



Promoting Women Entrepreneurship in the Indian Food Processing Industry: A Comprehensive Examination

Siya Sahni

Institute: Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi

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Abstract:

The food processing sector in India has witnessed significant growth in recent years, presenting promising opportunities for entrepreneurship. However, despite this growth, there exists a notable gender gap in the entrepreneurial landscape, particularly in the food processing industry. Female entrepreneurs face a multitude of challenges, ranging from limited access to finance and markets to societal norms and regulatory barriers.

This comprehensive research paper aims to explore the crucial aspect of empowering women entrepreneurs within the Indian food processing sector. It delves into the obstacles encountered by women when starting and growing their enterprises, evaluates current programs and strategies designed to support women's entrepreneurship, and provides practical suggestions for empowering female business owners in the industry.

The paper highlights the economic, social, and cultural significance of empowering women entrepreneurs in the food processing sector, emphasizing their role in driving economic growth, preserving culinary traditions, and challenging gender stereotypes. It also discusses the various obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs, including financial constraints, limited access to markets, and societal expectations. This paper examines existing programs and initiatives aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship in India, such as government schemes, skill development programs, and networking platforms. It analyzes the effectiveness of these programs and identifies areas for improvement.

This paper offers practical suggestions for empowering female business owners in the food processing sector, including improving access to finance, enhancing skill development opportunities, facilitating market linkages and networking, promoting technology adoption, and advocating for policy reforms. The research underscores the

importance of empowering women entrepreneurs in the Indian food processing sector and provides actionable recommendations for fostering a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem. By addressing the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and leveraging their potential, India can harness the full power of women's entrepreneurship to drive economic development and social progress.

I. Introduction

Over the past few years, the food processing sector in India has experienced substantial growth, emerging as a significant player in the global market. While making a substantial economic impact, this industry also holds promising prospects for entrepreneurship. Despite overall progress, there remains a noticeable gender gap in the entrepreneurial landscape, posing specific challenges for women entrepreneurs. This comprehensive research aims to offer insights into the crucial aspect of empowering women entrepreneurs within the Indian food processing sector. Women, constituting a significant portion of the population, play a pivotal role in shaping household food preferences and culinary traditions. However, they continue to face disproportionate underrepresentation in the entrepreneurial realm of the food processing industry.

The concept of women's empowerment refers to giving women the freedom to select their own lifestyle, educational path, employment, and career-related possibilities in order to achieve parity with men in the political, social, and economic domains. It is essential to the general development of a country. Women who have more control make better decisions, which makes them feel more confident. India is ranked 135th out of 146 nations in the World

Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022. The Female Entrepreneurship Index, which assesses 77 countries, also places India in that position. The depressing state of Indian women is



depicted in the world outlook. In our country, harassment, verbal and psychological abuse, rapes, discrimination at work, and other forms of abuse are commonplace for women. Because of this, empowering women is a powerful tool for creating a society that is forward-thinking and long-lasting.

Over time, employment has grown more informal. In general, 96% of women are employed in unorganized sectors, compared to 91% of males. This indicates that women are more likely than men to work in informal employment. Approximately 65-70% of women employed in unorganized sectors in large cities live in poverty. Almost half require instruction and skill improvement. In the workplace, younger women needed to be physically strong to perform manual labor. Women who are older often find it difficult to handle the strain of manual labor. Women have the lowest standing in society when it comes to labor. The majority of them have been employed for more than three years, and the type of work they do-permanent, temporary, or seasonal-determines the working circumstances. The primary cause of the challenge in selecting alternative careers is low educational attainment. Eight to twelve hours a day are required of them.

The value of women's empowerment in the food processing sector

Economic Growth and Employment: By generating employment opportunities and encouraging innovation, empowering women entrepreneurs in the food processing industry can make a substantial contribution to economic growth. An industry that is more vibrant and dynamic is the result of a workforce that is diversified in terms of perspectives. **Culinary expertise and cultural diversity:** Women are frequently the ones who preserve cultural and culinary traditions. Giving women entrepreneurs in the food processing sector more influence guarantees the promotion and preservation of various regional cuisines, which enhances the market's cultural value.

