

# Eco-friendly Women Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas: A Paradigm Shift for Societal Uplift

Dr. AFAQ AHMAD

Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Lovely Professional University,  
Punjab-144 411, India.

## ABSTRACT

Today, the discourse of entrepreneurship seems to have changed with the inception of eco-friendly women entrepreneurship in rural areas which proved as a panacea for societal development. In a patriarchal society, a man still remains doubtful about women's ability to be a good entrepreneur in spite of the fact that women appear to be more psychologically flexible and have a diplomatic administrative way of working. Village women are often equipped with artisan skills, albeit they struggle to become economically self-reliant. Multitasking is another virtue of women as they can execute various tasks at the same time; thus, women seem to be more productive than men. This paper is intended to provide an understanding of the paradigm shift in rural areas of the country in terms of theoretical amalgamation of the conventionally accepted capitalist, corporate or business-oriented entrepreneurship and eco-friendly women entrepreneurship where women entrepreneurs leave indelible marks for societal development in agrarian sectors and so forth. Entrepreneurship is a key element through which rural economic development can be achieved. The paper tried to reveal the impact of eco-friendly women entrepreneurship on rural areas for the alleviation of penury of the villagers, especially in agriculture sectors and domestic affairs, with the attempt to address the issues related to farmers, workers, daily wagers, etc.

**Keywords:** Eco-friendly Entrepreneurship, Rural Development, Women Entrepreneurs, Sustainability, Agrarian Sector, Farmers.

## 1. Introduction

Entrepreneur is an inordinately appreciated word in the developed countries. It arouses the meaning of active, spirited, and steadfast men and women consummating broad and comprehensive tasks. Entrepreneur means any individual or group who start a business, company or firm. Entrepreneurship has been familiarised in the country during 1980s as soon as management commenced to be treated with professionalism throughout the year 1970s.

Entrepreneurs discharge a prominent role in financial development of the country. They have been considered as liaison officers and reconnoitre required to 'muster capital, to explore natural resources, to manoeuvre market-driven merchandising' and so forth.

The entrepreneurial input spells the contrast between affluence and penury, development and degradation among countries. Entrepreneurs are predominantly try to promote new methods of production and utilize new sources of information/statistics for the benefit and betterment of an enterprise. Entrepreneurs not only try to gain profits to a specific business or enterprise but also develop creative temperament. Thus,

reorganization or rearrangement is a key attribute of an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur may gain perfection when he/she fully enjoys profitable opportunities and successfully exploits them. A good entrepreneur also introduces innovative ideas to the needs and expectations of the society so that individuals can achieve higher goals and conquer achievements which ultimately transforms the economic thinking of the society. In a nutshell, entrepreneurship is neither a profession nor a lasting occupation and it is not likely to formulate a social class viz. capitalists, financiers, investors, wage earners, etc.

Entrepreneurship is an essential input to industrial progress as entrepreneurial skills and productivity appears to be fruitful for the development of an enterprise. Entrepreneurs are those who pioneer, collocate, systemize, supervise, and administer the affairs of a business or enterprise and who restrict the components of production with supply of goods and services. Entrepreneurship incorporates taking risks and synchronizing the factors of production towards profitability in an undetermined territory and environment. In fact, entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial assets distinguish the success or failure of an enterprise.

The development of virtuous and equitable entrepreneurship is one of the most crying and serious problems encountered in a developing country like India. The scarcity of good and talented entrepreneurs obstructs economic development of the country. The government needs to initiate programmes which can impart all sorts of technical, managerial, and other related training to potential entrepreneurs so that they can discharge their duties confidently, competently and manage the units scientifically.

Women entrepreneurs need equal importance to engage in prospective entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs have been controlling and managing multiple enterprises these days. They have successfully surpassed the hurdles and obstacles to proceed for achieving sustainable development goals through women entrepreneurship and are reconnoitring new ventures for profit-making. In a nutshell, those women who take initiative to create, manufacture, develop or adopt a business activity may deem fit to be called women entrepreneurs.

Women entrepreneur can be defined as an enterprise owned and controlled by a woman having a minimum financial interest of 51 percent of the capital and at least 51 percent of the employment generated in the enterprise to women. "Women entrepreneurship" means a manoeuvre of business proprietorship and business inception that empowers women and financially expands their productivity or remuneration as well as position in society. Women entrepreneurs have been making a significant influence in almost all the segments of the economy in the country.

With the arrival of liberalization, globalization, privatization pioneered by the government of India since mid-1991, the economy of the country is witnessing a meaningful and epoch-making metamorphosis. Women entrepreneurship has procured impetus in the last three decades with the inflation in number of women enterprises and their contribution to economic growth of the country. Now, women entrepreneurs are playing a prominent role for the economic development and societal advancement of the country.

