

Corporate to Cottage: Women Entrepreneurs Driving Sustainable Business Models in Rural and Urban Spaces

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ABSTRACT

As more and more women are making a shift from corporate workspace to establishing their own businesses, many of them have shown keen interest in promoting sustainable businesses and thereby connecting rural and urban economies as a by-product. This study examines 385 women entrepreneurs based in Delhi NCR exploring their reasons for transition from Corporate to entrepreneurship, the challenges they have faced, and the strategies they are using. Primary data has been collected through survey method on parameters like workplace barriers (glass ceiling), work-life balance, financial independence, and the desire for professional freedom and SPSS has been used as the analytical tool.

From the results, it emanates that significant number of women entrepreneurs have ventured into self-owned digital finance enterprises (Green Fintech), and eco-friendly practices. Their businesses help in creating strong value chains between urban markets and rural enterprises.

It is encouraging to observe that these women owned sustainable enterprises encourage green investments and use resources efficiently.

Going with the entrepreneurial experiences shared by these women, it is clearly evident that more meaningful policies are needed to improve financial access, digital skills, and government support so that sustainable businesses may find their footing in an otherwise volatile market.

The findings also indicate that corporate experience and technology-driven rural entrepreneurship can work together not just to promote balanced economic growth but also help in gender equality in India.

Keywords: Women led business, Entrepreneurship, corporate sustainability, rural-urban synergy, digital finance

I. INTRODUCTION

As more women are moving from corporate employment to entrepreneurship, India's economic landscape is witnessing a new and pleasant change. Studies suggest that women may be choosing to opt out of corporate careers due to difficulties like glass ceiling and leadership barriers, work-life balance challenges, and limited career growth opportunities. However, they neither exit the industry nor leave the workforce. They just opt out of a stringent corporate setup to create a venture of their own, thus honing and channelizing their entrepreneurial skills.

The current study was undertaken on women in sustainable businesses, who ventures link corporates to cottages. That is, their ventures bridge the rural urban connections. Some of the key areas in which these women led business operate are sustainability, digital finance, and inclusive growth. Thus, they not only contribute to local economic growth but also promote

sustainable and inclusive business practices, strengthening the ecosystem of entrepreneurship in India.

A. Research Problem and Objectives

The literature review done on the subject indicates that despite the potential women entrepreneurs hold, they face both structural and financial barriers, such as limited access to funding, mentorship, and market linkages. Yet many of them have succeeded in overcoming these challenges and blazing their own trail. It would be interesting to study what motivates them and what strategic approaches do they use to break barriers. It will also help in designing effective policies and support systems for the future women force.

Thus, this study investigates how former corporate women leverage their professional skills, networks, and financial acumen to establish businesses that contribute to rural-urban synergy. An attempt is also made to understand how their businesses integrate digital finance with sustainability to create an impact on the ecosystem.

B. Theoretical Framework and Significance

This research is grounded in entrepreneurial theory. It takes into consideration behavioral economics as well. The study provides empirical insights and offers policy recommendations for strengthening women-led enterprises.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship is globally recognized for driving economic growth, innovation, and gender equality. But despite growing participation, women still face financial, social, and institutional challenges.

B. Motivations for Women's Entrepreneurship

Studies highlight how push and pull factors drive women from corporate jobs to entrepreneurship. Workplace barriers like the glass ceiling, discrimination, and work-life imbalance may be called the push-factors [Mehta, 2019]. While financial independence, flexibility, and creative control, may be called the pull-factors as they tend to attract women to self-employment [Agarwal, 2021]. In another study, Singh & Verma [2022] have observed that the more senior role or position women leaders have been at (mostly 10+ years in corporate) the more they have the propensity to switch to entrepreneurship in search for meaningful transitions or to build their passion projects.

C. Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

From the literature review done for the study, it emanates that despite the growing presence of women in business, they need to face multiple barriers. Such as, limited access to credit, social biases, regulatory constraints, and lack of mentorship [Trivedi, 2023]. As brought out in one of the studies, women entrepreneurs often struggle with "higher interest rates, collateral requirements, and exclusion from male-dominated business networks", which restrict their growth opportunities [Kumar & Sharma, 2020].

D. Financial Inclusion and Digital Finance Adoption

One learns from the review of literature on the subject that access to digital financial services has been fairly instrumental in promoting women's entrepreneurship. The adoption of Green Fintech, microfinance, mobile banking, and digital payment solutions has helped women [Mehta, 2019]. Research by Trivedi [2023] finds that 78% of women entrepreneurs in India now use fintech solutions to manage transactions.

