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**PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF WOMEN ECOPRENEURS IN SOUTH GOA**

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**Abstract:** An Ecopreneur is an ‘entrepreneur’ who conscious of profit making also concerned about the environmental quality of human being. Women do multiple roles in the family and business are known as the best agent for adopting sustainable development practices which protects the present and future generations to come. This makes women as the most suited to create opportunities in the emerging areas of ecopreneurship. In this context the paper broadly looks in to the profile of women ecopreneurs in south Goa and the problems and prospects facing them in their business venture.

**Keywords:** Ecopreneurship; Sustainable Development; Economy; Environment.

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**Introduction:** Ecopreneurship is emerging as an important category of entrepreneurship where in the environmental concerns of the society are incorporated by a socially conscious businessman in his business venture. The term ‘Ecopreneur’ is a combination of two words “ecological” and “entrepreneur.” which aptly describes the entrepreneur with environmental consciousness. Uncontrolled consumerism along with large scale production has created externalities which are reflected in higher pollution, ecological depletion, social costs and mitigation charges. Environmental degradation beyond a threshold level creates irreparable loss to the ecosystem. An Ecopreneur is an ‘entrepreneur’ who conscious of profit is making also concerned about the planet and the people living in the planet. There is also a growing awareness among consumers on the need to consume environmental friendly products like solar powered geysers, water conservation systems, compostable packaging etc. This increased awareness along the green marketing awareness strategies adopted by firms resulted in growing market for sustainable and socially responsible products and services due to which “Entrepreneurs” are becoming “Ecopreneurs”.

All ecopreneurs engage in business activities which are unpredictable, risk taking and face failure if it goes wrong. So they must look out for the appropriate opportunity, develop it and execute plans for growth and development. The commercial activities engaged by the ecopreneurs have an overall positive effect on the natural environment and the move towards a more sustainable future. Another unique distinctive feature of ecopreneur is that they possess a personal belief system – their set of values and aspirations – usually sees protection of the natural environment, and a desire to move on to a more sustainable future pathway, as important goals in themselves.

Now people are very much aware about the need for consuming organic fruits and vegetables because of the various issues connected with the usage of pesticides, chemicals and artificial ripening of fruits which can cause serious health issues.

**Scope and importance:** Breaking from the tradition more and more women are taking up entrepreneurial activity especially in medium and small-scale enterprises. Women entrepreneurship has been recognized as an important contributor for the rapid economic growth and well-being of the country. Women do multiple roles in the family and business are known as the best agent for the adopting sustainable development practices which protects the present and future generations to come. Women are most suited to create opportunities in the emerging areas of ecopreneurship. In this context the paper broadly looks in to the profile of women ecopreneurs in south Goa and the problems and prospects facing them in their business venture. The factors responsible for the success of women entrepreneurship in Goa and the government initiatives expected by them for the long term sustenance is also discussed. The study used fruits and vegetable vendors as the case to study ecopreneurship as they engaged in the sales of sales of organic fruits and vegetables which are friendly to the environment. The paper used primary data collected from 50 ecopreneurs from south Goa. The respondents were selected randomly and a structured interview schedule was administered to know their opinion about locally available fruits and vegetables. The survey was conducted during the period of December to January 2015-16.

**Concept of Ecopreneurs:** Ecopreneurs are engaged in business enterprises but concerned about the environmental issues where in they involve business practices that enhance productivity through efficient use of the resources in such a way that it promotes human health and sustainability of bio diversity. All over the world there is resurgence in the use of environmentally sustainable, healthy products due to increased awareness of the consumers. There is a niche market emerging for these products. The growth of this market is driven by factors such as life style changes, demand for environmental goods and services, increased awareness, social commitment of the entrepreneurs, climate change and the irreversibility of environmental changes. Because of

the rapid growth of this market segment, a new class of ecopreneurs will emerge to cater this rapidly growing market.

