

Women-led green entrepreneurial ventures in Ethiopia

Exploring challenges and opportunities from an ecofeminist viewpoint

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Abstract:

In the face of escalating climate change impacts, developing countries urgently seek innovative solutions that can address environmental and developmental challenges. Green entrepreneurship has emerged, in Ethiopia as well as in other countries, as a focal point of interest for their multidisciplinary contributions, allowing countries to grow economically while shaping novel solutions for the climate crisis. Despite growing recognition of the importance of women-led entrepreneurial ventures in promoting sustainability and social good practices, research has only recently begun to explore this and raise important questions about it. While women in Ethiopia have a fundamental role in advancing economic development and environmental protection, there is a notable gap in literature addressing women's experiences leading green entrepreneurial ventures, the challenges they face, and what opportunities are there for them. This limits greatly those pursuits seeking to support women in their work, obstructing the full potential of their contribution. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to conduct a preliminary exploration of the difficulties and positive impacts associated with women-led green entrepreneurship in Ethiopia. By offering initial insights, this research aims to inform both future studies and practical approaches so that these green ventures can benefit not only these women but also their communities and the environment. Employing a quantitative inquiry undertaken from an ecofeminist framework, the knowledge and perspectives of female entrepreneurs in Ethiopia are explored. The results show that Ethiopian women face significant barriers to green entrepreneurship due to discrimination and a challenging entrepreneurial environment. Gender inequalities prevent many from participating or add burdens to those who do. This limits the potential benefits of green entrepreneurship for Ethiopian society and the environment. Changing societal attitudes and recognising female entrepreneurship as distinct from male-dominated norms is crucial. Green entrepreneurship can lead to financial and personal emancipation, job creation, and environmental benefits. However, further research is needed focused on understanding motivations, and goals, and improving support mechanisms, especially for marginalised groups.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, sustainability, ecofeminism, development, gender, Ethiopia.

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1. Introduction

Climate change is disproportionately affecting sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), intensifying existing challenges and creating new ones. Rising temperatures, changes in precipitation, or drier conditions are among the patterns that are threatening livelihoods (Serdeczny et al. 2017:1586–89; Tesfay 2024:2). The region relies mainly on sectors that are and will be most affected by this phenomenon. One of the most important ones is agriculture, which supports more than half of the population, either through employment or by providing food (Connolly-Boutin and Smit 2016:386; Serdeczny et al. 2017).

SSA is currently facing different challenges due to its sociopolitical and economic situation, and there is a need to implement different alternatives that would help reduce poverty and unemployment and improve livelihoods. The role of economic development in worsening climate change and depleting natural resources highlights the importance of implementing a type of progress that does not come at the expense of the environment (Iqbal et al. 2020:36251; Lotfi, Yousefi, and Jafari 2018:1). Entrepreneurial businesses, and particularly the green ones, are emerging as one of the promising answers to tackle this situation (Endris and Kassegn 2022:2). Fostering green entrepreneurship¹ not only helps create and implement approaches that would increase the resilience of populations to climate change, but they would also be an important driver of innovation, job creation, and economic growth (Iqbal et al. 2020:36242–43).

While these efforts are vital across the continent, understanding their impact requires a closer look at the level of individual countries. Ethiopia, as the second most populated country in SSA, and the fastest-growing economy in Africa (Shkabatur, Bar-El, and Schwartz 2022:1), presents a unique context where innovation will play a very important role in its development. Unlike Nigeria, the most populous country in the region, Ethiopia remains predominantly rural and highly dependent on agriculture (The World Bank Group 2024). The country also faces societal challenges like a very high unemployment rate, particularly among young women living in rural areas and other vulnerable groups (Mohammed Shuker and Hashim Sadik 2024:7; (Shkabatur, Bar-El, and Schwartz 2022:1). As happens in other SSA countries, rainfall patterns, increasing temperatures, and vulnerability to desertification due to its arid climate will have

¹ There are several definitions of green entrepreneurship. For this thesis, the term refers to ventures whose aim is to develop a green product or solution, directly positively impacting the environment. This definition is in line with the one used by Reach for Change, an NGO that collaborated in the development of this thesis, as it will be later explained.

important consequences for the agrarian sector. This, therefore, threatens the livelihoods and food availability for the majority of the country (Alemu and Mengistu 2019; Gezie 2019:2). This is a critical situation that calls for solutions able to address different challenges while also increasing resilience to changing climate conditions. In this context, green entrepreneurship has risen as one such solution with good potential to transform the economy while fostering environmental sustainability in Ethiopia (Endris and Kassegn 2022:13).

Even if green entrepreneurship is one of the promising tools to advance development in the country, small business² founders face several important difficulties in establishing their businesses and creating an impact (Shkabatur, Bar-El, and Schwartz 2022:31). Factors such as insufficient coordination within the government, limited interaction among businesses, or intense government regulations pose significant challenges in the advancement of this activity (Järnberg et al. 2018; Shkabatur, Bar-El, and Schwartz 2022). Owners of small businesses struggle with obtaining capital, administrative burdens, or insufficient training and education in the field (Ahmed and Kar 2019:3). Furthermore, the government does not provide a supportive environment for entrepreneurship in general, exacerbating the problems that green entrepreneurs have.

Notwithstanding, development efforts will not be sufficient until all people participate and benefit from them. Women in Ethiopia, as happens in the rest of the developing world, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the environmental crisis. They encounter greater challenges entering the workforce and, especially in rural areas, climate change significantly threatens their livelihoods (Mersha and Sriram 2019:158). Additionally, as the primary caregivers, women's social and economic positions and opportunities are further impacted by these responsibilities (Mukurazhizha and Matanga 2023:2). This situation deepens existing obstacles that entrepreneurs face, affecting women's possibilities to improve their lives and the lives of their communities (Hailemariam et al. 2019; Korzenevica et al. 2022; Mersha and Sriram 2019; Wube and Atwal 2023). It also hinders the possibility of incorporating important perspectives into creating solutions to help adapt and prevent climate change effects.

However, even if research highlights the difficulties that women face in entering entrepreneurship in Ethiopia, the topic of green ventures is rather unknown.

² The terms entrepreneurial venture(s), small business(es) and startup(s) are used as synonyms throughout the text, even if their definitions may differ slightly.

Literature covers the difficulties green entrepreneurs face in the country. It also shows how establishing themselves in entrepreneurship in general entails more difficulties for women, due to sociocultural factors that add up to the already challenging environment (Hailemariam et al. 2019; Korzenevica et al. 2022; Wube and Atwal 2023). Nevertheless, the specific situation of women in green small businesses is rather unexplored. This situation may affect the implementation of targeted and effective support and strategies to empower female green entrepreneurs in Ethiopia, enabling them to overcome these challenges and harness the opportunities that green entrepreneurship presents.

In the Ethiopian context, research shows that women who start entrepreneurial businesses can increase their independence and gain social recognition, ultimately challenging gender norms (Cummings and Lopez 2022; Korzenevica et al. 2022). Notwithstanding, the importance of creating a more favourable environment for women in green entrepreneurship in Ethiopia is not only limited to the important benefits that it will bring for them.

Studies suggest that women entrepreneurs have a positive effect on their communities and economies (Cummings and Lopez 2022). This may be because they tend to show a more environmentally conscious and responsible attitude compared to men (Figuroa-Domecq et al. 2022:3). It has been shown that women play a stronger role in fostering positive values concerning social welfare, family, and community well-being (Kimbu and Ngoasong 2016). Women furthermore tend to start businesses in response to identified social problems and ecological challenges, focusing not only on financial benefits but also on social impact (Barrachina Fernández, García-Centeno, and Calderón Patier 2021:5). Women often actively link their businesses to sustainable development outcomes, such as alleviating economic challenges in their communities or adopting environmentally responsible practices (Raman et al. 2022). Their abilities, including innovative thinking, social awareness, and opportunity identification, are key to enhancing societal well-being and sustainability (Barrachina Fernández, García-Centeno, and Calderón Patier 2021:2).

1.1. Research Problem

Even if research suggests the possibilities for female green entrepreneurship in developing contexts, the Ethiopian context is less explored. Furthermore, a big share of current published literature on female-led green entrepreneurship in SSA focuses on

quantitative data and usually contrasts that information with the experiences of men in the field. There is a need to understand better women's perspectives and lived experiences and not compare them to others. This approach will enable to improve the effectiveness of support initiatives so that they can better contribute to harnessing women's full potential.

1.2. Research Objective

With this in focus, this thesis aims to provide a preliminary understanding of the experiences and challenges of female entrepreneurs with green businesses in Ethiopia. Using ecofeminism as a theoretical framework, this study investigates how gender inequality shapes the experiences of female entrepreneurs in the green sector. Ecofeminism acknowledges the interconnectedness of environmental and gender issues. This allows us to explore this topic through the lens of power dynamics that shape women's experiences and the relationship between humans and the environment within the field of green entrepreneurship in Ethiopia. By examining how societal norms and environmental challenges intersect, we can better understand the obstacles female entrepreneurs face and the innovative solutions they can offer. This framework can also help us understand how green entrepreneurship can simultaneously address environmental degradation and gender inequality.

1.3. Research Questions

To delve into the unique experiences faced by female entrepreneurs in Ethiopia's green sector, two research questions were developed. They are designed to uncover the difficulties that women face when trying to start a small green business and also understand their opportunities to create positive change in their context. By focusing on these aspects, this thesis aims to increase the understanding of this unexplored topic and make suggestions for future research and for practical actions designed to support women in the field.

The research questions to guide the analysis are the following:

1. In which ways does gender inequality shape the experiences of women entrepreneurs with green business in Ethiopia?
2. What insights can be gathered from the experiences of Ethiopian female green entrepreneurs about the possibilities to create beneficial outcomes for themselves, for society, and for the environment?

2. Previous Research

To understand the experiences of female and green entrepreneurs, I gathered an overview of published literature on the topic. This section explores existing research on different facets of female and green entrepreneurship, focusing on the context of Ethiopia.

It is important to first mention the scarce literature on the topic of Ethiopian women entrepreneurs with green businesses. Even though I did not do an exhaustive literature review, I tried to use as many synonyms as possible when formulating the queries during bibliographic searches and looked in some of the most widely used literature databases. I also did my search in English and Spanish, being these the languages I speak, as an additional language may serve me to expand the results. However, few relevant articles were found, and none covered the specific topic of female green entrepreneurs in Ethiopia. After a first search, 22 articles were found that discussed women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia and 10 on the topic of green entrepreneurship in the country. Their abstracts were examined to ensure relevance to my research topic and discard those that did not provide significant insights. Once I had completed this process, 14 articles, 10 dealing with female entrepreneurship and 4 covering green entrepreneurship, were selected for an in-depth analysis.

