

Seeds of change : Empowering women agri-entrepreneurs in India through key drivers

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Abstract

This study explores the key drivers behind women's participation in agricultural entrepreneurship in rural India, emphasizing factors that enable women to establish and sustain agri-enterprises. This study examines the key drivers for women's involvement in 14 rural India's agricultural entrepreneurship, focusing on the elements that allow women to start and grow agribusinesses. The research uses Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to identify ten key drivers: the need for achievement and self-motivation; the ability to make decisions; government policies and support; marketing networks and market access; training and skill development; family support; digital transformation and technology adoption; work-life

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balance; innovativeness and adaptability; and being independent financially. The capacity to decide for themselves and be financially independent were determined to be essential for enabling women to lead their business endeavours. Women are additionally supported by market access and government regulations, which lower obstacles and provide necessary resources. In order for women to continue their business endeavours, family support became a crucial component in striking a balance between work and family obligations. Furthermore, the use of technology and the development of skills were important facilitators that increased the efficiency and production of women's agribusinesses. The results also emphasize the value of self-motivation and flexibility, which help women entrepreneurs become more resilient and creative. The study comes to the conclusion that addressing these issues with focused interventions can greatly improve the growth and sustainability of agribusinesses run by women. The wider socioeconomic development of rural areas can be accomplished by encouraging women to engage in agricultural entrepreneurship, which will ultimately lead to more sustainable and inclusive farming methods.

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1. Introduction

A woman entrepreneur is a person who makes a substantial contribution through the social support network and a range of financial, economical, and social connections[1]. In India, 13.45 million people are employed by women-owned enterprises. Manufacturing and retail trade are the next two industries in which almost one-third of Indian women entrepreneurs are employed. Of the 58.5 million enterprises that were counted in that census, 8.05 million were owned by women. This means that 13.76 percent of Indian entrepreneurs are women[2]. The low number of female entrepreneurs is a component of a broader issue of women's low involvement in business. This also has to do with women's low labor force participation rate and their limited access to professional, technical, and business leadership roles[3].

Women entrepreneurs are eventually establishing themselves in this industry and contributing significantly to the growth of the economy. Women entrepreneurs operate approximately one fifth (20.4%) of India's own MSME's in this country[4]. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and entrepreneurship are gaining popularity, and women are contributing significantly to developing nations' GDP by generating wealth and jobs and reducing poverty[5]. India's women-led micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) have suffered from the COVID-

19-induced economic slowdown, despite the fact that some female entrepreneurs are labelled “path breakers” in the geared toward men workplace, where women are paid considerably less than men in spite putting in the same amount of work and serving the majority of their time on household chores [6].

According to Matharu and Juneja (2021), in order to promote women’s desire for self-reliance, they must be given enough opportunities and incentives to start their own businesses in SMEs and other productive areas of the economy[7]. Globally, things are changing, and women are becoming more prominent in all areas of business, despite challenges like financial dependency, work-life balance, social pressure, and family obligations. According to the countries covered in the GEM 2020 survey, an estimated 274 million women globally are involved in starting their own businesses, 139 million are owners or managers of already-existing businesses, and 144 million are informal investors[8].

Keeping all these points in mind, this paper aims to answer one key question:

What drives women to pursue entrepreneurship in agriculture?

Literature review was done to answer the key question and 16 drivers were identified which promoted women to pursue entrepreneurship in agriculture.

1.1. Drivers of Women Agri-Entrepreneurship:

Ability to take risk: A greater inclination for taking risks is a major factor in the success of women entrepreneurs, according to a study that looked at the relationship between risk-taking attitudes and the drive for achievement. According to the study’s findings, women entrepreneurs’ success is significantly enabled by their ambition for achievement and their readiness to take chances[9].

Financial Independence: Women are frequently inspired to start their own businesses by the desire for financial independence. It was underlined that one of the main reasons women pursue entrepreneurship is to become financially independent [10].

Ability to take decision: Decision-making skills empower women to transform personal adversity into entrepreneurial opportunities. This study reported that adversity can serve as a motivating force behind women’s entrepreneurial decisions, with effective decision-making

facilitating the transition from personal challenges to business ventures [11].

Innovativeness: Higher degrees of innovativeness are associated with better business outcomes for female entrepreneurs, according to a study that examined this relationship locally. Innovativeness was directly linked to increased entrepreneurial performance among female entrepreneurs [12].

