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Gender equality advocacy and socio-economic inclusion: A comparative study of community-based approaches in promoting women's empowerment and economic resilience (2022)

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Abstract

This review examines community-based approaches to gender equality advocacy and socio-economic inclusion, focusing on strategies to promote women's empowerment and economic resilience. As global discourse on gender equality gains momentum, community-driven initiatives have emerged as pivotal agents of change, particularly in marginalized communities where structural, cultural, and socio-economic barriers persist. This provides a comparative analysis of grassroots movements, local advocacy groups, and capacity-building programs that seek to enhance women's roles in economic and social domains. Through a qualitative approach, including case studies from various regions, this study explores how community-based strategies such as microfinance initiatives, vocational training, and entrepreneurial support networks have been instrumental in improving financial independence and workforce participation for women. Findings indicate that localized initiatives have achieved notable success in challenging traditional gender roles, expanding women's access to resources, and fostering economic resilience. Financial inclusion mechanisms, such as savings groups and access to credit, emerged as critical factors in enhancing women's economic stability, particularly in settings where formal financial systems are inaccessible. Additionally, the study highlights the impact of social empowerment initiatives that focus on health, education, and altering perceptions of gender roles, thereby creating a supportive environment for sustainable change. Challenges remain, particularly regarding the sustainability and scalability of community-based models, as well as cultural resistance to gender equality. The review concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen partnerships between governments, private sectors, and community organizations, promote adaptable models for broader implementation, and improve monitoring frameworks. This comparative analysis underscores the significance of community-based approaches in advancing gender equality, advocating for their expanded role in global efforts toward socio-economic inclusion and resilience for women.

Keywords: Gender Equality; Socio-Economic; Women's Empowerment; Economic Resilience

1 Introduction

Gender equality refers to the equitable treatment and opportunities for individuals of all genders, ensuring that rights, responsibilities, and opportunities do not depend on gender (Smith and Sinkford, 2022). It is foundational to achieving broader social and economic development goals, including those outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender equality contributes to reducing poverty, improving health and educational outcomes, and fostering sustainable economic growth. Empowering women, in particular, has been linked to a range of positive socio-economic impacts, such as higher household incomes, better childhood nutrition and education, and

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enhanced community development (Jabeen *et al.*, 2020; Onah, 2021). Thus, achieving gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also a pathway to greater social and economic resilience.

In economically marginalized communities, however, gender inequalities are often pronounced, limiting women's access to education, employment, healthcare, and political representation (Kabeer, 2021). Community-based approaches have emerged as effective ways to bridge these gender gaps, particularly in low-income and rural areas where centralized policy initiatives may not reach. By leveraging the strengths of local networks and understanding cultural contexts, community-driven efforts can directly address barriers to gender equality (Kim, 2021). They foster participation, raise awareness, and promote local ownership of gender equality initiatives, making these approaches both sustainable and impactful. Furthermore, community-based programs enable tailored interventions that respect local dynamics, creating environments where both men and women can engage in meaningful ways to address inequalities (King *et al.*, 2021; Angula *et al.*, 2021).

This review aims to analyze and compare community-based strategies that are designed to promote women's empowerment and economic resilience, highlighting the diverse ways that localized interventions can address gender disparities. Given that community-based approaches vary widely in their focus and methods, this comparative analysis seeks to identify common factors that contribute to their success or limitations. By examining how these strategies operate within different socio-economic and cultural contexts, the review will provide a deeper understanding of how gender-responsive interventions can be adapted to specific community needs. Another core objective is to explore the intersection of gender equality with socio-economic inclusion, emphasizing how gender-responsive programs can foster both individual and collective economic resilience. Women's empowerment initiatives that focus on improving financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and access to resources contribute significantly to community-wide economic stability. However, the dynamics of these contributions are complex, as socio-economic inclusion requires removing systemic obstacles that prevent equal participation and addressing the underlying social norms that reinforce gender biases (Eerdewijk *et al.*, 2021; Christopherson *et al.*, 2022). Through this lens, the study aims to illustrate how addressing gender inequalities directly supports broader goals of socio-economic inclusion and resilience.

