be taken to reflect an enhancement of her ability to make choices about the distribution of
household work since her husband remains the arbiter of when and how much he contributes to these activities.

There is also a question of whether or not artisans’ time spent performing domestic activities reflects a “free” or “constrained” choice (Kabeer 1999). While all of the respondents shared the ‘facts’ of their household workload, we did not discuss their thoughts about whether they felt they would enjoy a more equitable distribution of domestic tasks among the household members. This poses a limitation to the analysis. However, through observation of domestic life in the study sites and the narratives of artisans, it was apparent that patriarchal attitudes towards the division of household labour were normalised in these communities. Artisans did not express frustration at shouldering the household responsibilities, however suggested that this was the way of life and as such was not questioned or challenged.

**Freedom of mobility and access to opportunities**

Freedom of mobility refers to “women’s ability to move outside their homes independently” (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2016). Women’s freedom of movement is an important indicator of overall empowerment, signaling their level access to a multitude of resources and options available in the public sphere (Masood 2018). Feminist sociologists and demographers have drawn attention to the ways in which restrictions on women’s mobility sustain “the dichotomies of public/private” between men and women, thus reinforcing gendered hierarchies and obstructing women’s occupational choices (Masood 2018, p. 191; Phadke, Khan, & Ranade 2011; Spain 1993). Women’s access to public spaces carries significant implications for women’s inclusion in formal waged labour and in political domains, as well as for their physical and mental health (Masood 2018). It was therefore considered an important theme to explore in in-depth interviews with artisans.

During interviews, married women respondents were asked if they travelled outside of their village on their own and if they needed permission from
their husbands or any other household member to go out. Seven of the respondents reported that they travel outside of their village on their own and do not need to seek permission. Three said that they seek permission from their husband before going out, while one said that she does not need permission but must “inform” her husband before going out. The majority of artisans indicated that they usually informed their household before going somewhere, for example, to the local *bazaar* (market) or to visit the doctor.

_Condicting desires and ‘access’ to public spaces_

Interviews with artisans revealed complicated narratives about their own sense of mobility, access, and ‘choices’ to pursue alternative opportunities. When asked if they had ever considered going outside to find work, most respondents reported that they had never thought of this and that they would not want to leave their homes. As Artisan 6, explained, “I am happy here. I would not want to go.” However, when we discussed their thoughts about other women undertaking work outside, many respondents expressed a desire to go outside for work in order to gain “experience.” While some indicated that the possibility of increasing their income was a motivating factor behind their wish to find outside employment, the opportunity to gain “exposure,” “knowledge,” and “experience” were the major appeals of going outside for work for most artisans. Many respondents expressed conflicting desires to remain working from home and to gain the experience of working outside. For most artisans, this conflict appeared to centre on their preference to stay at home with their children, indicating that they could not manage outside employment alongside childcare and household responsibilities. As Artisan 11 told us:

It’s a good thing that women go outside for work. I would like to go too but I have responsibilities now due to which I can’t go… I used to dream of going out, but since my husband doesn’t stay here, I have to take care of my family… I dreamt that I could go out and learn something there…
When asked if she thought that other women had similar experiences, Artisan 11 pointed to a range of reasons why women in her community do not seek work outside:

… Some people have personal problems. Sometimes parents or husbands don’t want to let the women go outside. I have abandoned my dream of going outside as I have to look after my family.

Artisan 1 also explained that while she wants to continue living in her home village, she would like to do more weaving work outside to gain more experience. Similarly, Artisan 3 told us that she has never considered leaving her village in order to find work outside, but that she would like to go outside for work to gain new experience and knowledge.

Artisan 13 was the only respondent who had ever undertaken employment outside of her village, having spent a brief time working with an NGO in another nearby district after dropping out of school. She told us that while she enjoyed this work, the salary was meagre, and she decided to return home to complete her higher secondary education. Determined to finish school, she now aspires to become a police officer. When asked her thoughts about whether it is good for other women to go outside for work, Artisan 13 was of the opinion that this would depend on the opportunities available saying that “If they get a job outside, they should go.”

Economic incentive was cited by some respondents as a potential reason for undertaking outside employment. When economic incentive was the only factor mentioned by artisans, this was usually seen as an undesirable option, which would only be considered if it was “needed” to improve the family’s wellbeing. For Artisan 2, the idea of going outside for work was unappealing, believing that “it’s better for women to work at home so that they can take care of their children and family responsibilities.” However, she noted that although her preference is to continue working from home, she would go outside for work if it would “benefit” her family.
Lack of opportunities for outside employment

Lack of opportunity was commonly cited as a major reason for not seeking employment outside. As Artisan 9 mentioned,

If there were more opportunities outside, people here would have gone outside for a job, but there are no opportunities.

Artisan 12 described the need for decent opportunities and conditions for women to go outside for work, stating, “If there’s a lack of proper opportunity and safe environment outside, then they shouldn’t go.” Although she would like her daughters to find employment outside, Artisan 12 emphasised that a lack of opportunities limits this possibility, telling us:

…They are educated. If they get an opportunity outside, they should go. [Now] they haven’t got any work as it’s very competitive.

