

# Challenges and Opportunities in Women's Green Enterprises

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## **Abstract**

*Women-led green enterprises are crucial for promoting sustainability, economic growth, and environmental conservation. However, women entrepreneurs in green businesses face numerous challenges that hinder their full participation and success. These include limited access to finance, lack of technical expertise, social and cultural barriers, regulatory constraints, and difficulties in market access. Additionally, women often struggle with balancing entrepreneurial activities with household responsibilities and face a lack of mentorship in male-dominated green industries.*

*Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for women in green enterprises. The increasing demand for sustainable products, advancements in renewable energy, government incentives, and impact investment in eco-friendly businesses present new possibilities for women entrepreneurs. Sectors such as sustainable agriculture, waste management, green construction, and eco-tourism offer promising prospects for women to drive environmental change and economic development.*

*To support women in green enterprises, targeted policies, financial support mechanisms, capacity-building programs, and increased access to technology and networks are essential. Encouraging women's participation in the green economy can lead to greater innovation, environmental sustainability, and inclusive economic growth. Addressing gender disparities in green entrepreneurship will be crucial in achieving global sustainability goals.*

## **Keywords:**

*Green Enterprises, Entrepreneur, Sustainable, Renewable, Eco-friendly, Waste Management, Agriculture, Technology, Networks, Disparities, Innovation, Support.*

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## **Introduction**

The role of women in green enterprises is gaining increasing recognition as the global push for environmental sustainability intensifies. Green enterprises, which prioritize eco-friendly business practices, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, waste management, and ethical production, offer significant opportunities for economic empowerment while addressing environmental concerns. Women entrepreneurs in this sector contribute to both economic development and climate resilience. However, they face numerous challenges that hinder their success, including limited access to financial resources, technological barriers, social and cultural constraints, and regulatory complexities.

Despite these obstacles, women-led green enterprises present a viable path toward sustainable economic growth and gender inclusivity. As the demand for sustainable solutions rises, women have the potential to drive innovation in environmental conservation, circular economy models, and climate-resilient industries. Governments, international organizations, and financial institutions are increasingly recognizing the need to support women in this sector through policy incentives, capacity-building programs, and investment in gender-focused green financing.

This chapter explores the challenges and opportunities associated with women's participation in green enterprises. It examines the financial, technical, and socio-cultural barriers that women entrepreneurs face and highlights emerging opportunities in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, waste management, and eco-friendly businesses. Furthermore, it discusses policy recommendations and strategies to enhance women's involvement in the green economy, emphasizing the importance of inclusive economic growth and environmental stewardship.

## **Challenges faced by women in Green Enterprises**

### **1. Access to Financial Resources**

One of the most significant barriers for women in green entrepreneurship is limited access to finance. Women entrepreneurs, especially in developing economies, often face difficulties in securing loans, grants, and investment capital. Investors tend to favor male-led ventures due to traditional gender biases, leaving many women-led green businesses underfunded.

- **Limited access to venture capital:** In many parts of the world, women receive only a small percentage of venture capital funding, which hampers their ability to scale.
- **Collateral constraints:** In some countries, women may lack access to assets, such as land or property, to use as collateral for loans.

### **2. Gender Discrimination and Bias**

Despite progress in gender equality, women continue to face discrimination in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Gender stereotypes often prevent women from being taken seriously as business leaders, particularly in male-dominated sectors like energy and technology.

- **Bias in investment and hiring:** Women face a higher threshold for proving their capabilities, especially in green sectors that require technical expertise.

### **3. Limited Networking and Market Access**

Women often have limited access to networks that can help their businesses grow. Male-dominated business circles and investment ecosystems may leave women entrepreneurs out of key discussions and opportunities. This can restrict their ability to secure partnerships, funding, and market access.

- **Networking barriers:** Women may find it difficult to access business networks, both within their industries and across sectors, limiting their ability to form partnerships or collaborations.
- **Market entry challenges:** Green businesses often face significant competition, and women entrepreneurs may struggle to break into established markets.

#### 4. Balancing Family and Business Responsibilities

Women often shoulder the majority of family and caregiving responsibilities, which can interfere with their ability to focus fully on their businesses. Balancing these responsibilities with the demands of running an enterprise, especially in the early stages, can be overwhelming.