Given these results, this section is divided into research on women's entrepreneurship and green startup businesses in Ethiopia. They both provide an overview of the existing research of the Ethiopian context regarding these businesses and show the gaps in knowledge. This section is organised thematically, as interest is placed on common topics emerging from literature. This can allow us to understand what the most common experiences are, and how female and green entrepreneurship are understood within research.

2.1. Female Entrepreneurship in Ethiopia

The literature reveals that female entrepreneurs often encounter barriers that impact their performance. Some of them are shared with their male counterparts, but their social position results in greater negative consequences for them. In this section, I aim to build a foundational understanding of the multi-faceted challenges and identify areas where female entrepreneurs in Ethiopia may experience particular difficulties. The literature found only covers female entrepreneurial businesses in general, not focusing

on the green ones, but research on this topic may serve to have a preliminary idea of which challenges may also affect green female entrepreneurs as well.

2.1.1. Barriers to Female Entrepreneurship

The literature points out three main challenges faced by Ethiopian women in entrepreneurship: access to resources, insufficient and inadequate support measures, and a context of gender inequality.

Firstly, women are reported to encounter more difficulties than their male counterparts in accessing several types of resources. This is mainly due to social norms that portray them as wives and mothers, so the predominant belief is that they should not engage in other types of activities. Therefore, they are less likely to receive assistance from some available support schemes (Korzenevica et al. 2022).

The most highlighted resource that is difficult to access is economic capital (Hailemariam et al. 2019; Nguse et al. 2022). Female entrepreneurs in particular are less likely to access basic financial services and loans from formal financial institutions (Nguse et al. 2022). Some of the main causes are high interest rates, their generally lower technical skills, or the numerous bureaucratic procedures (Mersha and Sriram 2019; Nguse et al. 2022).

Women also face obstacles to accessing natural resources needed for their ventures. Gender-based barriers hinder women's possibility to own land, or even have access to it (Cummings and Lopez 2022; Hailemariam et al. 2019). Korzenevica et al. (2022) highlight the difficulties that women entrepreneurs have in accessing water, and that this important topic is rather ignored by research.

In more general terms, some of the needs and barriers women are facing are being acknowledged by the government and other administrations. However, research shows that policies being implemented are not able to encourage women enough to start their businesses. These policies do not consider the specific needs that women in this field may have (Wube and Atwal 2023). Korzenevica et al. (2022) point out that the existing initiatives are not implementing structural changes, more investments, or institutional reforms. Therefore, they are not able to tackle social inequalities and the unbalanced distribution of resources.

The main obstacle found in the literature, which is also intertwined with the rest, is the gendered social and political contexts in which women are embedded. Authors point out that, as in Ethiopian societies women are mainly the ones responsible for the family

and household, it may be harder for them to balance their duties if they start being part of the workforce (Hailemariam et al. 2019; Korzenevica et al. 2022; Wube and Atwal 2023). Having these many and important responsibilities may also be the cause of a bigger fear of failure, as research shows (Mersha and Sriram 2019), likely leading to a lower willingness to embark on somehow risky journeys.

Traditional values also influence female entrepreneurs in the country. Family dynamics likely play a role in women's path toward participation in the economy. This usually happens through resistance from family members or having to get married, which is also usually decided by other people (Cummings and Lopez 2022).

Research shows that the personality traits that male entrepreneurs have are more likely to impact positively their success (Mersha and Sriram 2019). There is a gap in women's engagement in this type of business and fewer chances to succeed (Wube and Atwal 2023). This phenomenon, combined with gender roles, has helped create and sustain stereotypes that portray men as the standard entrepreneurs or the ones who should be in managerial or leadership positions (Melesse 2019). This helps maintain an environment where women are usually not encouraged to start their businesses.

2.1.2. Effects of the Obstacles on Women's Entrepreneurship

The literature also highlights some of the consequences that the difficulties outlined above pose to women entrepreneurs in the country.

To start with, the bureaucratic hurdles they face and the lack of financial support, coupled with the sociocultural situation, obstruct achieving economic empowerment and restrict their opportunities to equally access education, skills, and development opportunities (Mersha and Sriram 2019; Nguse et al. 2022).

The lack of financial knowledge hinders informed decision-making for their businesses. The difficulties in accessing finance also impact the entrepreneur's possibilities of escaping poverty or achieving their full growth potential (Mamo et al. 2023; Nguse et al. 2022). Female empowerment in the economic realm is one of the crucial aspects that can boost countries' development, but if women entrepreneurs lack sufficient support, the advantages of this economic activity are diminished (Nguse et al. 2022).

Gendered social norms impact several aspects of the experiences of women entrepreneurs. The lack of autonomy they usually have over their lives limits their ventures. Women who want to start a small business, especially in rural areas, are likely

to have limited control over their ventures, and not be able to pursue their own goals (Hailemariam et al. 2019).

Furthermore, in Sub-Saharan African societies, women are expected to prioritize their family duties, but they also need to be a source of income. Having to deal with family obligations on top of a job can trigger emotional exhaustion, which will also affect the business (De Clercq, Kaciak, and Thongpapanl 2022). Their emotional well-being is impacted by stress and uncertainty, with the high stakes making the possibility of failure even more concerning (Cummings and Lopez 2022; Hailemariam et al. 2019).

The expectations placed on women are ultimately linked to the level of family support. Family members have a great influence on the female members, and this can translate into the amount of participation and freedom to engage in different activities outside of the house (Hailemariam et al. 2019).

The prevailing stereotypes in Ethiopia do not encourage the incorporation of women in entrepreneurship, because it is regarded as incongruent with their societal role. Despite some women overcoming this barrier, their activities are usually devalued, and their contributions are not recognised to the fullest (Cummings and Lopez 2022; Hailemariam et al. 2019).

Even if this and the previous section divided the findings from the literature chosen from this thesis into causes and consequences, it is worth mentioning how some of these factors create a feedback loop. For instance, lower technical skills that prevent them from accessing financial resources also hinder their ability to access education to develop those skills. Although it is hard to discern the causes and consequences, in this thesis they have been classified as such through simplifications to provide a clearer picture of women entrepreneur's experiences.

2.1.3. Benefits of Female Entrepreneurship for Women and Society

Different articles have shown the beneficial effects of entrepreneurship for the women who take on this activity. Research findings, along with the firsthand testimonies of participants in the reviewed articles, revealed that, if women had more access to finance, they would be able to improve their living standards with their income, as well as have a better position in the family (Nguse et al. 2022). In their study, Cummings and Lopez (2022) have found that Ethiopian women view entrepreneurship as desirable and are aware of the associated benefits.

But the advantages for women are not merely economic. Starting a business allows women to have more personal independence and make their own decisions. It can also contribute to helping them escape gender norms posed by their families, usually in the case of older women, and fulfil their aspirations, predominantly for younger women. The situation and mentality in the country, especially in urban settings are changing. Women are acknowledging the possibility of increasing control over their own lives and this is resulting in social recognition, as opposed to previous resistance and criticism (Cummings and Lopez 2022; Korzenevica et al. 2022). Despite a still difficult environment to succeed, women narrate their experiences focusing on the liberation they experience, not the oppression (Korzenevica et al. 2022).

The articles also report on the benefits that increasing female participation has on society. Women entrepreneurs tend to invest their profits into education, whether it is for themselves, their families, or their communities (Mersha and Sriram 2019). Their businesses, which are an example of resilience and innovation, have a positive effect on their communities and economies, even under a difficult entrepreneurial and social environment (Cummings and Lopez 2022).

Even if the literature reviewed highlights these positive impacts, there is a lack of coverage for the differential approaches that women take in their entrepreneurial ventures that result in more diverse advantages than the ones of their male counterparts. The focus of the articles about Ethiopia is rather on the actual consequences, as they have been described. It would be useful to know and understand their perceptions and approaches more in depth, so their potential could be harnessed and further used to advance a multi-faceted development.

2.2. Green Entrepreneurship in Ethiopia

This section will examine the emerging field of green entrepreneurship in Ethiopia. It will discuss the obstacles they face, mainly related to governmental strategies regarding sustainable development, and their importance in the country. Lastly, it will cover the promising approaches that green entrepreneurs can adopt to increase their influence and overcome some of the mentioned obstacles.

Even if women entrepreneurs in this field may be affected differently by the obstacles or face others, it is important to know more about the context in which they have to operate.

2.2.1. Obstacles for Green Entrepreneurs

Climate change is posing a serious threat to countries like Ethiopia, particularly to rural populations. New adaptation strategies and sustainable approaches are needed (Etana et al. 2021), and green entrepreneurial ventures can provide alternative and useful solutions. Even if there is high growth potential in environmental innovation, small businesses face a challenging situation. There is insufficient coordination within the government; between the government, industry, and academia; and not enough interaction among businesses (Shkabatur, Bar-El, and Schwartz 2022).

Another obstacle is the framework adopted by the government in their policies, in which the social and ecological domains are treated as if they were isolated from one another. It is also important to mention that this is not the case only in Ethiopia, but rather the predominant worldview regarding these two realms. This poses a great problem in the country, particularly in the context of food security (Järnberg et al. 2018).

Ethiopia is a predominantly agricultural country, and climate change will significantly impact traditional farming methods. The strategies presented by Ethiopian agrarian policies, such as natural resource management, are seen as mechanisms to reduce degradation, rather than a method to increase or maintain agricultural yields (Järnberg et al. 2018).

Ethiopia has implemented The Climate-Resilient Green Economy Strategy, which aims to contribute to the economic growth of the country in a sustainable and climate-change-resilient way. However, according to World Bank Group reporting (Habtewold, Benitez Ponce, and Mulatu 2019), there has been a lack of meaningful and effective activities linked to adapting to climate change. Significant work remains to be done in different areas, with agriculture being a crucial point to increase the resilience of the communities. Broader changes are required to boost the activities of green entrepreneurs (Järnberg et al. 2018).

Lastly, green entrepreneurs can offer important contributions to combat the consequences of climate change, but it is usually hard to implement new techniques at a bigger scale. Intense government regulations and rigid structures restrict the possibilities of small actors that are implementing sustainable methods in the agricultural sector (Järnberg et al. 2018).

2.2.2. Positive Impacts of Green Entrepreneurship

Given the significant role of agriculture in the country and the challenges it faces due to climate change, increasing productivity and resilience in the farming context is crucial (Etana et al. 2021; Järnberg et al. 2018). In particular, there is a recognition of the importance of empowering small-scale farmers using innovative techniques. Evidence shows that they have the potential to maintain functional ecosystems and natural capital, allowing agriculture to be sustainable in time for longer (Järnberg et al. 2018). There are also other benefits, such as increasing employment opportunities or improving and sustaining the livelihoods of the rural population (Etana et al. 2021).