This review adopts a comparative approach, examining a range of community-based gender equality initiatives across different geographic and cultural settings. By comparing varied strategies and their outcomes, the study aims to identify the most effective methods for promoting gender equality and socio-economic inclusion within communities. This approach is particularly relevant, as it enables the examination of both unique and shared characteristics across different initiatives, highlighting the influence of local contexts on project effectiveness. Data collection will involve several methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of community-based strategies. Case studies will be a primary source of information, focusing on specific gender equality initiatives that have been implemented in diverse locations. These case studies will allow for an in-depth examination of project design, execution, and outcomes. Additionally, interviews and focus groups with project participants, community leaders, and stakeholders will provide qualitative insights into the challenges and successes encountered (Jimenez *et al.*, 2019). These perspectives will help identify cultural and social factors that influence the acceptance and effectiveness of community-based approaches. Secondary data review will complement primary data collection, enabling the analysis of existing research, reports, and policy documents relevant to community-based gender equality initiatives. This review will offer a broader perspective on trends, common strategies, and challenges in gender-responsive community development. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, the study will provide a robust analysis of community-driven gender equality efforts and the socio-economic inclusion they facilitate (Lwamba *et al.*, 2021). This research approach will ultimately yield a comprehensive overview of effective practices and insights into how gender equality can be advanced through community-based strategies.

2 Conceptual Framework

Gender equality and women's empowerment are interrelated concepts that aim to eliminate disparities and create equitable opportunities for individuals of all genders (Odera and Mulusa, 2020). Gender equality implies a state in which individuals, regardless of gender, have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities, enabling them to participate fully in economic, political, and social life. Women's empowerment, specifically, encompasses various dimensions economic, political, and social each critical for fostering independence, decision-making capacity, and resilience among women. Economic empowerment is fundamental, as it involves increasing women's access to financial resources, employment opportunities, and entrepreneurial activities. By improving economic status and independence, women can better contribute to household and community well-being, which has far-reaching implications for poverty reduction and economic development. Political empowerment includes women's access to decision-making roles and political participation, ensuring that their voices influence policies and governance structures (Dar and Shaingojri, 2022). Social empowerment involves enhancing women's agency in personal and community matters, such as access to

education, healthcare, and protection from gender-based violence. Together, these components foster an environment where women can thrive as equal and active members of society. Gender equality plays a significant role in enhancing economic resilience and development at both community and national levels. When women are empowered economically, they contribute to the local and national economy through workforce participation and entrepreneurship, which in turn improves household income stability and poverty alleviation. Economies that support gender equality tend to experience faster and more sustainable growth, as they maximize the potential of their entire population rather than limiting it by gender (Olareswaju and Fernando, 2020). Research shows that increased gender equality correlates with improved health, education, and economic outcomes for communities, underscoring the role of women's empowerment as a catalyst for holistic socio-economic development.

Community-based approaches to development are strategies that emphasize local participation, inclusivity, and bottom-up decision-making. These approaches recognize that local communities possess unique insights, values, and resources, making them essential drivers of sustainable change. Key characteristics of community-driven development include community engagement, grassroots leadership, and local ownership, which create environments where initiatives are aligned with the specific needs and cultural contexts of communities (McNamara *et al.*, 2020). Community-based approaches also prioritize the inclusion of marginalized groups, such as women, who may otherwise be overlooked in conventional development models. One of the main advantages of community-based approaches is their adaptability and relevance to local contexts. Unlike centralized, top-down interventions, community-driven strategies allow for tailored solutions that respect and incorporate local knowledge, customs, and priorities. For instance, local leaders and community members can identify culturally appropriate ways to address gender issues, ensuring that programs are respectful and inclusive while promoting change. Furthermore, by involving communities directly, these approaches cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment, increasing the likelihood of long-term success and sustainability. Grassroots and localized strategies are particularly effective in addressing the cultural, social, and economic barriers that hinder gender equality and women's empowerment (Kathini *et al.*, 2020). Cultural norms and practices around gender roles vary significantly across regions, and addressing these norms requires a deep understanding of community-specific dynamics. Community-based strategies can engage local influencers, such as elders, religious leaders, and women's groups, to advocate for gender equality from within, which is often more effective than external interventions. These approaches also facilitate capacity-building, as community members develop skills in leadership, advocacy, and project management. By empowering individuals at the grassroots level, these strategies foster resilience and adaptability, enabling communities to tackle challenges collectively (Poland *et al.*, 2021). In sum, community-based approaches provide an inclusive, adaptive, and culturally attuned framework for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. They enable communities to address gender disparities within their own social and economic contexts, fostering economic resilience, political agency, and social cohesion. This conceptual framework underscores the importance of integrating community-based strategies in development initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, as these approaches are essential for overcoming cultural barriers and creating sustainable, transformative impacts on women's lives. Through a collaborative and localized lens, this framework lays the groundwork for building equitable societies where all individuals have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from socio-economic development.