There are various terms put forward to explain this sensitivity of business with ecological concern. Various terms were coined to explain these concepts. *Green entrepreneurs* are those that identify market opportunities and successfully implement innovative approaches to their product or service with a focus on social or ecological goals by means of profit-oriented business. (Braun, 2010). Walley and Taylor (2002) *Ecopreneurs* are individuals who found or set up green-green businesses who, along with an environmental orientation, have economic (i.e. financial) profit maximising or optimising objectives. *Ecopreneurial* businesses can be defined as profit-generating businesses where environmental considerations are the key to the business culture, product or service (Holt (2011). The essence of these definitions outline that ecopreneurs engage business activity that engage people-to-people exchange of goods and services and the overriding motive is to sustain Earth, its resources and its biodiversity for future generations. (Robert Isaak). The motivating factors driving the ecopreneurs are their green values; earning a living; passion; being their own boss; and seeing a gap in the market. (Jodyanne, Kirkwood and Sara Walton). Ecopreneurial activity is basically a business activity with an element of risk and uncertainty and the business outcome is unpredictable. These commercial activities will have an overall positive impact on the environment and sustainable future. These ecopreneurs have a positive intent and belief system of conservation and preservation of environment which pursuing reasonable profit for the enterprises.

The successful ecopreneur is an eternal optimist who wants to improve the world. They have a strong motivation to create market for the products and services that sustains the world. Their belief system and motivation is strengthened by constantly taking feedbacks from customers and stakeholders. This gives resolve to them to pursue business even more vigorously and this virtuous cycle continues.

**Agri Ecopreneurs in Goa:** Women Agricultural business entrepreneurs are a case of ecopreneurs as they engaged in business activity that strengthens environmental quality. Goa is facing ecological and environmental concerns in its agriculture. There is a rampant use of chemical fertilizers in Goan agriculture which make the soil lose its organic matter and increases the salinity and alkalinity. Also the biological organisms present in the soil get depleted affecting the soil aeration. There are problems of soil erosion and disturbance of nutrient cycle. It is recognized that good organic agriculture is the long run solutions to the problems existing in this

sector and to incentivize it the Governments are implementing various schemes over the years.

**Fig: 1** Virtuous cycle of Ecopreneurship



**Source:** Michael Schaper

Goa's topography and agro climatic conditions are suitable for different types of agriculture and crops. Also there is a strong demand for entire range of agricultural products from local vegetables to exotic species and flowers due to the presence of health conscious customers and large number of high end hotels and tourists visiting the state.

Goa has a rich tradition of organic cultivation which uses agricultural waste, dung, fish waste and leaves of specific varieties of trees. There were minimal use of chemical fertilizers and the agricultural yield was comparable to modern agriculture. This has helped in preserving some of the traditional varieties of vegetables and fruits and conservation of rich biological diversities. The modern packaged agriculture practices required large scale of use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and insecticides which necessitates subsidized inputs led to the destruction of traditional farming practices. This led to the contamination of agricultural food products in the state leading to serious human health consequences. The agricultural products brought in to Goa from the neighboring states are even more polluted with large trace of chemical components.

Goa is a consumer state with heavy reliance of imported goods from the neighboring markets. Tourism is the mainstay to the State's economy with a heavy reliance of domestic and foreign tourists. But lack of organic farming policy hinders provision of healthy food to its tourist population. If Goa goes completely organic it not only improves the health condition of the present generation but also future ones. Women being principal players in agricultural cultivation should take active interest in environmentally sensitive agriculture. It improves

their economic status, self reliance, role in decision making but also curb environmental menace from unsustainable cultivation.

**Profile of women Ecopreneurs in south Goa:** The study is based on the data collected from 50 women ecopreneurs in south Goa. The respondents are selected randomly based on their availability during the business period. 96 percent of the respondents are married and only 4 percent of them are unmarried. So married women ecopreneur are getting co-operation and support from their family members to go ahead with the business. Educational status of the women ecopreneurs showed that 62 percent of them are having primary education followed by 34 percent with secondary education and 2 percent college educated and the remaining 2 percent illiterate. Family composition of the respondents showed that 44 percent are having minimum 2 children, only 16 percent of them are having a single child, 24 percent of them are having 3 children and 16 percent are with 4 children.

**Problems faced by women Ecopreneurs:** Analysis of response from the Women Ecopreneurs showed that they are facing following problems and challenges in running their business.

