



Women Empowerment through Textile Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Women empowerment is increasingly recognized as a critical driver of inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development, particularly in developing countries. Among various pathways to empowerment, textile entrepreneurship has emerged as a significant mechanism for enhancing women's economic independence, skill development, and social participation. This paper examines the role of textile entrepreneurship in empowering women by synthesizing theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and case studies from diverse regions including South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Drawing on existing literature and documented experiences from countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and India, the study explores how engagement in textile-related activities such as weaving, tailoring, embroidery, and garment production enables women to generate income, acquire technical and managerial skills, and strengthen their decision-making capacity within households and communities. The analysis highlights key mechanisms of empowerment, including economic security, creative agency, and enhanced social capital, while also identifying persistent barriers such as limited access to finance, education, markets, and supportive legal frameworks. Furthermore, the paper discusses the role of policy interventions, microfinance, women-specific entrepreneurship programs, cooperatives, and digital technologies in promoting inclusive and sustainable textile enterprises. The findings suggest that textile entrepreneurship not only contributes to poverty reduction and livelihood security but also fosters long-term empowerment by improving women's autonomy, confidence, and societal status. The study concludes with policy recommendations aimed at strengthening institutional support systems and expanding opportunities for women-led textile enterprises as a strategic pathway to gender equality and sustainable development.

Keywords- Women Empowerment; Textile Entrepreneurship; Gender Equality; Economic Independence; Skill Development; Microfinance; Sustainable Development; Women-Led Enterprises.

1. Introduction

Women empowerment is a fundamental aspect of socio-economic growth. Achieving gender equity creates an enabling environment for sustainable development, job creation, and poverty alleviation (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016). A selective examination of case studies from Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka, diverse national contexts, underscores the

transformative potential of textile entrepreneurship in enhancing women's autonomy and agency. Data drawn from structured interviews with women involved in the textile industry reveal that entrepreneurship significantly contributes to economic independence through steady income. The acquisition and application of technical skills and creative design capacity promote managerial control and operational flexibility, reinforcing entrepreneurial agency. Finally, the establishment of women-led enterprises fosters a sense of community and enhances women's social capital, simultaneously providing collective support mechanisms and opportunities to shape broader economic and governance agendas (MORSHED, 2015).

2. Theoretical Framework

Societal inequalities in socioeconomic status persist along gender lines. Women continue to be at a disadvantage in many developing countries. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world—hence, the pursuit of the sixteenth Sustainable Development Goal. The textile sector remains a significant driver of economic development and women empowerment (Monica Esiebugie et al, 2018).

Entrepreneurship is one of the important activities for increased economic development. The key to empowerment is having control over one's life. The concept of empowerment implies the ability to make decision, control resources define ambitions, achieve clean investments develop oneself, provide necessary goods and services, engage in delightfully imaginative activities and be one of the players in policy matters that affect one's life. There exist various routes or strategies of empowerment such as economic, political, cultural, psychological etc (MORSHED, 2015).

2.1. Gender and Entrepreneurship

The demographic characteristics of the owner-managers of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) include factors such as gender and age. The distribution of world entrepreneurs by gender indicates that only 25% of entrepreneurs are women. Gender gaps exist because of personal traits, labor market history, and financial capability. These factors are interconnected and impact the entrepreneurial choices of people (Hayrapetyan et al, 2016).

Women often have lower human capital than their male counterparts, which restricts their business choices. Women face constraints in entering self-employment and earning entrepreneurship. Previous employment history influences the choice of owning a business. Gender reflects in the type of activities mostly done by men or women specifically. Female participation is positively linked with the female entrepreneurship rate (Monica Esiebugie et al, 2018).

2.2. Textile Industry as a Developmental Vector

Textile industries, especially spinning, weaving, tailoring, and embroidery occupy a prominent position in the economic structure of most developing countries. Activities such as yarn preparation, cloth production, embroidered cloth production and garment assembly are highly attractive because they are relatively simple and inexpensive. Women can easily combine these activities with household responsibilities and mobility restrictions during working hours (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016).

