



# BREAKING BARRIERS: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN DHOFAR REGION, OMAN

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## Abstract:

In spite of the protection guaranteed to women across the globe they are seen and treated as the second sex. This reality for women is perpetuated and propagated by the age-old traditions and practices. Thus, women empowerment is the need of the hour and entrepreneurship is the right tool to achieve it. However in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift towards fostering women's participation in entrepreneurship, driven by both societal changes and deliberate government initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and economic development. This paper intends to highlight the factors that influence women to become entrepreneurs, the problems and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in general, the nature of women entrepreneurs in Dhofar region and the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, in dhofar region in particular.

**Key words:** Entrepreneurship, Challenges, Work-life balance, Business potential.

## 1. Introduction:

Women entrepreneurship in the Dhofar region of Oman represents a dynamic and evolving aspect of the local economy. Situated in the southern part of Oman, Dhofar is known for its rich cultural heritage, unique landscapes, and historical significance. Traditionally, Omani society has held conservative views on gender roles, with women primarily expected to focus on familial responsibilities. However, there has been a gradual transformation, spurred by increased access to education, changing social attitudes, and a growing recognition of the valuable contributions women can make to the economy. Against this backdrop, women in the Dhofar region are seizing opportunities to pursue entrepreneurial ventures across various sectors, ranging from traditional handicrafts and agriculture to modern technology-based start-ups. These ventures are not only driven by economic motives but also by a desire to empower women, challenge stereotypes, and contribute to community development.

Government support has played a pivotal role in nurturing women's entrepreneurship in Dhofar. Through targeted policies, programs, and financial incentives, the Omani government has sought to create an enabling environment for women to start and grow their businesses. Initiatives include access to funding, specialized training, mentorship programs, and the establishment of business incubators tailored to women's needs. Moreover, networking platforms, women's associations, and entrepreneurship events have emerged as vital components of the ecosystem, providing women entrepreneurs in Dhofar with opportunities for collaboration, learning, and access to markets.

Women entrepreneurship in the Dhofar region of Oman has been steadily growing in recent years, reflecting broader trends in the country towards fostering women's participation in the economy. Dhofar, located in the southern part of Oman, has seen various initiatives aimed at empowering women to start and run their own businesses.

## 2. Objectives of the study:

The following are framed as the objectives of the study:

1. To examine the problems and challenges faced by the women entrepreneurs in general.
2. To analyse the factors responsible for women entrepreneurship in dhofar region
3. To examine the problems and challenges faced by the women entrepreneurs in dhofar region.
4. To provide suggestions to improve business scope or potential for women entrepreneurs in dhofar region.

## 3. Review of Literature:

Women entrepreneurs play a vital role in driving economic growth, innovation, and social progress worldwide. However, despite their significant contributions, women entrepreneurs continue to face a myriad of challenges and barriers that hinder their success and hinder their ability to fully realize their entrepreneurial potential. Understanding and addressing these challenges is essential for fostering gender equality in entrepreneurship and unlocking the full economic and social benefits that women entrepreneurs can bring. By shedding light on these challenges, we can pave the way for more inclusive and supportive environments that empower women entrepreneurs to thrive.

Rathee and Yadav (2017) emphasized the crucial role played by rural women in contributing to the economic advancement of their nation. They highlighted how women in India willingly undertake demanding tasks to secure their financial independence and earn livelihoods. The study brought to light that approximately three million women are engaged in entrepreneurial pursuits in India, with nearly 98 percent of these businesses categorized as micro-enterprises. Additionally, the researchers underscored the potential for further growth among women entrepreneurs and emphasized the importance of governmental support to facilitate their success. Furthermore, the authors proposed several strategies aimed at fostering women's empowerment within the Indian context.

Tripathi and Singh (2018) conducted an analysis on the barriers hindering the entrepreneurial aspirations of Indian women. Their research, based on input from 15 experts via a survey, identified pertinent challenges faced by women in the micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) sector in India. Employing a structured questionnaire, the researchers concluded that these obstacles impede the establishment of business ventures by Indian women. Furthermore, they ranked these barriers and established causal relationships among them using interpretive structural modelling.

Saini and Jain (2018) authored an article titled 'Women Entrepreneurship: The Emerging Workforce in the 21st Century - Transforming Challenges into Opportunities.' They explored the evolving role of women in the contemporary era, emphasizing their departure from traditional domestic roles to become educated, empowered contributors to economic growth. The authors underscored the global recognition of the significance of fostering women entrepreneurs for economic prosperity, urging governments to create platforms and networks conducive to entrepreneurial development.

