

Guest editorial: Empowering women entrepreneurs in the Global South through leadership and management development - Part 1

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509

1. Introduction

Women entrepreneurs play a critical role in economic development, employment creation, innovation and social transformation across the Global South. In many developing economies, women-owned enterprises contribute significantly to household livelihoods, community development and broader socio-economic progress (Dabić *et al.*, 2022; Ojedian and Anderson, 2020). Despite these contributions, women entrepreneurs continue to encounter persistent barriers that limit entrepreneurial participation, venture growth and business sustainability. These barriers frequently include unequal access to finance, gendered social norms, limited access to entrepreneurial networks, institutional constraints and leadership development challenges (Jayachandran, 2021; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2019).

Over the past two decades, research on women entrepreneurship has expanded considerably. However, scholars have increasingly argued that much of the dominant entrepreneurship literature remains influenced by theories and assumptions developed within Western contexts, often overlooking the unique institutional, cultural and socio-economic realities of the Global South (Ahl, 2006; Jennings and Brush, 2013; Welter, 2011). Consequently, there is growing recognition of the need for scholarship that foregrounds the experiences, capabilities and contributions of women entrepreneurs operating within diverse and often complex environments. At the same time, leadership and management development have emerged as important yet underexplored dimensions of women entrepreneurship. Beyond venture creation, women entrepreneurs are required to mobilise resources, build organisational capabilities, navigate uncertainty, influence stakeholders and create sustainable value. These activities position leadership development as a critical component of entrepreneurial success (Gupta *et al.*, 2004; Harrison and Leitch, 2005). Furthermore, rapid advances in digital technologies are transforming entrepreneurial opportunities and organisational practices, creating new possibilities for inclusion, innovation, resilience and growth across developing economies (Nambisan, 2017).

It is against this backdrop that this Special Issue, *Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in the Global South through Leadership and Management Development*, was conceived. The objective of the Special Issue is to advance understanding of how women entrepreneurs develop and exercise leadership, respond to institutional and societal challenges, leverage digital opportunities and contribute to entrepreneurial ecosystems within the Global South contexts. This first instalment comprises eleven articles that collectively examine women entrepreneurship through the lenses of leadership development, entrepreneurial ecosystems, digital transformation, organisational resilience, social norms, governance and business performance. The contributions in this SI challenge narrow and deficit-oriented perspectives of women's entrepreneurship. Instead, they highlight women entrepreneurs as active agents of change who continuously adapt to, navigate and shape their entrepreneurial environments. The articles further demonstrate the importance of leadership development, digital capability, ecosystem support and institutional conditions in fostering entrepreneurial resilience and impact across the Global South.

The following section provides an overview of the contributions included in this first part of the Special Issue and highlights their collective contribution to women entrepreneurship, leadership and management development scholarship.



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2. Overview of contributions to the Special Issue

This Special Issue comprises eleven articles that collectively explore women entrepreneurship in the Global South through diverse theoretical, methodological and contextual lenses. For ease of presentation, the articles in this Special Issue are discussed under four interconnected themes: challenging institutional contexts, leadership development and entrepreneurial capability, digital transformation and innovation and ecosystems, governance and social transformation. Together, they provide valuable insights into the experiences of women entrepreneurs and the factors that shape entrepreneurial outcomes across developing and emerging economies.

2.1 Women entrepreneurship within challenging institutional contexts

[Barbar \(2026\)](#) examines women's entrepreneurship in Lebanon amid a prolonged socio-economic crisis. Drawing on institutional theory and twenty in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs across diverse sectors, the study adopts a multi-level framework to explore how individual motivations, relational networks and structural barriers shape entrepreneurial agency. The findings reveal that women's entrepreneurship in Lebanon is largely necessity-driven and constrained by institutional collapse, limited resources and socio-cultural norms. Despite these challenges, women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to household livelihoods, community resilience and local economic activity through adaptive leadership, informal networks and improvisational learning. The study contributes by positioning women's entrepreneurship as a gendered survival strategy rooted in resilience, responsibility and socio-economic contribution.

Similarly, [do Prado Bueno et al. \(2026\)](#) investigate female entrepreneurs' perceptions of the factors influencing the competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises across fourteen Latin American countries. Using data from 452 female entrepreneurs and applying correspondence and homogeneity analyses, the study finds that cultural values, economic development levels, entrepreneurial leadership and sectoral characteristics shape perceptions of competitiveness. The study contributes to understanding female entrepreneurship as a transformative force for economic development within politically, economically and socially complex environments.

[Mohammad et al. \(2026\)](#) explores the relationship between digital resource access, entrepreneurial frustration and institutional trust among women entrepreneurs in Jordan. Drawing on survey data from 198 women entrepreneurs and employing structural equation modelling, the study reveals that access to digital resources alone does not necessarily result in empowerment. Instead, perceived structural inequity mediates the relationship between digital access, frustration and institutional trust, while digital literacy self-efficacy influences these relationships. The findings highlight the importance of addressing systemic inequalities alongside digital inclusion initiatives.