2.1 Socio-Economic Barriers to Gender Equality

Achieving gender equality remains a critical global goal, yet socio-economic barriers continue to hinder progress, especially in marginalized communities (Syed and Ali, 2019). These barriers often manifest as structural and cultural constraints that limit women's participation, economic independence, and leadership opportunities. Understanding and addressing these obstacles is essential for creating inclusive societies where individuals of all genders can contribute fully to socio-economic development.

Structural barriers to gender equality are deeply rooted in societal systems and include restrictive gender roles, patriarchal norms, and institutionalized discrimination. Traditional gender roles often define men as primary breadwinners and women as caregivers, limiting women's opportunities to enter the workforce or pursue careers (Pinho and Gaunt, 2021). This divide reinforces dependency and restricts women's economic autonomy. In many societies, patriarchal norms dictate power and resource distribution, resulting in women being excluded from decision-making roles in households and communities. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle where women's contributions are undervalued and overlooked, both economically and socially. Economic and policy barriers further exacerbate these structural limitations. Women frequently face unequal access to resources such as education, financial services, and employment opportunities. According to studies, women's labor force participation remains lower than men's globally, a disparity partly driven by limited access to formal education and vocational training. Education is a powerful tool for economic empowerment, yet girls in many regions still face obstacles such as early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and insufficient school facilities. Economic policies that do not specifically address gender disparities can also reinforce

inequalities; for instance, wage gaps persist in various industries, often leaving women underpaid compared to their male counterparts in similar roles. Additionally, legal barriers, such as restrictions on land ownership or inheritance rights, prevent women from acquiring and controlling economic assets, further impeding their economic independence and participation (Zulfiqar, 2022; Gaddis, *et al.*, 2022).

Cultural and social constraints play a significant role in sustaining gender inequality, often through stigmas and norms that discourage female employment and leadership (Koburtay *et al.*, 2020). In some cultures, traditional beliefs and values consider it inappropriate for women to work outside the home, especially in leadership or decision-making roles. These stigmas are reinforced through societal expectations that prioritize men's authority in both public and private spheres, often limiting women's ability to pursue careers, education, or political involvement. Such restrictions hinder not only individual aspirations but also the broader economic and social potential of communities that could benefit from women's contributions. Another major socio-economic barrier is gender-based violence, which significantly impacts women's ability to participate fully in economic and social life (Olojede *et al.*, 2020). Gender-based violence encompasses domestic violence, harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse directed at individuals based on their gender. This violence is a profound deterrent to women's economic engagement, as it not only affects their physical and mental health but also limits their freedom of movement and sense of security. For instance, harassment and unsafe work environments can discourage women from seeking employment or remaining in jobs. Domestic violence also has severe economic repercussions, as it disrupts women's ability to work, damages their self-esteem, and creates psychological barriers to participation in community activities. Furthermore, gender-based violence creates a climate of fear and exclusion, reinforcing the idea that women's roles should be confined to the domestic sphere. Addressing these cultural constraints requires a multi-faceted approach, including education campaigns to challenge stigmas and promote women's roles outside the household. Engaging community leaders, local organizations, and men as allies can help shift perceptions and normalize women's participation in various sectors. Legal and social support systems are also vital for protecting women's rights, offering resources for survivors of gender-based violence, and ensuring safe spaces for women in workplaces and communities (Anderson and Claes, 2022; Logar, 2022).