Social Impact: Gender equality is promoted and conventional preconceptions are challenged when women are encouraged to assume leadership positions in the food processing industry. As a result, obstacles are broken down and the younger generation of women is encouraged to explore entrepreneurship, which has a beneficial social impact.

Obstacles female entrepreneurs face in the food processing sector • Finance: One of the

biggest obstacles facing female entrepreneurs is their limited access to financial resources. This research will examine current financial support systems and offer recommendations for improving women's financial access. • **Market Access and Networking:** For a business to grow, gaining traction in the market and creating networks are crucial. The study will examine the obstacles that women encounter when trying to enter marketplaces and offer suggestions for building an environment that is helpful. • **Training and Skill Development:** Developing entrepreneurial abilities and offering pertinent training courses are essential to the success of female entrepreneurs. The study will look into the programs for skill development that are currently in place and suggest ways to close any gaps.

Research Gap: Most of the earlier research studies are on women entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector, tourism or manufacturing sector. Despite the fact that several studies on women entrepreneurship and food processing sector have been undertaken, few academicians have conducted complete assessments of the available literature. One of the most effective ways for collecting and analyzing current literature is a systematic review. A systematic review of prior studies is essential [79]. Further, a formal literature review in contrast to a systematic review has the possibility of being incomplete and is prone to reviewer bias and evaluates differences in the quality of the research study [80]. To contribute to the existing body of knowledge, the current study conducts a complete literature review on women entrepreneurship and food processing sector. A systematic review is one way for conducting a more in-depth review of existing literature [81]. Furthermore, while attempting to examine patterns in the topics, this methodology is efficient and it is also a renowned technique to researchers and scholars for performing evaluations of the entrepreneurship concept [82]. The process is systematic and allows for an evidencebased review of the current literature [83]. There are only a few studies done on women entrepreneurship in food processing sector in Mangalore so more research is required to assess the effect of women entrepreneurship in the food processing sector.

The aim of the study is to : Evaluate the situation of female entrepreneurs in the Indian food processing sector

-determine the obstacles that women encounter when starting and growing their enterprises.



-evaluate current programs, strategies, and support systems designed to encourage women's entrepreneurship in the industry
-to make practical suggestions for empowering female business owners in the food processing sector in India.

Ideal Solutions and Desired Status:

The ideal solutions and improvements required, that are needed, for women entrepreneurs in the food processing sector would be as follows:

(1) Building a network: Networking is the process of establishing long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with others. Networking helps in generating business leads, forming relationships that can lead to opportunities and being up-to-date on new industry trends. Networking can take place in person at events or conferences but with the advent of social media, virtual networking like LinkedIn helps to network with thousands of people around the world. Women entrepreneurs using such networks will be able to develop their business beyond their local market.

(2) Financial partner: Having outside capital is essential for the development of a business. While many women are risk-averse and do not seek outside financing, women entrepreneurs are more likely to get approved for a loan than male entrepreneurs. Banks offer expertise, guidance and opinions on financial strategies that are aligned with the company's business plan. There are also alternatives to banks for finding capital such as women-focused capital funds and informal providers such as crowd funding.

(3) Resources: Women entrepreneurs must have access to a wide range of resources. The resources which will help the women entrepreneurs are access to capital, education, connections and market channels. Access to financial education, advisory services, business development programs and mentorship are other resources available for helping women entrepreneurs working for any sector in the industry.

a) Situation of female entrepreneurs in the Indian food processing sector

The situation of female entrepreneurs in the Indian food processing sector presents a complex interplay of opportunities, challenges, and societal dynamics. While India's food processing industry has been growing steadily, propelled by factors such as

urbanization, changing consumer preferences, and government initiatives, female entrepreneurs face unique hurdles in navigating this landscape.

Firstly, it's important to recognize that women in India often encounter cultural and societal barriers that hinder their participation in entrepreneurship. Traditional gender roles and expectations may discourage women from pursuing business ventures, particularly in male-dominated sectors like food processing. This can manifest in limited access to resources such as finance, information, and networks, which are crucial for starting and sustaining businesses.

