

Promoting Women Entrepreneurship in India: Challenges, Initiatives and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Women entrepreneurship plays a key role in the economic growth of the country. Women in India need to be strengthened economically, socially and culturally to pave their way towards entrepreneurship. Providing opportunities and an enabling environment can enable women in emerging as entrepreneurs for their development. This paper reviews the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and initiatives that have been taken up by public and private organisations for providing enabling environment to them. An attempt has been made to highlight specific strategies such as getting access to financial and digital literacy, integrated policy framework, enabling ecosystem and gender specific initiatives for encouragement of entrepreneurship. There is a dire need for promoting public private partnerships to benefit larger section of women for bringing change and development in the status of women entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship, Agripreneurship, Agri Startups, Rural Women

Introduction: The role of women in Indian society has changed drastically in the past few decades and for the betterment. Now, women are occupying the corporate positions previously regarded as masculine and are outpacing their male counterparts in some areas. The gender stereotypes which were more prevalent in the society decades ago are breaking slowly. But there is still a long way to go. Women constitute around half the total (48%) Indian population but their participation in the economic activities is only 25%. According to Forbes India, women comprise about 30 percent of senior corporate management positions in India, which is notably higher than the global average (24%). But, when it comes to the gender gap in overall workforce, India is far behind several countries in the world – 113th out of 135 (Darshan, 2017).

The Government of India has defined Women Entrepreneurs as “an enterprise

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owned and controlled by women having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of the employment generated in the enterprise to women" (Goyal and Prakash, 2011; Sharma, 2013).

Out of 633.88 lakh MSMEs, 608.41 lakh (95.98%) MSMEs were proprietary enterprises. The predominance of male owners has been overwhelming in the proprietary MSMEs. Thus, for proprietary MSMEs as a whole, male owned 79.63% of enterprises as compared to 20.37% owned by female. There was no significant deviation in this pattern in urban and rural areas, although the dominance of male owned enterprises was slightly more pronounced in urban areas as compared to rural areas (81.58% compared to 77.76%).

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Enterprises in rural and urban areas.

Sector	Male	Female
Rural	77.76	22.24
Urban	81.58	18.42
All	79.63	20.37

(Source: MSME Annual Report 2018-2019)

Table 2: Percentage distribution of Enterprises by Male/Female Owners.

Category	Male	Female
Micro	79.56	20.44
Small	94.74	5.26
Medium	97.33	2.67
All	79.63	20.37

(Source: MSME Annual Report 2018-2019)

Further male dominance in ownership has been more pronounced for Small and Medium Enterprises with 95% or more enterprises being owned by them, as compared to Micro Enterprises where 80% were owned by males (MSME Annual Report 2018-2019).

According to Cabrera and Mauricio (2017), economic growth of the nation would be lop-sided without the involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities, as women constitute approximately half of the population and the domain of entrepreneurship is not confined to any particular gender. Women entrepreneurship directly affects income, employment and capital formation while indirectly benefitting household-level resource allocation. Supporting women entrepreneurs not only improves their livelihood but also creates jobs.

But the development of women entrepreneurship largely depends on internal as well as external factors such as personal attributes of the entrepreneurs, family affairs, government and other supportive organizational involvements (Parvin et al., 2012). In a developing country like India, there is need to establish an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs to prosper through overcoming their challenges. Also formulating strategies for promoting women entrepreneurship in both urban and rural communities should be given utmost importance.

Challenges faced by the Women Entrepreneurs in India

The hurdles faced by women who have embraced entrepreneurship are vast and often very different from those experienced by their male counterparts. The challenges which constrain women entrepreneurs are enlisted as follows:

The traditional structure of gender bias in the society, severely constrains women's productivity by the fragmentation of their time, their dual and triple responsibilities, and their lack of access to essential inputs including knowledge i.e. lack of education, and social barriers (Garg and Agarwal, 2017).

