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A Survey and Research on the Entrepreneurial and Innovative Paths of Rural Women in Suqian Empowered by Digitalization

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Abstract: In the process of rural revitalization in Suqian City empowered by digitalization, rural women, as an important force, deserve attention for their entrepreneurship and innovation. Affected by factors such as traditional beliefs and unequal resource allocation, rural women in Suqian face many challenges in entrepreneurship and innovation, including a lack of digital skills, gender bias in financing, limited education and training opportunities, weak brand marketing abilities, and low awareness and benefit rates of policies. Through investigation and analysis, this study proposes specific paths based on the multifaceted support of digital technology, including improving digital infrastructure, innovating financial services, strengthening talent cultivation, expanding market channels, and optimizing policy guarantees, to provide targeted support for rural women, stimulate their entrepreneurship and innovation vitality, and promote rural economic development.

Keywords: Digitalization; Suqian City; Rural Women; Entrepreneurship; Innovation.

1. Introduction

With the development of time, the proportion of women entrepreneurs in China has been increasing year by year. The "Internet Plus" era has provided more entrepreneurial opportunities for women. In rural areas, the acceleration of agricultural industrialization has transformed the traditional rural production methods. Rural women have actively participated in the innovation and development of agricultural production and have gradually become a significant force with various entrepreneurial models, playing a positive and vital role in promoting the transformation of the rural economic structure. As an important agricultural region in Jiangsu Province, Suqian City has witnessed a thriving trend of rural women's entrepreneurship and innovation in recent years, supported by various policies. Suqian City has issued the "Notice on Optimizing and Adjusting Several Measures to Encourage Return Migration for Entrepreneurship and Employment in Suqian City", which explicitly provides entrepreneurial loan support of up to 500,000 yuan for a maximum period of three years for return migrants. In addition, Suqian City has implemented the "I Support Women and Children's Well-being - Suqian Women's Employment and Entrepreneurship Support Project", providing financial support for rural women's entrepreneurship through loan interest subsidies and entrepreneurship guidance funds [1]. In 2024, the project was further optimized, achieving full coverage in townships. The implementation of these policies has provided strong policy guarantees for rural women's entrepreneurship and innovation in Suqian City, helping them better leverage digital empowerment to achieve a win-win situation for personal value realization and rural economic development.

2. Exploration of the Key Driving Fctors for Rural Women's Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Suqian City

The revitalization and prosperity of Suqian's rural areas in the new era cannot be achieved without the active participation of rural women. Rural women in Suqian are diligent, resilient, and persevering, taking root and thriving in this land. With the vigorous development of the digital economy and a strong atmosphere of "mass entrepreneurship and innovation," rural women in Suqian are provided with excellent opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation. Leveraging their own advantages, they enthusiastically participate in these endeavors, playing a significant role in promoting rural economic development and fostering social harmony.

2.1. An Inevitable Choice for the Role Redefinition of Women Amidst the Wave of Rural Transformation in Suqian in the Digital Era

Against the backdrop of the digital economy sweeping through Suqian's rural areas, the upgrading of traditional agricultural industries and the emergence of new formats have created an urgent need for rural women to participate in entrepreneurship and innovation. As a major traditional agricultural city, Suqian is renowned as the "Hometown of Flowers and Trees," "Hometown of Aquatic Products," "Hometown of Famous Liquors," "Hometown of Grain and Oil," and "Jiangsu's Granary," boasting unique resource and industrial advantages. Currently, Suqian is at a critical juncture of transitioning from a major agricultural city to a strong agricultural city. In line with the overall requirement of building a new-era land of fish and rice, it is focusing on industrial prosperity, continuously optimizing the rural

entrepreneurship and innovation environment, fostering the development of new industries, new formats, and new models, and presenting a vibrant and positive trend in rural industrial development. The integration of rural women into the innovation trend can not only enhance their personal and family economic status but also inject new vitality into the diversified development of the rural economy. Wangguanji Town in Sucheng District has thoroughly studied and applied the experience of the "Thousand Village Demonstration Project," aiming to satisfy people's aspirations for a better life and focusing on the construction of livable, workable, and beautiful rural areas. It has transformed agricultural areas into scenic spots and production areas into tourist attractions, driving rural women's entrepreneurship and innovation in rural tourism services and specialized agricultural deep processing. [Suqian Rural Revitalization Work December Newsletter [EB/OL]. (2024-12-25)]