E. Rural-Urban Synergy and Women Entrepreneurs

Women-led enterprises play a critical role in bridging urban demand with rural supply chains. Singh & Verma [2022] identify those women entrepreneurs in e-commerce, agro-tourism, and handicrafts serve as connectors between urban markets and rural producers.

F. Gaps in Existing Literature

While past studies have explored women's entrepreneurship, limited research focuses on corporate-to-entrepreneurship transitions. This research aims to bridge these gaps by providing quantitative insights into motivations, financial strategies, and business success indicators of women who transition from corporate careers to entrepreneurship.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY***A. Research Design***

Keeping the objective of the study in view, a cross-sectional, quantitative study has been adopted. The research has been designed in a manner such that it helps in examining the transition of women from corporate careers to entrepreneurship in Delhi NCR. Attempt has been made, through structured surveys and statistical analysis, to explore their motivation for such transitions made, challenges faced by them in the process, financial strategies adopted, and finally, the business success factors that helped them find a foot in entrepreneurship.

B. Sampling and Data Collection

A total of 385 women entrepreneurs who had previously worked in corporate roles were selected using purposive sampling. The eligibility criteria included:

1. Having at least three years of corporate experience before transitioning to entrepreneurship.
2. Running a registered business for at least two years in Delhi NCR.
3. Operating in sectors such as retail, manufacturing, fintech, agro-tourism, and e-commerce.

C. Data Collection Method

- Primary Data: Collected using structured questionnaires distributed via online surveys and personal interviews.
- Secondary Data: Sourced from government reports, startup funding databases, and prior research papers on women's entrepreneurship.

D. Survey Instrument

The structured questionnaire contained three types of questions:

1. Yes/No Questions (to assess background information).
2. Multiple-Choice Questions (for financial and business strategy details).
3. Likert Scale Statements (where 1-Strongly Disagree and ranges till 5-Strongly Agree) to measure motivations and challenges.

E. Statistical Analysis

The collected data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to test hypotheses and derive meaningful insights.

Statistical Techniques Used: Descriptive Statistics, t-Test, Chi-Square Test and Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

F. Ethical Considerations

To maintain research integrity, the ethical guidelines of Informed Consent, Confidentiality and Data Security has been adhered to.

G. Limitations of the Study

While this research provides valuable insights, some limitations exist:

- **Geographical Constraint:** The study focuses only on Delhi NCR and may not be fully generalizable to other regions.
- **Self-Reported Data:** Responses may include subjective biases.
- **Time Constraint:** The cross-sectional approach does not track long-term entrepreneurial success.

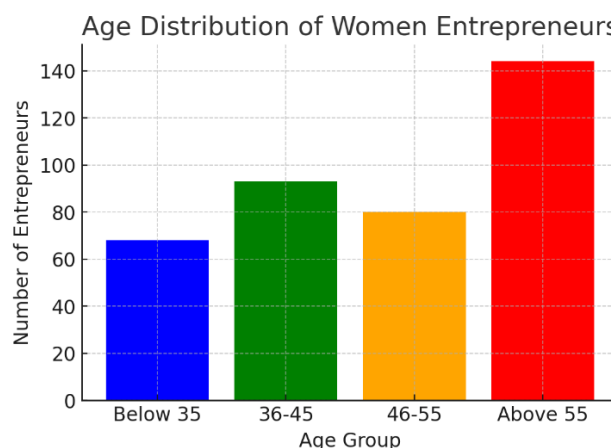
IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A. Demographics of Respondents

The study surveyed 385 women entrepreneurs in Delhi NCR, all of whom had transitioned from corporate careers to self-employment. The demographic breakdown provides insights into age distribution, education levels, marital status, and corporate experience which may have a link or influence on their entrepreneurial motivations.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

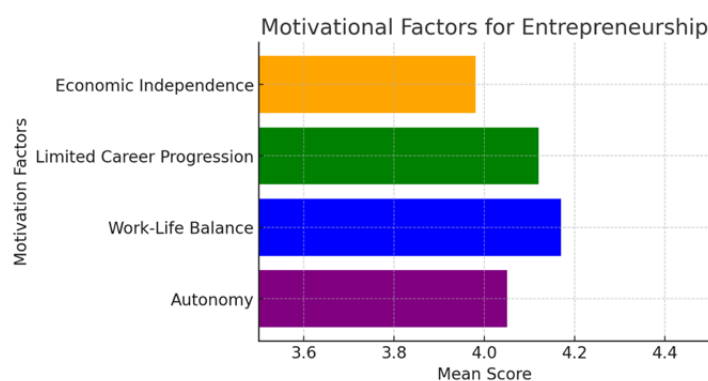
Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group	Below 35	68	17.6%
	36-45	93	24.2%
	46-55	80	20.8%
	Above 55	144	37.4%
Marital Status	Single	139	36.1%
	Married	246	63.9%
Education Level	Graduate	55	14.3%
	Postgraduate	117	30.4%
	Doctorate	213	55.3%
Corporate Exp.	1-5 Years	56	14.5%
	6-10 Years	165	42.9%
	More than 10 Years	164	42.6%