APJ Abdul Kalam once said that "Empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their value systems lead to development of good family, good society and ultimately good nation." Emergence of women entrepreneurs largely depends on changing social, psychological, economic, cultural

dimensions which ultimately supplicate a positive effect in the financial growth of a developing country like India. Tackling and problem-solving gestures, willingness to take risks, ability to motivate people, and knowing how to win and lose gracefully are the key features of a good women entrepreneurs. Those educated women who have these qualities cannot limit their lives in four walls of the house have become important players in their entrepreneurial landscape which shows that women are no longer adhering to the stereotype that only men can be the bread winners and wage earners in the family. Even house wives of the villages are touching success through their own businesses despite prevalent male chauvinism in country's villages (Gurnani, 2011).

The suitable use of information and communication technology (ICT) can shepherd to enhance knowledge and efficiency imperative for long-term economic empowerment and sustainable development. Gender discrimination should be avoided in policies and programmes dealing with rural development. Traditionally, agriculture activities in the country stiffly depended on family labours and women played a key role in farming and improving the quality of life in rural areas. Women continue to contribute greatly to household income through farm and non-farm activities as well as through work as landless agricultural labourers. In addition, rural-to-urban drift is leaving behind less privilege groups, particularly the women in communities, resulting in the "feminization of farming. Therefore, to adapt with the competitiveness in the global economy, farmers, especially women, need to embrace new methods like invariability, and non-farm production and ameliorate marketing mechanisms.

In many studies from literature, clearly note the contribution of small-scale green or organic farming in terms of alleviating poverty. In addition to generating income, organic farming had the possibility to preserve resources, variegate their crops, enable food security and purify environmental conditions. Cooperative establishments can help expedite the process of development and participation of women in their organizational and business activities. Moreover, existing literature on women entrepreneurship reveals that, women's commitment and participation in cooperative organizations and other local government bodies not only provides them an opportunity to persuade and communicate their problems but also helps them to be a dynamic partner in the decision-making process. It has also come to notice that women through cooperatives (e.g. cooperative banks, consumer stores, fruit and vegetable vendors) have done exceedingly well and provided a whole range of services to their members. Rural women cooperatives are, in most cases, working in isolation within a market that is confined to their local area. Their limitation in promoting sales of products has often been exploited by middlemen. E-business applications have great potential for such enterprises to sell their products to local as well as global market (Sanyang and Huang, 2008).

## 2. Objectives of the study

- To study the role of women entrepreneurs for rural development
- To examine the economic empowerment of rural women through building capacity to entrepreneurship skills in order to enable them to produce and market their green products across the country
- To inspect prevailing challenges and opportunities of the eco-friendly women entrepreneurship in rural areas

- To identify the eco-friendly enterprises led by women entrepreneurship for societal uplift of the country
- To make an evaluation of the impact of women entrepreneurship in economic empowerment of the country

### 3. Research methodology

The focal point of the study is primarily based upon women entrepreneurship in rural areas and to conduct the study, the secondary data assembled from different books, journals, census surveys, newspapers, and publications from multiple websites. The researcher also examined a couple of comprehensive studies concentrating on women's role in entrepreneurship and pioneering the development of green products market through the creation of cooperative enterprises. This paper is based on the qualitative study of the available literature of all relevant materials including research studies, articles, case studies, surveys, and reports published by the newspapers, journals, international organizations and academia related to gender, women's entrepreneurship, cooperatives, and organic agriculture.

Further, SWOT Analysis technique (Singh, 2014) was also adopted to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats pertaining to business competition and performance of women entrepreneurs in the rural development of the country.

*Strengths:* Women entrepreneur can be categorized as a self-confident, self-reliant, optimistic, assertive, experimental, poised and creative women competent of achieving self-economic sovereignty independently or in collaboration, generate employment opportunities for others through beginning, establishing, and running the enterprise by keeping pace with her personal, family, and social life. Women prefer to work from their own residence and complications in gaining befitting and lucrative jobs and aspirations for social identification encourage them to embrace self-employment.

*Weaknesses:* Absence of proper support, cooperation, and back-up for women by their own family members and the outside world people force them to drop the idea of excelling in the enterprise field. Women's family commitment also prohibits them from becoming successful entrepreneurs in both developed and developing nations. The greatest disincentive and discouragement to women entrepreneurs is that they are women.