2.2 Leadership development and entrepreneurial capability

[Baysal \(2026\)](#) explores the perceptions of young female students from Global South countries regarding entrepreneurship. Using ethnographic content analysis, the study investigates how cultural norms, policy environments, financing challenges and structural barriers shape entrepreneurial perceptions among future entrepreneurs. The findings indicate that while participants perceive gradual progress in support for women entrepreneurs, concerns regarding access to finance and participation in high-growth sectors remain prominent. By focussing on aspiring rather than established entrepreneurs, the study provides a unique perspective on how entrepreneurial intentions are formed and influenced.

[Barbosa and Real de Oliveira \(2026\)](#) examine the leadership development journeys of women entrepreneurs across South Asia, Africa and Latin America. Drawing on a qualitative multi-case study design, the research explores how socio-cultural and financial constraints shape leadership approaches and business outcomes. The findings demonstrate that women entrepreneurs develop adaptive, relational and transformative leadership styles in response to contextual challenges. Leadership development is closely linked to business sustainability and

community impact, leading the author to propose a contextual model of entrepreneurial leadership development for women in the Global South.

Deogaonkar *et al.* (2026) investigates how social enterprises can advance women's entrepreneurship and inclusive leadership in developing economies through the Entrepreneurship Skill Analysis Model (E-SAM). The study identifies barriers to business growth, including limited market access, restricted knowledge and weak support systems. Importantly, it highlights the role of digital platforms and podcasts as scalable mechanisms for promoting diversity, equity, inclusion and entrepreneurial capability development. The article offers practical recommendations for policymakers seeking to strengthen support systems for women entrepreneurs operating in resource-constrained environments.

2.3 Digital transformation and innovation

Chang *et al.* (2025) revisit women entrepreneurship theory through the lens of Digital Workplace Innovation (DWI). Drawing on an extensive review of entrepreneurship scholarship and multiple meta-analyses spanning five decades, the study argues that DWI has been largely overlooked in theorising women's entrepreneurship. The article proposes a new theoretical perspective that explains how DWI can help overcome barriers, reduce discrimination and create new opportunities for women entrepreneurs. In doing so, it contributes to the ongoing development of women entrepreneurship theory in an increasingly digital world.

Chewaka (2026) examines the factors influencing gender-inclusive e-business adoption among small and medium enterprises operating in areas with low Internet penetration. Using data from 120 SMEs and applying a fixed-effects model, the study finds that Internet compatibility, technological advantages, government support, competitive pressures and information intensity significantly influence digital adoption. The findings further demonstrate that women in top management play an important mediating role in promoting inclusive digitalisation and challenging traditional approaches to gender equity within organisations.

Tran *et al.* (2026) explore how women entrepreneurs and human resource managers in Vietnam utilise digital hiring practices and how these practices contribute to organisational resilience. Based on interviews and focus groups involving women entrepreneurs and HR practitioners, the study identifies themes relating to technology adoption, digital recruitment risks, strategic hiring decisions and operational efficiency. The findings demonstrate that digital hiring can strengthen organisational resilience while also highlighting the importance of cultural and regional considerations in digital transformation initiatives within women-led SMEs.

2.4 Ecosystems, governance and social transformation

Guzmán Rincón and Avolio (2025) investigate the entrepreneurial ecosystem variables that influence cultural and social norms surrounding women's entrepreneurship in the Global South. Using Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data from 764 female experts across thirty-five countries, the study identifies digital infrastructure, entrepreneurship education, transparent institutions and inclusive public policies as important drivers of positive cultural change. The article contributes by reconceptualising culture and social norms as dynamic outcomes of entrepreneurial ecosystems rather than static contextual conditions.

Finally, Singh *et al.* (2025) examine the relationship between women's leadership, ESG disclosures and investor sentiment across 450 listed firms in BRICS countries. Employing a fixed-effects regression approach, the study finds that women's leadership positively influences investor sentiment, while ESG reporting alone has a more limited direct effect. However, women's leadership strengthens the positive relationship between ESG practices and investor perceptions. The study contributes new insights into the governance and sustainability dimensions of women's leadership within emerging market contexts.

3. Concluding remarks

Collectively, the articles included in this first instalment of the Special Issue demonstrate that women's entrepreneurship in the Global South is shaped by a complex interplay of institutional conditions, leadership development, digital transformation and entrepreneurial ecosystem dynamics. Across diverse geographical contexts, the contributions highlight not only the challenges that women entrepreneurs continue to face but also the adaptive strategies, leadership capabilities and innovative approaches they employ to create economic and social value. Taken together, these studies move beyond deficit-oriented narratives and portray women entrepreneurs as active agents of change who contribute to household resilience, community development, organisational growth and broader societal transformation.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to all authors who contributed to this Special Issue, the reviewers who generously shared their expertise throughout the review process and the editorial team of the *Journal of Management Development* for their guidance and support in advancing scholarship on women entrepreneurship, leadership and management development in the Global South. We hope that readers find this collection both insightful and inspiring and that the contributions contained within it encourage continued research, policy development and practice aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs and fostering inclusive entrepreneurial development across diverse Global South contexts.

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