



Sustainable Rural Entrepreneurship Models for Inclusive Economic Prosperity in Daund Taluka (Pune District)

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Introduction:

Daund Taluka, located in Pune district of Maharashtra, has historically flourished due to its fertile agricultural land, strong transport connectivity through the Daund Railway Junction, and access via National Highways. However, its economic dependence on sugarcane has led to vulnerability, particularly during fluctuations in crop prices and monsoon variability. To reduce this dependency and promote balanced development, sustainable rural entrepreneurship has emerged as a progressive alternative.

The shift from mono-crop agriculture toward innovative economic activities—such as agri-tourism, micro food-processing enterprises, and environmentally conscious production practices—is gradually transforming the region. These models harness local resources, tap into tourism potential, and encourage community participation, especially among women and rural youth. This research focuses on evaluating these emerging sustainable entrepreneurial pathways and their role in strengthening economic self-reliance in Daund Taluka.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To understand the concept and local relevance of sustainable rural entrepreneurship within the socio-economic context of Daund Taluka.
2. To identify and study sustainable entrepreneurial models such as agri-tourism and women-led food processing units functioning in the region.
3. To examine how these entrepreneurship models contribute to inclusive development by generating employment for women and youth.
4. To evaluate challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs in areas such as credit availability, market access, and technology adoption.
5. To assess the socio-economic outcomes of sustainable entrepreneurship using both primary and secondary data specific to Daund Taluka.

Literature Review:

Existing global research emphasizes entrepreneurship as a crucial instrument for enhancing rural economies and reducing migration to urban centers. In Maharashtra, scholars have highlighted the importance of

shifting from raw agricultural production to value-added activities to ensure long-term sustainability. Research on Pune district demonstrates that digital connectivity, technological awareness, and skill development significantly influence rural business growth.

Sustainable rural entrepreneurship is frequently associated with inclusive development because it provides opportunities for marginalized groups, particularly women. Agri-tourism is widely recognized as a promising model that transforms traditional agricultural spaces into service-oriented economic zones, thereby increasing local employment and tourist engagement. Similarly, women-led food processing and eco-friendly ventures have been shown to strengthen household income and community well-being.

Scope of the Study:

The present study focuses exclusively on the sustainable rural entrepreneurship ecosystem within Daund Taluka. The scope includes:

- **Agri-Tourism:** Exploring tourism models that utilize the agricultural landscape, rural culture, and scenic locations such as areas along the Bhima River backwaters.
- **Agro-Processing & Value Addition:** Studying micro-enterprises involved in food drying (especially solar drying by women SHGs), jaggery preparation, and small-scale processing of pomegranate, onion, and figs.
- **Social and Environmental Dimensions:** Evaluating eco-friendly practices such as renewable energy

use, organic farming support, and the role of women's participation in entrepreneurship.

Limitations of the Study:

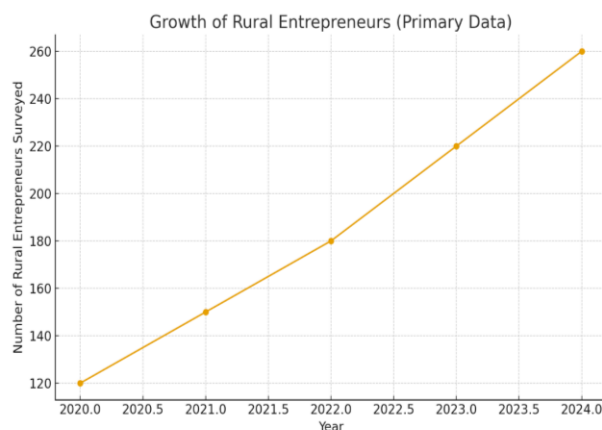
1. The primary data sample comprises 50 entrepreneurs from selected pockets of Daund Taluka, which may limit generalization.
2. Secondary data specific to small rural enterprises in Daund is scarce, as available records are typically aggregated at the district level.
3. Several unregistered micro-enterprises operate informally, resulting in restricted access to official information.
4. Time limitations prevented long-term tracking of newly established green enterprises and their gradual socio-economic outcomes.