Unfortunately, the government is not providing enough incentives and facilities for these actors. Research shows the importance of having a stable and strong innovation ecosystem, easing entrepreneurs' access to aid such as financial support or business development services. To harness the potential of these actors, it is also necessary to encourage them to work with each other, creating a network, rather than treating them as isolated individuals (Shkabatur, Bar-El, and Schwartz 2022). A side effect of improving the innovation ecosystem is that people can start ventures in sectors beyond farming. This way, they diversify their income or create an alternative source, and they can increase their resilience in the face of a changing climate (Etana et al. 2021).

The different solutions proposed by green entrepreneurs, as Etana et al. (2021) show in the case of agriculture, have multifaceted benefits. By being aware of the changes in the climate and potential future trajectories, these entrepreneurs usually come up with solutions that entail adaptation strategies. These practices not only help maintain crop yields and increase resilience but can also foster job creation, benefiting the economy and the local communities.

Most of the articles within the Ethiopian green entrepreneurial field that have been reviewed here covered the topic of agriculture, in line with it being the predominant activity in the country. However, Corredor Jimenez et al. (2023) studied the strategies adopted in Ethiopia during the COVID-19 pandemic. They explained how the impact of this event was not as big as expected in African countries and focused on studying the strategies implemented in Ethiopia. Bottom-up approaches and integrated solutions were found to be key in facilitating multidisciplinary benefits. For instance, securing access to water, allowed to decrease gender-based violence and increase the school enrolment rate of girls.

The article highlights how small-scale, local initiatives can increase the resilience of communities in pandemics. Approaches like rainwater harvesting not only provided clean water but also prevented diseases, improved food security, restored ecosystems, and reduced the community's vulnerability to climate and economic changes. This and other innovative techniques developed in these contexts are also valuable lessons, not only to apply in Ethiopia but also in other countries worldwide (Corredor Jimenez et al. 2023).

2.2.3. Useful Approaches in the Ethiopian Context

The literature did not cover the concrete innovative solutions implemented by the entrepreneurs. However, it provided an overview of approaches that have the potential to be very beneficial in a context like the Ethiopian.

As the awareness of the insufficiency and negative effects of traditional agrarian techniques is rising, there is a recognition of the importance of implementing alternative farming methods. Unfortunately, the institutional context is challenging, as stated before, so the influence of small-scale actors with innovative approaches is limited. However, entrepreneurs have been able to adapt their strategies to fit the context, developing and implementing their methods in close collaboration with the government and the agricultural extension system. This allows them to scale and increase their impact over time (Järnberg et al. 2018).

In the context of climate change in Ethiopia, innovation that helps increase resilience and productivity in agriculture is crucial. And, as mentioned before, this will entail different economic, social, and environmental benefits (Etana et al. 2021).

Lastly, Corredor Jimenez et al. (2023), when studying the COVID-19 case showed that the success of the approach was due to its holistic, interdisciplinary, and bottom-up nature. The entrepreneurial initiatives that considered the interconnectedness of humans with nature along with the social situation and encouraged inclusion in decision-making processes showed great results and potential (Corredor Jimenez et al. 2023).

However, significant changes are still needed in the country's dynamics, starting with the government's approach to innovation. As long as entrepreneurs have to work within the government structure, they face several trade-offs and there is almost no room for deep transformative innovation, which hinders the full development of these actors (Järnberg et al. 2018).

3. Analytical Framework: Exploring Ecofeminism in the Entrepreneurial Context

This section introduces the analytical framework used to examine the relation between gender, environment, and societal issues. Ecofeminism recognises that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are interlinked manifestations of power dynamics (Puleo 2005:202).

Within the ecofeminist framework, three key concepts – emancipation, otherness, and care-oriented practices – are chosen to help shed light on the complex dynamics shaping the experiences of women regarding their incorporation in the workforce to address environmental issues in a highly unequal society as it is in Ethiopia.

Research shows how women are more prone to include care-oriented practices towards the environment and society when running entrepreneurial businesses (Kutlu and Ngoasong 2023:4). However, their experiences tend to be compared to the ones of men, which are seen to be the standard. Differences and the usually lower success rates women score when examined through traditional metrics, marginalize women's contributions and portray them as 'the other' (Czarniawska and Hopfl 2005:65). This devaluation not only undermines their experiences but also hinders their potential to improve their circumstances and achieve empowerment through entrepreneurial activities (Theeuwien et al. 2021:3).

3.1. Emancipation

Emancipation has been a prominent concept in ecofeminism since the movement's emergence. The social construction of gender places women and nature in a subordinate position because they share the functions of support and life-givers. Instead of celebrating and respecting this quality, patriarchal social structures and profit-oriented economies exploit it for productivity gains. Any potential harmful repercussions for the people and the planet are disregarded (Dakshta and Das 2023:10). This is reflected in the way the caring work or household activities are not commonly considered as 'real work' or how we act as if natural resources were unlimited and deploying them had no consequences for humanity.

Ecofeminism advocates for the need of women and nature to emancipate from their subordinated position (Chircop and Keddy 2003:374; Mukurazhizha and Matanga 2023:3). It further claims that emancipation not only concerns the groups subjected to

domination but the whole of humankind (Dakshta and Das 2023:10). Creating a cleaner, sustainable environment and achieving social justice and equity are seen as the only way for securing a better world for future generations (Chircop and Keddy 2003:381; Mukurazhizha and Matanga 2023:3).

In the context of entrepreneurship, emancipation refers to obtaining equal rights or equality in social, economic, or political arenas (Atarah et al. 2023:737). The oppressed situation that women face is also reflected in this economic activity, as gender issues hinder their opportunities to be freed from this state (Theeuwens et al. 2021:3). Achieving emancipation through entrepreneurship is more important in poorer contexts, as women face more difficulties due to societal norms or economic constraints (Al-Dajani et al. 2015:716).

However, it is also important to mention that ecofeminism, as a critical framework, critiques the prevalent economic system and activities, including entrepreneurship, particularly for their focus on profit and growth at the expense of social and environmental well-being. This profit-driven approach is seen as an extension of patriarchal values that prioritize exploitation and domination— of nature, women, or marginalized communities—over care and sustainability (Herrero 2013). In line with this, traditional entrepreneurship models can undermine the potential for genuine emancipation, as they may reinforce existing power imbalances rather than challenge them. There is a possibility, nevertheless, to rethink entrepreneurship in ways that integrate care-oriented practices and emphasize the benefits of social and environmental justice alongside economic activities.

Green entrepreneurship has the potential to become a better alternative that shows that businesses can value society and the environment as much as economic profit. They can also bring positive change beyond financial stability to the people involved. Women taking part in this activity would be able, not only to have their income but also to achieve personal independence. Women in Ethiopia recognise the possibility of making independent decisions and achieving their goals, gaining more autonomy over their lives (Cummings and Lopez 2022; Korzenevica et al. 2022). Furthermore, their unique perspectives, experiences, and contributions are essential to providing alternative and gender-sensitive solutions to current environmental problems (Atarah et al. 2023:737). Deeper societal changes are needed to grant them enough support and create more favourable conditions to promote their full participation (Theeuwens et al. 2021:3).

3.2. Otherness

The construction of women as ‘the other’ is prior to ecofeminism. Feminist texts such as Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, explain how men are the standard while women are socially constructed as the non-conforming (Lueg and Ni 2020:19). Ecofeminism went further and pointed out how nature is also considered as ‘the other’ in contrast to culture.

The dominant dualistic and hierarchical vision has been one of the primary foci of criticism within ecofeminism (Natalis, Purwanti, and Asmara 2023:154). Hierarchies serve as a legitimising factor to dominate that which is considered ‘the other.’ Thinking that we exist independently from nature or other human beings has generated a dominant socio-economic system that only seeks maximum profit, without taking into account planetary limits. Additionally, the system also tends to disregard care work, which is mostly carried out by women (Herrero 2013; Puleo 2005). The contributions and tasks performed by women, as well as the goods and services obtained from nature, are not considered for what they are: something fundamental to sustain the existence of all the people who inhabit the planet.

In the environmental field, it is crucial to recognize the social and political factors shaping related issues. among other things, the ‘otherness’ of some groups affects their access to resources or can increase their exposure to environmental risks (Korzenevica et al. 2022; Ojeda et al. 2022). It is fundamental to acknowledge these inequalities to promote more inclusive and equitable environmental policies and practices. This involves engaging diverse stakeholders and advocating for systemic changes to address environmental injustices perpetuated by dominant groups (Ojeda et al. 2022:164).

In the entrepreneurial field, the duality by which we tend to examine reality placed the entrepreneur themselves as the other when comparing with more common traditional and structured jobs (Czarniawska and Hopfl 2005:53). When women’s entrepreneurship started to gather attention, they were also regarded as ‘the other’ within the entrepreneurs’ ‘otherness’ (Czarniawska and Hopfl 2005:65). They were seen as in need of special aid as they tended to perform worse than the male counterpart in entrepreneurship. However, criticism of this view arose as research on entrepreneurship had been done exclusively on men until the mid-eighties. The findings and suggested measures were mainly just extrapolated to women’s situations, instead of understanding their own experiences and desires (Czarniawska and Hopfl 2005:57–59).

Even if, nowadays, several research lines are aiming to understand women's entrepreneurship as its standing concept, it is difficult to escape the assumptions in which entrepreneurial research is grounded. The idea of what a successful entrepreneurial venture should be is regarded as neutral, even if it is just based on male ideals and experiences (Czarniawska and Hopfl 2005:59). And, even if there have been advances and a more critical vision has been adopted in the research field, the articles about this topic are still contributing to place female entrepreneurs as 'the other.' This constructed otherness perpetuates discriminatory practices, such as unconsciously favouring socially similar individuals, which can affect how women entrepreneurs are treated and supported (Lueg and Ni 2020:32–33). Similarly, green entrepreneurs may also face marginalisation due to their deviation from the norm of profit-centric small business models.

Even when women's experiences are centred in studies, Western, white, middle-class women's experiences receive most of the attention (Peiris, Tatli, and Ozturk 2023:6). Individuals from non-western or emerging economies, which do not conform to the dominant archetype, are also 'the other' entrepreneurs. Their stories and experiences are often marginalized, and evaluated against a perceived standard without acknowledging underlying assumptions, implying that everyone should strive towards this ideal (James, Xiong, and Anderson 2022:439; Peiris, Tatli, and Ozturk 2023:4).

In emerging economies, the role that women have hinders their possibilities of empowerment. This contributes to their ventures being regarded as less successful and not given enough recognition and acceptance, perpetuating a vicious cycle of harsher conditions and marginalisation (Anderson and Ojediran 2021:305). Even if in these contexts the number of female-owned businesses is quite high, the view of entrepreneurship and what constitutes success, and the morality of these businesses are still masculinised (James, Xiong, and Anderson 2022:439).

