



STRATEGIES FOR TRANSITIONING TO A GREEN ECONOMY FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

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Abstract: The transition to a green economy is increasingly becoming a priority for sustainable development, particularly for small businesses. This article explores effective strategies that small enterprises can adopt to align with green economic principles, reduce environmental impact, and enhance competitiveness. It examines the critical role of policy support, innovative financing mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives in facilitating this transition. The study highlights practical approaches such as adopting energy-efficient technologies, leveraging renewable energy sources, and integrating circular economy principles into business models. Case studies and best practices from various sectors are analyzed to demonstrate the economic and ecological benefits of green transformations. By addressing challenges such as financial constraints and knowledge gaps, the article provides actionable recommendations to empower small businesses in their journey toward sustainability, fostering long-term growth and resilience in a rapidly changing global economy.

Keywords: Green economy, small businesses, sustainability, circular economy, energy efficiency, renewable energy, innovative financing, policy support, environmental impact, sustainable development.

Introduction

The imperative for a global transition to a green economy has intensified, driven by escalating environmental challenges and the recognition of finite natural resources. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which constitute approximately 90% of businesses worldwide and contribute significantly to employment and economic output, are pivotal in this transformation. In emerging economies, SMEs provide about 60% of jobs and contribute around 40% to the gross domestic product (GDP).

Despite their economic significance, many SMEs have yet to implement comprehensive decarbonization strategies. A report by the British Business Bank indicates that 76% of UK small businesses lack a formal plan to reduce their carbon emissions. This inertia is concerning, given that SMEs are responsible for approximately 43–53% of the UK's business-related greenhouse gas emissions.

The barriers hindering SMEs from embracing sustainable practices are multifaceted. Financial constraints are paramount; the upfront capital required for green technologies and



energy-efficient infrastructure can be prohibitive. Additionally, a significant portion of SMEs report a lack of information and expertise regarding effective decarbonization methods. Regulatory uncertainties and inadequate governmental support further exacerbate these challenges, creating an environment where small businesses struggle to prioritize sustainability.

Conversely, the transition to a green economy presents substantial opportunities for SMEs. Consumer demand for sustainable products and services is on the rise, with 94% of consumers globally advocating for a shift towards environmentally friendly practices. SMEs that proactively adopt green strategies can enhance their competitiveness, access new markets, and achieve cost savings through improved operational efficiencies.

This article delves into the strategies that SMEs can employ to navigate the complexities of transitioning to a green economy. By examining policy frameworks, financial instruments, and capacity-building initiatives, we aim to provide a comprehensive guide for small businesses aspiring to integrate sustainability into their core operations. Through the adoption of energy-efficient technologies, utilization of renewable energy sources, and implementation of circular economy principles, SMEs can not only mitigate environmental impacts but also secure long-term economic resilience.

Literature Review

The transition of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to a green economy has garnered significant scholarly attention, reflecting its complexity and multifaceted nature. SMEs, accounting for approximately 99.7% of businesses in the UK, are responsible for about 60% of total carbon emissions and 43% of serious industrial pollution incidents.

Barriers to Green Transition:

Research indicates that SMEs encounter several obstacles in adopting sustainable practices. A study focusing on SMEs in Ohio, USA, identified key barriers such as limited financial resources, lack of information, and insufficient expertise in environmental management. Additionally, the perception of environmental regulations as burdensome and the absence of consumer demand for green products further impede the transition.

Drivers of Sustainable Practices:

Conversely, various drivers encourage SMEs to implement green practices. Market competitiveness, regulatory compliance, and corporate social responsibility are significant motivators. A systematic literature review highlighted that SMEs are increasingly recognizing the strategic importance of sustainability, viewing it as a means to enhance their market position and meet evolving consumer preferences.

Strategies for Green Transition:

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The literature proposes several strategies to facilitate SMEs' transition to a green economy. Adoption of energy-efficient technologies, integration of circular economy principles, and development of green products are among the recommended approaches. A study on European SMEs emphasized the role of green jobs and skills in implementing resource efficiency and circular economy practices, suggesting that investment in employee training and development is crucial.

Policy Support and Financial Mechanisms:

Policy interventions and financial support mechanisms are critical in overcoming the barriers faced by SMEs. The European Union's Green Deal, for instance, aims to provide funding and resources to assist SMEs in their green transition. However, concerns have been raised about the administrative burden associated with compliance, which may disproportionately affect smaller enterprises.