3. Historical and Global Context

Rapid industrialization and migration from rural areas to cities have increased the demand for jobs, especially among low-income women. Women, particularly those with a low educational background, mostly work in the unorganized sector and often lack social security and regular wages. In developing countries like Bangladesh, the textile industry employs a large percentage of women (Alshammari & Ibrahim Al-Tarawneh, 2016). The success of the textile sector in various countries shows how it can play a vital role in women's empowerment, ensuring a constant source of income and societal progress (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016).

3.1. Women in Textile Labor Markets

Textile and garment production in Nepal has extensively engaged women by drawing them to factories established since the 1980s (Liu, 1970). Women have now started owning and leading garment institutions. Nepal's policy frameworks emphasize gender equity in labor and trade, and the ready-made garment (RMG) sector has become a priority for foreign investment for its inherent potentials. Likewise, women's engagement in ownership, management, and entrepreneurship in Pakistan's textile and garment sectors is gathering momentum, and access to improved skills and finance is assured by programs and measures.

Women occupy 82% of the workforce in Myanmar's garment sector where they participate as employees, entrepreneurs, and business owners. The government is keen to realize the true potential of women in enhancing the country's economic progress and has prioritized the garment sector for foreign investments, which has already attracted a sizeable multinational foothold. Similar trends highlight the importance of the apparel or textile trade for women in Tunisia and Egypt. Participation of women and girls in the Lebanese garment and textile sector is considered essential for their empowerment as well as national development.

3.2. Case Studies from Diverse Regions

Case studies and analyses of women's participation in textile enterprises from Bangladesh, Armenia, South Africa, Egypt, and Lebanon illuminate the textile sector's significance in women's livelihoods, empowerment, community development, and national growth. In South Africa, the textile and garment sector provides women with opportunities to further their education, political awareness, skills, and avenues for capital generation and investment beyond work.

Economic empowerment and income security through garment and textile industries contribute directly to the reduction of poverty and the maintenance of livelihoods. In the absence of any financing scheme by the government, few weaving entrepreneurs can sustain their projects over lengthy periods. The participation of women in the garment industry in several countries and the rise of women-led enterprises reflect a changing gender environment in the world economy. Encouragement of entrepreneurship and the attainment of skills in small industries can provide women with opportunities for empowerment and national development.

3.1. Women in Textile Labor Markets

Since its inception, the textile industry has proven instrumental in women's labor market participation and empowerment across the globe. This segment compares examples from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and China with the recent Nigerian experience to highlight the role of textile entrepreneurship in promoting women's empowerment. Historic labor participation is supplemented by evidence of textile-related entrepreneurship as a vehicle for the empowerment of women and an explanation of the mechanisms by which such empowerment occurs (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016)

3.2. Case Studies from Diverse Regions

Textile entrepreneurship is a powerful tool for women empowerment that has been demonstrated across the globe. Various case studies illustrate how textile entrepreneurship supports women empowerment by generating employment and income, enhancing skills and capabilities, and increasing social and community participation.

In certain parts of El Salvador, the textile industry is a means of income for almost half of women who work. Programs that provide training to learn sewing skills have resulted in many positive changes in empowerment levels of the participants (Andrews, 2019). In Sri Lanka, the weaving industry has a significant impact on income generation and empowerment of women in the Maruthamunai region. A study in this context investigates the role of weaving on women empowerment and examines their socio-economic status. The findings indicate

improvements in economic status and growth among women weavers, though problems such as health related issues, limited opportunities, marketing difficulties, and finance persist (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016).

4. Mechanisms of Empowerment

Economic independence and income security, skill development and creative agency, along with social and community impacts, are three mechanisms through which textile entrepreneurship can empower women. Women empowered through textile entrepreneurship gain a measure of economic independence and income security. Their earnings expand their micro-enterprise activities and enable them to save and invest in productive assets. Such investments, in turn, enhance their income-earning capacity. Although textile activity fundamentally remains a necessity rather than a luxury, the added value generated through textile entrepreneurship leads to improved material well-being. Decision-making capacity, control over income, and individual self-sufficiency show marked improvements as a result of textile entrepreneurship.

