

# SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES: OVERCOMING START-UP CHALLENGES IN KALAHANDI, ODISHA

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the intersection of tribal entrepreneurship and sustainable development in the Kalahandi district of Odisha, India. Despite their rich cultural heritage, tribal communities face significant barriers, such as limited financial literacy, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient market access, which hinder their entrepreneurial efforts. This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, analyzing both quantitative data to assess the impact of start-up initiatives on various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key findings highlight the potential of start-ups to address poverty (SDG 1), promote gender equality (SDG 5), and foster environmental sustainability (SDG 15) while identifying critical challenges like infrastructural deficits. The study advocates for targeted interventions, including capacity-building programs, policy support for women entrepreneurs, and stakeholder collaboration to create a robust start-up ecosystem. These strategies aim to empower tribal communities, enhance economic resilience, and contribute to inclusive growth in alignment with global SDG objectives.*

**Keyword:** Start-ups, Tribal, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, Economy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Empowering tribal communities through sustainable start-ups is crucial for addressing socio-economic disparities in India. The Kalahandi district of Odisha represents a vivid case of cultural richness juxtaposed with economic challenges. The tribal populations here face significant barriers in initiating businesses, such as limited financial literacy, insufficient market linkages, and inadequate infrastructure. Addressing these barriers is not only vital for their socio-economic upliftment but also aligns with India's commitment to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study delves into the strategies that promote start-up sustainability in tribal regions of Odisha, focusing on empowering local populations while fostering inclusive economic growth.

The tribal communities of Odisha, particularly in the Kalahandi district, hold a significant place in India's cultural and social fabric. Despite their rich heritage and deep connection to their land, these communities face persistent socio-economic challenges that hinder their progress. Historically marginalized and often excluded from mainstream

economic frameworks, tribal groups struggle with systemic issues such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to modern resources, and inadequate infrastructure. This backdrop underscores the urgency of empowering these communities through entrepreneurial initiatives that foster sustainable development and inclusive growth.

Start-ups represent a transformative force in addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by tribal populations. By integrating innovative solutions with local knowledge, start-ups have the potential to bridge the gaps in economic opportunities, create employment, and uplift living standards. For tribal regions like Kalahandi, where traditional occupations dominate, entrepreneurial ventures can introduce modern practices while preserving cultural heritage. Moreover, these initiatives align closely with India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), addressing critical areas such as poverty eradication, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The entrepreneurial ecosystem for tribal communities has garnered increasing attention in

academic and policy circles. Research highlights that sustainable entrepreneurship serves as a tool for poverty alleviation and economic empowerment (Gupta, 2021). Tribal entrepreneurship, while promising, is constrained by systemic issues like access to capital, lack of mentorship, and infrastructural deficits (Patel et al., 2020).

Studies also reveal the critical role of start-ups in achieving the SDGs. For instance, start-ups contribute to SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by creating employment opportunities (Sharma & Das, 2018). Women-led entrepreneurial ventures play a pivotal role in achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality) through empowerment initiatives (Verma & Singh, 2019).

Efforts in similar global contexts underscore the need for capacity-building programs tailored to local cultural dynamics (Banerjee & Kumar, 2020). These findings guide the study in identifying and analyzing effective start-up strategies for tribal regions in Odisha.

### 3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to analyse the strategies of Start-up for sustainability of tribal regions of Odisha and their contributions to various Sustainable Development Goals

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to analyze start-up strategies for the sustainability of tribal regions in Odisha. Quantitative data were gathered through surveys targeting 140 tribal entrepreneurs, focusing on correlations between start-up initiatives and SDGs. Data analysis involved statistical correlation to assess the impact of start-ups on SDGs and thematic coding for qualitative insights.