However, despite these challenges, there has been a noticeable emergence of female entrepreneurs in the Indian food processing sector. Many women are leveraging their culinary skills, traditional knowledge, and creativity to establish successful food businesses. This trend is partly driven by changing social norms, increased education levels among women, and growing awareness of entrepreneurship opportunities.

One notable aspect of female entrepreneurship in the Indian food processing sector is the prevalence of micro and small-scale enterprises. These businesses often operate at the grassroots level, focusing on niche products, regional cuisines, or homemade delicacies. While these ventures may have limited scale compared to larger food processing companies, they play a significant role in promoting local cuisines, preserving culinary traditions, and generating livelihoods in rural areas.

However, female entrepreneurs in the food processing sector still face significant barriers to growth and sustainability. Access to finance remains a key challenge, with women often encountering difficulties in securing loans or investment due to factors such as lack of collateral, limited financial literacy, and biases within the banking sector. This restricts their ability to invest in equipment, technology, marketing, and expansion, thereby constraining the growth potential of their businesses.

Moreover, regulatory compliance and bureaucratic hurdles can pose additional challenges for female entrepreneurs, particularly those operating in the informal sector. Complex licensing procedures, stringent food safety standards, and compliance with hygiene regulations can be daunting for small-scale food processors, especially those with limited resources and expertise. Simplifying regulatory



processes and providing targeted support and training to female entrepreneurs could help address these challenges and foster a more conducive business environment.

Another aspect to consider is the role of technology and innovation in empowering female entrepreneurs in the food processing sector. Digital platforms and e-commerce channels offer opportunities for women to reach wider markets, connect with customers, and promote their products beyond traditional boundaries. Access to technology-enabled solutions for food processing, packaging, and distribution can enhance efficiency, quality, and competitiveness, enabling female entrepreneurs to scale up their businesses and tap into new opportunities. While female entrepreneurs in the Indian food processing sector face various challenges, they also demonstrate resilience, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit. Addressing barriers related to access to finance, regulatory compliance, and technology adoption is crucial for unlocking the full potential of women-led businesses in this sector. Empowering female entrepreneurs not only contributes to economic growth and job creation but also promotes gender equality and social inclusion in India's dynamic food industry.

b) Obstacles that women encounter when starting and growing their enterprises

Women entrepreneurs face a myriad of obstacles when starting and growing their enterprises, stemming from a combination of social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors. These challenges often manifest at various stages of the entrepreneurial journey and can significantly impact the success and sustainability of women-led businesses.

One of the primary obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs is limited access to financial resources. Studies consistently show that women have less access to capital compared to their male counterparts, whether it's in the form of loans, venture capital, or angel investment. Discriminatory lending practices, gender biases among investors, and lack of collateral are some of the factors contributing to this financial gap. Without adequate funding, women entrepreneurs may struggle to invest in essential resources such as equipment, technology, marketing, and talent, hindering the growth potential of their enterprises.

Furthermore, women often encounter barriers in accessing markets and networks. In many industries, there is a prevailing "old boys' club" culture where established networks and business relationships are predominantly male-dominated. This makes it challenging for women entrepreneurs to access valuable connections, partnerships, and market opportunities. Limited access to networks can also affect women's ability to find mentors, advisors, and role models who can provide guidance and support in navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship.

Societal norms and cultural expectations also play a significant role in shaping the experiences of women entrepreneurs. In many societies, women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities over career ambitions, which can limit their ability to devote time and energy to their businesses. Additionally, stereotypes and biases about women's capabilities as leaders and decision-makers may undermine their credibility and confidence in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Work-life balance is another obstacle that women entrepreneurs often grapple with, particularly those who are mothers or caregivers. Balancing the demands of running a business with familial responsibilities can be immensely challenging, leading to feelings of guilt, stress, and burnout. Without adequate support systems in place, women may struggle to sustain their enterprises while also meeting the needs of their families.