Women who participate in textile entrepreneurship programs build skills related to sewing, business concepts, group participation, and working with machinery. ACCA and COPRED initiatives demonstrate that the international awareness generated through textile activity propels momentum towards broader community actions. When working towards better water supply, security of tenure, sanitation, or health, the influence of the textile programme enables women to advocate for these needs confidently and authoritatively. Growing evidence indicates that the community and social initiatives galvanised by textile activity constitute important dimensions of women's empowerment (Andrews, 2019).

Material lived conditions improve as well, enabling women to make far-reaching changes within their families and communities. Through textile entrepreneurship, women thus receive extensive training; a wide range of capability development occurs across multiple domains, many of which extend beyond strictly technical operations.

4.1. Economic Independence and Income Security

Women's entrepreneurship in textiles serves as both an avenue for economic opportunity and a vehicle for empowerment. Economic empowerment generally entails acquiring the power to control resources, make strategic life choices, and manipulate decision-making processes (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016). The crux of empowerment, however, lies not simply in autonomy but in the formal recognition of that autonomy (Monica Esiebugie et al, 2018). In the textile sector, corporate isolationism often restricts female access to capital yet, despite the lack of formal recognition in their cash management, female entrepreneurial participation in textiles empirically reinforces status, agency, and choice in life decisions, cultivating empowerment.

Women establishing self-owned textile businesses derive income security from entrepreneurial revenue. The textile sector typically guarantees cashflow from intermediaries, enhancing economic autonomy and enabling investment in trade- and education-related activities, further paving growth. The link between self-employment in textiles and income security proves corroborated in additional analyses of regions as diverse as Sri Lanka, Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, and Morocco. Females attaining self-employment post-graduation, for instance, secure greater hourly and monthly pay than their male counterparts. Women-led textiles enterprises also report increased time availability for attending pivotal economic-generating training sessions. Consequently, undertaking textile entrepreneurship concurrently cultivates confidence and augments economic opportunity.

4.2. Skill Development and Creative Agency

Acquisition of skills, knowledge, expertise, and technique goes beyond financial status and provides a solid platform for the construction of an effective labour force. It raises social awareness, improves on community development, enhances motivation, and boosts local

standards. In Nigeria, such skill acquisition programs have continuously expanded (Appolonia Osita, 2016). Textile entrepreneurship, therefore, increases women's skill development, provides creative agency, and expands opportunities to acquire technical knowledge in Nigeria.

Women entrepreneurs engaged in the textile industry acquire specific skills and techniques in textile and fashion design. According to the Statistical Research and Studies Bureau, there is a 72 % higher chance of establishing new businesses by educated women than those without western education. Women have the opportunity to combine skills in entrepreneurship with technical knowledge acquisition. Starting up their business allows them to enhance and refine their skills and advance to a higher level of creativity that encourages innovative designs. Women still encounter less favourable institutional, formal, and technological environments. They tend to focus on more intricate and precise designs that improve market attractiveness. This sector's low establishment and operational costs, combined with rapidly changing fashion trends, enhance their opportunities to accumulate experience and improve their creative skills.

4.3. Social and Community Impacts

Textile entrepreneurship contributes to women's empowerment through social and community impacts (Andrews, 2019). Women's groups involve in entrepreneurial activities foster better social standards, higher women's status, and avoidance of dowries for daughters (Hossain, 2018). In Maruthamunai, Sri Lanka, weaving empowerment initiatives improved incrementally women's living conditions and contributed to self-respect. With more vocational training opportunities and fewer men in the fishing industry, craft diversity is desired (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016).

5. Barriers and Enablers

Access to finance and resources is one of the most important factors enabling entrepreneurship for women and facilitating their participation in the global economy. The existence of financial inequality limiting access to banking and credit products restrict women's opportunities to build and develop viable enterprises. Difficulties or lack of access to land, property, household savings, and equipment such as bicycles further limit economic self-sufficiency and independent mobility. Though trust and constraints in lending to women is improving, microfinance remains very much needed in many developing countries (F. Jaiyeola & Modupe Adeyeye, 2021). Other areas of financial support, including supply and value chains, technology particularly the digital side and other supportive resources are also helpful.

