



Social Entrepreneurship and Environmental Sustainability in India: An Overview

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurship has gained significant momentum in recent years in India, as it provides enormous opportunities and makes a positive impact on society and environment. It addresses pressing social and Environmental issues, fostering innovation and contributing to sustainable development resulting in overall well-being of communities. Social entrepreneurship in India has emerged as a transformative force in addressing environmental and social challenges and social entrepreneurs are leading the way with creative solutions that encourage environmental sustainability. These initiatives combine social impact with business approaches to advance renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture. Social enterprises are creating environment friendly technologies and also incorporating them into local communities, ensuring equitable distribution of economic benefits. India's commitment to achieving its sustainable development goals has spurred the growth of enterprises that focus on eco-friendly solutions and inclusive progress, including solar energy, water conservation, and waste-to-energy technologies.

Supporting the Sustainable Development theory and Social Innovation Model, this paper examines the connection between social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability. It provides a critical examination of essential sectors-renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture-showcasing successful ventures like SELCO India and Goonj. By referencing recent peer-reviewed research and international policy frameworks, this paper highlights the opportunities and challenges that social enterprises encounter in scaling their impact, securing funding, and engaging marginalized communities. Additionally, it connects India's domestic initiatives to its evolving foreign policy, illustrating how social entrepreneurship plays a role in global sustainable development diplomacy, apart from exploring the role of social entrepreneurship in environmental sustainability in India.

Keywords: India, *Social Entrepreneurship, Environmental Sustainability, Renewable Energy, Waste Management, Inclusive Growth.*

1 Introduction

“We need to redefine entrepreneurship- it should not be about profit alone, but about problem-solving with empathy, especially for the environment and the underserved”. -Dr. Harish Hande

Social entrepreneurship is a concept which originated in the western space and is often used to describe economic initiatives that have a social and/or environmental purpose, which reinvest a significant portion of their profits to support their mission. Its focus lies in achieving both economic efficiency and social innovation, which emerges in a context characterized by considerable uncertainty regarding the future of welfare states and their ability to address new societal demands as well as financial limitations. Thus, there is a necessity to create innovative solutions to societal issues that are socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable. In this framework, various initiatives can be categorized as social innovations.

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a crucial driver of social change in India. Home to more than a billion individuals and facing intricate socio-economic difficulties, India deals with various environmental and social problems, such as climate change, resource exhaustion, pollution, and increasing inequality. The growth of social entrepreneurship, focusing on environmental sustainability, has been facilitated by the rising demand for innovative solutions to these challenges.

Social entrepreneurs are essentially enterprises that aim to address environmental and social challenges while achieving economic viability. In social enterprises, the social impact is prioritized over profit maximization, unlike traditional companies. In India, these businesses have emerged as significant contributors to combating environmental degradation by offering sustainable solutions and fostering inclusive development.

1.1 Social Entrepreneurship and Environmental Sustainability in India

Social entrepreneurship in India represents a type of innovation aimed at tackling urgent social challenges and entrepreneurs for this they employ business strategies to address intricate social, environmental, and economic issues. These initiatives seek to advance sustainable development by devising solutions that are environmentally considerate and advantageous for everyone. In this way social enterprises enhance long-lasting benefits for people and the planet by prioritizing sustainability

Environmental sustainability lies at the heart of numerous social enterprises in India, especially those focused on tackling environmental issues like pollution, waste management, climate change, and resource conservation.

1.2 Theoretical Frameworks

This paper integrates two theoretical frameworks to analyze the trend. The first is “Sustainable Development Theory, which emphasizes the balance of economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection” [1]. The other is “Social Innovation Model, which identifies novel, scalable approaches to systemic social problems through cross-sector collaboration and entrepreneurial action” [2].

1.3 Analytical Literature Review

Analytical Literature Review of Social Entrepreneurship and Environmental Sustainability in India (Post-2022) clearly indicates that social entrepreneurship has emerged as a transformative force in India addressing pressing environmental and social issues. For example, to promote sustainable development, particularly in renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture sector they apply innovative business models.

To critically assess the current scenario, identify challenges, and explore opportunities for impact, some recent peer-reviewed studies (post-2022) are being reviewed.