Fears of sexual violence and harassment

In addition to the challenges of accessing decent employment, many artisans reported that they were afraid of travelling outside of their village for work due to a fear of being raped or harassed. The threat of sexual violence was a recurrent theme that emerged in discussions around respondent’s thoughts about seeking employment or training opportunities outside. As Artisan 1 told us:

If women stay in the village, there is less chance of them being raped… Most women are afraid to go because of this.

According to Artisan 1, these fears are based on stories that women hear about others who go outside and become victims of sexual violence. Artisan 5 expressed similar concerns about women travelling outside for work, and these appeared to influence her preference for home-based work:
I don’t think it is necessary [for women to work outside]. If women are getting opportunities and the facility to work from home, they do not need to go out… If some women go outside, they may be harassed by bad men. It’s better if she stays home and works.

Artisan 7 also indicated a preference for women to do home-based work due to perceived dangers in the outside world:

I do not agree with women going outside [to work] … It’s a tough world outside. It’s dangerous for them.

For Artisan 6, it was not the fear of actual sexual violence that troubled her, but the concern that others in the community might “talk” disparagingly about a woman who goes outside for work:

It’s not good [for women to go outside for work]. It’s better to work from home. When women go outside for work people may say bad things about them, like what kind of work is she doing, how is she earning?

She added that she had never heard anyone saying negative things about women who work outside, but “fear[s] it may happen.” Similarly, most of the respondents did not know anyone personally who had experienced sexual violence while working or travelling outside but had heard stories of this happening to other women.

Results from artisan’s accounts suggest that while most do not face severe restrictions on their mobility that are overtly enforced by husbands or other family members, their anxieties around sexual violence and harassment have a significant impact on their sense of freedom to occupy public spaces. In many cases, women’s fears of the “outside” world appeared to delimit the imaginary and actual zones of their mobility. In addition, three artisans were found to face overt restrictions on their mobility in public spaces. This lack of freedom was
neither influence nor altered by these women’s enhanced earning status but suggests that their freedom of movement continues to be proscribed by patriarchal social customs.

**Influence of earning on freedom of mobility**

Women’s freedom of mobility did not seem to be impacted by their engagement with ISE. However, in some cases, artisans’ support for other women to access ‘outside’ employment opportunities appeared to be influenced by changes in their perceptions of women’s economic roles through their enhanced earning status. For example, Artisan 8 told us that her attitude toward women working outside had changed since her engagement as an ‘Empower’ weaver. She said that she now thinks it is “a good thing to go to work outside” and that she had begun thinking this way since earning with ISE.

**Attitudes towards gender discrimination and domestic violence**

Discriminatory attitudes toward women and girls and acceptability of domestic violence tend to be more pronounced in societies operating within traditional patriarchal social systems (Borah, Kundu, & Mahanta 2017; Carpenter & Vauquiline 2016; A. P. Hazarika & Sharma 2015; B. Hazarika & Goswami 2016; Kalokhe et al. 2017). Norms and behaviours that reinforce such attitudes have negative impacts on women’s empowerment, while those that challenge and subvert gender-discriminatory practices can reflect higher levels of empowerment (Malhotra et al. 2002). Results from this study revealed significant insights into these indicators of empowerment in relation to women artisans’ experiences.
Effect of social norms on women's education

In many parts of rural India, practices reinforcing the subordination of women and girls, such as male preference and exclusion of girls from education, remain widespread. Girls’ education is a critical component of women’s empowerment (UNICEF 2019; United Nations 2019). There is insurmountable evidence that girls who receive an education achieve greater life and health outcomes (UNICEF 2019). They are less likely to be victims of child marriage and more likely to access a wider range of opportunities (UNICEF 2019). Parents’ attitudes towards girls’ education play a key role in determining whether or not girls go to school. In addition, women’s attitudes toward female education reflects their own self-esteem, with support for gender equality in education indicating higher self-worth (Malhotra et al. 2002).

Six respondents discussed their thoughts regarding the importance of female education, with all supporting the view that girls and boys should have equal access to schooling.

Reflecting upon her experience of being married at the age of 14, Artisan 8, who is now a 28-year-old mother of a teenage son and 10-year-old daughter, shared a moving account of her determination for both her son and daughter to complete their schooling:

It’s not like before, things have changed. It’s good if they get the same education… Whatever we went through [referring to getting married as a teenager] it shouldn’t happen to my children. After I had them I thought about this and about getting them a good education so that they don’t have to suffer like their mother and father did.

Artisan 11 reported that she discusses decisions about her children’s education with her husband, telling us:

We want the best for our daughters… I want my girls to get as equal education as boys and want them to become successful… I want my
daughters to become capable, hard-working individuals and be able to help their father.

Views on female education and decision-making behaviours regarding children’s education and family planning did not appear to be affected by respondents’ involvement with ISE. All reported that their regard for girls’ equal education pre-existed their association with ISE and increase in independent earning status. However, as earlier observed, belief in the importance of children’s education—regardless of gender—was a primary incentive for many of the women to associate themselves with ISE. In addition, artisans’ ability to contribute to their daughters’ education through their independent earnings was seen as a major benefit of their engagement in the social enterprise.

