

NURTURING RESILIENCE



USAID
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industree

POWER 2020-2021

The Power of Perseverance

Producer-Owned Women Enterprises (POWER) Project

In September 2019, Industree Crafts Foundation (Industree), with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) initiative, commenced the Producer-Owned Women Enterprises (POWER) project, which focuses on increasing economic opportunities for women through the sustainable use of natural resources. The project is working towards empowering rural women in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Odisha to become micro-entrepreneurs who collectively own and operate their enterprises.

POWER to women



The intricacy of a weave



By September 2022, the plan is to set up 28 women-owned enterprises that will connect 6,800 women producers to commercial supply chains in natural and biodegradable products such as leaf plates, baskets, mats, and bags from tree leaves, bamboo, banana and other natural fibers. Additionally, in the bamboo value chain, the project will work with 1,200 bamboo farmers as the source of raw material for the bamboo-based enterprises.

As of the second year of the project total, 17 units have been registered as Mutual Benefit Trust (MBT) in three value chains across Tamil Nadu, Odisha and Karnataka. In banana, there have been eleven MBTs, two in bamboo, and NTFP/Biodegradable value chain registered four MBTs.

3 Pillars of POWER



■ ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE

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

■ WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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.

THE POWER PROJECT: Building Power Identities

Women producers at work



A weave pattern





Soft skill training session

■ RISE OF INFORMAL TO FORMAL WORK:

Through the POWER Project supported by USAID, women are given the opportunity to work in formal, equitable environments where they are owners of their companies. They receive increased and regular incomes, enabling them to support their families and increase the standard of living for themselves and their children. Working in the Industree incubated production units provides them with hard skills training and equips them with life skills as well as soft skills training; such as gender training that helps shape their autonomy and view of themselves as independent, empowered women.

■ DEVELOPING SKILLS AND MICRO ENTERPRISE LEADERS:

The women producers are being trained under POWER for hard skills like how to manufacture products using natural resources, and are being educated to use technology like mobile phone, video conferencing to support enterprise development. They are further provided training on soft skills including women empowerment, leadership, and entrepreneurship to close the gender disparity at work and help them develop as Micro Enterprise Leaders (MEL).



Each Y stands for
You (The Producer),
Your Family,
Your Community,
Your Workmates,
Your World
and Your Planet.

Industree uses a holistic ecosystem approach to ensure that enterprises grow to be self sustainable. This is done through its unique model that addresses all aspects of enterprise building.

6Y Training Program

THE POWER PROJECT: Winning the battle with resilience amidst pandemic

Reopening of the units



The national lockdown from March 2020 affected lives harshly across rural India. Women across India are amongst the most vulnerable in the world in terms of food and nutrition, financial support and security as seen in national statistics. The severe lockdown, with no alternate means of livelihood, led to mass unemployment, and loss of income for millions of Indians. Rural and tribal India had to endure the harshest of times for their survival.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40888-021-00233-9>
(COVID-19 and women's nutrition security:
Panel data evidence from rural India)

Covid Vaccination awareness and sensitization



Soft skill training on Gender



Maintaining Covid appropriate behavior



■ **CALL TO ADAPT TO THE NEW NORMAL:
FROM WORK FROM OFFICE
TO WORK FROM HOME**

The USAID POWER project supported women producers using distance learning and work-from-home modules to continue their training, and provided a source of income for these women during the pandemic. This was achieved while maintaining precaution & COVID vaccination, assess health risk, reach out materials (via post for mask making) and disseminate atomized digital training through feature phones and smartphones. Women producers were also trained to manufacture masks that they used for themselves and sold them in the market as well.

■ **ROTATING WORK SCHEDULES TO MAINTAIN
SOCIAL DISTANCING**

Once the lockdown eventually lifted, production units reopened with caution, using a rotating schedule to limit the amount of producers present at a time in respect to social distancing. Producers from the same village were allowed in the unit at the same time, so that they were able to continue their work from home, and continue earning dignified livelihoods.

Impact under **POWER:** ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



Profile:

Vijay Lakshmi (45 yrs), Team leader in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She has two teenage sons in Class 10th and Class 12th and didn't have any regular source of income to support her family.

Challenges:

Lack of financial stability was affecting her morale and she didn't know how to earn money.

Role of POWER:

After becoming a part of the collective, she learnt and understood her true potential. Not only has she become a team leader in the collective supported by POWER Project, she has also initiated an 'Idli' batter business that she focuses on in the evening. She is now earning from two different sources as she sells the idli batter to her friends and also earns by being a part of the collective.