Renewable Energy Initiatives

Recent studies underscore the vital impact of decentralized renewable energy (DRE) technologies on enhancing rural livelihoods. A study conducted in 2023 by the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW) in India estimates that technologies such as solar pumps and dryers could affect approximately 37 million livelihoods, while firms producing DRE-based livelihood technologies may generate around USD 50 billion in revenue. Nonetheless, according to the CEEWSAGE Journals, significant challenges remain for the broad adoption of waste-to-energy (WTE) technologies, including substantial capital costs, difficulties in acquiring land, and inconsistent feedstock quality

Waste Management and Circular Economy

Unique waste management approaches have gained popularity, such as Pune's Swach, which enables informal waste pickers, particularly women, to become structured service providers. This model improves lives while also significantly aiding in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Similarly, the plastic weaving sector in Dharavi demonstrates how community-driven recycling initiatives can promote environmental sustainability while providing viable income opportunities.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain in applying circular economy practices, especially within the textile sector. A 2025 study identifies challenges in applying circular economy principles, such as regulatory adherence, consumer engagement, and supply chain collaboration.

Sustainable Agriculture and Women-Led Initiatives

In order to address environmental issues such as water scarcity and soil deterioration, social businesses are placing an increasing emphasis on sustainable agriculture. “The Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) created the Women-led Climate Resilient Farming (WCRF) model, which encourages multi-cropping of native, climate-appropriate food crops in order to guarantee household food and income security while also protecting water and natural resources” [3].

Furthermore, the example of “Piplantri village in Rajasthan demonstrates how ecofeminism can promote social entrepreneurship. The community made great progress in planting trees and conserving water under the direction of Dr. Shyam Sunder Paliwal, which had a positive impact on the local economy and environment” [4].

In India, the role of Social entrepreneurship in advancing environmental sustainability and social equity has been pivotal. And the potential of innovative business models in addressing critical challenges has been emphasized by recent studies. However, in order to maximize their impact, the existing challenges need to be addressed and at the same time an enabling environment that supports the growth and scalability of these enterprises should be made available. Future research should focus on developing frameworks for impact assessment, exploring policy interventions, and fostering collaborations that enhance the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship in achieving sustainable development goals.

1.4 Objectives

Supporting the Sustainable Development Theory and Social Innovation Model, and reviewing the recent peer-reviewed research and international policy frameworks this paper aims:

To examine the connection between social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability.

To provide a critical examination of essential sectors-renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture

To highlight the opportunities and challenges that social enterprises encounter in securing funds and engaging marginalized communities.

To delineate India’s domestic initiatives and illustrate the role of social entrepreneurship in environmental sustainability in India and global sustainable development diplomacy

1.5 Methodology

A qualitative and descriptive research approach to examine the connection between social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability in India. The research mostly used secondary

data analysis, employing a case study method to examine significant social businesses and projects in thematic fields like waste management, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture.

2 Themes in Social Entrepreneurship for Environmental Sustainability

Renewable Energy Innovation

In India, a country, rich in renewable energy potential, a growing number of social enterprises has been focusing on solar energy, wind power, and biogas. These initiatives are utilizing renewable resources to meet the energy demands of rural and underprivileged communities while decreasing dependence on fossil fuels.

‘SELCO India’ serves as a notable example, delivering solar energy solutions to rural households without grid access, providing cost-effective and sustainable energy options. Through a unique financing approach, SELCO has enabled marginalized communities to access solar energy, enhancing both environmental and social sustainability.

‘Mera Gao Power’ is another significant instance that has introduced cost-effective solar microgrid solutions to rural India. It provides eco-friendly electricity to isolated communities, enhancing living standards and decreasing reliance on costly and polluting kerosene lamps.

Waste Management

“The urban discard is not waste- it is a resource. It just needs to be looked at with dignity and purpose”. - Anshu Gupta

India’s growing population and urbanization has caused environmental concern particularly waste management. Though, Social entrepreneurs have stepped in to promote waste-to-resource models and this has resulted in ensuring that waste is recycled and reused in a sustainable manner. Besides, these initiatives have also created job opportunities and contributed to community well-being.

Goonj is one such example that upcycles urban waste to create products like clothing and sanitary pads for underprivileged communities. This has resulted in reducing environmental impact while benefiting vulnerable populations in addressing waste and providing useful products.

“Charity is not scalable, dignity is”. -(This also reflects Goonj’s model of sustainable reuse).

The Pollution Control Board Initiatives have also encouraged waste management enterprises across the country. And social startups like ‘Waste Warriors’ help in creating awareness around the importance of waste management in sustainable urban living apart from cleaning and segregating waste.