- 1. Lack of access and awareness about the financial assistance:** The loans to medium and small women entrepreneurs only satisfy a fraction of their financial needs (Barhate and Patgaonkar, 2012; Mwobobia, 2012). This is consistent with the anecdotal evidence of the problems faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing finance. Lack of property as collateral limits the women entrepreneur's access to finance (Mwobobia, 2012). The bankers also don't have trust in providing the loans to women. This gender gap in access to finance has been examined by a large number of studies providing evidence that women face "higher hurdles" in financing their businesses (Brush et al., 2014). Many women in the rural areas are unaware of the government schemes and subsidies available.
- 2. Socio cultural factors and status of women:** Barhate and Patgaonkar (2012) posit that the dual role of women, male domination, patriarchal society, lack of economic freedom and absence of family encouragement are major social impediments faced by women entrepreneurs. All these forms a barrier to and adversely affect entrepreneurial activities.
- 3. Individual factors like low self-esteem or confidence:** Achievement motivation of the women folk found less compared to male members. The low level of education and confidence leads to low level achievement and advancement motivation among women folk to engage in business operations and running a business concern.

4. **Lack of Social mobility:** Social mobility levels in terms of going for customer meetings or travelling extensively to be in the marketplace is a challenge for women across rural and urban settings levels in terms of going for customer meetings or travelling extensively to be in the marketplace is a challenge for women across rural and urban settings
5. **Lack of managerial,** marketing, organizational and entrepreneurial skills limits the potential of the women entrepreneurs.
6. **Lack of entrepreneurial training:** Large number of women has no proper and sufficient technical and professional training to set-up a new venture. All women entrepreneurs are given the same training through EDPs. Second-generation women entrepreneurs don't need such training as they already have the previous exposure to business (Vijayakumar and Jayachitra, 2013).
7. **Lack of proper linkages and networking:** Women are less integrated with formal and informal networks which constrains their ability to access business opportunities, mentors and informal knowledge. Networking is key to better funding outcomes for female entrepreneurs (Bendall, 2018).
8. **Incomplete entrepreneurial life cycle:** Women face challenges in raising capital as investors have observed women not completing the entrepreneurial life cycle due to family constraints

Apart from the mentioned constraints, there are other problems such as improper infrastructural facilities, high cost of production, attitude of people of society towards the women modern business outlook etc. Women also tend to start business much later than men and being a mompreneur is also challenging to pave their way towards entrepreneurship.

Facilitators of Women Entrepreneurship:

- Better access to education /knowledge
- Better access to finance
- Better resources
- Increasing social acceptance
- Completing the cycle of building an enterprise
- Rise of role models (Deloitte, 2019)

To provide the opportunity for a large number of women to turnout into successful entrepreneurs through overcoming their both the public and private entities have launched a wide range of initiatives. These interventions seek to address gender-specific financing challenges, providing skills training, building

market linkages, financial and mentorship access.

Efforts by Public and Private Organizations towards Promoting the Women Entrepreneurship

Government of India along with the nationalized banks has initiated many schemes to empower women. The launch of various schemes and measures have definitely helped women greatly to spark their talent and build their identity. There are some MSME schemes offered by banks to women entrepreneurs like the Mahila Udyam Nidhi Scheme (offered by Small Industries Development Bank of India -SIDBI), Annapurna Scheme, Cent Kalyani Scheme, Stree Shakti Package for Women Entrepreneurs, Bhartiya Mahila Business Bank Loan, Dena Shakti Scheme, Udyogini Scheme, Orient Mahila Vikas Yojana Scheme:

Table. 3. Different Schemes and Initiatives for Promoting the Women Entrepreneurship

S I . No.	Name of the Scheme	Description
	Government	
1	Mudra (Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Limited) Yojana Scheme (www.mudra.org.in)	This scheme is applicable to women who want to start up with smaller units of enterprises (including start-ups) either individually or as a group. Loans from Rs 50,000 onwards and up to Rs 50 lakh are sanctioned under this scheme. Collateral and guarantors are required only if the loan amount exceeds Rs 10 lakh.
2	Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) under the Ministry of Women and Child Development https://rmk.nic.in/	Offers multiple loans under various schemes to encourage women to create wealth and assets. One of their schemes is specifically focused on providing loans to new and smaller organizations with an experience of at least six months in thrift and credit. The organization can avail a maximum loan up to Rs 10 lakhs under this scheme to start-up.