The socio-economic barriers to gender equality are complex and interwoven, rooted in both structural inequities and cultural norms that perpetuate discriminatory practices (Jacobs and George, 2021). Addressing these barriers requires a concerted effort to dismantle patriarchal systems, reform economic policies, and challenge societal stigmas that constrain women's roles. Gender equality can only be achieved through comprehensive changes that create equitable access to resources, foster safe and inclusive environments, and empower women to participate fully in all aspects of socio-economic life. By overcoming these barriers, societies can unlock the full potential of all members, contributing to sustainable development and enhanced economic resilience.

2.2 Community-Based Approaches for Gender Equality Advocacy

Community-based approaches are essential in promoting gender equality and empowering women within their own localities (Temin and Heck, 2020). By leveraging grassroots movements, capacity-building programs, and social empowerment initiatives, communities can drive sustainable change from the ground up. These approaches enable women to participate actively in economic, social, and political spheres, building momentum toward gender equality in diverse regions.

Grassroots movements and local advocacy play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality, often spearheaded by women's groups, cooperatives, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Moghadam, 2020; Elfversson and Nilsson, 2022). These groups serve as platforms where women can discuss common issues, advocate for their rights, and collectively work toward social and economic goals. Women's cooperatives, for instance, provide members with a shared economic base, facilitating access to resources like microloans, markets, and training. Similarly, local NGOs often focus on raising awareness about women's rights and pushing for policy changes at the community level, which may include advocating against harmful practices like child marriage or supporting women in leadership roles (Fransen *et al.*, 2021). Several success stories underscore the power of these grassroots initiatives. For example, in rural India, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has empowered thousands of women through unionizing informal workers, providing skills training, and advocating for workers' rights. In Latin America, indigenous women's cooperatives have played a significant role in protecting land rights and preserving cultural practices, while also pushing for female representation in local governance. Despite their successes, grassroots movements often face challenges, including resistance from conservative cultural norms, limited funding, and sometimes legal restrictions on NGO activities. However, these movements continue to thrive, underscoring the importance of local advocacy in creating pathways toward gender equality.

Capacity-building programs focus on empowering women by equipping them with skills necessary for economic independence (Roy, 2022). These programs include skills training, financial literacy courses, and vocational programs that promote self-reliance and increase employment opportunities. By enhancing women's economic capabilities, capacity-building initiatives address one of the root causes of gender inequality: limited access to financial resources and economic opportunities. Skills training programs vary widely, from agriculture and handicraft training in rural areas to digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills in urban centers, aiming to make women competitive in local and global markets. Successful capacity-building efforts often involve partnerships with local governments, private sector organizations, and educational institutions. Such partnerships can provide the resources, expertise, and infrastructure needed to make programs sustainable and impactful. For instance, in East Africa, partnerships between NGOs and private financial institutions have promoted women's financial literacy and access to microcredit, enabling women to start and grow small businesses. In Nepal, collaborations between NGOs and the government have provided vocational training to women from marginalized communities, helping them secure employment in tourism and hospitality. Despite their benefits, capacity-building programs can face hurdles, including insufficient funding, cultural resistance to women's economic independence, and logistical challenges in reaching remote areas (Shkabatur *et al.*, 2022). However, these programs remain a vital tool for economic empowerment and gender equality.