Entrepreneurship, especially when it incorporates sustainable practices or objectives, can play a key role in providing innovative solutions for the climate crisis or improving local environments. In the case of female entrepreneurship, it is recognized how, apart from contributing to economic growth, it is a way to tackle gender discrimination. There is a need to move on from classical entrepreneurial research models and incorporate all the different experiences to have a comprehensive understanding of the field (Czarniawska and Hopfl 2005:66). Recognizing and valuing entrepreneurs' diverse backgrounds is crucial for fostering inclusive solutions to global challenges. This shift

involves moving beyond merely comparing gender differences to embracing and equally valuing a broader spectrum of perspectives and experiences (Czarniawska and Hopfl 2005:66; Peiris, Tatli, and Ozturk 2023:6).

3.3. Care-oriented Practices

When industrialism arose and our current economic system was established, work became what was done in exchange for a salary. At the same time, what was done in the space for domestic production, to guarantee reproduction and care, was ignored and devaluated, even if it was essential to produce all goods and services and for survival itself (Herrero 2013:296). This invisible work is carried out predominantly by women, as this is the role that the social construction of gender has imposed on them (Herrero 2013:281; Puleo 2005:205). Ecofeminism is rooted in this shared oppression of women and nature, as their life-giving and supporting functions are exploited and devaluated but are most fundamental for every person in the world.

This link, as pointed out before, calls for both problems to be considered as a whole, and it is one of the aspects in which ecofeminism is rooted. Some authors also argue, albeit with some nuances, that this similar position is what makes women in general more aware of and willing to solve environmental problems (Meinzen-Dick, Kovarik, and Quisumbing 2014).

Ecofeminism seeks to end oppression while advocating for a new ethical framework that prioritizes environmental considerations over pure economic growth. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity with nature, rejecting the notion of superiority over it. Additionally, it promotes community and solidarity, in opposition to the prevailing narrative of competitiveness that is dominant in Western cultures (de los Reyes Ancheta 2013:18).

Care-oriented practices are often viewed as feminine characteristics in entrepreneurship. Social gender norms typically lead women to adopt these practices more frequently than men. (Kutlu and Ngoasong 2023:2). Men and women are both equally able to implement these practices and create positive benefits for society and the environment, alongside economic gains. However, stereotypes reduce the likelihood of men adopting caring-oriented practices and actions, and this results in men being mainly motivated by competitiveness and financial profits (Hechavarría et al. 2017:252, 229; Kutlu and Ngoasong 2023:2).

However, even if this vision is usually marginalized in entrepreneurial research and discussion, it provides a key take on changing conventional practices to provide a possibly better path forward for the problems we are currently facing. Implementing care-oriented practices in businesses can also result in financially beneficial decisions, as most sustainable actions go hand in hand with bigger economic gains for companies as well as communities (Kutlu and Ngoasong 2023:3). It is important to acknowledge and value this perspective to be able to transform more traditional practices and introduce more widely the focus on the needs of others in business (Hechavarría et al. 2017:228; Kutlu and Ngoasong 2023:15–16).

4. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative methodology grounded in interview data collection. The primary objective is to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and unique perspectives of women engaged in green entrepreneurship within the Ethiopian national context. This study seeks to shed light on how gender dynamics intersect with environmental entrepreneurship, aiming to fill some of the gaps in existing knowledge and provide insights that can inform future research and practical initiatives in this field. For this reason, it was best to study women’s lived experiences, rather than statistics or other types of data, which also were not abundant. This was achieved through interviews, which allowed a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon studied through the unique experiences of the women who have lived through it (Castleberry and Nolen 2018:807–8). To complement and compare the information, a report from an NGO program that supported green entrepreneurs in the country was used.

This section covers the development and application of the research method for data collection and analysis and the positionality and ethical considerations of my research, including the collaboration with an NGO that had supported my participants. Lastly, it includes the methods used to ensure the quality of the findings, as well as the limitations entailed.

4.1. Collaboration with the Non-Governmental Organisation “Reach for Change”

Reach for Change is an international non-profit organisation founded in Sweden with a vision to create a world where all children and youth reach their full potential. This

vision is driven by the belief that all children deserve to grow up in a world free from poverty, inequality, and climate change. To achieve this, they invest in social entrepreneurs who are close to the challenges and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals, and that are addressing the most pressing issues in their communities. Their offices are located in Sweden (headquarters), Bulgaria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Senegal, and Latvia, and since their foundation in 2010, they have supported more than 1500 social entrepreneurs in 18 countries (Reach for Change 2023).

The semester before writing this project, I was an intern at their Stockholm office. During my time there, they offered me the possibility of writing my master's thesis in collaboration with them. I chose women green entrepreneurs in Ethiopia for three main reasons. The first one was that when I was previously working on a task for them, I realised how the involvement of women in entrepreneurship is given less attention in research and is usually studied compared to men's. Apart from the gap in research that this represents, in some cases, this would lead to upholding incorrect or discriminatory views regarding their contributions and experiences. The second reason was that their office in Ethiopia runs programmes for local green entrepreneurs with whom they collaborate very closely. This would allow a unique opportunity to access Ethiopian entrepreneurs directly. Lastly, as a student of environmental science, I am very interested in innovative ways to improve sustainability while contributing to societal development. For all these reasons, I wanted to focus on female green entrepreneurial businesses in Ethiopia.

While developing this thesis, I had the freedom and autonomy to work independently from Reach for Change. Nevertheless, they supported me in contacting possible interviewees, made their Ethiopia programme report available for me, and assisted with some other necessary information. It is also important to mention that the organisation did not have access to the data I have collected. They will be given the final version of this thesis when the work is completed.

All the necessary information about this thesis was communicated to the interviewees when I first contacted them. It was particularly important to clarify the role of Reach for Change to minimise any potential bias in their responses. This also helped avoid misplaced expectations given that the interviewees had been supported by one of the NGO's programmes that aimed to develop green businesses in Ethiopia. However, at the time of the interviews, the program had finished.

4.2. Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Extractivist research is understood as the practice of exploiting the knowledge and contributions from less powerful communities, usually without giving fair compensation or benefits to them and disregarding ethical considerations or the possible impact on said communities (University of Antwerp 2023). In this thesis, I aimed to avoid such practices by ensuring a respectful, reciprocal, and transparent engagement with the participants, prioritizing their perspectives and well-being throughout the research process.

As a researcher conducting this study on female green entrepreneurship in Ethiopia, I recognise my positionality and its power to influence the research process and results. Apart from being an outsider to the local context, I am originally from and living in a high-income European country and identify as white. This grants me certain social and economic privileges that differ substantially from those of the study participants. Furthermore, before starting drafting this thesis, I had been interning at the NGO that had supported the interviewees. Even if they were no longer part of the NGO's support programs at the time of the interviews, this could influence trust and openness during the interviews.

Sharing the same gender as my interviewees may have generated a better sense of understanding and empathy, potentially making them feel more comfortable and prone to share their experiences and views more openly. Nevertheless, I should acknowledge that our shared gender does not eliminate the differences in our cultural, social, and economic contexts.

It is important, therefore, to implement measures to mitigate the effects of the existing power relations. I have educated myself about the context of the participants to ensure a deeper understanding and to avoid any unintentional miscommunication when contacting the respondents and during the planning and realization of the interviews. The autonomy and agency of the participants were always respected by ensuring that all the needed information was given to them, and that procedures set in place to do this work were fair. Also, possible consequences of the study were screened beforehand, and I was transparent in my communication with the respondents about the relationship I had with the NGO.

Participation in this research was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time. Their privacy was protected throughout the research process unless they stated otherwise.

The aim during the interview process was to create a safe space for the participants to express their thoughts and share their experiences freely. This involved creating egalitarian settings where everyone's contributions are considered equally important. Furthermore, paying attention to body language and tone helped convey openness, empathy, and respect.

Lastly, the NGO was interested in this thesis as a learning opportunity about the needs on the ground of the programme participants. This understanding aims to provide more tailored support for target groups and enhance overall programme effectiveness.

4.3. Methods for Data Collection

To achieve a better understanding of the selected topic and explore the research questions posed, I applied method triangulation combining two methods of data collection (Carter et al. 2014:545). Interviews were the main source of information, providing crucial insights into the personal perspectives of the women involved. Additionally, I used Reach for Change's evaluation report *Catalyzing Green Business in Ethiopia* to add perspective, cross-check information shared, and access additional data on the topic.

4.3.1. Justification for Interviews

The primary method of data collection for this thesis was semi-structured interviews with three female green entrepreneurs from Ethiopia. Interviews allow for a comprehensive exploration of the participants' insights, experiences, and perspectives. By engaging with them this way, I aimed to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face as well as the opportunities they have in their context. The choice of interviews was justified by the need to obtain more detailed and personal explanations that cannot be grasped only through quantitative data.

4.3.2. Development of Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix) was developed to ensure that the research questions were answered in the most complete way possible. The first step to achieving this was to conduct a narrative literature review, which provided background about the topic. A review on the topic of ecofeminism concerning green entrepreneurship was also done. This helped identify key themes to structure the questions around.

Articles covering the topic of women with green entrepreneurial businesses in Ethiopia were not found. Nevertheless, the general challenges faced, their repercussions

on performance, and the positive influence of women entrepreneurs in the country served as a departure point to create the interview questions for the entrepreneurs. This way I could also explore whether the experiences of my interviewees were similar or not from entrepreneurs with other types of businesses in the same country. Based on this information, preliminary questions were formulated and refined through discussions with the thesis supervisor, who is well-versed in this type of qualitative approach. The interview guide was then pilot-tested with a member of the NGO that works with the Ethiopian branch to ensure clarity, relevance, and an appropriate contextual use of the language. The feedback for this testing was used to make final adjustments, aiming to get relevant and detailed answers from the participants.

4.3.3. Interview Process

The interviewees were chosen from a pool of Ethiopian alumni who received support in the form of training and entrepreneurial education from Reach for Change, specifically focusing on individuals who had green ventures. Potential participants were contacted through email with information about the study, including the researcher's background, the aim of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and how their data would be treated confidentially.

The interviews were administered remotely and one-on-one with the support of online conferencing tools given that international travel to Ethiopia was not possible at the time for me. An interview date and time were chosen based on their preference, facilitating them to balance their obligations and daily routines. The interviews took place between March and May 2024.

Each interview lasted between thirty-three minutes and one hour, according to the availability of the respondents. This allowed us to focus on the key topics selected while respecting the participant's time constraints.

The interviews were held in English, as it was one of the languages spoken by the interviewees and the researcher, so there was no need for translation. They were audio-recorded with the respondents' consent and afterwards transcribed. The transcriptions were then reviewed to ensure accuracy and help the researcher become familiarised with the information before analysing it.

