

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MANIPUR

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Abstract

Sustainable development depends on an equitable distribution of resources for today and for the future. It cannot be achieved without gender equality. Women's empowerment is a key factor for achieving sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. Entrepreneurship among women has led to their empowerment. Women entrepreneurship also leads to social and economic empowerment of women. Thus, need to focus on enterprises owned and run by women. According to the Sixth Economic Census Manipuri women contributed only 1.1 percent women entrepreneur in India. Manipur is entering a new phase of self-determination and socioeconomic prosperity. Women entrepreneurs are already playing an important role. Women-owned businesses in Manipur form a larger proportion relative to the national average of women-owned businesses. Despite the higher share of women-owned businesses, these enterprises are found to be mostly marginal in their growth. Only a handful of women-owned businesses in Manipur have externally hired labour and (or) received external finance. Women entrepreneurs of Manipur demonstrate high potential for running businesses. Women entrepreneurship promotion in Manipur, like most states in the North Eastern Region, is dominated by public sector organisations.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, Manipur, sustainable development, women empowerment

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is broadly defined as development which meets the requirements of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development should be a key principle of all policies and actions, which are broadly designed to create a society which is based on freedom, democracy and respect for fundamental rights, fostering equality of opportunity and solidarity within and between generations. It is about safeguarding the earth's capacity to support life in all its diversity. It seeks to promote a dynamic economy with a high level of employment and education, of health protection, of social and territorial cohesion and of environmental protection in a peaceful and secure world, respecting cultural diversity.

In specific, "sustainable development" aims at reducing the absolute poverty of the world's poor through providing long lasting and secured livelihoods that minimize resource

depletion, environmental degradation, cultural disruption and social inability. It is no longer just about planting trees or giving free food and clothes to the poor.

The United Nations Development Programme has defined sustainable development as development that not only generates economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably, that regenerates the environment rather than destroying it, and that empowers people rather than marginalizing them. It is development that gives priority to the poor, enlarging their choices and opportunities and providing for their participation in decisions that affect their lives.

2. Women Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is the future of the modern society. Entrepreneurship refers to a process adopted by an individual or group of individuals coming together to design, launch and run a new business, in an innovative and more sustainable way. Entrepreneurship is an area of research that has been of immense interest to researchers, academicians and policy makers. Entrepreneurship is significantly correlated to economic development of any economy by accelerating growth. In the last few decades woman as entrepreneur are emerging both in developed and developing economies. It is evident that women entrepreneurs contribute immensely to improved poverty levels, increased per capita income and employment creation. The question of gender gap in entrepreneurship is prevalent across countries. In almost all the countries there is a wide gap between entrepreneurial activities across both the genders. There is also a wide gap between entrepreneurial activity between male and females in Indian context.

Women entrepreneurs in Indian context can be defined as women having dominant financial control over their enterprise, who either choose or are driven out of some necessity to take up the challenging role of an entrepreneur and embark towards starting, organizing and managing resources at their disposal in expectation of earning profits. Women entrepreneurs take conscious decisions in order to manage their enterprise. Women entrepreneurship also leads to social and economic empowerment of women. Empowerment of women entrepreneur is an innovative success mantra for development of the economy like India. Entrepreneurship among women has led to their empowerment in the country. Today, women have acquired a significant position in social life, economic activities and decision making among their families. Earlier, their role in productive work, employment generation and income-oriented activities were hindered by many socioeconomic constraints. Hence, a need was felt to formulate policies, which aims for the empowerment and entrepreneurship of women. When women's move forward, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves. Empowering women through entrepreneurship has become an essential part of country's development efforts due to Economic growth, social stability and Women development.

3. Women Entrepreneurship – Steps Taken by The Government to Promote Women Entrepreneurs!

Women entrepreneurship in India is still in its initial stages. Women representation as entrepreneur is quite limited. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report on Women's Entrepreneurship 2016-17, India needs a lot of improvement as far as women entrepreneurial activity is concerned. Total early stage entrepreneurial activity in Indian females is only 7.6 percent while percentage of women having established business activity is only 3.4 percent.

