

POWER

# Empowered Women, Transforming Self and Communities




**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**industree**

Case Study Booklet 2021-22



The Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) initiative is built around three pillars and aims to promote women's economic empowerment across the globe. POWER is one of the initiative to achieve the WEE.

### **Workforce Development**

Advocates for workforce development, vocational and skills training to increase women's labor force participation.

### **Entrepreneurship & Finance**

Supports expanding access to capital, markets, and networks to help women grow their small businesses.

### **Enabling Environment**

Seeks to remove legal, regulatory, and cultural barriers that inhibit women's equal participation in the economy.

# Producer-Owned Women Enterprises (POWER)

**Industree's implementation of POWER project has touched the lives and livelihoods of women through the three pillars of Workforce Development, Entrepreneurship and Finance, and Enabling Environment.**

**Empowerment and development endeavours under POWER has encompassed women's needs, aspiration, access to critical resources such as own labour and finances, decision-making power, both at home and workplace. The initiative, in close partnership with USAID has created ripple effects on Industree's commitment towards actioning Gender, Equity, and Climate intersectionality.**

Industree Foundation, in partnership with USAID has focused on socially and economically empowering marginalized communities in rural areas by taking work closer to their homes. The project worked towards empowering rural women to become micro-entrepreneurs who collectively own and operate their enterprises.

Industree has successfully implemented the first three years of the POWER project. The project worked with over 6,800 women producers aggregated in 28 self-owned enterprises from rural and marginalized communities across the three natural fiber-based value chains, i.e., Banana in Tamil Nadu, Bamboo in Karnataka, and Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP)/ biodegradable leaf plate in Odisha. Furthermore, the project mobilized 1,200 farmers in Karnataka and trained them in sustainable cultivation and harvest practices of the bamboo plantation; these farmers will be a source of raw materials for bamboo-based enterprises.



# POWER: Strengthening Women at the grassroots

According to UN Women\*, women's economic empowerment is central to realizing women's rights and gender equality. The three years of association has witnessed examples of women who have been empowered at their workplace. They have become financially independent, saved for themselves and family, and more empowered to participate in social, economic and personal affairs. This transformative effect has contributed to a better livelihood for women.

\*Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment | UN Women – Headquarters



## From a Homemaker to first time worker

For a woman like Aarathi, moving out of her home in search of work was ambitious as she wished to be a part of the workforce and earn a living for herself.

The respect from family members for a working woman is quite different from a homemaker. Starting her career as a weaver and gradually becoming a team leader at the unit, Aarathi was a keen learner gaining knowledge on weaving techniques to hone her weaving skills. POWER enabled her to enhance her talents and she feels empowered to be a part of the POWER space that has supported to create bonds of trust with her co-workers and offer a space for co-creation, exchange learnings and good vibes.

**"With steady savings, I have purchased a Scooty - a vehicle of mobility to commute to office and for personal needs"**

**Aarathi**  
Tamil Nadu



**Empowering Women like Aarathi promotes the well-being of them and their families. POWER has enabled a working environment for the first time producers in rural communities and strengthened their presence in the creative workforce.**



## Enabling Environment

Jonesilvia, a weaver in a banana basketry unit worked as a coordinator in an NGO. Because of long travel distance, she had to discontinue the job. Finding work close to her home was crucial for her to find work and reduce the long travelling distances.

**"I am happy that work near my home has brought a big change in reducing the travel distance. Travelling to the workplace for long distances has been an issue women face."**

**Jonesilvia**  
Tamil Nadu



## Work closer to Home

**Working closer to home has brought women's productive involvement and participation, accessing the pillar of enabling environment constructively.**

Workforce participation closer to home is high, as access and availability of work is closer while reducing commute distance. It is seen that women's travel to workplace has reduced as they are situated within a 5-10 km radius and they commute by walk. Prior to the initiation of POWER, many women travelled by public transport for long distances.

**55%**  
of women  
walk to the  
unit.



## Enabling Environment

Working with POWER initiative gave an opportunity to work closer to home. Santhanamari's husband is a motivating factor supporting her to go to her workplace with enthusiasm and since the distance factor is pulled out, she is able to regularly opt for work at the unit and also mingle with her co-workers.

**"I was working at a billing section in a supermarket at my native place but my working place was far away from my residence, so I quit my job. In search of work closer to my home, I joined Industree"**

**Santhanamari**  
Tamil Nadu





## Workforce Development

Up-Skilling women to positions of power tackles the issues of gender discrimination and exploitation. Positions of leadership enable women to have a say in decision-making and protect other women under their leadership from abuse. This approach, coupled with financial literacy, group formation, social capital development, and participatory decision-making helps women identify issues and collectively resolve them.

