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Women Entrepreneurship in North-East Region

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is one of the most important inputs in the economic development of a country or a region. A woman Entrepreneur, in general terms, can be defined as any individual woman or a group of women, who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise. Entrepreneurship development among women is considered as a possible approach to economic empowerment of women. Women from the region have realized the availability potential resources of the region and have initiated various entrepreneurial activities in order to tap the natural wealth of the region. In Indian woman entrepreneurship is considered as "necessity entrepreneurship" rather than "opportunity entrepreneurship". The main aim of livelihood promotion is to increase household income. The initial stage of it is to form hamlet level Self-Help Groups with rural poor women in order to save woman from financial exploitation. Training in professional competence and leadership skills should be extended to women entrepreneurs. Activities in which women are trained should focus on their marketability and profitability. Education is instrumental in increasing the participation of woman in entrepreneurial activities. Government should provide better educational facilities and schemes to the women folk. The financial institutions are skeptical to engage women in new ventures.

Key Words: Entrepreneurship, Woman Entrepreneurship, Woman Entrepreneurship Guidance Cell, Self-Help Groups.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has always intrigued researchers over the year as it is hard to define. It has generally been assumed, however, that the entrepreneur should be male. Historically and traditionally, women have been confined to the private sphere of the household, doing the daily chores and tending to her family's needs. Therefore, they have

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been denied access to the requisite resources for entrepreneurial entry-access to capital, business and technical education and management experience. Great people like Mahatma Gandhi also actively encouraged woman's participation in public life as he said, "Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the activities of man" But, at the same time, he also said, "I do not believe in woman working for a living or undertaking commercial enterprise." (Ankurita July 23, 2012).

Entrepreneurship is one of the most important inputs in the economic development of a country or a region. Entrepreneurship development and income generating activities are a feasible solution for empowering women. A woman entrepreneur, in general terms, may be defined as any individual woman or a group of women, who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise. In the North-Eastern region, methodical efforts in entrepreneurship development began in the 1970's and Assam is the pioneer in the field. In 1973 Assam started a novel experiment on entrepreneurship development by setting up district level agencies known as entrepreneurial motivational training centers (EMTC) to identify, select and train prospective entrepreneurs and provide them all support services to start and run their enterprises.

Entrepreneurship development is closely connected with the development of human resources. Entrepreneurial development should not be left to chance, as is the practice now. Women are entering into entrepreneurship even while facing socio-cultural, economic, technical, financial and managerial difficulties. Women entrepreneurship movements have gained momentum through encouragement, appropriate awareness, training, environment and support. This has improved the Socio-economic status, which is a pre-requisite of woman's empowerment. The emergence of women entrepreneurs and their contribution to the national economy is quite visible in India. Women constitute half of humanity, contributing two-thirds of world's work hours. But they earn only one-third of the total income and owns less than one-tenth of the world's resources. This shows that the economic status of woman is in pathetic condition. Entrepreneurship development among women is considered as a possible approach to economic empowerment of women. Women entrepreneurship is considered as "necessity entrepreneurship" rather than "opportunity entrepreneurship". Employment or self-employment has been a noticeable phenomenon in the emergence of new entrepreneur. Like men, women too are equally endowed with physical and psychological qualities and managerial abilities that are essential for successful entrepreneurship. The main aim of livelihood promotion is to increase household income. The initial stage is to form hamlet level Self-Help Groups with rural poor women to save women from financial exploitation. This stage is encouraging saving and credit practice. Final stage is to link groups with banks to get larger loans for investment in economic activities. Self-Help Groups have emerged as one of the major strategies for woman's empowerment and various schemes of the Government of India have shown those strong woman's groups. Experience with various programmers and projects

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have highlighted the benefits of formation of woman's groups for building confidence and focusing on developmental tasks. Women cannot be ignored while devising various policies for rural and socio economic development. So, treating the woman with equality of opportunities is very much required.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to enable professional women to understand their entrepreneurship journeys by reflecting upon framing their life stories and experiences to date and to gain clarity about their entrepreneurship principles, values and ethical boundaries, and how they will respond when challenged. Keeping these objectives in view, the present study further focuses on the constraints faced by the entrepreneurs of the region in general and women entrepreneurs in particular.

Methodology

A systematic study in any branch needs a predetermined and well thought out methodology to find out the truth. The present study adopts qualitative research methods.

To carry out the research in addition to the primary data, sources like DIC, Circle offices, BDO offices, offices of Extra Assistant Commissioners and different institutions of the district have been explored to collect Secondary data schedule. For the Secondary data text books, research articles, government policies and strategies regarding women entrepreneurship development have been used in order to present the fact and to find in the logical format.

Discussion

The resource abundant North East India has a tremendous scope for agro based industries, agro forestry, horticulture, mushroom farming, herbal, medicinal and aromatic plants, organic fruits and vegetables processing, handlooms and handicrafts, bee keeping, poultry products, cereal based products, consumer industry, milk and milk based products, food processing, paper products, jute products, cattle rearing, fishery, edible oil, processing of oils and fragrances, gas based intermediary products, floriculture, spices production and processing wood based products etc. The region of North East India in particular will have to realize how confidently it can rely upon the rural enterprises but for that the society will have to walk extra miles with innovation, dedication and determination. Entrepreneurs taking rural entrepreneurship should not only set up enterprises in rural areas but should be also using rural produce as raw material and employing rural people in their production processes. Young people with perspective to think positively creatively, purposefully and with the help of rightly channelized efforts would usher in an era of rural entrepreneurship.

