

ECOFEMINISM: EMPHASIZING WOMEN'S ROLE IN PRESERVING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN RURAL AREA

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Abstract

The notion of ecofeminism stresses the link between environmental sustainability and equity for all genders. Ecofeminism theorizes that ecological degradation and societal oppression against particular genders are highly interconnected. This study utilized quantitative methods to understand the impact of ecofeminist values on sustainable development activities in educated youths and organizations led by women. With a structured questionnaire, we collected responses from a total of 200 educated youth and women-led organizations in various educational institutions and NGOs, based out of India. Findings suggest a strong relationship between ecofeminist awareness and pro-environmental behaviors, and also statistically significant support for policies that consider both gender and sustainability concerns. The study's findings support the inclusion of ecofeminist themes within education and policies related to sustainable development.

Keywords-Ecofeminism, Environmental sustainability, Gender equity, Ecological degradation, Societal oppression

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development aims to meet present needs without compromising future generations. Ecofeminism highlights that environmental degradation and women's marginalization stem from patriarchal and exploitative systems. This paper quantitatively explores the impact of ecofeminist awareness and practices in advancing sustainable development.

The unfathomable linking between women and men comes from the everyday interaction between them in developing areas of the world, women are considered the chief users of the resources like Land, forest, and water as they are the ones who are accountable for gathering food, fuel, and fodder. Even however in these Nations, women habitually can't own the land and farms outright, they are the ones who spend most of their time working on the farms to feed the family. Bearing this responsibility directs them to acquire more about soil, plants, and trees and not misuse them. Though, technical efforts increase male participation with land, several of them leave the farm to go to capitals to discover the jobs, resultant females become progressively accountable for an increasing percentage of field or farm responsibilities. These rural females incline to have a nearer connection with land and other natural resources, which promotes a new culture of respectful use and preservation of natural resources and the environment, ensuring that the following generations can meet their needs. Besides seeing how to attain proper agrarian production and human nourishment, women want to secure access to the land. Women's opinion and values for the environment are fairly dissimilar from men. They give priority to protection, conservation of and improving the capacity of nature, sustaining agricultural lands, and caring for flora and fauna and promoting environment's future. Repeated studies have revealed that women have a stake in environment, and this stake is replicated in the upgradation to which they care about natural resources. Ecofeminism denotes to females' and feminist outlooks on the environment – where the authority and mistreatment of women, of poorly resourced individuals and of nature is at the heart of the ecofeminist measures and drives.

Severity of Climate Change for Women

Women face the brunt of climate change's environmental effects, leaving them in more vulnerable situations. Incidents affecting the activities women primarily handle in developing countries include more storms, increased flooding, droughts, and fires. India's National Action Plan on Climate Change states, "The impacts of climate change could be particularly severe for women." Extreme weather conditions are becoming more common. We see increased water scarcity, rising temperatures leading to melting glaciers, reduced forest biomass, habitat loss, and greater health risks. Children, women, and older people in households are especially at risk. This calls for special attention to gender aspects. For example, in the Pacific Islands and coastal Asia, women play significant roles in subsistence fishing and gathering food. Climate change negatively impacts these habitats, such as mangroves and lagoons, directly affecting women's work and, in turn, their communities.

The response to the link between women and climate change has led to various policy changes. Policymakers have started to adopt gender-sensitive frameworks to tackle climate issues. Arora-Jonsson argues that highlighting women's vulnerability to climate change can place more burdens on them and distract from the root causes, like

power dynamics and institutional issues. The outcomes from UN efforts to support women in areas affected by climate change, such as agriculture, have not clearly shown positive results for women's communities.

Perception of Environment and Gender

Some have theorized that women would protect the Earth better than men if she will be in ruling authority or in power. Even though there is no evidence for this premise, present actions have shown that women are more sensitive to the earth and its problems. They have designed a specific value system regarding environmental substances. People's methods to environmental issues may depend on their association with nature. Equally women and nature have been measured as subordinates' entities by men throughout history, which bears a close affiliation between them.

