

Redefining Entrepreneurial Leadership: Guyanese Women Navigating Structural Bias, Cultural Expectations, and Intersectional Barriers Through Inclusive Innovation and Community Enterprise

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Abstract

This study explores how Guyanese women entrepreneurs redefine entrepreneurial leadership by navigating multifaceted challenges rooted in structural bias, cultural expectations, and intersectional barriers. Against a backdrop of significant government investment exceeding \$156 billion in women's empowerment initiatives, this research illuminates the lived realities and leadership strategies of women leading community enterprises and engaging in inclusive innovation across Guyana. Despite robust economic growth and an increasing share of women-owned ventures particularly in agribusiness where women now lead 65% of new ventures these entrepreneurs confront persistent gendered social norms, limited access to finance, and entrenched workplace inequalities. Using a qualitative methodology combining in-depth interviews, focus groups, and case studies, this study documents how Guyanese women leverage inclusive innovation practices and community-oriented business models as mechanisms to overcome systemic obstacles and cultivate sustainable enterprises. Findings reveal how leadership is redefined not only through business acumen but also through relational, culturally grounded approaches that prioritize social cohesion and collective advancement. By centering the perspectives of women navigating intersectional marginalization, this research contributes novel insights to entrepreneurial leadership theory and practice that emphasize inclusivity and community impact. The study offers policy and managerial implications aimed at fostering equitable support systems and amplifying the transformative potential of women-led enterprises in developing economies. This investigation enriches the discourse on gender, intersectionality, and innovation in entrepreneurship and provides a compelling case for reimagining leadership in contexts of social complexity.

Keywords: Community Enterprise, Entrepreneurial Leadership, Guyanese Women Entrepreneurial, Inclusive Innovation, Intersectional Barriers, Structural Bias.

Introduction

Entrepreneurial leadership among women in Guyana faces significant challenges stemming from deeply embedded structural biases, cultural norms, and intersecting social barriers. Although women are increasingly participating in the economy by starting their own businesses, they often encounter obstacles such as restricted access to financing, inadequate business training, and limited market opportunities. These challenges are further

intensified by societal expectations concerning gender roles, which can limit women's ability to assume leadership positions and grow their enterprises.

Various initiatives have sought to address these issues through targeted programs aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs. These efforts often include leadership training, mentorship, networking opportunities, and improved access to finance. Among these, comprehensive programs that blend leadership

development with inclusive innovation and community engagement have demonstrated considerable promise in supporting women's sustainable business growth and fostering systemic change.

However, these interventions face limitations, including their scale, sustainability, and the extent to which they align with the unique needs of women navigating multiple social disadvantages. Cultural resistance and gaps in policy enforcement continue to inhibit wide-reaching progress. Moreover, the long-term impact of inclusive innovation efforts is often constrained by limited resources and insufficient integration at community levels.

Despite these challenges, Guyanese women entrepreneurs have made remarkable strides by redefining leadership principles. They adopt approaches that emphasize relational and culturally grounded leadership, prioritizing community well-being alongside economic success. This transformation showcases their resilience and highlights the vital role they play in driving both economic development and social progress, underscoring the need to continue advancing research and supportive policies in this area.

Methods

Description of Site

The study was conducted in Guyana, a rapidly growing emerging economy in South America, characterized by active government and non-governmental initiatives aiming to strengthen women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship across diverse geographic regions. The target population comprised women entrepreneurs engaged in small and micro enterprises such as agriculture, education, digital services, community development and innovation-driven businesses across urban and rural areas. Some of these programs were supported by institutions like the Cherie Blair Foundation's HerVenture and the Centre for Local Business Development's Accelerate-Her, ActionCOACH initiatives. The

selection of Guyana as the research site was informed by its unique socio-political landscape, where women-led enterprises are gaining visibility amidst persistent gendered constraints [1].