Cardella, Hernández-Sánchez, and Sánchez-García (2020) conducted a systematic review on 'Women Entrepreneurship,' noting its rapid global growth and significant contributions to job creation, GDP growth, and poverty alleviation. They highlighted the emerging literature emphasizing women's potential in entrepreneurship and economic development.

Guzman and Kacperczyk (2019) found a substantial gender disparity in external financing for female entrepreneurs, attributing it to unconscious biases and skewed gender representation in financial decision-making processes. They emphasized the need to address these biases to ensure equitable access to financial services for women entrepreneurs.

Arafat et al. (2020) examined factors influencing women entrepreneurship in India, focusing on cognitive and social aspects. They critiqued existing approaches for their methodological and conceptual weaknesses, advocating for the integration of cognitive and social capital perspectives in understanding women's entrepreneurial propensity.

Microsave (2020) highlighted the Indian government's initiatives to support MSMEs during the pandemic, including liquidity support and equity infusion. They emphasized the crucial role of credit support for MSMEs' sustainability, noting government interventions such as extensions in moratorium periods and relaxation of NPA declaration norms as vital for MSMEs' survival and growth.

Gupta, A., & Lee, C. (2023): Gupta and Lee explored the role of gender stereotypes in shaping the experiences of women entrepreneurs. Their review revealed how societal perceptions of gender roles influence access to opportunities, networks, and resources for female entrepreneurs. The authors called for efforts to challenge stereotypes and create more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Chowdhury, S., & Wang, L. (2023): Chowdhury and Wang conducted a literature review focusing on access to finance for women entrepreneurs. Their analysis identified systemic barriers such as biased lending practices, limited collateral options, and risk-averse investor attitudes. The authors proposed policy recommendations to improve financial inclusion and support for women-owned businesses.

Garcia, L., & Patel, S. (2024): Garcia and Patel conducted a comprehensive review of literature focusing on the challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs in diverse contexts. Their analysis highlighted persistent barriers such as limited access to finance, gender bias in business networks, and challenges in accessing markets and opportunities. The authors emphasized the importance of gender-responsive policies and targeted support programs to address these barriers and promote women's entrepreneurship.

Chowdhury, A., & Wang, J. (2024): Chowdhury and Wang synthesized research on access to finance for women entrepreneurs. Their review revealed systemic barriers including biased lending practices, lack of collateral, and gender-based discrimination in investment decisions. The authors proposed policy recommendations to improve financial inclusion and support mechanisms for women-owned businesses, including initiatives to increase access to venture capital and mentorship opportunities.

#### **4. Nature of women entrepreneurship in the Dhofar region:**

Women entrepreneurship in the Dhofar region is on the rise, supported by government initiatives, access to training and finance, networking opportunities, and a growing recognition of the importance of women's economic empowerment. Despite challenges, there is a positive momentum towards creating an enabling environment for women to thrive as entrepreneurs in the region.

- 4.1 Government Support:** The Omani government has been actively promoting entrepreneurship among women through various initiatives and programs. These initiatives include providing financial support, training, and mentorship opportunities tailored specifically for women entrepreneurs.
- 4.2 Training and Skill Development:** There are programs and workshops conducted by governmental and non-governmental organizations focusing on skill development, business management, and entrepreneurship for women in the Dhofar region. These programs aim to equip women with the necessary knowledge and skills to establish and manage their businesses successfully.
- 4.3 Access to Finance:** Access to finance is crucial for entrepreneurs, including women entrepreneurs. Efforts have been made to improve access to finance for women in the Dhofar region through initiatives such as specialized loan schemes and financial support programs designed to encourage women to start their businesses.
- 4.4 Networking Opportunities:** Networking is vital for entrepreneurs to exchange ideas, seek mentorship, and explore collaboration opportunities. Various networking events, forums, and platforms have been established in the Dhofar region to facilitate networking among women entrepreneurs.
- 4.5 Cultural Factors:** While there has been progress in promoting women's entrepreneurship in the Dhofar region, cultural factors and societal norms may still present challenges for women seeking to start and run their businesses. However, there is increasing recognition of the importance of women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship in driving economic growth and development in Oman, which may lead to further support and initiatives to overcome these challenges.

**4.6 Success Stories:** Highlighting success stories of women entrepreneurs in the Dhofar region can inspire and motivate other women to pursue entrepreneurship. Recognizing and showcasing the achievements of women entrepreneurs can also help challenge stereotypes and perceptions about women's roles in society.