Factually, the perception of the natural environment between men and women varies. As an example, in place of cutting the live trees rural Indian women collect the dead branches which are cut by storm for fuel wood to use. Since African, Asian, and Latin American women use the land to produce food for their family, they gain the knowledge and information of the land/soil conditions, water, or other environmental features. Any changes in the environment on these extents, like deforestation, have the intense effect on women of that extent, and cause them to hurt until they may handle with these changes.

An example of female eminence in the defense of natural forests comes from India in 1906. As forest clearing was expanding conflict between Government and loggers and peasant societies increased. The men were settled and diverted from their villages to a fictional payment compensation were sent to forests. The women left in the villages, though, objected by physically hugging themselves to the trees to stop their cutting, giving rise to Chipko movement, an environmentalist movement initiated by these Indian women (which also is where the term tree-huggers originated). This conflict started because men wanted to cut the trees to use them for industrial purposes while women wanted to keep them since it was their food resource and deforestation was an existence substance for local people.

The place of ecofeminism within the reimagining of sustainable development can be seen in the following:

- Challenging consumerism and patriarchal capitalism.
- Emphasizing care ethics in environmental policies
- Promoting Inclusive and Participatory Environmental Governance
- Advocating for gender-sensitive climate action.
- Highlighting the contribution that indigenous and rural women play in biodiversity conservation.

Ecofeminism through Sustainable Practices

Here are some eco-friendly practices that are connected with the ecofeminist principles and foster environmental and gender justice:

A. Organic Farming-Led Women

- Encourages agroecology and seed sovereignty.
- Opposes industrial agriculture and GMO-based farming.
- Promotes local, sustainable food systems, for example Navdanya Movement by Vandana Shiva.

B. Community-Based Resource Management

- Empower women in water conservation, forest protection, and energy use.
- Example: Chipko Movement – women-led forest conservation in India.

C. Renewable Energy Initiatives by Women

- Training women in solar energy, for example Barefoot College in Rajasthan.
- Women as agents of clean energy transitions.

D. Ecofeminist Education and Awareness

- Integrating environmental ethics and gender studies into programs.
- Promoting eco-clubs and green campuses led by women.

E. Sustainable Consumption and Ethical Living

Minimalism, waste reduction, and ethical fashion

- Supporting women-run, eco-friendly businesses and cooperatives.

F. Strengthening Land and Environmental Rights of Women

- Land ownership by rural women.
- Legal rights in decision-making on environmental policies.

G. Reviving Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge

- Emphasizing women's role in preserving sustainable practices such as
 - Herbal medicine
 - Rainwater harvesting
 - Crop rotation

- Confirming knowledge passed through maternal lineages.

4. Policy Recommendations to Promote Ecofeminism

- Gender-inclusive climate policies
- Participation in environmental leadership by women.
- Support female environmental activists and defenders.
- Funding of women-led projects in sustainability.

It would not be better to say that people seem happier now than they did when the country was founded.

Objectives:

1. To assess the level of awareness about ecofeminism.
2. To analyse the relationship between ecofeminist awareness and sustainable behavior.
3. To identify gender-specific contributions to sustainability efforts.

Hypotheses:

- H1: Higher ecofeminist awareness is related with increased sustainable practices.
- H2: Due to inherent responsible attitude Women are more likely to practice ecofeminist-driven sustainability initiatives than men.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

❖ **Research design-** Descriptive Research.

❖ **Universe and sample-** The people of Village Gurai, Tehsil-Ujhani, District-Budaun, U.P., India will be the universe and 100 people (50 females and 50 males, age limit of 25-40 years) will be purposively selected as sample. As per the availability data from 2009, 1,337 residents living in 242 households in the villages. There are 621 females individual & 716 male individual constitute 45% and 55% of the total population.

❖ **Source of data collection-** Primary, secondary and tertiary.