*Attitudes toward physical domestic violence*

In patriarchal cultures, women are largely expected to fulfil the reproductive and domestic roles assigned to them, with any perceived violation of these duties carrying the risk of punishment and potential violence, typically by a husband (B. Hazarika & Goswami 2016; Sabarwal, Santhya, & Jejeebhoy 2014). Women’s acceptability of domestic violence has been shown to be high in such settings where stringent patriarchal norms prevail (Schuler, Lenzi, Badal, & Bates 2017; Schuler & Nazneen 2018).

Data from the Government of India and civil society organisations show high incidence of domestic violence in the state of Assam, particularly in rural areas (Baruah 2019; A. P. Hazarika & Sharma 2015). Domestic violence accounts for the highest number of all cases of crimes against women in Assam (Baruah 2018). Moreover, in 2018 the district of Golaghat was one of the eight districts with the highest number of registered cases. A study conducted in 2015 by the North East Network found that 83.7% of women surveyed in Assam had been physically beaten by their husband during their lifetime (A. P. Hazarika & Sharma 2015). Other studies show that women in Assam with lower levels of
education, low family income, and who marry at a young age, face higher chances of experiencing domestic violence (Borah et al. 2017).

This study was undertaken with the recognition that some of the respondents may have experienced domestic violence and that there was potential for the subject to cause distress among participants. Therefore, I refrained from asking direct questions about respondents’ personal experiences, and instead generated discussion through scenario-based questions to elicit women’s views on the acceptability of domestic violence. The scenario involved a story of a woman who asks her husband for money in order to buy clothing for her children and is beaten by him for making this request. Artisans were asked if they considered this type of behavior to be normal, if they believed the husband’s actions were acceptable, and if they thought those actions would be justified in any other instance. We then discussed their thoughts on the kinds of action a woman in this situation could and should take, and whether or not they knew of organisations or services that provide support to women experiencing such violence.

Six artisans responded to the scenario-based questions. These questions were not asked in other interviews either due to a lack of privacy, presence of a child, or because the respondent did not wish to discuss these matters. Two other artisans did not respond to the scenario-based questions but reported that they had never experienced domestic violence and had never witnessed it happening to anyone they know. Of the six women who discussed their thoughts about the scenario, four disapproved of the husband’s actions and considered domestic violence to be wrong in all circumstances.

Some of the respondents indicated that as the primary income-earner, it is a husband’s duty to provide for his wife and he should therefore ensure her welfare. This was suggested by Artisan 4, who told us:

No it is very bad of him to beat her. Who else will she ask if not him? She has no money and he is the sole breadwinner.
Artisan 9 disapproved of domestic violence in all situations, although this was founded on her belief that married couples should maintain a peaceful home for the wellbeing of their children:

It’s not normal. It shouldn’t happen. Husband and wife have equal responsibility for their children’s future. They should always discuss and make decisions together. He should not beat her.

Two respondents disapproved of the husband’s actions, but when asked if this behaviour would be acceptable in other situations, such as if the woman had gone shopping for herself, they indicated that punishment would be more justified. This mixed-response can be seen in the account given by Artisan 5:

Artisan 5: It is not normal and he should not do it. She should not accept it. She is not doing anything bad. She is trying to help her children and she should not get beaten for it. She should go and speak to the village elders so that they intervene and sort the problem.

Interviewer: If she wants to go for some other work and gets beaten, would that be okay?

Artisan 5: It depends on the situation. If she goes for some other work it should be with mutual understanding with her husband.

Artisan 6 expressed a similar viewpoint:

Artisan 6: … It is a very bad thing. He should not beat her. If the woman goes somewhere wearing a battered cloth she will be ridiculed. If she demands a new cloth from her husband and he beats her, that is not good. He should care for her. They should have mutual understanding amongst themselves.
Interviewer: If she goes outside without asking him and he beats her for that, do you think that is okay?

Artisan 6: If the girl goes out without asking him then she is at fault. If she goes out with his permission and he still beats her it’s his fault… If it is her fault, she should get punishment, if it is his fault then he should get punished.

Most respondents reported that they did not think that domestic violence was common in their communities while some said they had heard of it happening in other places.

While all respondents thought that domestic violence is a crime, only two artisans mentioned speaking to the police “through the village headman” or council as a possible action that women facing physical violence could take. In one case, Artisan 11 first described the best course of action would be to contact the local women’s committee for help. When asked if there was a women’s committee in her area, she responded, “No, but it would be good to have them.”

Artisan 9 suggested a similar course of action, telling us that “women should go and seek help from the women’s group. She shouldn’t bear it silently.” However, she also did not have any knowledge of a women’s group or organisation in her area that could provide support.

Collective community action was also seen as an effective way of dealing with domestic violence, with mediation through the village council. According to Artisan 4, for example, when violence among married couples occur, “the villagers try to solve the issue and reconcile the couple,” and this community intervention prevents it from recurring.

Only one respondent reported that she had heard of an NGO that provides support to women experiencing violence but did not have any information about it. None of the respondents had any knowledge of any organisation or service provider that assists victims or people wanting to support women facing such issues.
One artisan cited women’s economic independence as a potential deterrent of physical domestic violence, but added that this could not stop male violence in all cases:

Artisan 8: She needs to explain to her husband that it is wrong. She should try to earn on her own.

