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

Effect of Ecopreneurship on Environment Protection and Sustainable Development in India: The Role of Women Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Introduction: Ecopreneurship, a synergistic blend of environmental stewardship and entrepreneurial innovation, is gaining recognition as a powerful tool for addressing pressing ecological challenges while fostering socio-economic growth. It represents a paradigm shift in how businesses are conceived and operated, moving beyond profit-centric models to those that prioritize ecological balance and long-term sustainability. In the Indian context, where environmental degradation poses serious threats to biodiversity, public health and climate resilience, ecopreneurship has emerged as a timely and transformative approach.

Methodology: This paper delves into the growing ecosystem of women-led ecopreneurship in India, examining how these ventures reflect a unique confluence of community-centric values, environmental consciousness and innovative problem-solving. The study first defines ecopreneurship and establishes its relevance to India's environmental and economic landscape, then examines the role of women entrepreneurs across five dimensions: innovative green solutions, community engagement and grassroots empowerment, economic empowerment, promoting renewable energy, and waste management and recycling. In-depth case studies of pioneering women ecopreneurs are presented, followed by an

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assessment of environmental impact, an alignment mapping against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and an analysis of the challenges faced and the opportunities available.

Results & Discussion: Women-led businesses such as Bare Necessities in zero-waste lifestyle products and Green Sole in upcycled footwear demonstrate the potential of sustainable innovation, while rural self-help groups promote organic farming, eco-tourism and water conservation. Two case studies are documented: Poonam Bir Kasturi's Daily Dump in Bangalore, which encourages household composting through user-friendly compost bins and awareness campaigns and has diverted tons of organic waste from landfills; and Rashmi Bharti's Avani Kumaon in Uttarakhand, which promotes sustainable livelihoods through textile production using natural dyes and solar-powered looms. Measurable environmental contributions include reduction in plastic waste through biodegradable packaging and upcycling, soil and water conservation through organic farming, biodiversity conservation through reviving traditional seed banks, and emission reductions through clean energy adoption. These contributions align with SDG 5, SDG 7, SDG 12 and SDG 13. Four categories of challenge are identified: financial constraints, limited market access, cultural and social barriers, and skill gaps.

Conclusion: Women ecopreneurs are emerging as pivotal contributors to India's sustainable future. Their enterprises demonstrate that environmental protection and economic growth can go hand in hand when guided by innovation, inclusivity and ecological responsibility. Despite facing systemic barriers such as limited funding, market access challenges and socio-cultural constraints, women-led green ventures continue to make significant strides, and their efforts align closely with India's climate commitments and Sustainable Development Goals. To unlock their full potential, targeted support is essential, including gender-sensitive policy frameworks, financial inclusion mechanisms, skill development programmes and stronger institutional networks.

Keywords: Ecopreneurship; Women Entrepreneurs; Environment Protection; Sustainable Development; India; Sustainable Development Goals; Green Economy; Circular Economy; Renewable Energy; Waste Management.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the global community has come to recognize the critical urgency of addressing environmental degradation while sustaining economic growth. Issues such as

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climate change, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and resource depletion have reached alarming levels, prompting a widespread re-evaluation of traditional economic models. In this context, ecopreneurship — a form of entrepreneurship rooted in ecological values and sustainable innovation — has emerged as a powerful and pragmatic response. It blends the dynamism of entrepreneurial ventures with the responsibility of environmental stewardship, providing scalable and community-based solutions to pressing ecological concerns.

India, as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, is at a crossroads where economic expansion increasingly collides with environmental sustainability. The country has seen rapid urbanization, industrialization, and population growth, all of which have contributed to severe environmental challenges. These include deteriorating air and water quality, rising greenhouse gas emissions, unchecked deforestation, overexploitation of natural resources, and mounting waste. Such trends threaten not only environmental well-being but also public health, food security, and long-term economic stability.

Against this backdrop, ecopreneurs are emerging as change agents who harness innovation and local knowledge to address environmental issues in transformative ways. Their initiatives range from sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, eco-friendly manufacturing, and plastic alternatives to biodiversity conservation and waste management. Importantly, the rise of women ecopreneurs in India signals a profound shift in both the entrepreneurial and environmental landscape. Women are increasingly stepping forward as innovators, educators, community mobilizers, and business leaders, often bringing a holistic and inclusive approach to sustainability.

What distinguishes women-led ecopreneurship is its dual focus on environmental sustainability and social equity. These ventures often work at the grassroots level, empowering marginalized communities, creating livelihood opportunities, and promoting

education and awareness about sustainable practices. For instance, many women in rural India are leading organic farming cooperatives, initiating clean energy projects, and developing handcrafted eco-products that revive traditional knowledge systems while reducing environmental harm.