According to the Annual Report of Ministry of MSME released in 2015-16, following major schemes and programs exist for women entrepreneurs:

- TREAD (Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development). This scheme is aimed at the economic empowerment of women through nurturing entrepreneurship among women. This scheme specifically focuses on promoting non-farm activities.
- Mahila Coir Yojana was aimed at providing self-employment in rural women artisans in coir producing regions. This scheme entails providing training and subsidized equipment and machinery.
- Prime Minister's Employment Generation Program is aimed at promoting opportunities for gainful self-employment. Assistance in the form of margin money subsidy and credit relaxation for women is provided 0.95 per cent of the project cost is borne by governments while 5 per cent is contributed by women entrepreneur.
- Cluster development scheme. This scheme is aimed at providing infrastructural support to women entrepreneurs. Only 20 per cent of project cost is borne by women entrepreneur while 80 per cent is borne by government of India.
- Entrepreneurship development Programs for women. This program is targeted at providing training to women beneficiaries.
- Government of India promotes women entrepreneurs to represent themselves in International and national trade fairs and exhibitions through hundred per cent reimbursement of travelling cost

4. Women's empowerment: Essential for Sustainable development

- Gender equality is rightly seen as crucial to sustainable development
- Gender equality is a moral imperative whether you're in government, business, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or research institution, Gender bias is still deeply embedded in cultures, economies, political and social institutions around the world. Women and girls face unacceptable levels of discrimination and abuse, which is not only wrong, but also prevents them from playing a full part in society and decision-making.
- Women are key managers of natural resources and powerful agents of change. women are often more directly dependent on natural resources, with responsibility for the unpaid work of securing food, water, fuel and shelter for their household.
- Women are more vulnerable to environmental degradation and climate change
- In most societies and economies, women's unpaid work and nature's services are not accounted for and therefore not valued properly in our economic, political or social systems.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without a more equitable distribution of resources today and tomorrow: prevailing inequalities are deeply gendered. Understanding this and acting upon it is a key condition to achieving sustainable development. Taking women's needs, concerns and their knowledge and skills into account will ensure a better understanding of the dynamics in society which create and perpetuate gender inequality and enable policymakers and other agents of change, including employers and civil society organizations, to develop appropriate policy responses and actions. Equal participation in decision-making and a balanced involvement of both men and women at all levels of implementation will ensure that women and men take equal responsibility for today's and future generations.

Women's empowerment is a process. Firstly, the nature of the problem is identified. This means that the prevailing gender gaps where women continue to be at a disadvantage are identified and recognized as important. In this process it is important to consult women themselves to better understand their needs and concerns. Secondly, on the basis of this evidence-based analysis, key steps to create a safe, just and enabling environment are undertaken through both targeted policies and gender mainstreaming. Thirdly, to contribute to sustainable development, women need to be agents of change and therefore building their skills and capacities is crucial. Finally, women at all levels of activity and decision making need to be involved: women's full and equal participation is essential

5. **Women entrepreneur in Manipur** (based on Analysis of the Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in Manipur)

According to the Sixth Economic Census Manpuri women contributed only 1.1 percent women entrepreneur in India.

Women-owned businesses in Manipur form a larger proportion relative to the national average of women-owned businesses. Women own 44.1 per cent of the total non-agricultural enterprises in the state (2.5 times the national average). These women are engaged mainly in traditional sectors such as weaving, handloom, handicraft, knitting and embroidery, and horticulture products. Recently, women entrepreneurs have started venturing into non-traditional sectors also such as food processing, restaurant, bakery, and confectionery. Despite the higher share of women-owned businesses, these enterprises are found to be mostly marginal in their growth. Only a handful of women-owned businesses in Manipur have externally hired labour and (or) received external finance.

