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Research Article

Trailblazers of Change: Women Entrepreneurs Leading the Path to Sustainability

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Abstract

Women entrepreneurs are becoming important change agents in the global movement toward sustainability by addressing urgent environmental, social, and economic issues through a combination of creativity, resiliency, and purpose-driven leadership. Based on innovation and inclusivity, their endeavours are revolutionising conventional business methods by incorporating sustainable solutions into a variety of industries, such as community development, eco-friendly products, renewable energy, and ethical fashion.

Women entrepreneurs are developing solutions that combine social and ecological impact with commercial feasibility by utilizing their distinct viewpoints. Their businesses, which range from eco-friendly product lines and renewable energy companies to social enterprises that focus on community welfare, demonstrate a comprehensive approach to sustainable development. But they have to overcome many obstacles, such as a lack of money, gender bias, and insufficient policy backing.

This paper examines how women business owners are in a unique position to promote sustainability because of their capacity to strike a balance between profit and purpose, collaborative methods, and long-term vision. It explores their obstacles, including financial inequalities, societal prejudices, and resource constraints, while emphasizing the revolutionary possibilities of laws and support networks intended to enable women in sustainable entrepreneurship.

This study emphasizes the significance of creating an environment that supports women-led businesses by presenting motivational case studies and examining their wider influence on accomplishing global sustainability goals. In addition to being a crucial tactic for guaranteeing a prosperous planet for future generations, empowering women entrepreneurs to spearhead the sustainability movement is also necessary for building a more resilient and fair society. The necessity of focused efforts, like financial availability, capacity-building initiatives, and support systems, to empower female entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs may make a significant contribution to accomplishing global sustainability goals and advancing a more inclusive and equitable future by tackling these issues and creating an environment that supports them.

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INTRODUCTION

The global shift toward sustainability has reshaped entrepreneurship, opening up chances for innovation to address serious environmental and social issues. Women entrepreneurs have emerged as significant players in this movement, using their unique perspectives, leadership skills, and resilience to build businesses that promote sustainability. The purpose of this article is to investigate women entrepreneurs' contributions to sustainable development, the challenges they encounter, and solutions for their growth.

The increased urgency to address climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality has sparked a global trend toward sustainability, radically altering the entrepreneurial environment. Businesses are no longer judged merely on profitability; now, stakeholders expect companies to produce value that balances economic, environmental, and social consequences. This paradigm shift has created opportunities for new solutions to some of the world's most pressing concerns, such as reducing environmental degradation and increasing social fairness and community well-being.

Women entrepreneurs have emerged as key change agents in this evolving entrepreneurial environment, bringing new perspectives, collaborative leadership techniques, and a strong sense of purpose to the quest of sustainable development. Women entrepreneurs contribute distinct skills and experiences to sustainability-focused business operations. Studies have consistently shown that they prioritize values like inclusion, empathy, and long-term influence in their decision-making processes. These characteristics, together with their ability to overcome adversity and embrace creative problem-solving, qualify them as major contributors to the development of socially and ecologically responsible businesses.

Furthermore, women-led businesses frequently display a dedication to community-oriented solutions, which drives grassroots creativity and promotes social cohesion. From promoting renewable energy technology and sustainable agriculture to tackling gender inequities and improving healthcare solutions, women entrepreneurs are redefining success by combining profit and purpose.

Despite their revolutionary potential, women entrepreneurs confront numerous obstacles that can hamper their capacity to develop sustainable businesses. Gender-specific barriers, such as limited access to capital, entrenched gender biases, and a lack of representation in decision-making settings, frequently impede their advancement. Structural disparities, such as unequal division of household tasks and societal expectations, exacerbate these challenges, resulting in a "double burden" that males in similar situations rarely face.

Furthermore, the intersectionality of race, class, and geography exacerbates these challenges for women from marginalized or underserved communities, decreasing their chances of success in the competitive global marketplace. Recognizing the crucial role of female entrepreneurs in driving sustainability, it is critical to develop strategies that empower and promote their success. To address the structural challenges they confront, focused interventions at several levels are required, including

regulatory measures to assure equal access to financial resources, mentoring programs to bridge knowledge gaps, and community-based activities to establish support networks. Equally crucial is the creation of inclusive ecosystems that recognize varied leadership styles and promote gender equity as a foundation for long-term development.

