International Journal of Sustainability and Advanced Integrated Research
Volume 2, Issue 1 (January-March 2026) | ISSN: 3107-7854
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65339/ijsair.V2.I1.06

Beyond Financial Access: Capability Development as a Driver of Women's Empowerment among 4Ps Beneficiaries

Ma. Yssabela Baldo[1], Clarence Carampatana[1], Francis Gian Chua[1], Enzo Del Rosario[1], Reinhardt Gomez[1], Abdul-Rahman Radiamoda[1], Sergiris A. Ortega, CpE, DBM[1]
Xavier University – Ateneo de Cagayan, School of Business and Management
Cagayan de Oro, Philippines

Publication history: Received: November 19, 2025; Revised: December 18, 2025; Accepted: January 12, 2026
Email of Corresponding Author: sortega@xu.edu.ph

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between women's entrepreneurial development and empowerment among beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines. Guided by Amartya Sen's Capability Development Approach, the research examined three entrepreneurial capability dimensions—financial literacy, technical know-how, and access to finance—and their influence on empowerment outcomes. Using a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 79 women engaged in entrepreneurial activities using a structured questionnaire on a 4-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient were employed for analysis. Findings revealed high levels of financial literacy and technical know-how, while access to finance was moderate. Women's empowerment was rated very high across indicators of confidence, autonomy, and participation in household and community decision-making. Correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between financial literacy and empowerment, and a weak but significant positive relationship between technical know-how and empowerment. Conversely, access to finance exhibited a significant negative relationship with empowerment, suggesting that financial access alone does not guarantee empowerment without adequate skills and guidance. The study concludes that beyond financial access alone, capability development is the primary driver of empowerment among 4Ps beneficiaries. It recommends strengthening entrepreneurial training programs, particularly in financial literacy and technical skills, and complementing them with mentorship and capacity-building support. By advancing women's economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods, the study contributes to Sustainable Development Goals 1 (No Poverty), 5 (Gender Equality), and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), highlighting its sustainability impact in transforming short-term social assistance into long-term empowerment and self-reliance.

Keywords: Capability Development Approach; Financial literacy; Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps); Technical know-how; Women Empowerment; Women Entrepreneurial Development

1. Introduction

Women's entrepreneurial empowerment has emerged as a critical pathway for inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development in the Philippines. Also, entrepreneurship is seen as an important driver of economic growth (Gonzales & Gevero, 2024). Among beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), women play central roles in managing household resources and sustaining livelihoods. While conditional cash transfers address immediate welfare needs, long-term empowerment requires the development of entrepreneurial capabilities. Anchored in Amartya Sen's Capability Development Approach, this study examines how financial literacy, technical know-how, and access to finance influence the empowerment of women 4Ps beneficiaries, emphasizing the transition from dependency to self-reliance.

1.1 Women's Entrepreneurship and Empowerment among 4Ps Beneficiaries

Women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to household welfare, social inclusion, and economic resilience in the Philippines. Studies on micro-retail enterprises, such as sari-sari stores, show that women gain greater identity, independence, and social empowerment through entrepreneurship. Despite persistent constraints such as limited capital and market competition, women demonstrate resilience, discipline, and determination (Quiambao & Reyes, 2020; Ortega et al, 2025). At the macro level, micro, small, and medium enterprises are strongly linked to employment, income distribution, and poverty outcomes (Adviento et al., 2022), while micro-level evidence confirms that entrepreneurship increases the likelihood of moving out of poverty and sustaining welfare above subsistence levels (Cudia et al., 2019; Santos 2023).

1.2 Financial Literacy, Technical Know-How, and Access to Finance as Entrepreneurial Capabilities

Women's entrepreneurial development is commonly framed in terms of three interrelated capability dimensions. Financial literacy strengthens women's confidence and capacity to manage resources, make informed decisions, and pursue income-generating activities (Premraj, 2025). Technical know-how enables women to innovate, adapt, and sustain their enterprises under changing conditions (Andriamahery & Qamruzzaman, 2022). Access to finance provides the capital necessary to initiate, maintain, or expand entrepreneurial ventures (Simba, 2023). Together, these capabilities transform entrepreneurial empowerment from potential into lived economic and social outcomes.

1.3 The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in Local, National, and Global Perspectives

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), launched in 2008, is the Philippine government's flagship poverty reduction initiative that provides conditional cash transfers to poor households to improve access to education, healthcare, and nutrition. Women are typically designated as grantees, positioning them as key household decision-makers. While the program effectively addresses short-term welfare outcomes, concerns remain regarding long-term dependency and sustainability. Empirical findings indicate that without complementary capability-building and livelihood interventions, welfare gains may not translate into lasting empowerment (Talimio & Salagubang, 2019).

