

National Seminar on Effect of Ecopreneurship on Environment Protection & Sustainable Development

Challenges of Women Ecopreneur: Insights from Avani

Organics, Visakhapatnam

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Abstract

Introduction: Women were considered the nurturers of life and nature, closely associated with Prakriti (nature) and Bhoomi (Earth). Vedic scriptures and hymns, such as those in the Rig Veda, praised nature as sacred and emphasized the role of women in maintaining ecological balance. Ancient women played key roles in sustainable farming, preserving seeds, and using organic methods to maintain soil fertility, much like modern women ecopreneurs who continue to drive the green economy by promoting ecological balance and sustainability. However, they face numerous challenges that hinder their growth and impact, including limited financial support, gender biases and regulatory complexities.

Methodology: This study follows a descriptive research design, aiming to obtain a clear and detailed understanding of the challenges faced by women ecopreneurs, specifically focusing on Avani Organics in Visakhapatnam. It relies on both primary and secondary data. A structured questionnaire was used to gather customer and stakeholder opinions, interviews were conducted with women entrepreneurs at Avani Organics, and focus group discussions were held with suppliers and customers. Secondary data

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were drawn from a literature review, case studies, government reports and industry journals. Random sampling was used to select customers for surveys and purposive sampling was applied to interview women entrepreneurs, government officials and industry experts. The study included 150 respondents, comprising customers (80), women entrepreneurs (40) and stakeholders (30).

Results & Discussion: Avani Organics, based in Visakhapatnam and established in November 2022, is co-founded by Bindu Kommana and is a brand promoted by BHOOMI Sustainable Development Society, which works with more than 11,000 rural farming families across 8 districts in Karnataka. In these 8 districts, around 3,500 farmers' lands covering 8,750 acres have been converted to completely organic cultivation of traditional rice varieties, millets, spices, pulses, poha and cold pressed oils. AVANI supplies produce to more than 400 retailers, traders, brand developers and exporters in south India and has created 15 organic outlets on a franchisee model, serving 20,000 customers every day. The survey found that most customers are in the 26-35 age group with female customers outnumbering male; most female customers felt that Avani Organics is a women-led eco-friendly business; the major challenging task for women ecopreneurs is work-life balance; both ecopreneurs and customers are highly satisfied with product quality; and most customers are willing to purchase only organic food items due to fair price.

Conclusion: The benefits that entrepreneurship programs provide can have a significant influence on women's lives and the communities they serve, making them an effective instrument for women's empowerment. Increased economic participation is one of the most important results, since women are given the tools, resources and encouragement they need to launch and expand their own enterprises, which may result in better financial independence and stability. Programs for entrepreneurship can also have a profound impact on women's self-esteem and sense of independence, and women entrepreneurs can gain leadership skills through training, networking and mentoring. Empowering women through entrepreneurship supports social development, economic expansion and gender equality.

Keywords: Women Ecopreneurs; Avani Organics; Visakhapatnam; Organic Farming; Sustainability; Work-Life Balance; Gender Bias; Green Economy; Women Empowerment; Descriptive Research.

1. Introduction

Women have long been regarded as custodians of nature, playing a crucial role in ecological preservation and sustainability. Historically, their contributions to sustainable agriculture, seed preservation, and organic farming practices have been instrumental in maintaining environmental balance. In modern times, this legacy continues through women Ecopreneurs — entrepreneurs who integrate sustainability into their business models to promote environmental responsibility.

However, despite their significant contributions, women Ecopreneurs face numerous challenges that hinder their growth and impact. Limited access to financial resources, gender biases in business and policymaking, regulatory complexities, and the struggle to balance entrepreneurship with societal expectations are some of the key obstacles they encounter. Additionally, market competition, lack of sustainable supply chains, and inadequate government support further complicate their entrepreneurial journey. By exploring the journey of Avani Organics and its impact on local communities, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights into how women-led green businesses can drive economic growth while ensuring environmental sustainability.

2. Need for the Study

Women make stronger business and entrepreneurial leaders due to their higher emotional intelligence, resilience, and ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Promoting women's employment is seen by many companies as essential to reaching sustainability objectives. This study will shed important light on how Indian women entrepreneurs are promoting sustainable business practices.

3. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the challenges faced by women Ecopreneurs, with a special emphasis on Avani Organics. It examines financial, social, and regulatory barriers that

hinder the growth of women-led sustainable businesses. The research covers customer perceptions, buying behaviour, and awareness of eco-friendly products. The geographical scope is limited to Visakhapatnam, analyzing the regional eco-business landscape.