Legal and regulatory barriers also pose challenges for women entrepreneurs, especially in countries with complex bureaucratic systems or discriminatory laws. Women may encounter difficulties in registering their businesses, obtaining licenses and permits, or accessing government programs and incentives designed to support entrepreneurship. Moreover, gender-based discrimination in the legal system can exacerbate inequalities and limit women's ability to assert their rights as entrepreneurs.

Finally, lack of access to training, education, and resources tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs is a significant barrier to their success. Many entrepreneurship programs, incubators, and accelerators overlook the unique challenges faced by women and may not offer targeted support or resources to address their specific needs. Closing this gender gap in entrepreneurial support and fostering an inclusive ecosystem that empowers women to thrive as entrepreneurs is essential for



promoting economic growth, innovation, and social progress.

In conclusion, women entrepreneurs encounter a multitude of obstacles when starting and growing their enterprises, ranging from financial constraints and limited access to markets to societal expectations and legal barriers. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that addresses systemic inequalities, promotes gender-sensitive policies and programs, and fosters a culture of inclusivity and support within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. By overcoming these obstacles, women entrepreneurs can unlock their full potential, drive economic development, and contribute to building more equitable and prosperous societies.

c) **Current programs, strategies, and support systems designed to encourage women's entrepreneurship in the industry in India**

India has implemented various programs, strategies, and support systems to encourage women's entrepreneurship in the country, recognizing the importance of women's economic empowerment and their role in driving sustainable development. These initiatives aim to address the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and create an enabling environment for their success. Here are some of the key programs and strategies:

1. **Stand-Up India Scheme:** Launched by the Government of India, Stand-Up India aims to promote entrepreneurship among women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs) by providing them access to loans to start greenfield enterprises in the manufacturing, services, or trading sectors. Under this scheme, women entrepreneurs can avail loans ranging from Rs. 10 lakh to Rs. 1 crore to establish their ventures.

2. **MUDRA Scheme:** The Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) or MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) Scheme provides financial assistance to micro-enterprises, including those owned by women. Through this scheme, women entrepreneurs can access collateral-free loans up to Rs. 10 lakh, categorized under three stages: Shishu (up to Rs. 50,000), Kishor (from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 5 lakh), and Tarun (from Rs. 5 lakh to Rs. 10 lakh).

3. **Mahila e-Haat :** Launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Mahila e-Haat is

an online platform designed to support women entrepreneurs, artisans, and self-help groups (SHGs) by providing them with a digital marketplace to showcase and sell their products and services. This initiative enables women entrepreneurs to reach a wider audience and expand their market reach.

4. **Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP):** WEP is an initiative by NITI Aayog aimed at fostering entrepreneurship among women by providing them with access to networking opportunities, mentorship, capacity building, and financial support. The platform offers various resources, including knowledge articles, success stories, and guidance on starting and scaling businesses.

5. **Startup India Initiative :** The Startup India initiative launched by the Government of India aims to promote and support startups across the country, including those led by women entrepreneurs. The initiative provides various benefits and incentives to startups, such as tax exemptions, funding support, simplification of regulatory processes, and access to incubators and accelerators.

6. **Skill Development Programs :** Several skill development programs and vocational training initiatives targeted at women have been implemented to enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities and equip them with the necessary skills to succeed in business. These programs focus on areas such as business management, financial literacy, marketing, and technology.

7. **Women Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (WEDP):** Implemented by various government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions, WEDPs offer training, mentoring, and capacity-building support to aspiring women entrepreneurs. These programs cover various aspects of entrepreneurship, including business planning, market research, access to finance, and networking.

8. **Incubation and Acceleration Support:** Government-backed incubators and accelerators provide women-led startups with infrastructure, mentoring, networking opportunities, and access to funding to help them grow and scale their ventures. These initiatives aim to nurture innovation and promote the growth of women-owned businesses in India.