1.4 Capability Development Approach as the Framework for Women's Entrepreneurial Empowerment

This study is grounded in Amartya Sen's Capability Development Approach (Sen, 1979; 1999; Walker,2005), which conceptualizes development as the expansion of individuals' fundamental freedoms and opportunities rather than income alone. Within this framework, functioning refers to achieved states of being and doing, while capabilities represent the genuine opportunities individuals have to achieve them. For women 4Ps beneficiaries, financial literacy, technical know-how, and access to finance serve as critical capabilities that expand agency, choice, and entrepreneurial participation. The supporting literature affirms the relevance of this framework for assessing empowerment beyond material provision (Simba, 2023).

1.5 Gaps in Entrepreneurial Empowerment of Women 4Ps Beneficiaries

Despite the effectiveness of 4Ps in addressing immediate welfare needs, studies reveal that women beneficiaries continue to face constraints in decision-making, income generation, and leadership roles within households and communities (Talimio & Salagubang, 2019). Existing research has not sufficiently examined how specific entrepreneurial capabilities—financial literacy, technical know-how, and access to finance—jointly influence women's empowerment within the 4Ps context. This gap underscores the need for a focused investigation into how capability development links to entrepreneurial empowerment among women beneficiaries.

1.6 Alignment with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The study aligns with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by advancing women's economic empowerment and agency, SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through the promotion of sustainable entrepreneurship, and SDG 1 (No Poverty) by supporting transitions from welfare dependence to self-reliance. Strengthening entrepreneurial capabilities among women 4Ps beneficiaries contributes directly to inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

1.7 Contribution of the Study to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

This research contributes to socio-economic sustainability by demonstrating how capability development transforms short-term social protection into long-term economic participation. It supports community sustainability by strengthening women's roles as income earners and decision-makers, and policy and institutional sustainability by providing evidence to enhance the livelihood and capability components of social protection programs. Integrating perspectives from development economics, gender studies, and social policy, the study highlights women's entrepreneurial empowerment as a foundation for resilient households, communities, and institutions.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between Women Entrepreneurial Development and women empowerment among Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries in Barangay Carmen, Cagayan de Oro City. The quantitative approach was appropriate, as the study sought to measure levels of financial literacy, technical know-how, and access to finance, and to determine their relationships with women's empowerment. The descriptive component focused on assessing respondent characteristics and levels of the study variables. In contrast, the correlational component examined the presence and strength of relationships between the independent variables and women's empowerment outcomes. This design allowed the study to describe existing conditions while generating empirical evidence relevant to policy and program development aimed at reducing dependency on social assistance and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Barangay Carmen, Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental. Barangay Carmen is the most populated barangay in the city, with 78,612 residents (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024), and has the highest concentration of 4Ps beneficiaries. Although Cagayan de Oro City recorded the lowest poverty incidence in Northern Mindanao at 17.4 percent in 2021 (Philippine News Agency, 2022; PSA, 2021), many households in Barangay Carmen remain economically vulnerable and dependent on government assistance despite the presence of graduated beneficiaries in the region (Mindanao Gold Star Daily, 2024; Philippine News Agency, 2024). The barangay's dense population, concentration of 4Ps households, access to basic services, and exposure to livelihood initiatives supported by the local government and partner institutions (City Government of Cagayan de Oro, 2023) make it a suitable setting for examining women's entrepreneurial empowerment.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were women 4Ps beneficiaries residing in Barangay Carmen who were actively engaged in entrepreneurial or livelihood activities and possessed a barangay permit for business operation. These women were household heads or household members directly involved in income-generating activities. Focusing on this group ensured that respondents had firsthand experience relevant to entrepreneurial development and empowerment within the 4Ps program.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The total number of active 4Ps beneficiaries engaged in entrepreneurship in Barangay Carmen was 446. A target sample equivalent to 20% of the population was determined, yielding an intended sample size of 89 respondents. Referral sampling was employed due to data privacy restrictions and the protected nature of beneficiary information. Initial qualified respondents referred other eligible participants, ensuring that all respondents met the study criteria. Although the study aimed for full population representation, actual participation depended on respondent willingness and referral availability, consistent with limitations noted in referral sampling (Heath, 2023). Data collection yielded 79 respondents, which still provided a 99 percent confidence level and was deemed sufficient for analysis.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study utilized a structured questionnaire designed to measure Women Entrepreneurial Development, Financial Literacy, Technical Know-How, Access to Finance, and Women Empowerment among 4Ps women beneficiaries. The instrument consisted of demographic questions and attitudinal items measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was adapted from validated instruments on entrepreneurial behaviour, capability development, and empowerment, with modifications to suit the local context of 4Ps women entrepreneurs in Barangay Carmen. Content validity was established through expert evaluation by faculty members at Xavier University, leading to revisions that improved clarity, relevance, and contextual alignment. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha confirmed strong internal consistency across all variable clusters, indicating that the instrument was both valid and reliable for the study.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection began with securing formal permission from the Department of Social Welfare and Development Region X and Barangay Carmen. Eligible respondents were identified based on their 4Ps membership and engagement in entrepreneurial activities. The questionnaire was administered in printed form, and respondents were briefed on the study's purpose prior to participation. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, manually checked for completeness, encoded, and organized systematically to ensure accuracy and consistency prior to analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to determine the levels of financial literacy, technical know-how, access to finance, and women's empowerment. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to examine the relationship between women's entrepreneurial development and women's empowerment among 4Ps beneficiaries. All statistical computations were carefully reviewed to ensure the accuracy and validity of the results.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by excluding personal identifiers and reporting data in aggregate form. The study complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173), and all collected data were securely stored in encrypted, password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and there were no risks associated with participation. Permissions to conduct the study were obtained from the relevant authorities, and the study findings are intended for academic dissemination and institutional reference.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Levels of Women Entrepreneurial Development among 4Ps Women Beneficiaries