*Opportunities:* Having value-loaded inputs inside them, women instil entrepreneurial values in their fellow companions and essentially involve in business merchandising. Business opportunities that are redundant to be exploited for women entrepreneurs are eco-friendly technology, bio-technology, IT enabled enterprises, event management, tourist industry, telecommunication, plastic materials, mineral water, herbal and health care, food, fruits and vegetables processing. Women entrepreneurs avail new opportunities in the rural areas, for example, ice cream, *papads* and pickles and readymade garments.

*Threats:* Disquietude of growth and lack of access to technology fills threat in the minds of women entrepreneurs to trample the field of enterprise. Lack of self-confidence, will power, strong mental attitude and optimistic behaviour amongst women creates a fear from committing mistakes while doing their piece of work. Gender discrimination and non-cooperation of male colleagues also instil fear in women to initiate such tasks. Moreover, Insecure and poor infrastructure and dealing with male labourers is also one of the

impediments women possess while working in these grey areas. Lastly, Indian women give emphasis to family ties and relationships rather than working and collaborating with their male counterparts in the outside world.

#### **4. Eco-friendly women entrepreneurship in rural areas: A paradigm shift for societal uplift**

**4.1 Eco-friendly women entrepreneurship for rural development of the country:** Women's agricultural cooperatives have played a prominent role in rural development in mobilizing limited resources for women farmers and regisseurs. The traditional cooperatives primarily hold governing structures not conducive to free and fair participation of women as they are predominantly governed by male-dominated structure. For rural development, it is important to promote women's participation in cooperative eco-friendly entrepreneurship. In agricultural activities, a prospective alternative is available offering guarantees for rural women to form their own cooperatives. While efforts are on to improve women's status within existing cooperative institutions, the establishment of women-led or women member cooperatives constitutes strong potential for sustainability promoting women's entrepreneurship in the agrarian sector. Cooperatives also offers the opportunity for women to exercise decision making power. Cooperative enterprises can take on different forms. They can be set up by a group of enterprises or by individual entrepreneurs wishing to benefit shared services, cheaper goods, easier access to market or higher prices for their products.

Cooperatives empower small women farmers to take collective action to minimise input costs and marketing risks. Through cooperatives, the farmers can do collective bargaining or purchasing to get the best deals on seeds, supplies, and equipment and gain economic stability. For example, small women farmers who cannot afford to buy heavy equipment on their own can be benefitted with cooperatives. Through cooperative, they can purchase the equipment jointly and/or lease them from the cooperative.

**4.2 Economic empowerment of rural women through developing eco-friendly entrepreneurship:** The promotion of women's entrepreneurship in green or organic cooperatives is a proportionately new abstraction and still developing in practices, if mingling with marketing and skill development training, it has potential for fostering women's entrepreneurship, women's income generation and women's empowerment as well as assisting them to assuage chilling penury in rural areas. There are convincing opportunities that exist for women's entrepreneurship in the green or organic food industry. Organic food sales are increasing considerably in developed countries. As organic farming still comprises only a minor part of global farming, there are shortages in developed countries with the rapid increase of consumers' demand. Farmers in developing countries are additionally well positioned to reap the benefits of growing demand for organic products since farms in developed countries are inclined to use more chemicals than those in poorer countries. Entrepreneurship in organic farming and the foods markets offers strong potentiality for women entrepreneurs. The exorbitant initial capital investment required for conventional farming makes it difficult for women to enter this area as entrepreneurs. Moreover, with the advancement of cooperatives to grow, produce and/or market green or organic products, women entrepreneurs can become better equipped to enter the market for green products and gain access to vital resources required for business. Women's prevalence in agriculture field has led to make development strategies for the poverty eradication in rural areas. The promotion of

women's entrepreneurship through the formation of women's cooperatives in the niche area of green products can be of utmost importance to alleviate rural poverty.

Eco-friendly agriculture is a rapidly growing area and provides vigorous opportunities for the welfare of villagers, farmers, daily wagers, etc. This, merged with the inviolable and powerful entrepreneurial potential of rural women, makes the promotion of women's cooperatives in the agricultural sector reassuring for contributing both to the economic prosperity of rural areas and to advancement of women and women's empowerment.