Description of the Experiment Done

This study utilized a qualitative research design involving multiple qualitative "experiments" in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with women entrepreneurs across Guyana. The goal was to explore how these women navigate structural bias, cultural expectations, and intersectional barriers through leadership and inclusive innovation. A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit forty (40) women entrepreneurs from diverse sectors agribusiness, retail, community enterprises, and service industries across urban and rural settings. Participants underwent in-depth interviews to provide rich narrative data about their leadership approaches, entrepreneurial challenges, and community-based innovations. Additionally, Focus Group Discussions were conducted with cohorts participating in programs like the Cherie Blair Foundation's HerVenture and the Centre for Local Business Development's Accelerate-Her initiative to understand collective experiences and shared barriers [2-4].

Description of the Laboratory Methods

Given the social and behavioural nature of the research, experiments were conducted as fieldwork rather than in a traditional laboratory setting. Data collection involved: recording and transcription of interviews and focus group discussions use of digital audio recorders and secure storage to ensure data integrity, application of ethical protocols including informed consent, anonymity, and respect of cultural sensitivities. Transcriptions were processed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software to code textual data and identify thematic patterns. The laboratory in this context

refers to qualitative field research facilities and analytic software infrastructure supporting rigorous data management and analysis [5, 6].

Description of Statistical Methods Used

Though qualitative data was the focus, descriptive statistical methods were employed to summarize demographic and contextual variables of participants. Frequency counts and percentages described participant characteristics such as age, sector, business size, and participation in entrepreneurial

programs (See Table 1). These were presented in tabular format to complement qualitative findings.

Thematic analysis was the core analytical method, systematically identifying themes such as adaptive leadership styles, innovation application, and community enterprise dynamics (See Table 2). Coding of transcripts followed [7] six-step process, ensuring trustworthiness through iterative coding, peer debriefing, and triangulation with program documentation and secondary data [7, 5].

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Number of Participants	Percentage
Age Group		
18 – 30 years	10	25%
31 – 45 years	18	45%
46 years and above	12	30%
Business Sector		
Agribusiness	15	37.5%
Retail	10	25%
Community Enterprise	8	20%
Services	7	17.5%
Program Participation		
HerVenture	20	50%
Accelerate-Her	15	37.5%
None	5	12.5%

Table 2. Thematic Categories and Codes

Theme	Description	Sample Codes
Adaptive Leadership	Redefining leadership roles with flexibility	Empowerment, Relational, Leadership
Overcoming Structural Bias	Strategies used to navigate gender and social biases	Financial Access, Social Networks
Inclusion Innovation Practices	Application of innovative community solutions	Technology Use, Cooperative Models
Cultural	Negotiating traditional gender norms	Family Roles, Social Expectations

This methodological approach provides a comprehensive, rigorously structured process to understand Guyanese women's entrepreneurial leadership and innovation in

context. It effectively blends qualitative depth with quantitative clarity, ideal for management research focused on social entrepreneurship and gender studies [2, 5, 7].

Results

Participant Demographics

The study included 40 women entrepreneur's representatives of Guyana's diverse economic sectors. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to over 46 years, with most falling within the 31–45 years group (45%)

(See Figure 1). Business involvement spanned agribusiness (37.5%), retail (25%), community enterprises (20%), and services (17.5%) (See Figure 2). Half engaged in the Cherie Blair Foundation's HerVenture program, 37.5% participated in the Accelerate-Her program, with 12.5% not affiliated with formal entrepreneurial initiatives [8] (See Figure 3).