4.3.4. Complementary Data

As already mentioned, data from a report was also used in the analysis. This document was provided by Reach for Change, and it is an external evaluation of the

programme that all the interviewees had participated in. It is important to mention that the programme was aimed at providing training to men and women with sustainable ventures and some of the results are not disaggregated by gender. However, it also has a separate section to evaluate the gender aspects of the programme. The document provides an overview of the programme and qualitative information gathered through interviews with participants. It also includes quantitative data to measure the performance indicators. By using this complementary source of information, the validity of the interview findings was increased.

4.3.5. Data Source Triangulation and Integration

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and validate the interview findings, data from two sources was used. Interview transcriptions were cross-checked with information from the report. The statistical insights and testimonies gathered here served to either validate or contest the interview responses, allowing for a deeper understanding and also providing the base for possible explanations for the mismatches. This way, shortcomings in one of the data sources can be compensated by the strengths of the other, increasing the validity and reliability of the results, and reducing the risk of incorrect interpretations (Hales 2010:14).

4.4. Method for Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed and the answers from each participant were grouped, I proceeded to conduct the analysis. The aim was to identify patterns across the interviews, and this was done through a thematic analysis. The first step was coding, which involved organising the data systematically. Using the previously outlined analytical framework concepts, and after reviewing the interviewees' answers, I established three categories related to each concept. They would serve to examine the information from the interviews and the report (Castleberry and Nolen 2018; Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas 2013). To ensure clarity and consistency, I provided a concise definition for each category, specifying what types of responses or data fragments would be included or excluded.

Based on these categories, I proceeded to identify belonging fragments in the interview transcripts and the report. Coding involved tagging specific sections of the text that corresponded to each category. During this process, I also noted whether the fragments were positive, negative, or just added depth to each of the categories. The

coding process was not just about labelling data; it also involved cross-referencing the interview responses with the report data to identify consistencies and discrepancies. This offered a more nuanced understanding of the themes that emerged from the gathered information.

Throughout these steps, and more exhaustively after, there was a process of interpreting the data. This involved relating the fragments to each other and finding patterns. The research questions guided this process to create a coherent and cohesive narrative based on the data.

By comparing and contrasting two sources of information, I aimed to provide a nuanced analysis that reflects the participants' experiences. This synthesis was crucial for drawing meaningful conclusions and ensuring the analysis was comprehensive and reflective of the perspectives gathered. Overall, this process was iterative. It allowed me to refine and validate the findings, ensuring they were relevant to the research questions.

4.5. Quality Assurance and Rigor

To enhance the credibility, reliability, and validity of the findings, several methods were employed throughout the data collection and analysis. To start with, and as already mentioned, there was a pilot test to refine the questions and ensure clarity in the interview preparation process. The questions posed and my tone and attitude during the interviews aimed to be as neutral as possible and not lead towards specific answers. This way, my assumptions, based on previous research on the topic, could be contested. Data source triangulation was also used to address the research questions from different angles.

Throughout all the planning and writing stages, there was a continuous reflection on my positionality regarding the interviewees and the context I was exploring. This helped me understand how my perspectives may influence the analysis and findings. There was also a process of familiarisation with the situation of women in Ethiopia and green entrepreneurial businesses. Furthermore, the fact that in my academic and professional background I had dealt with those, or related topics, helped me understand my interviewees better.

Lastly, this thesis adopted the necessary ethical considerations to ensure participant's confidentiality and well-being. Being transparent in documenting my relationship with the NGO, as well as communicating it to the interviewees minimised potential biases.

Informed consent and anonymised data helped ensure the integrity of the research and respect the rights of the participants.

4.6. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences and challenges faced by Ethiopian female green entrepreneurs, it is important to acknowledge its limitations.

To start with, the researcher's positionality plays a significant role. As a European-born person who has never had the opportunity to visit Ethiopia, there are limits on how I can access respondents and am able thus to contextualise their experiences. This gap may affect the depth of understanding and the ability to accurately interpret cultural nuances.

Furthermore, qualitative data interpretation can be influenced by the researcher's perspective, even though measures were taken to minimise it. In qualitative research, the researcher's biases, preconceptions, and interpretative frameworks can inadvertently shape the analysis, which is a common limitation of this approach. To manage these biases, I employed strategies such as maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process, where I constantly reflected on my own potential biases and how they might influence the interpretation of data.

This challenge is further deepened by the fact that the interviewees come from a different background from the researcher and that both communicated in English, which was not the first language for either of them. This language barrier may have led to misinterpretation of some fragments. To address this, careful attention was given during the transcription and analysis phases, including clarifying ambiguous statements during the interviews whenever possible. Despite these efforts, it is important to acknowledge that some degree of bias and interpretation challenges is inherent in qualitative research, especially when dealing with cross-cultural communication and complex social phenomena.

Another limitation is the sample. Due to unforeseen circumstances and the strict timeline I had to follow to complete this project, I could only interview three people. While their contributions are invaluable and help shed light on this unexplored topic, the study would have benefited from having a bigger number of participants. This would have broadened the perspectives gathered and would have allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of women with green entrepreneurial businesses in Ethiopia.

Furthermore, and also related to the sample, all the people supported by Reach for Change have to fulfil the requirement of being social entrepreneurs. This means that their company had to have social objectives. Thus, before interviewing them, I knew that they prioritised social well-being, apart from environmental responsibility. It is important to acknowledge that green entrepreneurs, regardless of their gender, may not focus on the social aspects of the business just because they adopt a more caring approach regarding the environment. On the other hand, the people I interviewed allowed me to explore the possibilities of green businesses beyond taking care of the environment, which has the potential to improve the lives of people everywhere.

Lastly, for this study, a decision was made to only interview women and not to compare them with men. The reason for this was an aim to give their experiences sufficient weight and attention and not compare them to others'. However, one limitation arising from this is the inability to sometimes discern whether some practices or challenges are experienced more, or exclusively, by women. Female experiences should not be just compared to a usually biased and non-neutral standard. However, in some cases, finding an appropriate way of comparing them to others may be necessary to understand societal contexts better. This being said, the aim of this thesis research implied that there was no need to compare the experiences, but this could have provided a better understanding of the relatively unexplored field of green startups in Ethiopia.

5. Results and Discussion: Ethiopian Women's Green Entrepreneurship Through an Ecofeminist Lens

This section will present and analyse the findings gathered in the interviews, which were also triangulated with information found in the report *Catalyzing Green Business in Ethiopia*. The concepts outlined in the analytical framework provide a way to structure the information and focus on the most relevant findings.

The structure reads as follows: first, I will present an overview of the characteristics of the interviewees, to help contextualise their answers. This will be followed by a brief presentation of the report contents to introduce the relevant sections used in the analysis. After this, the concepts previously outlined in the analytical framework serve as the structure to present the results and analysis. The three of them have been divided into different subtopics adapted to the data obtained. This way, the insights from the

interviews and the report can be thematically compared and contrasted, highlighting individual experiences and general patterns.

5.1. Data Sources

5.1.1. Interviewee Profiles

By understanding the characteristics of the interviewees, particularly the ones related to their personal and family life, we can gain deeper insights into the factors that influence their entrepreneurial journeys. Their profiles provide more context to their responses, allowing us to better interpret how their backgrounds, support systems, and life circumstances have shaped their experiences and decisions. Personal situations will play a very important role in the respondent's strategies, motivations and outcomes in their businesses, which explains the need to delve deeper into this area before presenting the analysis of the findings.

I conducted interviews with three women from Ethiopia who had or have had entrepreneurial green businesses. Respondents A and C are in their twenties, living with their parents, and have graduated from their studies recently. They do not have any children or spouses. Respondent C is in her early forties and is married with two children. The younger ones have lived all their lives in the capital, Addis Ababa, while the other interviewee is originally from a rural area but moved to a city, where she lives now.

All three interviewees hold university degrees. The two who graduated recently pursued studies related to their entrepreneurial ventures, whereas the third shifted fields entirely when she started her business. Respondents B and C worked in private companies before becoming entrepreneurs, whereas the other interviewee has only worked in her own business after finishing her studies. The period in which they have been entrepreneurs is between 8 months and 5 years, at the time of the interviews. But Respondent A, who got her license 8 months ago, considers that she was exposed to this environment before graduating, around 4 years ago, and was already dedicating some time to it before actually becoming a full-time entrepreneur.

The businesses they own are making products using leather scraps (Respondent A), organic farming (Respondent B) and vertical farming (Respondent C). Participant A created her business with some of her friends, and this is the reason some of her answers are quoted using the first-person plural. Respondent C reported that her business is not

currently active for personal reasons. However, the questions were adapted so that she could share her experience from when she was active.

5.1.2. Evaluation Report - 'Catalyzing Green Business in Ethiopia'

The other element used in the analysis was a report facilitated by Reach for Change. This 33-page document is an external evaluation of one of Reach for Change's projects in Ethiopia that aimed to support green entrepreneurial businesses by providing the owners with training and education on the topic. It is the same type of programme that had previously supported the interviewees. The project lasted 18 months, from August 1st, 2021, to July 31st, 2023, while the evaluation for the report took place between mid-July to the end of August 2023. It aimed to understand to what extent the project achieved its intended results, review its impact, effectiveness and relevance, and identify lessons learned, good practices and potential scaling opportunities.

This programme consisted of two interconnected components, however, not all the entrepreneurs selected for the first one advanced into the second phase. The evaluation aimed to assess the project's impact and effectiveness in achieving its intended results, as well as to capture lessons learned from its two intervention components. The focus of the assessment is placed on the application of knowledge and skills acquired in the provided training to convert their ideas into minimum viable products and businesses, thereby generating employment.

The methodology followed mixed survey data and one-on-one interviews aimed to respond to six main evaluation questions. Based on these questions, different indicators were established, even though not all of them were relevant to this thesis. The data was collected from 110 participants from the first phase (out of 360 in total) and 45 participants from the second phase (out of 61 in total), as well as from 45 applicants who were not selected for the programme (out of a total of 60), for comparative purposes. Several participants in the evaluation were university students, and some project indicators were specifically designed to assess how successfully the programme supported them. The programme was aimed at men and women, and it was designed to achieve a balance in the participation between both genders. For this reason, the report also contains a section destined to evaluate women's effective participation.

5.2. Applying an Ecofeminist Framework to Explore Female Green Entrepreneurship in Ethiopia

5.2.1 Emancipation: Obstacles and Opportunities

Barriers faced due to gender and their consequences: Entrepreneurship has the potential to improve various aspects of women's lives in Ethiopia. However, obstacles for small businesses in general coupled with their situation challenge the emancipation potential of this activity.

