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Women Entrepreneurs in the Green Economy: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract: The green economy presents a transformative approach to sustainable development, offering vast opportunities for women entrepreneurs. This paper explores the role of women in green entrepreneurship, examining the challenges they face and the opportunities available for sustainable business growth. The study highlights key barriers such as financial constraints, policy limitations, and gender biases while also identifying strategies and support mechanisms that enable female entrepreneurs to thrive in environmentally sustainable enterprises. The paper includes a case study on women entrepreneurs in Hosur villages (Tamil Nadu, India) and concludes with policy recommendations aimed at fostering a more inclusive green economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The green economy is defined as an economic system aimed at reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities while promoting sustainable development without degrading the environment. Women entrepreneurs play a crucial role in this transition by innovating and leading businesses that focus on sustainability, circular economy practices, and eco-friendly solutions. However, despite their growing involvement, they face multiple challenges that hinder their full participation in the green economy. This paper aims to analyze these challenges and explore potential opportunities for women entrepreneurs in the sustainable business sector.

2. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE GREEN ECONOMY

1. Limited Access to Finance

Women entrepreneurs often struggle to secure funding for green businesses due to traditional financial institutions' risk-averse nature and gender biases. Studies show that women receive significantly less venture capital investment than their male counterparts (Brush et al., 2018). Additionally, green businesses, which often require high initial investments, pose an added challenge for women with limited access to credit and investment networks.

2. Policy and Regulatory Barriers

Government policies and regulations play a crucial role in supporting or hindering women entrepreneurs in the green economy. In many regions, policy frameworks do not provide sufficient incentives for women-led green businesses (OECD, 2021). Moreover, the complexity of obtaining necessary certifications and complying with environmental regulations can be overwhelming for small-scale women entrepreneurs.

3. Gender Bias and Societal Expectations

Women entrepreneurs face societal and cultural barriers that limit their participation in the business world. Gender stereotypes and biases often result in a lack of recognition and support for women in green industries, which are traditionally male-dominated sectors such as renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture (UN Women, 2020).

4. Limited Access to Technology and Market Information

Many women entrepreneurs lack the technical knowledge and market insights needed to develop competitive green businesses. The digital divide and unequal access to technological advancements further hinder their ability to implement innovative solutions and scale their businesses (World Bank, 2019).

3. CASE STUDY

Women Entrepreneurs in Hosur Villages (Tamil Nadu, India)

Hosur, a rapidly developing industrial town in Tamil Nadu, is home to many rural villages where women have ventured into green entrepreneurship. Several women-led businesses in Thorapalli and Aalur villages have emerged, focusing on sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and eco-friendly product manufacturing.

One notable example is the Thorapalli Women's Cooperative, which has successfully implemented organic farming techniques to reduce pesticide use and improve soil health. These women have received training in vermicomposting, natural pest control, and agroforestry, enabling them to create sustainable farming models. Their products, including organic vegetables, herbal cosmetics, and biodegradable packaging materials, have gained traction in local and regional markets.

Another success story is a group of women artisans in Aalur village who have embraced eco-friendly handicrafts. By utilizing locally sourced raw materials and promoting traditional weaving techniques, they have developed a sustainable business that not only preserves cultural heritage but also provides economic empowerment.

Despite these successes, women entrepreneurs in Hosur villages continue to face challenges such as limited access to financial support, inadequate market linkages, and difficulties in scaling their businesses. However, government initiatives, NGO support, and local self-help groups have played a crucial role in overcoming these barriers by providing microloans, capacity-building programs, and business mentorship.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE GREEN ECONOMY

1. Growing Demand for Sustainable Products and Services:

Consumers are increasingly prioritizing sustainability, creating vast opportunities for women entrepreneurs to enter markets with eco-friendly products and services. The shift towards ethical consumerism allows women-led businesses to leverage their unique perspectives in developing sustainable brands (Nielsen, 2022).

2. Government and International Support Programs:

Many governments and international organizations have launched initiatives to promote women's involvement in the green economy. Programs such as the UN's Women's Entrepreneurship Accelerator and the World Bank's Green Enterprise Development initiative provide funding, mentorship, and policy support to women entrepreneurs.

3. Collaborative and Networking Opportunities:

Women entrepreneurs can benefit from networking platforms, incubators, and business alliances that focus on sustainability and women's empowerment. Organizations such as Women in Cleantech & Sustainability offer mentorship, funding guidance, and market access to aspiring women entrepreneurs in green sectors.

4. Technology and Digital Innovation:

The rise of digital platforms and e-commerce has enabled women entrepreneurs to reach wider audiences and implement innovative business models. Online marketplaces, social media marketing, and digital financial services provide cost-effective ways for women to grow their green enterprises (Accenture, 2021).

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhancing Financial Access:

2. Governments and financial institutions should develop targeted funding programs that support women-led green businesses through grants, microfinance, and impact investment funds.

3. **Strengthening Policy and Regulatory Support:** Policymakers should implement gender-responsive policies that simplify regulatory procedures and provide incentives for women entrepreneurs in the green economy.

4. **Promoting Education and Skill Development:** Training programs should be designed to equip women entrepreneurs with technical knowledge, digital skills, and business development strategies essential for green business success.
5. **Encouraging Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration between governments, corporations, and NGOs can create support structures that foster women's inclusion in sustainable industries.

6. CONCLUSION

Women entrepreneurs are vital contributors to the green economy, yet they face significant barriers that limit their full potential. Addressing challenges such as financial access, policy constraints, and gender biases can unlock new opportunities for women in sustainable business ventures. The case study of women entrepreneurs in Hosur villages highlights both the successes and ongoing struggles in building sustainable enterprises. By implementing inclusive policies, fostering innovation, and expanding support systems, stakeholders can ensure that women entrepreneurs play a leading role in building a sustainable future.

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