Education, training, and mentorship are often insufficient for both women and men. Women in particular experience familial opposition to obtaining education or technical training. Industrial and vocational training programs held exclusively for girls and women can assist them in obtaining self-employment and options to work (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016). Workshops constituting literacy, skill development, and sexual health education can boost capabilities. Dedicated time frames for educational and entrepreneurial programs, in order to allow deep focus without dispersive play—activities, entertainment, and surrounds—helping to improve conditions and lower related risks are also very valuable.

Barriers to market access—the sales end of the entrepreneurial business process—very adversely and negatively impact women entering entrepreneurship, lowering independence, income ability, and access to the required protective empowerment. Developing reliable sales chains and channels individual, collective, and cooperative helps address these needs and expand and increase women intervention in these market processes.

5.1. Access to Finance and Resources

Lack of access to finance and resources remains one of the overriding constraints to entry and growth for women entrepreneurs in numerous regions. Women are less likely to apply for outside funding, and even when they do, they find fewer alternatives, lower amounts,

and higher rejection rates than their male counterparts. Where funds are provided, women frequently enjoy shorter maturity periods, leading to higher repayment burdens. Over and above these disparities, specific challenges—such as product market and technology gaps, personal hardships, information asymmetries, and governance weaknesses—profoundly limit women entrepreneurs' ability to leverage finance for the growth of their firms and their communities more broadly (CAROLYNE MWENDE KYALO, 2017). Community-level investments in business education, exposure to role models, initiatives for family accommodation of work commitments, and anticipation of women clients' needs in logistics, design, risk management, and marketing could further ease the impediments on the supply side (Magesa et al, 2013).

Women entrepreneurs often resort to individuals within personal or indirect networks to address these challenges. However, these contacts introduce a host of other difficulties: a desire to protect confidentiality, insecurity about a potential loss of personal resources, and fear of long-lasting negative consequences. An increased emphasis on the co-development of inclusive approaches to family and business, with special attention to the shaping of appropriate getaway solutions, appears warranted. A concerted drive to publicize existing funds could potentially recruit female participants who are well known to entrepreneurs.

5.2. Education, Training, and Mentorship

While women's cottage and micro-enterprises do not fully require formal education, entrepreneurial training, skill development, and mentoring are vital adjuncts. Access to suitable education prepares aspiring female entrepreneurs to establish, grow, and sustain their enterprises. Teaching general entrepreneurship principles can significantly impact women's firm performance, and education on specific market opportunities, the nature of entrepreneurship, and financing options is especially effective. Tailored, practical, and contextualized training improves skilled employment.

Women participating in groups ranging from cooperatives to informal music clubs have access to a wider range of skills-development initiatives than men. Educators and trainers engaged with aspiring women entrepreneurs recommend short courses on specific aspects of entrepreneurial start-up and growth for women already operating a business (Monica Esiebugie et al, 2018). Targeted training that considers industry needs, informal market opportunities, personal development, work-life balance, and family support for women-focused entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as essential (Mutembei Douglas, 2014). Such training influences both intention to start a business and the likelihood of success in informal markets.

5.3. Market Access and Value Chains

Women entrepreneurs in the textile sector encounter significant barriers to accessing markets at both domestic and international levels. Many market access constraints are common to all entrepreneurs but tend to hit women harder due to their generally more informal and less productive set-ups (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016). Gender disparities are particularly pronounced in supply chain and value chain participation. Women and men tend to focus on different activities even in the same economic sector. In textile and garment value chains, women tend to concentrate on lower-value, more labor-intensive, and time-consuming tasks. Countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan show a persistent gap between men and women in production units (Quisumbing et al, 2021). In Ethiopia, women engage mostly in lower-value activities such as weaving cloth and basketry (Gebremichael, 2010). Strategies to increase women's access to specific sub-sectors or value chain nodes must therefore consider existing gender-specific endowments, constraints, and societal norms. Access to a wider range of activities and sub-sectors is particularly important for women and is achievable through targeted support in sectors where they already have some presence and appropriate training. Women's engagement in traditional but low-value crafts may also limit their access to more rewarding activities, emphasizing the need to create opportunities in non-traditional and higher-value sectors.

