

**A Case Study on the Role of Social Enterprises in the Empowerment of**

## Women in the Agricultural sector and the Moderating Effect of Personal Constraints

Elapata, M.S.

*Department of Agribusiness Management, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences,  
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka.  
[maheshwari.elapata@gmail.com](mailto:maheshwari.elapata@gmail.com)*

Samarasinghe, D.S.R.

*Department of Marketing Management, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce  
University of Sri Jayawardhanapura  
[rohini@sjp.ac.lk](mailto:rohini@sjp.ac.lk)*

### Abstract

Social enterprises are receiving continuous attention of policy makers, researchers and practitioners. During the last decades it has been recognized as an imperative and untapped source for economic development. However, there is a dearth of reliable and detailed picture of the role of social enterprises on women empowerment particularly in the Agriculture sector. Thus, the study attempted to explore the role of social enterprises on women empowerment and the moderating effect of personal constraints on the relationship between the perceived benefits of social enterprises and women empowerment. The study purposively selected social enterprises operated under private organizations, people's organization and Cooperatives. Thereby 210 women entrepreneurs engaged in these social enterprises were selected using simple random technique. The study employed a quantitative methods of data collection, which included a structured questionnaire followed by interviews of key informants. One sample t test, Factor Analysis, Pearson Correlation, and Moderated Linear Regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The dependent variable of the study was women empowerment and the independent variables were the perceived benefits through "resource mobility", "community-based development", "community-based service provision". The moderator variable was personal constraints. The overall Women empowerment index of the sample women farmers was 3.9641 highlighting that the women farmers engaged in social enterprises were highly empowered. The results revealed that Resource mobility had a strong significant and strong positive relationship with women empowerment and Community based development had a weak positive relationship with women empowerment. However, majority of the women farmers perceived lack of capital, lack of family support and gender biasness and non-acceptance as the personal constraints they faced. The results also indicated that personal constraints have moderated the relationship between resource mobility and women empowerment ( $\beta = 0.160$ ,  $p=0.026$ ). The results revealed that the role of social enterprises

especially in mobilizing the resources will be affected by the personal constraints faced by the women farmers. However social enterprises could be used as a key driver for empowering the rural women farmers.

**Keywords:** Social enterprises, Perceived benefits, Women empowerment, Personal constraint

**INTRODUCTION**

The scholarly field of entrepreneurship has now been evolved and matured bearing new concepts. This has given birth to a broad array of theoretical traditions and methodologies. Thus, social entrepreneurship is considered as an imperative and a significant area of entrepreneurship for research (Di Domenico et al., 2010). Social enterprises are attracting the attention of policy makers and researchers as it has been recognized during the last decade as an important and untapped source of economic growth. A social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximize profit for shareholders and owners (Borzaga and Defourny, 2004 ; Bencheva et al., 2017; Ge et al., 2019;). Social enterprise operates as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), cooperatives and micro, small and medium-sized enterprise sector (MSMEs) (British Council, 2017). On the other hand, agriculturally based social enterprises could be categorized based on the primary activities carried out by these enterprises including “input supply”, “technical advice”, “marketing”, “financial services”, “managing infrastructure” and “producing environmentally friendly products” (Smith and Darko, 2014).

The majority of researchers have come to consensus that social entrepreneurship is an activity which create value to society through its innovative service delivery models and business delivery platforms (Kannampuzha, 2017). Empowerment is considered as a main social value creation strategy adopted by social enterprises. Thus, literature suggests that social enterprises uses women empowerment as one of their key strategies. Women want access to a new set of information and ideas that not only improves their perception and self-image but also promotes action, and hence considers external agents of change to be important for empowerment. Thus, entrepreneurship could act as an external agent for women empowerment.

A study conducted in Nigeria have emphasized the importance of agribusiness social enterprises to the economy since they enhance the economic growth and help to accelerate development of rural community (Olowa et al., 2015). Social enterprises have perceived to create value which implies that the benefits of initiating a new business surpass the costs incurred (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). This had positively influenced the stakeholders involved (Weerawardena and Mort, 2006). The intervening benefits of social enterprises could be classified in the form of “resource mobility”, “community-based developments” and “community-based service provisions” However, it is not known whether these interventions provide opportunities for the sustainable development of women at all possible levels and thereby reduce discriminatory practices against women as well as all types of gender-based stereotypes (Leonhäuser, 2004).

The degree of empowerment of a woman may vary greatly, often according to other factors,

such as class or caste, race, relative wealth, gender, family status (Mosedale, 2005). Family responsibilities prevent women from being away for work other than household chores (Shabbir and Di Gregorio 1996; Kantor 2005). 70% of women in rural Sri Lanka engage in subsistence agriculture and development, but often lack the resources, jobs, time, education, access to ICT and are poor in their economic empowerment (Samaranayake et al. 2003). Batliwala (2008) also acknowledged that women have been driven to engage in their own oppression. Women are considered to be an important human resource who displays a significant and imperative role in “agricultural” and “allied” sectors undertaking both on-farm and off-farm activities (Samaranayake et al. 2003). Yet their contribution has not been recognized and they are considered as “invisible farmers”. The extent of participation of rural women in a decision-making on agricultural affairs and economic affairs was minimum (Damisa et al., 2007). Women facing social restrictions tend to lose their self-confidence which lead them not to secure an employment (Datta, 2012).