The correlation analysis presented in the table highlights the interplay between start-up strategies in Odisha's tribal regions and their contributions to various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Correlations										
Control Variables	[It significantly contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in tribal regions of Odisha.]	[It plays a crucial role in addressing poverty and hunger in tribal communities, aligning with SDG 1 and SDG 2, by creating job opportunities.]	[It positively impacts access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities, as outlined in SDG 4, by having education and skills.]	[It effectively promotes gender equality and empowers women and girls within tribal communities, in line with SDG 5, by promoting women Start-up.]	[It contributes significantly to improving health and well-being outcomes among tribal populations, supporting SDG 3, by maintaining employees' welfare.]	[It demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainable consumption and production patterns, advancing SDG 12, by maintaining proper food habit.]	[It actively contributes to reducing inequalities within tribal regions, as outlined in SDG 10, by promoting equal pay and equal lives.]	[It promotes sustainable infrastructure development and innovation, aligning with SDG 9 objectives, by supporting extension and construction.]	[It fosters partnerships for the goals, collaborating with stakeholders to achieve SDG 17 targets by expansion and programs.]	[It positively impacts life on land by promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management practices, in line with SDG 15, by promoting green environment.]

[1. Do you believe Start-up strategies contribute to achieving SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by creating employment opportunities and promoting economic development in tribal regions of Odisha?]	[It significantly contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in tribal regions of Odisha.]	Correlation	1.000	-.058	-.077	.094	.083	-.001	.150	-.081	.108	.017
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.494	.367	.268	.331	.991	.077	.343	.203	.839
		df	0	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138
[It plays a crucial role in addressing poverty and hunger in tribal communities, aligning with SDG 1 and SDG 2, by creating job opportunities.]	[It plays a crucial role in addressing poverty and hunger in tribal communities, aligning with SDG 1 and SDG 2, by creating job opportunities.]	Correlation	-.058	1.000	-.331	-.011	.183	-.067	-.025	.128	.045	.016
		Significance (2-tailed)	.494	.	.000	.897	.031	.430	.765	.133	.601	.852
		df	138	0	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138
[It positively impacts access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities, as outlined in SDG 4, by having education and skills.]	[It positively impacts access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities, as outlined in SDG 4, by having education and skills.]	Correlation	-.077	-.331	1.000	.008	-.173	.158	.016	-.143	.041	.004
		Significance (2-tailed)	.367	.000	.	.928	.041	.063	.848	.092	.632	.966
		df	138	138	0	138	138	138	138	138	138	138
[It effectively promotes gender equality]	[It effectively promotes gender equality]	Correlation	.094	-.011	.008	1.000	.093	-.172	.229	-.013	.009	.019
		Significance (2-tailed)	.268	.897	.928	.	.275	.042	.006	.877	.917	.821
		df	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138

es in tribal communities?]&Start-up strategies towards Sustainability [3. In what ways do Start-up strategies contribute to achieving SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by promoting sustainable business practices, ethical sourcing, and waste reduction in tribal markets?]	and empowers women and girls within tribal communities, in line with SDG 5, by promoting women Start-up.]	df	138	138	138	0	138	138	138	138	138	138
	[It contributes significantly to improving health and well-being outcomes among tribal populations, supporting SDG 3, by maintaining employees' welfare.]	Correlation	.083	.183	-.173	.093	1.000	-.218	-.062	-.143	.218	.056
		Significance (2-tailed)	.331	.031	.041	.275	.	.009	.470	.092	.010	.511
		df	138	138	138	138	0	138	138	138	138	138
] &Start-up strategies towards Sustainability [4. Do Start-up initiatives address SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by providing equitable access to goods and	[It demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainable consumption and production patterns, advancing SDG 12, by maintaining proper food habit.]	Correlation	-.001	-.067	.158	-.172	-.218	1.000	-.113	-.166	.164	.091
		Significance (2-tailed)	.991	.430	.063	.042	.009	.	.185	.050	.053	.286
		df	138	138	138	138	138	0	138	138	138	138
	[It actively	Correlation	.150	-.025	.016	.229	-.062	-.113	1.000	-.218	-.161	.173