Women possess sufficient talents with all the qualities and abilities required for successful entrepreneurs. A favorable environment is to be created which can motivate, encourage and provide required facilities to women to be successful entrepreneurs. There should be an incessant attempt to motivate, give confidence, inspire and assist women

entrepreneurs. North Eastern region's economy is an agrarian economy with abundant natural resources, still it remains underdeveloped mainly because of lack of entrepreneurship.

The modern concept of women entrepreneurship took shape in this region of the country from the eighties. Contrary to the popular notion that women from the north east are still backward, they have come a long way now and have established themselves as successful and thriving entrepreneurs not only in the region but also beyond the boundaries of the nation. They began with traditionally women oriented business like beauty and well-being, garments fashion, handloom and handicrafts etc. mostly without any formal training or a rigid business framework. In Assam, industries like tea, cane and bamboo, terracotta, pottery, metal works of brass and bell, wood carvings, weavings and toy making have immense prospects. The work of making Japi is also popular in Assam. Furniture pieces of cane and bamboo are exclusive to Assam and are exported. The skill of Terracotta makes everything including idols of gods and mythological creatures and the pottery tradition in Assam results in wonderful items like earthen pot and pitchers, plates, incense stick holders and earthen lamps. Assam also fashions many types of toys like clay toys, pith, wooden and bamboo toys, cloth toys, cloth and mud toys, besides Cotton, 'Eri', 'Pat', and 'Muga' silk are the weaving heritages of the region. Medicinal plants that grow here may be made into products. Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland are known for bamboo work, wood carving, pottery, handicrafts, traditional jewelry, artificial flowers from various natural things, blacksmiths etc. and also for traditional weaving, dying and spinning. Agro and food processing industry is another area for entrepreneurship in the NE region, especially mushroom cultivation which is flourishing in the area. Moreover, entrepreneurs can venture into areas like agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, poultry, animal husbandry and forest which would improve value addition in the agriculture produce, employment generation in the region. Entrepreneurship is all about innovation and risk-taking and with abundant opportunities offered by the land, North East India can be a haven for entrepreneurs.

Women from the region have realized the potential resources of the region and have initiated various entrepreneurship activities in order to tap the natural wealth of the region. Handloom and handicrafts have been playing an important role in the economics of the North East States. All Assam Jana Jagaran Society is another NGO that is working towards helping small entrepreneurs of N.E. region. They are working on handloom, handicraft, sericulture etc. There are also several other organizations that are supporting initiative for promotion of new entrepreneurs and creation of awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities in the North East. Consortium of woman entrepreneurs of India (CWEI), a registered Civil Society and a voluntary organization that works for the economic empowerment of woman in the country, has also focused on developmental activities in the NE region. Recognizing the importance of entrepreneurship development for industrial development of the region on the one hand and at the same time lack of entrepreneurship development on the other, the

Central Government, North Eastern Council and State Government through various agencies such as small Industries Development Bank of India. (SIDIBI), Small Industries Service Institute (SISI), Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE), North Eastern Development Financial Corporation (NEDFI), Directorate of Commerce And Industries and NGOs have been organizing various entrepreneurship development programmes over the last few decades, such programmes have facilities for direct and indirect training and education to the potential entrepreneurs specially in the project preparation, managerial, technical, marketing, financial and accounting areas. The concerned directorate endeavors to create awareness amongst the woman beneficiaries through various programs of the state Government and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Human Resource Development. The training programs should include identification and selection of the potential entrepreneurs and their motivation in the entrepreneurial career though provisions of training and other inputs necessary to set up entrepreneurial units.

Entrepreneurship is a difficult undertaking as it calls for innovative ideas, risk-taking, strong business acumen and effective leadership in all aspects of business. It is a challenging role for a woman, but growing sensitivity towards the role of a thinking individual and increasing economic independence has made it possible today for several women to undertaken entrepreneurship. Enterprise Development programs aim at building and nurturing a reservoir of entrepreneurs and promotion of self-employed ventures capable of generating employment opportunities especially in rural areas with the coverage of woman.

Conclusion

The Central as well as State Government should introduce women friendly economic policies that can enhance both social and economic position and make them Self-reliant. Economic growth will be inclusive, sustainable if wealth creation and poverty reduction occur at a faster rate in rural India, more specifically in the State. Right efforts from all areas are required in the development of woman entrepreneurs and their greater participation in the entrepreneurial activities. Government should extend better educational facilities, suitable financial schemes, training on technical and management skills and professional competence to woman folk; and on the part of the society, incessant support and recognition is equally essential. Though the current situation in North East regions extraordinarily brilliant, the paradigm shift is visible and we can definitely expect the best in the near future. The outcome of this paper shall be useful for the government, funding agencies, and non-government organization to formulate an inclusive and sustainable policy that enables woman to become successful entrepreneurs. Women from the region have realized the potential resources of the region and have initiated various enterprises region. Handloom and handicrafts have been playing an important role in the economics of the North East State. Handloom and handicrafts products found in the North East have excellent brand value. The need today is to develop entrepreneurship among both men and women.

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