She is elated that she has learnt the art of entrepreneurship and feels that she can achieve all her dreams. Her self confidence inspires everyone around her.

VIJAY LAKSHMI

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

"I am working regularly and I am a part of a wonderful collective. I understand my role in society now and I believe that every woman must be respected.

I feel so proud that what I make reaches a global market, and can be bought all over the world."



Profile:

Thilagavathi (34 yrs), Team leader in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She lives with her three daughters and mother-in-law.

Challenges:

As a single mother she went through many hardships in life.

Role of POWER:

Her confidence grew leaps and bound after joining the POWER project. Currently, she is committed to training 40 more women producers to help them thrive in the workforce and be economically empowered.

Since Thilagavathi has felt the change brought about by the POWER Project after she joined the unit in December 2019 as a weaver, she has strived to excel in her work and to bring other women in her community into this program.

From a housewife to a confident producer and leader, Thilagavathi is an exemplar of the POWER Project's pillars in the real sense. She knows that she is the owner of her unit and wants to alleviate the women in her constituency towards self-achievement and financial liberation.

THILAGAVATHI

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

"Through POWER Project, I have grown and progressed to this day. I want this company to become more successful in the future. During International Women's Day, March 2021, I received a CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION from USAID under POWER for my exceptional leadership to the women producers in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, shepherding them to prosper in the workforce and succeed as entrepreneurs."

Impact under POWER: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



Impact under **POWER:** ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



Her Profile:

Devakirubai Maria Dheena (39 yrs), Basket weaver in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She was struggling to manage her life with her husband's meagre income which was not sufficient to run her family of three daughters.

Her Challenges:

There were no job opportunities for her in the area and no source of income. As a mother of three girls, education of her daughters was weighing heavily on her mind but she had no choice but to only focus on the physical survival of her family.

Role of POWER:

During the pandemic the POWER project funded by USAID was a crucial resource to her and her family and other artisans in her area. It trained her to become a skilled basket weaver and ensured continued employment throughout the pandemic.

It enabled her to take care of her children's educational expenses and well being and become self reliant. The home model was introduced after the pandemic lockdown helped her to remain financially independent while balancing her familial responsibilities.

DEVAKIRUBAI

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

"My daughters are admitted in a good school as I am financially independent now. My neighbors and community have started looking up to me and respect me. The work station given by USAID was very helpful to me. Earlier, I would sit on the floor while weaving and suffered from hip, neck, and shoulder pain. But after receiving the workstation, I can work without pain. It is also a space saver, as I can fix it in the wall. The first aid kit provided along with it is also very useful to me. Thank you Industree and POWER project."



Profile:

A. Kanagavalli (30 yrs), Basket weaver in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She was married at the age of 16 and has a son and a daughter. Her husband took her children away and abandoned her. She was not able to fend for herself. She was living with her parents and was completely dependent on them.

Challenges:

She is uneducated and was not able to get any job. She was living at the mercy of others as she had no money to even feed herself.

Role of POWER:

Under the POWER project, she was trained to be a basket weaver which provided her with employment and earning. It gave her confidence and hope to survive in the world and become self reliant. Her financial independence has helped her to take care of her children and old parents. The Gender Meeting helped her understand her worth and talent and she has blossomed as a producer and a community leader.

Impact under POWER: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



A. KANAGAVALLI

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

“The POWER project and Industree has changed my life. It gives me hope and confidence everyday and I feel strong and self reliant. Those who insulted me in the community are now treating me like a role model. I worked hard in the Gender Meeting to improve myself and I am very thankful to all of you.”



Impact under **POWER:** ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



Profile:

Subbulakshmi (38 yrs), Lacquering producer in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

At the young age of 22, she was married into a poor family due to poverty and social compulsions. She has two children and her husband struggled to sustain the family with his earnings. He met with tragic accident due to electric malfunction and lost one arm and hand. His disability brought further misfortunes for his family.

Challenges:

Her husband's accident pushed the family into deeper poverty and Subbulakshmi was under huge financial debt to sustain her family.

Role of POWER:

She joined the banana basketery in Veervanallur unit in September 2020 and learnt to be a lacquering artisan. The employment gave her and her family, a stable income and she started supporting her husband to make ends meet. She also managed to provide her husband medical care and quality education for their children.

Now, they are living a debt-free life after paying off their loans with her income.

SUBBULAKSHMI

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

“Hard work brings good results and collective co-operation has made our entire Enterprise a success. It brings me immense joy to come to work everyday and the other women producers are now like my family. I am committed to this work now.”