#### **4.3 Challenges and opportunities of the eco-friendly women entrepreneurship in rural areas:**

Encouraging micro and small-scale industries in rural areas viz. Khadi and cottage industries, are growingly witnessed as a means of generating sustainable employment opportunities, particularly for those at the edge of the economy such as women, the poor, and people with disabilities. Micro, small, and medium sized enterprises have been recognized as a pivotal way to promote women's economic empowerment while battling poverty and gender injustice. They have been identified as a propeller of progress by many governments and their promotion has been adopted as development strategy by many institutional and regional players to create new jobs for developing countries and to drive innovation and economic dynamism. SMB (small and medium-sized businesses) offer strong benefits for alleviating poverty in rural areas and for rural development. Eco-friendly women entrepreneurship contributes to the economic empowerment of poor people living in rural areas. By consolidating secluded and dispersed manoeuvres, marginalized farmers can be helped to acquire opportunities for entrepreneurship and to strengthen capacity for self-help. Cooperative enterprises have significant advantages, especially for rural women, who seldom face gender discrimination which ultimately curtail their access to entrepreneurial resources. Women's micro and small subsistence businesses play a crucial role in rural economy and in ensuring poor households' survival. In the agricultural sector, women farmers hardly have access to agricultural resources and services for production due to gender constraints. The double burdens of farming and family responsibilities and the lack of social services and government programmes to support women, women entrepreneurs seem to have go unnoticed. Therefore, women entrepreneurs need excessive support from cooperatives, male-dominated society and government to strengthen eco-friendly entrepreneurship in rural areas of the country. This encompasses measures to facilitate the creation of women's enterprises, such as training programmes to hone the skills of women with essential entrepreneurship capabilities, monitoring programmes to give women peer support. The establishment of business incubators is another important mechanism of helping to shield and safeguard the subsistence of women's business. It is essential that there should be gender awareness in designing and supplying support measures focused at female entrepreneurs.

#### **4.4 Eco-friendly enterprises led by women entrepreneurs for economic empowerment and societal uplift of the country:**

The most significant contribution of women in rural development lies in its pioneering role of women entrepreneurs between consumers' and producer's cooperatives. Meeting improved and intensified demand for green consumption, this linkage generates amplifying capacity for women-led producers' cooperatives to shepherd women's empowerment in rural areas. At present, however, organic items engross a greater portion, meeting the increased demand for goods that are produced without using pesticides and

chemical fertilizer. In addition, the large number of unregistered, unsettled, and unpaid family workers who are women and girls supposedly witness that women's labour contribution to the rural economy is much larger than official records indicate. As a whole, women spend their labour in less lucrative, profitable or unpaid work and much of rural women's work is not included in official statistics. In long run, the consequential transference of responsibilities from men to women might help to eliminate the gender constraints in women's role in agriculture. Thus, it is women rather men who are more likely to take over the better well-paid work in those rural areas which were left due to male migration.

## 5. Findings

1. Women are more likely to be aware of the potentials for sustainable economic and societal development in the country compared to men.
2. The ownership status (owner) is male-dominated and an entrepreneur's potentiality regarding eco-friendly practices in their business (employees) are mostly covered by women.
3. Women's constraints: Women all over the world face considerable traditional constraints on their role in agriculture as well as from rural feminization poverty in the country. Studies have shown on women's role in agriculture that women are not given equal opportunities for empowerment, despite their immense contribution in eco-friendly rural entrepreneurship, specialised knowledge, and highly-skilled labour in areas of agricultural and rural development. The inequality comes from the conservative formation of gender that severely constraints women's productivity by the fragmentation of their time, their dual and triple responsibilities. Also, despite their stiff labour, their perforation with men is steadily widening. The percentage of rural women among the absolutely poor and destitute has been growing. Women's constrains emerges from the actuality that women are more likely to do unremunerated work, work in low-wage jobs, earn less than men for the same work, gain smaller share of household income and prefer discharging responsibilities for the family's basic needs and requirements.

## 6. Conclusion

There is no denying of the fact that India is a developing country and have ambivalent economy, male dominated society and women are assumed to be financially as well as socially dependent on male members. Women entrepreneurs are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential, and resources to establish and manage enterprise, but simultaneously women entrepreneurs face numerous problems like deprivation of education, social obstructions, legal formalities, high cost of production, male dominated society, little managerial capability, lack of self-confidence, harassment or intimidation on work place, and not fulfilment of rules and regulations, etc. Various factors like positive reinforcement and negative augmentation influence women entrepreneurs. Women have the potential and determination to setup, endorse, sustain, and administer their own enterprise in a very systematic manner. Appropriate support and encouragement from the society, family, government can make these women entrepreneurs a part of mainstream national economy and they can contribute to the economic development, especially in farming sector and rural areas of the country.

The researcher tried to explore the determinant factors affecting women entrepreneurs and their awareness of the potentials for the economic empowerment and societal development of the country. The interconnection between economic development and women entrepreneurship is established through reviewing topical literature. In order to fulfil the objective of the study, emphasis was paid to women entrepreneurs towards rural and sustainability issues in respect to the paradigm shift for societal development, employing qualitative analysis mechanism.