Sustainable Agriculture

India's agriculture sector, which sustains a significant part of the population, is facing major environmental issues, such as soil deterioration, water shortages, and dependence on toxic pesticides. Social entrepreneurs are playing a crucial role in this sector as well by enhancing sustainable agriculture by advocating for organic farming, water preservation, and climate-resilient agricultural methods.

A notable initiative in this regard is the “Agastya International Foundation, that focuses on hands-on science education to teach rural farmers sustainable practices that boost agricultural productivity while being environmentally friendly” [5]. “Amul, India’s largest dairy cooperative, has implemented sustainable farming techniques by working with small-scale farmers to promote eco-friendly practices, such as water conservation and organic feed production, while ensuring fair compensation for farmers” [6].

3 Initiatives and Challenges for Social Enterprises in India

3.1 Key Initiatives

Water Conservation and Management

As water scarcity emerges as a pressing concern, various social enterprises concentrate on conserving water. Eco-First, for instance, engages in rainwater harvesting initiatives throughout India, assisting communities in preserving water and creating sustainable water management approaches

Inclusive Growth

Numerous social enterprises in India aim to generate economic opportunities for underserved communities and these initiatives guarantee that development is fair and inclusive by offering access to clean energy, education, and sustainable income sources, particularly for rural and underprivileged communities

3.2 Challenges Faced by Social Enterprises

Social entrepreneurship, have been facing several challenges that hinder their widespread impact.

Funding Constraints

Sustainable Funding is one such issue that many social enterprises struggle to secure as investors often prioritize profitability over social impact.

Government Policy and Regulations

Bureaucratic hurdle is another issue, even though the Indian government has introduced policies to promote sustainable development, lack of clear regulations often pose challenges for social enterprises.

Scalability and Impact Measurement

To achieve long-term sustainability scaling of operations and measuring their impact effectively is important, however, many social enterprises struggle to do so, which limits their potential.

4 Social Entrepreneurship and Environmental Sustainability in India's Foreign Policy

India's Foreign Policy has been inclusive and dynamic in nature hence, it reflects its commitment to environmental sustainability and inclusive growth, which aligns with the principles of social entrepreneurship. And India has been actively involved in global environmental discussions, promoting climate change reduction, resource preservation, and sustainable growth. Social entrepreneurship plays a crucial role here too, as these businesses frequently partner with global organizations, governmental bodies, and NGOs to accomplish common objectives

India's participation in the Paris Climate Agreement is a notable example and its push for renewable energy development speaks volume of how India's foreign policy supports environmental sustainability. And the Indian social enterprises advance these global objectives, thereby enhancing sustainability domestically at the same also encouraging international collaboration on worldwide issues. Moreover, efforts such as 'The Solar Alliance', led by India, demonstrate the country's dedication to advancing renewable energy domestically and internationally. Social enterprises in India are aiding the worldwide shift to clean energy by offering solar technology and sustainable solutions to various developing countries. Social Entrepreneurship and Environmental Sustainability align with India's Foreign Policy, offering a distinct viewpoint on how India is establishing itself as a worldwide leader in sustainable advancement and inclusive innovation

4.1 India's Foreign Policy and Sustainable Development

India's foreign policy being dynamic in nature has evolved to include development diplomacy, and climate leadership and this India has done by increasingly integrating sustainability into its international strategy through several initiatives and these efforts exemplify development diplomacy.

The International Solar Alliance (ISA), which promotes South-South cooperation on clean energy.

Bilateral and multilateral support for sustainable technology transfer, e.g., India-Israel clean-tech collaborations.

UNDP-partnered entrepreneurship hubs in Africa and Asia, disseminating Indian models of green enterprise.

5 Social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability as strategic tools

Social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability contribute to augmenting global partnerships; fulfilling the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); fostering inclusive development via South-South Cooperation; and enhancing India's image as a responsible global power.

5.1 Strategies in India's Foreign Policy

Development Diplomacy

Social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability help strengthen global partnerships; achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); promote inclusive development through South-South Cooperation; and enhance India's image as a responsible global leader.

India supports and assists other developing nations through technology transfer (clean energy, digital platforms) and capacity building (skill enhancement, entrepreneurship).

Also, there are infrastructure projects in place that align with sustainability goals like:

South-South Cooperation

India shares cost-effective innovations and social enterprise frameworks with Africa, South Asia, and Latin America via: Lines of Credit (LoCs); Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC); India-Africa Forum Summit; International Solar Alliance (ISA).