3.1.1 Financial Literacy

The findings indicate that the respondents demonstrated a very high level of financial literacy, with an overall mean of 3.80 interpreted as Highly Knowledgeable and a low standard deviation of 0.21, reflecting strong consistency in responses. A large majority of respondents, 98.73 percent, were categorized as Highly Knowledgeable, while only 1.27 percent were classified as Knowledgeable. All financial literacy indicators received high mean ratings, with the highest observed for regularly monitoring personal spending and closely watching money usage, while the lowest, though still high, pertained to the importance of savings for future needs. These results suggest that 4Ps women beneficiaries possess strong financial awareness and responsible money management practices, including budgeting, saving, and evaluating expenditures. Such financial competence reflects a capacity for informed economic decision-making and long-term planning. This finding supports Tambunan's (2019) assertion that women's economic participation and financial understanding play a critical role in poverty reduction and household stability, particularly when women reinvest resources in family welfare and community well-being.

3.1.2 Technical Know-How

The respondents also exhibited a high level of technical know-how, with an overall mean of 3.68 (Highly Knowledgeable) and a standard deviation of 0.33, indicating general agreement among participants. The majority, or 93.67 percent, were rated as Highly Knowledgeable, while only a small proportion fell under the Knowledgeable or Not Knowledgeable categories. Indicators related to the use of environmentally friendly technology and the belief that technology supports business growth obtained the highest mean scores. In contrast, support for sustainable technology use, although slightly lower, remained within the Highly Knowledgeable range. The results indicate that 4Ps women beneficiaries hold positive attitudes toward technology and recognize its importance for business efficiency, growth, and environmental sustainability. This openness to technological adoption strengthens their entrepreneurial potential and adaptability. Consistent with these findings, Feranita et al. (2024) emphasized that technology adoption significantly enhances women's entrepreneurial success by amplifying the effects of human and social capital, particularly in developing contexts. The high level of technical know-how observed suggests that the respondents are well-positioned to leverage technology to build economic resilience.

3.1.3 Access to Finance

Access to finance was rated as generally Accessible, with an overall mean of 3.15 and a relatively higher standard deviation of 0.67, indicating greater variation in respondent experiences. While 51.90 percent of respondents reported finance as Highly Accessible, a substantial proportion experienced varying degrees of difficulty, including Accessible, Not Accessible, and Highly Not Accessible. Indicators revealed that challenges such as high interest rates, lengthy banking processes, lack of collateral, and restrictive repayment periods were commonly experienced alongside reported access to financial services. These findings reveal a complex, contradictory situation in which financial services are available but may not be suitable or supportive of empowerment. Although respondents technically have access to finance, structural barriers such as cost, repayment terms, and procedural complexity limit its effectiveness. This reflects broader issues in financial inclusion where availability does not equate to meaningful access. A 2022 World Bank report highlights similar challenges, noting that high costs and institutional barriers disproportionately prevent women and low-income populations from fully benefiting from financial services.