Interviewer: Do you think if she starts earning it might reduce the problem?

Artisan 8: Some men will change, but some won’t. All men are not good. Women earning might not make a difference to some men, while to some it might.

While cultural norms prescribing male physical violence against women did not appear to be closely observed by the majority of the artisans we spoke with, many saw these norms as existing in other areas “far” from their own villages. An interesting insight was provided by the husband of Artisan 1, who told us that through his work as a school teacher in a nearby locality he observes high incidences of domestic violence. Expressing his disapproval of violence against women, he believed that the problem lies in the patriarchal social structures that prevail in rural areas, where “in most villages women are still dominated by men.” He did not, however, consider domestic violence to be problem in his own village.

Without having spoken with other men in the community about their views on these matters, it is not possible to speculate whether these insights reflect general attitudes towards violence against women in this village. However, in many ways, Artisan 1 and her husband are a unique couple in their village. As the ‘master weaver’ in her district, Artisan 1 is viewed with great respect among the other artisans, while her husband’s occupation as a school teacher accentuates his status as an ‘educated’ authority figure in the village. Both are
seen as leaders in their community and play instrumental roles in facilitating artisans’ engagement in the social enterprise. A vocal supporter of the “socioeconomic development of women” in his community, he supports his wife’s weaving work and hopes to build a community centre where women in the village can come together to weave and can also serve as a guest house for tourists. Insights from Artisan 1’s husband reveal some of the major limitations of this study, which include the absence of men’s views from the communities where artisans are engaged as Empower weavers. These limitations will be discussed in further detail in the concluding section of this thesis, but it is notable here that future research into women’s attitudes towards domestic violence in this context may be enriched by the inclusion of male participants.

**Freedom from exploitation and human trafficking**

As a prevention scheme, it is difficult to assess links between artisans’ involvement in the social enterprise and their freedom from human trafficking and exploitation. The objective of ISE is precisely to *not* see the occurrence of human trafficking in the communities in which it works, with the logic that women’s economic empowerment will protect themselves and their families from undertaking ‘unsafe’ migration—that is, migration which carries a high risk of exploitation and of possibly being trafficked.

All of the artisans we spoke with were “free” from human trafficking and exploitation in the plain sense that they had never been victims of trafficking and were not currently undertaking exploitative labour. Determining whether or not this freedom is connected in any way to their engagement as Empower weavers was not possible in this study. However, discussions with artisans about their awareness of human trafficking and migration trends provided important insights into their own understanding of the issue.

None of the respondents had any knowledge of human trafficking and had never heard of anyone from their community migrating for work and being unable to return. However, two respondents recounted ‘stories’ they had heard from other places that were evocative of human trafficking. For instance, Artisan
9 told us about rumoured cases of young women being married and unable to return home:

Artisan 9: I heard that some girls went outside, couldn’t return and had to get married there… I heard of a woman whose parents sent her out for work, and she got married and never returned.

It was unclear whether Artisan 9 thought that the second woman mentioned had willingly gotten married, however she suggested that the rumours were mainly about young women who were forced into marriage with men from other districts.

Artisan 13 also recounted a story she had heard about a young woman who had been forced to do “bad work”:

Artisan 13: I heard of a girl from Majuli, who was promised a job on cloth cutting in Guwahati. She went to Guwahati and was forced into bad work.

Interviewer: How did you come to know about this?

Artisan 13: I was discussing along with my friends that we want to go to Guwahati to get a job. That is when one of my friends told us about this incident.

Artisan 13 did not want to discuss what the “bad work” might have been, but when asked if this was a reference to prostitution she nodded. She told us that she did not know this woman, but she thought she must be around 22 to 24 years old. She had no knowledge of her whereabouts or whether she had returned home.

Awareness and education about human trafficking is an essential component of anti-trafficking interventions. Sensitising communities to the problem and providing them with information on their legal rights and available
support services empowers individuals and communities to play a crucial role in preventing human trafficking and appropriately reporting cases when they occur. These principles are central to Impulse NGO Network’s 6P’s and 6R’s model, and the NGO has a notable history of conducting awareness training programs among its network and media partners as part of its prevention activities. Since the focus of the social enterprise has primarily been on supporting women’s livelihood opportunities and technical training, resources have not yet been channelled into transferring this expertise into ISE-oriented awareness activities. This is perhaps why, despite ISE and Impulse NGO Network sharing a common goal to prevent human trafficking, this study found little awareness of human trafficking among respondents. These results suggest that although women’s enhanced earning status through their engagement with ISE may have decreased their vulnerability to undertaking risky migration and possibly being trafficked, there is a gap in knowledge about these issues. Building this knowledge through awareness training programs would help to fill this gap and strengthen the preventive purpose of the social enterprise.

**Self-confidence and dignity**

Though less commonly used in evaluations of women’s participation in development programs, women’s sense of self-worth and self-confidence is increasingly considered an important indicator of social empowerment ((Kabeer 1997; Kabeer et al. 2013; Malhotra et al. 2002). I used the FAO’s recommended guide for qualitative research on women’s empowerment to steer discussions around artisans’ sense of self-confidence, and to understand if there had been any “perceived and/or actual changes in beneficiaries’ sense of self-confidence, self-esteem and dignity” in their lives since their engagement with ISE (Pavanello et al. 2015).

