



## OPPORTUNE AND EFFECTIVE MARKETING OF THE RURAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

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### Abstract

*The study on the women of the rural areas is to bring together an extensive amount of information on various entrepreneurship and women's development programmes introduced in India. The study looks at the socio-cultural, educational and legal barriers to women's entrepreneurship in India. It also includes profiles of the key agencies involved in promoting women's entrepreneurship and recommendations for policy-makers aimed at enhancing the economic empowerment of women throughout the country. This study has been conducted in pockets of the Mahakoshal region of Madhya Pradesh. The objectives of the study included, understanding the working style and manner of operation of these women entrepreneur for creating a market for their products. The study was conducted on two sets of target respondents; the women involved in vegetable selling and second set included women who were involved in preserved food compliments and other miscellaneous things. The methodology followed was of convenient sampling and the respondents were interviewed on, one-on-one basis. FGD's (focus group discussion) of customers/consumers were also organized to get the feedback on the attitude and behaviour of these women agri-vendors and also on the parameters of reliability, cost efficiency and quality of the products being offered etc.*

**Key Words:** Rural Women entrepreneur, Entrepreneurs in Mahakoshal region, Agri-vendors, Preserved Food compliments.

### Introduction

Women owned businesses are highly increasing in the economies of almost all countries. The hidden entrepreneurial potentials of women have gradually been changing with the growing sensitivity to the role and economic status in the society. Skill, knowledge and adaptability in business are the main reasons for women to emerge into business ventures. 'Women Entrepreneur' is a person who accepts challenging role to meet her personal needs and become economically independent. A strong desire to do something positive is an inbuilt quality of entrepreneurial women, who is capable of contributing values in both family and social life. The glass ceilings are shattered and women are found indulged in every line of business from papad to power cables. In India, although women constitute a major half of the total population, the entrepreneurial world is still a male dominated one.

It has always been understood that, the rural women are grossly home-makers and are not a part of the active financial and working life of the rural India, inspite of the proven fact that, they are hard-working, farsighted and logical individuals. This study conducted in pockets of the Mahakoshal region of Madhya Pradesh is to understand the working of the various entrepreneur women of the area. Two major fields where remarkable change and growth has been seen: firstly, rural women earning out of their kitchen garden and secondly, the growth in the preserved food compliments like papad, badi, achar etc in the regular food. Women have also

proved a successful hand in the local / regional handicrafts.

In the recent industrial policy, the government has given tremendous importance for the agro-based products and allied products. Only 5% to 8% of the total production of fruit and vegetables are processed every year in India. This reveals a huge scope for the food, fruit and vegetable processing industry. Women have a natural flair and instinct for food preparation and processing. A new market is developed for the processed food products. Thus there are plenty of opportunities available for women entrepreneurs. The present study report is an effort in this direction. An attempt has been made to document available information regarding the status of women entrepreneurs, against the backdrop of the socioeconomic context and the attendant challenges they face.

### Literature Review

Reading material from the earlier works done on the relevant subject supported the study. This included the works done by the references mentioned; and in-depth research study done by Dr. Vishwanathan R.S.L. (1997) and Dr. Tripathi S.K. (2003) for their doctorate on this subject and other study material from the University of Jabalpur (R.D.V.V.).

Shrivastava S.K. and Jharia G.L.: "Women Entrepreneurial Behaviour with reference to Agriculture", Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics 77, 6 (2004). The study mentions about the change in the outlook of the people about women entrepreneur. It discusses about the changes that are seen in the



initiatives being taken by the women entrepreneur to gain economic independence and also taking up agriculture as a full time profession.

A Saeed: "Rural Women Agri-vendors in the contemporary Indian Society", *The Management Review Academy*, 25-256-289. The study discusses about the relationship techniques and means being used by the various agri-vendors to grow and sustain their customer base.

