

Women Entrepreneurs: Shaping a Sustainable Future

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Abstract—Sustainability involves maintaining a delicate balance between environmental preservation, social equity, and economic viability to ensure long-term well-being across generations. In the context of business, sustainability encompasses the use of eco-friendly materials, efficient supply chains, adoption of renewable energy sources, and investment in educational development.

Entrepreneurship is the process of recognizing opportunities, mobilizing resources, and taking calculated risks to transform innovative ideas into viable ventures. It plays a critical role in driving economic development, fostering innovation, and reshaping industries.

This study explores the evolution of women's entrepreneurship, examining key motivational drivers such as internal ambition, self-confidence, managerial capabilities, socio-cultural influences, and both push and pull factors. It delves into the challenges women entrepreneurs commonly face—including gender bias, restricted access to funding and professional networks, work-life balance issues, and a lack of visible role models.

Despite these barriers, women entrepreneurs often find ways to succeed by leveraging flexibility, embracing diversity, joining supportive networks and initiatives, and ultimately becoming role models for others. The research also reviews existing literature on the traits, achievements, and hurdles of women entrepreneurs, particularly in developing economies.

Further, the study explores the sustainable business intentions of rural women entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial journeys of refugee women, highlighting how these groups navigate their unique challenges.

Additionally, the research outlines Indian government initiatives that support women entrepreneurs, especially in sectors such as agriculture, food processing, and microfinance. It also captures the perspectives of today's youth regarding women in entrepreneurship.

Finally, the paper discusses the future prospects for women entrepreneurs, emphasizing the role of investment, digital technologies, collaborative networks, training programs, government support, innovation, and a continued focus on work-life balance, diversity, and social impact.

"To be liberated, a woman must feel free to be herself, not in rivalry to man but in the context of her own capacity and her personality."

— Indira Gandhi

To achieve sustainability, it is essential to fulfil present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. Sustainability encompasses multiple dimensions—environmental protection, social equity, and economic stability. In particular, economic sustainability emphasizes achieving long-term profitability while considering the broader social and ecological impacts. Overall, sustainability represents a comprehensive development approach that seeks to harmonize ecological balance, social inclusion, and economic resilience to ensure lasting well-being across generations.

In the context of business, sustainability entails implementing environmentally responsible practices such as using renewable energy sources, reducing greenhouse gas emissions through efficient supply chain management, utilizing sustainable materials in production, and promoting educational initiatives. These practices not only reduce ecological impact but also contribute to the long-term success and ethical responsibility of enterprises.

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic and evolving process that involves the creation, management, and expansion of business ventures. At its foundation, it requires the ability to identify opportunities, gather resources, and take strategic risks to transform innovative ideas into tangible outcomes. Entrepreneurs are recognized for their vision, adaptability, and resilience—traits that enable them to overcome challenges and lead change in a competitive marketplace.

Whether launching new ventures or revitalizing existing businesses, entrepreneurs play a vital role in driving innovation, shaping industries, and accelerating economic development. Their journeys are marked by on-going learning, strategic problem-solving, and a readiness to face uncertainty—elements that contribute significantly to the vitality and evolution of the business ecosystem.

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the global rise of entrepreneurial activity, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically focused on women entrepreneurs, particularly in developing economies. Women's participation in entrepreneurship remains underrepresented and underexplored, highlighting the need for deeper inquiry into their experiences, motivations, challenges, and contributions—especially within the context of sustainable development.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

These previous studies on the woman entrepreneurs are listed below:

- Dina Modestus Nziku and Chanel Bikorimana (2023) explored the entrepreneurial experiences of internally displaced refugee women in Glasgow, Scotland. The study focuses on minority women who, despite being forcibly displaced, actively engage in entrepreneurial ventures. It highlights their ability to dynamically identify, discover, recognize, and capitalize on business opportunities. However, the research also reveals that these women face significant institutional and regulatory barriers imposed by local councils, the Scottish Government, and the UK Government, which hinder the growth and development of their enterprises.
- Sharma and Agarwal (2022) explored the sustainability orientation of women entrepreneurs and found that many women-led businesses prioritize social equity, environmental responsibility, and ethical practices. These businesses, particularly in sectors like organic farming, textiles, and crafts, often aim to uplift communities while minimizing ecological impact.
- Kumari and Mishra (2021) studied women entrepreneurs in rural India who run eco-friendly ventures such as solar product distribution, biodegradable packaging, and sustainable fashion. Their findings indicate that women in rural areas are increasingly aligning their business practices with environmentally conscious goals, often with support from NGOs and government schemes.
- According to Martínez Dy et al. (2021), women-owned enterprises tend to integrate

social and environmental objectives into their core strategies more often than male-owned businesses. These ventures often focus on community welfare, ethical production, and resource efficiency—key components of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

III. RESEARCH GAP

While extensive research exists on entrepreneurship and sustainability as individual domains, the intersection of women entrepreneurship and sustainable development, particularly in the Indian context, remains relatively underexplored. Several studies highlight the growing contribution of women entrepreneurs to economic development; however, fewer focus on their unique role in driving sustainable business practices and social impact.

Most existing literature primarily discusses the barriers women face—such as access to finance, societal norms, and limited education—but often fails to examine how these women integrate sustainability into their business models or the long-term community and environmental impact of their enterprises.

Moreover, while global studies (e.g., refugee women, social entrepreneurship in developed nations) are emerging, empirical research on rural, tribal, and low-income women entrepreneurs in India remains limited. There is a lack of comprehensive data on how these women balance economic goals with ecological and social responsibility, especially in the post-pandemic era marked by digital transformation and climate urgency.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the historical progression and transformation of women's roles in the entrepreneurial landscape.
- To analyse the various internal and external factors that influence women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.
- To assess the key opportunities available to women entrepreneurs in India, as well as the challenges they encounter in different sectors.
- To investigate the emerging trends and future potential of women-led enterprises in contributing to sustainable development.

