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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

JAINENDRA KUMAR VERMA
RAJIV GANDHI NATIONAL FELLOW
DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF LUCKNOW
LUCKNOW

ABSTRACT

Since rural women constitute a major segment of Indian population and due to their pivotal role their role in the nation building is significant. Due to lack of education they are less likely to get employment. Further low family income also requires them to go for self-employment i.e. entrepreneurship. This paper addresses challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in rural areas. Besides that the paper also explores the opportunities prevailing for rural women entrepreneurs.

KEYWORDS

Challenges, Opportunities, Rural entrepreneurs Business and family, Finance, Illiteracy, Risk bearing capacity, Visibility, Information and assistance, Training and development, Mobility constraints, Infrastructure, Corruption, Male dominated society, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the prevailing political, economical and socio-cultural environment rural women either pushed or pulled for entrepreneurship. As a result they enter in entrepreneurship whereas lots of challenges are waiting for them. Though on the one hand they have challenges over and above rural male entrepreneur as well as urban female entrepreneurs on the other they have so many opportunities to exploit. So they need to judge whether the difference of opportunities and challenges is positive or not to decide for entrepreneurship.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the challenges for rural women entrepreneurs
- To explore the opportunities for rural women entrepreneurs

METHODOLOGY

The paper attempt to explore the concepts, obviously it's an exploratory research where earlier studies on the subject matter has been readdressed to give insight to phenomenon.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL ENTREPRENEURS

Kishor and Choudhary (2011) in his study emphasize on the role of women entrepreneurs, as they have been making a significant impact in all segments of the economy in India, However, it is potentially empowering and liberating only if it provides women an opportunity to improve their well-being and enhance their capabilities. On the other hand, if it is driven by distress and is low public support than it may only increase women drudgery. The small and medium enterprises led by women experiencing some major challenges and constraints. Kumari, et. al. (2010) conducted work in the rural areas, the results of the study indicate lack of supportive network, financial and marketing problems were the major problem areas for rural women entrepreneurs and major de-motivator for other women to initiate entrepreneurial activity.

Srinivasan (2009) Microfinance has made great strides during the last decade, the SHG bank linkage programme has continue to make good progress in India but at a slower pace. It is found that poor quality of information about microfinance that is available to people renders their decision making and conservatives.

CHALLENGES FOR RURAL ENTREPRENEURS

The main challenges faced by rural women in business are lack of technical knowledge and skills and to make balance their time between work & family. Some of the challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs are as follows:

Dual role of women overlapping of responsibility of business and family: As the boundaries between the business and the family tend to be indistinct, women operating family businesses face a unique set of issues related to personal identity, role conflict, loyalties, family relationships, and attitudes towards authority. Additionally, family businesses owned by women are at a disadvantage financially and are forced to rely on internal resources of funding rather than outside sources.

Problem of finance: There are several bottlenecks and a gap in availability of credit for women. The multiplicity of schemes is not adequately listed nor is there networking among agencies. As a result, clients approaching one institution are not made aware of the best option for their requirements.

Illiteracy among rural women: The literacy rate of women in India is found at low level compared to male population. The rural women are ignorant of new technology or unskilled. They are often unable to do research & gain the necessary training. The uneducated rural women do not have the knowledge of measurement and basic accounting.

Less risk bearing capacity: Women in India lives secure and protected life in family. Decision making power related to business activities is less due to economic dependent and domination of male headed society.

Lack of visibility as strategic leaders: Changing the perceptions about the likely success of women-owned businesses depends on increasing women's visibility in leadership positions within the greater business community. In an assessment of women's presence as CEOs or Directors of large business enterprises, it has been anticipated that the exodus of women to entrepreneurial growth firms might be because women believe that have greater representation in strategic leadership positions in privately-held or family-owned firms as they provide better opportunities for leadership than available to women in publicly-traded companies.