The existing body of literature underscores the complex interplay of barriers and drivers influencing SMEs' transition to a green economy. While challenges such as financial constraints and regulatory complexities persist, strategic initiatives supported by robust policy frameworks and targeted financial mechanisms can facilitate this transition. Further empirical research is necessary to explore sector-specific strategies and the effectiveness of various support mechanisms in promoting sustainable practices among SMEs.

Results

The empirical analysis of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) transitioning to a green economy reveals a nuanced landscape characterized by both significant advancements and persistent challenges.

Adoption of Resource Efficiency Measures:

A comprehensive survey conducted by the European Commission in 2021 indicated that 89% of SMEs have implemented at least one action to enhance resource efficiency. These actions encompass a range of initiatives, including waste reduction, energy efficiency improvements, and the adoption of sustainable materials. Notably, 24% of SMEs reported having a concrete plan to reduce their carbon footprint, while 32% have developed green products or services.

Environmental Impact of SMEs:

Despite these efforts, SMEs continue to contribute substantially to environmental degradation. In Europe, SMEs are responsible for approximately 40% of business sector greenhouse gas emissions, with variations across countries; for instance, in Slovenia, this figure reaches 56.6%. In the United Kingdom, SMEs account for about 60% of total carbon emissions and 43% of serious industrial pollution incidents.



Barriers to Green Transition:

The transition to sustainable practices is impeded by several barriers. Financial constraints are prominent, as evidenced by the fact that while 73% of public and private financial institutions offer green finance to SMEs, only 2.8% of SMEs have applied for such financing in the past three years. Additionally, regulatory complexities and administrative burdens associated with compliance to environmental standards pose significant challenges, particularly for smaller enterprises.

Drivers of Sustainable Practices:

Market competitiveness and consumer demand emerge as significant drivers for SMEs to adopt sustainable practices. A study by the World Economic Forum highlights that emphasizing sustainability strategies and demonstrating progress on environmental goals can be pivotal in attracting talent and enhancing brand reputation. Furthermore, the alignment with international frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, provides SMEs with a structured approach to integrate sustainability into their operations.

Case Studies of Successful Green Transitions:

Several SMEs have successfully navigated the transition to sustainable practices. For instance, a case study from the National Small Business Environmental Program illustrates how a small manufacturing firm reduced its hazardous waste generation by 50% through process optimization and employee training. Another example involves a textile SME that implemented a closed-loop water recycling system, resulting in a 60% reduction in water consumption and significant cost savings.

Policy Support and Financial Mechanisms:

Policy interventions play a crucial role in facilitating the green transition of SMEs. The European Union's SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe acknowledges the challenges faced by SMEs and proposes actions under three pillars: capacity-building and support, reducing regulatory burden, and improving market access. Additionally, financial mechanisms such as green loans and grants are essential to overcome the financial barriers impeding SMEs' adoption of sustainable practices.

The findings underscore a growing awareness and implementation of sustainable practices among SMEs. However, significant challenges persist, particularly in terms of financial constraints and regulatory complexities. Addressing these barriers through targeted policy support, innovative financial instruments, and capacity-building initiatives is imperative to accelerate the transition of SMEs to a green economy.



Conclusion

The transition of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to a green economy is both a critical necessity and a complex endeavor. SMEs, accounting for approximately 99.7% of businesses in the UK, are responsible for about 60% of total carbon emissions and 43% of serious industrial pollution incidents. Despite these significant environmental impacts, only about one-third of SMEs are environmentally engaged, with considerable variations across countries.

The barriers to this transition are multifaceted, encompassing financial constraints, limited access to information, and regulatory complexities. For instance, while 73% of public and private financial institutions offer green finance to SMEs, only 2.8% of SMEs have applied for such financing in the past three years. Additionally, a lack of skilled personnel and technological challenges further impede the adoption of sustainable practices.

Conversely, the drivers for SMEs to adopt sustainable practices include market competitiveness, regulatory compliance, and corporate social responsibility. A study by the World Economic Forum highlights that emphasizing sustainability strategies and demonstrating progress on environmental goals can be pivotal in attracting talent and enhancing brand reputation.

Policy interventions and financial support mechanisms are critical in overcoming the barriers faced by SMEs. Governments across OECD countries are actively supporting the green transition of SMEs, including by developing environmental regulations that are fit for SMEs and by helping SMEs to become more energy efficient, adopt circular business models, develop new green skills, and tap into the opportunities offered by sustainable finance.

In conclusion, while significant challenges persist, the transition to a green economy presents substantial opportunities for SMEs. Addressing these barriers through targeted policy support, innovative financial instruments, and capacity-building initiatives is imperative to accelerate the transition of SMEs to a green economy. By adopting sustainable practices, SMEs can not only mitigate environmental impacts but also secure long-term economic resilience.

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