Khan Md.Z.K. (2005) – "Changes in the Agri product market with special reference to consumption pattern of the consumer" - *Mekal Market*. He discusses about the change in the consumption pattern of agri products due to the generated awareness about the benefits associated with its consumption and also the increase in per individual intake and the frequency of consumption.

Nema V.K and Dubey P.K. (2002) – "Growth of Indian agricultural produce market in the changing retailing system" - *ICA 2002*. With the fast change in the retail sector the vending system of the agriculture produce have also been affected. The study states the changes in the basic retailing system and its impact on the overall market of the agriculture produce.

Dey. S.K. and Duggal P. (2006) - "Rural Women and their Entrepreneurial Skills" – *Journal of Rural Development*. It highlights the various skills and operational manners of the rural entrepreneurs for the growth and sustenance of their entrepreneurial projects.

#### **Objectives**

1. To understand how do these women operate and market their products.
2. How do they grow their customer base and sustain the existing customers in a price sensitive market.
3. To determine the growth pattern for these produce in the market.
4. Will some modular planning in the operations or assistance from some financial institutions help in generating better business.
5. To understand will modification in the state of the products get into better business opportunities.

#### **Research Design**

An extensive literature review of secondary data sources was undertaken as relevant to the stated objectives of the study. In order to fill in secondary data gaps, data from Rajya Grameen Vikas Nigam and Rural Development Board have been referred. This study has been conducted within a short time frame. Since secondary sources of data were highly relied upon it was difficult to maintain uniformity in sample size for

comparative analyses of various aspects related to women entrepreneurs. Also, qualitative analysis has been used in the main, to arrive at conclusions. Although the study is based largely on the secondary data sources, primary data has been obtained from a sample of about 487 women entrepreneurs the break-up for which is mentioned in the table given in the purpose of study.

The research data collection procedure followed was simple. The methodology used for primary data collection was convenient sampling and all the targets were interviewed personally under a structured open-end questionnaire. FGD's (focus group discussions) were also organized to study consumer (from SEC B and above) response for qualitative information. The details collected consisted both of qualitative and quantitative information. The focus areas for research works has been Jabalpur, Panagar, Patan, Sehore, Deori, Kareli, Hatta, Damoh, Barela, Majholi and Bargi.

#### **Analysis and Interpretation of the data**

The emergence of women entrepreneurs and their contribution to the national economy is quite visible in India. Women entrepreneurs need to be lauded for their increased utilization of modern technology, increased investments, creating a sizable employment for others and setting the trend for other women entrepreneurs in the organized sector.

While women entrepreneurs have demonstrated their potential, the fact remains that they are capable of contributing much more than what they already are. In order to harness their potential and for their continued growth and development, it is necessary to formulate appropriate strategies for stimulating, supporting and sustaining their efforts in this direction. Such a strategy needs to be in congruence with field realities, and should especially take cognizance of the problems women entrepreneurs face within the current system.

It is estimated that presently total women entrepreneurs comprise about 17% of the total entrepreneurs in India of which rural entrepreneurs contribute to be about 6%. It is also clear that this percentage is growing every year. If prevailing trends continue, it is not unlikely that in another five years, total women entrepreneurs will comprise 35% of the entrepreneurial force in India including a corresponding growth in the rural women entrepreneurs. In terms of numbers, one would estimate at least an approximate number of 17 lakhs in the next decade. Further in the studied market the local unorganized women vendors are 37% of the total vendors.



In the rural areas in and around the middle size towns, due to financial constraints and various other reasons the women of the families have taken an initiative and have entrepreneured in to petty businesses. Some operate from their houses and a big lot moves in the market. It has been a major growth phenomenon where the rural women move to the markets or haats of the nearby towns or urban habitat and sell out their produce which is either agri produce or hand made food compliments and so on. It is seen that these women sell packets of acchar, badi, papad and masalas etc in the local urban markets and haats and also move in the residential localities. This market is seen to be growing slowly but steadily.