5.2 Major Global Initiatives and Projects

International Solar Alliance (ISA)

Launched by: India & France at COP21 in 2015

Goal: Promote solar energy as a sustainable solution for energy access and climate change

Impact: Supports clean energy startups, local entrepreneurs in solar energy across Africa, Asia, and the Pacific

Example: Solar pump distribution in African farming communities using Indian innovation

ISA promotes green entrepreneurship globally using Indian technology

Headquartered in: India, its dedication to multilateralism and a carbon-neutral future is reflected in the ISA, the nation's first international organisation. The ISA, which has 120 Member and Signatory Countries, is essential to promoting international solar cooperation, improving energy security, and facilitating the switch to greener energy sources. [7].

UNDP and India's Entrepreneurship Hubs

Partnership: India collaborates with UNDP to support youth innovation labs and impact accelerators across developing countries

Promotes social enterprise models from India abroad as part of foreign aid and diplomacy.

Example: Youth Co: Lab India - Aiming to regionally establish a shared agenda for Asia-Pacific nations to invest in and empower youth to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through leadership, social innovation, and entrepreneurship, Youth Co: Lab India was started in 2019 by UNDP India and Citi Foundation in collaboration with Atal Innovation Mission and NITI Aayog. On Thursday, December 15, 2022, Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog, UNDP India, and Citi Foundation jointly launched the fifth iteration of Youth Co: Lab India, Asia Pacific's largest youth innovation initiative [8].

E-Vidya Bharati & E-Arogya Bharati (eVBAB) Network Project

Goal: Provide tele-education and telemedicine services to African nations

Social Impact: Education and healthcare access

Leveraging digital social entrepreneurship as soft power.

“Pan African e-Network Project (PAeNP)”, the first phase of this project, was conceived by late Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, former President of India. Launched in 2009, the project was successfully completed on September 30, 2017. In the 48 African nations that are members of the African Union (AU), the network offered medical and educational services via satellite-based, MPLS, and IPLC telecommunication links [9].

5.3 Strategic Goals Behind These Initiatives

Goal: How it Connects

Global Influence: Position India as a sustainability leader

Geopolitical Leverage: Foster goodwill with developing countries

SDG Alignment:	Fulfill commitments to UN SDGs, especially SDG 7 (Clean Energy), SDG 9 (Innovation), and SDG 13 (Climate Action)
Green Diplomacy:	Use climate leadership as a diplomatic asset

India is weaving social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability into its foreign policy through:

Global alliances like ISA

Development partnerships focused on innovation

Exporting inclusive and green enterprise models

Promoting frugal Indian innovations as tools for global good

6 Social Entrepreneurship, Environmental Sustainability, and Inclusive Growth in India

Social entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a transformative approach to addressing societal issues, particularly in developing countries like India. It combines innovative business strategies with social impact goals, focusing on finding sustainable solutions to various challenges.

In India, these business leaders are driving transformation in vital sectors like environmental sustainability, renewable energy, waste management, sustainable agriculture, and inclusive development.

6.1 Role of Social Entrepreneurship

The primary role is that these initiatives seek to address social, cultural, or environmental challenges while remaining financially viable. In contrast to conventional businesses that prioritize profit, social enterprises seek to harmonize profit with fulfilling a social mission.

In India, social entrepreneurship has surged significantly, driven by the necessity to tackle issues such as poverty, inequality, environmental decline, and climate change.

Examples

SELCO India

'SELCO India' was established in 1995 and is a leader in delivering solar energy solutions to marginalized communities, especially in rural areas of India. The firm merges business insight with social responsibility by offering cost-effective solar energy solutions, thereby fostering environmental sustainability and enhancing the lives of individuals in energy-limited regions.

Goonj

Goonj is a social organization dedicated to managing urban waste and tackling rural requirements. It converts urban waste (including textiles and fabrics) into valuable items such as blankets, sanitary pads, and various materials for underserved communities, promoting both ecological sustainability and social fairness.

6.2 Environmental Sustainability in India

Environmental sustainability is essential in light of worldwide climate change and resource exhaustion. In India, swift urban growth, industrial development, and tree-cutting have resulted in significant ecological harm.

Social entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as a way to mitigate these issues by fostering practices that protect the environment, ensure the responsible use of resources, and promote long-term ecological balance.

6.3 Role of Social Entrepreneurship in Environmental Sustainability in India

A social entrepreneur creates businesses that aim to solve social and environmental problems while also being financially sustainable. In the context of environmental sustainability, these entrepreneurs innovate to reduce environmental degradation; Promote renewable energy, waste management, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture; Empower local communities to protect and profit from their environment.