Graph 1: Age Distribution of Women Entrepreneurs**B. Key Motivations for Transitioning to Entrepreneurship**

From the primary data analysis, key push and pull factors influencing the shift women make from corporate jobs to self-started ventures were clearly visible. Their top three motivations included: (i) Desire for Autonomy (ii) Work-Life Balance and Corporate Glass Ceiling (iii) Career Limitations.

Table 2: Entrepreneurial Motivation Scores

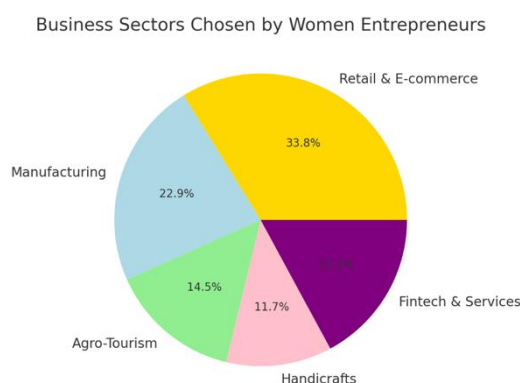
Motivation Factor	Mean Score	t-Value	p-Value
Autonomy	4.05	42.118	<0.001
Work-Life Balance	4.17	49.031	<0.001
Limited Career Progression	4.12	46.442	<0.001
Economic Independence	3.98	38.502	<0.001

Graph 2: Motivational Factors for Entrepreneurship**C. Business Sectors and Economic Contributions**

The business sectors chosen by women entrepreneurs predominantly included retail, e-commerce, manufacturing, and services. A significant portion engaged in agro-tourism, handicrafts, and fintech startups that catered to both urban markets and rural supply chains.

Table 3: Business Sectors of Women Entrepreneurs

Sector	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Retail & E-commerce	130	33.8%
Manufacturing	88	22.9%
Agro-Tourism	56	14.5%
Handicrafts	45	11.7%
Fintech & Services	66	17.1%

Graph 3: Business Sectors Chosen by Women Entrepreneurs

D. Financial Strategies and Digital Adoption

Funding Sources

The results show that women entrepreneurs largely depend on the following factors to source funds for business: -

- Self-financing: 45%
- Bank Loans & Microfinance: 30%
- Government Schemes: 15%
- Private Investors & Crowdfunding: 10%

Digital Finance

A significant 78% of respondents have adopted these methods of digital finance in their setups – (i) Banking (ii) Fintech solutions (iii) E-commerce platform. All three play a major role in sustainable and agro-based businesses.

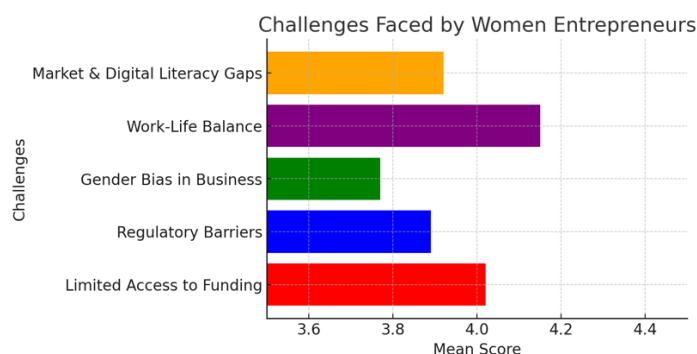
E. Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

Top Five Challenges Identified in the Study are:

1. Limited Access to Institutional Credit
2. Regulatory and Licensing Barriers
3. Gender Bias in Business Networks
4. Balancing Family & Business Responsibilities
5. Limited Market Reach & Digital Literacy

Table 4: Entrepreneurial Challenges and Mean Scores

Challenge	Mean Score
Limited Access to Funding	4.02
Regulatory Barriers	3.89
Gender Bias in Business	3.77
Work-Life Balance Issues	4.15
Market & Digital Literacy Gaps	3.92