Nine artisans currently earning with ISE discussed their thoughts about their sense of self-confidence since their involvement with the social enterprise. Six respondents reported that their confidence has increased since they began weaving with ISE. Three mentioned that the material benefits of having a greater
income had had positive impacts on their lifestyles, citing reduced stress and pressure of being able to provide for their children. One artisan reported that she had experienced no changes in her lifestyle or confidence since her engagement as an Empower weaver.

Artisan 9 noted that she had observed positive changes in her confidence and lifestyle since her involvement in the social enterprise, attributing this to her “hard work”:

... my confidence has increased... I am happy that my hard work is helping me earn money.

Similarly, Artisan 3 noted the positive impact her increased productivity has had on her general happiness, telling us,

I feel good when I’m busy. When there is work I am busy and happier.

Artisan 1 also observed that since being involved with ISE, she feels she has gained more confidence and her lifestyle has improved. She also reported that she has noticed a difference in the confidence of other artisans in her village, which is demonstrated by their willingness to work and earn their own income now, whereas this was not previously the case. For Artisan 1, another important aspect of her engagement with ISE was that she had gained exposure to different people through tourism facilitated by ISE under its burgeoning ‘Empower Travel’ concept. She and her husband currently host tourists referred by ISE in their home, providing an abundant array of home cooked Mising food and an opportunity to experience the ‘traditional’ Mising lifestyle of their village. The couple receive a handsome nightly payment for their hospitality in the context of Indian accommodation rates, although guests are limited to those referred by ISE and their numbers fluctuate according to the seasons, therefore they cannot rely on tourism to generate a steady income.

For Artisan 5, the ability to earn an income from her weaving work has enhanced her sense of purpose:
I am getting a lot of help from Impulse. Before I used to sit idle at home, but now I have work to do and I am earning money which feels good.

She had also observed “similar changes” in other women weaving with ISE, adding, “Weaving is a good option. I hope everybody gets a better life.”

As indicated by Artisan 5, the “option” to generate earnings through weaving was seen as desirable by many of the artisan respondents. Some, however, pointed to material obstacles that currently prevent other women in the community from choosing this option, with a lack of available handloom machines the most commonly reported challenge that artisans face. When discussing whether or not she felt that women’s involvement with ISE had impacted their lifestyle or sense of self-confidence, Artisan 3, for example, told us:

Some women think they can’t do this work. They aren’t confident enough, some aren’t interested. If they don’t have a machine and they can’t afford a machine they will not be interested in doing the work…

According to Artisan 3, a recent training program implemented by an NGO in association with the government forest department in 2018 had provided women in the village with technical training in weaving. However, without ready access to machines, she felt that such programs were redundant, telling us, “They will forget the training if they don’t have a machine.” After this training program, she reported that only four households had acquired machines, while most other women could not afford to buy their own handloom, which cost between 50,000 to 60,000 rupees (around 1,000 to 1,200 AUD) each— a sum most households in the village cannot fathom spending.

She further emphasised that the women in her community already possess high-level weaving skills—a result of being immersed in sophisticated weaving practices and artisanal culture since girlhood—and that investment in their skills would be better spent on the provision of machines. In terms of training
programs, she believed that these were still important but that they should impart new and innovative technical skills to women rather than repeating the stock-standard older lessons.

Alert to the politics surrounding government-led initiatives geared towards developing the profitability of the handloom sector in the state, Artisan 3 informed us of the self-interest she perceived to be motivating many of the training and skills development schemes being promoted in the area. In her view, initiatives that had been established by the forest department to increase women’s earnings through handloom activities and prevent them from undertaking exploitative labour as wood-cutters, were being co-opted by local village councils, which funnel the funds allocated to women’s development into other activities, such as building houses:

Currently they are making houses and keep the money for themselves… they could have used the money for women to buy machines.

Rather than preventing women’s engagement in hazardous wood-cutting activities, Artisan 3 reported that many women “are still doing this work.” In order for more women in the community to “come forward to work” as weavers and to gain “equal opportunities,” she stressed the need for machines to be supplied to individual households.

A total of eight respondents reported that they would like more machines to be provided to women in order for them to increase their productivity and for those who do not currently have a machine to be able to begin weaving. Most artisans expressed the wish for machines to be provided in each household, while two reported that they would like to have machines in a “community hall” or centre where women could come together to weave. One artisan expressed a preference for home-based machines but also supported the idea of machines being accessible in a community centre.

Most artisans cited that having machines provided at the household level would be more “convenient” for them and therefore the most preferable option. The two respondents who indicated a preference for machines to be provided in
a communal space cited both practical and social reasons. Artisan 8, for example, told us that a community hall would provide both a social working environment and a storage space for materials:

We want a community hall so that we women can get together and weave as well as store our machines and woven clothes.

According to Artisan 8 and Artisan 1, other women in the community have also expressed a wish for a community centre where they can work communally. Of the artisans we spoke with, however, the general preference was for home-based machines.