These programs, strategies, and support systems play a crucial role in encouraging and empowering women entrepreneurs in India, enabling them to overcome barriers, unleash their potential, and contribute to economic growth and social development in the country. However, there is still a need for continuous efforts to further strengthen the ecosystem and address the specific needs and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs.

d) Suggestions for empowering female business owners in the food processing sector in India

Empowering female business owners in the food processing sector in India requires a comprehensive approach that addresses various aspects of their entrepreneurial journey. Here are some practical suggestions to achieve this:

1. **Access to Finance:** Facilitate easier access to finance for female entrepreneurs by promoting government schemes like Stand-Up India and MUDRA, specifically targeting women-owned enterprises in the food processing sector. Provide financial literacy training to help women understand the loan application process and manage their finances effectively.
2. **Skill Development and Training:** Offer specialized training programs and skill development initiatives focused on food processing techniques, food safety standards, product innovation, and marketing strategies tailored for women entrepreneurs. Collaborate with industry experts, vocational training institutes, and universities to design comprehensive training modules.
3. **Market Linkages and Networking:** Create platforms for female entrepreneurs in the food processing sector to network, collaborate, and share best practices. Organize trade fairs, exhibitions, and networking events where women can showcase their products, build business connections, and explore new market opportunities.
4. **Technology Adoption:** Promote the adoption of technology and digital tools in food processing businesses owned by women. Provide training and support for using technology for production processes, quality control, inventory management, and online marketing. Encourage the use of e-commerce platforms to reach a wider customer base.

5. **Mentorship and Guidance:** Establish mentorship programs where experienced entrepreneurs, industry professionals, and successful business owners can mentor aspiring female entrepreneurs in the food processing sector. Provide guidance on business planning, strategy formulation, market analysis, and overcoming common challenges.

6. **Access to Infrastructure:** Improve access to infrastructure and facilities required for food processing operations, such as food processing units, storage facilities, packaging materials, and transportation services. Develop food processing clusters or industrial parks with dedicated infrastructure for women-owned businesses.

7. **Policy Support and Advocacy:** Advocate for policy reforms and regulatory measures that support the growth of women-owned businesses in the food processing sector. Lobby for gender-sensitive policies related to land ownership, taxation, licensing, and government procurement to create a more conducive environment for female entrepreneurs.

8. **Promotion of Women's Leadership:** Encourage women to take on leadership roles within their businesses and industry associations. Provide leadership training programs, mentorship opportunities, and networking platforms to empower women to become decision-makers and influencers in the food processing sector.

9. **Awareness and Outreach:** Conduct awareness campaigns and outreach programs to educate women about entrepreneurship opportunities in the food processing sector. Collaborate with local community organizations, self-help groups, and women's associations to reach out to aspiring entrepreneurs in rural and urban areas.

10. **Recognition and Awards:** Recognize and celebrate the achievements of women entrepreneurs in the food processing sector through awards, honors, and recognition programs. Highlight their success stories to inspire other women and showcase the potential of female-led businesses in driving economic growth and innovation.

By implementing these practical suggestions, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and support organizations can effectively empower female business owners in the food processing sector in India, enabling them to realize their full potential



and contribute to the country's economic development.

II. Conclusion:

In conclusion, empowering female business owners in the food processing sector in India is crucial for fostering economic growth, promoting gender equality, and harnessing the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs. This research paper has outlined a comprehensive set of practical suggestions to achieve this goal, covering various aspects of the entrepreneurial journey.

From facilitating access to finance and providing skill development training to promoting technology adoption and advocating for policy reforms, these suggestions offer a holistic approach to empower women in the food processing sector. By addressing barriers such as limited access to resources, lack of infrastructure, and gender-specific challenges, stakeholders can create an enabling environment where women can thrive as entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, initiatives such as mentorship programs, networking opportunities, and recognition awards play a vital role in empowering women, building their confidence, and providing them with the support they need to succeed in their ventures. Through collaborative efforts between policymakers, industry stakeholders, and support organizations, we can create a more inclusive and equitable ecosystem that unlocks the entrepreneurial potential of women in the food processing sector.

By implementing these practical suggestions, we can not only empower individual women entrepreneurs but also drive broader socio-economic benefits, including job creation, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development. As we strive towards a more inclusive and gender-responsive entrepreneurial ecosystem, it is imperative to prioritize the empowerment of women in the food processing sector, recognizing their role as catalysts for positive change and economic prosperity.

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