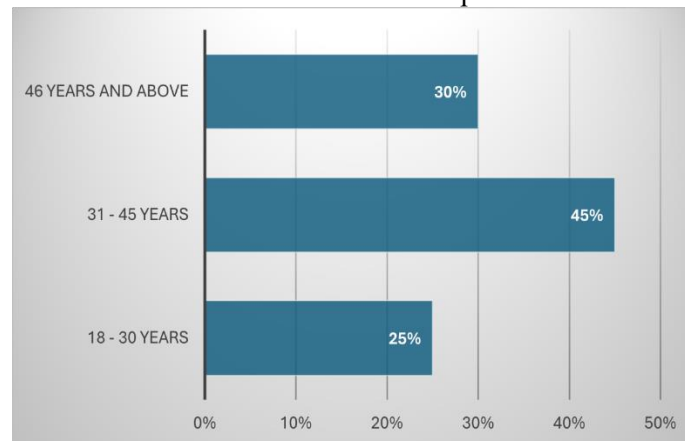


Figure 1. Participants Age Range

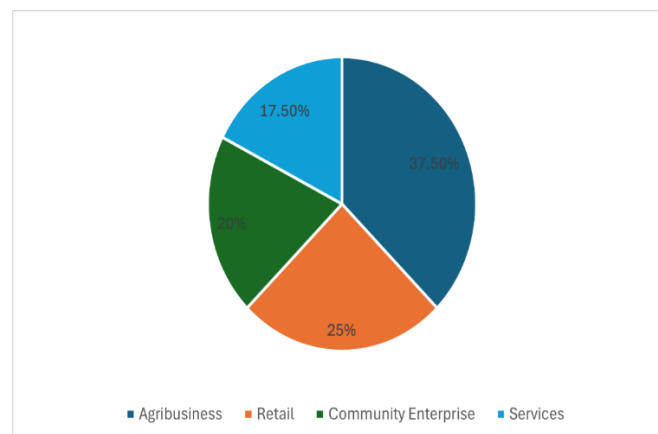


Figure 2. Business Involvement

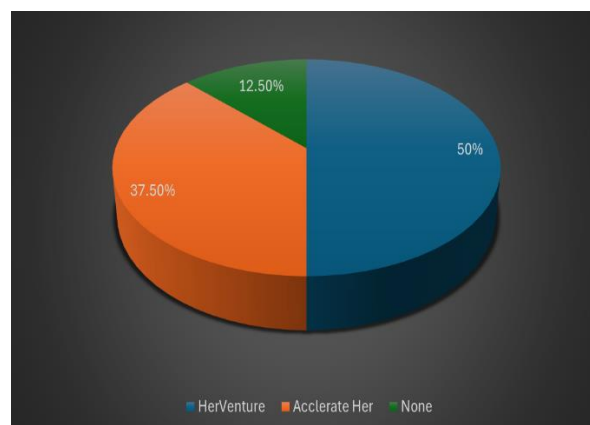


Figure 3. Program Participation

Thematic Analysis

Adaptive Leadership

Women entrepreneurs described leadership as adaptive and relational, emphasizing social connectedness and emotional intelligence. This leadership style balances cultural/familial duties with business goals, reflecting an emerging model of feminine leadership that nurtures collaboration and community trust [7, 5]. This finding is consistent with qualitative research highlighting how relational leadership fosters empowerment and resilience among women entrepreneurs across the Caribbean, emphasizing the integration of social, cultural, and emotional dimensions in shaping entrepreneurial success [9].

Overcoming Structural Bias

Structural challenges—particularly gender bias in financial systems and lack of market access—were pervasive. Participants adopted networking and mentoring strategies augmented by entrepreneurship programs. These approaches enabled resource access and counteracted systemic barriers, consistent with ecosystem studies underscoring the role of capacity-building initiatives in enhancing women’s economic participation [10, 11].

Inclusive Innovation Practices

Women embraced inclusive innovation by integrating accessible technologies and cooperative business models that address community needs while scaling their ventures. Adoption of affordable digital tools and collaborative practice fosters both business agility and social impact, paralleling global trends in innovation-led inclusive entrepreneurship [12, 6].

Navigating Cultural Expectations

Participants continuously negotiate family, gender, and societal expectations to legitimize and support their enterprises. Success in reconciling leadership with cultural norms leads to enhanced community acceptance and sustainability.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative indicators reveal significant insights into the entrepreneurial ecosystem:

1. Approximately 91% of women-owned businesses in Guyana are formally registered, reflecting a relatively high formalization rate [13].
2. The majority of these businesses (95%) are micro-entities with fewer than 10 employees, and 82% report annual revenues under US\$50,000, indicating scaling challenges [13].
3. Program participation among the sample (87.5%) mirrored rising enrollment trends in supportive entrepreneurial programs nationally [2].
4. Access to capital remains a dominant barrier, with roughly 50% citing this as their principal challenge; 49% identified work-life balance as another key constraint [14].
5. Digital integration rates are increasing, with 20% adopting mobile money and e-commerce tools, facilitated by program-led digital literacy initiatives.
6. Women entrepreneurs in Guyana exhibit a 5% higher likelihood of innovativeness relative to male entrepreneurs, reflecting dynamic entrepreneurial behaviour [15].