There were also mixed responses from some of the respondents regarding the rate of payment they receive for their weaving work. Only three respondents shared information regarding the rate they receive per metre of fabric they weave from ISE. While one reported that she receives 175 rupees per metre, the correct rate assigned by the social enterprise, two artisans reported that they receive only 150 rupees per metre and requested an increase in renumeration. Follow up with ISE staff has prompted investigation into these mixed responses by the team.

Overall, respondents’ involvement with ISE was seen to have positive impacts on their self-confidence and lifestyles, with enhanced productivity, earning capacity and income cited as important factors in facilitating these life changes. As Artisan 13 reported when asked if she had noticed any changes in her life or confidence since she began weaving with ISE,

Yes, my confidence has increased… women should earn and help those women who cannot earn on their own.

While the majority of respondents considered that their involvement with ISE had generated positive changes in their lives, they also highlighted that material constraints and a lack of machines presents a major barrier to increasing their productivity and to other women’s abilities to generate earnings from weaving. Mixed responses regarding renumeration among three respondents also suggests
the need for further investigation into the distribution of payment and more robust monitoring of artisans’ awareness of their entitlements as Empower weavers.

6. Discussion

Findings from discussions with artisans regarding their control over income echo those of previous studies highlighting the complexities of intra-household gender relationships, and of examining women’s decision-making autonomy in the household (Kabeer 1997). In terms of access, all artisans had their own bank accounts, and the majority reported joint control over expenditure with their husbands. However, three artisans appeared to have little control over their income, with two needing to seek permission from their husbands before accessing their earnings and before making purchases; and one dependent on her mother to give her cash from her income when she requested it. The majority of artisans displayed altruistic spending behaviours and devalued the use of income for their own personal wants or needs, investing their total income in the wellbeing of the household and their children. They generally considered their earnings as supplementing the primary income generated by their husbands’ labour and valued their income in terms of its contribution to the overall “betterment” of the family. In viewing their husbands as the primary “breadwinners,” respondents revealed that their “bargaining power” in the household was still limited, and their altruistic spending behavior may to some extent reflect a “perceived interest response” insofar as they aimed to invest in their own future by enhancing their status in the family unit (Kabeer 1997). In many cases though, investment in overall household wellbeing—especially in children’s education—appeared to be a pragmatic decision motivated by a goal to achieve greater economic prosperity and enhanced quality of life in the long-term. By investing their income in their children’s education and wellbeing, artisans conveyed a strong motivation to expand future economic opportunities for their children and families. Supporting their children’s schooling was
immensely important to many of the artisans, who felt that their own life opportunities had been stunted by their lack of education.

Overall, artisans’ participation in household and family decision making did not appear to have been influenced by their engagement with ISE. In the three areas of household and family decision-making discussed in in-depth interviews—children’s education, family planning, and division of household labour—artisans revealed no changes in their participation, reporting that they made these decisions jointly with these husbands and that this had always been the case. An exception was in the distribution of household labour in one artisans’ household, where her husband had assumed some of the domestic duties to enable her to invest more time in weaving. Although this artisan appeared to have little say in this division of labour, her enhanced earning status proved to have altered the normative arrangement of household roles which typically place the full burden of domestic responsibilities on women. Overwhelmingly however, the artisans we spoke with continue to shoulder the majority of the household work, even as their weaving activities have increased alongside their income. Acceptability of the inequitable distribution of domestic labour was high among respondents, indicating the prevalence of patriarchal norms undergirding household decision-making arrangements.

Women’s freedom of mobility did not appear to be influenced by their engagement with ISE. Most artisans reported that they could travel outside independently without seeking permission from their husbands and that this was the case prior to their association with the social enterprise. Similarly, for those who required permission from their husbands to go outside their village, their enhanced economic status had not influenced nor altered this lack of freedom. Artisan’s narratives also portrayed complicated relationships to notions of freedom and access to opportunities in the public realm. These relationships were marked by conflicting desires to remain working from home and to also discover new “experiences” and “knowledge” in the “outside” world. For most, the idea of leaving their homes or of being away from their children while working outside was daunting and undesirable, while managing the household alongside a job out of the home was an inconceivable option. At the same time,
most artisans observed an absence of opportunity for them beyond home-based weaving work, citing both a weak job market and their lack of education as primary barriers to gaining employment outside. Findings from interviews with artisans revealed an additional obstacle to women’s freedom of movement, manifested by an entrenched fear of sexual violence and harassment in the outside world. Artisans’ fears around possible sexual violence in the public sphere appeared to have a significant impact on their sense of freedom to travel independently beyond their immediate localities for work, with additional anxieties about how members of their community might perceive their actions.