Yet, in a male dominated environment, it is important to go beyond a mere observation to investigate on the increase in women’s entrepreneurial opportunities and probe more deeply as to whether the females who participate to social enterprises are actually benefited and empowered. However, we still lack a reliable and a detailed picture of the role of social enterprises on women empowerment particularly in the Agriculture sector. Thus, the study attempted to explore the role of social enterprises on women empowerment and the moderating effect of personal constraints on the relationship between the perceived benefits of social enterprises and women empowerment. The study specifically attempted a) To identify the degree of women empowerment of farmers joined to social enterprises b) To identify the perceived benefits of social enterprises c) To assess the relationship between perceived benefits of social enterprises with women empowerment. d) To assess the moderating effect of personal constraints on the perceived benefits of social enterprises and women empowerment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study purposively selected social enterprises operated under Bio Food Pvt. Ltd, PODDIE (People’s Organization for Development Import & Export) and the Department of Cooperatives and Internal Trade. Thereby 210 women entrepreneurs engaged in these social enterprises were selected using simple random technique. The study employed a quantitative methods of data collection, which included a structured questionnaire followed by interviews of key informants. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using the Cronbach alpha. The value of Cronbach

alpha is more than 0.7 for all the variables except for Community based service provision and

Personal constraints which showed a value (0.695 and 0.696 respectively) less than 0.7. However  $0.6 < \alpha < 0.7$  is considered acceptable (Bhatnagar, 2014). The results of the reliability analysis is summarized in Table 1.

Table 60: Reliability Analysis

Variables of the Questionnaire	No of Items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Women Empowerment	16	0.878
Resource Mobility	4	0.780
Community Based Development	7	0.731
Community Based Service Provision	4	0.695
Personal Constraints faced by the female beneficiaries' social enterprises	7	0.696

The dependent variable of the study was women empowerment. Studies show that women empowerment is also measured using the power in decision making which appears in four domains, namely "agricultural activities", "domestic affairs", "business", and "social affairs" (Herath, et al., 2015). Colombage et al (2008); Bose et al., (2009); Herath, et al. (2015) had adapted a women empowerment index (WEI) to measure the women empowerment

Thereby the Women empowerment Index (WEI) for the four domains i.e. Agriculture (Ag), Domestic Affairs (Do), Business (Bu), and Social affairs (Soc) will be computed as shown below in Equation 1, Equation 2, Equation 3, Equation 4 respectively.

$$\frac{WEI_{Ag} = \sum_{i=1}^5 (Ag)_i}{5} \quad (1)$$

$$\frac{WEI_{Do} = \sum_{i=1}^5 (Do)_i}{5} \quad (2)$$

$$\frac{WEI_{Bu} = \sum_{i=1}^5 (Bu)_i}{5} \quad (3)$$

$$\frac{WEI_{Soc} = \sum_{i=1}^5 (Soc)_i}{5} \quad (4)$$

Finally, an overall index (WEI) was calculated as shown in Equation 5.

$$\mathbf{WEI} = \frac{\mathbf{WEI}_{Ag} + \mathbf{WEI}_{Do} + \mathbf{WEI}_{Bu} + \mathbf{WEI}_{Soc}}{4} \quad (5)$$

The rating values of the decision-makers have been assigned according to the weight in favour of wife/female. This indicates that a higher value (K) of an indicator (X) goes to indicate higher empowerment level of a woman shown below, where K is (1...5):

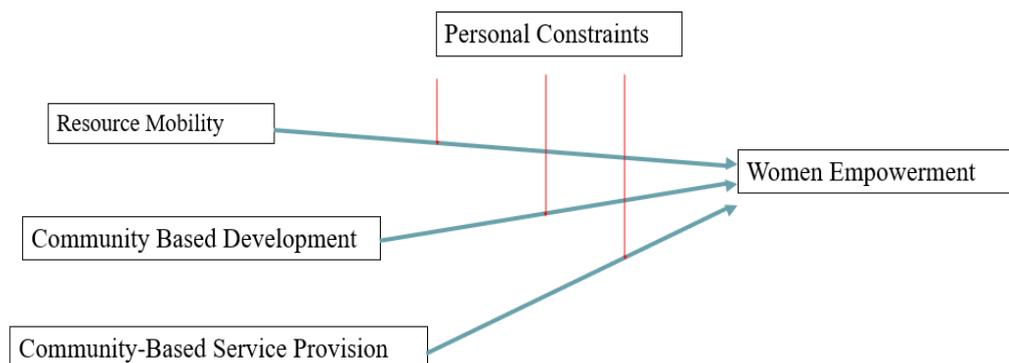
“1= decision is made by other members in the absence of the husband;2= by husband, when he is present without consultation of the wife;3= by wife in the absence of the husband;4= jointly by husband and wife, or jointly with others in absence of the husband;5= by wife, even when husband/other members is/are present”.Thus,value 1 and 2 is considered for having a low empowerment and ,3,4,5 indicated high empowerment (Table 2).