2.2. The Core Engine for Filling the Gaps in Suqian's Rural Economic Structure and Activating Family Economic Vitality

The current status of Suqian's rural industrial structure shows a high but suboptimal proportion of primary industry, with uneven distribution of land resources and precipitation leading to regional development imbalances. Agricultural production is still dominated by small-scale individual farmers, with traditional, decentralized, and homogeneous production methods, resulting in low production efficiency and benefits. Rural women, leveraging their unique family and community resource advantages, engage in entrepreneurship and innovation in specialized agricultural deep processing, rural tourism services, and rural e-commerce, playing a crucial role in optimizing the rural economic layout and enhancing the resilience of family economies. Sucheng District actively promotes the integration of cultural industries into rural revitalization, creating ticket-free, open-access attractions such as the Niujiao Village Happy Countryside Resort themed around parent-child leisure and the Zhuhai Leisure Sports Town themed around wellness and vacation. These initiatives have transformed agricultural and production areas into scenic spots, driving rural women's entrepreneurship and innovation in rural tourism services and specialized agricultural deep processing. These measures have not only effectively improved the overall quality of the rural economy but also enhanced the resilience of family economies, providing strong support for the sustainable development of the rural economy [2].

2.3. The Indispensable Role of Women in Promoting Social Harmony and Stability as Well as Cultural Inheritance and Innovation in Suqian's Rural Areas

Entrepreneurial and innovative activities by rural women have a positive impact on inheriting local culture, cohesion within rural communities, and fostering civilized rural customs. The Women's Federation of Suqian City actively carries out the "Thousand Villages Women Strive for Five Beautiful Courtyards" initiative, closely revolving around the requirements of the rural revitalization strategy and beautiful village construction. With the fundamental goal of improving rural living environments and enhancing people's quality of life, it focuses on promoting the construction of "Five Beautiful Courtyards," thereby enhancing the overall appearance of villages and the quality of residents' lives. In addition, Suqian City enriches rural cultural life by hosting events such as "Village BA," "Village Super League," and "Village Evening," strengthening the cohesion of rural communities. Rural women play a significant role in these activities, effectively inheriting local culture and fostering civilized rural customs. They have become an irreplaceable force in the social aspect of rural revitalization, demonstrating the social value of rural women.

3. Analysis of the Prominent Characteristics of Rural Women's Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Suqian City

3.1. Industrial Choice Tendency: Close Integration of Local Resource Utilization and Family Experience in Heritance

Rural women in Suqian City fully leverage the abundant local specialties such as agricultural products and handicrafts in their entrepreneurship and innovation. Relying on skills and production experiences passed down through generations within their families, they engage in innovation and entrepreneurship in areas such as innovative agricultural planting and breeding, revitalization of traditional handicrafts, and development of local cuisine. Wangguanji Town in Sucheng District has thoroughly studied and applied the experience of the "Thousand Village Demonstration Project," transforming agricultural areas into scenic spots and production areas into tourist attractions, thereby driving rural women's entrepreneurship and innovation in rural tourism services and specialty agricultural deep processing. Furthermore, the Women's Federation of Suqian City has organized salons and various training programs in communities to enhance the entrepreneurial capabilities of mothers, nurturing a large number of female entrepreneurs and further promoting entrepreneurship and innovation in these fields [3].