When asked about the difficulties that they have faced during their entrepreneurial journey, the three of them mentioned the financial landscape. Respondents A and B mentioned specifically that getting a loan is complicated. Respondent A also highlighted that for this reason, forming a business is very hard, even for more experienced people. If it is not profitable within a short period, the entrepreneur will not be able to resist the conditions and continue. The shortage of funds also prevents her from doing comprehensive advertisement and promotion, hindering growth opportunities. Lastly, she mentioned the limited knowledge that startups have regarding their finance. Even if they can access it, they are unfamiliar with how to manage it properly. More coaching or other type of support is required.

Another problem faced is the bureaucracy. It was mentioned by Respondents A and C. Participant C reported that the legal processes that SMEs have to go through are complicated. The data from the programme report states that 84% of the survey respondents knew the requirements to register their businesses. However, it is also explained that, in Ethiopia, most small businesses operate as informal. Of the participants, only 22% registered their businesses. In the report evaluation, one entrepreneur shared that some of the purchases were done without receipts, so it was not possible to justify them when registering a business. This testimony adds to the reasons that the interviewees shared. Nevertheless, it is important to dive deeper into the most pressing challenges faced by entrepreneurs in this environment so they can register their businesses and access the possibilities that this entails.

The last two obstacles were only mentioned by one respondent each. They were the overall business environment, mentioned by Participant A, and the access to a working place, by Participant B. The business run by this respondent is an organic farm, and it can reflect how, depending on the nature of the business, the owners may face additional challenges.

Regarding the entrepreneurial environment, literature on green entrepreneurship highlights the situation in Ethiopia as a tough environment for launching small businesses, especially in the sustainable sector (Shkabatur, Bar-El, and Schwartz 2022). Furthermore, the policies implemented in this field do not ease things for women, as they do not take into consideration their specific situation (Wube and Atwal 2023). Respondent A did not provide any more information on this note, so it is hard to know if the specific challenges are the ones previously recognised.

The first two difficulties analysed here, access to financial support and bureaucracy, reflect the findings from previous research about the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the country (Hailemariam et al. 2019; Mersha and Sriram 2019; Nguse et al. 2022). Although the literature reviewed did not specifically address green businesses, insights from the interviews suggest that entrepreneurs in this field would encounter similar challenges. Two of the major obstacles for green businesses stated in the report were a shortage of access to finance and that the businesses were not able to generate enough revenue to be economically sustainable. This corresponds to difficulties faced by men and women in the sector.

The reviewed literature highlighted the main barriers for female entrepreneurs, however, the respondents' answers referred to their challenges in general as entrepreneurs. It could be the case that they do not realise that these issues are affecting them more because it can be difficult to acknowledge at an individual level. To dive deeper into the concrete adversities that women entrepreneurs face in their sustainable businesses, I asked them if they think that entering this industry is harder for women and why.

Respondent A stated that it is uncommon to start a business and to be financially independent as a woman. Furthermore, they may face harassment and other related issues. However, she also explains that, in her experience, in the capital city things are different and easier, as people are in general more open-minded. She also explains that if she got married, her life would be altered, and she would not be able to continue running her business. While her own family is supportive and open-minded, she is aware that many households have high expectations for women who marry into them. Apart from taking care of most or all the responsibilities in the household, this also means directly or indirectly expecting them to decrease your attention from any outside activity. Respondent B mentioned mainly that some families are unsupportive when women want to enter the business. Respondent C is aware that her situation is not the

same as many other women with children and more household obligations. She reported that, for most women, is very difficult to start their businesses when they have to take care of the family and the house. She also highlighted the importance of having an accepting and helping spouse for them to be entrepreneurs.

The three respondents mentioned varied factors, reflecting the entrepreneurs' different experiences, but they all touched upon the topic of family dynamics and gender roles. They reflect the social context in which women are embedded, as described in the literature (Hailemariam et al. 2019; Korzenevica et al. 2022; Wube and Atwal 2023). Having to deal with more difficulties restricts the potential of entrepreneurship to help women achieve a more emancipated state.

The report did not study the consequences of inequality for women who want to create a green entrepreneurial business. However, female representation is lower in all aspects studied, even if it is stated that the programme was planned to be gender balanced. To start with, women participating in the first and second phases only accounted for around 30% of the total. Among the students participating in the programme, this percentage is similar, but it increased to 40% in the second phase. Lastly, the green businesses studied provided numerous job opportunities, but only 27% of the employed were women. This may indicate that, even if all entrepreneurs face challenges in establishing their businesses, women may confront additional obstacles or/and the existing ones may affect them more.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the challenges mentioned by the green entrepreneurs are the same as some of the ones the literature pointed out for female entrepreneurs in general in Ethiopia. The social situation in the country presents a unique set of challenges shared by all women entrepreneurs. The nature of their businesses is unlikely to make these challenges differ because societal norms impact all women, regardless of their industry or business type.

Contextual situation and importance of green entrepreneurship for women: Some interviewees shared their views about the importance of green entrepreneurship in their context and for themselves. Respondent A explained knowing about the large amount of waste produced by tanneries in Ethiopia, which was one of the things that inspired her business idea. In a developing economy, according to our Respondent: “entrepreneurship is not a choice, but something we must do” (March 2024. Respondent A). On the other hand, the opportunities, in her opinion, are even greater than those in

developed countries. Furthermore, if someone brings something different and useful, it is perceived as a very valuable contribution. Regarding the potential for personal emancipation, Respondent A mentioned that, in this context, introducing new, different, or valuable ideas leads people to regard your input highly. The existence of more pressing problems in those contexts, makes people want to strive to solve them; “if things are very comfortable, there is nothing you need to do” (*March 2024. Respondent A*).

She thinks that people are expected to take initiative and use their potential to achieve great things. Her context is very supportive, as mentioned before, but it could also be the case that because she created her own business, and at a very young age, she was able to realise her potential in this field (Cummings and Lopez 2022; Korzenevica et al. 2022). She has high ambitions to grow her brand and contribute to making Ethiopia a great supplier of leather products.

The other two interviewees focused more on the reactions from their families or other close people. Respondent B shared that, when becoming an entrepreneur, she was understood by some of the people around her. Based on her answer, it is unclear if those people changed their minds when a woman close to them pursued that career if they were already supportive and simply validated her choice, or if she meant anything else. This could either imply that creating her business generated a change in some of the people around her, or that they were already willing to accept it (Nguse et al. 2022).

Respondent C shared that her family supported her business and even provided her with land and other resources, also showing that family support can play a crucial role in facilitating entrepreneurial ventures. This assistance not only shows the importance of family support but also highlights the potential for social change and emancipation when traditional gender roles are challenged and supportive environments are cultivated for women entrepreneurs.

While the report provides valuable insights into various aspects of the programme and its outcomes, it lacks data on the family situations of the participants. This absence can be explained by the nature of such information, which is sensitive and not easily quantifiable. However, family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the experiences and opportunities of women entrepreneurs. Therefore, while not captured in the report, understanding the family context is essential to assess the situation of women participants in the programme and tackle challenges derived from it.

As already mentioned, entrepreneurship in general, as well as environmentally aware businesses are particularly important in developing contexts. They can help women have more resources and improve how they are regarded by their close surroundings. On the other hand, the contributions of creating sustainable businesses present a great path for the development of the countries. For instance, Respondent A wanting Ethiopia to be a representative in the exportation of recycled leather products shows that fostering green entrepreneurship can not only promote economic growth but also place the country as a leader in sustainable practices. This can indicate the potential for significant environmental and economic benefits that arise from empowering green entrepreneurs and from incorporating diverse perspectives into the field.

In alignment with these observations, the report highlights that the programme is aligned with the approach championed by the African Development Bank (ADB). This approach states to be aiming to promote green growth by addressing development challenges without depleting Africa's natural capital. The ADB also wants to ensure that economies and livelihoods become less vulnerable to climate change and other environmental, social, and economic risks. This shows how important is to adopt sustainable alternatives that can provide multifaceted solutions in developing countries.

If countries develop using environmentally conscious practices, they can foster a new relationship with the environment, ensuring that initiatives remain sustainable over time and adapt to changing circumstances. The environment would eventually cease to be viewed as a resource to exploit, but rather something to grow along (Chircop and Keddy 2003; Mukurazhizha and Matanga 2023). Additionally, and as in one of the examples above, these practices enable the creation of wealth from waste, promoting economic growth while preserving natural resources.

Emancipation through entrepreneurship and the role of support systems: When asked why they had chosen this profession, Respondents A and B also shared how becoming a green entrepreneur has had positive impacts on their finances. Interviewee B said that in her previous employment, she was earning a small amount of money and that this was the main reason for her to choose this path. Participant A said that she became an entrepreneur to be more economically stable and fulfil her needs. She aimed to be financially independent and stated: "I want to be able to live my own life" (*March 2024. Respondent A*).

Their thoughts reflect the potential that this economic activity can have on women, particularly in countries like Ethiopia (Cummings and Lopez 2022). By managing their businesses, they could become close to economic equality. They could also be freed from economic constraints or potential control by other members of the family due to a lack of funds (Al-Dajani et al. 2015:716).

Respondent A also mentioned that, when her business receives grants or another type of external funding, she has had the chance to try new things, make unique products, and introduce themselves to new customers. In general, smaller venues do not allow for it, which also hinders their growth. Her response highlights the potential that these businesses have when properly supported.

When evaluating green entrepreneurs in general, the report shows that 40% of participants were currently employed thanks to being part of the first phase of the project. This percentage increases to 83 when assessing the participants of the second phase. Furthermore, 31% of these participants reported a rise in their income that ranged between 10% and 50% after participating in the programme. On the contrary, 89% of the applicants that were not selected were currently unemployed. This reflects the potential of entrepreneurship to improve people's lives. Nonetheless, the report did not make a distinction between men and women in the percentages, so it is not possible to know if they benefited equally from the programme.

This data, coupled with the interviewees' responses shows how supporting entrepreneurship can improve lives and help people achieve economic independence. In a country with such an unfavourable entrepreneurial environment, effective assistance through other means can help unlock entrepreneurship's potential.

The interviewees' answers showed that achieving emancipation through entrepreneurship is not limited to the economic aspect. Respondent A shared that, when you start a business, a lot of people want to work with you and show their support for what you are doing. Interviewee B highlighted that this profession has made her "impress everyone" (*March 2024. Respondent B*), feel strong and know that she is creating a better future for her children. She also recognised how one of the things that made her journey easier was having moral support. On the other hand, the report data did not cover the personal improvements that green entrepreneurship brought to the participants, as the metrics and objectives tend to be quantitative.