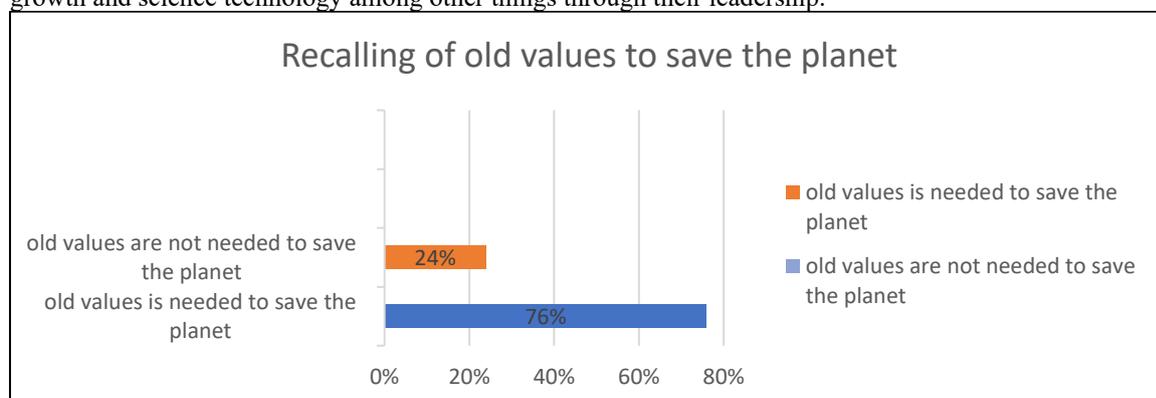
❖ **Tools of data collection-** Interview Schedule and Observation Guide

❖ **Techniques of data collection** – Observation and Interview.

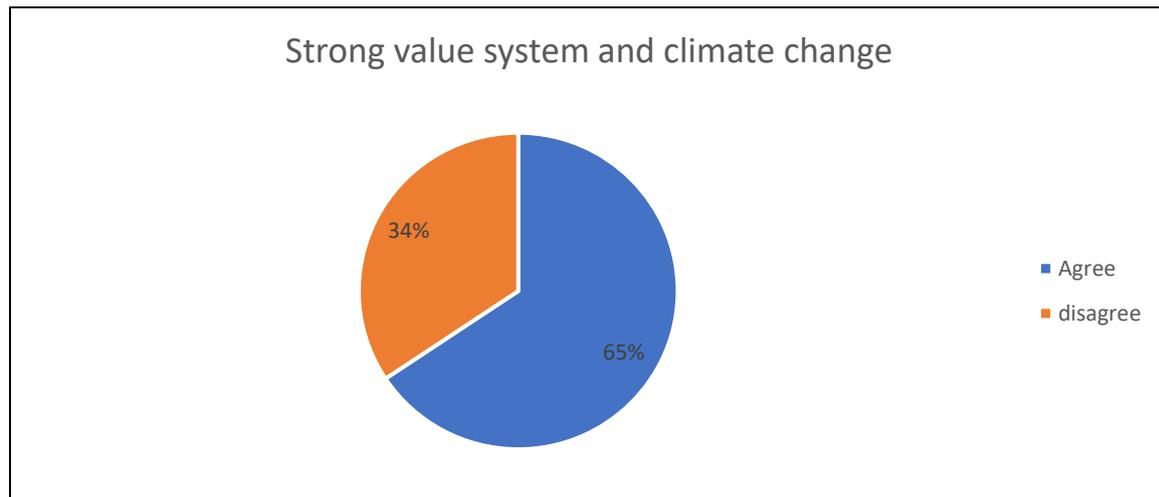
❖ **Classification and Analysis of Data** – Through editing, coding and tabulation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