- **Work-life imbalance:** Lack of access to affordable childcare or flexible work arrangements can make it difficult for women to fully dedicate themselves to their businesses. According to a recent National Family Health Survey (NHFS) report, only 32% of wedded Indian women aged between 15 and 49 are employed. In most Indian homes, women are responsible for cuisine, cleaning, and minding for their children and other family members. Society expects these placed as a woman's scores that they must play adequately. Successful business possessors need good work-life integration to control their social and professional lives, including family liabilities. When a woman starts a business, their precedence and schedules change. Household responsibilities and family commitments may disturb women entrepreneurs' work-life balance, making it challenging to run a business.

#### 5. Limited Access to Technology and Innovation

Green businesses, especially in renewable energy or eco-tech, require significant technological investment and innovation. Many women entrepreneurs lack access to the latest technology, research, and development resources necessary to build competitive green enterprises.

- **Tech gaps:** Women in green startups may not have the same access to technical training or tools to innovate in their respective sectors, limiting their capacity to drive sustainable change.
- **Resource constraints:** Due to limited funding and support, women may also lack the infrastructure to scale technological solutions effectively.

#### 6. Environmental and Economic Risks:

Green enterprises often operate in sectors that are highly vulnerable to both economic fluctuations and environmental conditions (e.g., agricultural ventures that are dependent on climate). Women may have less access to risk management tools or support to navigate these uncertainties.

#### 7. Lack of Mentorship and Networking

There are fewer female role models and mentors in the green entrepreneurship space, which can make it harder for women to find guidance.

In green industries, which are still developing, the networks of support and mentorship for women are often smaller. Building connections with other business leaders, policymakers, and potential partners is crucial for growing a successful enterprise.

#### 8. Policy and Legal Barriers

Women in the green enterprise sector often lack access to legal resources or are subject to policies that don't adequately support female entrepreneurs. This can limit their ability to benefit from government incentives or programs designed to promote sustainability and green innovation.

#### 9. Cultural and Societal Barriers

In many societies, women may still face traditional expectations that restrict their ability to participate fully in the workforce or run businesses. These cultural barriers can discourage women from pursuing green entrepreneurship or prevent them from accessing resources like land or technology.

#### Opportunities for Women in Green Enterprises

Despite these challenges, there are numerous opportunities for women to thrive in green entrepreneurship. These opportunities can drive not only environmental sustainability but also economic empowerment for women globally.

## **1. Growing Market Demand for Sustainable Products**

There is a growing global demand for sustainable and eco-friendly products, creating a strong market opportunity for women-led green enterprises. Consumers are increasingly aware of climate change and its impact on the environment, and they are demanding environmentally friendly alternatives.

Sustainable fashion, renewable energy, and organic agriculture are seeing increased consumer interest, which women-led enterprises can leverage.

Circular economy innovations that focus on waste reduction, reuse, and recycling are becoming increasingly popular, providing opportunities for women in product design and manufacturing.

## **2. Supportive Policies and Initiatives**

Governments and international organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of gender equality in achieving sustainable development goals. This has led to the creation of policies and initiatives that support women's involvement in green businesses.

- **Gender-responsive climate policies:** Many countries are adopting climate policies that prioritize gender equality, ensuring women have access to resources and opportunities in green sectors.
- **International funding opportunities:** Multilateral organizations, such as the UN and the World Bank, are increasing their support for women in green entrepreneurship, with funds dedicated to empowering women in sustainability and climate adaptation.

## **3. Collaborative Networks and Communities**

In recent years, a growing number of women-focused networks and communities have emerged in the green business sector. These networks provide invaluable support, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities.

Women's Entrepreneurship Networks such as Women in Renewable Energy (WiRE) and Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) have played a vital role in bringing women entrepreneurs together to share resources and build their businesses.

Mentorship and capacity-building programs designed specifically for women are helping them gain the skills and confidence needed to succeed in green industries.

## **4. Technological Advancements**

As technology continues to evolve, there are increasing opportunities for women-led businesses to integrate innovation into their green enterprises. Advances in clean technology, sustainable agriculture, and digital platforms create new avenues for women entrepreneurs to scale and innovate.