Graph 4: Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

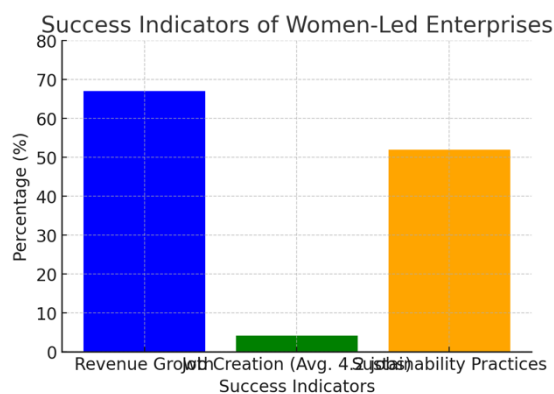
F. Entrepreneurial Success Indicators

Women-led businesses showed substantial economic and social contributions:

- Revenue Growth: 67% reported increased annual revenues within three years.
- Job Creation: On average, each generated 4.2 direct employment opportunities.
- Sustainability Practices: 52% incorporated eco-friendly practices in their businesses.

Table 5: Entrepreneurial Success Indicators

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Revenue Growth	67%
Job Creation	4.2 jobs per business
Sustainability Practices	52%

Graph 5: Success Indicators of Women-Led Enterprises

G. Key Takeaways

1. Adopting Digital Finance: Digital platforms are a key enabler in overcoming financial barriers.
2. Sectors with High Participation: Women are dominating in retail, manufacturing, and digital commerce.
3. Challenges Remain: Funding gaps, gender biases, and work-life balance continue to pose hurdles.
4. Growth Potential: Women-led enterprises can further expand economic contributions if proper policy support and digital literacy is extended along with financial accessibility.

V. DISCUSSION

From the results of the study based on primary data collection using survey as well as after talking to a couple of them for a broader narrative understanding, the vital role women entrepreneurs play in strengthening economic sustainability and rural-urban integration gets clearly highlighted. Women shifting from corporate careers bring valuable skills, leadership, and expertise from their past jobs, which they use to establish their own businesses.

Further, they understand the pulse of rural-urban bridge and therefore, their sustainable business models connect urban financial markets with rural economies. Their ventures also help in job creation, economic diversification, and leave long lasting social impact.

What emerges as one of the most encouraging findings is the massive use of digital finance by women entrepreneurs in their business. From fintech tools and digital banking to establishing e-commerce infrastructures, they have utilised technology to its best advantage for market expansion.

Yet, barriers like high interest rates, complex licensing, and lack of collateral and restrictive loan policies continue to exist limiting their growth. This is one area where government support is highly needed. Corporate partnerships and skill development initiatives can also help enhance the ecosystem in which entrepreneurship thrives.

Women-led businesses also promote social and economic empowerment by prioritizing sustainability, ethical sourcing, and community engagement. While gender biases, stereotyping and societal norms remain a steady challenge, these women manage to go one step further and employ and mentor other women too, fostering financial independence.

It can be inferred from the study results that an integrated support framework is crucial for women to keep their businesses sustained in the long run and empower them for the future. This, in turn, would lead to gender equity and bridging of urban and rural economies which is indicative of a healthy nation.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of women entrepreneurs in driving sustainable rural-urban economic synergy. The transition from corporate careers to entrepreneurship is primarily fuelled by the need for autonomy, financial independence, and

improved work-life balance. Women-led businesses significantly contribute to job creation, economic diversification, and financial inclusion, helping to bridge the gap between urban expertise and rural enterprise development.

However, several challenges hinder the growth and scalability of women-led businesses. These include limited access to institutional credit, regulatory hurdles, gender biases, socio-cultural expectations, financial literacy gaps and policy constraints which continue to restrict their full potential.

A. Recommendations

1. Financial Inclusion: Expand access to low-interest microloans, venture capital, and alternative financing options for women entrepreneurs.
2. Policy Support: Simplify business registration, tax structures, and compliance regulations to ease market entry.
3. Capacity Building: Implement training programs, mentorship initiatives, and networking platforms to equip women with business skills and market knowledge.
4. Digital Literacy: Promote technology adoption and financial education programs.
5. Corporate and Government Partnerships: Encourage corporate incubators, public-private collaborations, and rural enterprise funding to strengthen women-led businesses.

By implementing these strategies, women entrepreneurs can play a more influential role in fostering sustainable economic growth, rural-urban connectivity, and gender-inclusive development in India.

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