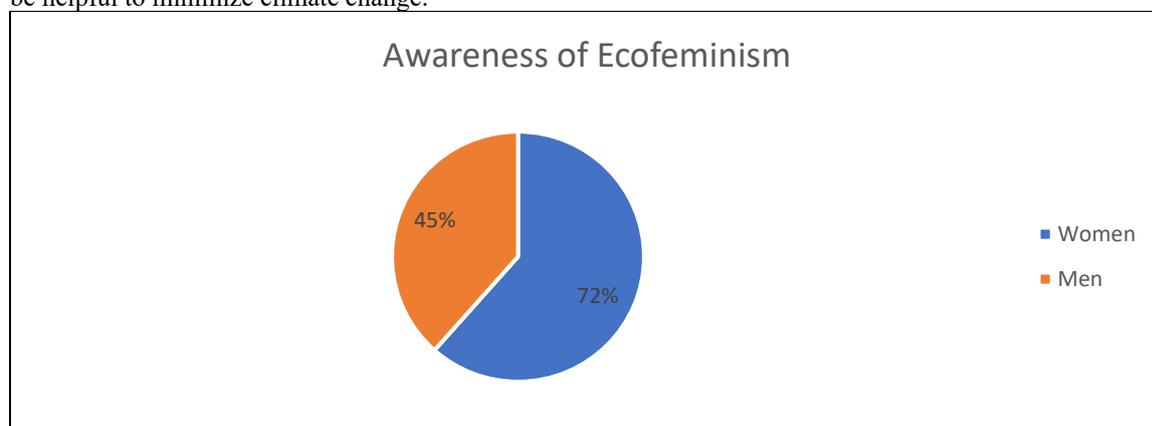
Women as Strong Contributors: The poor, the majority of whom are women living in developing countries, will be disproportionately affected. Yet most of the debate on environment so far has been gender- blind. Women, particularly poor women, face different vulnerabilities than men. Approximately 70% of the people who live on less than \$1 a day are women. Many live in conditions of social exclusion. They may face constraints on their mobility or behavior that, for example, hinders their ability to relocate without a male relative’s consent. Climate change due to environmental degradation can have disproportionate impacts on women’s well-being. They are powerful agents and can help or hinder strategies related to energy use, deforestation, population, economic growth and science technology among other things through their leadership.



The analysis regarding the recall of old values is needed where trees were worshiped shows that 76% respondents responded that recall of old values is needed to save the planet and 24 % respondents responded that old values are not needed to save the planet they were on the viewpoint that technologies, global efforts have crucial role than values to save planet.

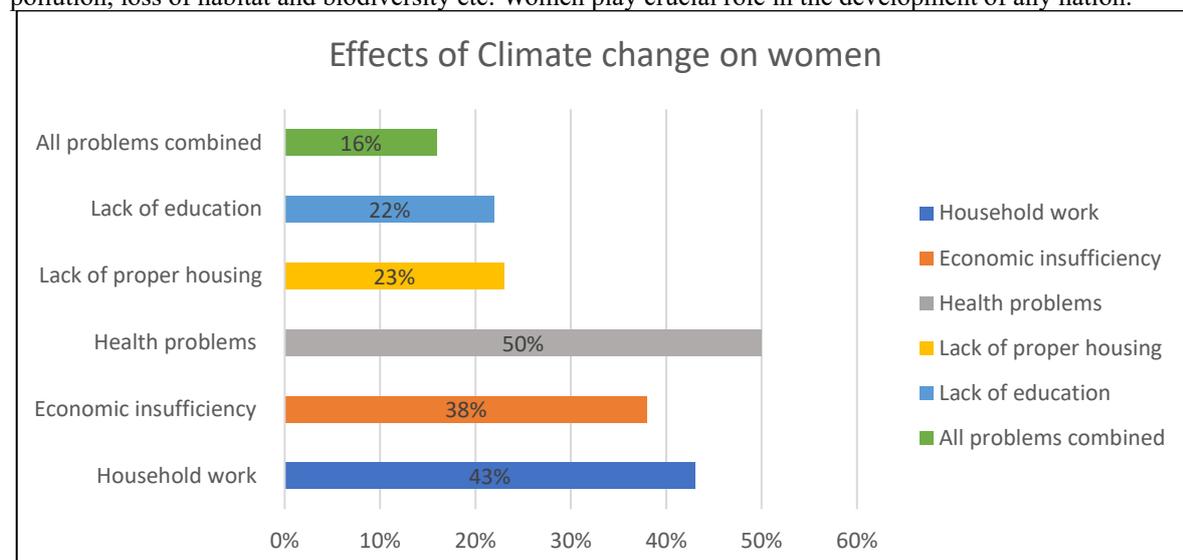


Strong value system will be helpful to minimize climate change, 65% respondents were agree with that a strong value system will be helpful to minimize climate change and 34% respondents disagreed by saying that it will not be helpful to minimize climate change.