3.2. Entrepreneurial Organization Form: Organic Fusion of Family-Based and Neighborly Mutual Assistance and Collaboration

In the entrepreneurship of rural women in Suqian City, the family-based entrepreneurial model predominates. Family members work together with clear divisions of labor, forming an effective entrepreneurial mechanism. Liu Mei, the principal of Meijiayue Vocational Training School in Suyu District, successfully applied for a fund with the assistance of the community's Women's Federation, effectively alleviating the economic pressure caused by the expansion of her store. Since its establishment, the training school has helped nearly 7,000 women secure employment. Furthermore, the mutual assistance and collaboration network among neighbors has played a crucial role in providing funds, technology, labor, and other resources. The Women's Federation of Suqian City has implemented a three-year cultivation plan called the "Hundreds of Thousands of Wise and Innovative Women Entrepreneurs" program, which has increased the guiding fund for rural women's entrepreneurship and employment to 2 million yuan. They have also compiled a book titled "They, Running on the Fields of Hope – A Compilation of Typical

Cases of Supporting Rural Women's Entrepreneurship and Employment." To date, a total of 8.5 million yuan in guiding funds has been disbursed. The entrepreneurial organization form based on families and neighborly mutual assistance not only reduces entrepreneurial risks but also improves resource utilization efficiency, providing strong support for rural women's innovation and entrepreneurship.

4. Insights into the Current Situation and Analysis of challenges Faced by Rural Women's Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Suqian City

To delve deeply into the actual circumstances of rural women's innovation and entrepreneurship in Suqian City, this study targeted women aged 18-60 in rural areas of Suqian who have entrepreneurial aspirations or are already engaged in entrepreneurship. Using a questionnaire survey method, a combination of online questionnaire platforms and offline field visits was employed to extensively collect firsthand data. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, covering multiple townships in Suqian City. The questionnaire design underwent multiple rounds of expert validation and pilot testing to ensure the scientificity and validity of the questions, ultimately yielding 383 completed responses. With the aid of scientific methods such as big data analysis and statistics, the survey results were systematically analyzed. From the dimensions of digital skills, access to funding, overall quality, market competition, and policy fit, the challenges and difficulties they face were precisely identified, providing a solid basis for formulating targeted support strategies subsequently and helping rural women achieve greater development in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship [4].

4.1. Digital Skills Dap: Technology Application Dilemmas Constrained by Urban-Rural Disparities and Age Structure

When asked, "Do you often use digital devices for learning or work?", only 10% of rural women indicated that they could proficiently use digital devices for learning or work, while a staggering 60% rarely or almost never used them. This clearly reflects a significant deficiency in digital skills among rural women in Suqian, with unequal access to digital educational resources between urban and rural areas limiting rural women's opportunities to engage with and learn digital technologies. Additionally, increasing age poses more difficulties for some women in learning new skills, making it hard for them to keep pace with the rapidly evolving digital era. Regarding the question, "What is the biggest challenge you face in applying internet technology?", 30% of respondents cited the inability to keep up with learning due to age as the main difficulty, indicating an age-related disadvantage for rural women in adapting to new technologies. Another 25% mentioned a lack of internet knowledge and not knowing where to start learning, highlighting deficiencies in internet knowledge dissemination and educational guidance in rural areas. Furthermore, 20% mentioned a lack of practical opportunities and guidance, further underscoring the shortcomings in learning resources and environments for internet technologies in rural regions.

4.2. Funding Acquisition Bottleneck: Financing Challenges Intertwined with Financial System Shortcomings and Gender Bias

When asked, "Where does the funding for your entrepreneurial venture or expected startup capital mainly come from?", rural women indicated that their entrepreneurial funding primarily relies on personal savings and loans from friends and family, with these two sources accounting for 70% combined. Bank loans and government support funds only account for 15%, which fully reflects the numerous restrictions in financial institutions' lending policies specifically for rural women's entrepreneurship, making it difficult for them to obtain sufficient financial support from formal financial channels. At the same time, social investment pays relatively little attention to female entrepreneurial projects, exhibiting gender preferences, which also greatly limits the sources of funding for rural women's entrepreneurial ventures. When asked, "Do you think there is gender bias in the approval of loans for female entrepreneurship by financial institutions?", over 30% of women believe that there is obvious bias in financial institutions' approval of loans for female entrepreneurship, making it more difficult for women to obtain loans; another 40% indicated that there is some bias, albeit to a relatively lesser extent [5]. This indicates that gender inequality is a prominent issue in the field of financial lending, where female entrepreneurs may face more scrutiny and restrictions when applying for loans. This bias severely impacts the initiation and sustained development of rural women's entrepreneurial projects.