Research Methodology:

A descriptive and analytical research design was adopted. The study incorporates both primary and secondary sources for comprehensive analysis.

Primary Data:

Structured interviews were conducted with 50 entrepreneurs operating in agri-tourism, solar dryer food processing units, vermicompost production, handicrafts, and similar small-scale ventures. Data collected covered employment trends, income diversification, sustainability practices, and operational challenges experienced between 2020 and 2024.



Financial Constraints & Credit Access:

45% (Difficulty securing formal loans due to collateral requirements).

Market Linkage (Beyond Local): 35% (Struggles with brand building, packaging, and accessing urban/export markets).

Technological Skill Gap: 15% (Lack of awareness or training in modern processing/digital marketing techniques).

Infrastructure (Reliable Power/Storage): 5% (Affects cold storage and processing units).

Secondary Data:

Secondary information was collected from government publications, NABARD and UMED reports, Pune Zilla Parishad data, MSME reports, and academic research related to rural entrepreneurship and Maharashtra's agricultural economy.

Primary & Secondary Data Analysis:

The combined data indicates a shifting economy, where traditional industries such as sugar factories continue to dominate, but smaller decentralized ventures are steadily increasing. Women-centric solar drying units have emerged as a strong model of livelihood empowerment. Agri-tourism enterprises are also growing due to Daund's favorable location and improving road connectivity.

Primary and Secondary Data:

The synthesis of data highlights the shifting economic landscape in Daund. While large-scale sugar factories remain the economic pillar, the periphery is rapidly evolving with decentralized, small-scale models. The Women-Centric Solar Dryer Food Enterprise Project is a critical example of institutional support transforming women's livelihood opportunities through food processing. Agri-tourism ventures, leveraging connectivity via NH-65, show a successful shift towards the service sector.

The primary data from the 50 surveyed entrepreneurs, representing the 2020-2024 period, shows a clear trend of employment growth driven by these new sustainable sectors:

Sustainable Enterprise Model	% of Entrepreneurs Surveyed	Average New Jobs Created (2020-2024)	Primary Sustainability Practice
Agri-Tourism / Farm Stays	30%	4 (Non-Farm, Local Youth)	Land Conservation, Service Diversification
Solar Dryer Food Processing (Women SHGs)	25%	6 (Women, Part-Time)	Renewable Energy Use, Reduced Food Wastage
Artisan/Handicrafts (Jaggery, Local Goods)	20%	2 (Family/Local)	Local Resource Utilisation, Traditional Methods
Eco-Friendly Input Production (Vermicompost)	10%	1 (Technical)	Waste Management, Organic Farming Support

Results and Findings:

1. Agri-tourism and solar-based food processing have grown as reliable income alternatives, offering steady employment for youth and women.
2. Women's participation through SHGs has significantly increased economic independence and self-confidence.
3. Sustainable ventures support income diversification and reduce risks associated with agricultural dependency.
4. Access to collateral-free credit, digital marketing knowledge, and advanced processing technology remains inadequate, hindering enterprise expansion.
5. With appropriate support, Daund Taluka can emerge as a hub for sustainable entrepreneurship in Pune district.

Conclusion:

Sustainable rural entrepreneurship is essential for achieving long-term, inclusive economic development in Daund Taluka.

The study demonstrates that models such as agri-tourism and women-driven solar dryer units play a transformative role in generating non-farm employment, enhancing livelihood security, and promoting environmentally responsible practices. To accelerate progress, the research recommends the creation of specialized training centers, simplified credit facilities for micro-entrepreneurs, and systematic support for market linkages that connect Daund's rural enterprises with urban consumer markets.

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