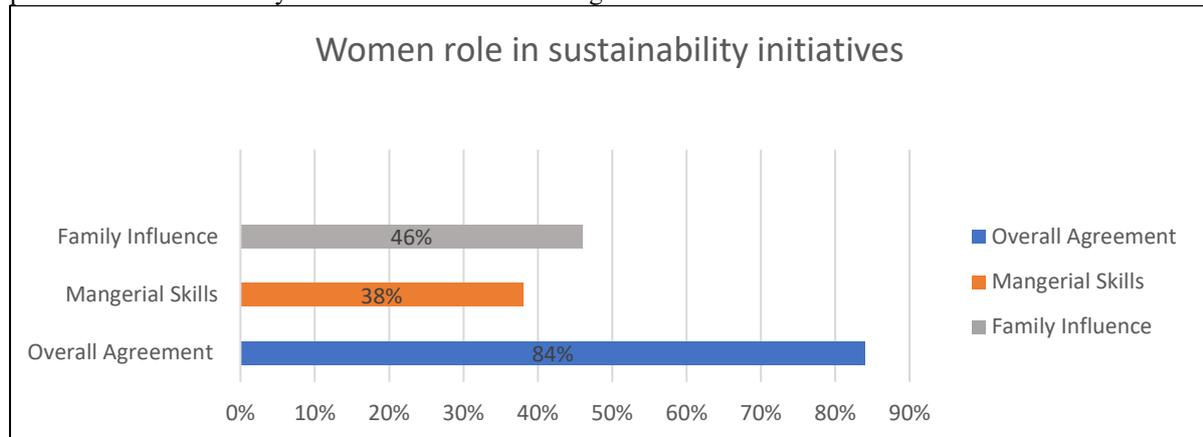
72 % of women respondents had moderate to high awareness of ecofeminist concepts. Only 45 % of male respondents showed awareness of ecofeminism. 73 % respondents opined that in our society women are always neglected as many a time their point of view remains unheard. Rest of the respondents i.e. 27 % were not agreed with this view.

Women are more prone to bad effects of environmental degradation related issues like climate change, increased pollution, loss of habitat and biodiversity etc. Women play crucial role in the development of any nation.

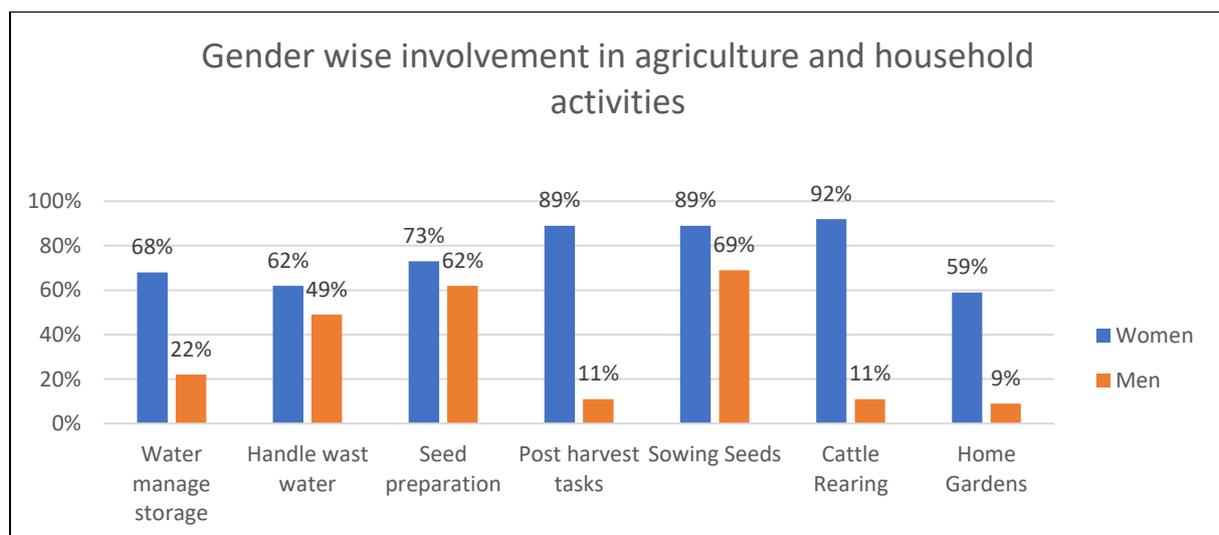


After questioning how the bad effects of climate change will affect the women. 43% were of the view that climate change will increase household work of women, 38% respondents opined that economic insufficiency will raise due to climate change, 50 % respondents stated that health problem will increase among women due to climate change, 23% respondents responded women will face lack of proper housing, 22% stated that lack of education

will raise among women due to climate change and 16% percent respondents responded that all of the above given problems will be faced by women due to climate change.