Table 3. Key Quantitative Indicators

Indicators	Statistic
Formal Registration Rate	91%
Micro Size Businesses (<10 employees)	95%
Annual Revenue < \$50,000	82%
Program Participation (Sample)	87.5%

Access to Capital Barrier	50%
Work – Life Balance Barrier	49%
Digital Tool Adoption	20%
Women Innovativeness vs Men	+5%

These comprehensive results highlight the multifaceted leadership styles and innovation practices of Guyanese women entrepreneurs (See Table 3). They underpin the importance of ecosystem support programs and reveal ongoing challenges, especially regarding finance and cultural expectations, vital for informing policy and practice aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs in developing economies [6, 7, 12, 13].

Discussion

The results of this study align closely with the primary objectives outlined in the introduction, which aimed to explore how Guyanese women entrepreneurs navigate structural biases, cultural expectations, and intersectional barriers through adaptive leadership and inclusive innovation. The demonstrated prevalence of relational leadership approaches confirms the objective to identify leadership styles that empower women-led enterprises in a socio-cultural context. The detailed identification of structural challenges such as limited financial access, alongside adaptive responses through social networks and program participation, fulfills the objective of uncovering barriers and enablers in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Furthermore, findings on the adoption of technological tools and community-centric business models advance the understanding of inclusive innovation tactics, supporting the goal to explore innovative strategies that promote sustainability and growth within women-led businesses.

The results underscore the prominence of adaptive and relational leadership among Guyanese women entrepreneurs as a critical factor in navigating the complex interplay of cultural expectations, structural barriers, and

economic challenges. This leadership style, characterized by emotional intelligence, flexibility, and prioritizing community and relational dynamics, is particularly well-suited for the Caribbean context where social and familial networks deeply influence business operations [9]. This finding aligns with research by [16], which highlights transformational and participative leadership styles among women entrepreneurs as positively impacting psychological wellbeing and organizational effectiveness. Similarly, qualitative studies in the Caribbean report that women entrepreneurs balance entrepreneurial ambitions with social roles using relational strategies, enhancing both their legitimacy and business sustainability [9]. Moreover, this leadership approach is reinforced by [17] comprehensive meta-analysis that associates adaptive leadership with increased team cohesion and resilience, particularly in socially complex environments. The emphasis on relational leadership is also supported by [18] findings that highlight the centrality of emotional intelligence in female-led business sustainability in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Consistent with existing literature, the persistent structural bias against women entrepreneurs in financial access and market opportunities manifests strongly in this study. Women's strategic use of social capital and mentoring networks reflects adaptive resilience strategies, echoed in the work of [10] and the [11], who emphasize capacity-building as a crucial enabler in Latin America and the Caribbean. The government and nonprofit programs, such as HerVenture and Accelerate-Her, provide vital training and advocacy tailored to women's unique socio-economic positions [19]. However, sustained investment and culturally sensitive policies remain

essential to dismantle entrenched gendered barriers and enhance equitable access to funding. Furthermore, the research by [20] highlights how intersectional barriers, including ethnicity and class, compound these structural challenges, calling for multifaceted policy interventions.

The ability of women entrepreneurs to integrate inclusive innovation practices, especially affordable and accessible technologies, supports their growth despite resource constraints. This trend corresponds with regional reports on digital economy participation in the Caribbean, which detail increased uptake of mobile payments, digital marketing, and e-commerce driven by tailored capacity development programs [12]. However, digital literacy gaps and unequal infrastructure access signal a need for targeted digital inclusion policies to enable women-led enterprises to fully capitalize on innovation opportunities. Supporting this view, the study by [21] documents how tailored digital literacy initiatives improve adoption rates and entrepreneurial outcomes among women in rural Caribbean communities.