Social empowerment initiatives complement economic and advocacy efforts by addressing broader health, education, and social inclusion issues that affect women. These community-led initiatives often focus on improving access to healthcare, promoting educational opportunities, and fostering safe, inclusive environments for women and girls. Programs targeting early education, for instance, work to reshape perceptions of gender roles from a young age, encouraging boys and girls to see themselves as equal. Community health initiatives that focus on maternal and reproductive health are also instrumental, as they address unique challenges that women face in accessing healthcare and making informed choices about their bodies (Ireland *et al.*, 2022). Educational programs and awareness campaigns also play a significant role in shifting cultural perceptions of gender. In some communities, local leaders, schools, and women's groups collaborate to educate parents and children on the importance of girls' education, breaking down the stigma that restricts female participation in school. Additionally, initiatives that encourage men's involvement in gender equality campaigns help reduce resistance to change by promoting shared responsibility for gender issues. For instance, in South Asia, several programs have successfully involved men and boys in dialogues around gender norms, resulting in increased support for women's participation in economic and educational activities. Social empowerment initiatives, although challenging to implement due to deeply ingrained cultural norms, create the social foundation needed for lasting change by promoting gender equality as a shared community value. Community-based approaches to gender equality advocacy provide an inclusive, sustainable framework for addressing gender disparities. Grassroots movements, capacity-building programs, and social empowerment initiatives collectively foster environments where women can thrive socially, economically, and politically. These approaches acknowledge and address local contexts and challenges, empowering women and girls to contribute fully to their communities. By involving local stakeholders, these strategies increase the likelihood of meaningful and long-lasting progress, underscoring the importance of community involvement in the journey toward gender equality (Chung *et al.*, 2022).

2.3 Economic Resilience and Women's Empowerment

Economic resilience is the ability of individuals and communities to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of economic challenges, and it is essential for women's empowerment. Empowering women economically creates a positive cycle of resilience, enabling them to contribute to and benefit from economic growth (Bonin *et al.*, 2021). Key strategies in achieving economic resilience for women include financial inclusion, entrepreneurial support, and workforce development.

Financial inclusion is a powerful means of enhancing economic resilience by ensuring that women have access to the financial tools necessary for their personal and professional growth. Microfinance programs, savings groups, and access to credit are critical components of these strategies, especially for women in low-income communities who may lack collateral or formal employment histories (Hussain *et al.*, 2019). Microfinance institutions (MFIs) provide small loans and financial services to women, enabling them to start or expand small businesses. These programs often work in conjunction with savings groups, where women pool their resources and create a safety net to support one another financially. Case studies from South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa illustrate the transformative impact of financial inclusion on women's lives. In Bangladesh, the Grameen Bank's microfinance model has helped thousands of women break free from poverty by starting small businesses, from weaving to dairy farming. Similarly, in Kenya, mobile-based savings and lending programs, such as M-Pesa, have given women access to financial services, enabling them to save, invest, and manage their businesses more effectively. These programs have shown that when women gain financial independence, they also achieve greater economic stability, allowing them to support their families, educate their children, and reinvest in their communities.

Beyond access to credit, entrepreneurial support and mentorship networks play a vital role in fostering sustainable business practices and empowering women entrepreneurs. Community-driven support networks are often established through local women's groups, NGOs, and business cooperatives that provide skills training, business development resources, and a network of peers and mentors (Tripathy *et al.*, 2022). These support networks encourage collaboration, provide resources, and offer a sense of solidarity, which is crucial for women venturing into entrepreneurship, particularly in male-dominated industries. Mentorship is especially valuable, as it provides guidance on business management, problem-solving, and decision-making. Mentors can be role models, offering advice on navigating challenges and balancing personal and professional responsibilities. Peer networks, where women entrepreneurs share knowledge and experiences, also contribute to creating resilient businesses. For example, the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women has established global mentoring programs that pair female entrepreneurs with experienced business leaders, fostering skills and confidence needed for business growth. In Uganda, mentorship initiatives for women in agriculture have led to improved farming techniques and access to larger markets, significantly increasing women's income and resilience in the face of economic fluctuations.

Increasing women's participation in the workforce, particularly in non-traditional sectors such as technology, STEM, and skilled trades, is crucial for enhancing their economic resilience (Tikly *et al.*, 2020). Local initiatives that provide skills training, certifications, and job placement in these fields empower women to enter stable, well-paying careers that are often male-dominated. These initiatives also challenge societal norms by demonstrating women's capabilities in diverse roles, thereby broadening future opportunities for others. Workforce development also requires supportive policies that address the unique challenges women face in balancing work and family responsibilities (Uddin, 2021). Programs that provide childcare support, flexible work arrangements, and safe workplaces are critical in helping women remain in the workforce and advance professionally. For example, in Canada, subsidized childcare policies have enabled more women to participate in the workforce, thereby reducing the gender employment gap. In India, organizations offering flexible work arrangements have seen increased productivity and employee retention among female staff, underscoring the effectiveness of adaptable working policies. Safe workplaces are equally important, as the threat of harassment or discrimination can deter women from entering or remaining in certain industries. Policies to ensure safe, inclusive work environments are therefore essential for long-term workforce engagement and retention (Kumar, 2022).

