

Article

# Gender-responsive policies to support women start-ups to make a difference in the world

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**Abstract:** The 2019 Social Enterprise Promotion Act in Thailand represents a pivotal step towards promoting social enterprises by fostering self-reliance and a fair and sustainable future for the country. Despite their significance, there is a noticeable research gap focusing on the factors that motivate Thai entrepreneurs to venture into social entrepreneurship. This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing data from 2000 respondents in Thailand, utilizing linear regression to explore whether the awareness of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the adoption of digital technologies, extrinsic motivations, such as the overall societal view of entrepreneurs, social awareness, and perceptions of entrepreneurial capabilities influence the decision to start a social enterprise. In a gender comparison, our findings reveal that the societal context plays a crucial role for both genders, although in distinct ways: Male entrepreneurs are more influenced by individualistic extrinsic values, with motivations linked to power, respect, and societal recognition. In contrast, female entrepreneurs display a collectivistic orientation, being more likely to be inspired by intrinsic motivations, such as the success and visibility of other successful startups within their society. These findings underline the need for a gender-sensitive approach by government bodies, educational institutions, and other relevant organizations aiming to boost start-up rates of enterprises who “make a difference in the world”. Tailored support and educational programs to address the unique motivations and perspectives of male and female entrepreneurs could play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of strategies designed to promote social entrepreneurship in Thailand and beyond.

**Keywords:** start-up; social entrepreneurship; SDGs; entrepreneurial capabilities; entrepreneurship education; extrinsic motivations

## 1. Introduction

Social enterprises are self-sustaining enterprises (ADB, 2019) because they not only address social and/or environmental concerns, but also produce goods and services, thus creating employment (British Council et al., 2021). In addition, these enterprises aim to “make a difference in the world” and pursue both profit maximization and reinvestment towards their social goal (Kim and Lim, 2017). As other entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs tend to be innovative for their social purposes, and thus create new social innovations (Endo and Lim, 2016; Kim and Lim, 2017). In Southeast Asia, only 3.8% of the adult population are social entrepreneurs, the lowest number in a global comparison (Bosma et al., 2016), estimated to account for 500,000 to 1 million social entrepreneurs in the region (British Council et al., 2021). All countries in Southeast Asia lack equivalent support from governments and organizations to help in scaling social enterprises from small start-ups or social