4. Objectives of the Study

- (a) To analyse the role of Women Ecopreneurs in promoting sustainability and environmental conservation.
- (b) To examine the challenges faced by women Ecopreneurs, including financial, social, regulatory and market related barriers.
- (c) To explore the journey of Avani Organics and its contribution to sustainable business practices in Visakhapatnam.
- (d) To assess the impact of gender biases and social expectations on women's participation in ecopreneurship.
- (e) To evaluate the effectiveness of existing government policies and support mechanisms for Ecopreneurs in the green economy.

5. Methodology of the Study

Methodology defines the research design, data collection methods, and sampling techniques used in the study. It plays a crucial role in ensuring the accuracy and reliability of findings. This study follows a descriptive research design, aiming to obtain a clear and detailed understanding of the challenges faced by women Ecopreneurs, specifically focusing on Avani Organics in Visakhapatnam.

5.1 Sources of Data

This study relies on both primary and secondary data to achieve its research objectives.

(i) Primary Data: A structured questionnaire was used to gather customer opinions and stakeholders on Avani Organics and the challenges faced by the women Ecopreneurs.

Interviews were conducted with women entrepreneurs at Avani Organics to understand their experiences, financial struggles, and market challenges. Focus group discussions were held with stakeholders, including suppliers and customers, to assess the impact of women-led eco-businesses.

(ii) Secondary Data: Literature review, case studies, government reports, and industry journals were studied and analyzed to understand the broader challenges of women Ecopreneurs. Online sources, magazines, and previous research papers provided insights into sustainable entrepreneurship and business strategies.

5.2 Sampling

Sampling is a key component of the research design, ensuring that data collection represents the target population accurately.

Sampling Technique: Random sampling was used to select customers for surveys to ensure unbiased opinions about Avani Organics. Purposive sampling was applied to interview women entrepreneurs, government officials, and industry experts.

Sample Size: 150 Respondents. The study included 150 respondents, comprising customers (80), women entrepreneurs (40), and stakeholders (30) to provide diverse perspectives. The sample was selected to ensure representation from different economic backgrounds, consumer segments, and business stakeholders. This methodology ensures a comprehensive and objective analysis of the challenges women Ecopreneurs face while highlighting potential solutions for their business growth and sustainability.

6. Review of Literature

With the rise of more female-led companies in the sustainability space, the idea of women Ecopreneurs has attracted a lot of attention lately. According to research, women are essential to environmental preservation and green business projects, but they also face many obstacles, such as monetary constraints, social norms, and

competitiveness in the market. This review looks at previous research on women Ecopreneurs, their difficulties, and how support systems might help them succeed.

Devi. A. et al., (2023) focused on Women's empowerment has major advantages for the larger community in addition to being a question of human rights. Gender equality has been repeatedly shown to support sustainable development, better health outcomes, economic stability, and higher-quality education. The best decision a community or nation can make to promote a more successful and just society is to invest in women's empowerment. Gender inequality still exists in Jammu in a number of areas, including political representation, economic participation, and education. Women frequently experience discrimination, and their ideas and efforts are frequently disregarded. Addressing gender disparity and ending discriminatory practices in the area have been the goals of recent projects.

To make sure self-help organizations and microfinance initiatives are effectively empowering people and communities, it is imperative to keep a tight eye on their operations. Such monitoring is essential for confirming that these programs have a beneficial influence on economic growth and successfully reduce poverty, promoting a more just and inclusive society.

Meena, R. et al., (2023) explained that although women's employment in Rajkot District is better than it is in the rest of Gujarat, there is still opportunity for improvement. Enhancing educational chances, creating better job options, and bringing about a change in the way society views women are the main areas that need to be improved. It is underlined that women's empowerment is essential to this development. Given its capacity to spur constructive change, the study promotes a greater emphasis on girls' education as a national goal. The report also highlights how males often ignore

women's problems and notes that women's empowerment has the potential to greatly improve health, quality of life, and societal advancement in general.

Yadav et al., (2022) expressed that both necessity and opportunity entrepreneurs varied in their socioeconomic characteristics, the types of opportunities they seized, and the factors that contributed to their success. In particular, behavioral economists tend to focus more on the environment of decision-making when examining women's entrepreneurship in emerging nations.