3.2 Level of Empowerment among 4Ps Women Beneficiaries

The results show that the respondents exhibited a very high level of empowerment, with an overall mean of 3.85 (Highly Empowered) and a low standard deviation of 0.14, indicating strong consensus. All respondents were categorized as Highly Empowered. High mean scores were recorded across all empowerment indicators, particularly those related to fair pay, equal opportunities, access to good work, family support, and fair treatment in business or employment settings. The lowest-rated indicator, decision-making autonomy regarding work or business, still fell within the Highly Empowered interpretation. The findings suggest that 4Ps women beneficiaries experience substantial autonomy, fairness, and support in both household and work environments. The consistency in high empowerment ratings reflects confidence in economic participation, workplace equity, and supportive social structures. Although decision-making autonomy showed slightly lower variation, it still indicates meaningful agency among respondents. These outcomes suggest that participation in livelihood activities, combined with program support, contributes positively to women's sense of empowerment and well-being.

3.3 Relationship Between Women's Entrepreneurial Development and Women's Empowerment

Correlation analysis revealed that all independent variables were statistically significantly associated with women's empowerment at the 0.01 level. Financial literacy showed a moderate positive relationship with women empowerment ($r = 0.432$, $p = .000$), while technical know-how demonstrated a weak but significant positive relationship ($r = 0.123$, $p =$

.000). In contrast, access to finance exhibited a significant negative relationship with women empowerment ($r = -0.379$, $p = .000$). These results indicate that increases in financial literacy and technical know-how are associated with higher empowerment. In contrast, greater access to finance corresponds with lower empowerment levels. The positive association between financial literacy and empowerment underscores the role of financial knowledge in strengthening women's economic autonomy and decision-making capacity. This aligns with Heena Tyagi's (2025) findings, which demonstrate that financial literacy enhances women's empowerment by improving income generation and resource management. The weak positive relationship observed for technical know-how suggests that skills alone may be insufficient to enhance empowerment without complementary resources and opportunities. Conversely, the negative relationship between access to finance and empowerment suggests that financial access, when not paired with adequate guidance and management capacity, may lead to dependency or financial stress rather than empowerment. This finding is consistent with Kato and Kratzer (2013), who emphasized that financial resources alone do not guarantee empowerment unless women possess the capability and autonomy to use them productively. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming significant relationships between entrepreneurial development variables and women's empowerment among 4Ps beneficiaries.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This study examined the relationship between women's entrepreneurial development and women's empowerment among 4Ps beneficiaries and found that overall entrepreneurial development was high, particularly in financial literacy and technical know-how, while access to finance remained moderate. The findings confirmed that women's empowerment was likewise high across indicators, reflecting increased confidence, decision-making capacity, and participation in family and community affairs. Correlation analyses established a significant relationship between women's entrepreneurial development and women's empowerment, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Financial literacy and technical know-how emerged as the strongest predictors of empowerment, with technical know-how showing the highest correlation. At the same time, access to finance demonstrated a weaker or negative relationship when not supported by adequate skills and guidance. These results indicate that empowerment among 4Ps women beneficiaries is driven more by capability development than by financial access alone, underscoring the importance of knowledge, skills, and entrepreneurial competence in achieving sustainable empowerment.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that program implementers, policymakers, and community stakeholders strengthen women's empowerment initiatives by prioritizing the development of entrepreneurial capabilities among 4Ps beneficiaries. Emphasis should be placed on structured and continuous training in financial literacy and technical know-how to enhance women's confidence, decision-making, and effective business management. Access to finance should be complemented by proper guidance, mentorship, and capacity-building to ensure that financial resources are used productively and do not lead to dependency or financial stress. Programs should adopt a holistic and long-term approach that integrates skill development, responsible financial access, and sustained support systems, enabling women beneficiaries to achieve lasting economic independence, social empowerment, and meaningful participation in household and community decision-making.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study adhered to established institutional and academic ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Participation in the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) was voluntary, and confidentiality, anonymity, and responsible data management were maintained throughout the research process.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Barangay Carmen officials, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Region X, and academic advisers for their assistance in securing permission, validating the research instrument, and facilitating data collection among 4Ps beneficiaries.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare no financial or personal conflicts of interest and confirm that no external individual or organization influenced the conduct, analysis, or outcomes of the study.

Statement of ethical approval

Survey data collection was conducted with prior permission from the relevant government agencies and local authorities. As the study involved minimal risk to participants, formal ethics board approval was not required, and all procedures complied with accepted research ethics standards.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

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