

Women-Led MSMEs as Catalysts for Advancing The 17 Sustainable Development Goals: A Multi-Sectoral Framework

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Abstract—Women-led Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are increasingly recognized as critical drivers of inclusive and sustainable development, particularly in emerging economies. These enterprises contribute not only to economic growth but also to social empowerment and environmental sustainability, aligning closely with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, despite their growing presence, their full potential remains underutilized due to structural constraints.

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach to examine how women-led MSMEs catalyze progress toward the SDGs within a multi-sectoral framework. The analysis shows that these enterprises significantly contribute to poverty reduction, gender equality, job creation, and sustainable production. The study further highlights the central role of partnerships (SDG 17) in strengthening MSME ecosystems. However, barriers such as limited access to finance, digital exclusion, and socio-cultural constraints constrain their scalability. The study concludes with policy recommendations to enhance the role of women-led MSMEs in advancing sustainable development, particularly in India.

Index Terms—Women Entrepreneurship; MSMEs; Sustainable Development Goals; Inclusive Growth; Gender Equality; Sustainability.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Empowered women entrepreneurs do not just create businesses—they shape sustainable societies.”

The adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marked a significant shift toward integrated and inclusive development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize

the need for economic growth that is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable. MSMEs play a crucial role in this process due to their widespread presence and adaptability. Within this sector, women-led MSMEs represent a rapidly growing segment that contributes to employment generation, poverty reduction, and social transformation.

Women entrepreneurs often adopt business models that integrate community development, ethical production, and sustainability practices. As a result, their enterprises align naturally with multiple SDGs. Despite this, their contributions remain fragmented and insufficiently recognized in policy frameworks. This study develops a multi-sectoral framework to understand how women-led MSMEs act as catalysts in achieving the SDGs.

II. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on analyzing women-led MSMEs across sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, digital enterprises, and social enterprises. It emphasizes their contribution to sustainable development through SDG mapping and conceptual analysis.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women-led MSMEs possess significant potential to contribute to sustainable development; however, this potential remains underutilized due to structural barriers. Limited access to finance, low digital literacy, and socio-cultural constraints hinder their growth and scalability.

Additionally, the absence of a structured framework linking MSME activities to SDGs results in fragmented policy approaches. This creates a gap between their potential contribution and actual impact, necessitating a comprehensive analytical framework.

IV. OBJECTIVES

- To examine the role of women-led MSMEs in achieving sustainable development outcomes
- To analyse the linkage between MSME activities and the 17 SDGs
- To develop a multi-sectoral framework connecting women entrepreneurship with SDG achievement

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Area Of The Study

The study focuses on India, with reference to women-led Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) operating across multiple sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, digital enterprises, and social entrepreneurship.

Source Of Data

Secondary Data

The study is entirely based on secondary data collected from various sources such as academic journals, books, government reports, policy documents, international organization publications, and credible websites related to MSMEs, women entrepreneurship, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the role of women-led MSMEs in achieving sustainable development outcomes.

VI. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The collected data are analysed systematically and presented in a structured manner to interpret the results effectively.

- Thematic Analysis
- Conceptual Analysis
- SDG Mapping Approach
- Case Study Analysis

VII. TOOLS USED FOR ANALYSIS

The study utilizes qualitative analytical tools to examine patterns, relationships, and linkages between MSME activities and SDGs.

VIII. LIMITATIONS

- The study is based entirely on secondary data
- The findings depend on the availability and reliability of existing data sources.

IX. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Brush (2006)¹ examined women entrepreneurship and highlighted structural challenges such as limited access to finance, networks, and institutional support, emphasizing that empowering women-led enterprises can significantly enhance economic participation and inclusive growth outcomes.
- Minniti (2010)² analysed gender differences in entrepreneurial activity and found that socio-cultural norms and economic conditions strongly influence women's participation, stressing the importance of policy interventions to promote gender-inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems.
- United Nations (2015–2023)³ emphasized the role of MSMEs in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting that inclusive and women-led enterprises contribute directly to poverty reduction, gender equality, and sustainable economic development.
- Chatterjee et al. (2021)⁴ investigated the role of digital capabilities in SME performance, demonstrating that technology adoption enhances innovation, market reach, and operational efficiency, which are crucial for scaling women-led MSMEs in modern markets.
- Adhav, Gaikwad & Bapat (2023)⁵ analysed MSME performance and highlighted that strategic capabilities, skill levels, and adaptability influence enterprise growth, emphasizing the importance of structured support systems for women entrepreneurs.

X. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis

- Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns and key themes from the secondary data collected through journals, reports, and policy documents. The study categorises the data into major themes such as economic contribution, social empowerment, environmental sustainability, and institutional support.
- The analysis reveals that women-led MSMEs consistently contribute to poverty reduction (SDG 1), employment generation (SDG 8), and gender equality (SDG 5). At the same time, themes related to financial constraints, digital exclusion, and socio-cultural barriers emerge as critical challenges limiting their scalability. This thematic categorization helps in understanding both the contributions and constraints of women-led MSMEs in achieving SDGs.

Conceptual Analysis

- Conceptual analysis is applied to develop a structured understanding of the relationship between women entrepreneurship, MSME activities, and sustainable development outcomes. The study constructs a conceptual framework that links inputs (skills, education, social capital) with enterprise activities and SDG outcomes.
- This analysis highlights that women-led MSMEs function as multi-dimensional development agents, integrating economic, social, and environmental objectives. It also establishes that SDG 17 (Partnerships) acts as a central connecting mechanism that enhances the effectiveness of MSME contributions. The conceptual model provides a theoretical foundation for interpreting the role of MSMEs in sustainable development.

SDG Mapping Approach

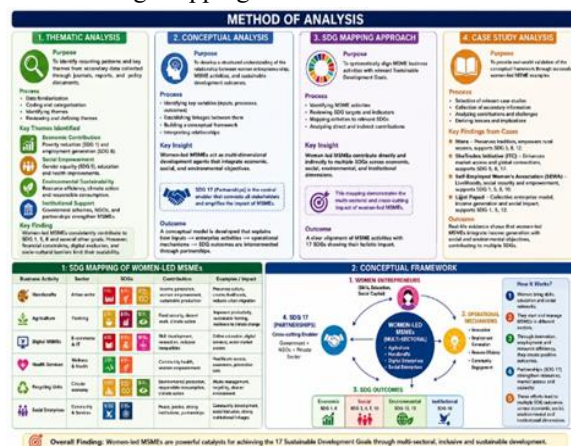
- The SDG mapping approach is used to systematically align different MSME business activities with relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Based on secondary data, activities such as agriculture, handicrafts, digital enterprises, and recycling units are mapped to specific SDGs.

- For instance, agricultural MSMEs contribute to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), while handicraft enterprises align with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption). This mapping helps in identifying the direct and indirect contributions of women-led MSMEs across multiple SDGs, demonstrating their multi-sectoral impact.

Case Study Analysis

- Case study analysis is used to provide real-world validation of the conceptual framework. Selected cases such as Ittara, She Trades Initiative by International Trade Centre, Self-Employed Women's Association, and Lijjat Papad are analyzed.
- The findings from these cases show that women-led enterprises successfully integrate income generation with social and environmental objectives, thereby contributing to multiple SDGs. These cases also highlight the importance of institutional support, market access, and partnerships in scaling MSME impact.

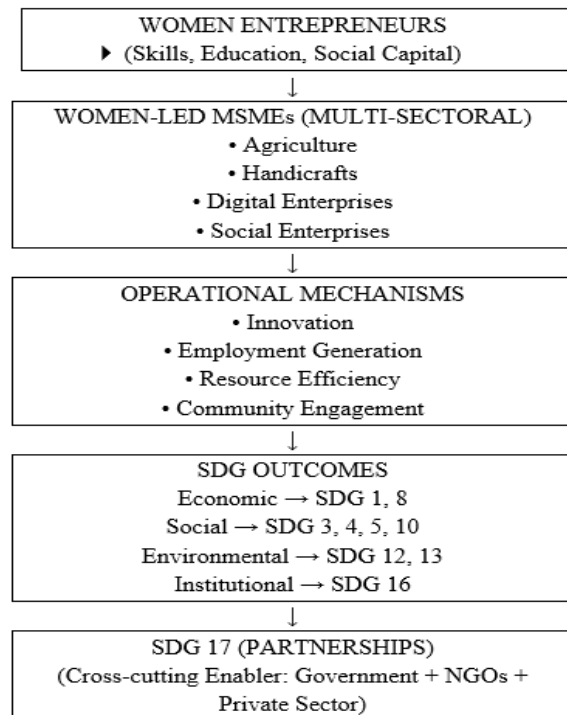
1: Sdg Mapping Of Women-Led Msme



Business Activity	Sector	SDGs	Contribution
Handicrafts	Artisan sector	SDG 1, 5, 12	Income + sustainability
Agriculture	Farming	SDG 2, 8, 13	Food security + climate action