Table 61: Indication of the average scoring value

X=Decision Making indicators	K=Any rating value for each indicator				
	Low Empowerment		High Empowerment		
X <sub>1</sub>	1	2	3	4	5
:	1	2	3	4	5
:	1	2	3	4	5
X <sub>n</sub>	1	2	3	4	5

Source: (Bose et al., 2009)

The women farmers engaged in the social enterprises might have perceived the benefits derived from social enterprises in different degrees. The study after a rigorous literature survey identified that the perceived benefits from the social enterprises could be categorized into three namely “Resource Mobility”, “Community based development”, “Community-Based Service Provision” and are regarded as the independent variables of the study (Opathi, 2014).The moderator variable of the study was personal constraints faced the women farmers. The proposed model of the study is shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 15: Proposed Model*

The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics .One sample t test, Pearson Correlation, Factor Analysis and Moderated Linear Regression analysis were used to analyses the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socioeconomic profile of the respondents

The socioeconomic profile of the respondents of the study is summarized in Table 3. Most of the farmers were in the age category of 51-60 years and the second large group of farmers were in the age group of 41-50 years with the percentage of 36.7%, thus indicating the sample was comprised with matured women farmers. More than half of the respondents (82.4%) were married and living with their husband and family and more than half of the respondents (68.6%) were having a medium size household with 4 to 6 members. The educational level of the respondents indicated that 36.2% of the women farmers have been qualified up to Ordinary Level and 25.7% of the women farmers are qualified with Advanced level. The results indicated that the women farmers were knowledgeable to a significant extent, and they have the capacity to understand the theoretical concepts expressed in the questionnaire. Further the study revealed that half of the respondents (50%) earn a monthly income of Rs.20,000 to 50,000.

Table 62: Socioeconomic profile of the respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Age	Less or equal to 30 years	4	1.9
	In between 31-40 years	35	16.7
	In between 41-50 years	60	28.6
	In between 51-60 years	77	36.7
	Higher than 60 years	34	16.2
Marital Status	Single	5	2.4
	Married	173	82.4
	Separated/Divorced	1	.5
	Widowed	31	14.8
Household Size	1 to 3 members	64	30.5
	4-6 members	144	68.6
	7 or more	2	0.9

Educational Level	No Education	7	3.3
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	Primary Education	35	16.7
	Up to grade 8	18	8.6
	Up to grade10	7	3.3
	O/L	76	36.2
	A/L	54	25.7
	Higher Education	13	6.2
Monthly Income	<20,000	30	14.3
	20,000-50,000	105	50.0
	50,000-70,000	56	26.7
	70,000<	19	9.0

The figure 2 reveals the product or the service offered to the customers through the social enterprise in which the farmers were engaged. The study revealed that 42% of the women farmers were organic tea suppliers and 32% of the women farmers were spice suppliers mainly pepper. 11% of the women farmers were holding their own plant nurseries and thus provide planting materials for the customers. 7% of the women farmers were involved in apiculture/bee keeping. 5% of the farmers were supplying biofertilizers.

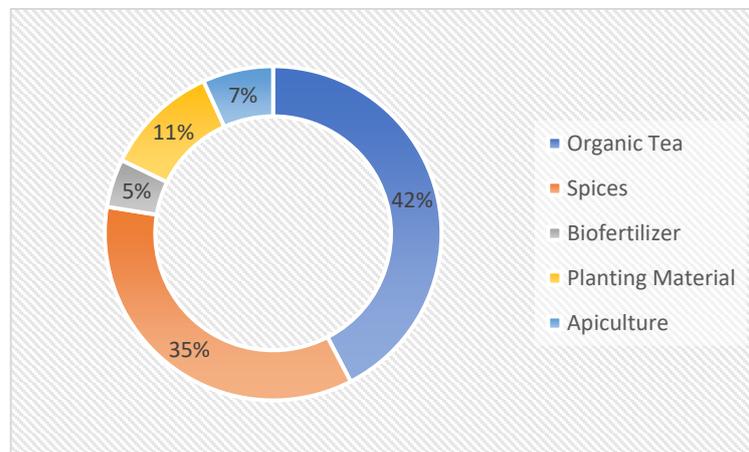


Figure 16: Product or the service offered to the customers through the social enterprise

### Women Empowerment

The results of the one sample t-test are tabulated in Table 4. The significance value of the Women Empowerment on Agricultural activities -WEI\_AG, Women Empowerment on domestic affairs -WEI\_DO, Women Empowerment on Agricultural activities -WEI\_BU and Women Empowerment on Agricultural activities -WEI\_SOC (<0.000), are less than the alpha value 0.05. The results indicated that the mean of Women Empowerment on the Agricultural activities, domestic

activities, business affairs and social affairs were 3.79054, 4.0484, 3.8750, 4.1429 respectively.

The values indicated that the mean value is higher than the neutral value 3.

Table 63: One Sample t-test

	Mean	Test Value = 3					
		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
WEI_AG	3.7905	15.100	209	.000**	.79048	.6873	.8937
WEI_DO	4.0484	20.705	209	.000**	1.04841	.9486	1.1482
WEI_BU	3.8750	22.580	209	.000**	.87500	.7986	.9514
WEI_SOC	4.1429	16.673	209	.000**	1.14286	1.0077	1.2780
Women Empowerment Index	3.9641	22.210	209	.000**	.93849190	.8551906	1.0217932
**. Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

The overall Women empowerment index of the sample women farmers was 3.9641 highlighting that the women farmers engaged in social enterprises were highly empowered. It was evident from the study that the agricultural, domestic, financial, and social decisions were made jointly by husband and wife in Sri Lanka as shown in Figure 3,4 and 5. Thus, this revealed that most of the female farmers jointly make the decisions and thus shows an increase in power in the decision-making capacity. This is also consistent with the study conducted by Vidovic et al (2015) that women joined to social enterprises express a profound change in their own sense of power and ability to improve their standing in their families and local communities.