**"The soft skill training has brought forward new terms, like gender equality, education for their children, financial literacy, and leadership, which was never heard before'. Under hard skill training, I have learnt about leaf segregation, preservation, and product processes such as leaf plate stitching, pressing of leaves, and packaging"**

**Mamta**  
Odisha



## Skilling, Learning and Up-Skilling

**Providing entrepreneurial and employment opportunities to underserved groups by offering skills training, mentorship, and sources of incomes under POWER has proved to be uplifting at the grassroots level and strengthened the pillar of workforce development.**

Prior to POWER,

**65%**

**had savings upto ₹5000. Skilling under the project has given them a chance to earn income and an opportunity towards larger savings.**

## Workforce Development

Before working with Industree, Lakshmi worked as a teacher in special needs school, won the gram panchayat elections, and started a very small shop to prepare breakfast and snacks in the village along with her sister. She wanted a continuity at workplace and wanted to learn skills that can help her excel in life and support her savings for her livelihood.

When she started weaving baskets, she was eager to learn and up-skill. She is not only taking income back home, but she is also being socially empowered.

**"I learned my job role and the responsibilities at the bamboo weaving unit, understood the quality requirements of the product, and adopted best practices"**

**Lakshmi**  
Karnataka





## Workforce Development

Bhanu's childhood days had always made her an independent iron lady. She explored different work opportunities at beauty parlor and tailoring factory but the problem entailed in receiving continuity in incomes. When she heard about women in her vicinity talking about Industree in the local Self Help Group group, she was enthusiastic to try her hands on product making. The incomes received has been important which helped her clear some of the loan taken by her husband.

**"Given my past experience of tailoring, I used my skills to create handmade products. Skills related to design, creativity, resilience, and even empathy, which I learnt during empowerment training were critical in nature"**

**Bhanu**  
Karnataka



## Skilling, Learning and Up-skilling

**Awareness on skilling and training through 6Y, gender training, leadership skills and sensitization campaigns for women were brought in the enterprise. This has resulted in positive attitudinal changes, willing to seek change for the good.**

Learning new skills and influencing co-workers to work better has forged bonds of trust with women and exploring their potential has created a sense of mutual trust, which is a significant workforce development pillar under POWER.

# 85%

**of producers agreed that they learned new livelihood skills to earn income.**

## Workforce Development

Gulnaz studied till 7th standard before her father discontinued her further education. Having worked in a beedi unit, she earned Rs 200 per day. Post marriage brought a scenario wherein her husband earned no fixed income as a daily wage labourer. Chances of moving out of village in search of work was difficult as she had a family to take care. Finding work under POWER initiative brought a new lease of life and she learnt about various techniques of skilling at workplace. Her co-workers were also a source of motivation for her.

**"As a proud independent woman, I am happy to save around Rs 6000 with my own earnings"**

**Gulnaz**  
Karnataka







"I came out of my home to earn an income and reduce my dependency on anyone, especially for financial needs. To me, financial freedom is real freedom"

**Namita**  
Odisha



## Financial Freedom

Having access to financial services has proven to be empowering for women as it has fostered opportunities of savings and allowed a springboard for investment on children's education and nutrition. Women feel it empowering to be financially literate; opening bank accounts for women, managing finances at work and home. It has contributed to women's economic empowerment, underpinning the importance of Entrepreneurship and Finance pillar.

Before POWER, women producers kept their personal savings in bank, which has increased by more than

**50%** with financial learnings under POWER.

"Women are no lesser than men. We were brought up in a way where we were instructed not to associate with men until we were married. When we came out of the house to join the enterprise, we made supportive friends. The women here are now able to make their own decisions. Now, I am bringing up my daughters with this idea of freedom that I learnt at my workplace"

**Selvanayaki**  
Tamil Nadu



"In small villages, it is difficult for women to live the life they want to, but when people come to us and provide opportunities to earn a stable source of income, we feel encouraged in many ways. I am happy because I can contribute towards my home through decent income. Everyone around me started respecting me more because I started earning an income"

**Bhanu**  
Karnataka



## Enabling Environment

Prior to the current workplace, she worked as a daily wage labourer with minimal wages. Belonging to a low-income family, she was struggling to change her economic conditions. Additionally, she took up a job as a seasonal farmer working in the field and made a living out of it. COVID brought chaos to her family, with husband losing his job.