Artisans’ attitudes towards female education and physical domestic violence were also found to have been unaffected by their engagement with ISE. Rather than being impacted by their involvement in the social enterprise, artisans’ positive attitudes regarding the importance of girls’ education was found to be a motivating factor for some women’s microentrepreneurial earning endeavours, while their ability to contribute to their daughters’ schooling was a major benefit of their engagement as Empower weavers. Acceptability of physical domestic violence appeared to be low among most respondents and this was not found to have been influenced by artisans’ enhanced earning status. Responses however revealed significant gaps in women’s awareness and knowledge of support services for victims of domestic violence. These gaps have important implications for the social enterprise and its objective to support women’s empowerment. Freedom from domestic violence is an integral prerequisite to ensuring women’s empowerment. Although none of the respondents indicated that domestic violence was a problem in their communities, their lack of knowledge of available support services signals a need to build awareness of these services and to sensitize community members to the issue. ISE is well-positioned to facilitate this through Impulse NGO Network, which works with a range of partner organisations and service providers specialised in assisting victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Similarly, lack of awareness and information about human trafficking was found to be high among artisan respondents. On one hand, artisans’ lack of knowledge about human trafficking can be positively interpreted as a result of
their own freedom from the crime. None of the respondents personally knew anyone who had been subject to trafficking, suggesting that the problem does not affect their communities. However, awareness about human trafficking is an important component of anti-trafficking interventions and of efforts to prevent exploitation. This is a fundamental tenet of Impulse NGO Network’s model, and the organisation is expertly placed to facilitate awareness-building activities among artisan communities associated with ISE. While current resource and funding constraints pose barriers to implementing such activities, future investment in awareness programs for ISE’s beneficiaries is recommended to strengthen the preventive potential of the enterprise.

Despite the limitations outlined above, the accounts of artisans interviewed demonstrate that their involvement in home-based handloom activities through their engagement with ISE have had transformative impacts on their lives, evidenced in number of important ways. At an individual level, women’s earning through weaving has lessened their sense of dependency on their husbands in the majority of cases. This increased financial independence has enabled these women to make investments they consider paramount to their lives, namely, in their children’s wellbeing and education. At the household level, some women’s economic contributions have enhanced their status within the family unity and shifted intra-household relations to the extent that they are afforded higher respect by their husbands, who are “happy” that their household income has increased. The ability to earn from weaving and to invest their income in their children and household was also shown to have had a direct impact on artisans’ self-confidence, sense of purpose, and quality of life. Most of the respondents who discussed their thoughts on their self-confidence and life changes reported that they felt their confidence had increased as a result of their engagement with ISE, while others indicated that their earning had relieved their stress by reducing financial constraints, thereby improving their lifestyles. Such changes cannot be underestimated, reflecting the potential for women’s engagement micro-entrepreneurial activities to enhance their socioeconomic empowerment.
7. Conclusion

Women’s socioeconomic empowerment is critical to reducing their vulnerability to forms of gender-based violence, including human trafficking. Northeast India is a context in which women and girls from low socio-economic and tribal backgrounds are routinely targeted by trafficking networks, which employ deceptive recruitment tactics to lure victims into exploitative labour and prostitution. Preventive schemes aim to reduce these risk factors by supporting women’s livelihood opportunities, however, there is little evidence of their effectiveness in improving tribal women’s socioeconomic empowerment and lessening their vulnerability to human trafficking. This thesis has attempted to examine how home-based microentrepreneurial handloom activities undertaken by Assamese tribal women through one such trafficking prevention initiative has impacted their lives and socioeconomic empowerment, in order to build the evidence-base for interventions that can effectively support women to secure economic independence and reduce their vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation.

A number of limitations to the study must be acknowledged. Firstly, due to a lack of time and resources, it was not possible to incorporate the viewpoints of other members of the communities in which the field research was undertaken. Analysis of intra-household relations and attitudes towards the indicators of empowerment examined might have been enriched by the inclusion of these other perspectives, particularly of male members of the households. Secondly, the study is based on a small participant sample, limiting generalisability. Finally, the preventive nature of the social enterprise model examined made analysis of its effectiveness an elusive and ambiguous task, with no previous baseline study on which to compare results. Despite these limitations, findings from this study revealed significant insights into the experiences of women artisans and their socioeconomic empowerment.

Results revealed some significant areas in which the social enterprise model could be enhanced to strengthen its preventive objectives. Primarily, widespread lack of knowledge about domestic violence, human trafficking and
related support services among respondents indicate the need for awareness-building activities in beneficiary communities. Such activities would be strategically aligned with the prevention model of Impulse NGO Network and could be effectively implemented under the arm of the NGO and through the institutional partnership. Additionally, mixed responses from some respondents regarding the rate of renumeration signalled a need for stronger monitoring of payment distribution and of artisans’ understanding of their entitlements through their engagement with the social enterprise.

The narratives of artisans documented in this thesis highlight the complex, multidimensional nature of ‘empowerment’ as a dynamic, often conflicted, process. Returning to Kabeer’s (1999) definition of women’s empowerment as “a process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability,” we can see that the artisans we spoke with negotiate different elements of this process in their daily lives. While the lack of opportunities, household responsibilities, and fears of sexual violence in the ‘outside’ world experienced by these women are reflective of “constrained choice,” they also exercise agency in a number of significant ways. This ability to make strategic life choices was found to be directly influenced by their enhanced economic independence as a result of their engagement as Empower weavers. As individuals, artisans’ earnings have reduced their dependency on their husbands, enabling them to make investments they consider paramount to their lives, primarily, in their children’s education and wellbeing. The ability to contribute their own income to the improvement of the household has further enhanced artisans’ self-confidence, sense of purpose and resulted in positive lifestyle changes. These changes should not be undervalued, demonstrating the potential for women’s engagement micro-entrepreneurial activities to contribute to their socioeconomic empowerment.
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### Appendix A. Table of study findings in the literature