6.4 It Matters in India

India faces major environmental challenges with respect to Air and water pollution; Deforestation and biodiversity loss; Waste management crisis; Climate change affecting agriculture and rural livelihoods; Social entrepreneurs offer innovative, affordable, and scalable solutions, especially where government or big business fall short.

Roles of Social Entrepreneurship in Environmental Sustainability

Table*: 1

	Role	Description	Example
1	Green Innovation	Develop low-cost sustainable technologies	Greenway Grameen – energy-efficient cookstoves reduce smoke and emissions

2	Waste to Wealth	Turn waste into useful products, reducing landfill use	Goonj – recycles urban waste into rural resources
3	Clean Energy Access	Provide renewable energy to off-grid communities	Selco India – solar power for rural homes, schools, and health centers
4	Sustainable Agriculture	Help farmers adopt eco-friendly farming methods	AgroStar, Digital Green – support organic farming, reduce chemical use
5	Eco-Friendly Livelihoods	Train people in green jobs like composting or recycling	Barefoot College – solar engineers from rural and tribal communities
6	Water Conservation	Promote rainwater harvesting, efficient irrigation	Aakar Innovations, Jal Bhagirathi Foundation – clean water solutions in dry regions

***Table prepared by author with help of data collected from different sources**

6.5 Detailed Examples

Selco India

Provides solar energy systems to rural areas

Environmental Impact: Cuts fossil fuel use, reduces carbon footprint

Social Impact: Enables education, healthcare, and business in remote areas

Goonj

Repurposes discarded urban goods for rural development

Environmental Impact: Reduces urban waste and landfill stress

Social Impact: Supports disaster relief, rural development, and menstrual hygiene

Daily Dump

Makes household composters and promotes waste segregation

Environmental Impact: Encourages composting, reduces landfill waste

Social Impact: Raises awareness, supports local artisans

Barefoot College

Trains rural women to become solar engineers

Environmental Impact: Brings solar energy to off-grid villages

Social Impact: Empowers women, creates green jobs

“The real solutions to our problems lie with the people. You only need to train and trust them”. - Bunker Roy

“You don’t need a PhD to bring solar power to a village- you need courage, community, and commitment”. (This sums up the objective of the initiative)

6.6 Impact on India’s Green Future

Supports national missions: Swachh Bharat, Startup India, Skill India, Atmanirbhar Bharat

Promotes decentralized solutions for clean energy and waste

Builds local ownership of environmental protection

Encourages youth innovation in climate tech

Social entrepreneurship is India’s grassroots engine for environmental sustainability. It bridges the gap between environmental needs and economic empowerment-offering people-powered, planet-friendly solutions.

6.7 Examples of Environmental Sustainability Initiatives

Barefoot College

This NGO trains rural women, especially grandmothers, to become solar engineers, helping to provide solar energy solutions in off-grid villages. This promotes environmental sustainability by reducing the dependence on fossil fuels and providing clean, renewable energy.

Besides, several organizations, including the Waste Warriors in India, focus on waste segregation, recycling, and creating awareness about sustainable waste management practices in the Indian Himalayan region. These initiatives help reduce pollution and contribute to more sustainable urban living.

Also, as India is endowed with a wealth of renewable energy sources, including solar power and wind energy, social enterprises are harnessing this potential to provide clean, affordable, and reliable energy solutions, particularly in rural and off-grid areas, where access to electricity is limited. Renewable Energy initiatives by corporates guarantee energy security and lessen reliance

on outside energy providers. Mera Gao Power is a good example of Renewable Energy Initiatives. This company installs and operates solar microgrids to provide electricity to rural households in Uttar Pradesh. By focusing on low-cost, scalable solutions, Mera Gao Power is bridging the energy access gap and promoting renewable energy.

Waste Management- Turning Waste into Resource

Waste management is a critical issue in India, where rapid urbanization has led to mountains of waste, much of which ends up in landfills or pollutes water bodies. Social enterprises in India are turning waste into a resource, focusing on recycling, waste segregation, composting, and creating circular economies.

Examples of Waste Management Initiatives

Goonj

As mentioned earlier, Goonj collects urban waste (especially cloth) and repurposes it to create useful products such as sanitary pads and blankets. By addressing waste and providing low-cost products, Goonj is helping marginalized communities while promoting environmental sustainability.