1. Non availability of finance: Many of the women ecopreneurs are facing financial constraints in running the business as they are not aware of different government schemes available to them. Respondents also felt that the procedures at the bank are cumbersome and difficult to get access to the institutional credit without landed property.
2. Social system: Majority of women ecopreneurs are married with minimum 2 children. Women ecopreneurs are forced to make a tradeoff between family and business and often limit their activities to certain extent to devote their time for family.
3. Lack of education and awareness: The level of education among women ecopreneurs are very low compared to their male counterparts. This acts as a barrier to know about various schemes meant for them and adoption of new technologies and marketing strategies.
4. Low risk taking attitude: One of the problems faced by women ecopreneurs are their unwillingness to take risk and try out new variety of seeds and cultivating & marketing on large scale basis.
5. Competition: Ecopreneurs face competition from other traders who make available hybrid fruits and vegetables from neighboring states at cheaper price.
6. Lack of confidence and restricted mobility: As Women Ecopreneurs they lack confidence to move away from their locality for sales or other

related activities and also restricted movements to faraway places due to family responsibilities.

**Scope for Organic farming in Goa:** In order to understand the scope of organic farming in Goa, a survey is conducted among 50 customers to know their preference for organically grown fruits and vegetables. Of the 50 customers, 38 responded by saying that they often buy such fruits and vegetables, 5 consumers said always, 4 said sometimes and only 3 of them told they rarely go to buy such organic produces.

Majority of them strongly agree that organic fruits /vegetables are more fresh, tastier and healthier. On the question whether buying organic fruits and vegetables is a waste of money or expensive, 34 of them told that they never feel so because they know the hard work that has been put into by ecopreneurs making it available in front of them. And at the same time they can directly use them just washing in the plain water rather than relying on other methods to wash away chemical coating in the case of those fruits and vegetables coming from nearby states. They also opined that by consuming these locally cultivated fruits and vegetables they care about themselves and the environment and also support women ecopreneurs and their agriculture. So there is a good scope for such initiatives and more demand can be expected in the near future due to increased awareness and the benefits of consuming such products and health consciousness of people.

**Government initiatives required for women ecopreneurs:** Women ecopreneurs surveyed for the study opined that there should be a forum to express their grievances to the authorities. Women ecopreneurs expect Government should provide subsidies and incentives, high yielding seeds, organic manures and irrigation facilities to promote organic farming in the state. Women ecopreneurs want provision for more cultivable land to them by making available unused land through government intervention. There should be separate market places that get distinguished from other agriculture produce sellers and the Government should take initiatives to organize more exhibitions to sell their produce. In order to enhance financial availability, Government should provide loans, startup capital at concessional interest rates.

**Conclusion and Suggestions:** It is a win - win situation for Goa if women ecopreneurship is promoted in the State. It provides livelihood to poor women, provide healthy agricultural products to the consumers and preserve and promote natural environment. These ecopreneurs are into seasonal fruits and vegetable and majority of them are cultivating in their own field. They are getting adequate profit which enables them to manage their livelihood. But they find it difficult to balance

business and family as most of them spend more than 6 hours for the business sometimes sacrificing the family attention. Most of them are still continuing in this business with the strong support of their family members. Women ecopreneurs are fully aware that their business activities protect the environment along with promoting people's health. They are seeing a bright future for their agricultural activities because of the increase in demand for locally cultivated fruits and vegetables.

Awareness drives and campaign about organic farming by the Governmental agencies will attract more people towards this occupation. Availability of good quality seeds, composts, organic fertilizers, pest repellents, water harvesting schemes and sapling through agricultural departments can increase productivity and profitability of this activity. Regular visits of the concerned agricultural officer and team in their locality will help in giving timely intervention to the problems. Banks can be encouraged to provide

more finance to ecopreneurs and at the same time government can offer different subsidies for organic farming. In order to ensure ecopreneurs are getting fair price for their products, a central agency can be entrusted to collect various fruits and vegetables directly from these ecopreneurs. Further all government functions and mid day meals should make use of such locally cultivated fruits and vegetables. A new marketing campaign sensitizing people about the adverse effects of commercially cultivated fruits and vegetables laced with chemicals. More sales of these products are possible if the government can encourage new entrepreneurs to take up fresh cut vegetables to make it available for urban population every day morning to save time and to promote healthy eating habits. This successful women ecopreneurs can be inspiring role models to show how to create a healthy, thriving livelihood with ecological sensitivity and business acumen.

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