V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limited Geographical Scope: The research primarily focuses on women entrepreneurs within the Indian context. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other cultural or economic environments.

Sample Constraints: Due to time and resource limitations, the study may include a relatively small or non-random sample of participants, which could affect the overall representation and robustness of the findings.

Availability of Data: Secondary data and literature on the specific intersection of women entrepreneurship and sustainability in rural and underdeveloped regions of India are limited, which may restrict the depth of analysis in certain areas.

Subjectivity in Perception-Based Responses: Data collected from surveys or interviews may reflect personal biases, perceptions, or experiences, which can introduce a level of subjectivity into the findings.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

□ Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design to understand the evolution, challenges, and sustainable impact of women entrepreneurs, particularly in the Indian context. The aim is to gather both qualitative and quantitative insights into the entrepreneurial ecosystem shaped by women and its alignment with sustainable development goals (SDGs).

□ Secondary Data

Secondary data will be gathered from:

- Research journals, government reports (e.g., MSME annual reports), NITI Aayog publications
- Articles from reputed databases and organizations (e.g., UN Women, World Bank)
- Existing literature and previous studies on women entrepreneurship and sustainability

□ Data Analysis

- Quantitative data (from surveys) will be analysed using statistical tools such as percentages, averages, and graphical representations (bar graphs, pie charts).
- Qualitative data (from interviews and FGDs) will be analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and sustainable strategies employed by women entrepreneurs.

Government Schemes for Women Entrepreneurs: Shaping a Sustainable Future

Recognizing the importance of empowering women in driving inclusive and sustainable growth, the Indian government has introduced a wide range of schemes and programs to support women entrepreneurs. These initiatives not only enhance women's participation in the economy but also encourage eco-friendly, innovative, and community-focused businesses. Below are some key schemes:

□ Stand-Up India Scheme

Launched in 2016, this scheme facilitates bank loans between ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore to women and SC/ST entrepreneurs to set up greenfield enterprises. The scheme encourages first-time women business owners to venture into manufacturing, services, and trading sectors.

□ Mudra Yojana (PMMY)

Under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, women entrepreneurs can avail micro-financing support through Shishu, Kishor, and Tarun loans. Many women have used this scheme to start small-scale sustainable businesses such as organic farming, textile weaving, or eco-craft production.

□ Mahila Coir Yojana

This scheme provides training and financial assistance to rural women for establishing coir-based units. It promotes self-employment and sustainable livelihoods using coir, a natural and biodegradable fibre, thereby supporting environmental sustainability.

□ Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD)

Implemented by the Ministry of MSME, TREAD aims to provide credit, training, and information to economically disadvantaged women. It promotes group-based entrepreneurship and includes NGOs to assist with skill development and enterprise setup.

□ Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)

An initiative by NITI Aayog, the WEP is a digital platform that offers a support ecosystem for women entrepreneurs. It connects them with funding, mentorship, and knowledge resources, helping them adopt sustainable technologies and scale their businesses.

□ Annapurna Scheme

This scheme provides loans to women to set up food catering businesses. It supports women-led ventures in the food industry, promoting hygiene, nutrition, and local sourcing—elements critical to sustainable practices.

VII. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- Increasing Participation of Women in Entrepreneurship
 - There has been a noticeable increase in the number of women-led enterprises in India, particularly in sectors such as textiles, food processing, handicrafts, education, and e-commerce.
 - Government schemes, digital access, and educational awareness have contributed to this upward trend.
- Role in Sustainable Development
 - Women entrepreneurs are increasingly aligning their business models with sustainability goals by promoting eco-friendly products, ethical sourcing, local employment, and community development.
 - Many women-led start-ups are operating in sectors such as organic farming, sustainable fashion, and clean energy, thereby directly contributing to SDGs.
- Influencing Factors
 - Key factors influencing women to pursue entrepreneurship include self-motivation, financial independence, and family support, access to education, and inspiration from role models.
 - Urban women cite digital platforms and skill-based training as enablers, while rural women depend more on local NGOs and self-help groups.
- Major Challenges
 - Women continue to face obstacles such as:
 - Limited access to capital and credit facilities
 - Balancing family responsibilities with business demands
 - Societal and cultural restrictions in conservative regions
 - Lack of mentorship and networking opportunities
 - Rural women face additional issues such as lack of digital literacy and market access.
- Youth Perspectives
 - A majority of youth respondents view women entrepreneurs positively, recognizing their resilience, creativity, and leadership potential.
 - However, there is still a gender bias in perception when it comes to leadership in

male-dominated industries like technology and finance.

- Awareness of Government Schemes
 - While several schemes exist to support women entrepreneurs, awareness about these schemes remains low among rural women and first-time entrepreneurs.
 - Those who have accessed support (e.g., MUDRA loans, Stand-Up India) report positive outcomes but face bureaucratic delays and lack of follow-up services.

VIII. CONCLUSION

- Women entrepreneurs play a crucial role in shaping a sustainable future by contributing not only to economic development but also to social inclusion and environmental responsibility. Their growing involvement in diverse sectors demonstrates a shift toward more inclusive and resilient economies. Despite facing several challenges, including limited access to finance, social norms, and lack of awareness about support schemes, women are increasingly breaking barriers and redefining the entrepreneurial landscape.
- The integration of sustainability into women-led enterprises—whether through ethical production, community development, or eco-friendly practices—further amplifies their impact. Moreover, the enthusiasm of youth and their changing mind-set toward gender equality in business signals a positive trend for the future.