Financial inclusion, entrepreneurial support, and employment development are foundational to building economic resilience for women (Pomeroy *et al.*, 2020). These strategies not only empower women individually but also generate positive ripple effects in communities and local economies. When women have access to financial resources, mentorship, and supportive work environments, they are better equipped to withstand economic hardships and contribute meaningfully to society. By fostering environments that support women's economic empowerment, societies can enhance overall resilience, paving the way for sustainable development and gender equality (Feitosa and Yamaoka, 2020; Zabaniotou, 2020).

2.4 Comparative Analysis of Community-Based Approaches

Community-based approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment vary widely across regions due to differences in culture, policy environments, and socioeconomic conditions. Comparative studies of these approaches highlight both common strategies and unique adaptations that influence the success of community-driven initiatives in promoting gender equality and economic resilience (Coger *et al.*, 2022). This analysis examines regional case studies and assesses the impact of these approaches on socio-economic outcomes and women's quality of life.

Examining community-based approaches in diverse regions reveals the importance of local leadership, policy support, and cultural adaptability in achieving positive outcomes. In South Asia, women's self-help groups (SHGs) have been effective in rural communities, particularly in India and Bangladesh, where they provide financial resources, skills training, and a platform for women to support each other. These groups often work in collaboration with local governments and NGOs, which provides them with access to microfinance and skills training programs. SHGs in India, for instance, have played a pivotal role in empowering rural women economically and socially by improving access to resources and fostering a support network that strengthens women's confidence and agency. In East Africa, community-based initiatives often focus on economic and social empowerment through women's cooperatives and partnerships with local governments (Rwigema, 2022). In Kenya, for example, the women's cooperative approach has been successful in agricultural communities, where groups pool resources for farming equipment, training, and access to larger markets. This cooperative model has shown success due to its alignment with local economic activities and government support for cooperatives, which has contributed to higher income levels and improved social standing for women in these communities (Ribas *et al.*, 2022). In Latin America, especially in Bolivia and Peru, community-driven initiatives are often shaped by indigenous cultural values and involve women in local governance and environmental stewardship. These

programs focus on integrating women into decision-making processes, particularly in issues related to land rights and environmental conservation. The success of these programs is largely influenced by culturally adaptable strategies, which respect indigenous knowledge systems and integrate them into development goals (Lam *et al.*, 2020). Local leadership from indigenous women has been crucial, as it ensures community trust and active participation in these initiatives.

The socio-economic impact of community-based programs is evident in several areas, with women who participate in these programs generally experiencing better economic, social, and psychological outcomes compared to those who do not (Bashir, 2019; Sharma *et al.*, 2020). Studies show that women involved in SHGs in South Asia report higher financial independence, increased decision-making power in their households, and greater access to healthcare and education for their children. Financial independence also correlates with a reduction in domestic violence, as women with income-generating capacities gain social standing and autonomy within their households (Miedema *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, these women report improved resilience, as their financial contributions to the household make them essential economic partners rather than dependents. In East Africa, women participating in agricultural cooperatives report higher income stability and improved quality of life, as these cooperatives provide not only economic benefits but also social support networks. Women involved in these cooperatives often state that they feel empowered to make decisions about household spending and that they have greater confidence in managing family finances. Furthermore, cooperative structures enable women to negotiate better market prices for their goods, further improving their economic outcomes (Serra and Davidson, 2021). By contrast, women who are not part of such programs face more challenges in accessing resources, which limits their income potential and makes them more vulnerable to economic shocks. Qualitative assessments reveal that women in community-based programs also experience self-reported improvements in resilience and quality of life. Many women express a heightened sense of empowerment, citing increased self-confidence and the ability to voice their opinions both in the household and within the community (Hibbs, 2022). For instance, indigenous women in Latin America involved in community governance and environmental programs report that they feel valued as protectors of their cultural heritage and environment, which has not only raised their social status but has also encouraged other women to participate in leadership roles.