3	Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD) under the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises http://www.dcmsme.gov.in/schemes/treadwomen.htm	A MSME scheme for empowering women entrepreneurs. It aims to empower women by providing credit to projects, conducting specific training and counselling, and eliciting information on related needs.
4	Capital Subsidy Scheme (CSS) under the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises http://www.dcmsme.gov.in/schemes/credit_link_scheme.htm	A MSME scheme provides 15% subsidy prioritizing any investment by women led enterprise.
5	SFURTI (Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries) under the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises https://msme.gov.in/scheme-fund-regeneration-traditional-industries	It is encouraging rural women with traditional and KVIC (The Khadi and Village Industries Commission) industries in rural areas.
6	Udyam Sakhi Project ambitious towards entrepreneurship. http://www.udyamsakhi.org/	It gives the right information to go for self-employment on one single portal comfortably for women
7	WE Hub (platform for every women) wehub.telangana.gov.in	Telangana also promotes women owned enterprises and start-ups. It is the first state led incubator for women entrepreneurs. WE Hub is also taking efforts to attract women in rural areas. It has collaborated with German Development Agency to run a seven-month incubation and acceleration programme for women led and women owned enterprises in rural areas.
8	The Kutumbashree	Kerala state government encourages the women communities, gender programmes, sthreesakthi portal to promote women entrepreneurship.

	Private	
1	Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and NITI Aayog formed the WEP for development of women entrepreneurs.
2	Indian Women Network (IWN)	The CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) has launched IWN, a network of women, for the women and by the women provides opportunities for women professionals/ students to grow personally and professionally through entrepreneurship opportunities.
3	Women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment (WEE)	A social national initiative by IIT Delhi to strengthen women eco system. It offers entrepreneurship training for every six months at free of cost across the country.
4	COWE India (Confederation of Women Entrepreneurs of India)	It is one of the leading Women Business Associations in Andhra and Telangana which works towards enhancing the spirit of Women Entrepreneurship and incubating the women led start-ups. It focuses on promoting entrepreneurial skills among rural women.
5	Atal Incubation Centre, ALEAP Women Entrepreneurs Hub (AIC ALEAP We-Hub)	It is an effort towards creating innovative start-up ecosystem to translate the dreams of young women into sustainable entrepreneurship. With the support of ATAL Innovation Mission (AIM) NITI Aayog, Government of India, WE hub have now scaled up existing facility to the state-of-the-art incubation centre with an objective to support a number of innovative start-ups by women (http://aicaleapwehub.in/).
6	International Centre for Entrepreneurship and Career Development (ICECD), Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Karnataka, (AWAKE), Manndesi Foundation	These NGOs are making efforts to support the empowerment of women by providing entrepreneurial skills, mentoring, encouraging women to pursue further education and build communities that value gender equality and inclusion.

Box-1: Farm Women Entrepreneurship Development through Finger Millet Processing and Value Addition: Initiative of KVK

A group of 20 farm women of Talagawara village, Chintamani taluk were extensively trained on processing, preparation of value-added products, packing, branding and various avenues for market linkages of finger millets by Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Chikkaballapura. After getting acquainted with these aspects, the women under the leadership of Mrs. Roopa Rajendra with technical guidance of KVK established a small-scale processing and value addition unit and registration was done for marketing of finger millet value added products. They are involved in preparation and marketing of value-added finger millet products viz., Malt, Laddu, Chakkuli and Hurihittu under a brand name of “CHIRAYUSH” food products and marketing in and around Chikkaballapura district and Bangalore. The monthly production of the products is 550 to 600 kg with a turnover of Rs. 60,000- 70,000/-. The efforts made by the KVK to establish village level enterprise on processing and value addition of finger millet with the objective to provide additional employment and income generation for the farming family sets as an example for a new way of self-reliance practice. This initiative by the KVK also played a strategic role in increasing the self confidence among the farm women (Yankanchi and Majula, 2016).