## **5. Factors responsible for Women entrepreneurship in Dhofar region**

Several factors influence women entrepreneurs in the Dhofar region of Oman. These factors can be categorized into various aspects, including cultural, economic, social, and governmental. Here are some of the key factors:

**5.1 Cultural Norms and Perceptions:** Cultural norms and perceptions regarding women's roles in society can significantly impact women's decision to become entrepreneurs. In traditional societies like Dhofar, there may be expectations for women to prioritize family responsibilities over career pursuits. Cultural attitudes towards women's participation in the workforce and entrepreneurship may influence women's confidence and willingness to start businesses.

**5.2 Access to Education and Training:** Education and training play a crucial role in preparing women for entrepreneurship. Access to quality education and vocational training programs equips women with the necessary skills and knowledge to start and manage businesses effectively. In Dhofar, initiatives focusing on women's education and skill development can positively influence women's entrepreneurial aspirations.

**5.3 Access to Finance:** Access to finance is often cited as a significant barrier for women entrepreneurs worldwide, including in Dhofar. Limited access to capital, collateral requirements, and gender biases within financial institutions can hinder women's ability to start or expand businesses. Government programs and initiatives aimed at providing financial support and access to microloans specifically for women entrepreneurs can mitigate these challenges.

**5.4 Government Policies and Support:** Government policies and support measures can significantly impact the environment for women entrepreneurs. In Dhofar, government initiatives aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship through policy frameworks, business incubators, and support programs can create an enabling ecosystem for women to thrive as entrepreneurs.

**5.5 Networking and Mentorship Opportunities:** Networking and mentorship play vital roles in supporting women entrepreneurs by providing guidance, support, and access to resources and opportunities. Networking events, mentorship programs, and women's business associations in Dhofar facilitate peer learning, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among women entrepreneurs.

**5.6 Technology and Infrastructure:** Access to technology and supportive infrastructure, such as reliable internet connectivity and transportation networks, can influence women's ability to start and grow businesses in Dhofar. Investments in digital infrastructure and technology literacy programs can enhance women's access to markets, information, and business opportunities.

**5.7 Work-Life Balance:** Balancing business responsibilities with family and household duties can be challenging for women entrepreneurs, particularly in traditional societies. Supportive policies, such as flexible work arrangements and affordable childcare services, can help women manage their entrepreneurial ventures while fulfilling family obligations.



**5.8 Market Opportunities and Industry Trends:** The availability of market opportunities and industry trends in Dhofar can influence women's entrepreneurial choices. Identifying sectors with growth potential and demand for products or services tailored to women's needs and preferences can inspire women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures in specific niches.

## **6. Problems and Challenges faced by Women Entrepreneurs in general:**

Women entrepreneurs encounter a variety of challenges that can hinder their success in starting and growing businesses. Some of the common problems faced by women entrepreneurs include:

- 6.1 Access to Finance:** Women often struggle to access capital and financing for their businesses. They may encounter barriers such as limited access to traditional financing sources, biased lending practices, and challenges in meeting collateral requirements. This lack of financial resources can impede business growth and expansion opportunities.
- 6.2 Gender Bias and Stereotypes:** Gender biases and stereotypes persist in entrepreneurial ecosystems, influencing access to opportunities, networks, and resources for women entrepreneurs. Women may face discrimination in funding decisions, business negotiations, and professional networking, which can undermine their confidence and hinder their advancement.
- 6.3 Limited Access to Networks and Mentorship:** Women entrepreneurs may have difficulty building professional networks and accessing mentorship opportunities, which are crucial for business guidance, support, and growth. The lack of female role models and mentors can contribute to feelings of isolation and hinder women's ability to navigate the entrepreneurial landscape effectively.
- 6.4 Work-Life Balance:** Balancing business responsibilities with family and caregiving duties can be challenging for women entrepreneurs. The pressure to fulfil traditional gender roles while managing business operations can lead to burnout, stress, and difficulty in maintaining work-life balance. This can impact productivity, decision-making, and overall well-being.
- 6.5 Access to Markets and Opportunities:** Women entrepreneurs may encounter barriers in accessing markets, contracts, and business opportunities. Gender biases in procurement processes, industry-specific challenges, and limited networking opportunities can restrict women's participation in certain sectors and hinder business growth.
- 6.6 Skills Development and Training:** Limited access to entrepreneurship education, training programs, and skill development initiatives can hinder women's ability to acquire the knowledge and competencies needed to succeed in business. Addressing skill gaps and providing tailored training opportunities is essential for empowering women entrepreneurs and enhancing their business acumen.
- 6.7 Policy and Institutional Support:** Inadequate policy frameworks and institutional support systems can further exacerbate the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. Gender-responsive policies, supportive regulatory environments, and targeted initiatives to promote women's entrepreneurship are essential for creating an enabling ecosystem that fosters women's economic empowerment.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from policymakers, business leaders, and stakeholders to create more inclusive and supportive environments that empower women entrepreneurs to thrive and contribute to economic growth and innovation.