Her Profile:

Viji (41 yrs), Basket weaver in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She is a widow with a son and a daughter. She lost her husband at a very young age and has been the primary caretaker of her family. Following the regressive conditioning of her community, she had been focusing only on the education and future of her son. She had completely ignored the needs of her daughter.

Her Challenges:

All her hopes for her future was dependent on the career and success of her son so she sent him to a good english medium school. She put her daughter in a government school to ensure just basic education for her daughter. However, her son turned out to be irresponsible and arrogant and refused to take care of her.

Role of POWER:

Under the POWER project funded by USAID she underwent gender sensitivity training and realized that her focus on the male gender was incorrect behaviour. She admitted her daughter to a good school finally and has ensured that the future of her daughter is secure and self reliant.

VIJI

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

“Thanks to the Gender meeting under the POWER project, I have realized that girls are equal to boys and they must be educated and provided with equal opportunities. I am so glad that I got educated and trained under the project. Now my daughter considers me a hero and I help other women understand the value of educating girls.”

Impact under POWER: WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT



Impact under **POWER:** WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT



Profile:

M. Deivana (36 yrs), Basket weaver in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She was forced to drop out of school in 11th class and was married off at the tender age of 17. She is a mother of two children and her husband is an angler. He didn't have a regular income as her couldn't work due to health issues. They were living hand to mouth and life was difficult for the whole family.

Challenges:

When she heard about the POWER project and Industree, she immediately joined and got trained as a basket weaver.

Role of POWER:

In January 2020, she joined the enterprise. She attended the 6Y and Gender Training programme, and that changed her perspective and way of thinking. After the MEL Training, she got more confident and developed a self belief that she can do anything that she wants to do in life. Now with her income, she is paying her daughter's school fees, and her son's and husband's medical expenses.

M. DEIVANA

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

"I am very thankful to the POWER project, because it is helping so many woman like me. I forget my worries because I have the support of so many women producers, and can take care of my family without any struggle. Thank you for bringing so much light into the lives of so many families."



Profile:

Esakkiammal (25 yrs), Rope weaver in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

Her hometown is Uppur and she has studied till class 10th. She was married off at the age of 18. At that age she did not know how to take any decisions in life. She went through various personal hardships. She was abandoned by her husband and was living below the poverty line.

Challenges:

All her hope for her future was dependent on the career and success of her son so she sent him to a good english medium school. She put her daughter in a government school to ensure just basic education for her daughter. However, her son turned out to be irresponsible and arrogant and refused to take care of her.

Role of POWER:

She has been working under the POWER project for 1.5 years now and feels very safe and well treated in the enterprise. After becoming a producer, she bought herself a new two wheeler to make herself even more independent. She believes that the rope spinning industry under the POWER project is robust enough to provide women like her a stable income. This income is not available anywhere in the countryside.

Impact under POWER: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



ESAKKIAMMAL

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

“Now that I have got this job, I have a lot of support and respect in my community. I am financial independent. My debt was so high that I cut my debt in half with the income I am generating at the moment and soon I will be completely debt free. Thank you USAID and POWER project for all your support and help.”



Impact under **POWER:** ENABLING ENVIRONMENT



Profile:

Aparna Kasinathan (36 yrs), Basket weaver in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She was married into a lower middle class family due to poverty and social compulsions, and her husband struggled to sustain the family with his earnings from daily wages.

Challenges:

During the pandemic, her husband was not even able to earn a meagre daily wage. Sourcing food was her daily focus even though she wanted to focus on providing education to her children.

Role of POWER:

The POWER project enabled her to financially support her husband and provide quality education and food for their children. After joining the banana basketry producer-owned unit, she started earning enough money to help share her home's economic burden, and now, they are living a debt-free life after paying off their loans with her income.

Currently, she is able to train new women producers to help them thrive in the workforce and be economically empowered.



APARNA

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

“When you support handmade products, you support a dream of artisan. I have ownership in my enterprise, and now I want to help other women producers to move towards next stage of wealthy life.”

Profile:

Chermaselvi (25 yrs), Basket weaver in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She has studied till 12th standard and she wanted to pursue higher education, but, due to her family's financial situation she was married off at the age of 18. She was not able to continue her higher education after marriage because of the birth of her daughter.

Challenges:

During the pandemic lockdown, her husband could not continue his business. They were struggling financially, and she would try to earn some meagre earnings through basic tailoring work or weaving a basket which was not enough for her and her family to sustain themselves.

Role of POWER:

She joined the USAID funded POWER Project in the month of February 2021. Initially she was given training to weave basket and she was able to weave only 5 baskets per day. After further training and practice, she is now able to weave 25 baskets per day. Today, she is earning Rs. 12,000/ (approx. 160\$) per month which is a huge achievement for her.