4.3. Limitations in Overall Competence: Low Educational Attainment and Lack of Professional Training as Ability Shortcomings among Women

Regarding the question "What is your highest level of education?", a staggering 60% of rural women have an educational level of junior high school or below, while only 10% have a college degree or above. This low level of education results in innate deficiencies for rural women in terms of innovative and entrepreneurial thinking, market analysis, and business management. Influenced by traditional beliefs and uneven distribution of educational resources, women have relatively fewer opportunities to access higher education, which has become a key factor constraining the enhancement of their innovative and entrepreneurial abilities. When asked, "Are you satisfied with the professional skills training you have participated in so far?", nearly half of the women expressed moderate or dissatisfaction with the training, with 5% even considering it a complete waste of time. This indicates that the current professional skills training for rural women may be disconnected from actual needs in terms of curriculum design, and the training methods are not flexible or effective enough. The depth of training also fails to meet their skill enhancement requirements during the entrepreneurial process. Additionally, there may be insufficient attention paid to female entrepreneurs in the allocation of training resources, failing to fully consider their specific needs and practical difficulties.

4.4. Market Competition Challenges: Lagging Brand Building and Narrow Marketing Channels as Obstacles to Women's Development

Regarding the question "Do you pay attention to brand building during your entrepreneurial process?", only 5% of rural women place great emphasis on brand building, investing a lot of energy and funds, while over half do not attach sufficient importance to it, and 30% pay little attention to brand building, focusing only on product sales. This reflects serious weaknesses among rural women in brand shaping, lacking brand awareness and the ability to build brands. In an increasingly competitive market environment, lagging brand building will make it difficult for their entrepreneurial projects to stand out in the market. This may also be related to the fact that women face more pressure and challenges in market competition, leaving them little time to focus on brand building. When asked "What is the biggest difficulty you encounter when expanding marketing channels?", 30% mentioned a lack of experience and skills in online promotion, reflecting the insufficient digital marketing capabilities of rural women, which is interrelated to the previously mentioned digital skills gap. Twenty-five percent believe that offline market expansion costs are high, posing a significant challenge for rural women entrepreneurs who are relatively short on funds. Logistics and distribution issues and intense competition each accounted for 20%, and these problems seriously hinder the market expansion of rural women's entrepreneurial projects. When dealing with these difficulties, female entrepreneurs may face greater pressure due to resource and capability constraints [6].

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4.6. Policy Adaptation Dilemma: Implementation Obstacles and Cognitive Biases in The Rooting of Policies Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship

Regarding the question "Are you aware of the government policies supporting women's entrepreneurship?" (Figure 9), over 70% of rural women are either not very aware or completely unaware of these policies, reflecting significant issues in the government's policy promotion and interpretation. The relevant policies have not been effectively communicated to rural women entrepreneurs. In the process of policy promotion, there may have been insufficient consideration of the characteristics of rural areas and the actual situation of female entrepreneurs, resulting in extremely low policy awareness. When asked "Do you think government support policies have been helpful to your entrepreneurship?" (Figure 10), nearly half of the women believe that government support policies have been of moderate or little help to their entrepreneurship, and 5% even think they have been completely unhelpful. This indicates a mismatch between government support policies and the actual needs of rural women's entrepreneurship. The formulation of policies may not have fully considered the specificities and specific difficulties of rural women's entrepreneurship. At the same time, there may also be issues in the policy application process, implementation supervision, and other aspects, making it difficult for policies to truly take root and provide effective support and guarantees for rural women's entrepreneurship.