It has been seen that, in and around the marked local vegetable markets in the cities of Jabalpur, Sehore and Damoh, there is a big lot of women vegetable vendors who are although not big in terms of volume and value but still have a very consistent market. There are a lot of women mobile vegetable vendors who keep moving within the residential colonies of the city where they have a very consistent and regular set of customer base. These are by and large the women vendors hailing from the nearby rural agriculture areas of Jabalpur, Amkhera, Panagar, Patan, Sehore, Deori, Kareli, Hatta, Damoh, Barela, Majholi and Bargi. Further it was found out that, almost every rural household has some small area which is being used by these women to grow vegetables for their everyday house-hold requirements. These women use this as their means of initiation for a new business prospects. After having saved for their regular need, they move to the nearby market for selling this excess good and in due course of time this becomes a regular business and means of earning for them. These women agri-vendors have further been categorized into various types on the basis of their operation. Of the sample size the percentage of each category is as follows: vendors with a permanent place in or around the market (36%); without permanent place (31%); permanent vendors in residential areas (15%) and; mobile vendors in the residential areas (17%).

In cases where the agri-vendors are selling in either retail or wholesale they can get good price subject to quality of the product; aptness of time for the produce to reach the market and price negotiated. All this is majorly supported by the demand and supply ratio for a product. Further it was known that, the vendors who do not find it

possible to trade directly, sell off their produce in bulk to bigger retailers or the wholesalers and ensure having cleared their stock. Although in such a case most of the time the purchaser has an upper hand and fixes the rates and, the rates do vary from having direct retail sale but in most of the cases the goods are sold.

Another noticeable phenomenon has been that, 57% of the stationed and 73% of mobile agri-vendors have a defined regular customer base; whereas 43% of the stationed and 27% of mobile agri-vendors have a floating customer base. They have a set of customers who trust them and are regular purchasers. In case of stationed vendors, the customer at the onset visits the regular shop (in case of vendor without permanent place in the market, the customer tries to locate the vendor) and picks up goods from him/her assuming that they would be offered the best deal in quality and price. It is only after this that he precedes to other shops. To sustain their customers even the vendors ensure that they provide them a fair quality product at a reasonable price as against the market rates. These vendors also extend gestures of gratitude by either weighing a marginally extra quantity or at times giving credit deals. Similarly, in case of mobile vendors, they too have a fair set of regular customers and while on move they ensure visiting the regular customer's house. In some cases these mobile vendors have a monthly account with the customer, wherein the customer keeps purchasing the whole month and at the end of the month clears his payments. Thus, not only providing regular and convenient services on door but also providing credit to the customers. Therefore maintaining and sustaining the relation with the customers. These vendors also like any other national brand, work on schemes like on every purchase of a defined minimum amount they give them some tit-bits free. For eg: on purchase of Rs.20/- or more they give away some quantity of complimentary vegetable free. At times if some regular customer demands some specific product the vendor manages to arrange it for them from some other vendor at a good deal. Vendors also supply specific products or bulk quantity against orders to the customers at a better price along with facilities of home delivery. This helps them not only in maintaining the existing base but also generating new customers. These are some of the means through which these vendors sustain and grow their customer base in their respective market.

**Table 1**  
**Percentage Distribution**

<b>Research Sample</b>	<b>Vegetable Vendors</b>	<b>Food Compliments</b>	<b>Handicrafts and Potteries</b>	<b>Nursery</b>	<b>Bidi making</b>	<b>Incense Stick Making</b>
Absolute numbers	213	117	56	19	35	47
Different types of Women vendors	RV with permanent place in market	RV W/O permanent place in market	Retail Vendors in residential areas	Mobile vendors in residential areas		
% distribution	37	31	15	17		
Every 100 times of sale	Cost recovered	Profit range of 10-15%	Profit range of 15-25%	Profit range > 25%	Loss range of 10-15%	Loss > 15%
% distribution	27	69	43	19	9	7
Vendors other than women	Petty sellers	Petty sellers with	Sellers with permanent	Wholesalers random	Wholesalers with	
<b>Research Sample</b>	<b>Vegetable Vendors</b>	<b>Food Compliments</b>	<b>Handicrafts and Potteries</b>	<b>Nursery</b>	<b>Bidi making</b>	<b>Incense Stick Making</b>
universe	in sampled		permanent place allotted space	Municipal	Municipal allotted space	permanent
% Interviewed	47	44	47	62	66	
Average weekly footfall of the customers	One visit	> 3-4 times in a week	Daily	Weekly	Not noticeable	
Stationed vendors	37	53	36	34	23	
Mobile Vendors	9	13	19	11	7	
Types of customers	Stationed	Mobile				
Regular Customers	57	73				
Floating Customers	43	27				