CHERMASELVI

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

"I love this work so much. This is the first job working from home and I am able to take care of my children and family. This would not have been possible without the support of POWER project who have taught me so much."

Impact under POWER: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



Impact under POWER: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



Profile:

Rahumath Nisha (37 yrs), Basket weaver in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She is a widow and the sole breadwinner of her family. She did odd jobs and her family could barely survive with her meagre income, especially during the pandemic.

Challenges:

Rahumath had no special skill prior to her interaction with the POWER project.

Role of POWER:

The POWER project funded by USAID was a crucial resource for her and her family because it ensured continued employment throughout the pandemic and enabled her to support her mother and her children financially. She was initially weaving one basket per day, but she gradually mastered her weaving and time management skills,. She wakes up earlier than usual and manages to weave two baskets a day. Now, her neighbours have joined as weavers too and are also employed through the POWER project.



RAHUMATH NISHA

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

“Development makes a person to achieve their life goal, So every one should grab when opportunity comes to develop the livelihood. The work from home model allowed me to take care of my mother and children, The model suits mydaily life so well that my overall productivity has increased over time”.

Profile:

Bhuvaneshwari (21 yrs), Basket weaver in Tamil Nadu

Life before Industree:

She has basic education and she was working in a grocery shop. She was not happy and did not feel comfortable so she quit her job. She lost her mother 3 years ago, and she is the youngest member of her family, and her father and brother are anglers. But their income is not regular and during pandemic they had no source of income.

Challenges:

She joined Industree in January 2020, and didn't feel confident. She was new to the banana basket industry and didn't feel very happy as she lacked the skills for it. She felt that she won't be able to weave beautiful baskets like other producers.

Role of POWER:

During the pandemic, work from home model was introduced by the POWER Project which was very helpful for her. Her co-workers, supported and motivated her to work hard and now she is the top producer in her unit. During the pandemic, USAID also provided financial aid to her so that she could focus on her skill and training without any worries.

Impact under POWER: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



BHUVANESHWARI

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

"Now I have become a role model in my community. Compared to my previous job, I feel very happy, comfortable and safe. I also earn more salary than my previous job. I am able to fulfill all my family's needs. I got the workstation which is very helpful to me. My house is very small, but, the workstation did not take separate space. I fixed it in the wall and work happily. The POWER Project has brought a very big change and lot of positivity in my life."



Impact under **POWER:** ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FINANCE



Profile:

Jananti Patamajhi (48 yrs), Leaf collector in Odisha

Life before Industree:

Jananti is an uneducated tribal woman. She had no access to primary school and she was married off as a minor girl. Her lack of education made her submissive with a servitude attitude towards her husband.

Challenges:

Being uneducated made her life difficult as she had no prospect of getting a job outside her home.

Role of POWER:

She went through 6Y & Gender training, which helped her to understand her worth and role in society and in her family. Her thinking & imagination changed drastically and it imbibed a sense of worth and confidence in her. She learnt the skill of being a leaf collector under the POWER project. Her new found freedom and financial independence has made her confident in her community and now she doesn't feel inferior in front of anyone. She is also ensuring the same sense of worth in her children.

JANANTI PATAMAJHI

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

I'm loving my new self & treating my son & daughter equally. I sell leaf to Industree and I keep the money with me. I know my rights now and I am not handing over my earnings to my husband as I used to do before. I am thankful to the POWER project for teaching me how to live happily and be independent."

Profile:

Nabingi Mallick (51 yrs), Sewing machine operator in Odisha

Life before Industree:

She is uneducated and had been struggling to meet her daily necessities in life due to her meagre earnings. She has endured many personal hardships in life too.

Challenges:

During the pandemic, she was not even able to earn a meagre living for survival. She was struggling to stay alive as her son also lost his job due to covid. As a family, they were completely reliant on the kindness of others to provide them with minimum food supplies.

Role of POWER:

She underwent training in 6Y and Gender which helped her to improve herself along with the course of her skill training. The income received while working with the POWER project helped her to pay off the loans (for food and basic necessities) taken before the covid crisis.

Impact under POWER: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT



NABINGI MALLICK

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

"I owe everything to the Foundation under the POWER project. It rescued me at the time of a deadly crisis and I shall always be grateful for this. I am financially independent now and I believe that I can face any hardship now as I am a hard working and talented producer."