The main aim of the study is to provide insights into the factors that affect women entrepreneurs' behavioural intentions regarding sustainable development, financial progress and societal evolution. Summarizing the findings of the qualitative analysis, it is concluded that women entrepreneur's presence and impact in eco-friendly enterprises have distinctive effects towards sustainable entrepreneurship and acknowledgement of the sustainability options of society. This study also shows the importance of environmental awareness on women entrepreneurs' intentions towards sustainable entrepreneurship and scripting a quiet revolution in terms of socioeconomic reforms and environmental protection. Another important factor that positively affects women entrepreneurs' choice to act eco-friendly is income. Findings suggest that eco-friendly women entrepreneurs value adopting relevant sustainability actions within their business, such as the promotion of environmental management systems, or by supporting similar actions independently and participating in campaigns to bolster business for the benefit of the society like disposable sanitary products for women, fishing ponds, *jhum* agriculture (Instead of the traditional slash-and-burn method), extraction of oil from castor seeds, dairy industry, organic fertilizers, jute industry, and so forth. The environment-friendly women entrepreneurship seems to have been playing a prominent role to fulfil the requirement of Swachh Bharat, Swastha Bharat, and Samarth Bharat.

Many developing countries in Asia have been confronting problems of rural poverty and environmental degradation caused by the low competitiveness of their agricultural products and exploitation of natural resources. A major developmental agenda of these countries is to increase income from agricultural products for poverty alleviation and economic growth while ensuring agricultural sustainability. With trade liberalization, consumer demand for high quality, safe and healthy food has been on the upsurge and escalation while the price of standard subsistence crops has been constantly dropping.

Women entrepreneurship in green/organic production provides new opportunities to small farmers in developing countries like India. There are all symptoms that traditional small-scale farming technology is adjacent to the green/organic farming system, that organic systems are more labour intensive and that small women farmers can potentially produce green/organic products at relatively low labour costs which may give these women cooperative entrepreneur a comparative advantage in the production of green products. Moreover, organic system may result in more work opportunities for women smallholders throughout the year with its crop diversification practices as well as value adding activities such as processing and marketing. At the same time, many Asian countries possess strong market potential for producing specialty, value-added products that sustain the agro-ecological environment. The green cooperative model of enterprise enables smallholders to make best use of these potentials by supporting the identification of specialty products and its marketing opportunities, providing financial and business-related services, linking farmers to effective



marketing channels and creating key networks with partners in the local, governmental, and international agencies. They reach a broader market and strengthen partnerships, green cooperatives entrepreneurship and e-business development. To conclude, to ensure the effectiveness of rural poverty reduction strategies through the promotion of rural entrepreneurship, in particular among cooperative enterprises in the green products business, it is essential to consider gender mainstreaming into the planning process (Kesavan & Swaminathan, 2007).

An eco-friendly women entrepreneur may identify a situational context where she can capitalize the abundance of untapped value in the social and/or natural eco-system without interrupting the symmetry between the ecological and social sub systems. The use of renewable energy sources like solar energy, wind energy, tidal energy or hydraulic potential of waterways is the pertinent examples of maintaining the equilibrium of ecological and social sub systems.

## 7. Suggestions

This paper is not without any limitations. First, this study only focused on intentions for adoptions of sustainable women entrepreneurship practices for rural uplift. Thus, further research is needed on the actual sustainable entrepreneurship and the specific sustainable practices taken by the eco-friendly women entrepreneurs. Moreover, future researchers are recommended to examine the impact of social norms or peer groupings. The findings are specific in that quantitative data did not take into consideration to distinguish a specific geographic area of India for conducting the role of eco-friendly women entrepreneurs for rural development. Lastly, further research is needed on specific motives, including economic ones, that can encourage a women entrepreneur in adopting the principals of sustainability in their business strategies. For this purpose, a national sustainable women entrepreneur development framework may be chalked out.

## References

- Gurnani, P. S. (2011). Women entrepreneurship. New Delhi, India: Educreation Publishing.
- Singh, A. (2014). Role of women entrepreneurs in India: A SWOT analysis. *International Journal of Management and International Business Studies*, 4(2), 231-238.
- Sanyang, S. E., & Huang, Wen-Chi. (2008). Green cooperatives: A strategic approach developing women's entrepreneurship in the Asian and Pacific region. *World Journal of Agricultural Sciences*, 4(6), 674-683.
- Kesavan, P. C., & Swaminathan M. S. (2007). Strategies and models for agricultural sustainability in developing Asian countries. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 877-891. doi:10.1098/rstb.2007.2189