Box-2: National Entrepreneurship Awards for encouraging Women Entrepreneurs

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has instituted the National Entrepreneurship Awards (NEA) to the outstanding efforts of young Entrepreneurs. The NEA has dedicated the special category awards for women. A few women entrepreneurs have also won the awards for their efforts in the field of agriculture.

- Petarbar grahmin poultry cooperative society won NEA award in 2018: A Jharkhand based poultry cooperative society by tribal women. Initially start as a small business it was later expanded to other villages on larger scale sale of boiler chickens.
- Green Biotech Eco solutions: It is a research-based farming input biotech manufactures and marketing enterprise based in Manipur, India founded and managed by women. Provides innovative solutions to farmer's problems through their products and improves the quality of farming. **They are also into manufacturing of healthy foods and won NEA award in 2019.**

- Early foods (Freshness first): Early Foods by Shalini Santhosh is on a mission to provide “organic, fresh and chemical and preservative free food to children” won NEA award in 2019. Their product portfolio includes porridge mixes, health drinks, cookies and rusks for young children using nutritious cereals and millets as key ingredients with 2000 orders in a month and turnover of about 3 crores (<https://yourstory.com/2018/03/shalini-santhosh-healthy-babies-food>).

Women’s increasing role in family farming could be an opportunity for enhancing their economic and social empowerment as producers, traders, workers and entrepreneurs. If women have the same access as men to extension services, technologies and loans, they can contribute to improving the agricultural productivity of family farms, engage in processing and marketing activities, and increase their voice in household decisions (World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organization, and International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2009).

MANAGE Role in Promoting Women Entrepreneurship in Agriculture and Rural Areas:

MANAGE is focused towards promoting entrepreneurship in farming sector through its initiatives across the country.

1. Agri-Clinics and Agribusiness Centres (AC&ABC) scheme: The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, MANAGE as an implementing agency and in association with NABARD has launched this AC&ABC scheme to promote private extension and to promote entrepreneurship development in the field of agriculture across the country by professionally mentoring the agricultural and science graduates. A 45 days residential training is provided to the graduates and diploma holders in agriculture and allied subjects to start up their own Agri-ventures after the successful completion of the training. Many women agricultural graduates and diploma holders are encouraged through this scheme (44% subsidy for maximum of Rs. 20-25 lakh bank loan for AC&ABC trained women) to turnout into successful agripreneurs (www.agriclinics.net).

The progress made through this scheme in promoting women agripreneurship from its inception (2002) to till now (April, 2023):

- The total women trained under this scheme is only around 7,401 (8.72%) of the total candidates (84,783) trained.
- The total women who established ventures after successful completion of the training are only around 2,540 (6.77%) of the total ventures (37,491) established. Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and

Bihar are the top five states having higher trained women and ventures established.

With the assistance of this scheme, 6.77% women out of the total trained 8.72% were able to establish their own venture which highlights its significance towards promoting women in Agriculture and allied sector entrepreneurship also.

2. Promotion of Agri Startups through RKVY- RAFTAAR: Under the RKVY-RAFTAAR program, MANAGE-Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (CIA) has Incubated and mentored more than 331 startups across India overall from the 8 cohorts since 2017-2018 and out of 331 Agri-startups, 77 Startups led by women (23%) and 12 (11%) women's received grant in aid under RKVY-RAFTAAR program of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. GoI.