Comparative analysis shows that community-based approaches are effective in advancing gender equality when they are tailored to regional contexts, supported by local leadership, and backed by policy (Lowe *et al.*, 2022). Women who engage in these programs tend to experience positive socio-economic impacts, including improved income, resilience, and social empowerment. This analysis underscores the importance of locally adapted, culturally respectful strategies in community-based programs, as these factors play a critical role in enabling women to achieve long-lasting socio-economic inclusion and gender equality.

2.5 Challenges and Limitations in Community-Based Approaches to Gender Equality

One of the foremost challenges facing community-based programs is sustainability. Many initiatives rely heavily on external funding from governmental or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which can fluctuate based on donor priorities, economic conditions, and political climates. This dependency can lead to uncertainty regarding the continuity of programs, resulting in abrupt interruptions that disrupt services and diminish the momentum gained in community engagement and empowerment. For instance, programs that provide financial literacy training or entrepreneurship support may struggle to maintain operations if funding is not secured long-term, leaving participants without the resources they need to sustain their economic gains. Moreover, transitioning community-based models from small-scale implementations to broader populations poses additional difficulties (Maat *et al.*, 2021). While localized programs may thrive in specific contexts, scaling these models requires careful consideration of regional differences in culture, infrastructure, and economic conditions. A successful initiative in one community may not translate effectively to another due to varying levels of community engagement, resources, or pre-existing social norms. Consequently, the challenge lies in adapting successful elements of a program while ensuring that they resonate with and are accepted by new target populations (Paret *et al.*, 2019). This necessitates comprehensive assessments and modifications tailored to the unique characteristics of each community, which can be resource-intensive and time-consuming.

Resistance to change is another significant barrier that community-based gender equality initiatives face (Stern *et al.*, 2022). Socio-cultural dynamics often play a critical role in the acceptance and effectiveness of such programs. In many communities, traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained and perpetuated by patriarchal norms that resist the promotion of gender equality. This cultural backdrop can lead to skepticism or outright opposition to initiatives aimed at empowering women. For example, efforts to increase women's participation in decision-making processes can be met with resistance from community leaders or family members who believe that such changes undermine traditional values or disrupt social harmony. Furthermore, addressing deeply entrenched patriarchal values is a complex and gradual process. Initiatives that seek to alter perceptions around gender roles often require extensive community

engagement and dialogue, which can be challenging to initiate (Harrington *et al.*, 2019). In some cases, existing power structures may actively oppose these changes, fearing loss of authority or control. This resistance can manifest in various forms, including social ostracism of women who attempt to assert their rights or engage in economic activities outside traditional roles. Consequently, while community-based programs aim to promote gender equality, their success is often contingent on navigating these socio-cultural challenges. Additionally, limited engagement with men and boys in these initiatives can exacerbate resistance (Flood *et al.*, 2021). Programs that solely focus on women's empowerment without addressing the underlying societal norms perpetuated by men may lead to backlash. Engaging men as allies in gender equality initiatives is crucial for creating a more supportive environment for women. Without such engagement, programs may inadvertently reinforce existing divisions, leading to tensions and undermining the overall objectives of gender equality.

While community-based approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment have the potential to drive meaningful change, they face significant challenges related to sustainability and socio-cultural resistance. Ensuring long-term funding and support is essential for maintaining the momentum of these initiatives, while adapting successful models to broader populations requires careful planning and consideration of local contexts (Krebs and Nosyk, 2021; Feuer *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, addressing the deeply entrenched patriarchal values that persist in many communities is crucial for fostering an environment conducive to gender equality. By recognizing and actively working to overcome these challenges, stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness of community-based programs and ultimately contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society.

2.6 Policy Implications and Recommendations for Advancing Gender Equality through Community-Based Approaches

To effectively promote gender equality and economic resilience through community-based approaches, it is imperative to develop robust policies that provide essential support and foster collaboration among various stakeholders. This outlines key policy implications and recommendations aimed at enhancing the sustainability, scalability, and effectiveness of community-based programs focused on gender equality.