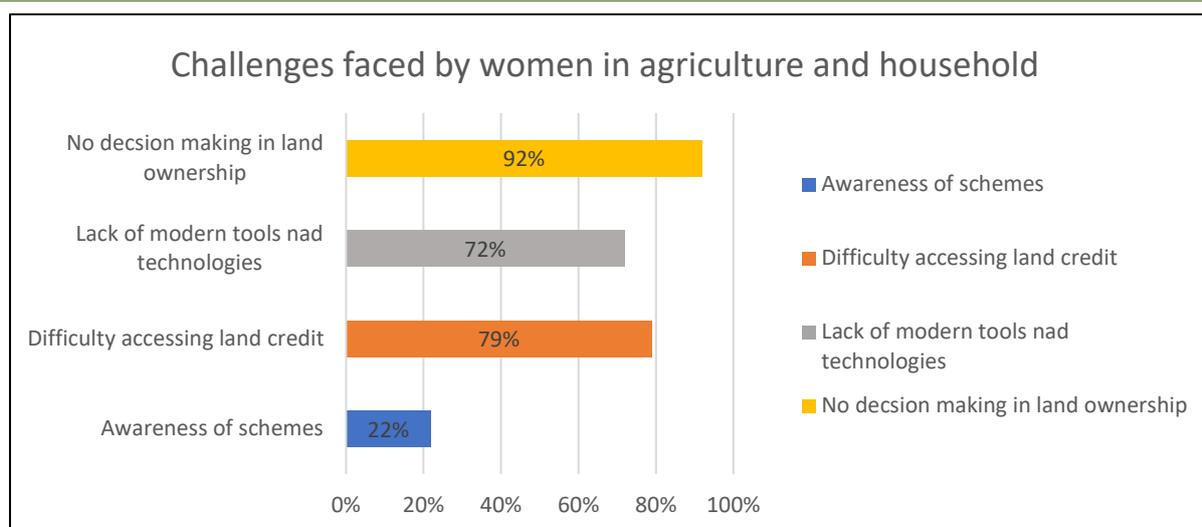


Women can play a vital role to aware the people regarding the sustainable life style practices. An overwhelming majority i.e., 84% respondents responded positively. In the support of their statement 38% were of view that they have good managerial skill to deal with any issue sensitively and 46% were of view that women hold whole family as they can narrate environment-friendly values among their children and family. Hence, the hypothesis that due to inherent responsible attitude women are more likely to practice ecofeminist-driven sustainability initiatives than men.



68% females of the village were taking care of water storage and then uses for their daily life routine usage & only 22% of males were involved. While it experiences a sub humid climate with low water availability around 88% its rainfalls occur in monsoon season (June to September). 62% of women were managing household waste water through daily activities in different work like washing, watering the plants, toilet use etc. While 49 % Males were also involved in these activities to manage the waste water in different household activity.73% of women were engaged in presentation of seeds for agriculture use like crop yielding while only 62% males were involved in this activity.

69% of female have significant role in sowing seeds for the healthy crop growth transplanting, the seeding and weeding of harvest while 89% males were also actively participating in the same practice.89% of female participate in post harvesting tasks of crops like threshing, winnowing, drying and storing harvested produce with 82% of male representation.92% of women were responsible for cattle rearing including feeding, watering, milking a main source of income also, only 11% males were involved in cattle rearing.59% of women frequently manage home gardens, growing vegetable for household consumption and food security with 9% of males' involvement.



22% females were aware with the government schemes like PMKSY Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Yantra Yojana (PMKYY) aim to support farmer.

79% of female often face challenging assessing land credit and other agriculture resources.

72% of women have lack access to modern tools and technologies related to agricultural and household practices while most of the tasks are physically demanding at home also.