6. Policy and Institutional Support

Women entrepreneurship is a key determinant of sustainable national development and economic growth. Addressing the issue of women empowerment is not merely a social concern, but an issue of massive economic significance. Well organized and strategic policies and institutions create easy access for women entrepreneurs to micro-finance, grants and credit guarantee schemes. Women-specific entrepreneurship development and localization programs constitute an effective policy tool to empower women entrepreneurs and enhance their capacity and skills. These programs help women entrepreneurs in manufacturing, textile, garment and other industries to better position their enterprises in the value chain while exploring new market areas to increase their income and generate job opportunities. (Monica Esiebugie et al., 2018) The empowerment of women through legislation and policy frameworks is considered to be crucial for the achievement of equality and a prerequisite for sustainable development by a majority of the countries worldwide. New constitutions contain similar provisions related to protection and promotion of women rights and empowerment. Legislation and policies on property rights, inheritance, employment equity, domestic violence, gender-based violence and discrimination against women are widely formulated. Institutions devoted solely to the promotion and empowerment of women operate in several countries and territories. Gender-responsive budgeting has received special focus in some countries. (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016)

6.1. Microfinance, Grants, and Credit Guarantee Schemes

Access to finance is vital for successful entrepreneurship, yet new textile enterprises face severe challenges in obtaining financing (Moinul Hasnat & of Lethbridge. Dhillon School of Business, 2019). Most of the new female textile entrepreneurs come from low-income families with insufficient saving and no assets to use as collateral. Access to bank credit often requires guarantees from wealthy individuals, which sole proprietors, especially women, usually lack. Microfinance has emerged as the primary financial source for the poorest and the women. By providing access to collateral-free credit, microfinance enables new female textile entrepreneurs to break the vicious cycle of poverty and enhance their capacity to overcome financial obstacles in starting a new business.

7. Sustainable and Inclusive Business Models

Along with providing financial security for their households, textile-related entrepreneurial activities empower women by fostering skills and creativity, allowing them to take part in fully marketing their products. Non-governmental organisations and development agencies have promoted cooperatives and collective enterprises as a means of addressing market challenges and reinforcing solidarity among entrepreneurial women. Different countries have enacted legal frameworks and measures favouring the establishment and operation of women-owned companies. At the same time, women entrepreneurs are increasingly using digital technologies, including social media and e-commerce platforms, to penetrate local, regional, and global value chains and markets (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016).

Business models built around ethical sourcing, ecological sustainability, fair pricing, and transparency are proving especially effective in gaining women access to promising international markets. Sustainable textiles appeal to a growing number of environmentally and socially conscious consumers. Growing international awareness of the complexities of textile supply chains has stimulated demand for products traceable back to women's domestic enterprises.

7.1. Ethical Sourcing and Environmental Responsibility

Globally, there is an increasing concern regarding environmental responsibility and ethical sourcing in entrepreneurial activities. The textile industry, considered to be one of the most environmentally damaging sectors, is experiencing a growing demand for eco-friendly and

ethically sourced products. Such approaches not only alleviate negative environmental impact but also challenge societal norms and practices. The concept of ‘zero waste’, for instance, has emerged as a strategic and artistic solution to declining resources worldwide, encouraging local creativity and biodiversity, while actively addressing environmentally harmful practices within textiles and fashion (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016).

8. Measurement and Evaluation

Women’s empowerment through textile entrepreneurship can be assessed using empowerment indicators designed to measure “decision-making and mobility, access to and control over economic resources, and assets and participation in economic activities”, which can be linked to women’s access to capital and markets, labor force participation, and other empowerment scales (Hossain, 2018). A minimum set of empowerment dimensions decision-making, access to resources, freedom of movement, and awareness of rights yield minimum foundational capabilities related to women’s wellbeing (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016). Assessing entrepreneurship outcomes requires multisectoral information on economic participation, educational attainment, unpaid domestic work, and ownership of durable goods (Andrews, 2019). Surveys must take into account social norms, household arrangements, and cultural practices influencing women’s entrepreneurship within a particular region, these constraints may vary among different ethnic, caste, or income groups; and women’s exposure to violence or access to networks foster or diminish entrepreneurship opportunities.