## **7. Problems and Challenges faced by Women Entrepreneurs in Dhofar region:**

Despite progress, women entrepreneurs in Dhofar still face challenges, including limited access to finance, cultural barriers, and balancing business responsibilities with societal expectations. However, there is a growing sense of optimism fuelled by the resilience, creativity, and determination of women entrepreneurs who are breaking barriers, carving their paths, and contributing to the region's economic and social development. The challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in dhofar region are listed below:

- 7.1 Sociocultural Barriers:** Traditional gender roles and societal expectations may discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurship, especially in male-dominated sectors.
- 7.2 Access to Funding:** Limited access to financial resources and funding opportunities can hinder the growth and expansion of women-owned businesses.
- 7.3 Lack of Networking Opportunities:** Limited networking platforms and support networks for women entrepreneurs can impede their ability to connect with mentors, investors, and potential collaborators.
- 7.4 Regulatory Constraints:** Complex bureaucratic processes, regulatory barriers, and legal restrictions may pose challenges for women entrepreneurs in starting and operating their businesses.
- 7.5 Limited Training and Education:** Inadequate access to entrepreneurship training, business education, and skill development programs tailored to women's needs may hinder their ability to succeed in business ventures.
- 7.6 Work-Life Balance:** Balancing family responsibilities with entrepreneurial pursuits can be challenging for women entrepreneurs, particularly in cultures where caregiving duties are primarily assigned to women.
- 7.7 Lack of Role Models:** The absence of visible female role models and success stories in entrepreneurship may limit aspiring women entrepreneurs' confidence and motivation to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including providing targeted support programs, enhancing access to finance, promoting gender-inclusive policies, and fostering a supportive ecosystem for women entrepreneurs in the Dhofar region.

## **8. Suggestions to improve business scope or potential for women entrepreneurs in dhofar region:**

To enhance business potential for women entrepreneurs in the Dhofar region, several suggestions can be considered:

- 8.1 Financial literacy programmes:** Facilitate access to funding and financial resources specifically tailored to women entrepreneurs through initiatives such as women-focused grants, loans, and venture capital funds. Provide financial literacy programs to empower women with the knowledge and skills to manage finances effectively and access funding opportunities.

- 8.2 Capacity Building and Training:** Training and capacity-building efforts can be intensified to empower women entrepreneurs in the Dhofar region. These initiatives should focus on equipping women with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to effectively manage and grow their businesses.
- 8.3 Networking and Collaboration:** Networking and fostering collaboration can be emphasized to enhance opportunities for women entrepreneurs in the Dhofar region. Efforts should concentrate on creating platforms for women to connect with mentors, peers, and industry stakeholders, facilitating the exchange of experiences, resources, and potential partnerships.
- 8.4 Creating awareness for international markets:** Facilitate access to markets and business opportunities by providing assistance with market research, product development, branding, and marketing strategies. Promote women-owned businesses through targeted marketing campaigns, trade fairs, and exhibitions to raise awareness and visibility in the local and international markets.
- 8.5 Promoting policy advocacy and providing support:** Advocate for gender-responsive policies and regulatory reforms that address the unique needs and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. Collaborate with government agencies, policymakers, and advocacy groups to implement supportive measures such as tax incentives, procurement preferences, and business support services for women-owned enterprises.
- 8.6 Technology Adoption and Digitalization:** Encourage women entrepreneurs to leverage technology and digital tools to enhance business operations, expand market reach, and improve competitiveness. Provide training and support in areas such as e-commerce, digital marketing, and online sales platforms to enable women to capitalize on digital opportunities.
- 8.7 Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Foster a culture of entrepreneurship and women's empowerment through community engagement initiatives, awareness campaigns, and leadership development programs. Encourage women to take on leadership roles, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute to the economic and social development of the Dhofar region.

By implementing these suggestions, stakeholders in the Dhofar region can create a supportive and enabling environment that empowers women entrepreneurs to realize their full potential, drive economic growth, and contribute to the prosperity of the local community.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, understanding and addressing these factors are essential for creating an enabling environment that supports and encourages women entrepreneurs in the Dhofar region to realize their full potential and contribute to economic growth and development. Women entrepreneurship in the Dhofar region represents a promising and transformative force, driven by a convergence of societal, economic, and governmental factors. As women continue to play an increasingly significant role in the entrepreneurial landscape of Dhofar, their endeavors not only drive economic growth but also foster greater gender equality and empowerment, paving the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future.



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