POWER played an important role for women producers like Sadhabani who could not find work during the pandemic, encouraging them to be a part of workforce during pandemic.

**"Through social mobilization at my place during COVID times, I came to know about POWER project that created opportunities for women economically and socially at my place"**

**Sadhabani Ghadai**  
Odisha



## COVID uncertainties and seeking job continuity

**Continuity in access to work and incomes under POWER, providing confidence amidst crisis such as COVID was an important trust-building factor. Ensuring income continuity has empowered them to support their family in trying times and remain resilient amidst adversity, thus realising the pillar of enabling environment even more stronger.**



## Enabling Environment

Due to the uncertainties, her husband was unable to work and travel, which made the entire family struggle for survival. With numerous commitments in life, she found it challenging to support the family and their children's education. Encouraging resilience was the need of the hour for women like Mita who faced obstacles but had a strong support in terms of skills and training, which supported them with stable income levels, and to remain resilient amidst adversity.

**"My life journey has not been smooth, and I have faced a lot of challenges in my life. During COVID, I barely got the basic necessities to support myself in times of crisis and would rely on help from others"**

**Mita**  
Odisha





## Advocate for Change

Before joining Industree, Shanumugavalli was a homemaker and started her career as a weaver and proceeded as a 6Y and gender trainer.

Being promoted as a Production Executive, she had an opportunity to teach weaving techniques to her fellow trainee producers and she also imparts 6Y and gender training to all her women producers. The trainings served as a sensitization facilitator, which enabled women to think and analyze their own lives, attitudes and views. This is quite encouraging as it enables women to be more productivity and empowered. She has become a role model for her children and teaches them to progress in life and be changemakers.

**"Back home, I used my earning and grew my saving to support my husband for the construction of our new house. My dream is to lead this unit as a leader and I will guide at least 50 women producers to grown up to the next level like me"**

**Shanumugavalli**  
Tamil Nadu



**Aspiring women like Shanmugavalli have the potential to serve as role models for other women. Women under POWER initiative wished to be a change agent at the workplace and have supported co-workers towards work productivity, personal lives, which in-turn strengthens the pillar of enabling environment for women.**



## Workforce Development/Enabling Environment

Transitioning from a beedi worker to a rope maker, Aadhilakshmi can see a change in her health and the regular flow of income. Being the sole breadwinner, she has been able to manage her family. At her workplace, the designation of a team leader gives her responsibilities to guide and manage her fellow women producers to be more productive and engaging.

**"This is the right place for women empowerment and I feel very happy to work here"**

**Aadhilakshmi**  
Tamil Nadu



## Change of Workplace

**Accelerating progress towards the economic empowerment of women aims to empower rural women to claim their rights, become leaders, grab opportunities and make choices, and to participate at workplace. Increase in incomes through wage support, skill training, and access to the market for products has been testified.**



## Workforce Development/Enabling Environment

As a daily wage labourer, the incomes were not sufficient to support her family and personal commitments. Joining Industree as a producer, she learnt the art of making ropes. Her income helps to support education expenses of her son and her family praises her for her contributions towards the family. POWER project, a positive action for women's employment has lended a supporting hand in creating economic opportunities for women in rural areas and ensured the women have access to work and earn continuity in incomes.

**"In comparison to my previous jobs, I have noticed a change in the incomes as well as continuity"**

**Usha**  
Tamil Nadu





Raw Material  
storage area  
மேல்தரப் பொருள்  
மிடம்





## Enabling Environment

For Arokiyapriya, searching for a livelihood opportunity in times of pandemic was important to support her household. Her relatives and neighbors mocked her for working in the beginning. After a few months when they saw her skill set, and how she weaved baskets with banana bark, they were impressed by her work. People who laughed asked her to teach them to weave. The way things changed at home was a sign of empowerment.

**"Work From Home was an opportunity to spend time creating products and spend time with family as well. Training on soft skills including women empowerment, and leadership was significant to me as it was helpful to manage 30+ artisans as a team leader"**

**Arokiyapriya**  
Tamil Nadu



## Work From Home

**POWER has provided opportunities and encourages women producers to be resilient to life crises during the pandemic. Changing the dynamics of work, POWER supported the Work from Home model where COVID protocols, compliance, and sourcing raw materials by professional teams from the producers' homes was enforced. This culture allowed for flexibility for a women, who often juggled between work and home roles.**



## Enabling Environment

Before starting my work, Fathima finishes household work and fixes a time for weaving products. She feels that the flexible working opportunity has helped her maintain work-life balance and increased her productivity overtime. Her earnings have helped manage and help meet both ends. This work makes her feel delighted and productive during the daily routine.