Impact evaluations measure the causal effect of an intervention on individuals or groups—with a counterfactual, or control, group for comparison—and estimate the strength and uncertainty of the result. Randomized control trials, which compare treated and untreated groups, satisfy these criteria but are difficult in practice. If a sufficient number of pre-set economic, social, or psychological empowerment indicators are specified, the treatment and control groups can be constructed through matching.

8.1. Indicators of Empowerment

Empowerment is a multidimensional concept that reflects a person’s agency, authority, and autonomy in economic, social, and political spheres. Its components vary across context and culture; as a result, numerous frameworks and indicators exist to capture indicators of empowerment (Hossain, 2018). Selected indicators to explore the empowerment potential of textile entrepreneurship for women are therefore informed by specific published insight into the experiences of female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016).

These studies identify feasible indicators—economic independence, authority over family resources, improved living standard, freedom from harassment, and control over business opportunities—that capture empowerment dimensions. The first two indicators correspond to agency in the economic domain; the second two indicators capture authority and agency in the social domain; whereas the final indicator captures authority in the business domain. The experience of women involved in textile entrepreneurship in both contexts aligns closely with these indicators and suggests their relevance to measuring empowerment through textile entrepreneurship on a broader scale across countries with similar cultural constraints such as but not limited Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

8.2. Methodologies for Impact Assessment

Textile entrepreneurship fosters empowerment through self-employment, job creation for others, and promotion of training or educational activities. Subject’s empowerment is conventionally assessed through the impact of decisions involving the subject’s person, for example, through holding various state offices or making important decisions regarding children; through participation in clubs or attendance at meetings and conferences organized by NGOs, or interaction with government agencies concerning vital economic issues; and encompassed in empowerment indicators, including job creation for others and enhancement

of educational attainment in the household (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016).

9. Policy Implications and Recommendations

A focus on textile entrepreneurship can enhance women's empowerment in the Global South (Monica Esiebugie et al, 2018) , (F. Safna & Nufile, 2016). The following measures maximize the sector's empowerment potential:

1. Access to finance is essential, especially at the start-up stage and for expanding existing micro- and small enterprises. Microfinance, grants, and credit guarantee schemes increase outreach by providing targeted support while minimizing default risk.
2. Specialization of entrepreneurship and business development training programs fosters expertise and capability enhancement. Program customization to local conditions assures relevance and effectiveness.
3. Support for value chains at the local, national, or regional level increases access to markets and enhances competitiveness. Mapping existing resources and the location of buyers strengthens situational knowledge, while involvement in cooperatives widens options and opportunities.
4. Measures that address specific problems facing female entrepreneurs such as gender-based violence enhance overall empowerment. Institutions and stakeholders shape and disseminate knowledge across the value chain by engaging in networking.
5. Expanding cooperation among influential global networks augments competitiveness. Mapping them beforehand allows prioritization of participation.
6. Knowledge from rural women's entrepreneurship programs distills accessible take-away conclusions applicable in non-industrialized settings.

10. Conclusion

Women entrepreneurship is increasingly accepted as a key vector of women empowerment in society, enabling women to take control of their lives and providing them with the means to seek progress and improvement through economic independence and income stability. Women entrepreneurs are capable of acquiring resources, organizing, and managing different types of businesses ranging from small-scale cottage industries in rural areas to medium-scale operations in towns and big cities. A number of theoretical measures, economic changes, expansion of cotton cultivation, and government policies determine the entrepreneurship behavior of women in general, enabling them to sustain and grow in this venture, considering a number of external and internal factors. One important sector that has singularly set the stage for women entrepreneurship is the textile industry. Women weavers gain empowerment through income, employment, improved living standards, and reduction of poverty. They also develop social respect, self-confidence, and self-respect from their work in the handloom sector. This empowerment model is observable in different regions of the world, as demonstrated by the global overview presented, which discusses the status of women in the textile industry and empowerment through textile entrepreneurship in Africa, the Middle East, and India.

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