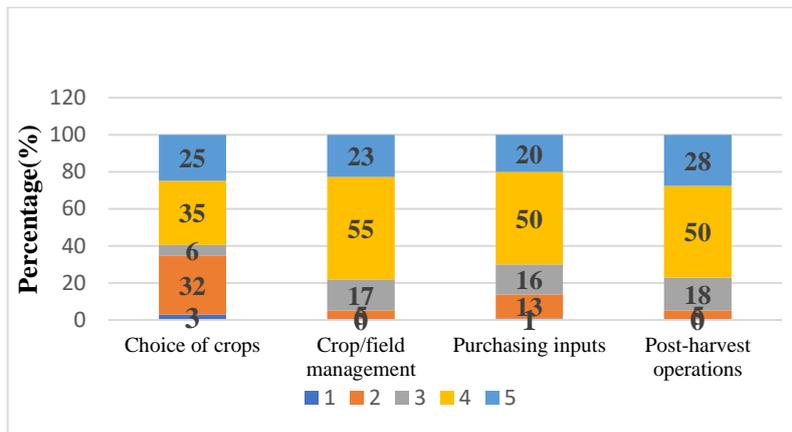


Figure 17: Women Empowerment on Agricultural Affairs

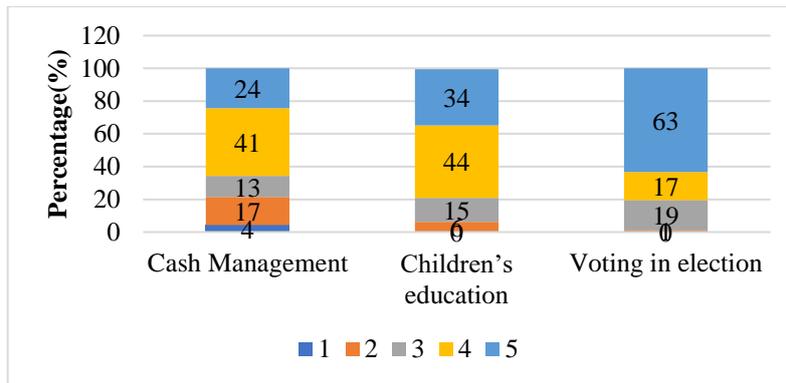


Figure 18: Women Empowerment on Domestic Affairs

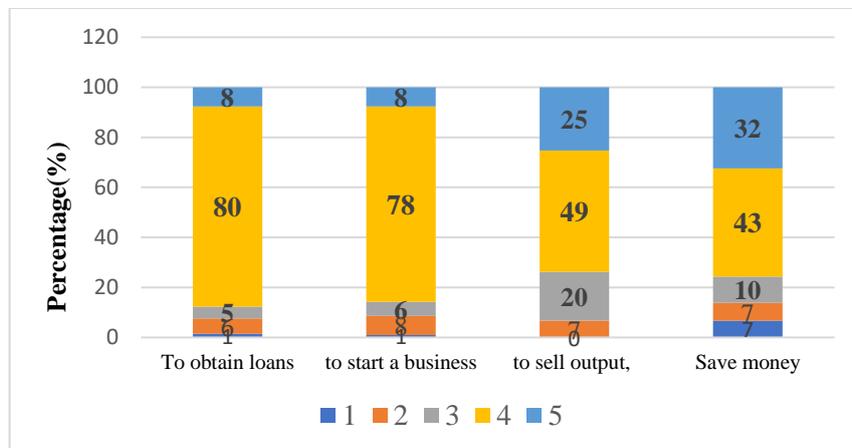


Figure 19: Women Empowerment on business affairs

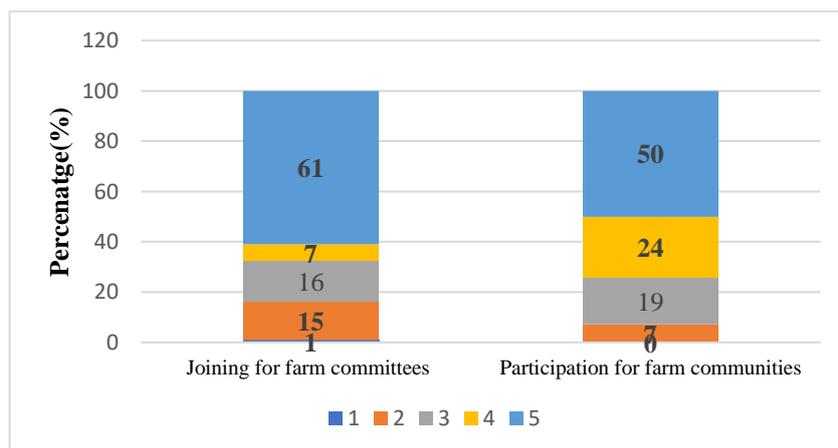


Figure 20: Women Empowerment on social affairs

**Perceived Benefits of Social Enterprises**

The table provides the list of benefits perceived by the women farmers on the factor resource mobility through the social enterprises. Figure 7 depicts the percentage of the level of agreement of the women farmers on resource mobility. Majority including 65% strongly disagreed and 13% moderately disagreed with the fact SE enable the community to access appropriate technology. On the other hand, 47% strongly agreed and 51% moderately disagreed making almost all respondents agreeing on the fact that SE enables the community to access necessary skills required carry out their agribusiness activities. Furthermore 46% strongly agreed and 50% of the respondents moderately agreed that SE facilitate the access to business information.46% strongly agreed and 52% of the respondents moderately agreed that SE facilitate community to access to finance.