To quote a personal example a women vegetable vendor traveling from the nearby agricultural area of Panagar who is a regular visitor in our locality, ensures that she gives a call in all the houses which regularly purchase from her, and this is irrespective of any purchases made on a particular day or not. She at times in absence of money change maintains a credit and ensures to return it sincerely or at times gives vegetables of slightly bigger quantity in return of the change and sometimes postpones acceptance of the payment till the next visit. This manner of operation generates goodwill for the vendor and the customer waits for her to come whenever goods are needed instead of purchasing from someone else.

Most of the vendors mentioned that in most of the cases money and price are the two major factors along with attitude and behaviour of the vendor to create new customer base and sustain the existing ones. In case of the stationed vendors, customers making purchases 3-4 times in a week is higher; where as in case of mobile vendors the daily purchasers are higher in percentage. This can also be due to the reason that, in middle size town even today a large female population is homemakers and they prefer purchasing fresh produce every day; and with an agri-vendor the rapport of the females is developed well, thus supporting the business. The

working class women prefer making weekly purchases opposite to the one following this phenomenon. Mobile vendors further extend the facility of on door service, which is convenient; although the study mentions that the price / rates of the mobile vendors are 8% to 10% more than the stationed vendors. On further probing it was understood that, the rates are higher because the vendors are making the efforts of mobility and providing on door fresh products, thus extra labour, leading to extra charge.

Another important effort seen is of an entrepreneur (who is a house wife of a small grocery shop owner) who started a new phenomenon. This also answers that; will some modular planning in the operations would help in generating better business? She purchases agricultural produce directly from the small agri-vendors in totality and then after proper cleaning, processing and packing, she sells it or eg: uncovered green peas. This has given raise to good business options for the entrepreneur as well as a people associated with her. Since the purchases are made directly in bulk, the prices are better than what can be received from the open retail market. Due to this, since the consumers are getting products at the same price at what the products can be picked from the open market, but in a better state, they are accepting the idea and concept very well. This is also generating better



business options and also helping the small women agri-vendors who cannot manage to do direct retailing, in getting a fair earning out of their produce.

This concept was first introduced for chopping green mangoes for pickles and kathal for routine consumption; and then further followed by various categories of vegetables and it has worked fairly well. Even during the discussions, consumers accepted this idea with an open view and mentioned that even if the price varies marginally and the vegetables are made available cleaned and chopped, they do not mind paying an additional amount. To support this concept of clean and packed agri produce, FGD's were organized with target potential consumers. This concept was appreciated and there was an open willingness to accept it. The consumers were also asked to rate the concept on the parameters of quality, price, affordability, availability, etc. For majority consumer's quality was the major concern, and since these consumers belonged to the category of SEC B and above, affordability was not a very big concern. Another important concern was the factor of ready to use. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, the business of these vendors is based variedly on customer relations.