92% females were not having the decision-making role in land ownership, land management regarding the selection of crops according to their ideas and experiences for better yielding and opportunities was lacking or being ignored due to the strict social norms & traditions.

CONCLUSION

Eco-feminism operates on the belief that there is commonness between the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of women by the same phallogocentric society. In the present scenario prevailing in the world, it has become imperative to save mother earth and Mother Nature. This quantitative study gives a spotlight on the important role that ecofeminist awareness plays in driving sustainable development behaviors, especially among women. Integration at the levels of education, policy, and grassroots movements is required for holistic sustainability. Ecofeminism connects environmental sustainability with gender equity, hence making it a strong lens for change. Further, promoting eco-feminism means honoring care, cooperation, and ecological harmony-not through theory but through grassroots practice, policy, and changes in the traditional mindset for underestimating women in decision-making. Their strong managerial skills can promote a sustainable environment.

The present study explored the relationship between ecofeminist awareness and pro-sustainable development practices of male and female respondents in Village Gurai, Uttar Pradesh. In line with this, the analysis revealed that women had a comparatively higher awareness about ecofeminist values and better pro-environmental attitudes and practices than men. It has established women as active agents in sustainable development due to their direct involvement with natural resources through farming, fetching water, seed preservation, waste management, cattle rearing, and environmental care at home. Additionally, the results demonstrate that women endure more significant challenges posed by climate change due to heavier household burdens, health risks, economic difficulties, and limited access to resources. However, despite these difficulties, they are significant change agents who apply themselves positively to a number of sustainable practices: water conservation, post-harvest operations, home gardening, and the diffusion of environmental values inside the family. The findings confirm the hypothesis that a high level of ecofeminist awareness would lead to more sustainable behaviors; this is made possible by the natural sense of responsibility and care ethics in women's environmental contributions.

However, there is one important gap: women play vital roles in the management of the environment but are denied access to land, credit, improved tools, and government support programs. Their exclusion serves to underscore a potential role for policy in responding to gender issues. The strong belief among the respondents in value-based environmental ethics, revival of traditional practices, and a need for a stronger socio-cultural value system further reinforces the integration of ecofeminist values into education, governance, and community development. In short, the study concludes that ecofeminism provides a sound framework for sustainable development in its linking of gender justice with ecological well-being. The empowerment of women, recognition of their knowledge systems, and full participation in environmental policymaking by women are essential for maintaining resilient, sustainable communities.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Gender-Inclusive Environmental Policies • Government programs should ensure women are represented in committees on climate action, agriculture, forest management, and water governance. • Policies must directly address the gendered impacts of climate change and offer targeted support for vulnerable women.

2. Improve Women's Access to Resources and Technologies • Give women farmers land rights, access to credit, irrigation support, and modern eco-friendly farming tools. • Set up training centers to build skills in organic farming, renewable energy, and climate-resilient livelihoods.
3. Promote Ecofeminist Education and Curriculum Integration • Include ecofeminism, gender equity, and environmental ethics in school and college programs. • Encourage eco-clubs, women-led environmental campaigns, and awareness programs for youth.
4. Support Women-Led Sustainable Enterprises • Offer financial incentives, marketing support, and skill training for women's cooperatives involved in organic farming, handicrafts, eco-friendly products, and green entrepreneurship. • Expand programs like Barefoot College (solar training for women) to other areas.
5. Strengthen Community-Based Environmental Management • Foster women's leadership in water conservation, forest protection groups, seed banks, and biodiversity committees. • Revive traditional and indigenous practices, such as rainwater harvesting and community forest management.
6. Improve Awareness of Government Schemes • Launch information campaigns to educate women about agricultural and rural development programs like PMKSY and PMKYY. • Simplify application processes and provide local support officers.
7. Address Socio-Cultural Barriers and Promote Gender Equality • Hold community discussions to challenge gender stereotypes and ensure women's perspectives are heard. • Share household and farming responsibilities to lessen women's workload.
8. Encourage Value-Based Environmental Stewardship • Promote cultural and traditional values that stress respect for nature, such as tree worship, seed preservation, and community resource sharing. • Use local festivals, gatherings, and schools to spread environmental values.
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