5. Exploring Breakthrouth Paths for Digital Empowerment of Rural Women’s Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Suqian City

Through research and analysis of the issues faced by rural women in the process of innovation and entrepreneurship in Suqian City, a detailed path framework can be constructed from both macro and micro perspectives, effectively addressing the practical problems in promoting rural women's entrepreneurship, further facilitating the development and growth of women's entrepreneurship in vast rural areas, and making them a backbone force for rural revitalization in the new era.

5.1. Strengthening Digital Infrastructure: Building A Digital Network and Intelligent Facility Architecture Serving Rural Women's Entrepreneurship

In rural Suqian, due to traditional beliefs and family divisions of labor, women often have limited exposure to and use of digital technology, and their demand for and ability to utilize digital infrastructure is relatively weak. Therefore, improving digital infrastructure is crucial for rural women's innovation and entrepreneurship. Firstly, the upgrade of rural broadband networks should be accelerated to ensure that rural women can smoothly engage in online learning, e-commerce operations, and other activities. In some remote villages, female entrepreneurs cannot participate in online training or communicate with clients in a timely manner due to poor network connectivity, limiting the development of their

entrepreneurial projects. It is necessary to expand 5G network coverage to support rural women in using 5G technology for live streaming e-commerce, remote agricultural technical guidance, and other purposes. Secondly, rural digital service centers should be established to provide women with one-stop digital services, such as training on the use of digital devices and guidance on joining e-commerce platforms. Meanwhile, the construction of intelligent warehousing and logistics facilities can solve the logistics and distribution challenges faced by rural women. For example, rural women engaged in agricultural product sales face difficulties in preservation and delivery due to the lack of intelligent warehousing facilities, which limits their sales scope and revenue. By building a comprehensive digital network and intelligent facility support structure, a favorable digital hardware environment can be created for rural women's innovation and entrepreneurship, narrowing the urban-rural digital divide and enhancing rural women's digital competitiveness [7].

5.2. Financial Innovation Empowerment: Tailoring Exclusive Financial Products and Service Ecosystems for Rural Women

Financial institutions in rural Suqian exhibit some gender bias in supporting women's entrepreneurship, with female entrepreneurs typically facing stricter loan approval processes and higher financing thresholds. On the one hand, the "Subsidized Interest Loans for Women's Entrepreneurship in Rural Revitalization" project in Suqian City has provided financial support to many women entrepreneurs, but some women still fail to benefit due to lack of awareness of the policy or cumbersome procedures. Therefore, it is necessary to design financial products and service solutions that align with the characteristics of rural women's entrepreneurship in Suqian, establish a green channel for small credit loans, simplify loan procedures, lower loan thresholds, and provide convenient financing channels for rural women. A risk-sharing fund for entrepreneurial projects should also be established to reduce financial institutions' risk concerns and provide risk protection for rural women's entrepreneurship. On the other hand, a linkage mechanism for financial knowledge popularization and entrepreneurship mentoring should be established, providing rural women with financial knowledge training and entrepreneurship mentoring through a combination of online and offline methods to improve their financial literacy and entrepreneurial capabilities. Drawing on successful financial innovation cases at home and abroad, such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which provides micro-loans specifically to impoverished women to help them start businesses and lift themselves out of poverty, can provide experience and reference for financial innovation in Suqian City.

5.3. Talent Cultivation Upgrade: Building A Platform for Women's Digital Skills Training and Comprehensive Quality Improvement