The study investigates women entrepreneurs' contributions to sustainable development by looking at the innovative ways they handle environmental and social issues. It will also investigate the ongoing impediments that prevent them from reaching their full potential and provide actionable methods to maximize their influence. This report highlights the endurance and resourcefulness of women entrepreneurs, emphasizing their critical role in crafting a sustainable future and calling for a coordinated effort to remove the structural barriers that limit their potential.

Defining Sustainability and Women's Role in Entrepreneurship

The United Nations defines sustainability as addressing current demands without jeopardizing future generations' ability to meet their own. It has three main pillars: environmental conservation, social fairness, and economic development. Women entrepreneurs have shown outstanding leadership by incorporating these elements into their enterprises.

According to research, women are more inclined to promote sustainable business methods. Their leaders frequently prioritize diversity, ethical governance, and long-term effect. This predisposition stems from women's different lived experiences, which motivate them to confront structural injustices and environmental challenges. Women entrepreneurs have emerged as major contributors in promoting sustainability across a variety of industries. Their leadership, creativity, and dedication to ethical business practices benefit the economy, the environment, and society as a whole. This section delves into how women entrepreneurs lead sustainable initiatives, the hurdles they encounter, and their distinct contributions to a greener, more equitable future.

Women are catalysts for sustainable innovation.

Women entrepreneurs are at the forefront of industries that promote sustainability, including renewable energy, organic farming, ethical fashion, and zero-waste businesses. Their enterprises frequently incorporate social responsibility and environmental conscience from the ground up, ensuring that sustainability is not an afterthought but a guiding concept. Many female-led startups prioritize the circular economy, including waste reduction, upcycling, and resource efficiency.

Holistic and Ethical Business Strategies

- ❖ According to studies, women entrepreneurs prioritize long-term sustainability over short-term earnings, which makes them more likely to use ethical business methods.
- ❖ Women executives frequently include community well-being, fair compensation, and social equality in their company strategy.

- ❖ They are more likely to support local economies, encourage ethical supply chains, and campaign for environmental protection.
- ❖ Overcoming Challenges and Barriers Despite their significant contributions to sustainability, women entrepreneurs confront various challenges:
- ❖ Limited funding: Women entrepreneurs receive much less venture capital investment than men, making it more difficult to scale their long-term firms.
- ❖ Gender biases: Many female entrepreneurs struggle to establish credibility in male-dominated fields like clean energy and technology.
- ❖ Work-life balance pressures: The demands of juggling company and family duties can be a barrier to business growth.
- ❖ Lack of mentorship and networking opportunities: Women frequently have fewer industry connections and mentorship options, which might impede their business success.

4. The Social and Environmental Impact of Women-Led Businesses

- ❖ Women-led sustainable enterprises have a multifaceted impact:
- ❖ Economic impact: Generating employment, especially for marginalized communities and women.
- ❖ Environmental impact: Developing eco-friendly products, reducing waste, and promoting biodiversity conservation.
- ❖ Social impact: Creating inclusive workplaces, advocating for gender equality, and supporting community-based initiatives

5. Notable Women Entrepreneurs in Sustainability

- ❖ Several inspiring women entrepreneurs have pioneered sustainability initiatives:
- ❖ Vandana Shiva (Navdanya) – Promotes organic farming and seed conservation in India.
- ❖ Stella McCartney – A leader in ethical fashion, using sustainable materials and cruelty-free production.
- ❖ Kristine Tompkins – Conservationist and former CEO of Patagonia, working on large-scale rewilding projects.
- ❖ Lauren Singer (Trash is for Tossers) – A pioneer in the zero-waste movement, demonstrating sustainable living practices.

6. The Way Forward: Empowering Women in Sustainable Entrepreneurship

To further support women entrepreneurs in sustainability, there is a need for:

- ❖ Greater access to funding and investment opportunities tailored for women-led green businesses.
- ❖ Mentorship and leadership programs that connect women with industry experts and investors.
- ❖ Policy support and incentives to encourage more women to enter sustainability-focused industries.
- ❖ Stronger global collaborations to amplify the impact of women-led sustainable ventures.

- ❖ Women entrepreneurs are not only transforming businesses but also leading the charge toward a more sustainable, inclusive, and environmentally conscious world. Their role is crucial in achieving global sustainability goals and ensuring a better future for generations to come.