**Table 2**  
**Consumers Rating**

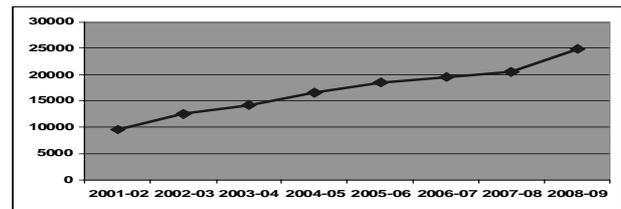
Product Quality	4.3
Product Price	3.7
Product Availability	3.1
Consumers Affordability	2.4
Ready to use ease	3.4
Requirement	3.1
Because it makes a difference	3.0

Apart from the agri-vendors there are women entrepreneur who deal in other products. These include Food Compliments, Handicrafts and Potteries, Bidi making, Incense Stick Making etc. The food compliments include the various kinds of papads, badi, pickles and murrabba (gelly) etc. There are a lot of women in these rural areas who makes these products in bulk and either sell it themselves or through a source i.e. they supply it to some shop keepers in the urban areas or the goods are bought by some middle men who further sells it with a good margin to the urban shopkeepers.

There were a certain percentage of these women who sell their products on their own, which is either through small shops in the regular markets or haats, or on hand cart in the residential area. There are a few women co-operatives which are working with these women to help them in marketing their products better.

In the Mahakoshal region a women's association called MAWE (Mahakoshal Association of Women Entrepreneurs) promotes all those women who are entrepreneurs in any form of business. There are a few members in this group who make bulk purchases from these rural food compliment makers and sell it further to shops and also through exhibition stalls etc. MAWE

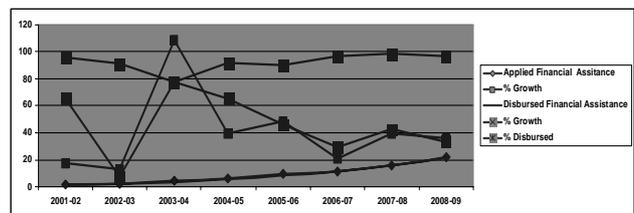
organizes regular training programs for skill up gradation and enhancing know-how about latest technologies for the women of rural and semi rural areas. Specifically Entrepreneurship Development Programs (EDPs) focusing on the growth and for the benefit of the rural women are conducted on specific topics from time to time. EDPs are planned to be organized in surrounding areas of Jabalpur such as Katni, Mandla, Sihora, Seoni and Majholi to reach out to even more women entrepreneurs in regions of Madhya Pradesh. MAWE has partnered with NGOs, Governmental Organizations and other associations for study and discussion of different issues of concern to Women Entrepreneurs. MAWE recognizes the need of its members and women entrepreneurs at large to market their product. Keeping this in mind MAWE organizes and takes part in several national and international trade fairs. MAWE organizes MAWE DeepUtsav and also participates every year in national trade fairs such as Ojaswini and AAHAR. There is a regular and consistent growth in the number of rural working women and rural entrepreneurs over the years.



**Indicative growth in the number of working rural women and entrepreneurs**

Source: Rajya Grameen Vikas Nigam

Further to understand it would not be an exaggeration to mention that financial institutions and other societies have been supporting these rural women in their growth and development. Nationalized banks, NABARD and other co-operatives have come forward and extended helping hand by organizing regular training and development programmes for these women. They have also assisted in managing funds whether it was for starting a new business or upgrading an existing one. These financial institutions have consistently been disbursing a substantial amount of the applied amount.



**Cumulative financial data statistics**

Source: Journal of Rural Development, (MGRGVS - Vol 52, 37)

### **Constraints of Indian Women Entrepreneurs**

1. In general, the family members and the society are reluctant to stand beside their entrepreneurial growth thus women leading to lack confidence in their strength and competence.
2. Only few women are able to manage both home and business efficiently, devoting enough time to perform all their responsibilities in priority.
3. Women are not fully aware of the changing market conditions and thus find it difficult to capture the market and make their products popular.
4. Motivational factors – Self motivation can be realized through a mind set for a successful business, other factors are family support, Government policies, financial-assistance from public and private institutions and also the environment suitable for women to establish business units.
5. Women must be educated and trained constantly to acquire the skills and knowledge in all the functional areas of business management.
6. Sincere efforts taken by various institutions in the financial sector towards women entrepreneurs may not reach the entrepreneurs in rural and backward areas.
7. Exposure to the training programs which are really useful to new, rural and young entrepreneurs who want to set up a small and medium scale unit on their own.
8. Identifying the available resources – Women are hesitant to find out the access to cater their needs in the financial and marketing areas.