Competitiveness: Women entrepreneurs are driven to enhance their business performance by competitiveness. According to a study examining how women's entrepreneurship affects competitiveness, women-led business ventures support innovation and economic growth [13]

Work-life balance: Many women are inspired to start their own businesses in order to improve their equilibrium between work and life. One of the primary causes behind American women entrepreneurs' decision to start their own businesses was the desire to balance professional and home obligations at the same time, according to a study on the subject [14].

Ability to adapt: Women entrepreneurs frequently work in culturally and socioeconomically constrictive environments. According to a study conducted among Mexican women entrepreneurs, flexibility enables them to successfully negotiate these limitations by modifying their tactics to conform to accepted standards and expectations [15]

Socialization: Entrepreneurial success depends on the creation of social capital, which is facilitated by socialization processes. This study used the perspectives of cognitive and social capital to examine the variables influencing Indian women's inclination to start their own business. Women's decisions to pursue entrepreneurship are greatly influenced by social networks & support systems that are formed through socialization, according to the research [16].

Need for achievement: A study conducted among Pakistani women entrepreneurs investigated the variables influencing their performance as business owners. According to the study, women's entrepreneurial activities are positively impacted by a strong demand for achievement, which motivates them to establish ambitious objectives and persevere in the face of setbacks [17].

Digital transformation: Digital technologies empower women entrepreneurs by helping them overcome traditional constraints and creating a more favorable network environment. This study of female entrepreneurs in Albania highlighted how new digital technologies can

help women overcome obstacles in their business endeavors, creating a positive ecosystem in the process [18].

Marketing network: Marketing networks give female entrepreneurs availability of important assets that are essential to their companies' expansion. Networking is essential for obtaining entrepreneurial resources, which can be made possible via technological incubators and accelerators, according to a study on women entrepreneurs in technology [19].

Family support: Family members, especially spouses, provide essential tools to help women entrepreneurs launch and expand their companies. This study indicates that women's performance in the workplace is positively impacted by the assistance that spouses and other household members provide [20].

Government Policies: Government programs that provide funding, training, and mentorship are essential in encouraging women to launch their own companies. A study looking at the effects of government policies on Indian women entrepreneurs found that these policies have a significant positive influence and inspire women to pursue their business ventures [21].

Training Programmes: Training programs designed specifically for female entrepreneurs greatly enhance their knowledge and abilities in the business world. Participants in a study evaluating the efficacy of a women's entrepreneurship training program run by a non-governmental organization in Nigeria reported feeling satisfied and gaining useful knowledge, which encouraged them to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors [22].

Globalization: International markets are made available by globalization, giving female business owners access to a larger clientele. A research looking at women entrepreneurs in the claims that women are empowered by globalization since it gives them access to international marketplaces, which improves their chances of starting their own businesses [23].

Rewards and Recognition: Programs for recognition greatly increase the motivation and involvement of female entrepreneurs. According to this study, praising both individual and group accomplishments can boost motivation and morale, which in turn can result in higher output and corporate success.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Research Design:

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used in this qualitative study design to investigate the main factors motivating Indian women to seek entrepreneurship, especially in the agriculture industry.

2.2. Participants:

The participants of the FGDs were women who were actively engaged in agricultural entrepreneurship across diverse regions of India, including rural and semi-urban areas. Participants who were in charge of agricultural endeavors, including farming, agro-processing, and agri-business businesses, were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. To ensure variety and a thorough knowledge of the factors impacting women's decisions to pursue entrepreneurship, the sample comprised women from a range of socioeconomic origins, ages, and educational levels. A total of six FGDs were conducted, with each group consisting of 8-10 participants. The groups represented women from northern, southern, and eastern India, ensuring geographical diversity.

2.3. Data Collection:

The FGDs followed a semi-structured format, guided by open-ended questions designed to probe into the elements that encourage women to work as agricultural entrepreneurs. The following was the main topic of discussion:

What drives you to pursue entrepreneurship in agriculture?

The FGDs were conducted in an informal, supportive environment, which has been shown to encourage participants to share openly and honestly. A trained facilitator moderated the conversations, making certain that each person got a chance to speak and that the discourse stayed civil and on topic.