services and supporting the economic empowerment of marginalized groups in tribal areas?]&Start-up strategies	contributes to reducing inequalities within tribal regions, as outlined in SDG 10, by promoting equal pay and equal lives.]	Significance (2-tailed)	.077	.765	.848	.006	.470	.185	.	.010	.057	.041
		df	138	138	138	138	138	138	0	138	138	138
towards Sustainability [5. Do Start-up strategies contribute to achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty) by promoting inclusive economic growth and improving livelihood opportunities for small-scale retailers in tribal regions?]&Start-up strategies towards Sustainability [6. Do Start-up initiatives support SDG 11 (Sustaina	[It promotes sustainable infrastructure development and innovation, aligning with SDG 9 objectives, by supporting extension, expansion and construction.]	Correlation	-.081	.128	-.143	-.013	-.143	-.166	-.218	1.000	-.186	-.087
		Significance (2-tailed)	.343	.133	.092	.877	.092	.050	.010	.	.027	.306
		df	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	0	138	138
[It fosters partnerships for the goals, collaborating with stakeholders to achieve SDG 17 targets by expansion programs.]	[It fosters partnerships for the goals, collaborating with stakeholders to achieve SDG 17 targets by expansion programs.]	Correlation	.108	.045	.041	.009	.218	.164	-.161	-.186	1.000	-.262
		Significance (2-tailed)	.203	.601	.632	.917	.010	.053	.057	.027	.	.002
		df	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	0	138
	[It positive]	Correlation	.017	.016	.004	.019	.056	.091	.173	-.087	-.262	1.000

ble Cities and Commun ities) by	y impacts life on land by	Signific ance (2- tailed)	.839	.852	.966	.821	.511	.286	.041	.306	.002	.
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revitalizing local markets, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering community resilience in tribal areas?] &Start-up strategies towards Sustainability [7. Do Start-up strategies promote access to affordable and nutritious food options, thereby supporting SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) in tribal regions of Odisha?] &Start-up strategies towards Sustainability [8. Do Start-up initiatives address environmental sustainability and promote green business practices, aligning with SDG 13	promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management practices, in line with SDG 15, by promoting green environment.]	Df	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	0
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<p>(Climate Action) in tribal markets? ] &amp;Start-up strategies towards Sustainability [9. Do Start-up strategies contribute to achieving SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) by enhancing access to healthcare products and services and promoting community well-being in tribal communities?]</p> <p>&amp;Start-up strategies towards Sustainability [10. Do Start-up initiatives foster collaboration and partnership building among stakeholders, thereby supporting SDG 17 (Partner</p>												
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ships for the Goals) in tribal regions of Odisha?]													
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1. SDG 1: No Poverty- Start-up initiatives significantly address poverty alleviation in tribal regions by creating job opportunities. By promoting inclusive economic growth, these ventures enhance livelihood opportunities for marginalized communities. The findings indicate that the integration of tribal resources into entrepreneurial ventures plays a pivotal role in uplifting socio-economic standards, helping small-scale retailers and artisans improve their income and stability.
2. SDG 2: Zero Hunger- The entrepreneurial efforts contribute to ensuring food security by fostering sustainable agricultural practices and promoting affordable and nutritious food options. The initiatives incorporate local food habits and traditional knowledge into start-up strategies, helping to bridge the gap between production and consumption within the community.
3. SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being- Start-ups contribute significantly to the health and well-being of tribal populations. By maintaining employee welfare and providing access to healthcare services and products, they improve the overall health outcomes. Programs that focus on clean drinking water, hygiene, and preventive healthcare are essential components of these start-up models.
4. SDG 4: Quality Education- Education and skill development are integral to the start-ups' strategies. They provide lifelong learning opportunities and upskilling programs that empower tribal youth and adults. This aligns closely with improving education quality and accessibility, fostering a culture of self-reliance and innovation within tribal communities.
5. SDG 5: Gender Equality- Promoting women's participation in Start-up has been a key focus. Start-up initiatives have significantly empowered women, enabling them to lead business ventures and gain economic independence. This not only enhances the social standing of women in tribal

areas but also aligns directly with the goal of reducing gender disparities.

6. SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure- While start-ups aim to foster innovation and create sustainable infrastructure, challenges persist due to infrastructural bottlenecks in tribal areas. Limited access to digital connectivity, transportation, and modern tools hampers the scalability of tribal enterprises. Nonetheless, efforts to integrate innovative practices, such as the use of traditional crafts with modern marketing methods, show potential for long-term impact.
7. SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities- Start-up strategies actively work to reduce economic disparities in tribal communities. Equal pay, equitable resource distribution, and empowerment of marginalized groups through inclusive policies contribute to narrowing the gap between mainstream and tribal populations. These efforts align with creating a more equitable economic framework.
8. SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production- The alignment of start-ups with sustainable practices—such as ethical sourcing, waste reduction, and promoting eco-friendly products—demonstrates a strong commitment to responsible consumption. By leveraging tribal knowledge and sustainable techniques, start-ups advance the goals of environmental and economic sustainability.
9. SDG 15: Life on Land- Start-ups have positively impacted biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management practices. By integrating eco-friendly business models, these ventures contribute to preserving the local environment, promoting reforestation, and ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources.
10. SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals- Collaborative initiatives between start-ups, local governance, and NGOs are instrumental in achieving sustainable development in tribal areas. Expansion programs and community-driven

partnerships create robust networks that support long-term entrepreneurial success and socio-economic development.

**Positive Correlations with SDGs:** The analysis underscores a strong relationship between start-up initiatives and multiple SDGs, demonstrating their potential as tools for socio-economic transformation.

**Infrastructure Deficits:** Despite the progress, the lack of adequate infrastructure remains a critical barrier to achieving full potential, especially concerning SDG 9.

**Gender Inclusion and Empowerment:** Women-led start-ups emerge as a significant force, showing that gender-focused Start-up leads to broad societal benefits.

**Environmental Sustainability:** Emphasis on green practices and biodiversity conservation aligns well with both economic and environmental goals.

The analysis reveals significant correlations between start-ups and various SDGs. Start-up initiatives demonstrate strong alignment with SDG 8 by creating employment opportunities and fostering economic growth. A significant positive correlation exists between Start-up strategies that promote gender equality (SDG 5) and those that reduce inequalities (SDG 10) ( $r = 0.229$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ). This implies that Start-up initiatives focusing on inclusivity, such as equitable pay and economic opportunities, effectively reduce inequalities in tribal regions.

There is a moderate positive correlation between strategies addressing health and well-being (SDG 3) and fostering partnerships (SDG 17) ( $r = 0.218$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ). Start-ups promoting employee welfare and healthcare access while collaborating with stakeholders contribute meaningfully to the well-being of tribal communities. A significant negative correlation between health and well-being strategies (SDG 3) and sustainable consumption (SDG 12) ( $r = -0.218$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ) may indicate competing priorities. For instance, increased focus on healthcare or food security might inadvertently strain sustainable resource practices.

## 5. FINDINGS

1. Start-ups in tribal regions of Odisha considerably add to poverty reduction (SDG 1) and gender equality (SDG 5).

2. Education and skill development programs included into start-ups improve the quality of life and align with SDG 4 (Quality Education).
3. Infrastructural deficits stay a barrier, mainly impacting innovation and sustainability (SDG 9).
4. Collaborative efforts between stakeholders, including local governance and NGOs, amplify start-ups' contributions toward SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

## 6. SUGGESTIONS

1. Capacity-Building Programs: Execute localized financial literacy and skill development initiatives tailored to tribal communities.
2. Enhanced Market Access: Establish sustainable market linkages while respecting cultural sensitivities.
3. Infrastructure Development: Address gaps in physical and digital infrastructure to support innovation and scaling.
4. Policy Support: Formulate policies encouraging women entrepreneurs and inclusive growth models.
5. Stakeholder Collaboration: Foster partnerships between government, NGOs, and private sectors to amplify the impact of start-ups.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The entrepreneurial journey for tribal communities in Odisha is both challenging and transformative. Start-ups not only uplift these communities but also contribute significantly to the global SDGs. By addressing existing barriers through targeted strategies, it is possible to create a sustainable and inclusive ecosystem. The findings of this study serve as a blueprint for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers aiming to empower tribal populations through Start-up.

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