Respondent C got to meet with different people who, in her words, "(...) had cool ideas and amazing things on their minds to change the world" (*May 2024. Respondent*

C). Being able to network with like-minded people has felt very rewarding for her. Furthermore, getting into the NGO support programme allowed her to understand more about sustainability and business in general. She was able to create a market strategy, a targeted customer, and make her business more sustainable. In line with her answers, the report showed that 98% of the programme participants stated that the training provided helped them gain new skills, knowledge, and interest in green entrepreneurship.

These answers show the multifaceted potential of entrepreneurship. Respondent A's answer may imply that people are interested in sustainable businesses and are willing to support startups in the field. Alternatively, they may see entrepreneurship as a promising path to economic growth and social change, reflecting a broader acceptance and encouragement of innovative business ventures, even when these ventures challenge pre-established social norms (Atarah et al. 2023; Cummings and Lopez 2022; Korzenevica et al. 2022). The insights from Respondent B show how she felt more empowered by gaining social recognition and this empowerment is translated into a better quality of life for her family (Mersha and Sriram 2019). She also showed the importance of having a supportive network and feeling encouraged by the people around them (Korzenevica et al. 2022). Lastly, participant C revealed her personal growth, and her answer, coupled with the report statements, reflects the unlocked potential of this demographic when properly supported (Cummings and Lopez 2022).

5.2.2. Navigating Otherness: Work and Life Experiences

Entrepreneurial otherness: In a dual worldview, entrepreneurs are often considered as the alternative to more traditional or common jobs. This perception creates a distinct sense of 'otherness' for entrepreneurs, positioning them outside the conventional workforce and making them harder to fit into societal norms (Czarniawska and Hopfl 2005:53). This situation is especially pronounced in the case of female entrepreneurs, which will be analysed in the following section. Here we will explore briefly the general concept of entrepreneurial otherness, as some of the responses from the interviews touched on this topic even when not specifically asked about it.

When explaining her journey at the end of her studies, Respondent A explained that she was quite unsure of following this path. The reason was that she knew that forming her own business was very difficult in the Ethiopian context. Furthermore, all her life she had been told that the path to follow was to graduate, apply for a scholarship, move

out, and study a second degree in a Western or Asian country, which is collectively assumed to be how: “as anyone that wants to live a good life” (*March 2024. Respondent A*). According to her answers, this was the common way of thinking in Ethiopia. She did not indicate the last step, but she may have implied that this process was aimed at securing a well-paying job. However, testimonies from people she knows made her realise that being employed implied hard conditions even in more developed countries. Thus, as she put it, “entrepreneurship is a good thing” (*March 2024. Respondent A*). She soon started seeing that it is not necessarily the best to do what you always have been told.

Even if it is an alternative that has brought more independence and other positive consequences for the interviewees, they recognise the challenges that this choice implies. When asked about the difficulties faced, Respondent C highlighted that entrepreneurs face many obstacles in Ethiopia but also everywhere else. One example of this was shared by Interviewee A. Given the lack of funding that the ventures face and the high interest rates, this business model implies that you cannot make any mistakes. This results in not being able to think freely and be creative, which constrains the added value that you can bring as a business. Ultimately, this leads to an inability to grow, inspire change in others, or transform the lives of the people around you.

The way the interviewees describe entrepreneurship reflects the common perception of this economic activity. There is often a disregard for it, viewing it as less favourable compared to more traditional and structured approaches, as suggested by the prevailing opinions described by Interviewee A. This can exacerbate the discrimination towards the people who may not be able to be employed in regular jobs and for whom entrepreneurship can be a good alternative to improve their situation. By allowing people from different backgrounds to contribute to the economy, we not only provide them with opportunities but also introduce new perspectives to societal problems that may not have been considered before (Anderson and Ojediran 2021:305).

Lastly, otherness affects the very existence of green entrepreneurial businesses. The system is not designed to give support to these ventures, making their journey more difficult. As mentioned earlier, this type of activity entails economic and bureaucratic difficulties in general. The report states that a very low share of small businesses is registered, and this number is even lower among the businesses that did not receive support from the NGO. Entrepreneurs also face difficulties in getting enough finance to get established and continue. The result is that a lot of them are not able to survive, even

when given support from external sources. Respondent C highlights their importance but, even if this activity is gaining recognition, especially in contexts like Ethiopia, she also claims that there are not that many green entrepreneurial businesses or ventures in general. The underlying reasons could be a lack of support for these companies, combined with the prevailing belief that the environment is not a priority.

Consequences of female otherness: The dichotomy that distinguishes men and women has repercussions in all areas, including entrepreneurship. These are also further exacerbated by more unequal social contexts. When asked if they think that being a woman makes creating a business more difficult, Respondent A highlighted the different expectations and the greater negative consequences when they are not fulfilled. She revealed that, as a businesswoman in her country, you are expected to be more communicative. In an environment where founders must actively reach out to customers, clients, partners, and employees to understand and fulfil their needs and expectations, this creates an additional obstacle for women. Furthermore, she explained that, if people perceive you as fearful or that you lack confidence, it will be very hard to achieve your objectives and advance your business.

Another example concerns household duties. Respondent A explained that, as a woman, you are expected to be the main or sole responsible, as already mentioned. However, apart from being an impediment to work and causing more stress (De Clercq, Kaciak, and Thongpapanl 2022), which she recognises, she also considers that having to handle both situations gives women more strength to confront what happens in the business. This perspective transforms the predominant ideas in the literature, acknowledging that balancing two time- and energy-consuming realities leads to a unique form of empowerment. It also challenges the criticized view of what is success, because it redefines achievement through the lens of resilience and multifaceted capability, rather than through traditional, singular metrics of business performance (James et al. 2022:439).

The report findings presented mostly aggregated data from men and women, even if there are some statistics regarding participation or employment opportunities, among others, in which the percentage of each gender is stated. However, as the programme aims to be gender-sensitive, there is a section that conducts a separate analysis of this topic. Among the participants of the program, almost all the surveyed agreed that equal opportunities were given to men and women. Nevertheless, around half of them stated

that the training did not address women's needs and challenges. The evaluation also found that the targets were not disaggregated by gender.

Considering the differences between the people who are going to be supported by these kinds of programmes is fundamental to achieving meaningful assistance. It is important as well to find a balance between seeing women as in need of special help because they perform worse and ignoring gender differences. This is challenging, but it comes down to recognising the different situations, needs, and ambitions of women, as well as of other marginalised groups, instead of evaluating them based on not-so-neutral targets (Czarniawska and Hopfl 2005:66).

Different considerations of women's ventures: This last section will provide a couple of examples based on personal experiences of how entrepreneurial ventures run by women are treated differently.

Respondent B shared how some families are unsupportive when women create a green startup. In her case, some members of the family saw it as inconceivable that she worked at a farm while holding a university degree. This is tied to the already discussed predominant view that people should follow a more conventional path. Many times, the prevailing stereotypes in Ethiopia discourage the involvement of women in entrepreneurship, as it is seen as incompatible with their societal roles (Cummings and Lopez 2022; Hailemariam et al. 2019). It could also be the case that, even though all paths can make meaningful contributions to society, careers involving a university degree have more prestige. However, this shows that some people still fail to realise the importance of green businesses and the benefits they bring to the whole society. Furthermore, entrepreneurial ventures can provide more flexibility to the workers, and, in the case of women, may also allow them to fulfil the household expectations placed on them (De Clercq, Kaciak, and Thongpapanl 2022).

On the other hand, interviewee A shared two positive experiences. Firstly, she narrated that she presented a business proposal with some of her friends when their university made a call for projects. They were the only female team, and the institution was happy about it. When sharing her experience as a woman in the field in more general terms, she also said that she has encountered a lot of people who admire their efforts. People also want to support them, and this is something that was not happening some years ago. Literature points out that the mentality in Ethiopia, and especially in

urban areas, where she lives, is shifting (Cummings and Lopez 2022; Korzenevica et al. 2022), and this testimony reflects it.

Considering the different treatment of ventures run by women has both positive and negative outcomes. Stereotypes can discourage women from entrepreneurship, but there is also a shift in mentality and increased support for entrepreneurs. Striving for equality while leveraging these positive changes can help create a more inclusive and dynamic economic landscape.

5.2.3. Care-oriented Practices as Opportunities, Enablers and Barriers

Adoption by women in their businesses: Research suggests that women are more prone to adopt practices aligned with a caring approach. In this section, I will present the findings, which both provide examples in line with this assumption but also challenge it.

When explaining how she became an entrepreneur, Respondent A shared that she and her friends were very impressed when they knew about some people who were making sanitary pads from waste materials. Before starting her green business, she had tried to create a different venture that was not focused on being environmentally conscious. However, she was not able to make it profitable enough so it could resist over time. When the opportunity came to develop another business, she wanted to change some parts of the system to have a stable business. For that reason, she explained, she made her company green. She also considered this approach allowing her to have “a chance to create a good life for others” (*March 2024. Respondent A*).

Her answer reflects how she is interested in adopting this approach as a strategic response to previous failures. It also highlights her innovative mindset and willingness to adapt to new business models that prioritise environmental responsibility while seeking profitability. This transition demonstrates a conscious effort to align her entrepreneurial activities with environmentally sustainable practices, acknowledging both the economic and ethical advantages of green business. The importance given by her to these ventures is also shown when she talks about other people in her position. She said that, even if the environment is very unfavourable, many people are willing to put themselves into an uncomfortable situation to benefit their close community and, ultimately, the greater good. Furthermore, it is an example of how green businesses have the potential to achieve greater economic stability and long-term sustainability compared to traditional ventures (Järnberg et al. 2018).

On that same note, Respondent B shared throughout the interview her awareness of the environment and her interest in nature. Her choice of creating a farming business that grows organic products comes from her acknowledgement that these products are more environmentally sustainable. When asked about whether more men or women engage in sustainable businesses, she shared that women are significantly involved, both directly and indirectly. This reflects the claim that women are more likely to adopt this mindset (Kutlu and Ngoasong 2023:2).

On the contrary, Respondent C explained how in Ethiopia women in entrepreneurial businesses are underrepresented, and this translates to green businesses as well. This contradicts the previous statement. However, the reason may be that Interviewee B has had contact with a lot of women interested in her business. As mentioned earlier in this section, Respondent B shared that women were very implicated in her sustainable farming venture. She also explained that men, in general, were rather uninvolved. On the other hand, Respondent B provided a broader overview of the data she is familiar with from her country. It is coherent that, given the difficulties that Ethiopian women have when incorporating into the work market, they are not greatly represented, even in businesses that prioritise social and economic responsibilities. However, despite women-owned businesses being less predominant among green entrepreneurial ventures, the percentage may vary depending on the sector, as some are more accessible or appealing to women.

The report data on this topic is non-existent, as it aimed to cover the achievement of the posed indicators, so it focused mainly on offering quantitative data. Care-oriented practices are not mentioned, nor this approach was adopted to conduct the evaluation. However, as it has a section to assess women's participation and inclusion, there is some data to complement these last testimonies from the interviewees.