Access to digital tools has leveled the playing field for women entrepreneurs, enabling them to reach global markets through online platforms.

Innovative solutions like blockchain for supply chain transparency and AI in climate forecasting offer women entrepreneurs the tools to create more efficient and sustainable businesses.

## **5. Strong Impact on Social and Environmental Goals**

Women-led green businesses often have a dual impact: they contribute to economic empowerment for women while also advancing environmental sustainability. This "dual impact" makes these enterprises particularly attractive to impact investors and development organizations.

- **Job creation:** Green businesses often focus on local communities, creating jobs and fostering economic growth in underserved areas.

Social enterprises led by women can have a transformative effect on communities, especially in rural or developing regions, by providing eco-friendly solutions that also address social inequalities.

## **6. Access to Government and NGO Funding**

Many governments and international organizations are actively supporting green and sustainable initiatives. Women entrepreneurs can tap into grants, subsidies, and funds that specifically aim to promote gender equality and environmental sustainability. There are also gender-specific funds designed to empower female entrepreneurs in the green sector.

## **7. Collaborations and Partnerships**

There is a growing trend for businesses to collaborate on sustainability goals. Women-led green enterprises can form partnerships with larger companies, governments, and NGOs that are looking to meet sustainability targets. These partnerships can provide access to markets, expertise, and networks that might otherwise be difficult to penetrate.

## **8. Niche Markets**

Women-led green businesses can tap into niche markets where sustainability is a key driver of consumer behavior. From eco-tourism to organic food production, from sustainable fashion to green technology, these niche markets offer growing demand and opportunities for small and medium-sized women-led enterprises.

## **9. Increased Investment in Green Industries**

As investors increasingly turn their focus toward sustainable business practices, women-led green enterprises have the opportunity to attract capital and support from impact investors and venture capitalists who prioritize environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors.

## **10. Resilience to Future Economic Trends**

As the global economy shifts towards sustainability, women's green enterprises are well-positioned to benefit from long-term trends. Sectors like renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-friendly products are expected to grow significantly, presenting opportunities for women entrepreneurs to enter emerging industries that are expected to thrive in the future.

## **11. Empowerment and Leadership Opportunities**

Women in green enterprises have the opportunity to become leaders and role models in sustainability, setting examples for future generations of women entrepreneurs. By establishing successful green businesses, they can inspire others to follow suit, fostering an ecosystem of empowered female leaders in the green economy.

### **Initiative and program related to Women's green enterprises**

India has launched several initiatives and programs to support women's involvement in green enterprises, promoting sustainability and environmental stewardship. Notable examples include:

- **Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP):**

Established by NITI Aayog, WEP aims to empower women entrepreneurs across various sectors, including green businesses, by providing resources, mentorship, and support.

- **Grow Initiative:**

In partnership with WEP, the GroW initiative focuses on advancing women-led green enterprises, facilitating pathways for women entrepreneurs to realize their business aspirations in sustainability and environmental stewardship.

- **Powering Livelihoods:**

A collaboration between the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and Villgro, this initiative aims to scale up clean energy-powered appliances for livelihoods, particularly among women, integrating a gender lens into program activities to make the decentralized renewable energy sector more inclusive.

• **Greenr Sustainability Accelerator Program:**

Operated by techno Serve, this program assists women entrepreneurs in Bangalore to scale their businesses through financial management training, focusing on sustainability and green enterprise development.

• **Eco Femme:**

Women-led social enterprise in Tamil Nadu producing organic, washable cloth pads, promoting sustainable menstrual practices, and providing menstrual health education, thereby contributing to environmental sustainability and women's health.

These initiatives exemplify India's commitment to integrating gender inclusivity within its green economy, empowering women to lead and participate in sustainable development.

**Conclusion**

Women-led green enterprises are a powerful force for change in both sustainability and economic development. While significant challenges such as access to finance, gender biases, and balancing family responsibilities remain, there are also ample opportunities for women to lead in the growing green economy. With increased access to funding, supportive policies, and a focus on technological innovation, women entrepreneurs can break through barriers, scale their businesses, and contribute to a sustainable and inclusive future.

Supporting women in green enterprises is not only beneficial for gender equality but also critical for tackling global environmental challenges.

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