Impact under **POWER:** ENABLING ENVIRONMENT



Profile:

Midali Mallick (65 yrs), Leaf collector in Odisha

Life before Industree:

She is an uneducated tribal woman with 4 children. To support her family, she used to explore the forests and plucked leaves to make roughly stitched leaf plates. The price she received for the plate was at abysmal low and it was difficult for her to support her family.

Challenges:

She was completely dependent on the local buyers for the sale of her roughly stitched plates and it was not a regular and stable income for her.

Role of POWER:

After joining Industree as a leaf collector, she learnt the skill of making fine stitched leaf plates under the POWER project. She is offered good and regular income for her fine work that is helping her support her family.



MIDALI MALLICK

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

“ My children can finally get healthy food and education. I have learnt so much under the POWER project and now no one can cheat me for my work. I will always be grateful for this opportunity as it will help my children to have a better future than I ever had.”

Profile:

Mahadevamma (52 yrs), Weaver in Karnataka

Life before Industree:

Madevamma lost her husband at the young age of 30 years. As a widow, it was very difficult for her to raise children without a husband. She found it difficult to survive in the society and faced a lot of hardships. Now, all her children are grown up but they have abandoned her and she was homeless.

Challenges:

Being homeless and uncared for took a toll on her mental health and it was difficult for her to even work on the fields during that phase in her life.

Role of POWER:

With the start of the enterprise, she has found a new found confidence in herself by being involved in an entrepreneurial set up facilitated by Industree and POWER project. She is relieved and happy that she no longer has to ask anyone for help. She is not dependent on anyone for her survival and her confidence and mental strength has become strong.

Impact under **POWER:** WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT

**MAHADEVAMMA****Her Life after POWER in her own words:**

“The money I get from here helped me to have roof over my head and enjoy a nice, hot, peaceful meal. I feel like I belong here and this is my family. Thank you POWER project for giving me a reason to live happily.”



Impact under **POWER:** WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT



Profile:

Deena Dayana Giri V (28 yrs), Production assistant in Karnataka

Life before Industree:

Denna comes from a five- member family. Her father and brother lost their job during the pandemic. Deena's mother had been supporting the family using the financial assistance from the SHG. However, with incomes vanishing in their house because of the pandemic, the loan repayment had been affected, resulting in her mother being removed from the SHG (Self Help Group).

Challenges:

She was financially dependent on her husband, mother and brother and it affected her moral and standing in the family.

Role of POWER:

The opportunity to work in the bamboo unit is seen with great hope by Deena, as she can now earn for herself and support her family. She is confident of learning more skills through the training programs under the POWER project and believes that it can benefit more people who comes from a similar background as hers.

DEENA DAYANA GIRI V

Her Life after POWER in her own words:

"My life has changed under the POWER project and I know that there are a lot of women like me who need an opportunity to earn and do something meaningful in life. My financial independence has made me realise my true potential and worth in my family and in society."



Profile:

Neela (33 yrs), Weaver in Karnataka

Life before Industree:

Madevamma lost her husband at the young age of 30 years. As a widow, it was very difficult for her to raise children without a husband. She found it difficult to survive in the society and faced a lot of hardships. Now, all her children are grown up but they have abandoned her and she was homeless.

Challenges:

Being homeless and uncared for took a toll on her mental health and it was difficult for her to even work on the fields during that phase in her life.

Role of POWER:

With the start of the enterprise, she has found a new found confidence in herself by being involved in an entrepreneurial set up facilitated by Industree and POWER project. She is relieved and happy that she no longer has to ask anyone for help. She is not dependent on anyone for her survival and her confidence and mental strength has become strong.

Impact under **POWER:** WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT

**NEELA****Her Life after POWER in her own words:**

"I am confident that my children will have a better life than me as I am trying to give them everything that I didn't have. The enterprise under POWER project is a safe and happy environment for women like me where we can work and learn together. Nature has so many things to offer and nothing is a waste. I am very proud of the work that I am doing."



TESTIMONIES

from our
Women
Producers

JANANTI PATAMAJHI

Odisha



“After getting the training of 6Y & Gender my thinking & imagination changed. Now I'm living a life of freedom & prosperity. I can stand before a group of people & speak. I understand now that men & women are equal. I'm loving & treating my son & daughter equally.”

SHOBANA S.

Tamil Nadu



A. KANAGAVALLI

Tamil Nadu



“From a housewife to a confident producer, now I am succeeding as an entrepreneur, and prospering in the work force. I know that I have ownership in my enterprise, and want to help my fellow producers to move towards self-achievement and financial liberation.”

“The MEL training has been very helpful to me, to improve myself. My self confidence level has grown, and now, I am able to train other artisan also.”



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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RESILIENCE**

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