Findings from studies measuring women’s empowerment in relation to income-generating activities in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study/Location</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Population group</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Empowerment Indicators*</th>
<th>Method + Data Analysis</th>
<th>Results/Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Hazarika &amp; Goswami (2016)</td>
<td>Evaluate empowerment of women engaged in the handloom sector in Assam</td>
<td>Married women engaged in different handloom activities across six districts of Assam: Kokrajhar, Baksa, Kamrup, Udalguri, Lakhimpur, and Dhemaji.</td>
<td>205 female respondents</td>
<td>- Decision making ability - Freedom of movement - Ownership of assets and income - Male preference - Domestic violence</td>
<td>- Qualitative survey (semi-structured interviews and FGDs) - Cumulative women's empowerment index (CWEI) and parsimonious model3 with predictive validity4</td>
<td>- Majority of women working enjoyed an average level of empowerment - 45.36% of women reported increased participation in household decision-making; 11.71% did not - 32.68% still faced restrictions in mobility outside the home - 40% showed neutrality in gender preferences - Women’s participation in home-based economic activities can improve their status in the family and society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Das (2012) Assam, India</td>
<td>To investigate the empowerment of women through</td>
<td>Members of 16 Self Help Groups (SHGs) in</td>
<td>180 female respondents</td>
<td>Categories: economic, technological, social,</td>
<td>- Qualitative structured interviews</td>
<td>- 44% of respondents had low overall empowerment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
participation in entrepreneurial activities in two districts of Assam.

North Cachar Hill and Karbi Anglong districts, engaged in dairy, poultry, piggery, handicrafts and other enterprises

entrepreneurial, and political empowerment

- 52% had medium level of empowerment and 42% had medium level of social empowerment
- Increase in women’s social recognition of self, status of family in the society, size of social circles and involvement in family and entrepreneurial decision making
- Increase in self confidence, self reliance and independence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Datta &amp; Gailey (2012)</th>
<th>To examine business models that support women’s empowerment and the self-perception of empowerment by the women-owners of a social enterprise (Lijjat)</th>
<th>Women members of Lijjat, an Indian social enterprise</th>
<th>7 female respondents</th>
<th>Categories: economic security; development of entrepreneurial behaviour; increased contributions to the family</th>
<th>Qualitative persuasive case study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mumbai, India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Empowerment elements are embedded in the business models of for-profit social entrepreneurial ventures</td>
<td>- Women practiced successful entrepreneurship despite resource constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Engagement in social entrepreneurship can lead to women’s empowerment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

| Haugh & Talwar (2014) | To examine the relationship between the women members of a rural social enterprise | Female members of a rural social enterprise | 49 respondents | Categories: Changing attitudes towards | Qualitative Single case study |
| Gujarat, India        |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                      |                        |                                  | - Women were economically, personally, |
| Women’s membership of a social enterprise, their empowerment and social change | Enterprise, Mahaul, in Gujurat, North India | Women and paid work; Changing underlying power relations within the family unit; Changing attitudes towards gender discrimination; Changing men’s roles in the family unit. | Socially and politically empowered - Positive changes in men’s attitudes towards women and paid work; underlying power relations within the family unit, influence over how household income was spent; attitudes towards gender discrimination; and men’s roles in the family |

Kantor (2003) Ahmedabad, India | To examine the extent to which home-based production in the garment sector of Ahmedabad, India, serves to empower its female participants | Female home-based garment producers 536 respondents Categories: control over enterprise income and decision-making within the household | Quantitative survey - Many respondents controlled their own income, but control decreased when income increased - Home-based producers were involved in important household decisions, but this was true mainly for women who were able to control their income - Relying on improving women’s access to income to facilitate their
empowerment is not sufficient as patriarchal norms reduce women's ability to convert resources into power.

| Torri & Martinez (2011) Tamil Nadu, India | To assess the impact of a women's community enterprise, GMCL, on enhancing the economic/social empowerment of women | Female members of a community enterprise belonging to Schedule Tribes in the herbal sector in Tamil Nadu | 22 households of Sanghas (community enterprise) farmers and sales representatives | Categories: economic, social, and psychological empowerment | Quantitative/Qualitative Individual and group interviews and participant observation | - The community enterprises’ holistic approach had positive effects on women’s empowerment - Development of skills important for enhancing women’s productivity and helping women control income |

| Ramswamy & Kumar (2013) Mizoram, India | To assess the impact of micro handloom enterprises on livelihood | Mainly female entrepreneurs from the Thenzawl handloom cluster, Mizoram | 97 entrepreneurs | *Indicators of livelihood impact: main occupation of women's families; income earned from weaving and other sources; number of persons employed in the sample enterprises | Quantitative/Qualitative Structured questionnaire and personal interviews | - 68.04 per cent of the entrepreneurs were solely dependent on weaving - It is commercially viable to run a handloom enterprise with just one or two looms - Weaving is playing an important role in economic empowerment of tribal women |
Appendix B. Map of India