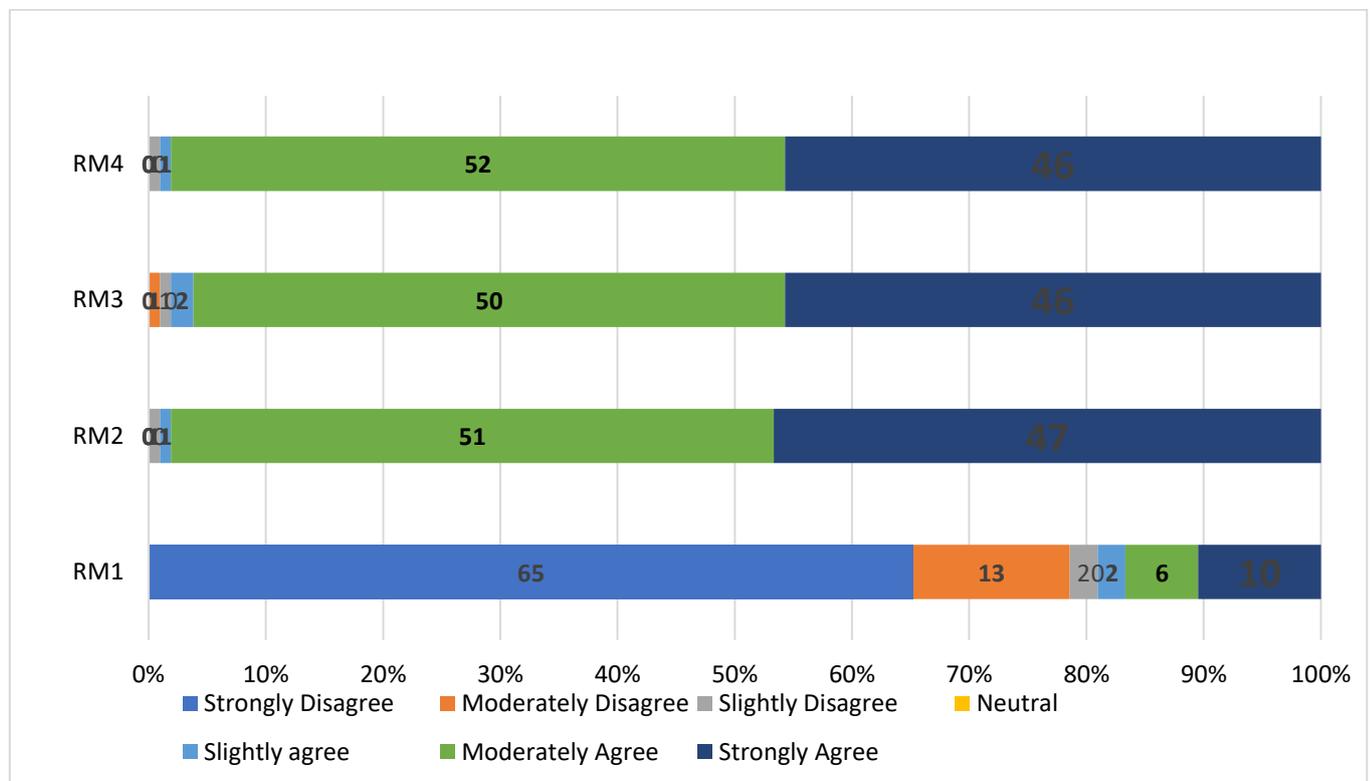


Figure 21: Perceived Benefits through Resource Mobility

Table 64: Perceived Benefits through Resource Mobility

RM1	SME/Cooperative/NGO enable the community to access appropriate technology
RM2	SME/Cooperative/NGO enable the community to access necessary skills
RM3	SME/Cooperative/NGO facilitate access to business information
RM4	SME/Cooperative/NGO facilitate community access to finance

The table 6 provides the list of benefits perceived by the women farmers on the factor Community based development through the social enterprises. Figure 8 depicts the percentage of the level of

agreement of the women farmers on Community based development. Majority including 51%

strongly agreed and 24% moderately agreed with the fact SE encourages entrepreneurship in the community. On the other hand, 29% strongly agreed and 20% moderately agreed making almost all respondents agreeing on the fact that SE enhances entrepreneurial skills and talents in the community for development. Furthermore 57% strongly agreed and 27% of the respondents moderately agreed that SE establishes sustainable economic development initiatives. 23% strongly agreed, 17% of the respondents moderately agreed and 13% slightly agreed that SE strengthen the economic base of the community. 45% strongly agreed and 50% of the respondents moderately agreed that SE attract investments .44% strongly agreed and 50% of the respondents moderately agreed that SE enhances the community’s ability to rebuild itself. Finally, 25% strongly agreed and 29% of the respondents moderately agreed that SE build community wealth.