One of the critical areas for policy intervention is the establishment of supportive frameworks that allocate funding and resources for community-based gender equality and economic resilience programs. Governments should prioritize these initiatives within their national development agendas, recognizing their potential to drive economic growth and social stability. Policies that provide direct financial support to local organizations and community groups engaged in gender advocacy can significantly enhance their capacity to deliver impactful programs. Additionally, earmarking funds for gender-responsive projects within broader development budgets can ensure that community needs are adequately addressed. Furthermore, fostering partnerships between local governments, private sectors, and community groups is essential for creating a supportive ecosystem for gender equality initiatives. Policies should incentivize collaborations that leverage resources, expertise, and networks from various stakeholders. For instance, local governments can create platforms for dialogue and collaboration, enabling community groups to connect with private sector partners who can provide funding, technical assistance, or access to markets. Such partnerships can amplify the reach and impact of community-based programs, making them more resilient and responsive to local needs.

Another critical policy implication involves identifying and promoting scalable and adaptable community models that can be replicated in diverse contexts. Policymakers should conduct thorough evaluations of successful community-based initiatives to extract best practices and key success factors. By documenting these models and creating comprehensive guidelines, governments and NGOs can provide communities with the tools necessary to implement similar programs tailored to their specific circumstances. This approach not only enhances the likelihood of successful implementation but also fosters a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration among communities. To ensure sustainability and replicability, policies should support capacity-building efforts that empower local organizations and community leaders. This includes training in project management, financial literacy, and advocacy skills. By strengthening the skills and competencies of those leading community initiatives, programs can be better equipped to navigate challenges and adapt to changing circumstances. Additionally, fostering a culture of innovation within communities can encourage the development of context-specific solutions that address unique socio-economic barriers.

Finally, establishing robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks is essential for assessing the effectiveness and impact of community-based programs. Policymakers should prioritize the need for consistent data collection and analysis to inform decision-making and facilitate continuous improvement of initiatives. This can be achieved by developing standardized indicators that measure both quantitative and qualitative outcomes related to gender equality and economic resilience. Moreover, involving community stakeholders in the M&E process can enhance the relevance and accuracy of assessments. By engaging beneficiaries in feedback mechanisms, programs can gain valuable insights

into their effectiveness and areas for improvement. Policymakers should also promote transparency in reporting M&E findings, ensuring that lessons learned are shared widely to inform future initiatives.

Advancing gender equality through community-based approaches requires comprehensive policy support, scalable models, and effective monitoring frameworks. By strengthening policies that fund and facilitate collaboration among stakeholders, promoting adaptable community models, and establishing robust evaluation systems, governments can significantly enhance the impact of gender equality initiatives. These recommendations aim to create a sustainable ecosystem that empowers women and fosters economic resilience, ultimately contributing to broader social and economic development goals.

3 Conclusion

In summary, this review has highlighted the effectiveness of community-based approaches in advancing gender equality and enhancing socio-economic inclusion. Through comparative analyses and case studies, key insights have emerged regarding the significant role these initiatives play in empowering women and fostering economic resilience, particularly in marginalized communities. The findings indicate that grassroots movements, local advocacy, and capacity-building programs are essential for overcoming socio-economic barriers and promoting women's participation in the workforce and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the collaborative efforts between local governments, private sectors, and community organizations have proven instrumental in creating sustainable and impactful programs.

Looking ahead, several areas warrant further research to build on these findings. Long-term impact studies are essential to assess the durability of changes brought about by community-based initiatives and to understand their lasting effects on women's empowerment and economic stability. Additionally, a deeper analysis of socio-economic outcomes will provide valuable insights into the specific factors that contribute to the success of these programs and how they can be effectively adapted to different cultural and economic contexts.

Moreover, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of continued investment in community-based gender equality and empowerment programs. As the landscape of socio-economic development evolves, sustained funding and support will be vital to ensure these initiatives remain resilient and responsive to community needs. Policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize the integration of gender-responsive strategies within broader development frameworks, recognizing that empowering women is not only a matter of equity but also a catalyst for economic growth and societal advancement. By committing to these efforts, we can foster a more inclusive and equitable society where all individuals have the opportunity to thrive.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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