Case Studies: Women Entrepreneurs Leading the Change

1. **Falguni Nayar**, a former investment banker who turned to entrepreneurship in her fifties, has altered India's beauty and personal care market with Nykaa. She has transformed the consumer experience in the sector by using a new omnichannel retail approach that mixes e-commerce and offline storefronts. Nykaa successfully went public under her leadership, becoming one of India's most valued businesses. Beyond business, Nayar has had a huge social impact by boosting female entrepreneurs and small enterprises through her platform, promoting diversity and opportunity in the marketplace.
2. **Sudha Murthy's** tenacious spirit and persistent will to combat gender inequality are towering sources of inspiration. Amidst the entrenched bastion of male-dominated engineering, her courageous act of advocating for female employment—written in a small postcard to JRD Tata—caused seismic waves of upheaval, driving a paradigm shift that welcomed female applications. This historic moment not only broke the glass ceiling, but also lit a beacon of inclusivity, illuminating paths previously blocked by prejudice. Sudha's long impact goes beyond achievement; it exemplifies the limitless power of determination, inspiring generations to resist convention and create a course for a more just and enlightened future.
3. **Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw** is a pioneering Indian entrepreneur and the creator of Biocon Limited, one of the country's major biotechnology enterprises. Born in Bangalore on March 23, 1953, she studied biology before training as a brewmaster in Australia, which was an unusual feat for a woman at the time. In 1978, she established Biocon in a small garage in Bangalore with the intention of using biotechnology to make healthcare more inexpensive and accessible. Biocon has expanded into a global biopharmaceutical firm under her leadership, known for its innovations in biosimilars, insulin manufacture, and cancer medicines. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw has earned various awards for her services, including being named one of TIME's 100 Most Influential People and receiving the Padma Shri (1989) and Padma Bhushan (2005) from the Government of India. She is also a big supporter of women in STEM, entrepreneurship, and healthcare equity.
4. **Richa Kar** is the founder of Ziva me, a ground-breaking brand that revolutionized lingerie buying in India. Ziva me, founded in 2011, addressed the taboo around intimate apparel by providing women with a discreet and empowering platform to buy for lingerie. Richa's vision and tenacity led her to develop a venue that promotes body

positivity and open conversations about women's needs, defying traditional taboos and altering India's intimate clothing sector.

5. **Vandana Luthra** is a wellness and beauty industry pioneer in India. She created VLCC in 1989 with the goal of promoting holistic wellbeing via the integration of traditional health methods with cutting-edge technology. VLCC has grown into a globally recognized brand under her guidance, stressing self-care and well-being while providing possibilities for women through vocational training and employment.
6. **Upasana Taku** is the Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of MobiKwik, one of India's most popular digital payment companies. She is a trailblazing entrepreneur who has made important contributions to India's finance industry. After getting her engineering degree from NIT Jalandhar and a master's degree in Management Science & Engineering from Stanford University, she worked at worldwide companies such as PayPal and HSBC before returning to India. Upasana and her co-founder Bipin Preet Singh created MobiKwik in 2009 with the goal of delivering a seamless and safe digital wallet service for Indian users. MobiKwik has grown into a diverse financial services platform that provides mobile payments, credit, insurance, and investment opportunities. She is one of the few female leaders in India's fintech business and has received multiple awards, including inclusion in Fortune India's Most Powerful Women in Business and Forbes Asia 30 Under 30. Upasana's path continues to encourage prospective entrepreneurs, particularly women, to break down barriers in the technology and finance industries.
7. **Aditi Gupta – Co-Founder of Menstrupedia** According to an Indian conservation family belief, a woman is not permitted to enter the kitchen or place of worship while menstruating. Even in her own home, she is not permitted to cook or perform other household tasks. While this may sound ludicrous, it is a widely held notion in India's rural and urban communities. Aditi was born and raised in a tiny city in Jharkhand, India, and had her first period when she was twelve years old. Even at that young age, she had to sleep in a different room in her family, wash her clothes separately, and was not permitted to engage in any worship-related activities when she had her period. That's what Aditi hoped to alter with her small but effective project, Menstrupedia. Aditi founded Menstrupedia, a Hindi comic book, with her spouse Tuhin Patel in 2012. The whole point of that comic was to raise awareness and education about menstruation and cleanliness.
8. **Malavika Hegde's** rise to leadership at Cafe Coffee Day (CCD) after the terrible death of her husband, VG Siddhartha, exemplifies resilience and unshakable drive. She promised to carry on Siddhartha's legacy while handling CCD's massive debt of over 7,000 crores. Malavika demonstrated great leadership by engaging in personal negotiations with lenders and making enormous

personal sacrifices to reduce CCD's financial burden, eventually returning a significant chunk of the debt—1,644 crores. Her story exemplifies her unwavering passion and determination to ensure the company's future in the face of hardship.