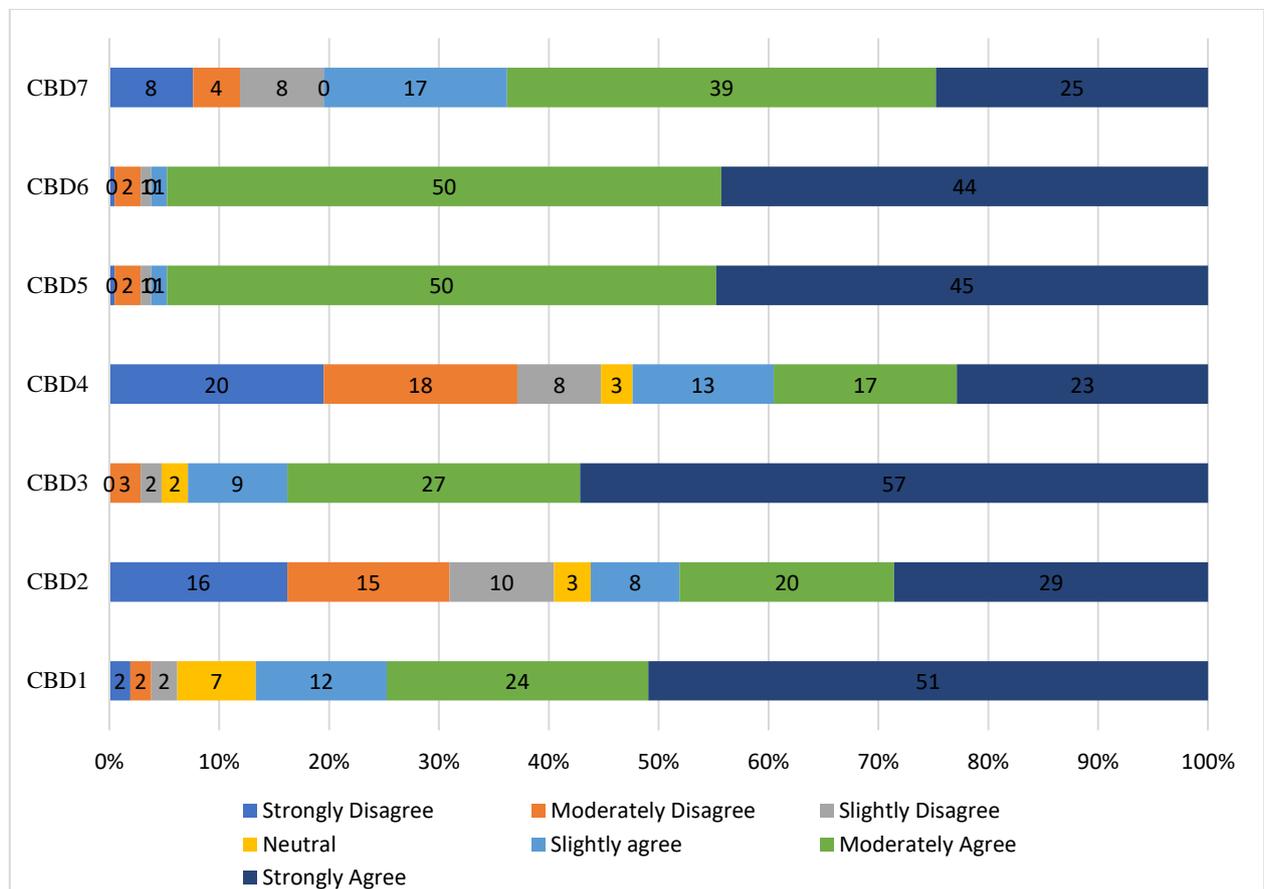


Figure 22: Perceived Benefits through Community Based Development

Table 65: Perceived Benefits through Community Based Development

CBD1	SME/Cooperative/NGO encourage entrepreneurship in the community
CBD2	SME/Cooperative/NGO enhance entrepreneurial skills and talents in the community for development

CBD3	SME/Cooperative/NGO establish sustainable economic development initiatives
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CBD4	SME/Cooperative/NGO strengthening of the economic base of the community
CBD5	SME/Cooperative/NGO attract investments
CBD6	SME/Cooperative/NGO enhance the community’s ability to rebuild itself
CBD7	SME/Cooperative/NGO build community wealth

The table 7 provides the list of benefits perceived by the women farmers on the Community-Based Service Provision through the social enterprises. Figure 9 depicts the percentage of the level of agreement of the women farmers on Community-Based Service Provision. Majority including 49% strongly agreed and 20% moderately disagreed with the fact SE strengthen public infrastructure and facilities that provide public services that contribute to human, social, and economic development. On the other hand, 47% strongly agreed and 52% moderately agreed making almost all respondents agreeing on the fact that SE provide the necessary support to women communities to identify and/or address their concerns. Furthermore 16% strongly agreed and 43% of the respondents moderately agreed that SE delivers social services in the community.77% strongly disagreed with the fact that SE participates in growing business markets.