Digital MSMEs	E-commerce	SDG 4, 9, 10	Innovation + inclusion
Health services	Wellness	SDG 3, 5	Community health
Recycling units	Circular economy	SDG 11, 12, 13	Environmental protection
Social enterprises	Community	SDG 16, 17	Institutional strength

2: Conceptual Framework



XI. FINDINGS

- The study reveals that women-led MSMEs function as “micro-engines of sustainability,” where entrepreneurial activity extends beyond profit generation into social transformation, local resilience, and community-centered development.
- Women entrepreneurs demonstrate a multidimensional contribution toward the Sustainable Development Goals by simultaneously addressing economic participation, employment creation, social equity, and sustainable production practices within localized business ecosystems.
- The analysis identifies that women-led enterprises possess a “ripple-effect impact,” where small-

scale entrepreneurial activities indirectly stimulate broader outcomes such as financial independence, educational support, household stability, and regional economic circulation.

- Digitally enabled women-led MSMEs exhibit stronger adaptability, innovation capacity, and market responsiveness, indicating that technological integration significantly enhances sustainable business scalability.
- The findings further indicate that women entrepreneurship acts as an “invisible infrastructure of development,” particularly in sectors where formal institutional support remains limited but community dependence remains high.
- Despite their developmental significance, women-led MSMEs continue to encounter structural friction in the form of limited access to finance, digital inequality, market invisibility, and socio-cultural constraints, restricting their long-term expansion and sustainability.
- The study establishes that women-led MSMEs should not be viewed merely as economic entities, but as decentralized sustainability actors capable of accelerating inclusive and balanced development across multiple SDG dimensions.

XII. SUGGESTIONS

Future policy frameworks should move beyond conventional financial assistance models and develop sustainability-oriented entrepreneurial ecosystems that integrate funding, mentorship, digital enablement, and market connectivity for women-led MSMEs. Governments and development institutions need to establish AI-enabled and digital-first support platforms that simplify financial access, business training, and SDG-oriented enterprise monitoring for women entrepreneurs. MSME development initiatives should also encourage community innovation clusters where women entrepreneurs can collaboratively share resources, digital infrastructure, and sustainable business practices. In addition, educational institutions and incubation centers should actively promote sustainability-driven entrepreneurship through experiential learning, green innovation programs, and digital business acceleration initiatives. Greater emphasis must be placed on enhancing the visibility of women-led enterprises through digital branding, e-

commerce integration, and international networking opportunities. Furthermore, collaborations among governments, NGOs, fintech firms, and private organizations should focus on reducing the opportunity gap that restricts women entrepreneurs' growth potential. Overall, future development strategies should recognize women-led MSMEs not merely as contributors to GDP, but as strategic drivers of social resilience, sustainability transition, and inclusive economic architecture.

XIII. CONCLUSION

“When women-led enterprises grow, sustainability moves from policy to reality”

The study concludes that women-led MSMEs represent far more than small-scale business units; they operate as dynamic sustainability ecosystems capable of transforming economic growth into inclusive societal progress. Their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals is not confined to individual targets but extends across interconnected dimensions of employment, innovation, gender inclusion, responsible production, and community development. The research highlights that women entrepreneurship creates a “multiplier effect of sustainability,” where localized business activities generate broader developmental outcomes beyond conventional economic indicators. However, structural barriers such as financial exclusion, digital inequality, and institutional limitations continue to restrict the transformative capacity of women-led enterprises.

The proposed multi-sectoral framework demonstrates that empowering women entrepreneurs is not simply a developmental intervention, but a strategic investment in resilient and future-oriented economies. Strengthening women-led MSMEs can accelerate sustainable transformation by converting entrepreneurial participation into long-term social, economic, and environmental progress.

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