The overall education level of rural women in Suqian City is relatively low, and professional training is scarce, significantly constraining their innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities. To enhance rural women's digital skills and overall quality, it is necessary to integrate online educational resources and provide them with a diverse range of digital skills training courses, such as e-commerce operations, social media marketing, data analysis, etc., allowing them to learn flexibly according to their time and needs. Experts can also be invited to give lectures in rural areas, imparting entrepreneurial experience and professional knowledge to rural women face-to-face and addressing the practical problems they encounter in the entrepreneurial process. Secondly, field observation and learning activities can be organized for rural women to visit successful entrepreneurial enterprises and projects, broaden their horizons, and stimulate entrepreneurial inspiration. For example, the Luji Subdistrict in Suyu District, Suqian City, organized village officials to visit advanced rural e-commerce development areas such as Cao County in Shandong and Shuyang, and upon their return, actively promoted local e-commerce development. Systematic training covering courses on e-commerce operations, agricultural technology applications, marketing, and enterprise management can be conducted to comprehensively improve rural women's overall quality and entrepreneurial capabilities. Thirdly, a long-term follow-up service mechanism should be established to promptly understand the progress and needs of rural women's entrepreneurship and provide them with continuous support and assistance.

5.4. Market Expansion Promotion: Cultivating Characteristic Brands for Rural Women and Building an Omni-Channel Marketing System

Rural women in Suqian face numerous difficulties in brand building and marketing channel expansion, with weak brand awareness and insufficient marketing capabilities being significant constraints on their entrepreneurial development. Firstly, local cultural connotations should be tapped into, integrating local history, culture, folk customs, etc., into brands to create unique and charming entrepreneurial brands for rural women. Design distinctive brand logos and enhance brand recognition and appeal through professional design and packaging. Secondly, tell brand stories well, and in the digital era, use social media, e-commerce live streaming, and other channels to convey brand values and cultural connotations to consumers, enhancing brand influence. At the same time, diverse online and offline integrated marketing channels should be expanded, utilizing social media platforms such as WeChat Official Accounts and Douyin for brand promotion and product sales. Furthermore, e-commerce live streaming activities can be conducted to allow rural women to interact directly with consumers, increasing product sales and visibility. Women should also be encouraged to participate in agricultural product exhibitions, rural tourism route promotions, and other activities to broaden offline sales channels and enhance brand market share.

5.5. Policy Optimization and Guarantee: Improving Precision Policy Drip Irrigation and Establishing a Long-Term Mechanism for Collaborative Services to Support Women's Entrepreneurship

Rural women in Suqian have relatively low awareness and understanding of the government's innovation and entrepreneurship support policies, and there are certain issues in policy promotion and interpretation, application process simplification, and implementation supervision. Therefore, the Suqian municipal government should enhance the

precision and effectiveness of policy promotion and dissemination, using a combination of online and offline methods, such as government websites, WeChat Official Accounts, and rural broadcasting, to precisely deliver policy information to rural women, ensuring they can promptly understand and grasp the policy content. In addition, the application and approval process should be simplified, reducing unnecessary procedures and steps, to facilitate rural women's application for policy support and avoid some women entrepreneurs giving up on applying for policy support due to cumbersome application processes. Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen collaborative services and supervision and evaluation among departments, establish a multi-department collaborative working mechanism, enhance services and support for rural women's entrepreneurship, avoid gender discrimination, advocate for gender equality, eliminate the "male superiority" mindset, and strengthen supervision and evaluation of policy implementation to ensure policies are effectively implemented. Finally, digital technology should be used to promptly adjust policy content and implementation methods based on the dynamic needs of rural women's entrepreneurship, improving the pertinence and effectiveness of policies and providing strong policy support for rural women's innovation and entrepreneurship.

6. Conclusion

Digital empowerment of rural women's innovation and entrepreneurship in Suqian City is a key measure for promoting rural revitalization. Currently, rural women face numerous challenges on their entrepreneurial journey due to gender constraints and other factors, including difficulties in implementing digital infrastructure, insufficient financial service innovation, inadequate talent cultivation systems, high market competition pressure, and inadequate policy implementation. It is evident that exploring innovation and entrepreneurship paths suitable for rural women is of great significance. Targeted support can enhance rural women's economic status and promote diversified development of the rural economy. In the future, it will be necessary to continuously pay attention to gender differences, optimize strategies, create a favorable environment for rural women's innovation and entrepreneurship, and contribute to comprehensive rural revitalization.

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