Sustainable Agriculture- Promoting Green Farming Practices

Agriculture is the strength of India's economy, with approximately 60% of India's population depends on agriculture for their livelihood, making it the foundation of the country's economy. Though, conventional farming methods have resulted in misuse of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, water scarcity, and soil degradation. Social entrepreneurs are promoting sustainable agriculture by encouraging practices like organic farming, water conservation, and agroforestry.

Examples of Sustainable Agriculture Initiatives

Agastya International Foundation

Agastya works to train rural farmers in innovative, low-cost methods that increase productivity while preserving the environment. Their initiatives emphasize scientific agricultural methods, organic cultivation, and water preservation to enhance sustainability and resilience in farming

Inclusive Growth- Ensuring Equitable Development

The term 'inclusive growth' refers to economic expansion and is broad-based in nature that benefits all segments of society- especially marginalised communities in rural areas. Social

enterprises are crucial in promoting inclusive growth by providing opportunities for economic participation, education, and access to essential services like healthcare and clean energy.

Examples of Inclusive Growth Initiatives

SELCO India

With its solar energy initiatives, SELCO tackles environmental issues at the same time also fostering inclusive development by providing rural communities- often excluded from traditional electricity benefits, with access to cost-effective energy

Barefoot College

Barefoot College empowers women in rural India by training them, especially grandmothers, to become solar engineers, thereby creating job opportunities and advancing gender equality. This initiative promotes inclusive growth by enhancing women's involvement in sustainable energy solutions.

Amul

Amul is a cooperative dairy organization that collaborates directly with small farmers, offering them equitable compensation and improved market opportunities. The cooperative framework strengthens rural farmers, guarantees income stability, and promotes community progress, aiding in inclusive growth in rural India

7 Integrating Social Entrepreneurship and Environmental Sustainability in India

“If you want to change the world, don’t wait for someone else. Just start with your spoon”. - Narayana Peesapaty

Narayana Peesapaty is the founder of Bakeys (Edible Cutlery). His edible spoons combat plastic waste-perfect example of environmental entrepreneurship.

Social entrepreneurship is crucial in tackling some of the significant challenges confronting India. By focusing on sustainable agriculture, waste management, renewable energy, and inclusive growth, they are tackling environmental issues while promoting long-term economic and social welfare. These initiatives show that economic growth and environmental sustainability can coexist, leading to a fairer and greener future for all.

Social entrepreneurship in India is reshaping the development landscape by fostering creative solutions to intricate problems, guaranteeing that progress is equitable and sustainable. With ongoing backing from government initiatives, investors, and communities, the capacity for social

entrepreneurship to enhance India's sustainable development goals is still significant. Through encouraging innovation, advocating for sustainable solutions, and embracing inclusivity, these social enterprises are creating a future where individuals and the environment prosper. Merging Social Entrepreneurship with Environmental Sustainability is an emerging trend in India, where business leaders address social challenges while maintaining ecological equilibrium. "This approach creates triple bottom line impact-people, planet, and profit. Social entrepreneurs in India are solving problems like poverty, unemployment, waste management, and climate change by creating sustainable, scalable, and inclusive business models" [10].

7.1 Benefits of Integration

Scalability: Sustainable models attract funding, partners, and policy support.

Inclusivity: Focus on grassroots ensures wide social reach.

Resilience: Green practices build climate resilience in vulnerable areas.

Policy Synergy: Aligns with Indian government initiatives like Startup India, Swachh Bharat, and Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability in India is not just idealistic, it's practical, profitable, and urgent. These hybrid models are leading the way to a greener and more equitable future.

7.2 Examples of Integrating Social Entrepreneurship and Environmental Sustainability in India

Selco India – Sustainable Energy for the Underserved

Provides: solar energy solutions to underserved communities, especially in rural India.

Environmental Impact: Reduces reliance on fossil fuels, promotes clean energy.

Social Impact: Enables education (solar lamps for students), healthcare (solar-powered clinics), and livelihoods (power for small businesses).

Location: Karnataka

Founder: Dr. Harish Hande (Magsaysay awardee) [11].

Goonj – Urban Waste to Rural Resource

Collects: urban waste (like used clothes, fabrics) and repurposes it for rural development (like sanitary pads, school kits).

Environmental Impact: Reduces landfill waste, promotes upcycling.

Social Impact: Addresses basic needs, generates employment, and empowers rural communities.

Location: Nationwide

Founder: Anshu Gupta [12]

Daily Dump – Composting Made Easy

Designs and sells: composting solutions for homes, schools, and communities.

Environmental Impact: Diverts biodegradable waste from landfills.