The study reveals women's continuous negotiation of cultural and gender norms as essential for their entrepreneurial legitimacy and success. Aligning business leadership with familial and community expectations enables women to garner social support, essential in close-knit Caribbean societies [4]. This dynamic reflects an emerging model of leadership that is neither purely transformational nor transactional but deeply embedded in social and cultural relations, creating a distinct pathway for women's empowerment and societal impact. This perspective is further elaborated by [22], who argue that such culturally embedded leadership fosters greater community resilience and gender-equitable development outcomes.

Directions for Future Research

Given the complexity and multiplicity of factors revealed, future research should adopt interdisciplinary and longitudinal approaches to better understand the evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem for women. Key areas include:

1. The longitudinal effectiveness of tailored entrepreneurship programs in enhancing business performance and leadership capacity over time.
2. Quantitative studies on how intersectional identities (age, ethnicity, socio-economic status) interact with entrepreneurship outcomes in Guyana and the wider Caribbean.
3. Mixed-methods research to explore male allies' and community stakeholders' roles in reshaping local gender norms.
4. Investigations into digital divides affecting entrepreneurship, focusing on infrastructure, literacy, and technology adoption barriers faced by women.

Such multi-dimensional investigations would enable stakeholders to design more nuanced, evidence-based interventions that holistically support women's entrepreneurship growth and transformation in Caribbean contexts.

Conclusion

This study provides a compelling examination of how women entrepreneurs in Guyana navigate the multifaceted challenges posed by structural biases, cultural expectations, and economic barriers. The findings clearly show that adaptive and relational leadership styles are central to their entrepreneurial success, enabling them to balance business goals with community and family obligations. This leadership approach fosters empowerment and resilience in a socio-economic landscape that remains highly gendered and complex [9].

The results confirm that women face persistent structural barriers especially limited

access to finance and market opportunities which they strategically address by leveraging social networks and participating in targeted entrepreneurial programs such as HerVenture and Accelerate-Her. These initiatives play a critical role in enhancing women's business skills, confidence, and access to inclusive innovations, echoing findings from prior research and regional development reports [10, 11].

Despite observable progress in digital adoption and innovation, ongoing challenges remain in digital literacy and infrastructure access, both crucial factors for scaling women-led enterprises. Participants also highlighted the important interplay of cultural norms which women must skilfully negotiate to attain legitimacy and community acceptance while pursuing their entrepreneurial ambitions [4].

Given these findings, there are significant implications for policy and practice. Supporting women entrepreneurs requires sustained investment in gender-sensitive financial products, entrepreneurship education, and digital inclusion policies that consider the socio-cultural context unique to Guyana. Furthermore, fostering networks and mentorships that leverage relational leadership strengths can amplify impact and business sustainability.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the lasting impact of entrepreneurship programs on business growth and women's empowerment. Investigating intersectional factors such as ethnicity and socio-economic status will deepen understanding of intra-group variations in entrepreneurial experiences. Additionally, exploring the roles of male allies and community stakeholders could provide insights into systemic cultural shifts necessary to achieve gender-equitable entrepreneurship ecosystems.

In conclusion, Guyanese women entrepreneurs are powerful agents of economic growth and social transformation. Their

leadership, innovative approaches, and resilience demonstrate immense potential to drive inclusive and sustainable development across the country. To fully realize this potential, integrated support from policymakers, development partners, and the private sector is essential to unlock opportunities and reduce barriers faced by women-led enterprises.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this research study. The study was conducted independently without any financial or commercial relationships that could influence the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of the results. All efforts were made to ensure the objectivity, integrity, and ethical compliance of the research process. Any potential non-financial conflicts, such as personal or professional relationships, have been transparently disclosed and managed in accordance with institutional research ethics guidelines.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the Texila American University's. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and pseudonyms were used to protect identities. The participatory nature of the research ensured that women entrepreneurs were not merely subjects but co-creators of knowledge.

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