By embedding environmental goals within inclusive economic models, women ecopreneurs are playing a pivotal role in advancing India's national and international commitments. Their work contributes directly to multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Furthermore, their ventures align with India's nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Climate Agreement, by reducing emissions, promoting renewable energy, and fostering sustainable consumption.

In essence, women ecopreneurs in India are not merely participating in the green economy — they are shaping its future. Their work illustrates that sustainable development is most effective when it is inclusive, locally rooted, and driven by those who understand the social and environmental fabric of their communities. Strengthening their presence and enabling their growth can serve as a powerful lever in India's pursuit of a resilient, equitable, and sustainable future.

2. Defining Ecopreneurship and Its Relevance in India

Ecopreneurship, also known as environmental or ecological entrepreneurship, represents a progressive approach to business that integrates sustainability into the very foundation of entrepreneurial ventures. Unlike conventional enterprises that often prioritize profit with little regard for environmental impact, ecopreneurship emphasizes the development of products, services, and solutions that are ecologically responsible, economically viable,

and socially inclusive. It is not just about doing business but about doing business with a purpose: minimizing harm to the planet while contributing positively to society.

At its core, ecopreneurship promotes environmental stewardship by leveraging innovation to solve critical ecological problems. This includes launching ventures that use biodegradable or renewable materials, operate with low carbon footprints, engage in clean energy practices, and implement circular economy models where waste is minimized, reused, or transformed into new resources. It encourages long-term thinking, focusing on sustainability over immediate gain, and places value on ethical production, resource efficiency, and green innovation.

In the Indian context, ecopreneurship holds significant relevance due to the country's pressing environmental challenges and its evolving economic landscape. With over 1.4 billion people, India faces growing demands on its land, water, and energy resources. Issues such as air and water pollution, plastic waste accumulation, climate variability, and biodiversity loss have intensified with urban sprawl and industrial growth. As a result, there is a growing need for business models that support environmental restoration while also creating employment and driving inclusive growth.

India's policy environment increasingly supports ecopreneurial ventures. Initiatives such as "Startup India" and "Make in India" provide financial incentives, technical assistance, and incubation support for innovative startups, including those focused on green technologies. The "National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)" outlines missions aimed at promoting solar energy, energy efficiency, water conservation, sustainable agriculture, and strategic climate adaptation, all of which open doors for ecopreneurs to contribute meaningfully. Moreover, schemes such as Stand-Up India and Mudra Yojana specifically aim to enhance women's participation in entrepreneurship, providing a much-needed boost to women-led green enterprises.

Women ecopreneurs are particularly well-positioned to drive this transformation in India. Many bring with them deep-rooted traditional knowledge systems, such as organic farming practices, indigenous crafts, and natural resource management, which are inherently sustainable. When combined with modern technologies and business strategies, these practices create powerful models for sustainable enterprise. Women-led ventures are often more community-oriented, emphasizing local sourcing, inclusive hiring, and reinvestment into social development, all of which align closely with global sustainability principles.

Examples abound across the country. From startups that produce eco-friendly sanitary products and biodegradable packaging, to those that run renewable energy initiatives and community recycling programs, women-led ecopreneurial ventures are forging a path toward a greener economy. They are not only tackling environmental issues but also generating income, building skills, and fostering resilience in vulnerable communities.

In conclusion, ecopreneurship is not just relevant to India's development — it is essential. As the country navigates the complexities of environmental degradation, economic disparity, and climate change, ecopreneurship offers a sustainable, inclusive, and scalable solution. Women entrepreneurs, in particular, are proving that environmentally responsible business can also be socially empowering and economically rewarding, making them key stakeholders in India's sustainable future.

3. Role of Women Entrepreneurs in Ecopreneurship

3.1 Innovative Green Solutions

Women-led businesses such as Bare Necessities (zero-waste lifestyle products) and Green Sole (upcycled footwear from discarded shoes) demonstrate the potential of sustainable innovation. These ventures not only reduce waste but also create market demand for environmentally conscious consumerism.

3.2 Community Engagement and Grassroots Empowerment

In rural India, women are organizing self-help groups (SHGs) that promote organic farming, eco-tourism, and water conservation. Their grassroots involvement ensures that environmental awareness percolates into communities often neglected in policy discourse.

3.3 Economic Empowerment

Ecopreneurship empowers women by providing them with meaningful employment and economic independence. For instance, handloom and natural dye cooperatives allow rural women to preserve traditional crafts while adopting eco-friendly production methods.