MANAGE also conducts several training programs and Saturday webinars for the awareness, capacity building and entrepreneurship development such as Pre-Incubation, Digital marketing, and Agri-Eureka-Innovation challenge program. In all these programs put together around 5692 women participated during last three academic years 2020-23 (<https://www.manage.gov.in/managecia/>).

3. Promoting the Rural Women Entrepreneurship through partnering with UNDP and NGOs like Access Livelihoods India for initiating a six-month micro MBA training programme for transforming the rural communities and working at promoting entrepreneurship at grassroots level. One hundred rural women have successfully completed the training and are certified by MANAGE. These 100 rural women are intended to train 150 women each, thus reaching a total target of 15,000 rural women.

MANAGE is also offering partnerships with other like-minded organizations for enhanced efforts towards achieving the goal of promoting women entrepreneurship.

All National, State and non-governmental organizations objectives are same for promoting entrepreneurial development in every level of their activities and make them economically independent and creating many employment opportunities through them and make them successful contributors for the economic development of the country (Uma and Ramesh, 2018).

Box-3: Gender Inclusion in Agri-Entrepreneurship -Recommendations by Syngenta Foundation India

Syngenta foundation India has launched Agri Entrepreneurs (AE) Programme in 2014 and has trained 278 women across 6 project locations i.e Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.

Based upon the study conducted by the foundation few immediate steps are put forth for the successful Agripreneurship among the women:

- Women centric financial products to promote initial investments
- Business training for decision makers (spouses)
- Training centres to have child care support facilities
- Exclusive women AE forums to be created
- Training on confidence and business simulations
- Women mentors and trainees should be hired to lead the change
- Focused campaigning
- Promote women to take technology adoption decision (Chowdhary, 2019)

Suggestions for Promoting Women Entrepreneurship:

Unlocking entrepreneurship amongst women in India is a complex effort, but it provides an unprecedented opportunity to change the economic and social trajectory of India and its women for generations to come. A few specific suggestions for promoting women entrepreneurs is as follows:

- There is a need for an integrated policy framework for accelerating entrepreneurship among women including the semi urban and rural India.
- Launching a dedicated national and state level mission for women entrepreneurship to lead and /or catalyse transformational interventions across India.
- The banking ecosystem needs to create transparent and simple access to banking instruments and policy intervention to define accountability and tracking.
- The government, NGOs and various supporting organizations should emphasize on development programs that focus on the development of competencies of women entrepreneurs.
- Need for the dedicated funds to companies owned or led by women agripreneurs.
- Women focused pitch days for Agri-startups and celebration of women role models.
- Setting up sector specific incubators and accelerators to drive targeted networking and mentorship for women.
- Planning for sector specific online classes and training platforms for women.

Training and certificate courses to drive participation in women friendly and growing sectors.

- Digital enablement and access to women networks for ideas, insights and connects.
- Enabling the public-private partnerships to provide access to technical and business counselling and mentoring to reach the women in rural areas.
- Encouragement of entrepreneurship in gender balanced ways through showcasing role models, women entrepreneurship champions, case studies, guest lectures etc.

Conclusion

For the development of women entrepreneurs, the attitudes of women should be channelized towards innovative, scientific and economic thinking. Their dormant entrepreneurial qualities and their deficiencies are to be brought to the limelight through capacity building and handholding support.

In a diversified society like India, social factors are much dominant in determining even the economic well-being of the people. So any full-fledged women empowerment programmes must be multi-dimensional in nature which should encompass social as well as economic criteria.

With the growth of entrepreneurial awareness in the country, the women entrepreneurs have emerged into existence in rural and urban areas. But, unfortunately, the public-private entrepreneurship development activities have benefited only a small group of women. The majority of women have not benefited from the entrepreneurship development initiatives. Hence, the governments and developmental institutions have to analyse the current status and potential role of women in the process of entrepreneurship development with a view to bring positive change which would result in sharing responsibilities and benefits by all the stakeholders in the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

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