Social Impact: Creates awareness, encourages behavior change, supports local artisans.

Location: Bangalore

Launched by: Poonam Bir Kasturi in 2006

Target Users: Urban households [13].

Greenway – Clean Cooking Technology

Produces: fuel-efficient, low-smoke stoves for rural households.

Environmental Impact: Cuts down carbon emissions and firewood use.

Social Impact: Improves women's health, reduces cooking time, and saves money.

Users: Rural women across India

Co-created by: Ankit Mathur, Neha Juneja and Shueb Kazi in 2010. , and co-created to build Greenway

A Collaborated effort, Greenway designs, manufacturers and distributes clean cooking stoves that help save women time and effort while also mitigating climate change and air pollution [14].

7.3 Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges that hinder Impact

Despite the promising growth of social entrepreneurship, several challenges hinder its widespread impact:

Funding Constraints: Traditional investors often view social enterprises as high-risk due to lower returns.

Many social enterprises struggle to secure sustainable funding, as investors often prioritize profitability over social impact.

Policy and Regulatory Uncertainty: Entrepreneurs often navigate unclear frameworks, delaying project implementation.

While the Indian government has introduced policies to promote sustainable development, bureaucratic red tape and lack of clear regulations often pose challenges for social enterprises.

Impact Measurement: A lack of standardized metrics hinders performance benchmarking and resource mobilization.

Many social enterprises struggle to scale their operations and measure their impact effectively, limiting their potential to achieve long-term sustainability.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to develop supportive policies, enhance access to funding, and implement robust impact measurement frameworks.

Opportunities

Blended Finance Models: Combining public grants, private equity, and impact investment could ensure capital sustainability.

Digital Transformation: Leveraging AI, IoT, and blockchain for impact monitoring and operational efficiency.

Youth Entrepreneurship and Education: Promoting entrepreneurship education and rural innovation hubs to harness demographic dividends.

This research would not be complete without including the role of women in this new and dynamic endeavor

8 Role of women in Integrating Social Entrepreneurship and Environmental Sustainability in India

“When you invest in women entrepreneurs in rural India, you are investing in the planet”. - Chetna Sinha

Women are playing a transformative role in integrating Social Entrepreneurship with Environmental Sustainability in India, especially at the grassroots level. They have been

contributing by being powerful agents of change in India's green movement, through community leadership, innovation, and sustainable impact. Women are often the first responders to environmental challenges- whether it's water scarcity, fuel shortage, or waste- especially in rural and tribal communities. As social entrepreneurs, they turn these challenges into opportunities. Many women-led enterprises are designing affordable, sustainable, and locally rooted solutions in energy, agriculture, hygiene, and recycling [15].

8.1 Examples of Women Leading in this Space

Barefoot Solar Mamas

Organization: Barefoot College, Rajasthan

Illiterate and semi-literate women from rural areas are trained to become solar engineers

Impact: Brought solar electricity to 18,000+ households across 90+ countries

Reduces reliance on kerosene and fossil fuels

Empowers women with technical and entrepreneurial skills

Founder: Bunker Roy, but run by and for women [16].

Eco Femme - Sustainable Menstruation by Women

Location: Auroville, Tamil Nadu

Women-led social enterprise that makes washable cloth pads

Impact: Reduces plastic waste from sanitary products

Provides health education and menstrual dignity

Supports rural women's employment

As of 2023, *Eco Femme* has saved 100 million disposable pads from landfills and served over 120,000 girls and women across India [17].

Mann Deshi Foundation

Focus: Micro-enterprises, sustainable farming, and water conservation

Impact: Helped build 10+ check dams for water access

Trained 600,000+ rural women in entrepreneurship

Many adopted organic and sustainable farming practices

Founder: Chetna Gala Sinha – Location: Maharashtra [18].

Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Waste Management

Example: Pune's SWaCH cooperative

Women waste pickers organized into cooperatives to collect, segregate, and recycle waste

Impact: Handles over 600 tons of waste daily

Promotes segregation, recycling, and composting

Recognized as a model for decentralized, sustainable waste management [19]

Based on the Issues and themes covered with respect to social entrepreneurship in India's environmental sustainability, here are the limitation of the research, some practical recommendations and potential themes and areas for further research.

9 Limitation of the Research

The research provides a valuable descriptive overview, however, lacks in Quantative evaluation, and impact measurement.

10 Recommendations

Regulatory and Policy Interventions

Create a national regulatory framework for social firms which could clearly specifies their status, tax benefits, and compliance standards.