**"Any work that I get engaged with, I put my 100% into it and I don't feel worn-out when the day ends. Attending the trainings for working from home, I find my skills helpful in my personal life and can prioritize important matters apart from my area of work"**

**Syed Ali Fathima**  
Karnataka



## Enabling Environment/Entrepreneurship & Finance

Latika is a leaf collector for Industree. Her job is to collect Sal leaves from the jungle and stitch them into plates. Before joining POWER, Latika went to jungle to collect firewood, which she used for cooking. She helped her husband on the farm and took care of multiple household activities. They did not have a toilet in their house and had to go to open fields, which was unsanitary and the family would have to go to a nearby river to bathe. During festivals or any special occasions, they would organize a vegetarian feast since they weren't able to afford meat.

**"I have access to a steady income and my health has drastically improved. I am able to pay for my daughter's education. Buy groceries and supplies for my home"**

**Latika Pradhan**  
Odisha



## Living With Dignity

**Rural women have been able to make contributions to rural economies by producing for markets, generating income and contributing to the overall well-being of their households. They feel a sense of dignity and empowerment from creating products and earning a living from their income.**

**66%** participated in major household financial decisions and around

**58%** participated in non-financial household decisions.

**Living a dignified life is a reality under POWER with constant and continuous access to entrepreneurship and enabling conditions for women.**

## Enabling Environment/Entrepreneurship & Finance

Before Industree's intervention, Anumati would stay home all day. Other than her usual household work she wouldn't do much else and had no control over her own finances or any decisions regarding the household.

Anumati wanted to work and earn a life for herself. She learnt machine stitching through the hard skills program and other important things like how to manage her finances in the soft skills program. She now works as a sewing machine operator and she works hard and earns her own money.

**"Through the 6Y program, I have learnt why and how to save money and how to budget for things needed at home"**

**Anumati Malik**  
Odisha



## Enabling Environment

As a Quality Checker in the Banana Basketry producer unit, Priyanka has learnt different types of weaving and mastered them skillfully. Priyanka is elated to have been a part of the workplace in her early years and POWER has given an opportunity to many youngsters like her.

**"Being young, I am quite attentive to minute details and have been able to make different types of basket. Being promoted from a Producer to a Quality Checker, I feel elated to have an opportunity to look closely into the quality of the products. I am happy to share that my income has supported to pay the college fees of my siblings to a large extent"**

**Priyanka**  
Tamil Nadu



## Promising Youth

**'Youth' feel empowered about exploring access to work in their early age and begin to contribute to their families and have a potential to save for their future. Economic restrictions or burden at home have enabled these youth to be a part of the POWER initiative, enabling participation to the young and bright women, who wanted to contribute to the family's expenses and build a future for themselves.**



## Enabling Environment

Due to Kamakshi's family's economic burden, it was difficult for her to study further. Joining Industree under the POWER project as her first job, she is happy to work here as her income has helped to meet the housing needs to a large extent. Trainings such as 6Y & Gender training has helped access to gender related understanding. Being a first time hands on job, the skills learned at her workplace has supported to boost her confidence and she is eager to learn more.

**"I am saving money for my future while contributing to my family's expense, and I have a plan to continue my studies with my earnings"**

**Kamakshi**  
Tamil Nadu





## Workforce Development/Enabling Environment

From being a basket weaver to Micro Enterprise Leader, Kanagavalli has climbed the ladder in her career and is a proud leader. As an MEL, she has awareness and understanding of self and the producer ecosystem, and has mastered concepts of leadership skills, learnt operational efficiencies, while improving the governance of the organization.

**"It is important to understand the vision, motivation of an MEL and the trust that the ecosystem places in a leader. Identification of attitude, business and leadership skills to guide the enterprise was a key learning during the training and I guide my fellow women producers to improve their working productivity"**

**Kanagavalli**  
Tamil Nadu



## Women as leaders and change agents

**Leadership is an art of building capacity of potential women leaders in collectives. MELs (Micro Enterprise Leaders), and MBTLs (Mutual Benefit Trust Leaders) have shown exemplary capabilities towards productivity, enterprise business, negotiations and decision-making. The leadership platform under POWER has entrusted women to be the forefront of leadership tasks like, running meetings, problem solving, conflict management, public speaking and networking, business and finance management.**

**89%**

**of the MELs share that training helped to become better managers/leaders.**



## Workforce Development/Enabling Environment

Having learnt about the work opportunity available in her area which also provided a creche facility, Maheswari found a new window of opportunity to work and look after her child. Being a quick learner and having qualities of a good leader, she was identified as a unit MEL, became a production supervisor, and then was selected as an MBTL. Her preparedness and capability to do leadership tasks like running meetings, problem solving, business and finance management is transforming her own potential and skill set.