As stated before, the participation of women in the project is very low. This is in line with the answer of Respondent C: women are less represented in entrepreneurship in general, and, therefore, in the green startup field. This could imply mainly two things. Firstly, and based on both sources of data, women face a lot of difficulties when taking on entrepreneurship, and some are worsened based on their gender because of the social situation in the country. This means that, even if they may be the ones more interested in creating businesses that prioritise social and environmental responsibility, their situation does not allow them to achieve success in this field. The other possibility is that they are indeed less interested in these types of businesses, so their presence is

lower than men's. If we analyse this situation considering the rest of my findings, the first option is more likely to be the case. However, more research is needed to uncover the reasons and unlock the potential of this activity by creating adequate support measures for the people who are interested in it.

The ethics of care approach did not only appear during the interviews regarding the environment. When asked about the number of employed people in her business, Respondent A was concerned about having a stable situation before giving opportunities to others. According to her, "You cannot care for others if you are not standing on your own two feet" (*March 2024. Respondent A*). She also shared that she is in the process of recognising how she can include other people in her business "in a good way" (*March 2024. Respondent A*). Respondent B shared that she has several women employed on the farm. Her experience showed that they are more interested than men in farming, so she is happy to have them as her employees.

The role of caregivers and work-life balance: Care practices can interact in several ways with women's possibilities of starting an entrepreneurial business in Ethiopia. As explained before, I interviewed three women. Two of them had graduated recently from their studies and did not have a spouse or children (Respondents A and C), while Respondent B is a mother. Along with their answers, they shared their experiences on how care practices play different roles in starting and maintaining their green businesses.

Women in Ethiopia are expected to be primarily responsible for household activities, and this may affect the amount of time and effort they can allocate to other activities. It may also create more pressure on them or increase the stress they are under (Cummings and Lopez 2022; De Clercq, Kaciak, and Thongpapanl 2022; Hailemariam et al. 2019).

Respondent C shared that being an entrepreneur is a type of working lifestyle that fits her, as she has more flexibility. In her case, the support from her family has allowed her to focus on her business. However, she recognises that, for most women, it is hard to start their own ventures when they have numerous household duties.

On the other hand, and challenging this view, Respondent B explained that she has plenty of time to take care of her children as well as devote time to herself. In her opinion, people in her country have plenty of time and, if they feel that they do not, it is because they are not organising themselves well enough. This testimony contradicts the reviewed literature as well as the other interviewees' replies. Several reasons may

explain this. Firstly, she may have a supportive family network that allows her to attend her business because she has fewer obligations in other areas. Another reason may be that her business is not very demanding for her in particular, as she has several people employed, or because she is better established in the market than the other respondents. There could be other underlying reasons not explained by the research done in this thesis. Anyhow, the reason is unclear and would require delving deeper, also to understand how others can achieve this situation.

Lastly, Respondent A feels that she is not balancing her life and work. Especially when she was studying, she felt that she had to do many things, and it was hard to juggle everything. She acknowledges that one particularly important reason why she is succeeding is her mom. In her words, “Thank God I have a mom. A very strong mother that never gets tired of supporting us” (*March 2024. Respondent A*). The care work that her mother carries out has allowed Respondent A to create her company. Equally important to recognising the contributions of women entrepreneurs is to acknowledge the often-invisible work of people who may not have had the opportunity to work but enabled others to create meaningful change for themselves and their communities.

There is no data on the report about this topic, which also suggests the need for understanding better women’s situation. This can allow them to know more about their obligations or family situation, as this will affect their opportunities to participate in entrepreneurship. It is also important to acknowledge the role of their network in facilitating or hindering their incorporation into the workforce to learn more about each person’s possibilities and need for support.

Green entrepreneurship outcomes and caring for others: The objectives of the entrepreneurs with their businesses go beyond economic profitability, and this is reflected in their communities in diverse ways.

Respondent’s A business is in a growing phase, but she wants to reach more stability to be able to provide more jobs. Also, as she puts it, “I don’t want to say a job, but an opportunity” (*March 2024. Respondent A*). She also wants to focus on employing women and youth, as they are usually the ones having more difficulties being incorporated into the job market. For the first ones as well, she highlighted how they may also work from home, and this makes it easier to take care of the household. Lastly, she mentioned how entrepreneurship allows them to have their income and be economically independent from their husbands or other male members of the family.

Data from the report show how the eleven supported businesses help to create job opportunities for 154 participants and non-participants of the programme. Even if this is a considerable amount, the programme aimed to create around 226 new jobs. This is likely to have been due to economic and logistic problems, such as those mentioned before, rather than a disinterest of the owners in helping others. The data is not disaggregated by gender, and it would have been useful to have seen the data this way, and to pursue the reasons why men or women created more jobs, or if this number was balanced. Qualitative data about the participant's backgrounds and interests in combination with more specific indicators could have helped clarify why targets were not being met.

During the interview, Respondent B was more focused on the environmental consequences of her business, but she also mentioned the social repercussions. She recognises that green entrepreneurship in her country is a required way forward with benefits in diverse areas. Her aim with her business was to create a cleaner environment and increase the availability of organic products for society, as currently there is not a broad selection of foods. She would also like to export her products in the future, making Ethiopia a great seller of these among other countries, and giving access to them to as many people as possible. Furthermore, she is concerned about health issues. She is aware of the relationship between food and health, so she wants everyone to have quality ingredients.

Regarding existing benefits that her business has originated, organic farming can help in aspects such as preventing hazardous waste in the water or avoiding the use of disruptive chemicals. Apart from this, she explained how other farmers had been inspired by what she was doing and are implementing organic farming techniques.

Respondent C also had the objective of increasing food availability with her business. She explained that most fruits and vegetables are produced far from the city, so she wants the urban population to be able to afford them more. She is also focused on growing and being able to provide job opportunities for her community. What she also mentioned that none of the others did is that, as Ethiopia is such a greatly populated country, creating significant change and impact there affects a great share of Africa as well. She acknowledged this when asked about the importance of green entrepreneurship in her country. She also recognised the importance of this activity in the face of climate change, not only in Ethiopia, but everywhere else, to create a better environment.

When asked about improvements in her community, she expressed that there are no easily noticeable changes in short periods. However, she explained that she started collecting used plastic bottles from her house to build the infrastructure for the vertical farms. She said that it is a small impact but is the one she was able to see. This will also be scalable, as she is planning to educate people so they can produce their own fruits and vegetables, while also reusing plastic bottles, with the consequent positive impacts on the environment as well.

Respondents B and C highlighted the fact that their businesses bring better and more sustainable products to their communities. The report also studied the number of people or households that had access to the green businesses' products or job opportunities. Around 2300 people benefitted from them and 56% of them were women. The report does not state how many people gained access to the products or jobs separately, which would have helped interpret the trends and the potential of these green businesses. The fact that more beneficiaries are women could be due to several reasons, but our findings may point to two. Firstly, women have more difficulties entering the labour market and have jobs that require them to be away from their homes. Entrepreneurship provides a different and, in most cases, more flexible path, and as Respondent A shared, allows them to work from home and have a more adaptable schedule. This means that many women may be available or more interested in being part of these companies. Regarding the accessibility of sustainable products, it may be the case that some of them, such as the vegetables produced by organic or vertical farming, ease their daily work of getting food and other necessities for their homes. Women are usually the main or solely responsible of households in Ethiopia, so creating a way of easing the accessibility of domestic products will benefit them more.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed to provide preliminary learnings and identify paths for research and practice on the topic of women entrepreneurs with green businesses in Ethiopia. Using ecofeminism as a framework, two research questions were examined:

1. In which ways does gender inequality shape the experiences of women entrepreneurs with green business in Ethiopia?

2. *What insights can be gathered from the experiences of Ethiopian female green entrepreneurs about the possibilities to create beneficial outcomes for themselves, for society, and for the environment?*

Regarding the first question, gender inequality shapes the experiences of Ethiopian women entrepreneurs with green businesses by adding layers of discrimination and obstacles. In the country, business owners from this field have to deal with a difficult entrepreneurial environment and a government that fails to prioritise climate change in its strategy. This may add up to the particular challenges that women endure when wanting to start any kind of small business. Gender inequality hinders their possibilities of success and emancipation, limiting green entrepreneurship's potential to improve their lives and benefit society. Women are also often perceived as 'the other,' facing higher standards and having their contributions overlooked.

This thesis also wanted to gain a preliminary understanding of the opportunities for Ethiopian female green entrepreneurs to create positive outcomes for themselves, society, and the environment. Regarding personal changes, green entrepreneurship can allow women to achieve financial and individual emancipation, gain societal recognition, and increase control over their lives. It also has the potential to provide an essential perspective on developing countries' problems, offering an easier path to economic independence, especially for women, and fostering a better relationship with the environment.

Female green entrepreneurship in Ethiopia is still a rather underexplored topic. More research is needed, using approaches that allow for a better understanding of women's motivations, social situations, and contexts. Understanding the challenges they face is key to developing effective support. New and more tailored methods, inspired by these ideas are needed in practice for support programmes and mechanisms. Data should be disaggregated by gender, not treating female entrepreneurs as 'the other', but to understand where there are imbalances between men and women to identify the consequences and tackle the inequalities. Furthermore, success metrics could also reflect people's fulfilment and aspirations, instead of focusing mainly on financial goals. Lastly, understanding how green entrepreneurship in Ethiopia can benefit different demographics, especially marginalised groups, is an important path to follow in future research and practice. This way, a great share of the country's population will improve their life conditions while adapting to climate change impacts.

7. References

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8. Appendix – Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me about yourself?
2. Could you tell me why did you become an entrepreneur?
 - 2.1. What was your occupation before?
 - 2.2. For how long have you been an entrepreneur?
3. What has made your entrepreneurial journey difficult?
 - 3.1. Do you think it is more difficult for women? Why?
4. If anything, what things have made your journey easy?
5. Can you tell me about your work-life balance, how do you manage your family obligations with your work? Do you think that your job is flexible and allows you to have time for your personal life? How/ how not?
 - 5.1. What do you think are the consequences of having to deal with family obligations for women who want to take on entrepreneurship or who are entrepreneurs?
6. What type of business do you have? Why did you choose that one?
7. What are your primary objectives with your business beyond financial profitability? Why are these important to you?
8. What is your perspective on the importance/role of sustainable entrepreneurship in Ethiopia?
 - 8.1. Are more men or women engaged? Why do you think it is that way?
9. Could you share with me the positive impacts that sustainable entrepreneurship has brought to your life, and whether you have observed any similar or other benefits within your close community?
10. Do you have people employed in your business or are you planning to employ people in the future? How was/will be the selection process?