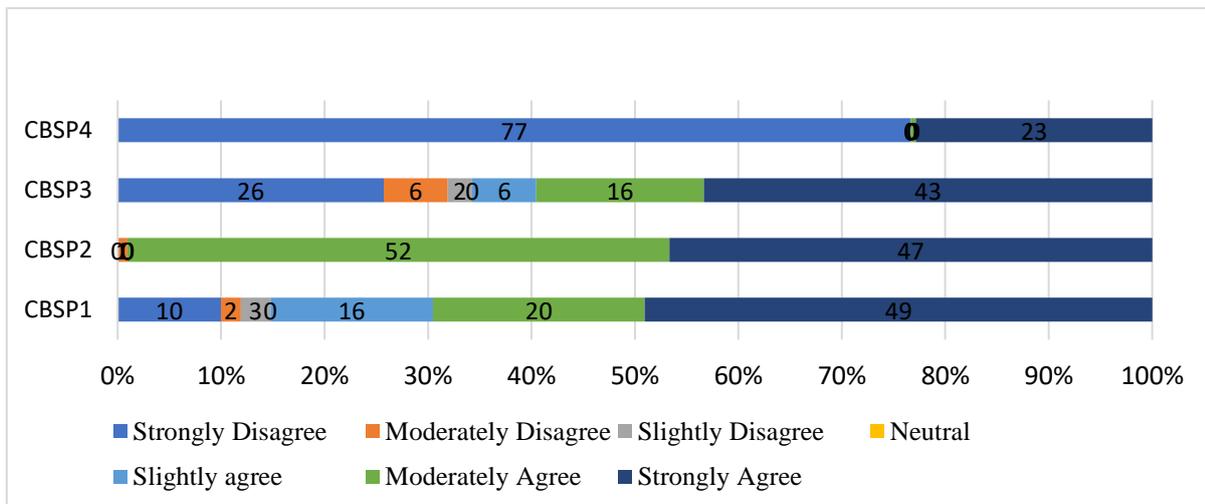


Figure 23: Perceived Benefits through Community-Based Service Provision

Table 66: Perceived Benefits through Community-Based Service Provision

CBSP1	SME/Cooperative/NGO delivers social services in the community
CBSP2	SME/Cooperative/NGO strengthen public infrastructure and facilities that provide public services that contribute to human, social, and economic development
CBSP3	SME/Cooperative/NGO participates in growing business markets

CBSP4	SME/Cooperative/NGO provide the necessary support for skill development to help
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	communities to identify and/or address their concerns
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The results of the correlation analysis is depicted in Table 8. The results revealed that resource mobility had a strong significant and strong positive relationship with women empowerment ( $r=0.727, p<0.000$ ). It is therefore impossible to talk about women empowerment and their decision making capacity without reference to the structures that mediate both women's access to resources and their control and use of them (Oppenheim Mason, 2005; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). This emphasis that accessibility to resources by mobilizing them would increase the women's' decision making capability. Community based development had a weak positive relationship with women empowerment ( $r=0.411, p<0.000$ ). This empirical finding of Mary et al., (2009) emphasized that social enterprises bring a systematic and sustainable change in education and the economic development through its community-based development benefits in the long term. This change in education and economic status in long run would thereby increase the decision-making capacity and power of the women.

*Table 67: Correlation between perceived benefits and Women Empowerment*

	p value	Correlation Coefficient(r)
Resource Mobility	0.000	.727**
Community based development	0.000	.411**
Community Based Service Provision	0.000	.254*
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).		

### **The moderating effect of personal constraints on the perceived benefits of social enterprises and women empowerment.**

The personal constraints are listed in Table 9. Figure 10 depicts the level of agreement of the women farmers on the personal constraints they have experienced. Majority of the women farmers (48%) slightly agreed with the fact that lack of capital was one constraint that they face. Majority of the farmers disagreed (41%) that lack of resources was a personal constraint. 53% of women farmers disagreed that lack of Entrepreneurial skills was a personal constraint. 50% of the farmers agreed that lack of family support was a major personal constraint that they face. However, 59% moderately disagreed that Insecurity and lack of self-confidence was a personal constraint.

However, 61% moderately agreed that Gender Biasness and non-acceptance was on personal

constraints that they encounter. Majority of the women farmers (57%) disagreed that lack of awareness and adequate knowledge was a personal constraint.