**"As an MBTL, I understand the concept of ownership and collectives and I have developed a positive attitude towards myself and other women producers"**

**Maheswari**  
Tamil Nadu



# Women in News

## புள்ளி செய்தி: இந்தியாவில் பெண்களின் பங்கு

இந்தியாவில் பெண்களின் பங்கு என்பது ஒரு பெரிய கேள்வி. பெண்கள் சமூகத்தில் எவ்வளவு பங்கு வகிக்கிறார்கள் என்பதை அறிய உதவுகிறது. பெண்கள் சமூகத்தில் பங்கு வகிப்பது மட்டுமல்லாமல், அதை மேம்படுத்தும் பணிகளையும் செய்கிறார்கள். பெண்கள் சமூகத்தில் பங்கு வகிப்பது மட்டுமல்லாமல், அதை மேம்படுத்தும் பணிகளையும் செய்கிறார்கள்.



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**பெண்களுக்கு திறன் பயிற்சி இண்டஸ்ட்ரி ஃபவுண்டேஷன் லாப நோக்கற்ற அமைப்பாகும்.** இது உலக இளைஞர் திறன் தினத்தில் பகலமை திறன், பயிற்சியை வலியுறுத்துகிறது. இது பெண்களின் சமூக பொருளாதார மேம்பாட்டிற்காக செயல்படுகிறது. பெண்களுக்கான வாழ்க்கையை மாற்றுவதற்கும் அவர்களுக்கான வேலை வாய்ப்புகளை அதிகரிப்பதற்கும் தொடர்ந்து கவனம் செலுத்துகிறது. தமிழகத்தை சேர்ந்த 21 வயதான வாழைப்பழ சட்டையாரிப்பாளர் ஸ்ரீமதி சி. சுவாமிநாதன், 'POWER திட்டம்' என வாழ்க்கையில் மிகப்பெரிய மாற்றங்களை பெற்றுள்ளார்.

**'USAID Power project for women in India example to empower them'**

USAID Power project for women in India example to empower them. The project aims to empower women in India through various initiatives.

**Industree's POWER Project to boost ideas from tribal women to promote creativity and equality**

Industree's POWER Project to boost ideas from tribal women to promote creativity and equality. The project focuses on supporting women entrepreneurs in rural India.

**How a Woman-led Organisation is Helping Rural Women Artisans become Self-sustainable in Lockdown**

How a Woman-led Organisation is Helping Rural Women Artisans become Self-sustainable in Lockdown. The organization provides support and resources to women artisans during the lockdown.

**Industree's POWER project, in partnership with USAID, builds women-owned enterprises in rural India**

Industree's POWER project, in partnership with USAID, builds women-owned enterprises in rural India. The project aims to create sustainable livelihoods for women in rural areas.

Prior to POWER initiative, there were women who were reduced to being home makers, without local job opportunities, receiving meagre wages. Women walked miles in search of work with an uncertainty in work and incomes.

POWER created socio-economic opportunities near their homes offering them to be a part of formal workforce and participation. The initiative brought work closer to women and not vice-versa which is a significant achievement. Women's access to work and supporting their families have been received with respect.

Valuing them by empowering and paying heed to their voices made them leaders in decision making, both at home and work place. Sourcing natural fibres for women to create handmade and high quality products have resulted in sustainability, woven into every processes, right from Farm to Home. The initiative has complemented the efforts of Industree towards Equity, Climate and Gender and is continuing to do so.



The POWER project has been extended for two additional years and will work with a total of 7,000 beneficiaries; this includes 3,600 women in Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP)/ biodegradable leaf plate value chain in Odisha, and 1,400 women in the Bamboo value chain in Karnataka, alongside 2,000 farmers in the bamboo cultivation in Karnataka. The primary focus of the extended project will be on developing markets, mainly building up a producer-owned distribution and sales channel nationally in various cities in India while exploring international market channels. Additionally, compliant infrastructure and traceable processes for exports in the NTFP/biodegradable leaf plate and bamboo value chains will be initiated, resulting in increased revenues and bridging the gap toward enterprise sustainability.

# POWER

# Empowered Women, Transforming Self and Communities

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