Use government grants, low-interest green bonds, and tax credits for impact investing to incentivize eco-social innovation and draw mixed finance.

Establish a specific fast-track category for environmental impact and simplify access to government programs like Startup India and Standup India for social companies that prioritize sustainability.

Capacity Building and Ecosystem Development

Introduce social entrepreneurship modules with an emphasis on environmental innovation and SDG-aligned business models into higher education and vocational training facilities.

Create a national mentorship network that links seasoned eco-entrepreneurs (such as SELCO and Goonj) with up-and-coming businesses.

Local Inclusion and Scaling Impact

Encourage community-owned business models in industries like waste management and renewable energy to guarantee grassroots participation and long-term viability.

Utilize participatory design thinking to co-create solutions with marginalized communities, enhancing social fairness and adoption.

Utilize digital technologies for real-time monitoring, impact measurement, and remote capacity building, especially in marginalized communities

11 Potential Research Topics for further Study

Future research should focus on measuring outcomes and exploring the dynamics between local initiatives and global sustainability goals.

Some other potential research topics are:

Empirical Research on Impact Measurement

Create India-specific social return on investment (SROI) frameworks to empirically evaluate the multi-dimensional impact of social businesses on environmental and social results.

Comparative studies between social businesses and conventional CSR programs to assess efficacy in addressing environmental issues.

Geographic and sectoral mapping

To identify innovation clusters and policy gaps, map environmental social businesses by state and industry (e.g., solar in Rajasthan, waste in Delhi, organic agriculture in Karnataka).

Case studies comparing successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurship models in rural and urban ecosystems to better understand the contextual enablers of sustainable business practices.

Research on foreign policy and soft power

Evaluation of India's utilization of social enterprise diplomacy as a tool of geopolitical soft power and development cooperation, such as through the International Solar Alliance or e-Vidya Bharati initiatives.

Policy assessment of bilateral programs that promote the export of Indian eco-business models to the Global South: Do they have a long-lasting effect on the receiving nations?

12 Conclusion

Social entrepreneurship in India is a vital force driving both environmental sustainability and social change. India's attitude to its environmental problems is changing as a result of the rise in social

entrepreneurs that deal with topics including waste management, sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and inclusive growth. While these ventures face challenges in terms of funding, scalability, and regulations, they continue to provide innovative solutions to some of the country's most pressing problems. By focusing on green solutions and fostering inclusive growth, social entrepreneurs in India are not only contributing to the country's sustainable development goals but also helping shape a more equitable and environmentally responsible future.

Social entrepreneurship has been playing an important role in promoting environmental sustainability by blending innovation with mission-driven business models. This has proven essential in advancing environmental sustainability. Through scalable, community-based solutions, these businesses tackle important ecological issues like waste management, access to renewable energy, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture. Particularly at the local level, social entrepreneurs in India are turning environmental issues into chances for financial emancipation. In addition to preserving natural resources, they are creating more resilient and inclusive communities by coordinating environmental objectives with social effect. The necessity of entrepreneurship that prioritizes people and the environment is shown by their efforts.

India's foreign policy, with its focus on sustainability and climate change, further aligns with the efforts of these enterprises, ensuring that social entrepreneurship plays a key role in achieving global environmental goals. Integrating social entrepreneurship with environmental sustainability has paved way for inclusive growth. And women in India are playing a transformative role in integrating social entrepreneurship with environmental sustainability, particularly at the grassroots level. Their leadership and innovative solutions are driving significant positive change across various sectors.

Rooted in the theories of sustainable development and social innovation, social entrepreneurship in India offers a convincing paradigm for addressing intricate socioeconomic and environmental challenges. Social businesses are becoming ambassadors of green diplomacy as India makes efforts to fulfill its climate objectives and SDG commitments. They are also becoming solvers of domestic issues. However, strong academic engagement, innovative financing models, and supportive policy ecosystems are necessary for them to reach their full potential.

A multi-stakeholder ecosystem that combines supportive policy, creative finance, academic understanding, and grassroots involvement is necessary to ensure that social entrepreneurship continues to promote sustainable development in India. Rigorous research and evidence-based policy adjustments will be essential in turning India's attempts to establish itself as a leader in green innovation on the world stage into systemic, scalable, and long-lasting change.

As the country moves forward, social entrepreneurship will remain a cornerstone in India's quest for a sustainable and inclusive future.

“Be the change you wish to see in the world”. - Mahatma Gandhi

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