Entrepreneurs in traditional sectors, such as handloom, embroidery, or handicraft, typically have less formal education but acquire business skills through family business or long periods of apprenticeship in businesses. Their decision to become an entrepreneur is more often driven by financial problems in the family and lack of other employment opportunities.

The above-average participation of women-owned businesses is enabled by unique institutional conditions in the state where women historically controlled the trade and production in the traditional sectors. These enterprises are also enabled by traditional credit institutions (Marups) and labour sharing arrangements (Khutlang), which supported women entrepreneurs to participate in the economy. The majority of women-owned businesses trade with ethnic fabrics and food which are high-value products and highly demanded in the local market.

6. **Business Environment Constraints to Women Entrepreneurship**

- Women-owned businesses in the state are limited in their economic growth due to barriers such as patriarchal norms, access to market, access to formal finance, a large informal economy, lack of supporting infrastructure in packaging, logistics and warehousing, low integration with e-commerce and external markets and difficulties for the women entrepreneur to balance domestic duties and business responsibilities.
- While financial constraints and lack of employment opportunities (push factors) drive the entrepreneurial choice of typical home-grown women entrepreneurs, a return migrant's choice is more aspirational (pull factors) and is based on a desire to make an impact by combining their skills (often outside Manipur) with unique local resources.

7. Prominent Sectors for Women-led Enterprises

- Women entrepreneurs in the traditional sectors, such as handloom, have been able to upscale by adhering to strategies such as increasing business opportunities through unique design or process innovation which will increase demand for their products, resolve human resource challenges by teaming up with women with similar vulnerabilities and by establishing networks of solidarity through skill development and use of fair benefit-sharing arrangements and access capital through a wide range of channels such as subsidised government programmes, suppliers credit and traditional credit institutions in combination with micro-credit.
- Home-grown women entrepreneurs with scalable business in traditional sectors are primarily local in their outlook (e.g. skills, technology, and products), home-grown women entrepreneurs with startups in non-traditional sectors, such as agricultural products, food processing, restaurants and bakery, are different as they act as a bridge for technical know-how and products between the local markets and the external markets. Similarly, there are instances of women entrepreneurs who bring know-how from external markets to Manipur (e.g. bio fertilisers, new baking techniques). The dynamics of the traditional and the new generation women entrepreneurs create an apt environment for cross-fertilisation of practices and ideas.

8. Recommendation for policy makers and implementing partners

- Address the gaps in incubation services by starting an incubation centre in a city like Imphal.
- Partner with other changemakers to develop enterprises in the middle in the traditional sectors of the state.
- Focus on innovative business models with new technological applications for the agriculture and ethnic products segment. High potential value chains are available for products such as spices (for example, organic turmeric, U-Morok - a local variety of chilly), medicinal plants (for example lemon grass, sangbrei, and laibakngou), horticultural products (for example indigenous varieties of banana and pineapple), bamboo shoot and handloom.
- Leverage the enthusiasm for women entrepreneurship among the Manipuri diaspora and include them in intensive incubation services.
- Build the capacity of incubators in critical areas such as legal and intellectual property.
- Establish a 'community of practice' which can serve as a co-creating platform for partnership with external mentors.
- Introduce new entrepreneurship promotion practices such as 'startup challenges' where problems faced by many women entrepreneurs are presented as a challenge to aspiring women entrepreneurs who come up with their respective business models solutions for the challenge.

9. Conclusion

Women need to become aware of their rights, schemes and benefits that can help achieve overall empowerment. Entrepreneurship brings gender equality and also improves the overall status of women in the family, society and in the nation. Many success stories of women are coming up these days. More will come as women are expanding their entrepreneurial horizons and venturing into an unaccustomed range of business areas. Women's endowment to sustainable development must be acknowledged. In order to build women as catalyst for sustainable development, their role in family, community and society at large has to free from socio-cultural and religious traditions that prevent women participation. Many of the barriers to women's empowerment and equity lie ingrained in cultural norms. There is need for change of mindset, especially of the males who dominate the scene.

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