### **Problems of Women Entrepreneurs**

Women in India are faced many problems to get ahead their life in business. A few problems can be detailed as;

1. A kind of patriarchal – male dominant social order is the building block to them in their way towards business success. Male members think it a big risk financing the ventures run by women.
2. The financial institutions are skeptical about the entrepreneurial abilities of women. According to a report by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), “despite evidence that women loan repayment rates are higher than men’s, women still face more difficulties in obtaining credit,” often due to discriminatory attitudes of banks and informal lending groups (UNIDO, 1995b).
3. Women in developing nations have little access to funds, due to the fact that they are concentrated in poor rural communities with few opportunities to borrow money (Starcher, 1996; UNIDO, 1995a). The women entrepreneurs are suffering from inadequate financial resources and working capital. The women entrepreneurs lack access to external funds due to their inability to provide tangible security. Very few women have the tangible property in hand.
4. Women’s family obligations also bar them from becoming successful entrepreneurs in both developed and developing nations.
5. Indian women give more emphasis to family ties and relationships.
6. Another argument is that women entrepreneurs have low-level management skills.
7. The low level freedom of expression and freedom of mobility of the women entrepreneurs.
8. Lack of knowledge of availability of the raw materials and low-level negotiation and bargaining skills are the factors, which affect women entrepreneur’s business adventures.
9. Although great advances are being made in technology, many women’s illiteracy, structural difficulties, and lack of access to technical training prevent the technology from being beneficial or even available to females (“Women Entrepreneurs in Poorest Countries,” 2001).
10. Low-level risk taking attitude is another factor affecting women folk decision to get into business.

### **Limitations of Study**

1. Recent figurative data for exclusive women details is not available.
2. Not a very big sample size could be taken due to factors of mobility.
3. The study has been conducted only in few towns of Mahakoshal region, and thus these available categories of traders and farmers cum vendors could only be tapped.

### **Key understandings**

1. Women entrepreneurs have grown many folds in numbers in the last decade.
2. The areas tapped by these women entrepreneurs are work areas where they are directly the first hand workers and are not dependent for any supplies.
3. Aggressive assistance and support of women co-operatives, societies and financial institutions would help these women in working and operating more profitably.
4. The rural women are willing hard workers and enterprising; it is just they need proper timely guidance and support whether it is related to marketing of their product or any financial assistance for better growth and development of their business.
5. Regular training and exposure to current trends and systems would lead to better management by these women of their business and growth.
6. CRM is definitely the guiding factor for any business and this category is governed completely by the



mutual association and customer relations of the vendors and the customers.

7. In small towns the agri-vendors show a perfect blend of product and service marketing based on customer relation management.
8. Regular customers do more than 60% of the sale by the vendors and the balance comes from the other floating category customer.
9. Opportunities in this business are huge it is just needed to be tapped in the right manner at the right time.
10. If the local market is organized and even the small agri-vendors are given an opportunity to operate from a better location, they would probably earn better market money.

#### **Conclusion**

Empowering women entrepreneurs is essential for achieving the goals of sustainable development and the bottlenecks hindering their growth must be eradicated to entitle full participation in the business. Apart from training programs, Newsletters, mentoring, trade fairs and exhibitions also can be a source for entrepreneurial development. As a result, the desired outcomes of the

business are quickly achieved and more of remunerative business opportunities are found. Henceforth, promoting entrepreneurship among women is certainly a short-cut to rapid economic growth and development. Let us try to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus allow 'women' to be an entrepreneur at par with men.

The author of this paper has conducted the entire study and for any further data or details, the readers can revert to the author. It is expected that the study would be of utility to many more researchers.

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#### **Introduction**