How do aspiring female entrepreneurs in India get started on their business

Starting a business involves dedication, finances, and strategic preparation. Here are some actions that aspiring female entrepreneurs in India might follow to start their businesses.

Identifying Business Opportunities

Aspiring entrepreneurs should start by identifying feasible company possibilities that match their interests and talents. Market research can assist businesses evaluate the demand for their products or services as well as uncover possible competitors.

Create a business plan.

A well-structured business strategy is critical for steering the startup's course. It should contain the business objectives, target market, competition analysis, marketing strategy, and financial projections.

Leveraging Government Schemes and Initiatives

The Indian government provides a variety of plans and efforts to help women entrepreneurs. Women-led enterprises benefit from programs such as the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) and the Stand-Up India scheme, which offer financial aid, training, and mentoring.

Creating a support network.

Building a solid support network is critical to entrepreneurial success. Aspiring female entrepreneurs should seek mentorship, join entrepreneurial communities, and network with other female entrepreneurs to share their experiences and resources.

Using digital platforms.

Digital platforms and e-commerce offer fantastic opportunities for female entrepreneurs to reach a larger audience. Using online marketplaces and social media can help improve brand visibility and customer interaction.

Women Entrepreneurs Face Barriers

Despite their triumphs, women entrepreneurs face major barriers that limit their capacity to develop sustainable businesses. This includes:

Access to investment: Women receive a disproportionately small share of venture capital investment, limiting their capacity to grow their businesses and invest in sustainable innovations.

Societal norms: Gender stereotypes and cultural biases frequently hinder women from pursuing entrepreneurship, especially in male-dominated industries.

Lack of Mentorship and Networks: Limited access to mentorship and professional networks limits opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Regulatory Obstacles: Policies and regulations may not effectively support women-led enterprises or encourage sustainable practices. Addressing these hurdles is crucial to realizing women entrepreneurs' full potential for driving sustainability.

The Intersection of Gender and Sustainability

Women entrepreneurs bring a unique perspective to sustainability. According to research, women are more likely than males to prioritize environmental and social goals in addition to financial aims. This congruence with sustainable principles arises from their increased awareness of community needs, intergenerational equity, and ethical considerations. Furthermore, women's involvement in sustainable business promotes leadership diversity, which leads to more inventive and complete solutions. This intersectionality emphasizes the importance of empowering female entrepreneurs to play key roles in achieving global sustainability goals.

Strategies to Support Female Entrepreneurs

Access to Investment -Governments, financial institutions, and venture capitalists should emphasize funding for women-led sustainable ventures by providing grants, low-interest loans, and equity investments.

Policy Reforms: Policies that encourage sustainable practices, such as tax exemptions or subsidies for green enterprises, can help more women into the area.

Mentorship and Networking: Creating mentorship programs and professional networks specifically for female entrepreneurs can provide advice, resources, and possibilities for collaboration.

Education and Training: Providing training in sustainable business practices, financial literacy, and leadership abilities can help women start and grow successful businesses.

Media Representation: Highlighting the achievements of female entrepreneurs in sustainability can encourage others and challenge prevalent misconceptions.

CONCLUSION

Women entrepreneurs are not just participants in the sustainability movement—they are its trailblazers, visionaries, and changemakers. Their leadership in industries ranging from renewable energy to ethical fashion is redefining business success, proving that profitability and sustainability can go hand in hand. Despite facing challenges such as funding barriers and gender biases, these women continue to break boundaries, drive innovation, and uplift communities.

The future of sustainable entrepreneurship is undoubtedly female, as women-led businesses prioritize environmental responsibility, social equity, and long-term impact. However, to fully unlock their potential, there is a pressing need for greater investment, mentorship, and policy support. By empowering women entrepreneurs, we are not just supporting businesses—we are investing in a healthier planet and a more just society. As we move forward, let us celebrate and support these trailblazers of change, ensuring that their voices, ideas, and businesses shape a world where sustainability is not a choice but a way of life. The path to a greener future is being paved by women—now, it's up to all of us to walk it together.

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