V. Krishnamoorthy and R. Balasubramani (April 2021), identified the key elements that drive women entrepreneurs and how they affect their success as entrepreneurs. According to the survey, the key motivators for entrepreneurship include ambition, knowledge and skills, family support, market opportunities, independence, government subsidies, and satisfaction. The study also found that the entrepreneurial motivational factors of ambition, knowledge and competence, and independence significantly affect the success of entrepreneurs.

Veena S. Samani, (2020) in her thesis, shed light on a particular segment of the working class: women who work in food processing. According to the report, the majority of Gujarati women are skilled and knowledgeable in food processing and preparation. Although the types and quantities of food processing may vary, these businesses have shown to be quite successful whether or not they are connected to homes. Additionally, the current study sheds light on their methods, issues, expertise, and attitude. For all of the chosen women, stress was the main issue. According to the study, the majority of female entrepreneurs were Hindu, about 65% of them were from nuclear households, and just a small percentage had received formal education.

7. About Avani Organics

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Avani Organics, based in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, established in November 2022, is a notable example of women-led entrepreneurship in sustainable and organic farming. Co-founded by Bindu Kommana, the organization is dedicated to empowering women and nurturing nature. "AVANI" is meaning of BHOOMI (Earth), AVANI Organic is a brand promoted by BHOOMI Sustainable Development Society. BHOOMI is working with more than 11000 Rural area farming families, covering 8 districts in Karnataka. These families are purely involved in Organic farming, soil and water conservation, rearing of local livestock breeds, etc. BHOOMI is working with farmers to strengthen their livelihood. These Farmers are growing all food grains organically, and products are marketed by AVANI Organic. It was started in 2010 because of the market for our organic farmers' produce both in retail and bulk. Now AVANI is supplying their Farmer's produce to more than 400 retailers, traders, brand developers, and exporters in south India.

In 8 districts around 3500 farmers' lands are converted to completely organic in an area of 8750 acres. Mainly, we are focused on different varieties of traditional rice like Red Rice, Brown Rice, Black Rice, Rajamudi, Scented Rice, Medicinal Rice, Boiled Rice, Regular Rice, etc., and all millets, spices, pulses, Poha, and Cold Pressed Oils. These are organically certified and procured from organic-certified farmers at premium prices. The majority of the location is situated in the western ghat area and the rest of the farmers are semi and dry zones, therefore, almost all groceries growing in our working area. We have created 15 organic outlets in different locations as a franchisee model and provide very good service to our 20000 customers every day.

8. Results and Recommendations

The following results are obtained from the responses given by the targeted audience by the Structured Questionnaire.

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- (a) Most of the customers are in the age group of 26-35 years and female customers are more than the male.
- (b) Most of the female customers felt that the Avani Organics is women led eco-friendly business.
- (c) The major challenging task for the women ecopreneurs is the work life balance.
- (d) Women Ecopreneurs and customers are highly satisfied with the Quality of the Products.
- (e) Most of the customers are willing to purchase only organic food items due to fair price.

The following recommendations are obtained from the responses given by the targeted audience by the Structured Questionnaire.

- (a) The Government need to encourage the organic products with proper awareness programmes and financial assistance.
- (b) It is advisable to improve the sales through online or through with proper App Design.
- (c) It is better to collaborate with the eco-friendly brands, so that the turnover and access of the products will increase considerably.
- (d) For ease of access, it is advisable to start more branches with a wide variety of products.
- (e) There is a need to identify the sources of material to success the organics which is eco-friendly and creates employment opportunities.

9. Conclusion

The benefits that entrepreneurship programs provide can have a significant influence on women's lives and the communities they serve, making them an effective instrument for women's empowerment. Increased economic participation is one of the most important

results, since women are given the tools, resources, and encouragement they need to launch and expand their own enterprises. Women may gain more control over their personal and familial lives as a result of this increasing participation, which may also result in better financial independence and stability. Programs for entrepreneurship can have a profound impact on women's self-esteem and sense of independence in addition to their financial advantages. Women entrepreneurs can gain leadership skills and become more successful leaders in their communities and enterprises through training, networking, and mentoring.

Furthermore, women-led companies frequently benefit society by fostering sustainability, generating jobs, and assisting local communities. All things considered, empowering women through entrepreneurship can support social development, economic expansion, and gender equality, which benefits both female entrepreneurs and society at large.

It is a crucial investment that may enhance the lives of women and their families and bring about long-lasting change.

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