Lack of information and assistance: Another significant need of many women business owners is obtaining the appropriate assistance and information needed to take the business to the next level of growth. In a study conducted to gather information needs of women entrepreneurs, those who were just starting their ventures, requested assistance and training in implementing the business idea, identifying initial sources of financing, and advertising/promotion. The entrepreneurs, who were already established, had a somewhat different set of needs including financing for expansion and increasing sales. It has been identified that most desired needs of fast growth entrepreneurs may be:

- Optimum use of capital to make operational decisions
- Financing growth
- Increasing the value of the business

- Compensation for self and associates
- Hiring, training and motivating for growth
- Succeeding in a rapidly changing world
- Successful selling
- Sales force management
- Management success
- Scanning of business environment

Need of training and development: Furthermore, in business schools where most of the professional advisers today were trained, the male model of business is still being taught by an overwhelming majority of male professors. Examples of women entrepreneurs have been left out of textbooks, and rarely is a female business owner used as the example or case study. Neither the women nor the men students are learning about the natural abilities and talents women are using to succeed as business owners today.

Unfortunately, without some very strong initiatives on the part of educators, the process will be slow to change.

Male dominated society: The male - female competition is another factor, which develop hurdles to women entrepreneurs in the business management process.

Despite the fact that women entrepreneurs are good in keeping their service prompt and delivery in time, due to lack of organizational skills compared to male entrepreneurs women have to face constraints from competition. The confidence to travel across day and night and even different regions and states are less found in women compared to male entrepreneurs. This shows the low level freedom of expression and freedom of mobility of the women entrepreneurs.

Lack of infrastructure and widespread corruption: These are also the other problems for the rural women entrepreneurs. They have to depend on office staffs and intermediaries to get the things done, especially the marketing and sales side of business. Here is the more probability for business fallacies like the intermediaries take major part of the surplus or professional dependence. Rural women lack training and advisory services on managerial and technical skills to solve production problems. Here more than 70 percent of enterprises are micro- and small enterprises but their growth and the competitiveness is greatly challenged by a lack of business management, marketing and technical skills besides the overall weak infrastructure and complicated legal frameworks for business processes, especially in global online transaction context.

Mobility constraints: Rural women in Indian society have got restricted mobility. The carrier of women is limited in four walls of kitchen. The women confined themselves to three Ks, Kitchen, kids & knitting. There are hardly any opportunities to cross this boundary. The mobility problem has been solved to certain extent by the explosion of Information technology & telecommunication facilities.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL ENTREPRENEURS

There is generous evidence to suggest that if more women are motivated and are given the necessary encouragement and help for becoming entrepreneurs, they would contribute effectively in running viable commercial enterprises. There are several schemes and plans both by centre and state government at different levels for the encouragement and support to rural women entrepreneurs in India. In 1999-2000, the Government of India launched "Swarna Jayanthi Grama Swarozgar Yojana" programme for promoting poverty alleviation through selfemployment and the organization of poor into Self-Help Groups (SHG). Loans sanctioned under this scheme are treated as medium-term loans. The SHGs have given a new lease of life to the women in villages for their social and economic empowerment. There is national policy for creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential. These policies provide opportunities of equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and participation in economic progress of the nation. There are diversified vocational training programmes for women by ministry of labour and employment, they have established regional vocational training institutes for development of entrepreneurial skills Following are the major programs for development of entrepreneurship in India:

- Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP): The main objectives of Integrated rural development Programme is to increase the income generating power of family who are below the poverty line to alleviate the poverty. They impart technical & entrepreneurial skills & raise the income level of the poor.
- IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) allied programmes

TRYSEM (Training Rural Youth for Self Employment)

DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas)

- JRY (Jawahar Rozgar Yojna): It is wage Employment programme implemented by Panchayats at Village, Block & District level in the ratio. 70:15:15 etc.
- Support and Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)

By Ministry of Rural Development

- Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)
- Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), including Food Grains Component
- Assistance for Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes
- National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)
- National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)
- National Food for Work Programme (NFWP)
- National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP)

By Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

- Credit Support Programme
- Rajiv Gandhi Udyami Mitra Yojana
- Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme
- Workshed Scheme for Khadi Artisans

CONCLUSION

- Rural women entrepreneurs face lots of challenges like business and family conflict, financial crisis, illiteracy, low risk bearing capacity, lack of visibility and leadership, lack of information and assistance, lack of training and development, mobility constraints, lack of infrastructure, high level of corruption, male dominated society etc. which makes their work very difficult and discouraging.
- So many support schemes has been implemented by the agencies of the Ministry of Rural Development and Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

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