3.4 Promoting Renewable Energy

Women are increasingly involved in the adoption and distribution of renewable energy technologies. From solar panels in off-grid villages to biogas units for clean cooking, women entrepreneurs are bridging the energy access gap in an environmentally responsible manner.

3.5 Waste Management and Recycling

Urban women entrepreneurs are leading waste segregation, composting, and plastic recycling ventures, transforming waste into wealth. Their efforts significantly reduce the burden on municipal waste systems and promote circular consumption patterns.

4. Case Studies of Leading Women Ecopreneurs

4.1 Poonam Bir Kasturi — Founder, Daily Dump

Based in Bangalore, Poonam founded Daily Dump, an initiative that encourages household composting. By designing user-friendly compost bins and conducting awareness campaigns, Daily Dump has diverted tons of organic waste from landfills and encouraged behavioral change among urban dwellers.

4.2 Rashmi Bharti — Co-founder, Avani Kumaon

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Operating in Uttarakhand, Rashmi's Avani Kumaon promotes sustainable livelihoods through textile production using natural dyes and solar-powered looms. Her work has empowered local women while preserving biodiversity and traditional knowledge systems.

These case studies exemplify how women ecopreneurs are simultaneously addressing environmental and social issues through holistic business models.

5. Environmental Impact of Women-led Ecopreneurship

Women ecopreneurs have made measurable contributions to environmental protection:

- **Reduction in Plastic Waste:** Through biodegradable packaging and upcycling initiatives.
- **Soil and Water Conservation:** Promoting organic farming techniques that improve soil health and reduce chemical runoff.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Reviving traditional seed banks and cultivating indigenous plant varieties.
- **Emission Reductions:** Adoption of clean energy sources and promotion of low-carbon transport systems.

Their actions contribute directly to mitigating climate change and promoting ecosystem resilience.

6. Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Women ecopreneurs actively contribute to multiple SDGs:

Table 1: Contribution of women ecopreneurs to the Sustainable Development Goals

SDG	Contribution
SDG 5: Gender Equality	Empowerment through financial independence and leadership roles
SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	Adoption and promotion of solar energy solutions
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Eco-friendly products and circular business models
SDG 13: Climate Action	Community-level climate resilience projects and awareness drives

These contributions reflect not just environmental impact, but also long-term socio-economic transformation.

7. Challenges Faced by Women Ecopreneurs

Despite their successes, women ecopreneurs in India face several barriers:

- **Financial Constraints:** Difficulty in accessing loans and venture capital due to gender bias and lack of collateral.
- **Limited Market Access:** Difficulty in competing with established, often unsustainable, large-scale corporations.
- **Cultural and Social Barriers:** Patriarchal mindsets and restrictive norms often hinder women's mobility and decision-making authority.
- **Skill Gaps:** Many lack formal training in business management or environmental science.

These challenges necessitate targeted interventions to create a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

8. Opportunities and the Way Forward

With the right support, the future of women in ecopreneurship is promising. Key enablers include:

- **Policy Support:** Government schemes like Stand-Up India, Mudra Yojana, and Skill India can be leveraged to support women-led green businesses.
- **Mentorship and Networking:** Platforms that connect ecopreneurs with mentors, investors, and like-minded collaborators.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration with CSR programs and environmental NGOs to provide resources and technical expertise.
- **Awareness and Education:** Environmental literacy programs and business training focused on sustainability.

Creating dedicated green incubators and gender-responsive funding models can further accelerate growth in this sector.

9. Conclusion

Women ecopreneurs are emerging as pivotal contributors to India's sustainable future. Their enterprises demonstrate that environmental protection and economic growth can go hand in hand when guided by innovation, inclusivity, and ecological responsibility. By integrating traditional knowledge with modern green technologies, these women are not only addressing critical environmental issues such as waste management, renewable energy adoption, and biodiversity conservation but are also creating livelihoods, empowering communities, and promoting social equity.

Despite facing systemic barriers such as limited funding, market access challenges, and socio-cultural constraints, women-led green ventures continue to make significant strides. Their efforts align closely with India's climate commitments and Sustainable Development Goals, proving that ecopreneurship is both a practical and transformative pathway to sustainable development.

To unlock the full potential of women in ecopreneurship, targeted support is essential. This includes gender-sensitive policy frameworks, financial inclusion mechanisms, skill development programs, and stronger institutional networks. By investing in and amplifying the role of women ecopreneurs, India can accelerate its transition toward a resilient, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable economy — one where both people and the planet thrive.

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