2.4. Data Analysis:

The verbatim transcriptions of the FGD data were examined by hand utilizing thematic analysis, as no software was employed. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of patterns and themes that reflect the key motivations, challenges, and barriers experienced by women agri-

entrepreneurs. This process involved a careful reading of the transcriptions, assigning codes to relevant segments of the text, and categorizing the data into themes such as personal motivation, family support, access to resources, and societal influence.

3. Findings

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed several key drivers that motivate women to pursue and sustain agricultural entrepreneurship in India. These findings highlight the diverse and interconnected factors contributing to the empowerment of women working in agriculture. Along with the main motivators, more encouraging information was found that clarified the ways in which these elements interact and boost women's success as entrepreneurs.

Financial Independence: Financial independence emerged as one of the biggest motivators for female agribusiness owners. Many women saw entrepreneurship as a way to gain control over their financial resources and to support themselves and their families. Beyond the initial desire to achieve financial independence, many women also mentioned the long-term economic stability entrepreneurship provided. One participant shared, "Through my business, I've gained financial freedom, and I no longer have to depend on my spouse. It has brought me peace of mind and confidence." Women entrepreneurs in agriculture used their earnings not just for immediate family expenses, but also to invest in community development projects, showcasing their expanded economic empowerment.

Ability to Take Decisions: The ability to take decisions independently was another key driver identified by the participants. Women in the FGDs expressed how autonomy in making business-related decisions—ranging from financial management to production processes—was empowering. One participant emphasized, "Being able to decide the direction of my business has been one of the most important parts of being an entrepreneur. It gives me a sense of control over my life." Decision-making autonomy increased women's self-confidence and leadership skills, which significantly contributed to their entrepreneurial success.

Government Policies & Support: Government policies and initiatives that specifically target women agri-entrepreneurs were identified as crucial drivers. Participants highlighted various government subsidies, grants, and financial schemes that have significantly facilitated their ventures. One participant noted, "The government's financial assistance

helped me purchase the necessary equipment to expand my farm. Without this, it would have been impossible.” Government policies offering subsidized loans and credit schemes for women entrepreneurs in rural areas have significantly helped women farmers access capital and expand their agricultural businesses in rural communities.

Marketing Network & Market Access: Access to marketing networks and broader market opportunities was another significant factor driving women’s agricultural entrepreneurship. Women emphasized how connecting with various networks, such as farmer cooperatives or trade fairs, helped them extend their reach beyond local markets. A participant noted, “Participating in these fairs gave me the exposure I needed to sell my products in other cities. Now, I can sell directly to consumers, and that has increased my income.” women who were part of cooperative marketing networks had better access to wider markets, as they were able to collectively pool resources and reduce costs associated with transportation and distribution. Research shows that women who participated in local community networks, such as rural women’s associations, were able to promote their products and services more effectively, leading to improved market access and a greater customer base.

Training & Skill Development: Training and skill development programs emerged as pivotal for the success of women entrepreneurs. Many participants emphasized that acquiring skills for sustainable farming techniques boosted their confidence and helped them run more efficient operations. One woman shared, “After attending training programs, I now feel confident in managing my finances, and I know how to grow my business systematically.” The women who participated in training programs focused on sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic farming or climate-resilient crops, were more likely to achieve higher yields and income.

Family Support: Family support was identified as a crucial factor that enabled women to pursue their entrepreneurial goals. Many women credited their spouses, children, and extended family members with providing both emotional and financial support, especially during the early stages of their ventures. One participant shared, “My husband’s encouragement made all the difference. He helped with managing finances and gave me the confidence to start the business.” Women were more inclined to take entrepreneurial risks, like diversifying their product lines or growing their markets, when they received emotional support from their family, especially from spouses and kids.

Digital Transformation & Technology Adoption: The adoption of digital tools and technology played a transformative role in the entrepreneurial activities of women. Many participants noted how mobile phones, social media, and digital platforms helped them reach wider markets, improve product visibility, and streamline operations. A participant explained, "With my phone and social media, I can connect with buyers from all over the country. It's been a huge advantage for my business." It is also found that mobile banking services allowed women entrepreneurs to easily manage their finances, track income and expenses, and access loans and financial services, contributing to better business management.