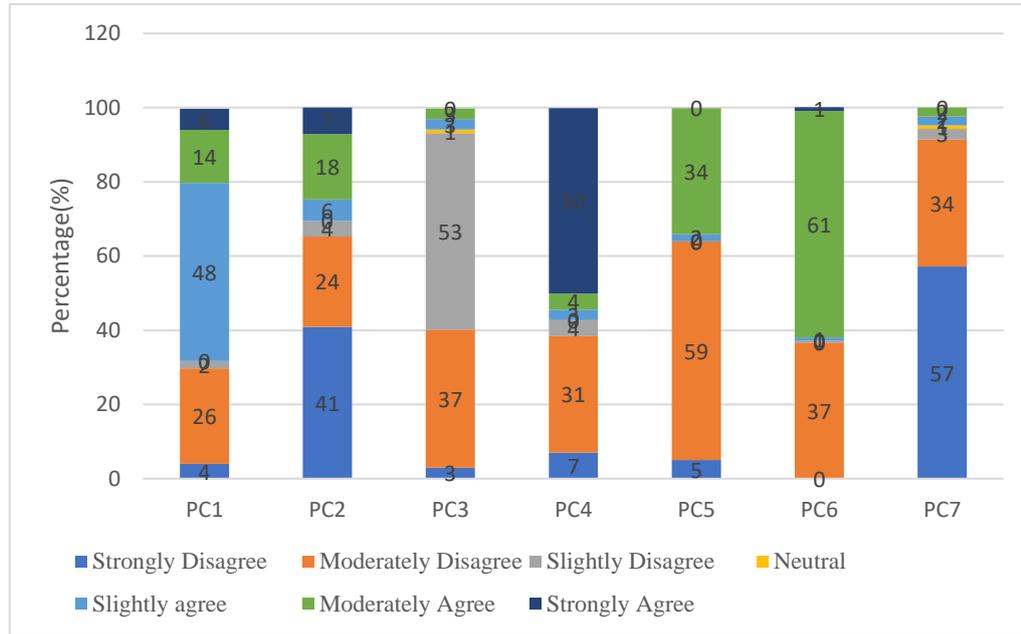


Table 68: Personal Constraints

PC1	Lack of capital
PC2	Lack of resources
PC3	Lack of Entrepreneurial skills
PC4	Lack of family support
PC5	Insecurity and lack of self confidence
PC6	Gender Biasness and non-acceptance
PC7	Lack of awareness and adequate knowledge

The hypothesis developed to access the moderating effect of personal constraints on the perceived benefits of social enterprises and women empowerment as follows;

Hypothesis1: Resource Mobility has a significant positive effect on women empowerment

Hypothesis 2: Community based development has a significant positive effect on women empowerment

Hypothesis 3: Community based service provision has a significant positive effect on women empowerment

Hypothesis 4: Personal constraints moderates the relationship between resource mobility and

women empowerment

Hypothesis 5: Personal constraints moderates the relationship between community based development and women empowerment

Hypothesis 6: Personal constraints moderates the relationship between Community based service provision and women empowerment

The regression specification for direct effects model is as shown in figure 6.

$$\text{Women Empowerment} = \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{Resource Mobility}) + \beta_2 (\text{Community Based Development}) + \beta_3 (\text{Community-Based Service Provision}) + \varepsilon \quad (6)$$

The moderated regression model is specified as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Women Empowerment} = & \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{Resource Mobility}) \\ & + \beta_2 (\text{Community Based Development}) \\ & + \beta_3 (\text{Community-Based Service Provision}) \\ & + \beta_4 (\text{Resource Mobility} * \text{Personal Constraints}) + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Women Empowerment} = & \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{Resource Mobility}) \\ & + \beta_2 (\text{Community Based Development}) \\ & + \beta_3 (\text{Community-Based Service Provision}) \\ & + \beta_4 (\text{Community Based Development} * \text{Personal Constraints}) + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Women Empowerment} = & \alpha + \beta_1 (\text{Resource Mobility}) \\ & + \beta_2 (\text{Community Based Development}) \\ & + \beta_3 (\text{Community-Based Service Provision}) \\ & + \beta_4 (\text{Community-Based Service Provision} * \text{Personal Constraints}) \end{aligned}$$

+ε

The results of the regression analysis is shown in Table 10. The results indicated that personal constraints have moderated the relationship between resource mobility and women empowerment ( $\beta = 0.160$ ,  $p=0.026$ ). The women must make an effort to access the resources provided by the social enterprises. However, this effort could be hindered by the personal constraints faced by the women affecting their decision-making ability.

*Table 69: Regression analysis*

<b>Predictor variable</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	2.775 (0.000)	3.017 (0.000)	2.892 (0.000)	2.815 (0.000)
<b>Resource Mobility</b>	0.750 (0.031)	0.031 (0.757)	0.017 (0.865)	0.006 (0.953)
<b>Community Based Development</b>	0.244 (0.006)	0.213 (0.016)	0.214 (0.020)	0.218 (0.014)
<b>Community-Based Service Provision</b>	0.115 (0.174)	0.171 (0.052)	0.139 (0.112)	0.180 (0.050)
<b>Resource Mobility * Personal Constraints</b>		-0.160 (0.026)		
<b>Community Based Development * Personal Constraints</b>			-0.081 (0.262)	
<b>Community-Based Service Provision * Personal Constraints</b>				-0.128 (0.074)
<b>R2</b>	0.137	0.116	0.122	0.055
<b>Adjusted r2</b>	0.121	0.103	0.105	-0.029
<b>F</b>	8.159	9.031	7.098	0.652
<b>Standard errors in parenthesis. Significant at 0.05</b>				

## CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurial rural women have joined to social enterprises with an intension of moving away from the vicious cycle of poverty and providing better life for their children. Empowerment of women is an important phenomena and social enterprises seem to be an important tool for empowering the rural women farmers agriculturally, domestically, socially and economically. Engagements in local social enterprises have reported to make significant positive changes in various aspects of their lives of women farmers including advances in income and employment opportunities, access to education, widening of social networks, increased mobility, improved visibility and status in local communities. Social enterprises can be used as a tool to empower the

marginalized women in rural areas who are confined only to subsistence agriculture. Personal

constraints act as barrier to the resource mobility and hindering women empowerment. The government and policy makers should popularize these concept within the rural communities of Sri Lanka.

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