Work-Life Balance: The flexibility offered by entrepreneurship was cited as a key motivator, as it allowed women to balance their obligations to their families and their businesses. Women expressed that being their own boss helped them achieve a better work-life balance, allowing them to attend to personal and familial needs while running a business. One participant shared, "I can work according to my own schedule, which gives me more time for my children and household." Further, effective time management skills enabled women to balance both household responsibilities and business operations, leading to increased efficiency and business growth.

Innovativeness & Adaptability: Women entrepreneurs emphasized the role of innovative thinking and adaptability in growing and sustaining their businesses. Many participants mentioned how they constantly sought new methods ideas to improve their products or services, keeping them competitive in the market. One participant shared, "I started by growing vegetables, but now I've expanded into organic produce and home-made pickles. Adapting to the market's needs has been key to my success." The women entrepreneurs who embraced innovative farming techniques, such as hydroponics and polyhouses, were more successful in adapting to environmental challenges and increased market demand.

Need for Achievement & Self-Motivation: Finally, the need for achievement and self-motivation was a key intrinsic driver that propelled women to continue their entrepreneurial pursuits. Many women shared that their internal drive to succeed, coupled with a strong desire to prove their capabilities, kept them focused on their business goals despite challenges. One participant stated, "My motivation comes from within. I want to show my family, my community, and myself that I can succeed in this business." Further, the need for achievement, particularly the desire to

prove oneself in a male-dominated sector, was a major driver for many women in agriculture, motivating them to persist despite challenges.

4. Discussion

The findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) reveal a variety of factors that serve as key drivers for women pursuing agriculture-based entrepreneurship. These drivers not only provide essential motivations but also reflect broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics that empower women to establish and sustain agri-enterprises. Achieving financial autonomy allows women to take control of their lives and resources, reducing their reliance on family members or external sources of income. The autonomy to make business-related decisions emerged as another significant driver in women's entrepreneurial journeys. Government policies and support mechanisms were consistently identified as essential enablers in women's agricultural entrepreneurship.

Access to markets and robust marketing networks were highlighted as essential drivers for women's agribusinesses to be successful and sustainable. Numerous female participants highlighted that being part of agricultural cooperatives, women's farmer groups, or other local networks helped them connect with larger markets, share knowledge, and improve their bargaining power. Training and skill development programs emerged as fundamental drivers of women's success in agri-entrepreneurship. Many women entrepreneurs noted that these programs played a critical role in enhancing their technical knowledge and business acumen.

Family support was consistently cited as a crucial factor in women's ability to pursue and sustain entrepreneurship in agriculture. Many women acknowledged the importance of support from spouses, parents, and other family members in enabling them to manage the dual responsibilities of household duties and entrepreneurial ventures. With the rise of mobile technology, internet access, and digital tools, women in rural areas now have greater access to valuable information, such as market prices, weather forecasts, and agricultural advice. The opportunity to achieve a work-life balance was identified as a major driver in women's decisions to pursue agri-entrepreneurship. Innovativeness and adaptability were identified as essential drivers of women's entrepreneurial success. Women in agriculture are often at the forefront of adopting new technologies, farming methods, and business strategies to improve productivity and meet changing market demands. A strong need for achievement and self-motivation was a significant psychological driver for

women pursuing agri-entrepreneurship. Many women expressed that the desire for personal success, recognition, and financial independence motivated them to take on the challenges of entrepreneurship.

5. Conclusion

This study identifies several critical drivers that encourage women to pursue agricultural entrepreneurship, including financial independence, decision-making autonomy, and access to government support. Marketing networks, training, and skill development also emerge as key enablers, helping women navigate the complexities of the agricultural sector. Additionally, family support, digital transformation, and work-life balance play significant roles in fostering women's entrepreneurial success. The need for achievement and adaptability further motivates women to innovate and overcome challenges. These drivers highlight the multifaceted nature of tailored interventions. By addressing these factors, it is possible to enhance the sustainability of women-led agri-enterprises. Ultimately, promoting women's participation in agriculture contributes to broader socio-economic development in rural areas.

Ethical Considerations:

The study received ethical approval from the appropriate ethics committee. All participants gave their informed consent, guaranteeing that they were aware of the study's objectives, that their participation was voluntary, and that their answers would be kept private. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities, and all data were stored securely to ensure confidentiality.

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